Mr John's Kingdom of Tonga
Welcome to Vava’u

For ease we are going to divide this Cruising Ground into four cardinal Sectors

NW Section

NE Section

SW Section

SE Section
Welcome to Neiafu... Customs require that you dock alongside for clearance....

You may get away without going alongside for departure and internal clearance, you may not...
This is a private dock but can be used at a small charge (not only for clearing but for taking Fuel or Supplies..)

Customs Building

Watch that you don’t get caught with these fenders

A small or low freeboard boat would be best on this face of the dock
Fenders are lower here and a small boat can make do with just this one.

The main face of the wharf may cause damage if your freeboard is below the fenders.
There are lots of moorings in the harbour and finding one should not be difficult. Three companies rent out and prices are reasonable. In general, the moorings at the North end are used by locals or the charter companies so try starting South of the Aquarium Cafe.

Anchorage is also available but you will either end up well south of the town or in depths over sixty feet.

Note: in a southerly blow there is a good fetch here and both moorings and anchorage can become uncomfortable......

If you get right down the southerly end of the harbour you'll find the mooring buoys used for the tanker operations and you'll see both the Oil and LPG storage ashore. You should avoid this area......
A Few words about Neiafu

You should be a little cautious using the moorings, generally they are well looked after but you can never be sure when you are sitting on someone else’s gear! Best take your normal precautions, go astern on it like you would do your own anchor, use your anchor drag alarm and if the weather is becoming adverse, keep a good eye out or move so a more sheltered spot.

There is enough food to survive in town however it is best not to have high expectations.

The local restaurants put on good value for money food but they also have logistical and price considerations ……so if you want prime Angus and French wine; you are in the wrong place.

There is a surprising amount of talent available to ‘fix things’; at least enough to get you to someplace where more permanent repairs can be carried out.

The patrons of ALL establishments work hard (and in concert with each other) to get you fixed up with what ever you want.

Town water is available at two docks and it’s cheap enough….. problem is you can’t drink it (although they SAY the locals do). If you are short on drinking water most of the restaurants will come forward and let you fill jerry cans….(No one wants to see you leave because you can’t get good drinking water!).

There is an active VHF net in the mornings and if there is anything you want or want to know, this is a sure place to ask…. 
Out and about in the NW Sector

VAIMALO
Just fifteen minutes from Neiafu Harbour.

Away from the hustle and bustle.....
Mala Island has a good anchorage although it can be subject to tidal flow and the wind tends to funnel through. Friendly restaurant and bar ashore.

In Sly or Ely winds you can take anchorage just about anywhere along here but the wakes of passing traffic may annoy...

Yachts tend to hug the shore to avoid current and wind...... There is passage through here...... and I've heard 7ft draft has done it...... at HW...... Expect some local speedboats and fishing boats to pass through (night and day).
Also quite close to Neiafu are two very nice anchorages.

On route, having passed Mala Island to Port, you will round the next promontory “Muifaitunga”, on the end of which you will find Swallows Cave; an interesting dinghy excursion from Port Maurelle.

Port Maurelle is one of the most sheltered anchorages in the group and has a nice beach (no houses) and some coral with plenty of colourful, small fish.

There is a path leading south to Barnacle Beach where they hold Tongan Feasts most weekends.

Nuku is a great spot for swimming and the anchorage gets more Trade Wind breeze.
They have a few markers but I wouldn't bring my dinghy here at night or at low tide.

Nuku anchorage: from here you can dinghy to the dock and walk the short track to the village. Barnacle Beach

Plenty of anchor space. I went up between the coral heads, but you have to be careful as there is some current through here.

Some good snorkelling on the coral heads in the channel.
When it comes to Hunga, there are only two places that yachts go; the main one is the Central Lagoon, which is the main body of “almost” enclosed water you see above. The second one is to Blue Lagoon in the south. The later has some lovely colouring and a neat spot for a photo, other than that, I find it has little to recommend it as the Blue Lagoon resort is well known for it’s inhospitable attitude towards visiting yachts (even if you do want to spend money!) and the anchorage can become very rolly at high tide when the swell gets over the reef.

