

Vava'u Heritage Sites

1. 'Esi 'o Sālote (Holonga)



During the reign of her majesty the late Queen Sālote Tupou III, she would always frequent this site when visiting Vava'u with her family. Her two sons, the late King Taufa'āhau Tupou IV and his brother the late Tu'i Pelehake Fatafehi (5th Tu'i Pelehake) would go for a swim at the beaches below, while Queen Sālote watched over them from above. This site was then called the 'Esi 'o Sālote after Queen Sālote Tupou III.

Source: Mafi Laungāue

2. 'Utula'āina (Holonga)



After the marriage of the 10th Tu'i Tonga *Momo* and *Nua* (the daughter of the high chief Lo'au, also known as the Tu'i Ha'amea), they came to Vava'u to this side of the coast, and this site became their residence. Chiefs and commoners from across the island and from the outer island groups would then come in waves to pay their respect to the Tu'i Tonga, and they would tire themselves out while continuing to come just to get a glimpse. This

was the origin of the village *Holonga*. *Nga/Ngā* refers to the people tiring themselves through preparation on the way to see the King, and *holo* is used to describe people going in waves to a certain destination for a specific reason.

Source: Mafi Laungāue

3. Pouono (Neiafu)

Note: Current informational sign board is in perfect condition and the information is accurate enough.

4. Lolo ‘a Halaevalu (Neiafu)

Along this southwestern coast of Neiafu, there are 8 streams of freshwater that flows from inside the island towards the sea. Each stream had its own name..... During low tide, when all eight streams would flow into the sea at once, the ripples would connect and cancel each other out causing a calm across this sea area, and one could see straight into the bottom of the ocean with one’s naked eyes as if looking through glass. This resembles an old Tongan saying of pouring coconut oil into a rough ocean surface to clear it up; *Hange ha lolo kuo lingi ki ha tahi hou. Like pouring oil into a rough ocean surface*, meaning to calm an already rough, bad and angry situation. Halaevalu is a name that is associated with royalty; the late Queen’s name was Queen Halaevalu Mata’aho. It is assumed that the name originated from these 8 streams, ‘Hala’ meaning road/pathway and ‘valu’ meaning eight. During the time of ‘Ulukālala ‘i Feletoa (‘Ulukālala II), his daughter was named Halaevalu, and so he named the phenomenon of the calm ocean “Lolo-‘a-Halaevalu” after his daughter.

Source: Filianga Pasikala, Tevita Haniteli, Lesieli Mo’unga

5. Fā ko Fieme’a (Neiafu)



This pandanus plant is located right next to where the Vai ko Lēlea freshwater stream used to flow. Before the area was buried and transformed into its current situation, the stream was a very popular bathing spot for royalty and high chiefs, both men and women.

One day, when women of nobility were bathing at this spot, they felt as if they were being spied on, but they could not figure out how that was the case. After a while they still felt as if they were being watched, and one of them pointed out the pandanus tree which was arching over the water as if it was leering at them. The nobles then called the pandanus tree the Fā ko Fieme’a; *Fā* meaning pandanus and *fieme’a* meaning wanting to do something outside of one’s social power/right to do so.

Source: Tevita Haniteli,

6. Sia 'o Kafoa (Taoa)

In the nearby village of Taoa, there lived two brothers named Kafoa (also known as Maka) and Talau. They were playing around one day, and decided to build a mount, so they started digging up soil from around the area and piled them up as high as they could. No one knows how long they kept doing this, but the end result was this mount now known as the Sia 'o Kafoa.

After the job was done, the two brothers were satisfied with their work, but they both wanted the mount for themselves, so they decided to compete for the right to own the mount and live there. They decided upon a race. They went all the way to the *makatano 'a* (a kava bowl/kumete made of rock further down towards the village Taoa) and raced from there. Kafoa won the race and therefore got the mount for himself, whereas Talau left and took over another mountain (now known as Mt. Talau). 'Sia' is another term for a man-made mount, and Kafoa refers to the original resident. Sia 'o Kafoa literally means Kafoa's Mount.

