

Tonga: Major Eruption in the South Pacific

Chris Shieff

18 January, 2022



On January 15, there was a major volcanic eruption in Tonga - an island nation in the South Pacific.

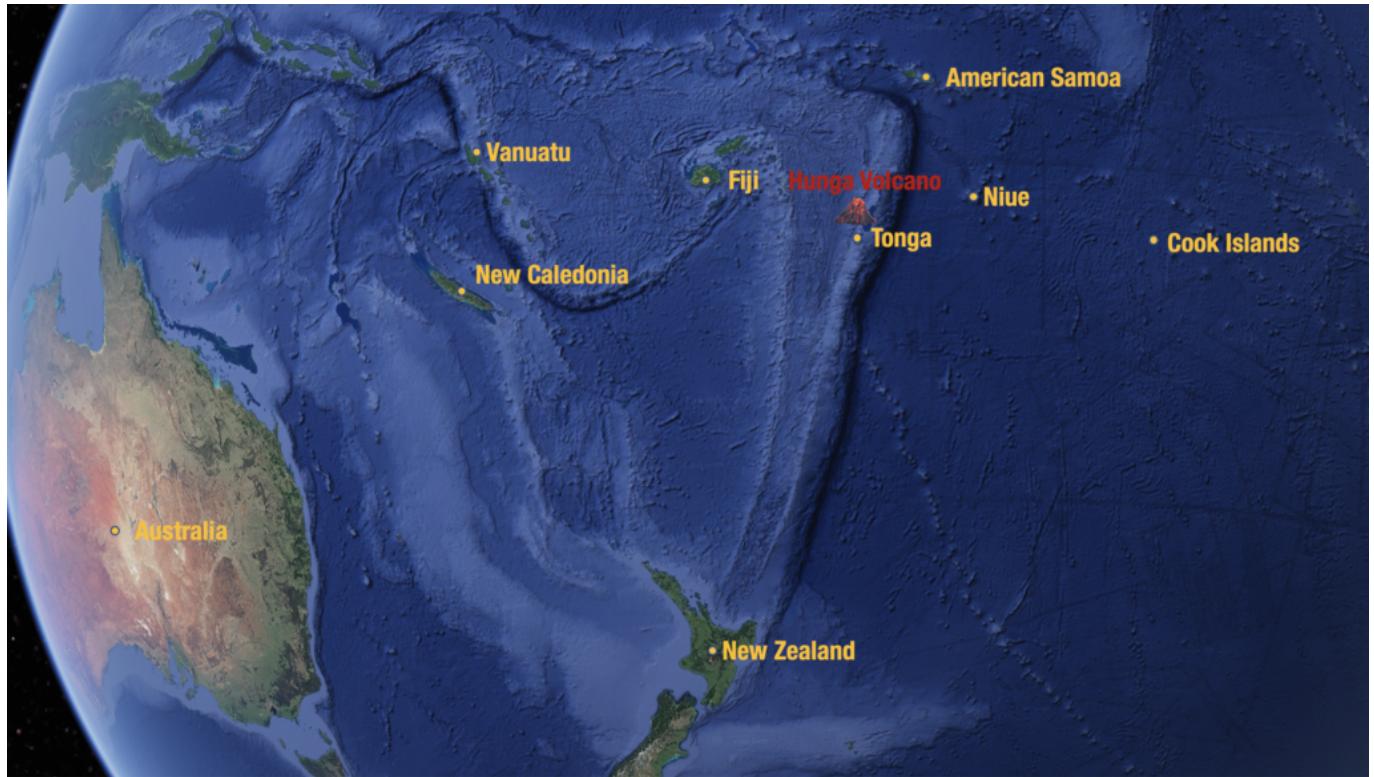
It was perhaps the most explosively violent eruption of the 21st century to date. Since then, the volcano has continued to produce ash as high as **FL630** and has potential to continue to cause major flight disruptions throughout the region.

Here's what you need to know.

Where is it?

The *Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha'apai* volcano, or just **Hunga Volcano** for short, is found approximately 30nm north of Tonga's capital, Nuku'alofa. You won't find it on maps because it is hidden underwater. It is nestled squarely within the Tonga Trench, and is part of the Pacific's infamous Ring of Fire - where eruptions and earthquakes come with the territory.

Because it is submerged, the risk to airports in the region is actually two-fold - from **ash**, and from **tsunamis** caused by seismic activity under the sea.



