



Recognised Seasonal Employer

Information booklet -
Tuvalu





Official name: Tuvalu, formally known as the Ellice Islands is part of the Polynesian Countries. It is the world's smallest nation comprising of six small atolls and three reef islands in the Pacific Ocean.

Capital: Funafuti (note Government offices are in Vaiaku)

Languages: Tuvaluan and English (there are two different dialects spoken in the northern and southern islands)

Religion: Christianity

Currency: Australian dollar (AUD)

Population: 11,000

Tuvalu joined the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme in 2007.





What Ministry oversees the RSE scheme in Tuvalu?

The Tuvalu Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Labour and Trade is the lead agency overseeing employment relations and labour administration across different sectors of employment including Recognised Seasonal Employers.

What is the role of the Tuvalu High Commission?

Tuvalu does not have liaison officers. Support for workers currently sits with the Tuvalu High Commission office based in Wellington. Their role is to advocate, support and mitigate any concerns raised by workers and to provide support and cultural perspectives to employers. The Tuvalu High Commission works alongside New Zealand Government officials and employers.

What is the recruitment timeframe?

The recruitment timeframe from when the Labour Sending Unit is in receipt of the Agreement to Recruit to when the worker is expected to board a flight is eight weeks.

What is the length of an RSE visa and where are they assessed?

Tuvalu workers are deployed to New Zealand for nine months in an 11-month period.

Visa applications are assessed and approved by the Immigration New Zealand office in Fiji.

Recruitment process

Pre-selection, screening to departure

1. Interested candidates must register with the Labour Sending Unit team.
2. Candidates' information is recorded in the in-country recruitment database. The in-country recruitment database tracks the movement of workers and provides real-time reporting on labour mobility programmes administered by the Labour Sending Unit.
3. Employer emails the following documents to the Labour Sending Unit team:
 - Immigration New Zealand Agreement to Recruit
 - List of returning workers
 - Contracts to be read, agreed and signed by worker
 - Deduction form to be read, agreed and signed by worker
 - Confirmation of travel arrangement/s.
4. If the employer has provided a list of returning workers, the Labour Sending Unit will contact workers to provide the required documentation to commence the process **or** if the employer has not provided a list of workers, the Labour Sending Unit will select from either the in-country recruitment database or the work ready pool.
5. The Labour Sending Unit interviews short-listed candidates.
6. Depending on recruitment arrangements, the following documents need to be provided by workers, the employer or agent to the Labour Sending Unit:
 - Visa application – if required by the Labour Sending Unit (filled in by worker)
 - Valid passport – two photos are required
 - Birth certificate – only for first time candidates
 - Police clearance report
 - Medical check
 - Signed contract(s) and deduction forms.

Note: Immigration New Zealand will not accept an incomplete visa application and one that is not endorsed by the Labour Sending Unit.

7. An x-ray may be required if requested by Immigration New Zealand (this will only be requested if Immigration New Zealand feels that the worker has a medical condition that could require attention while in New Zealand – insurance related).
8. Before the lodgement of the visa application the Labour Sending Unit will inform Immigration New Zealand of the number of applications, name of the employer and the date and time of lodgement. Visa lodgement is around ten working days.
9. The Labour Sending Unit informs the employer that the applications are ready for lodgement. Immigration New Zealand will receive payment directly from the employer.
10. Selected candidates will go through pre-departure training conducted by the Labour Sending Unit. A presentation is provided by the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment. This provides general information about New Zealand rules and regulations.
11. The Labour Sending Unit informs workers and employers when visas are ready.
12. The Labour Sending Unit prepares travel information, this includes:
 - Passport
 - Visa
 - Ticket/itinerary.
13. The Labour Sending Unit confirms the departure of workers, and any concerns encountered at the airport.

What flights can be booked for workers?

Flights to and from Tuvalu and New Zealand include:

- Fiji Airways – Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch (via Nadi)

Pastoral care

What does good pastoral care look like?