Source: Taniela Fisi'ihoi

7. Loto'āfitu (Makave)

The ruling chief of this village goes by the name Tu'i-'ā-fitu. Tu'i meaning 'king', 'ā meaning 'fence', and fitu meaning 'seven'. This was in reference to the residence of the earlier Tu'i'āfitus before the time of Taufā'āhau (George) Tupou I. This chief would reside on a raised mount in the middle while surrounded by warriors who formed 7 fence-like circles around him as protection. There was no need for ditches or actual fences, as the warriors were enough to keep their chief safe. If there was an attempt at assassination, one would have to go through all 7 'fences' before reaching the chief. This was very unlikely and near-impossible to attempt. This area was called the Loto'āfitu (the inside of the 7 fences).

Source: Peni Vainikolo

8. Mapu 'a Tonga (Makave)

This area was the testing place of Tongan warriors in ancient times. If a new person was to be inducted into the elite group of Tongan warriors or a 'to'a', that person will have to first overcome and survive the trial that every warrior has to go through. All the current warriors will line up in pairs facing each other, and the prospective warrior will have to run in between the two lines, trying to make it to the end. The warriors will then do everything they can; punching, kicking, beating with blunt objects, to stop the prospect from getting to the end. Sometimes the prospects will die before getting to the end, which meant failure, but when one survives towards the end without quitting, he will then be acknowledged and given the title of a warrior/to'a.

This place was called Mapu 'a Tonga due to the sound made by the warriors at the end of the test, almost resembling a whistle from them trying to catch their breaths. Mapu means to whistle,

and the name Mapu 'a Tonga refers to the Tongan warrior's state of breath at the end of their trial.

Fakalelei Fonua

After King George Tupou I (Taufa'āhau at the time) got converted into the Christian faith, he set out to convert the rest of Tonga into Christianity as well. After succeeding with his people at the Ha'apai group, he set out to Vava'u to meet with the highest chief/king of Vava'u at the time named 'Ulukālala Tuapasi (the 3rd of the 'Ulukalala title). 'Ulukālala Tuapasi accepted the new religion after some convincing from King Taufa'āhau, but he knew that his warriors from the Feletoa fortress would not be easily swayed and convinced to disregard their old religions without an all-out war. Therefore, 'Ulukālala Tuapasi and King Taufa'āhau devised a plan to get rid of these warriors so as to guarantee a smooth transition of Christianization among the Vava'u islands.

'Ulukālala Tuapasi called his warriors from Feletoa to gather at this place for a peaceful meeting with Taufa'āhau. When the warriors came, Taufa'āhau commanded his warriors (they accompanied him from Ha'apai) to mingle with the Feletoa warriors, and they were seated in a circle (like a kava circle) with one warrior from each side sitting alternately to one another. When they were seated, a command was heard being shouted out, and Taufa'āhau's warriors jumped at the unsuspecting Feletoa warriors and strangled them, held them down and tied their limbs together. They were then taken out to sea and drowned. This event has from then become known as the 'Fakalelei fonua'. Fakalelei means 'to make well/good' and fonua means 'land/country'. This refers to the sacrificing of the Feletoa warriors in order to make a peaceful transition into Christianity without further bloodshed from an all-out war.

Source: Tu'akifālelei

9. 'Api 'o Maka (Taoa)

During the reign of the 14th Tu'i Kanokupolu Tuku'aho in Tonga, 'Ulukālala was a very prominent chief in the Vava'u groups, and was known for his warriors in the Feletoa fortress. Tuku'aho once visited 'Ulukalala, and due to some disagreements, 'Ulukālala sought out to assassinate Tuku'aho.

Tuku'aho knew of this assassination attempt so he fled to Leimātu'a village and sought refuge under the warrior Lepuhā. 'Ulukālala found out where Tuku'aho was hiding so he sent men to kill him. Tuku'aho fled once again to the village of Tefisi where twin warriors resided. The same thing happened and he was forced to flee once again. This time, he sought refuge with the warrior Maka (also known as Makato'a) at the village of Taoa. 'Ulukālala heard of this and he sent men to intimidate Maka into handing over Tuku'aho but to no avail.