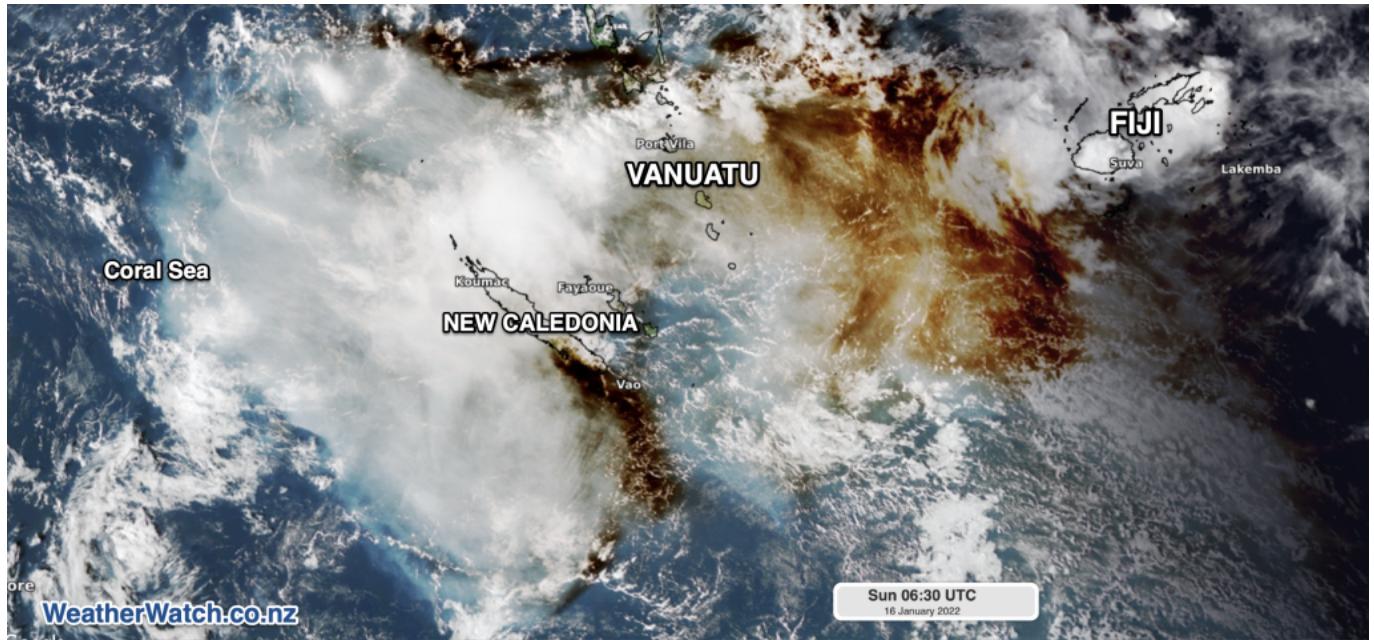
The Hunga Volcano is found underwater, just to the north of Nuku'alofa, Tonga.

What has been happening?

The Hunga Volcano has been stirring for a while. In December there were small eruptions which produced ash and disrupted flights at Tonga's main airport, **NFTF/Fua'amotu**. Then on January 15, there was a much more violent eruption.

Hunga produced a large ash plume, 150 nm wide and extending up to FL630 well west of Tonga. The remnant of this cloud is currently over New Caledonia. The current VAAC forecast is good, with ash emission expected to stop.

NFTF/Fua'amotu is currently **closed due to ash on the ground**, and is expected to re-open at 0630 local on Jan 21 (1730z on Jan 20) but this may well be extended. Airports nearby – especially in **Fiji, New Caledonia** and **Vanuatu** have so far escaped major disruptions.



Hunga's ash plume reached hundreds of miles west of Tonga.

Over the weekend, widespread Tsunami warnings caused by Hunga were issued for coastlines as far away as **South America, the US and Japan**. These have since been lifted, however Tonga itself was badly impacted by waves. It remains in a state of emergency and is still cut off from the world as internet and phone services are reportedly down. Reports of damage are still coming through.

The majority of major airports in the South Pacific Islands are at or near sea-level which leaves them especially vulnerable to this threat. They are also very remote. If Hunga erupts again, widespread closures could happen with little notice.



Hunga's Tsunami threat puts low level airports at risk throughout the South Pacific.

