

*Beautiful*

**SAMOA**

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**PRESS PACK**

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## **Samoa: The South Pacific Awaits You**

The islands of Samoa - The Treasured Islands of the South Pacific - are the true heart of Polynesia and home to 197,600 souls. Ten islands of stunning wild beauty, Samoa - or Independent Samoa as it is now known so as to avoid confusion with American Samoa, is paradise waiting to be explored. From powder soft beaches, to warm tropical seas, colourful coral reefs alive with marine life. The rugged, lush interiors reveal endless wildlife, waterfalls and hiking trails.

## **The Islands of Samoa – There’s a Paradise for Everyone**

The main islands are **Upolu**, home to over two thirds of the nation, and **Savaii**, the largest island in Polynesia. The other eight smaller islands include two of which are inhabited.

The gateway and thriving capital **Apia**, is full of island charm and home to 40,400 Samoans. Its historic and deep water harbour has been shelter to countless explorers, naval warships over the centuries.

A ferry ride away is Savaii, the largest of the Polynesian islands – called ‘the big island’ – is even more unspoiled. The other two inhabited islands are **Apolima**, a volcanic tip jutting out of the ocean and **Manono**, a car free haven located in between the two main islands.

The remaining six are totally preserved - their natural flora and fauna host an abundance of wildlife surrounded by coral reefs. The islands are a must see for wildlife enthusiasts and walkers.

Samoa has a strong surfing heritage. Large ocean swells on both the north and south shores create the perfect conditions for the experienced surfer. Samoans not surprisingly are accomplished surfers; however the surf breaks are not for the faint hearted or new arrivals.

## **History**

First contact with Europeans came in the early 18th century, with mission work beginning in 1830. Germany showed interest in the islands for commercial reasons but the U.S. laid a claim and formed alliances with chieftains on the islands of Tutuila and Manu'a, which were later annexed to the United States as American Samoa. Britain then sent troops to protect British rights, which led to a civil war as America, Germany and the

U.K. fought over who should control the islands.

In 1899, the Samoan Islands were partitioned into two parts: the eastern group of islands became a territory of the U.S. (American Samoa) while the Western Islands were German Samoa, which came under control of New Zealand in the wake of World War I. Samoa gained independence in 1962 and became the Independent State of Samoa also known as Western Samoa.

### **Fa'a Samoa: The Samoan Way...**

The most fascinating aspect of Samoa, are the proud people. Fa'a Samoa (the Samoan Way) is a traditional way of life, where family is everything and unconditional love is woven through the cultural fabric. It's a guideline for every Samoan on how to lead their lives, celebrating and embracing traditional values, culture and visitors. Fa'a Samoa has three key elements to it, the matai (chiefs), aiga, (the extended family) and the church. There are 362 nu'u (villages) found throughout the islands with a total of 18,000 matai.

Sprinkled across Samoa's raw landscape are remote villages or nu'u, where the simple homes or open fale focus their lives around the community church. Matai are the heads of the extended family unit and their role is very complex covering family, civic and political duties in the village.

### **Religion**

The church plays a major role in the day to day life of the Samoans. Sunday is sacred, a devoutly Christian nation, Samoans practice Christianity - whilst maintaining strong belief and a superstition in the myths and legends of tribal days.

It all began when John Williams, from the London Missionary Society arrived in Savaii in 1830 with eight Tahitian and Rarotongan teachers to spread the word. Today, the motto on Samoa's crest reads, Fa'avae I Le Atua Samoa (Samoa is founded on God) and every village has churches of various denominations.

Above all, Samoans exude natural heart felt hospitality.

## **FAST FACTS**

<b>Location</b>	Samoa is located in the heart of the South Pacific and lies north of Tonga, North East of Fiji and approximately 4,000 km southwest of Hawaii covering a land area of 1,097 square miles.
<b>Time</b>	Samoa is +13 hrs GMT
<b>Topography</b>	The Samoan archipelago consists of ten volcanic islands.. The highest peak on Upolu is Mount Fito and the highest on Savaii and overall is Mount Silisili which rises to over 1,866 metres.
<b>Climate</b>	Samoa's climate is tropical, with two distinct seasons – the dry season running from May to October and the wet season from November to April. The average daily temperature is 30 degrees celsius and ocean temperature is a warm 25 degrees celcius.
<b>Population</b>	The total population of Samoa is just over 197,000, over 40,000 of which live in the capital Apia.
<b>Getting There</b>	<p>Air New Zealand operates flights six days a week between Auckland and Samoa (4 hour flying time).</p> <p>Virgin Samoa offers direct flights two to three times a week from Sydney, plus once a week from Brisbane (5 hour flying time)</p> <p>Fiji Airways fly direct from Fiji to Samoa six days a week (from 2 to 3 hour flying time) and once a week from Honolulu in Hawaii (5 hour flying time)</p> <p>Regional flights between Samoa and American Samoa are operated every day courtesy of Talofa Airways (25 minute flight time)</p>