The trip around to the entrance of Hunga Lagoon is very straight forward and you may even catch a fish if you hug the coast…..I have no problem doing this in low visibility but first time around you may like a little sun behind you, thus it’s best to have an afternoon arrival. The tidal flow in or out of the lagoon is minimal but enough that there is often a long ‘tell tail’ on the surface, ruffled when against the wind, smooth when with the wind, showing where the main body of water is moving fastest; this also indicates the deep water so you can just follow it in……
Outer: 18 41.716S  
174 08.264W
Pass: 18 41.728S  
174 08.170W
Buoys: 18 41.760S  
174 08.111W
Anchor: 18 42.050S  
174 07.540W
There is some coral shelf to starboard on the way in so get on your line early, passing the small clump of rock in the pass to port on the way in. There is a shelf you go over after you have entered and before the buoys, six foot draft should have no problem even at spring low water... just go slowly!

Go east directly at the beach, pay out to 25 / 30 feet (in the water) on the bow anchor, pay out without delay as soon as anchor makes contact with bottom. Maintain slow progress towards beach and drop second anchor / kedge as close in as you dare go... in about six feet of water. Avoid any coral heads that you can see, mainly so as not to damage them... there are plenty of patches of sand to get the hook down. If you are not satisfied with the 'shore' anchor, take a floating line to the shore and tie off to a tree. There is very little wind effect in close to the shore and it's not too buggy. Take the path north to the village and to the resort at the north end of the lagoon.
You can find plenty of spots here. I tend to anchor in a shallower sandy spot where I can get my anchor back if it fouls anything; however, plenty of yachts just drop in the deep stuff (as shown) and few have problems.

Having just departed, this is looking east into the lagoon. You may not be able to see both nudes of leaves from here, but they come into view before you reach the lagoon.

This is looking west (or outwards from in here). I tend to favour the left side although the bevels do make the port and starboard extremes of the channel... just that when I summoned it, there seemed to be less to hit on this side. If you don't trust me, just go down the middle; you'll still be OK!!!
The Blue Lagoon

With the trades blowing in one way and the swell coming in over the reef the other, this can be rolly (or even dangerous in squalls)....handle with care!!!
The SW Sector

- Coral Garden
- Sisila
- Vaka
- Avalau
- Nounu Island Resort
- Blue Lagoon

Whales: Aug to Nov

Location:
- S18°42'30"
- E174°07'48"
- S18°43'48"
- E174°06'36"
- S18°45'30"
- E174°05'24"
- S18°46'12"
- E174°04'12"
- S18°47'24"
- E174°03'
This general area is known as 'The Coral Garden', however the garden in question is only the small area indicated. With or without tanks there is a good 'wall' here on the outer side of the reef. It is best accessed at High Water (over the reef) and a SW swell can make it uncomfortable to dangerous. There is often some current so care is always required.

Ten foot draft will carry through here at all states of tide

If the Trades get fresh there is anchorage over this side

Best done with good Vis and sunlight

There are a couple of Moorings available for use at a small fee
Note: In strong Trades (gusting 25 / 30kts) none of these are 'great' anchorages!
For winds NW through South

Avalau

These two clumps of coral had over 12' of water over them...so you could anchor in the sand and lay back over them.

Mounu Island Resort

In normal Trade Winds anchor anywhere along here but watch for moorings and boat activity near the Resort.

You could take 4ft draft over this head at LW and get away with it...better to just snorkel on it!!!

My preferred anchorage in lighter Trades...try to avoid damaging any coral clumps with your gear.

Avalau

Here you get chance to have an island to yourself.....and a nice sandy beach!
Not much in the way of anchorage but you can ‘hang off’ in a couple of places.

