



# American Samoa

Pristine paradise emerges from colourful colonial past

American Samoa - the only United States territory in the South Pacific - has emerged from a colourful colonial and wartime history to become a pristine and prized destination for world travellers.

These eastern islands of the Samoan archipelago became a US territory in a Deed of Cession agreement signed in April, 1900, whereby Germany took possession of the western islands - now known simply as Samoa - which became an independent state in 1962.

American Samoa played an important role in the Pacific during the Second World War. US Marines in Samoa outnumbered the local population and had a huge cultural influence on island life. Young Samoan men from the age of 14 and above were combat trained by US military personnel. Military service

in US forces continues to this day, with American Samoa soldiers suffering disproportionate casualties per population in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The dangers posed by the vastness of the Pacific were always present when airlines began introducing the world to these alluring isles. In 1938, the noted aviator Ed Musick and his crew died on Pan American World Airways' S-42 Samoan Clipper over the capital city of Pago Pago during a survey flight to Auckland. Some time after take-off, the aircraft experienced trouble and Musick turned back toward Pago Pago. The crew were dumping fuel in preparation for an emergency landing when a spark in the fuel pump caused an explosion that tore the aircraft apart.

"Talofa" (welcome) is the greeting for travellers arriving in these rainforest-

covered tropical islands, where the locals are proud of their strong Samoan culture and heritage.

Forget five-star hotels, designer stores and mass tourism, travellers instead discover affordable accommodation and services, a great selection of retail shops, an eco-tourism paradise and some of the friendliest people in the Pacific.

Archaeologists record that early Polynesians travelled from southeastern Asia into the western Pacific, populating the islands from Papua New Guinea to Tonga and Samoa. Some time later they migrated east from Tonga and Samoa and populated the Cook Islands, Niue, Tahiti and Rapanui (Easter Island), before heading north to Hawaii and south to Aotearoa (New Zealand) on the last legs of the great Polynesian migration.

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Today, Samoans are regarded as the largest full-blooded Polynesian race left in the world. Family life and Christian values form the basis of society. Fa’a Samoa, or the Samoan way, is the foundation of Samoan culture and heritage. Aiga, or extended family, is the core of Fa’a Samoa, where matai or chiefs are at the head of the family, with each family member playing their role in their tautua, or service to the extended family.

Samoan customs and culture are more than 3000 years old and have

changed very little. The most major western influence accepted into Samoan custom has been Christianity, which forms the spiritual basis of their society.

Visitors and eco-tourists searching the world for an undiscovered vacation spot will find lush tropical rainforests offering challenging trails and breathtaking views of an ocean filled with abundant sea life, including whales, dolphins, turtles and exotic fish. Visitors who go diving enter a world of brilliantly coloured reefs and fish. Fishos can try

game fishing and hook a tuna, marlin or sailfish.

Shoppers will be surprised at the vast and very inexpensive range of American goods on the island, while history buffs should visit the Historic Preservation Office and pick up guides to the territory’s US Naval history and visit gun placements at Blunts and Breaker’s Points that protected the entrance to Pago Pago Harbour during the Second World War. [B](#)



## Twenty things to do

1. Tour Maugaoalii Government House. Originally built in 1903 as the Commandant's Residence during the US Naval Administration, Maugaoalii Government House is the official residence of the Governor and First Lady. Tours are by arrangement.

Email Kathryn McClutchan-Tupua, [kathryn@americansamoa.gov](mailto:kathryn@americansamoa.gov) for a booking form.

2. Visit the National Park of American Samoa on Tutuila and the Manu'a Islands. Enjoy trails through the rainforest, the views and secluded beaches, then stay with a local family in the village at the end.

Contact the National Park Visitors Centre, phone (+1 684) 633-7082 for information or to arrange a free guide.

3. Drive from Pago Pago Harbour to the village of Vatia on the

northern coast. Stop at the top of the mountain ridge and enjoy the view of the harbour. Further on, pull over to the scenic lookout with views to Cock's Comb and Pola Island before reaching the tranquil village of Vatia.