As of 14 November 2017, Samoa Airways operates six days a week from Auckland, twice a week from Sydney and twice a week from Brisbane.

Launched in May 2018, direct flights between Tonga and Samoa operate twice a week (3 hour flying time)

The main entry point into Samoa is Falelolo International Airport, 35 kms from Apia.

## **Currency**

The local currency is the Samoan Tala and the Sene (cent), 100 Sene = ST\$1. The current rate of exchange is ST\$1 = GBP £0.27 / ST\$3.51 = GBP £1.00. (Oct 2015).

ANZ and Westpac are the two international banks found in Samoa. Both have branches at the international airport, and within the main towns, Apia and at Salelologa and Manase on Savaii.

Credit cards (Visa, Mastercard, American Express, Diners & JCB) are widely accepted in the major hotels, restaurants and stores.

All major foreign currencies are exchangeable in Samoa. The main Post Office is located in the Samoa Tel building opposite the government building on Beach Road, Apia and open Monday to Friday.

## **Entry requirements**

Visitors to Samoa are not required to obtain an entry permit for stays of less than 60 days, however, you must have a return or onward ticket and your passport must be valid for six months or more at the time of entry into the country.

## **Dress**

Light summer clothing is appropriate all year round. As Samoa has a strong cultural structure and Christian faith, tourists are asked not to wear bathing suits outside of the hotel surroundings or away from the beach areas. Nude and topless swimming or sunbathing is prohibited.

## **Getting Around Samoa**

Upolu and Savaii are linked thanks to a 90-minute ferry crossing departing daily from the Mulifanua Wharf on Upolu near the international airport, 45 minutes from Apia.

On the return journey the ferry departs from the Salelologa Wharf on Savaii, crossing times can vary, so always check at a hotel or local shop. One way adult passenger fares are ST\$15. Transport with a vehicle the cost varies (depending on size) between ST\$80 – ST\$110 each way. Taxis are easy and readily available at both wharfs; agree a fare before departure as most taxis are unmetered.

Local operators offer boat trips to the smaller islands upon request. Manono Island, has a frequent operation that departs from the Manono-uta at the western end of Upolu, just down the road from Mulifanua Wharf costing ST\$5 for adults one way.

Exploring Samoa is a travel enthusiasts treat. The most authentic way to navigate the islands is by local bus. Public transport is as laid back as the Samoan's themselves, and timings can amusingly vary. Bus stops are non-existent; the only way to alert the driver is to wave an oncoming bus down. To exit at your chosen point alert the driver and pay your fee as you depart the vehicle. Buses are the choice of most locals, and routes into Apia can often be busy, often if the bus is full when you board locals will sit on a person's lap.

Hiring a car in Samoa is easy, but visitors must validate a foreign driver's license by taking it to the Ministry of Works Transport & Infrastructure in Apia, at the Post office or by one of the rental car companies located at the airport in Apia for approximately ST\$20.

In September 2009, Samoa was the first nation since the 1970's to switch from driving on the right to driving on the left. In the interest of cost efficiency Samoa will begin importing vehicles from closer neighbouring countries such as New Zealand and Japan.

## **Upolu - An Introduction**

Upolu is the second largest island in Samoa yet the most populated. Home to the capital Apia, Upolu offers an eclectic mix of island life. The hub of Samoa's nightlife, Apia has several bars and clubs for a night out.

Similar to the rest of the archipelago, Upolu offers stunning coastline, picturesque beaches, alluring waters and a dramatic lush interior. Equally as laid back as the other islands, Upolu breathes tranquillity, only the city offers a slightly faster pace of life.