I’ve seen local boats belt through the pass at full speed (and a few Moorings boats with 6’ draft.....)
If you go through carefully, you can find anchorage to the south with some protection but there is coral, even in the deeper water.......
The NE Sector

The Main route to the NE Sector is round the S end of Kapa Island..... just about every year, someone clenks the reef here; with the sun in your eyes you won’t see it until too late.....

From Nuku head for the south end of Taunga, when you can see into Tapanah... Afo Island... after course for the N end of Taunga. When the peak of Pangai motu (290m) opens up round Kapa, alter to the west tip of Tapanah. Look where you’re going!!

A: 18 43.003S 174 02.738W
B: 18 44.055S 174 01.769W
C: 18 44.133S 174 01.408W
D: 18 43.232S 174 00.428W
**TAPANA ISLAND**

Get away from it all in South Tapana anchorage. Here you can find shelter from North through East to Southwest... lots of places to take the dinghy and snorkel. Flat water but with the trade wind breeze to power up the wind generator. Pick your spot and move right into the Sand... you can always have a beach to yourself here.
Not much to bring you up here... The clam farm steals the best anchorage and small boat traffic passing SW of Mala causes a wake.

Going further East

Check before you go what buoys are there and what are missing. Pick your weather as the pass is difficult in strong trades. Check out the Kingdom of Tonga Guide.
Above and below are from the ‘Sailingbirds Guide’..... you should buy this book as soon as you arrive if you don’t have it already.........
Dinghy Landing
Short walk over to Neiafu

You really need good light and good conditions to enjoy this area
SE sector
You may want to bear in mind I only draw 4ft... Just move into a depth you are comfortable with... In normal trades, this side of the island is difficult at best!

You can hang off over this side behind Tauta to get some shelter.

Anywhere in the southern bight if you want your wind generator to work.

This is a good anchorage, even in strong trades, lots for kids to do also!

This is one of the best beaches in the group... and it faces directly into the E-SE trades.
The far SE is out of the comfort range for most cruising yachts but it's not far from Taunga and there are some fair day anchorages with really good snorkelling.

See google earth shot below
A visit to the Ha'apai

From Vava’u to The Ha’apai there is about 50 miles of open water and 12 miles of pilotage at each end. For most cruising boats this is too much to do in a day, so you either make an early start (leave in the dark) or do an overnight. Most do the latter as arriving in the Ha’apai late in the day with fading light is not a good idea.....
There are few places in the Ha'apai you'd want to arrive at with poor light but this may be a place to consider if you get caught out. Put 19°45.75S 174°20.77W in your GPS, approach from the NW and drop as soon as you have anchoring depth (this only for normal trade wind conditions).
The ‘Sailingbirds Guide’ offers the above anchorage……It may be good for an early departure when going north but arrival in poor light may be tricky.... I couldn’t get a ‘google’ on it and the last time I went passed, there was a boat rolling heavily in the cove......so I kept on going!!!
Anchoring off Pangai, Lefuka
Posn 1) 19 48.002S 174 21.239W …muddy sand…18feet of water
Posn 2) 19 47.973S 174 21.285W… muddy sand…16feet of water
Both of these are a short distance north of the harbour entrance but clear of traffic.
PANGAI HARBOUR
Not the greatest of places but you have to go here to ‘clear in’ and out of the Ha’apai. The process is painless if you are calling in anyway….. but if you are on route, passing through, it can be a pain. Best take clearance direct between Vava’u and Nuku’alofa, then if you do stop on route, well… you can always make your way here to make it official.
There is room in the harbour for a couple of boats to anchor and this is one of the few places with some all-round protection in a frontal passage. Ourselves and a few other boats did take one here in roughly the yellow positions marked… You should be prepared to use at least two anchors (line ashore is also an option). Do not anchor in the north of the basin as commercial traffic arrives and departs at all hours….