4. Drive west and turn off to Larsen's Bay and the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary. The walk down to both bays is rigorous, but once you get there they offer secluded beach settings like no other, with pristine surroundings. Swim or snorkel to view abundant sea life.

Contact the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary office, phone (+1 684) 633-7354.

5. Lunch at the Goat Island Café in Utulei and enjoy the view across Pago Pago Harbour to Rainmaker Mountain. Boats, yachts, ships and canoes glide past and the occasional


turtle pops its head up to see what is around.

6. Experience a traditional Samoan Fiafia Night Show, where a buffet of authentic Samoan food is served and groups perform the renowned Samoan siva and fireknife dance.

Contact the American Samoa Visitors Bureau, phone (+1 684) 699-9805 for venues and times.

7. With a map in hand, hop on a local bus and head east or west and take in the picturesque villages and generally explore. When the mood strikes, jump off, wander along a beach or have a swim before catching another bus to the next destination.

Contact the American Samoa Visitors Bureau for fares, schedules and departure points.



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[www.turtleandshark.com](http://www.turtleandshark.com)

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**8.** American Samoa's motto is "Samoa la Muamua Le Atua", or Samoa, God is first. Sunday is for worship and spending time with family. Whatever your religious background, visit a local church on a Sunday morning and enjoy a rousing sermon and melodic singing.

**9.** Go shopping! A huge range of products are available at the main shopping areas of Fagatogo, Nu'uuli and Tafuna.

**10.** American Samoa is steeped in history, as the US Navy once administered the territory. The American Samoa Historic Preservation Office (ASHPO) has produced a Walking Tour of Historic Fagatogo booklet, and the National Park of American Samoa office has maps of the gun placements at Blunts and Breakers Points, which guarded the entrance to Pago Pago Harbour during the Second World War.

**Contact ASHPO at (+1 684) 699-2316.**

**11.** Fly to the Manu'a Islands, half an hour east of Tutuila Island. Known as the sacred islands of the territory, in 1904 their chiefs were the last to sign the Deed of Cession, handing over control to the United States. The three lush islands are home to fewer than 2000 people and have some of the most dramatic landscapes in American Samoa and the tallest peak, Lata Mountain, standing 966 metres high.

**12.** The waters surrounding Ofu Island in the Manu'a Islands are probably the most pristine in

the territory. In 2009 one travel website voted Ofu Beach as the most beautiful undiscovered beach in the world.

**13.** Head east from Pago Pago Harbour and board a local alia boat for the short trip to Aunu'u Island. Swim at the island's main beach and walk to the quicksand lake.

**14.** Visit the Tia Seu Lupe Park (Starmound) in Ottoville and view an ancient stone structure. Archaeologists believe they were platforms built for the chiefly sport of catching pigeons.

**Contact ASHPO at (+1 684) 699-2316.**

**15.** The view of Pago Pago Harbour from the water is one of the most spectacular in the Pacific, especially from an outrigger canoe. Pago Pago Harbour Outrigger Tours provides canoes seating eight, guided by two experienced paddlers, on a tour across the harbour. The paddlers will take in panoramic views of Rainmaker Mountain and the Second World War historic landmarks of Breakers and Blunts Points, as well as viewing underwater sea life.

**Email [pago.paddling.tours@gmail.com](mailto:pago.paddling.tours@gmail.com) or phone (+1 684) 258-1772.**

**16.** Traditional Samoan garments are great gifts to take home. For women the puletasi is a two-piece long, fitted blouse and skirt, while men wear Samoan island shirts. Numerous sewing shops on Tutuila can make an inexpensive puletasi or

shirt in a day to any design.

**17.** Drive up to the mountain village of Aoloaifou where the air is cooler and take in the Tafuna Plain and the northern coastline. On a clear day the islands of independent Samoa can be seen in the west.

**18.** Visit the Jean P Haydon Museum in Fagatogo for its historical artefacts and exhibits, including a small display of American Samoa's link to the Apollo moon missions, when the astronauts splashed down in the territory's waters and transited through Tutuila on their way back to the US mainland. One display includes a small American Samoa flag that was carried to the moon.

**Contact the Jean P Haydon Museum, phone (+1 684) 633-4347.**

**19.** Fagatogo Marketplace is a local favourite shopping spot. Buy fresh fruit and flowers, or handicrafts and souvenirs to take home.