Apia is a scenic city, located on the northern coast, a bustling sprawling city decorated with low rise colonial style buildings. Apia is easy to explore with a day's walking tour taking in the architecture, government buildings and memorials commemorating the lives lost during the wars and territorial struggles that the city has witnessed.

Apia thrives with the activity of food stalls and vibrant markets. The Maketi Fou is the main food market located on Fugalei Street and is laden with fresh produce from tropical fruits to locally grown vegetables and meats. A fish markets attracts visitors and locals alike every Sunday. Close by is the flea market where you'll find an array of lava lavas, (Samoan sarong) and arts and crafts, often complimented by authentic Samoan music adding to the lively atmosphere.

Sun down in Apia marks the winding down of the city, a common sight is a game of Kirikiti (Cricket) and a handful of *Vailima's* the locally produced beer. As well as an abundance of cafés and bars that provide Apia with a slow paced yet thoroughly enjoyable nightlife, there are several high end restaurants such as Sails, Scalini's, Paddles, Bistro Tatau, Apia Yacht Club, Moana Blue and Le Tamarina that should be on the agenda for visitors, all with either a grand view or a story to tell. Sails restaurant is located in the 140 year old building that was the first home of Robert Louis Stevenson.

## **A Literary Tour - Robert Louis Stevenson**

The famous Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson spent his last four years in Samoa, having fallen in love with the islands and the Samoan culture he immersed himself in. The colonial building that became his home, Villa Vailima is a popular attraction and now has a walking tour and museum dedicated to his life. The view over the vast Pacific is worth a visit alone, as is the view from his burial ground at the top of the Mount Vaea Scenic Reserve. The route to the top is a decent 45 minute trek or a more leisurely half hour trail.

Outside of Apia, Upolu offers a diverse wealth of nature, wildlife and breathtaking landscape. Intent in preserving its lush terrain much of Upolu's interior has been granted with National Park or Conservation Area status such as the Ufato Conservation Area, the Sataoa and Sa'anapu mangroves and O Le Pupu-Pu'e National Park which stretches from the southern coast to the heights of Mount Fito. Upolu is blessed with an abundance of cascading waterfalls, often reaching dramatic heights such as the Papapapai-Tai Falls, which plunge 100 metres into the gorge below. Closely followed by the Togitogiga Falls, Sopo'aga Falls and the Fuiipisia Falls where the end of a 350 metre trail offers an adrenaline pumping view point 55 metres down onto the Mulivaifagatola River.

Like the rest of the Samoan islands, Upolu is dotted with crater lakes, lagoons and water features that represent the remains of a once volatile volcanic topography. Visit Lake Lanoto'o, Papasee'a Sliding Rock, To Sua Ocean Trench and descend into a 15 metre water hole and take a short walk to the nearby blow hole for some of Upolu's best examples.

Samoa's beaches are idyllic and often untouched; Upolu is dotted with world class beaches, its signature location being Lalomanu Beach on the southeastern tip of Upolu. As well as perfect sand and turquoise waters the lagoon along the South coast stretching to Lotofaga, is a protected marine reserve, teeming with a magnitude of tropical fish species.

## **An Introduction to Savaii**

Savaii is Samoa's wild frontier, although inhabited, the communities that reside here rather than on sister island Upolu are located along the coast leaving a jungle of an interior teeming with unspoilt wildlife, tropical fauna and an expanse of geological treasures for exploring.

The highest point of Savaii is Mount Sillisilli, located in the centre of the island. From Sillisilli's midriff stretching in all directions to Savaii's coast lie vast jungle and rainforest coveting Savaii's rich topography. Exploring this landscape will open up an array of attractions such as ancient star mounds, rock pools, fresh water springs and blow holes. A must see is the Alofaaga Blowholes in Southern Savaii, a demonstration of the sheer power on the Pacific.

The southern tip of Savaii is blessed with the Tafua Peninsula, now a rainforest reserve and also home to beautiful turquoise lagoon of Si'ufaga beach, Aganoa beach, the Tafua volcanic crater and is close to the stunning and thundering Afu Aau Falls.

The most dramatic geological feature on Savaii is the 50km expanse of the Saleaula lava fields located on the north-eastern coast, the remains of Mt Matavanu's eruption over 100 years ago. The crater at the top of Matavanu is also a spectacular sight; it is possible to walk but even more adventurous to ascend in a 4 wheel drive.

