

TONGA ISLANDS LANDSCAPE

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Tongatapu Island, largest of the group and seat of government, has dimensions of 9 by 18 miles and an area of about 90 square miles (Figs. 10, 11). It is representative of the easterly chain of Tongan islands which are relatively low and very largely formed of limestone, in contrast to the several active volcanic islands to westward. Southeastern Tongatapu reaches a maximum elevation of 270 feet, with precipitous coastal cliffs close at hand. From this eminence the island slopes gently northwestward. Nuku'alofa, the capital and principal city, lies on the north coast where indentations and a maze of reefs provide excellent protection for shipping.

Temperatures in Tonga are equable and pleasant, with easterly winds during much of the year. Rainfall at Nuku'alofa averages 63 inches per year and is quite dependable. Typhoons at irregular intervals are the principal interruption in a rather even climatic tenor.

Coconut palms are widely diffused and a principal aspect of vegetation, although pandanus, hibiscus, and other typical Pacific island plants are also present. Considerable portions of the island have been cleared, are used for truck crops, or may have reverted to grass or scrub.

With its unique system of government and landholding Tonga presents a most interesting facet of landholding patterns in the Pacific.