There is not much available here however the Diesel was cheaper than in Vava’u and easier to get!!!!!! LPG is also available near the dock and limited supplies. Most of the limited Fresh Provisions were of very poor quality. AND if you do buy anything best check for roaches before you bring it aboard (that includes lettuce, cabbage and the like!!!).
The end of the dock is fine most weekdays however, when school is out this is the local swim site so you can expect a wet, if not drowned, dinghy.

There are two ramps (one facing you on the bottom photo), we put our wheels down and pulled out there without problem except that at Low Water the ramp has a drop-off at the end..... and it’s slippery!!!

As there is so little of interest ashore here, there should be no problem leaving the dinghy for short periods.

c/o Sailingbird Guide......... (The FL.G has been replaced by a stake June 2010)
There is a wide exit pass with a big lump of coral in the middle, dividing it in two; this coral patch is marked by a difficult-to-see stake. The southern extremity of the south pass has a large concrete cairn (easy to see). However the northern pass is wider, deeper and more used.

Anchor as shown in sand (18 feet). This section of beach has no coral so you swim ashore from your boat.
The long route is the best way to go, there is a short 'back door' route and the channel is marked with a beacon north of Tafala Island but you should check it out first. The current runs very strong in the pass so the 'back door' should only be used heading north.

Most people head for the village and anchor just north of the outer mark on the approach to the dock.

The line and route shown is clear but in this area you should always be keeping a lookout.

Scattered areas of reef

Anchor Point: 19° 57.660S 174° 29.599W
Going South from UANUKUHAHAKI, which is the anchorage indicated on the chart above in the southern Uiha group, you pass ‘Ava Mata MaTa Veka’ and to the west of Joulton Shoals. You may then take up a course directly for Limu Island. There are a couple of coral heads close to the approach line so the best time to do this passage is in the early afternoon.
A short distance south of Uiha is Limu,... 'this off the track' island is great for both shells and bird watching. In easterly winds you can find nice sand in 12ft of water and lay back.....

Anchorages range from 8ft to 20 ft in sand at LW. We always had 6ft of water over the nearest coral head......
Ha‘afeva Anchorage and Village

If the wind goes into the north, especially if it blows fresh from the NW, comfortable anchorages can be found in this bight...

Anchor well clear of the dock as there is a lot of commercial traffic and you will be in the way.

With shallow draft we can get well up onto nice clean sand here (FR @ LW)
Can be buggy.....
Fare protection in normal trades...
Came across a Saw Fish here (rare).

Anchor posn: 20 16.763S 174 48.011W
And after all that time, the Rats are still here............!!!!!!!!!
TONGATAPU is not a bad place to hang out waiting for the jump to New Zealand, there is some local cruising around the island and ashore you can always hire a car to see the interior. There is a good market up town and all basic supplies can be purchased.

If you go alongside for fuel, watch out for Rats on the quay….. they will board you within moments of getting alongside no mater what time of day!

Whilst there are some nice places to visit south of Vava’u, none of it could be called a ‘Cruising Ground’ in the same way as Vava’u….. you always have to be alert and looking over your shoulder, there are few places offering any sort of all round protection; in many you may be fine with the trade wind but the southern ocean swell will creep in and set you rolling. With due care however, good times can be had.

I was never that impressed with the snorkelling, they have had a lot of cyclone damage of late. Swimming with the whales however is the most unbelievable experience and this is one of the few places in the world where you can do it.

THIS IS NOT A PILOT BOOK…… just a little guide to give you some ideas what is available and how much time you want to a lot to the group. I hope it gives you some insight and that you have a great time here as we have always done.

There are some good, up to date, Pilot Books available and you should get one on arrival. Watch out when using charted data…. both paper and electronic charts are out in many areas…. I have always found “Google Earth” positions to be spot on.

Good luck and good sailing….

John & Paula Wolstenholme
British Yacht “Mr John VI”
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www.yachtmrjohn.blogspot.com
yachtmrjohn@gmail.com

“Mr John IV” in Hunga Lagoon 1989