Further sights exploring the creations of now dormant volcanoes are the Lava Caves a full day trip from the village of Paia, the Pe'ape'a Cave, and Dwarf's Cave and the Rock House near Falealupo Ruins. The highlight is the Falealupo Lava Tube Trail, tubes that have formed from eruptions and now form a natural shelter.

The Falealupo Peninsula also offers a 1200 hectare rainforest reserve and is home to the peninsula Cape Mulinuu.

## **Accommodation Options**

**Fall into a Fale....** A fale is a wooden, often beach-side, hut that is open on two sides with posts and woven blinds that remain hidden but can be lowered at night or when it rains. Breathing natural air conditioning from the off shore breeze, a fale is a liberating experience and will leave you rejuvenated. The fale's design is based closely on the traditional Samoan home, a simple mattress and mosquito net cocooned under a thatched roof caters to all your needs.

Beach fales are dotted all over Samoa's coast, often privately family ran complexes they are extremely reasonable and offer an authentic and inspiring stay. Particularly popular for divers, surfers and any visitor that wishes to fall out of bed straight on to the white sand.

**Luxury...**For a more luxurious stay much of the accommodation on Upolu and Savaii ranges up to 4.5 star and is designed in keeping with the tradition of the fale. A stay at a spa resort will treat you to an unforgettable rejuvenating Samoan experience. Most hotels and resorts offer bars and restaurants that serve a mix of local cuisine as well as international options, often with an Asian flare.

Catering for the high end traveller on Upolu Island are Sheraton Samoa Aggie Grey's Hotel and Bungalows, The Taumeasina Island Resort, The Sheraton Aggie Grey's Lagoon Beach Resort & Spa, Coconuts Beach Club, Le Vasa Resort, Saletoga Sands, Return to Paradise Resort, Seabreeze Resort, the stunning Sinalei Reef Resort and new Aga Reef Resort On Savaii the signature resorts are Le Lagoto Resort and Amoa Resort.

## **Spa & Wellbeing**

**Relax and rejuvenate....**A visit to Samoa and a trip to explore the South Pacific is undoubtedly the trip of a lifetime unless you're lucky enough to be able to combine it with visits to New Zealand and/or Australia. So, as well as making sure that a stay in Samoa incorporates 'seeing' and 'experiencing' Samoa do not forget, that island life is laid back and the ethos is to **relax**. Samoans have been practicing rejuvenation for the mind, body and soul before the word 'spa' was even invented. The tropical flora and fauna has been used organically for herbal remedies, oils and treatments for centuries gone by. Be sure to experience a Koko Samoa Scrub, take advantage of the serene and tranquil setting

and lose yourself in island life.

**Food of the Islands** Samoan cuisine is a fusion of Asian, Polynesian and Western gastronomy and a home cooked meal will pay testament to all of these influences. Hotels and local restaurants, bars and café's offer a range of experiences; the largest choice is in Apia.

All of the hotels and resorts offer traditional Samoan food, particularly at their Fiafia nights, with traditional buffets and entertainment. In Samoan culture, food is a social event that brings together family and friends to share what bountiful wonders nature has provided. Fish is most commonly on the menu, with locally reared chicken or pork as well as locally cultivated and harvested vegetables. Tropical fruits are of course a common offering, as is the coconut, a fruit that Samoa has an endless supply of. Many of the villages are self sufficient, trips to the Apia are relied on for stocks and westernised imports.

A wander into a local village can be inspiring and it is unlikely that a visitor will leave without being offered the opportunity to sit, eat and to enjoy the vibrant entertainment that accompanies a traditional Samoan supper.

## **Land Adventure**

**Cycling and Hiking.....**A great way to experience both Upolu and Savaii is on two wheels with off the beaten track dirt roads for the more adventurous and over 1,800 kilometres of sealed roads drifting round the circumference of both islands for a more leisurely cycle. Trails off the main roads will take you through National parks, past waterfalls, secluded coves, deserted beaches and tropical rainforests. Bike Samoa offer all kinds of island excursions across Upolu and Savaii ([www.outdoorsamoa.com](http://www.outdoorsamoa.com)). On foot, the National Parks of Samoa offer incredible hiking tracks that traverse dramatic waterfalls, cliff faces, volcanic craters, lava tubes and steep gorges. Be sure to look out for Star Mounds, man-made structures deriving from myths and legends such as the highest, Pulemelei, on Savaii island.