Outlook

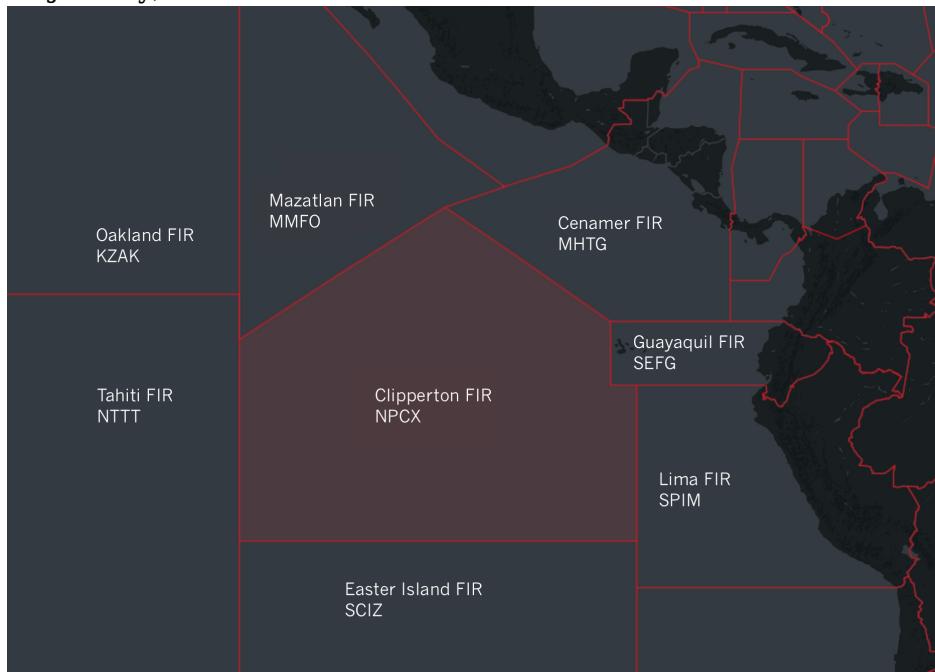
While things have started to subside since the eruption, it's not clear whether this was a one-off, or if we are in the middle of an 'eruptive sequence.' In other words, there may be more to come.

Stay Updated

VAAC Wellington handles volcanic alerts for the South Pacific region. You can view new advisories as they are issued, [here](#).

OPSGROUP wins bid to control 1.8 million km area of Pacific Airspace

Declan Selleck
18 January, 2022



1st April 2018: Clipperton Oceanic starts operations today, and is the world's newest piece of airspace!

This one is different though - the users are in charge.

OPSGROUP take official control today of the Clipperton Flight Information Region (FIR) in the South Pacific, a 1.8 million square kilometre chunk of airspace west of the Galapagos Islands and north of Tahiti. The FIR has been unused since 1958, when the Clipperton Oceanic centre and radio service closed.

Announcing the news in an official Press Release, **Francois Renard, PM of the Clipperton Government** said: "We are a little island but we are proud of our history in Pacific aviation. The years from 1937-1958, when Clipperton Oceanic was a name known to all passing aircraft, are looked back on fondly here. Now, we look forward - to a resumption of traffic on these once busy routes, and we are confident that OPSGROUP is the key to making this happen".

For the first time, regulations are set by the users. There is no requirement for PBCS, RNP, ADS-B, ADS-C,

GNS, GNSS, HLA, MNPS, RLAT, RLON, SLOP, or any of the other exponentially increasing acronyms that operators struggle to keep up with. No LOA's, no slots, no delays. And no ramp checks. There are no Notams. Although it is large, it's a simple piece of airspace, and that allows for a simple approach.

Juergen Meyer, a Lufthansa A350 Captain, and a long standing OpsGroup member said: "We've seen enough. Ercan (the Cyprus based Turkish ATC centre) doesn't officially exist, yet you have to call them every time. French Guyana seems to have abandoned their ATC centre. Several African countries have outsourced their entire Permit Department, meaning you have to pay extortionate amounts just to secure a routine overflight. Greece and Turkey continue to hijack the Notam system for a diplomatic war. CASA Australia, like many others, continues to publish absolutely unreadable Notams, endangering safety. Nobody dares to enter the Simferopol FIR. The French ATC service is on strike more often than they are not. Libya lies about the security risks at their airports. Egypt and Kenya refuse to publish safety information because it would harm their tourism."

Jack Peterson, an Auckland based operator of 2 G550's, said: "If all these agencies can exist with a poor service, then why not try something different? Clipperton puts the users in charge, and we get to decide whether any of these rules or procedures actually serve us. Now that we have our own airspace, we can make it safe and user-friendly rather than user-hostile. And the South Pacific is the perfect place to start."

OPSGROUP has also banned Ramp Checks within the region, a practice where pilots are taken hostage by the local Civil Aviation Authority during routine flights, and held accountable for the mistakes of their company, not being released from the ordeal until they submit with a signature.