Maka was known for his spear fighting skills, and his ferocity with the spear was unparalleled. Even his house was decorated with countless spears he had used to conquer his enemies. After the first and second group of warriors failed to intimidate Maka, a larger group of warriors sent

by ‘Ulukālala came, which angered Maka greatly. Maka grabbed his main spear and stabbed it into the ground. This caused the other spears in his house to resonate with the main spear, causing them to shake as if craving the blood of their masters’ enemies. Maka told the warriors to go back to ‘Ulukālala with a message, saying that his spears has not been fully retired yet. If he wishes to continue pestering him, his spears are ready to be drowned in blood once again.

The warriors fled in fear and conveyed the message to ‘Ulukālala. ‘Ulukālala was outraged by the audacity of Maka, but he did not send any more warriors to Makas’ house. After a while, Tuku’aho expressed his desire to head back home to Tongatapu. Maka accompanied Tuku’aho on their vessel all the way to Tongatapu to ensure his safety before heading back home. Tuku’aho offered Maka many riches but he turned them all down. Maka only asked to drink the Kings’ kava whenever he has a kava ceremony. Hence, whenever there was a kava ceremony held by the Tu’i Kanokupolu with Maka present, Maka will be the one to drink the Kings’ kava when it comes his turn. The name Maka became a talking chief name passed down through generations of the original Makas’ descendants. It was not until the reign of Queen Sālote Tupou III did the practice of Maka drinking the Kings’ kava come to an end as a show of respect and reverence by the descendants of Maka to the current ruling dynasty.

Source: Taniela Fisi’ihoi

10. Hila-ki-Tapana/Ī ‘o Mata’aho (Leimātu’a)



This small mound was once home to a māna’ia named Lepuhā, known throughout the country for his good looks and exploits with women. It is said that women would always glance towards this area from wherever they were because of his reputation and beauty.

Lepuhā however, seemed to have had his heart set on a beautiful maiden who lived at the island of Tapana. It is said that one of the reasons why he chose this area as his residence was so that he can have a clear view of the island, and would glance towards it from time to time looking for a signal from the maiden. Hence, the name of this place became ‘Hila-ki-Tapana’ meaning ‘to glance towards Tapana’.

Source: Fotu (Sāmiu Lātū)

11. Ngofe-Reed fields (Tu'anuku)



This magnificent scenery is one of its kind in all of Tonga. The reeds (kuta/kutu in Tongan) are native to Fiji, and are hard to find around the Tongan islands. Fijians brought these plants and planted them here, where it has spread into the reed fields it is today.

There is a Polynesian mat made out of weaving the leaves of this plant called kuta, and the people of the nearby village Tu'anuku are one of the main sources for these type of mats in Tonga due to this area. It is not only a source of income for the families, but it is also a shelter for many different types of birds who live among the reeds. When visiting, you could even spot a few rare birds that are rarely seen across all of Tonga.

Source: 'Amanaki Fūnaki

12. Mt. Talau (Neiafu)



At 131 metres, Mt. Talau is the highest mountain in Vava'u. A short hike to the top along the marked trails will take you to four lookouts affording spectacular views of Neiafu, the Port of Refuge, Vaipua inlet and the outer islands of Vava'u. The trail begins steeply but there is a step in place. Be careful after heavy rains and make sure you are wearing sturdy shoes. The return trip will take approximately 45 minutes. Please stay on marked trails

and remember to bring back all the rubbish with you.

The legend of Mt. Talau: Why the top of Mt. Talau is flat.

In the time of the ancient gods, Mt. Talau was among the highest mountains throughout the South Pacific, and dwarfed even the mountains of Samoa. The ancient gods of Samoa saw Mt. Talau as a threat and became jealous of its loftiness, so they devised a plan with the god Fehunui (known as Moso in Samoa) who was a god in both Tonga and Samoa to steal Mt. Talau and carry it over to Samoa.