On Upolu the best hike is at O Le Pupu-Pu'e National Park. The trail begins opposite the Lava coast and heads up through the rainforest of the national park to Pe'ape'a Cave and for real walkers, on to the Ofa waterfall near the dizzy heights of Mount Fito, please note that a guide is compulsory.

On Savaii, hike the 8km trail from Paia on Savaii to Mt Matavanu's crater for breathtaking views of the islands interior. For a serious walking tour, it is possible to accomplish a two day hike to the top of Savaii's Mount Sillisilli, a guide is advised along with your camera as it undoubtedly offers unprecedented views of Savaii and further into the expanse of the Pacific and neighbouring islands.

Many hikes and explorative treks are easily arranged at the nearest local village. For example, the two day trek of Sillisilli can be organised by the mayor of A'opo for a nominal fee.

**Waterfall Crawl....**On Upolu, the most spectacular falls are situated off the southern coast. A half day trail is available, with or without a guide that stops off at some of the best and most dramatic falls. The first stop is Papapapai-Tai Falls that has a bird's eye view 100 metres high, accessible from Lanotoo road. The next stop is a refreshing dip at the pool of Togitogiga Waterfalls, which is in close proximity to the next hot spot, Sopoaga Falls on Le Mafa Pass Road.

Those wanting a serious hike can then head north for the Fuipisia Falls and then East for the Mu Pagoa Falls, where Samoa's largest river flows meet the open ocean.

**Papasee'a Sliding Rock...**A five metre rock face slide into a jungle pool is an adrenaline pumping daredevil activity that also involves a 200 step climb to its top before plunging down the slide into the cool water. The rock is best visited between December and June when the water levels below are high.

**On four wheels...**Often a scenic drive will ensure a spot of adrenaline rush as a drive off the beaten track samples the sights of the rugged landscape, dramatic cliffs, deep gorges and tropical rainforest. Tour operators, mostly based in Apia will often offer 4WD tours heading off the main roads exploring the magnificent landscape that the Samoan islands have to offer. A common tour is the Le Mafa Pass that takes in the interior high in the mountains of Upolu, starting north and traversing down to the Southern coast.

### **Sport & Recreation**

The nation of Samoa is sport mad, rugby sits close behind Religion and is a common sight in the many sports fields situated in local communities. A game of Kilikiti, a Samoan version of Cricket is well worth an afternoon's spectating accompanied by a handful of the locally brewed beer Vailima. An enthusiastic inquisition into the rules of the sport to a fellow spectator or team member will probably invite some participation with any luck.

Upolu and Savaii are equipped with good local community sports facilities, often available for hire at a small cost. Many of the resorts equally have their own facilities such as tennis courts.

**Le Penina Golf Course** is an 18 hole championship golf course which meanders around some 160 landscaped acres of Faleolo, nestled in the centre of the golf course is the Sheraton Samoa Aggie Grey's Lagoon and Beach Resort. In 2012, the course hosted the SIFA Samoa Open, a sanctioned three round event of the Australian PGA. The **Royal Samoa Country Club** is an impressive 18 hole, par 72 course and extremely good value as is the **Faleata Golf Course**.

Apia Sports Complex is highly regarded as one of the best facilities for sporting tournaments in the South Pacific, consequently Samoa plays host to many international tournaments such as the Oceania Judo World Cup, annual Netball and Rugby Series and the Youth Commonwealth Games in 2015.

## **On, In and Under the Water**

**An underwater playground...**The waters and lagoons surrounding Samoa have over 900 different species fish alone, so imagine the variations when you step out to in to the depths of the ocean. Samoa's snorkelling and scuba diving attractions are enviable and suit both the novice as well as the advanced diver. The waters that covet the islands of Samoa are pristine and calm with entrancing coral reefs keeping the force of the Pacific at bay, ideal for snorkellers.

**Game for some fishing?...** Fishing opportunities are abundant in Samoa, particularly off Savaii's coast. Local operators, mostly based in Apia, offer fishing charters that take guests past the sweeping coral reefs and out into the depths of the Pacific. Livaboard options are also available for serious anglers. For a simple stride out into the reefs or to join a trip with some locals simply ask a local from the nearest village as the nearest community will own the fishing rights.