The Clipperton FIR has a chequered history.

The island is named after a Pirate (John Clipperton). First activated in 1937, Clipperton Oceanic Radio provided a Flight Information and Weather service to trans-Pacific flights for 21 years, until it lost funding from a French-British-American government coalition in 1958.

In 1967, the **Soviet Union** attempted to takeover the airspace, offering to build several Surveillance Radars on the island. That was seen by the United Nations as a cover story, with their interest being more likely centred on having additional monitoring territory proximate to the US.

Since then, the Flight Information Region has remained dormant, appearing in most Flight Planning systems as "XX04". Until the agreement with FSB, no service of any kind was provided.

The move has been seen by some observers as similar to the delegation of control of Kosovo airspace to Hungary in 2013, under a 5-year agreement that will likely be extended. Reinhard Kettu, newly appointed Oceanic Director, FSB, commented: "It's not really the same thing. The Kosovo thing was just a delegation of Air Traffic Control, and at that, just for civil aircraft. Here, in Clipperton, FSB is taking full control of the aviation system. That will allow us to introduce an across-the-board user-first system."

On the Notam issue, OPSGROUP founder Mark Zee commented: "We've made things really simple here. Critical Notams, for the most part, tell us of a binary Yes/No for availability. Runway closed, ILS unavailable, Frequency u/s. It's basically an On/Off switch, and the existing system handles that pretty well. When it comes to everything else, they fail, badly. So much rubbish about unlit towers, cranes, birds, and the rest. That makes up the noise. So, we've banned them in this new airspace, while we work on a better system. We will notify operators through the DCA of any withdrawn essential service or facility, for example if our HF is broken. Nothing else."

Operationally, there are two new airways, UN351 and UN477, with 8 associated waypoints. HF is provided on the South Pacific MWARA Network, on the same frequencies as Auckland, Brisbane, Nadi, and Tahiti – 5643 and 8867 will be the primary ones.

Flight plans should be addressed to NPCXZQZX and NPCXZOZX. Although only HF is required to enter the airspace, CPDLC is provided and the AFN logon is NPCX. To begin, only a Flight Information Service is provided; no alerting, SAR, or Air Traffic Control service is part of the agreement. The rest is detailed in **Clipperton AIC 03/18**.

FSB and the Clipperton Government have also partnered with Thales and the KPA Military Construction Unit in a US\$27 million agreement to build an entirely new Oceanic Control Centre on the Island, to be completed by 2021. “Until then, we will rely on HF and position reporting, but from 2021 we will be able to use space-based ADS-B”, said Mr. Kettu.

Clipperton Oceanic welcomes all. If you’re passing, say hello on HF. And if you’re planning to enter the airspace, make sure to read AIC03/18.

Media contacts:

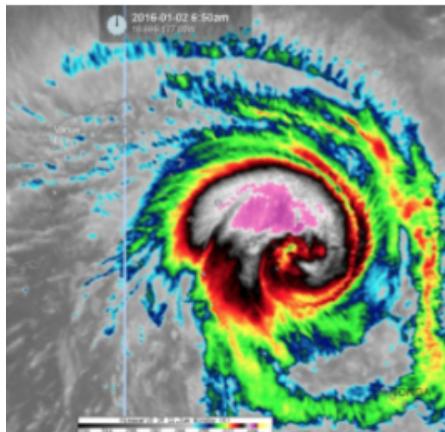
- **Reinhard Kettu** (FSB) - reinhard.kettu@fsbureau.org
- **Francois Renard** (Clipperton Government) - renard.francois@clipperton-gov.co

Further Reading:

- Clipperton Oceanic - AIC03/18 (Clipperton DCA)
- Clipperton Department of Civil Aviation website
- Clipperton Government website
- Press Release (March 2018)
- Clipperton Radio - a history (Wikipedia)

Monday Briefing: Cyclone Ula strengthens towards Fiji, TSA Waiver program changes

Cynthia Claros
18 January, 2022



Cyclone Ula maintains strength towards Fiji The first tropical cyclone for 2016 is lashing Fiji's outlying islands, after causing destruction in parts of Tonga. Category three Cyclone Ula is bringing 150-kilometre-an-hour winds, strong gusts and heavy rain to the Lau group, in Fiji's eastern division. Fiji Met Service has the latest information.

TSA Waiver program changes 04JAN The requirement for foreign operators to obtain a TSA Waiver for domestic flights within the US has been dropped, but only for aircraft under 45 tons. See new Notams FDC 5/6289, 5/5782, and 5/5806.