One night, the Samoan gods arrived unnoticeably in Vava'u with the help of Fehunui. As they began to lift Talau, the Tongan god Tafakula (who resided in the island of 'Eua) suddenly woke

up and saw what the Samoan gods were attempting. Tafakula took a position at the eastern horizon, with his back towards the Samoan gods. He made a flapping noise and crowed like a rooster. Because of his divine might and power, it echoed across the ocean towards the Samoan gods who were so high up into the sky at this point with Talau. The Samoan gods, thinking that it was sunrise and the ancient Tongan gods would notice their thievery, dropped Talau and fled. As they dropped the mountain, the summit broke off and fell to the side. This summit was the origin of the island of Lotuma which is located near Mt. Talau.

Source: Tongan Myths and Tales by Edward W. Gifford, 1924.

Notes on current site situation

- Towards the end of the steps on top, there are parts of the railing missing. This needs to be fixed for safety precautions.

13. Ngā'unoho (Talihau)

There once was a fair maiden by the name of Tukuvakalelei, whose beauty was beyond compare, and known across all the islands of Tonga. Suitors consisting of princes, high chiefs, and warriors would come from all over to ask for her hand in marriage.

Tukuvakalelei lived on top of the mount between the villages of Ngā'unoho and 'Utungake called 'Fungaamoamo'. The name of the mount was derived from the maiden's daily ritual of getting massages (amoamo) from her attendants and having her skin rubbed in traditional herbal oils.

Many warriors and chiefs tried every day but could not even get into her residence. They were refused entrance by her attendants and protectors, and the maiden herself refused to see any of the suitors. Many men from all over Tonga would exhaust themselves every day to find ways with which to please the maiden and possibly gain her favour. This is where the name of the village *Ngā'unoho* came from. *Ngā* refers to a tiring state while doing something, and *'unoho* is the official Tongan term for spouse (in this case, wife). The name refers to the warriors and chiefs tiring themselves with the goal of getting Tukuvakalelei as a wife.

Among these warriors was a local man named Fangupō. Fangupō would visit the mount daily with baked *'ufi* (yams) and leave it with the attendants for the maiden to dine on, then leave without saying a word. He would do this every single day, and one day, Tukuvakalelei became curious about the *'ufi*, and asked her attendants whence it came from. The attendants told her the story of Fangupō visiting everyday with his baked yams then leaving without a word. The maiden got even more curious and ordered her attendants to let him into the residence the next time he comes to visit. The next day, Fangupō once again appeared with *'ufi* and the attendants conveyed the maiden's message. Fangupō complied and entered the residence where Tukuvakalelei was getting her daily massage and body-rub. Fangupō sat down near the entrance and remained quiet and still. Tukuvakalelei noticed this and ordered her attendants to delay the

massage and leave the room to her and Fangupō. They obeyed and left, leaving Fangupō to spend the rest of the day with Tukuvakalelei.

The two soon got married, much to the dismay of every chief and warrior throughout Tonga. Their children were given the name *Hala 'ufia* in remembrance of Fangupō's visit with the 'ufi, as if to remember that it was his way (*hala*) into Tukuvakalelei's heart.

Source: Peauafi Tatafu

14. 'Otu Mala (Talihau)



These islands were once the territory of a cannibal whose main residence was at a cave in Mala lahi. *Mala* means 'curse'. Whenever someone comes by these islands (some are rocks/reefs) they were cursed to be killed and eaten by this cannibal. All 9 *mala*/curse islands were critical hunting points for the cannibal, and he would

hide near them while stalking his prey, even sometimes staying underwater for a long period of time before snatching people off their canoes and taking them away. The 9 *Mala* are as follows;

Mala lahi: The biggest of all the 9 islands.

Mala Fakalava: The attached island to Mala lahi pointing towards 'Ōtea.