Fishing enthusiasts should time their trip to coincide with the annual Samoa International Game Fishing Tournament that attracts professionals as well as amateurs from all over the globe organised by the Samoa International Game Fishing Association.

**Scuba Diving & Snorkelling...**Scuba diving is still a very new tourist activity in Samoa, which gives divers a virtually untouched territory to tap into. Just as well, because both Upolu and Savaii have fabulous dive spots, sporting around 900 fish species, including spinner dolphins, green turtles, eagle rays, clown fish families, a wide variety of colourful reef fish, stingrays and whales. Wreck Juno lies just off Samoa as do other variounew yesites that boast a diverse underwater landscape commonly featuring dramatic walls, shelves, some swim-throughs and canyons to explore.

To make the rich marine world more accessible to visitors, sites and facilities are now beginning to open up. Paradise spots include 'Turtle Minefield' home to an abundance of green turtles nestling amongst the reef fish and soft coral as well as schools of bat fish. On Upolu, where the fish-densest reefs are situated along the South Coast popular sites include Christmas Tree Rock, Elephant Arch and Shark Plateau with The Aquarium, Sheer Wall, The Terraces and Treasure Island further round towards the East and heading North of Upolu.

Samoa is also the proud owner of 200 types of coral, and much is done to protect the

existing coral reefs, as well as grow new ones. Corals vary from lettuce, bubble, cabbage to table coral just to mention a few.

**Dive Savaii** are currently the only PADI dive centre on Savaii and offer beginner courses including DSD and PADI Open Water Course to advanced levels such as **Advanced Open Water,EFR, Rescue Course and Divemaster Course** .

Snorkelling off any of Samoa's beaches and exploring the lagoons off-shore is equally as fulfilling due to the immense diversity of marine life that meander close to the coastline. Snorkelling tours and gear rental are widely available, particularly from some of the more popular beaches as well as hotels and resorts. As with any activity from hiking, fishing to snorkelling, ask local villagers for permission.

**Surf's up....**March to November is considered surfing season in Upolu where swells from the Southern side ocean create hotspot beaches such as Siumu, Coconuts and Salani where waves can gather heights of up to 20 feet. December to February is the best time for Savaii to catch the northern swell, and the best breaks in the South Pacific. The **Salani Surf Resort** offers a wide range of watersports and is a dedicated surf resort located on Upolu's South East coast. The shallow reefs close to the shore are surf free so surf guides are employed to take surf enthusiasts out to the surf hotspots to fine the best breaks. Further operators include **Maninoa Surf Camp**, and **Moanalei Dive n Surf** on Upolu and **Savaii Surfaris** on Savaii. **Sa'Moana Resort** is a superb higher end surf resort based on the South coast of Upolu.

**Sailing...**The calm waters near the shore offer sailing at its most relaxed, whilst heading out further into the Pacific can be a whistle-stop tour of some serious waves. A sail around Samoa's coast is thoroughly recommended whether it be an afternoon coastal tour, a sunset cruise, snorkelling trip or overnight cruise. Operator **Latitude 14** has the luxurious Beneteau designed for overnight cruising and can sleep up to six, The **Samoa Adventure, Boat Tours & Charter**, based at Sheraton Samoa Aggie Grey's Resort offers day-charter for up to 18 passengers at a time on its 35ft sailing yacht, the only Samoa based sailing catamaran.

## **Nature & Wildlife**

Samoa boasts an enviable list of land and water species to catch sight of whilst exploring its wild islands.

Between Samoa and American Samoa, nature enthusiasts can find 39 introduced, native and endemic landbirds; 22 seabirds and 7 shorebirds - most of which can be observed in various habitats on both archipelagos. Endemic species include the Manumea, Flat-billed Kingfishers, Cardinal Myzomela and Mao, the giant honeycreeper of Samoa. Other species that are often spotted are Polynesian and Samoan Triller, Samoan Fantail, Samoan Flycatcher, Fruit-Doves and more rarely, the Pacific Imperial-Pigeon. Savaii island is the only place in the world where the Samoan White-eye lives.

The Manumea, Samoa's national bird is a tooth billed pigeon, nowadays it is rarely seen and tracking this bird, supposedly closely related to the dodo can take birding enthusiasts on a wonderful journey through Samoa's interior.

