



Jes Armstrong



Vava'u, Tonga

Partner - Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga

About Tonga

The Kingdom of Tonga, affectionately called the "Friendly Islands," is made up of 171 islands, although less than 40 are inhabited. The main island of Tongatapu holds the country's only urban and commercial centre.

Approximately two thirds of Tonga's population reside in Tongatapu, with increasing numbers flocking to the urban centre. Tongans are ethnically Polynesian and make up 98% of the population. The remaining 2% is made up of Europeans, other Pacific Islanders and Chinese immigrants.

Tonga enjoys warm tropical weather, although the country often experiences cyclones from November to April. As Tonga lies in an active earthquake zone, it is also susceptible to tsunamis.

Tonga, a constitutional monarchy, is the only South Pacific country never to have been colonized by a foreign power, and in fact, the kingship has been handed down through many generations, beginning in the 10th century.

There are four island groups including the mostly low-lying Tongatapu group, the volcanic and coral Ha'apai group; the flat coral islands of the Vava'u group, and the volcanic Niua group in the far north.

The local economy is primarily based on agriculture, manufacturing and tourism, with a strong recent push into light industrial manufacturing.

Population: 99,000

Capital City: Nuku'alofa (24,500)

Languages: Tongan, English

Official Currency: Pa'anga

Religions: Christian, others

Land Area: 720 sq km

Latitude/Longitude: 21 14'S, 175 22'W

Highest Point: on Kao Island, 3,380 ft. (1,030 m)

About Vava'u

The islands of Vava'u (one of Tonga's three main island groups) are located 240km north of Tongatapu. Vava'u is a very scenic location with both coral reefs and mountainous countryside, and is often visited by yachting tourists who moor in the harbour and restock in the small main street of Neiafu (where Jes will be based). Neiafu is the only real town in Vava'u (population approximately 10,000 and home to a third of Vava'u's people). Jes, however, will be immersed in traditional Tongan culture and church-initiated activities such as education and community development programs. She will have a very different, sometimes challenging, authentic experience of Tongan society, sharing in daily living, engaging with our FWCT partners, participating in school activities, etc.

Our Church Partner

The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga is one the UCA's longer term international partners. The first Methodist missionaries arrived in Tonga in 1822. After a difficult start the work progressed, and by the middle of the 19th century the whole population was Christianized. Tonga was a conference within the Methodist Church of Australasia until 1977 when the Uniting Church in Australia was formed, and the Free Wesleyan Church gained its autonomy. The relationship between the King and the Free Wesleyan Church has been strong since the foundation of modern Tonga under Taufa'ahau Tupou I in 1845. The reigning monarch confirms constitutionally the elected president of the church in office.

Education and evangelism are strong features of the work of The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. While the government is responsible for most primary education, the church has six primary schools and at the secondary level caters to the needs of 60 percent of the students in three middle schools, five senior secondary and three district schools.

Jes will be based at Mailefihī-Si'ilikitapu College and its associated primary school, Sau Faubula Bilingual Side



Experience Program



School, based in Nieafu, Vava'u. The FWCT is keen to provide a rich early learning experience for children and is trialling several English-speaking side-schools for K-6 students. In order to run these schools, a native English speaker is required, and Jes fits the bill! Our partners in Vava'u are excitedly waiting for her arrival!

About Jes

Jes is a casual primary school teacher, with a Masters in teaching, who has enjoyed working mostly at The Hills Special School teaching children from ages 5-18. She has also found individual tutoring rewarding, but feels her calling is with mainstream classes. Jes loves watching kids learn.

Jes enjoys spending spare time with family and friends, especially going on 'adventures' in the park with her little brother, Kian and playing with his toy cars. She also enjoys traveling and seeing new places.

"I have always been keen to take on a challenge and volunteering in primary education seems like a natural thing to do, especially when my family, the UnitingWorld Experience staff and the Partner Church in Tonga are encouraging me. I'm a bit nervous and excited about

the trip but I'm confident that it will be fantastic! I have travelled in the Pacific before and each time I have loved it! I'm excited to travel to a new country and to meet the people of Vava'u.

In Vava'u I hope to learn about the customs and culture of the people. I hope to be useful/helpful to the school community and to learn to be resourceful!

Thanks be to God for providing me with opportunity and I pray for many blessings to eventuate from this opportunity. Thank you to everyone for encouraging me!"



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