Immigration New Zealand provides information for employers on pastoral care as part of the Agreement to Recruit application process and maintaining RSE status: (<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/assets/inz/documents/employer-resources/rse-employer-pastoral-care-guide.pdf>)

The RSE scheme is complex and to be able to support workers from diverse backgrounds, experiences, regional and provincial affiliations and beliefs requires patience and understanding.

Workers may wish to participate/attend the following ceremonies:

- Church
- Funerals
- Weddings
- Independence Day – October.

There will be workers who have a sense of responsibility to attend certain ceremonies/or church depending on their status in their family and/or village.

Practical advice for closer collaboration with workers

- Be patient and understanding when communicating with workers and their families in Tuvalu and New Zealand.
- Employers should take the time to listen and explore all avenues to provide the worker with support to be comfortable to engage.
- A no answer does NOT mean they are guilty or rude. It can mean they do not understand, do not know how to respond, or speaking up can be seen as disrespectful.
- Family (immediate/extended) is important to workers, be understanding of when family want to visit the workers. Put in place visiting rules but avoid prohibiting workers from seeing family.
- Have a good induction programme (not rushed) when welcoming and/or inducting new and/or returning workers around the rules and expectations in the orchards, accommodation, and behaviour in public/community. Clearly demonstrate the 'how' in basic English and in their language.
- Use signs in both English and their language of how to operate a washing machine, microwave, clean their room, wash their dishes, put out the rubbish etc.



- Hold leadership trainings – employers are encouraged to use High Commission representatives to support content.
- If workers are all from different regions/provinces, treat them all the same.
- Reach out to High Commission representatives to provide support on mitigating serious incidents.
- Champion performers by working with team leaders to ensure information is disseminated accurately and behavioural concerns are managed and addressed appropriately.
- Discuss with workers their preference to work on Sunday's. Understanding workers religious affiliation is strongly encourages as for many this is their source of strength and motivation.
- Avoid making assumptions when workers do not reply immediately.
- Don't put down a team leader or someone of high status (chief) in front of the team. This may damage hierarchy status.
- Avoid derogatory words or gestures as this is a sign of disrespect and suggests the employer does not value their contribution to the business. There is a difference between being assertive and being disrespectful.
- Take the time to ensure workers understand company work values and practices.
- Treat all workers the same regardless of what village they are from.
- Never house men and women in the same accommodation or have them sharing bathroom facilities. Be sensitive to cultural appropriation of the different regions and/or provinces.



Addressing issues amongst workers

- Build trust that you are there to help resolve the matter.
- Reach out to the team leader (if the team leader is not involved) for support and language barriers.
- Depending on the severity of the case, reach out to the following people for support:
 - Immigration New Zealand RSE engagement partners
 - Pacific representatives (Tuvalu High Commission representatives)
 - Village/district representatives.
- Depending on the matter, reach out to a family member of the worker.
- Be patient and respectful when explaining things to the workers. What an employer sees as normal, may appear foreign for workers.

Other considerations

Staying in touch with families at home in Tuvalu is important especially if workers are in isolated areas or regions not easily accessed by local families.

Be mindful of selecting leaders from different districts/provinces – discuss amongst the workers reasons for selecting leaders and possibly allowing them to have a say.

Attending church on Sunday should not be prohibited.

Dress appropriately and research the customs and relations between men and women from the villages/regions you recruit from.

Note: Many of the workers are recruited from rural or outer villages. They will not have been exposed to things they will see/or have access to in New Zealand. Many of the men would not be expected to cook, clean or make their own beds as this is the responsibility of others back home. Many would also not know how to maintain or keep a modern house clean as they live in huts back in the islands – the standard of cleanliness will be different.