Hotspots include the uninhabited **Nuutele Island** for nesting seabirds and areas near **Lalomanu Beach**, (*recently voted as one of Lonely Planet's Top Ten Paradises on Earth*) for flying foxes, a short guided walk from the beach to an extinct volcanic crater.

The Vaillima Botanical Garden protects a variety of species, an excellent place for a day visit to relax and enjoy nature. The walk to Robert Louis Stevenson's Tomb atop Mount Vaea weaves through dense tropical rainforest and passes a magnificent Banyan tree.

Heading South from Apia takes visitors through Upolu's jungle interior to the south coast of the main island. Expect volcanic coastal terrain, national parks and the magnificent Pandanus forest. Follow the coast to the south easterly tip for stunning views of Samoa's uninhabited islands Nu'usafe'e, Nu'utele and the Aleipata Islands which are reserved for flora, fauna and are important nesting grounds for seabirds. Upolu's wilder sister island Savaii is even more unspoiled with rugged landscape, jaw dropping volcano craters, lava fields and ancient mounds. Rising to a height of 1,858 metres, surrounded by rainforest is Mount Silisili the highest point in the Samoan archipelago. It takes an approximate two-day guided round trip to get there and a guide is compulsory but the trail leading from the plantation path through the Aopo Conservation area to the crater ridge is a rewarding experience.

## **Weddings & Honeymoons – Tropical Nuptials**

The islands of Samoa are a popular honeymoon destination and possess the ideal attractions for any type of honeymoon whether it is an island hopping Pacific adventure, tranquil paradise beach and relaxation, a thrill seeking adventure or that once in a lifetime trip. Samoa can accommodate visitors wishing to marry too, the range of resorts cater well for couples wishing to marry and either have wedding co-ordinators in-house or can easily organise one on request.

Marriages in Samoa are legally recognised worldwide. Application forms for a marriage licence must be filed 14 days prior to the wedding day with the Justice Department in Apia. (This can be done via a local tour operator or hotel)

Samoa is not short of churches and most are available if a traditional church wedding is requested. Alternatively, Samoa offers strikingly beautiful hot spots to tie the knot including:

- Cascading waterfalls
- Secluded beaches
- Uninhabited Islands
- Sunset Cruise

For an idyllic stay, arrive into the airport on the main island of Upolu and within just a forty minute transfer to the stunning south coast winding through the lush interior and coastal villages you will reach your honeymoon hideaway. Pick one of these boutique retreats for your honeymoon paradise:

Sinalei Reef Resort – a nature’s sanctuary. This beachside boutique retreat is set in lush tropical gardens and comprises of just 29 villa. Each villa offers stylish design with touches of Samoa’s authentic culture. The beautiful boutique resort is locally owned and is an ideal base for exploring Samoa. ([www.sinalei.com](http://www.sinalei.com))

Seabreeze Resort – after all the planning and the whirlwind of the wedding day, this is where your life together truly starts... at the spectacular Seabreeze Resort. A winner of the Top 10 Hotels for Romance in the South Pacific, and 2013 Trip Advisor Travellers Choice Award, here you can relax, dine, sightsee, and indulge like nowhere else. Comprising of 11 luxury villas and an unbeatable honeymoon villa this resort is chic and built with nature in mind. Spend balmy days, lazing on the hammock whilst soaking up

the sun and the sea breeze. ([www.seabreezesamoa.com](http://www.seabreezesamoa.com))

The Aga Reef Resort – officially opened in April 2013 has already gained a reputation as a top honeymoon destination in the South Pacific. The breath-taking scenery that surrounds its unique redwood villas all set in a tropical lagoon, and not to mention the idyllic weather, make it easy to find happiness here. Enjoy a candle-lit dinner on the terrace of one of Samoa’s best restaurants and watch the starry skies as you fall in love with Samoa. ([www.agareefresort.com](http://www.agareefresort.com))

Coconuts Beach Club – stay in Samoa’s only over-the-water fales and enjoy the panoramic views of the one of the South Pacific’s most stunning coasts. ([www.cbcsamoa.com](http://www.cbcsamoa.com))

Return to Paradise Resort - opened in October 2014, the Return to Paradise Resort is located on Samoa’s most stunning beach. The Resort’s 61 bright rooms and villas open onto one of the best views Samoa has to offer. ([www.returntoparadiseresort.com](http://www.returntoparadiseresort.com))

## **SAMOA'S VIBRANT CALENDAR**

### **New Year Celebrations, January**

One of the first places on earth to see the first sunrise of each calendar year ensures a celebration like no other in Samoa. Both 'New Year's Day' and imaginatively 'The Day After New Years Day' are public holidays throughout Samoa.