**20.** The thrill of catching tuna, marlin and sailfish lures sport fishermen from around the world to American Samoa, where untapped game fishing waters are just half an hour offshore. The territory hosts the la Lapoa (Big Fish) Game Fishing Tournament every May.



## FACT FILE

American Samoa is half way between Hawaii and New Zealand. The islands are five hours flying time from Honolulu, Hawaii and 35 minutes by air from Apia, Samoa.

The total land area of 197 square kilometres is largely made up of five volcanic islands (Tutuila, Aunu'u, Ofu, Olosega and Ta'u) and two atolls (Rose and Swains).

The territory's 200-mile exclusive economic zone is about the same size as New Zealand's. Ninety percent of the islands are covered in untouched tropical rainforest with some flora and fauna. The islands' rugged interiors rise to 966 metres on Mt Lata on Ta'u Island. At 653 metres, Mt Matafao is the tallest peak on Tutuila Island.

The National Park of American Samoa, the only US park in the Pacific, offers dramatic hiking trails to historic sites, secluded beaches and villages. Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary is one of only 13 conservation areas in the United States.

Samoa and English are spoken by over 95 percent of the population, with English being the main business language.

### Climate

American Samoa is tropical, with temperatures averaging 28 degrees Celsius throughout the year, while the ocean averages 28 to 30 degrees. The wet season is usually between December and March and the dry season from April through to September.

### Time zone

American Samoa is 11 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time.

### Transport

Air New Zealand, Air Pacific and Polynesian Blue have regular services from New Zealand, Australia, Fiji and Hawaii into Apia, Western Samoa. Passengers transfer to the American Samoa airline Inter Island Airways or Polynesian Airlines for the flight to Pago Pago.

Hawaiian Airlines offers two flights a week from Honolulu to Pago Pago and three flights a week during the peak seasons, Christmas and summer time.

Inter Island Airways also flies between Tutuila Island and Manu'a Islands.

American Samoa has local aiga or family buses, as they are called. Visitors can wait at a bus stop or simply wave it down.

All buses have village names on them and travel from their respective villages to the bus depot at Fagatogo (next to the Marketplace) in town and then return. Services end around 5pm during the week but are infrequent on Saturday and especially Sunday.

### Rental cars

Visitors must have a valid driver's licence from their home country to drive in American Samoa. Traffic drives on the right-hand side of the road and the maximum speed limit is 25 miles per hour (about 40 kilometres per hour). School buses have the right of way.

### Dining out

Visitors can choose between traditional Samoan food, Chinese or an old-fashioned American diner for home-style cooking. Several hotels and other venues offer a Fiafia Night once a week with a traditional Samoan buffet and a floor show.

### Where to stay

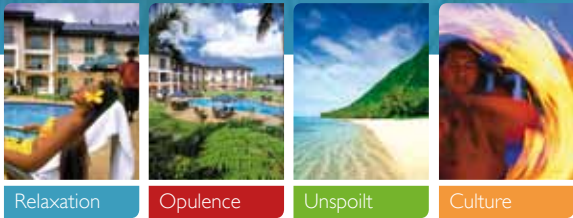
Whether it's a beachfront Samoan fale, a boutique lodge, an apartment or a hotel suite, all American Samoan travel accommodation is locally owned and operated. Power is 110 volts using American power points.

### Banks and currency

American Samoa has two major banks - the Bank of Hawaii and the ANZ Amerika Samoa Bank. The currency is the United States dollar.

### Entry requirements

All visitors to American Samoa require a valid passport, return ticket or onward ticket and sufficient funds to support your stay. US citizens and US nationals may enter and leave freely. Citizens of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom are issued with a 30-day permit under the US Visa Waiver Programme when they enter American Samoa. Other international passport holders must apply for an entry visa.



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# American Samoa

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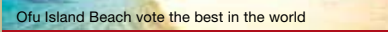
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Taking a jump in the ocean on the Manu'a Islands



Fautasi (longboat) racing, Pago Pago Harbor



Ofu Island Beach vote the best in the world

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