OAKB/Kabul, Afghanistan At approximately 1100 local time (0630 UTC) on 04JAN an explosion was reported near Hamid Karzai International Airport (OAKB/KBL). According to police sources, the blast occurred when a suicide bomber in a vehicle detonated explosives at a police checkpoint near the airport. With the exception of the assailant, the bombing did not result in injuries or fatalities, and there was no indication that airport operations were affected.

South Pacific / Tropical Storm Ula located approximately 230 nm south-southeast of Suva, Fiji. The current intensity is assessed at 85 knots based on Dvorak intensity estimates ranging from 77-102 knots. The system is expected to slow significantly under a weak steering influence, before shifting northwest as the ridge to the south begins to build.

UIBB/Bratsk A common Polar ETOPS alternate has issued a notice that non-scheduled aircraft must have prior permission due to fuel supply issues.

UIII/Irkutsk A common Polar ETOPS alternate. The main and only runway 12/30 is closed due to repair from 05JAN until 26JAN. Please see NOTAM A5600/15 for further details.

UUDD/Moscow Arrival of An-124 and B747 aircraft only by prior coordination with the Airport Company until March.

VHHK/Hong Kong International Airport opened a new \$10 billion concourse this week. The Midfield Concourse's 19 gates and 20 aircraft parking stands will allow the airport to handle an additional 10 million passengers per year and will serve approximately 20% of passenger flights once it begins operating at full capacity in March, Hong Kong International said. The five-story, 1.1 million-square-foot concourse sits

between the airport's two existing runways and connects to Terminal 1 via an automatic people mover.

NFFF/Nadi FIR Until Jan 21/2016. Operators of RNAV equipped aircraft intending to operate within the NADI FIR shall plan using random routes only if the aircraft are equipped with RNP10 or better and must have HF. Non-RNP aircraft will be permitted to operate but will be required to flight plan vis published fixes air routes. Please see NOTAM A1521/15.

HSSS/Khartoum, Sudan has no Jet A1 available for Ad-hoc operations between 27DEC and 05JAN. Carry return fuel or choose another tech stop.

View the full International Operations Bulletin 04Jan2016

Monday Briefing: NAT Track Changes, Russia-Ukraine airline ban

Declan Selleck
18 January, 2022

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26OCT2015 In around two weeks time, significant changes will occur to the design and structure of North Atlantic Tracks (NAT OTS), which have existed in their current lateral structure since the OTS introduction in 1965. The key changes are: a reduction in separation to '**half-track**' compared to the existing structure, introduction of **24 new Oceanic Entry Points** (OEP's), and a new requirement for **RNP4**. A special briefing on these changes is below.

26OCT2015 With effect from yesterday, almost all Ukrainian and Russian airlines are barred from each others airports and airspace. Ukraine issued a sanctions list in September barring all except one Russian airline from operating, and in return Russia banned the three Ukrainian airlines from operating to Russia. GA, Business Aviation, and non-scheduled flights are not affected.

EGPX/Scottish FIR High delays this morning 26OCT in Scottish airspace due to ATC radio system failure. EGPF/Edinburgh airport departures were suspended, now resumed, with enroute traffic rerouted to avoid Antrim, Galloway, Tay, and Talla sectors. Situation is slowly improving but potential for afternoon delays exists.

KORD/Chicago O'Hare There will be a TFR in effect for Oct 27 and Oct 28 due to VIP movement. Please see NOTAM 5/1931 for further details.

MMXX/Mexico The impact of Hurricane Patricia was less than feared. MMPR/Puerto Vallarta Airport, MMZH/Ixtapa, and MMZO/Manzanillo have all reopened and are operating normally.

KXXX/USA Current runway closures: BWI-RWY 10/28 CLOSED, IAD-RWY 01R/19L CLOSED, DTW-RWY 03R/21L 09L/27R CLOSED, SEA-RWY 16C/34C CLOSED

NAT/North Atlantic ASD15 Exercise Trident Juncture (At Sea Demonstration) military exercise until 31OCT. The designated firing areas incorporate elements of Scottish FIR/UIR, Shanwick and Reykjavik FIR as well as notified UK Danger areas. Flight planning restrictions will be applied affecting NAT Traffic on northerly routes, monitor NOTAMs.

South Pacific Tropical Cyclone Season 2015-16 begins on 01NOV. Tropical cyclone warnings in the South Pacific region, please consult the Joint Typhoon Warning Center, Fiji's regional meteorological center responsible for tropical cyclone warnings in the South Pacific region, or Australia's Bureau of Meteorology.

[View the full International Ops Bulletin for 26OCT2015.](#)