Mala Loi: The space between 'Ōtea and Mala Fakalava. Loi means lies

Mala Maka: Maka means rock

Mala Toa: Toa is Tongan for the ironwood tree known for making weapons in the past

Mala Moa: Moa referred to the shape of this rock which looked like a chicken

Mala Niu: Niu means coconut

Mala Melemo: Melemo means to drown, referring to the rock being under the water.

Mala lafi: lafi means very near, referring to the rock being very near the shore of 'Ōtea.

For those who survived and made it onto Ngā'unoho/Talihau, the cannibal would continue chasing them until he kills them. There was only one spot of refuge for these victims, and the place was called Vainafa, and for some reason, the cannibal would not dare go near it, nor continue his chase of the escapees.

Source: Peauafi Tatafu

15. 'Ene'io Botanical Garden (Tu'anekivale)



The 'Ene'io Botanical Garden is a botanical garden in Tonga and is the first of its kind there. It has the largest and most varied plant collection in the Kingdom of Tonga.

The botanical garden is located 10 minutes from the capital Neiafu. It consists of 22 acres (89,000 m²) of privately owned gardens and was developed in 1972 by Haniteli Fa'anunu, retired Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries. As an agronomist with 38 years of agricultural experience (18 as the Director of Agriculture and Food within the Tongan government), Fa'anunu offers visitors a personalized tour through gardens containing over 100 plant families and 500 plant species, both native and exotic. The garden also has ocean access at 'Ene'io Beach, a private beach with a camping area.

16. 'Otualea (Ha'alaufuli)

This beach was named "'Otua-Lea" because of its nature and role in history. In ancient times, this beach was a supernatural signal used by the local warriors to prepare for battle. It is said that the waves on this beach would always be noisy, as if constantly talking without rest. Whenever the noise would become louder than usual, it is the beach's way of warning the local warriors that an enemy is on their way here. The warriors would then prepare an ambush and when the enemy arrives, they are slaughtered before making it far inland. The beach was from then on known as 'Otua-lea (the speaking-god/the god who speaks). The *toa* trees throughout this coast also has the characteristics of being constantly noisy without rest, especially during night time, thus earning the name *toa-lea*.

Along this coast is also home to the rare *fāhina* (white pandanus) which is known for its fragrant smell and unique color among pandanus fruits. It starts off white, and when it gets ripe, it turns yellow in colour and the aroma it exudes is very distinct and unlike any other. This has earned the village's nickname of *Funga Fāhina*, referring to the group of white pandanus trees along this coast, and its distinct aroma.

Source: Afu Ha'alaufuli (Lotu Lauti) and Mōsese Fahiua Vaka

17. Tō'anga'ofa ('Utui)



After reverends John Thomas and John Hutchinson arrived in Tongatapu in 1826, they began to work on spreading the Christian faith, and advocating for more people to repent and abandon their old religions for Christianity. Progress was not very steady, and there were multiple problems that they had to face, but with the help of some converted local chiefs and other Wesleyan missionaries that came soon after them, they persevered.

It was not until 1834, that they began to see a rapid increase in believers and faithful followers.

The event that started all this has been passed down as the event of “Tō ‘a e ‘ofa” or the descent of love (referring to the holy spirit). King George Tupou I has already succeeded in converting most of the Ha’apai group into Christianity, and was on his way here to Vava’u where he was to meet with the ruler of Vava’u at the time, ‘Ulukālala Tuapasi to discuss strategies of how to go about spreading Christianity across the Vava’u group. He brought many local preachers from Ha’apai with him, and they were to aid him in his endeavor.

On July, 23, 1834, in the village of ‘Utui, a converted Ha’apai preacher by the name of ‘Aisea Vovole began preaching the gospel on Christ’s lament over Jerusalem in this very spot where their Christian church stood. During the sermon, the congregation collectively felt an overwhelming feeling of contrition. Many among them began making open confessions of past sins and throughout the night, weeping and prayers could be heard from this church. The morning was greeted with joyful shouts over assurance of God’s forgiveness. According to Rev. John Thomas himself, this has never been seen in the islands before.