### **Samoa's International Game Fishing Tournament, April**

**SIGFA** was established in 1996 when a group of passionate sports game fishermen initiated Samoa's first Game Fishing International Fishing Tournament in 1996. From its' humble beginnings it has grown into a thriving sport which now attracts many local members and supporters from the public and private sectors, but also many visitors from abroad. The **SIGFA International** is a "boutique style" international competition which provides an environment which is very unique to Samoa. The event normally takes place towards the end of April.

### **Samoa Swim Series 2018, August**

The fourth annual Samoa Swim Series will be held in August 2018 with three great swims spanning three days. There is also the option of the Pacific Open Water Challenge. The swims will be carefully selected to fit with schedule and tides, and a balancing act between travel to sites so both spectators and participants alike can enjoy the occasion.

### **Teuila Festival, September**

Celebrating its 28<sup>th</sup> year in September 2018, the Teuila Festival is a five day extravaganza of all that is Samoan, from sports, dances, choir performances to brass band competitions. Expect an abundance of food stalls, arts and crafts markets, tattooing, talent shows and the annual Miss Samoa competition. The name Teuila derives from Samoa's national floral emblem the 'red ginger'.

### **White Sunday, and White Monday, October**

The second Sunday of every October sees the children of Samoa dressed in white and is an event dedicated to the children. Church attendance is followed by a feast served by the adults of every community to their children who are the guests of honour of the day.

With all these celebrations, there is one thing that visitors will learn...the Siva!

**Learn to Siva...**The Siva is the national Samoan dance, an art that you cannot leave Samoa without endeavouring to master or understand. Samoans boast that the Siva, performed by young maidens 'is the most graceful dance you will ever see.' Samoans love to perform, but it isn't just the women that take pride in a dance that has been passed through generations. The Siva Afi is a fire knife dance performed by young boys, and the equally mesmerizing Fa'ataupati performed by the men. Artistic performances today mix tradition with contemporary influences, distinctive in its style the Samoan dance is an infectious entertaining art not to be missed.

### **Heading Down Under?**

The islands of Samoa make the ideal add-on or extension to an Australasia itinerary. With direct flights from Auckland, Sydney and Brisbane, Samoa offers a South Pacific experience in between Australia and New Zealand, or as an affordable and authentic Polynesian island extension to either destination. The Samoa Tourism Authority is keen to showcase how well Samoa compliments either an Australia or New Zealand trip and would like to hear from any press that are visiting either destination and can consider extending their trip to include Samoa. Any media that can secure a relevant separate European press commission on Samoa should contact the STA European PR office to discuss this opportunity.

*NB: Press trips cannot be guaranteed and are subject to commissions and approval by Samoa Tourism Authority Head Office.*

## **Top Tips When Visiting Samoa**

Fa'a Samoa culture has a strong focus on welcoming visitors, however, it is important that visitors follow protocol when entering villages and family homes as well as using and accessing village resources:

- Avoid walking through villages during evening prayer (usually between 6pm and 7pm). This usually lasts for 10 to 20 minutes and is often marked at the beginning and end by a bell or the blowing of a conch shell.
- Respect Sunday. While many visitor attractions are open on Sundays, you are expected to behave quietly and to travel slowly through villages.
- Skimpy clothing is not recommended in villages, and will cause offence.
- Women are recommended to wear a lavalava (sarong) rather than shorts or trousers, especially if they attend church.
- Almost all shops are shut on Sunday, so buy what you need the day before.
- No nude or topless (for women) swimming or sunbathing.
- Shoes should be removed before entering a fale.
- Never stand within a fale when elders are seated.
- When sitting in a fale, avoid pointing your feet at others. Either tuck them away, cross them (yoga style) or cover them with a lavalava or mat.
- Always ask permission from your host before taking photos in a village.
- If in any doubt, ask your host or a village member for advice.

Visit [www.samoa.travel](http://www.samoa.travel)

**For images of the Islands of Samoa or for more information on Samoa please contact the Samoa Tourism Authority, UK & Europe Press Office:**

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