Process for employers when a worker dies while in New Zealand

1. Handle the situation with care and sensitivity particularly around family members of the deceased worker.
2. Reach out to liaison officers/Pacific High Commission representatives to understand cultural protocols and government requirements.
3. The definition of family member extends more than their immediate family.
4. You may come across the involvement of a church pastor or chief of the village or family who has the blessing from the next-of-kin to speak on behalf of the family of the deceased worker.
5. You may come across a situation where the next-of-kin may not always have the say when it comes to organising the repatriation of the deceased worker - the decision can sit with the wider family.
6. Communication to other teams to refrain from sharing information about the deceased on social media until the family has been informed.
7. Depending on the cause of death, the employer, will need to be aware of insurance and ACC policies and the support available for the deceased worker's family.
8. During the entire process keep the Labour Sending Unit/High Commission and family updated if you are in direct contact with the next-of-kin or family representative.

Note: The process will vary depending on government protocols, cultural practices, and repatriation requirements of each country and what the families of the deceased want to do. The next-of-kin and/or immediate family of the deceased (either in New Zealand or overseas) are the decision makers.

Key steps to aid employers:

Step 1: Report the death

Employer to inform:

- 1.1 The next-of-kin immediately. Ascertain what the family would like to do with the body of their loved one.
- 1.2 The Immigration New Zealand RSE engagement partner on visa and pastoral requirements.
- 1.3 Medical insurance providers- liaise with them regarding a pre-approved insurance quote for body repatriation to country of origin or New Zealand burial.

Depending on the country's protocols inform:

- The Labour Sending Unit – they will require information including the name of the deceased, date/place/cause of death etc. This will assist them with their briefing to the respective Minister(s).
- The Office of the High Commission – RSE workers are non-citizens of New Zealand and therefore it is important the Heads of Mission are informed of the passing of one of their citizens. They will also provide support around government protocols, translation and/or cultural advice.

Note: Protocols and processes will vary, and remedial intervention will be necessary depending on circumstances surrounding the death. It's important you reach out to the right people for guidance.

Step 2: Engage a funeral director

Liaise with the funeral director to progress and discuss requirements.

Step 3: Documentation

The following documentation is required to facilitate clearance for the body to be repatriated home and to process deceased worker's benefits and entitlements.

3.1 Death certificate to confirm cause of death.

3.2 Clearance from respective government organisations (Ministry of Health, Customs New Zealand Service and Immigration New Zealand).

Note: Employer will need to liaise with the Labour Sending Unit/liaison officers regarding the documents required to clear repatriation.

Step 4: Payroll and benefits

Employer initiates the process for final payments and necessary paperwork.

Step 5: Facilitate family/funeral service

There may be customary practices requested before repatriation of the deceased worker. The employer is encouraged to work with the High Commission representatives/spokesperson of the deceased to obtain advice.

Note: Employers may witness customs and practices that are not aligned to beliefs/customs.

Step 6: Transportation

The employer in conjunction with the insurance provider is to facilitate travel arrangements for one family member from Tuvalu to accompany the deceased worker.

Note: The employer may choose to travel with the deceased worker and family. It may vary from country to country. The liaison officer or selected official may also accompany the worker back home.



What do you need to do before visiting Tuvalu?

Employers are encouraged to visit the country and homes of their workers.

Things to note:

1. Gifts are sometimes exchanged at meetings.
2. Dress respectfully when meeting with officials and visiting provinces or families of workers. (Modest dress codes apply for men and women in Tuvalu. In some outer islands and in all community meeting halls (Falekaupule), it is not acceptable for women to wear pants).
3. Take something with you whenever you visit someone at their home. Food or souvenirs from New Zealand are often appreciated gifts, e.g. New Zealand chocolate.
4. Inform the Labour Sending Unit of your visit including your agenda/itinerary.
5. Driving is on the left-hand side.

Useful words/phrases to enhance communication with Tuvalu workers

Hello/Hi – Talofa

Welcome – Talofa

Goodbye – Tofa

Have a nice day – Manuia te aso

Please – Fakamolemole

Thank you – Fakafetai

Family, household, relatives, society, congregation – Kāiga

Yes – Ao

No – Ikai



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