

Crystal clear water makes choosing a spot to drop anchor easy at Kelefesia

Kelefesia, Ha'apai Group



Tom Partridge recommends this anchorage as a piece of paradise in Tonga

If your idea of paradise is anchoring off a deserted island with palm trees and white sands, then look no further than the Ha'apai Islands in Tonga. Most yachts choose to stay in the Vava'u Islands in North Tonga where bars, restaurants and good provisioning abound; many are put off the Ha'apai Islands by rumours of menacing reefs, cyclone destruction and unprotected anchorages. Yes, the Ha'apai are low-lying islands and, yes, you do need to use Mk 1 eyeball navigation, but with careful preparation they are easily tackled and it's a rare day when you have to share an anchorage. Our favourite in all of the Ha'apai is off Kelefesia.

This is an anchorage better suited to calm weather, because in winds above 15 knots there can be an uncomfortable swell when waves at high tide flow over the reef. If you're sailing south to Kelefesia it is best to avoid the islands to the north-west and approach the island from due west. The pass through the reef into the anchorage is approximately 230m wide and the surrounding reef is easily spotted, marked by small breaking

waves. It is a good idea to download satellite images of the island and its surrounds in advance of your arrival and check these against your charts. Ensure you have a good look-out coming through the short entrance. Once inside, it's a case of looking through crystal clear water for a good patch of sand amongst coral heads to drop your anchor. The coral outcrops can rise 10m from the sea floor and you need to ensure you will not swing into one. If there is any swell you may want to consider using a stern anchor to help keep the boat pointing into it.

Kelefesia resembles a mini Rock of Gibraltar. Days here are passed by idly enjoying the sun, snorkeling or exploring

'Enjoy that perfect Pacific sunset from the small sand cay'

the small island, which is uninhabited for most of the year. Take the dinghy a short hop to shore and land on the sandy white beach. To the west of the island there is a small path, which can be scrambled up to enjoy a view of the anchorage. Or perhaps enjoy that perfect Pacific sunset from the small sand

cay that juts out to the north-west. The island can be circumnavigated but some parts will require entering the water to either wade or swim a little. Look out for turtles and maybe even schools of baby black tip reef sharks swimming in the shallows – no need to fear them, they'll quickly flit off when they see you.

Diving, snorkeling and fishing can likewise be enjoyed in the surrounding reef. Shell collecting is another rewarding pastime and many beautiful specimens

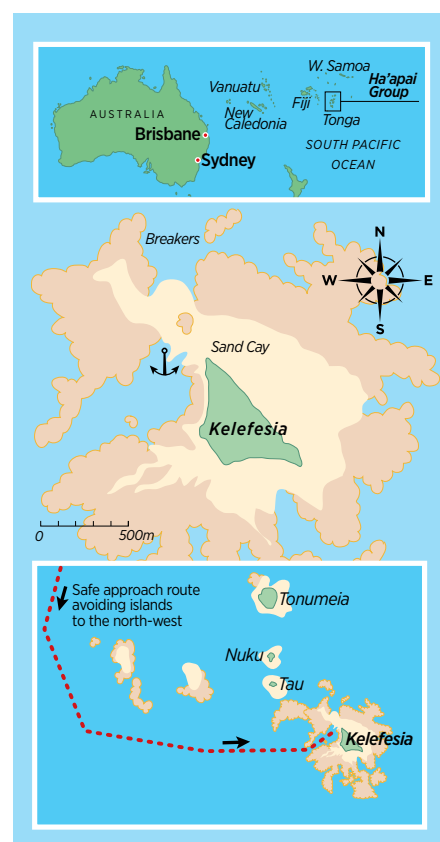


PHOTO: TOM PARTRIDGE. CHART: MAXINE HEATH

can be spotted by the eagle-eyed. Mangoes and other fruit grow wild and if you're a dab hand at husking coconuts there is no shortage of those. From July to October you will spot humpback whales nearby, but don't attempt to snorkel with these wild animals – professional tours are best organised in Uoleva further north. What else do you need to enjoy paradise? 🚤