This event caused a chain reaction with other congregations of the Christian faith throughout Vava’u in the following days. The people of the Ha’apai group heard of this phenomena and began praying and praising God for the miracle that has descended. Ha’apai congregations almost immediately began experiencing the same scenes and feelings of contrition, repentance and forgiveness.

This led to Vava’u and Ha’apai being one of the most successful missions of the Wesleyan missionaries in all of Tonga. This also gained favor for King George Tupou I among the warriors of both island groups, who then followed him into Tongatapu to continue spreading the Christian faith to all of Tonga.

Source: The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Tu’akifālelei (Hingano Lātū)

18. Mo'ungalafa (Tu'anuku)



During the late 18th century and the early 19th century, Tonga was in the midst of multiple civil wars, culminating in Tafua'āhau's war against the ancient religions for the unification of Tonga under Christianity. This war ended with the fall of the last ancient fortress in 1852, which was located in the village of Pea,

Tongatapu. Tafua'āhau had gathered warriors from all the island groups, including Vava'u and they were known as the *Tautahi*. After the war, they were set to disperse and return to their respective islands.

There was a certain disagreement among two of the main chiefs within the *Tautahi*; 'Ulukālala from Vava'u and Lavaka from Pea. In an attempt to reconcile and show peace and unity among the warriors once again, Lavaka gave his son to 'Ulukālala as a symbol/token of peace between them and 'Ulukālala accepted. The boy was then known as Tukuafu, in remembrance of this event. *Afu* refers to a seedling, and in this case, a son, whereas *tuku* refers to the giving of this seedling to 'Ulukālala.

Tukuafu chose Mo'ungalafa as his residence, so as to always be facing towards Pea (his homeland). After his death, Tukuafu was buried atop Mo'ungalafa, on a funerary mount named 'Esi 'o Tukuafu.

Before the time of Tukuafu, the high chief Nuku from Tongatapu once resided on Mo'ungalafa. He noticed that getting freshwater was difficult so he ordered his men to dig up two wells now known as the *Lepa Māhanga* or the twin wells.

Source 'Amanaki Fūnaki

19. Veimumuni Cave (Toula)



This cave was once the bathing place of a beautiful maiden named Vei. After bathing, Vei would sit at the entrance to the cave and brush her long hair, while being bathed in sunlight, making her skin shine, giving her a god-like appearance. From across the ocean on the opposite peninsula facing the cave, there lived an ancient god named Muni in the village of Makave. He would always go to work in his plantation, and was known for always wearing a white hat. Muni would longingly stare towards the cave at Vei, but knew that he could not approach her, for whenever he tries to, Vei would vanish from his sight. One day, Muni decided to try once more. This time, he left his white hat on his plantation directly facing the cave. He then traveled around the island towards Vei's cave as fast as he could.

Vei was in the midst of brushing her hair. She looked across to the peninsula at Makave and saw the god's white hat. Thinking that the god was still occupied at his plantation, Vei continued brushing her hair. Suddenly, Muni appeared from behind her and grabbed her hair. Vei begged Muni not to kill her, and invited him into the cave. Vei herself was like a goddess, and she had supernatural abilities as well. Once inside the cave, Vei took in all the water in the cave and held it in her mouth as she fled outside.

Vei ran through the village of Toula, where she was questioned by the gods Sisi and Faingaa. She was tickled and water fell out of her mouth into Toula, and that is why Toula wells are known for how easy it is to dig up, and the purity of its waters. This place is now called Vai'ene ('ene meaning tickle, and vai meaning water). She then fled through Tufu, Falaleu and what is now called the Port of Refuge harbor. She slid down the slope and more water spilled out forming a fresh water stream known as Veingangana (ngangana meaning fell/dropped). She continued fleeing through the sea-wall of Mt. Talau, Vaipua and Mataika sea-wall where she rested. There is a cave there with the same brackish water as the cave here named Tufutele. Vei finally stopped running when she got to the coast of Leimātu'a where she rested now known as Veisiale.