Tuvalu, formerly known as the Ellice Islands, is a small island nation in the southwestern Central Pacific made up of a 420-mile chain of 9 tropical coral formations, 5 of which are considered atolls, and 4 of which are considered reef islands. Tuvalu is situated in the Pacific between Kiribati in the north and the islands of Fiji to the south, with the Solomon Islands lying just to the southwest.

The atolls—Nanumea, Nui, Nukufetau, Funafuti, and Nukulaelae—have a ring of islets rising slightly from the ocean around a shallow interior lagoon, while the reef islands—Nanumanga, Niutao, Vaitupu, and Niulakita—have no lagoon but are fringed by a coral reef. The islands and atolls are very small, making Tuvalu the world's fourth-smallest country by landmass with a total surface area of less than 10 square miles. The entire country lies very close to the ocean, with the highest elevation being a mere 16 feet above sea level. The soil in Tuvalu is sandy and of poor quality, making agriculture very difficult, and there are no reliable sources of fresh water in the island chain. With no rivers or bodies of water other than the saltwater lagoons, rainwater collection and the digging of a few wells are the only ways to maintain a supply of drinking water. The land is mostly sand, with coconut palms and other tropical trees growing along the narrow strips of land.



The largest of the atolls and islands is the atoll of Funafuti. Like most true atolls, it comprises a ring of small islets that rise from a coral reef with a depressed area in the center of the formation that creates a large saltwater lagoon. The lagoon of Funafuti has an area of 170 square miles, making it the largest lagoon in Tuvalu, with a meandering outer ring of coral islets enclosing it that amounts to less than two square miles in total surface area. The largest islet along the ring is known as Fongafale, which is seven miles long but only 1,300 feet wide at its widest point—and only 30 feet wide at its narrowest point—with a western coast on the lagoon and its eastern coast on the Pacific Ocean.

Tuvalu has a warm and humid tropical climate, typical of Central Pacific islands. The trade winds blow through the islands from the southeast for most of the year, from mid-March to late September, but westerly winds can bring tropical storms—and, infrequently, even cyclones—between November and February. During the short wet season of the westward winds, most of the annual rainfall comes in sporadic, heavy bursts, averaging 100 inches in the northern islands and up to 138 inches in the south. Temperatures seldom vary significantly, ranging from lows of 82ºF to highs of 89ºF throughout the year.

**ABC-CLIO**

**MLA Citation**

"Tuvalu: Landforms & Climate." *World Geography: Understanding a Changing World*. ABC-CLIO, 2013. Web. 17 Sept. 2013.