

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY OF

AMERICAN SAMOA

Cultural Briefing



E Mamana Ou Gataifale

“Your Waters Have Power”

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Talofa Lava - Welcome Indeed!

Malo le folau ma le tautai a'e! Sa taumate pe tua i ni a lou folau mai i le vasa. O lenei ua tau mai lou vaa a'o loo mamau pea le vaa na faoafolau. Compliments on your safe captaincy! Your voyage was a matter of many wishes for a safe arrival. As we say, "Now, your vessel has arrived to the reception at our fixed abode."

In our honorific terms, we say, Afio Mai! - Grace us with your entry upon our shores!

We greatly appreciate your work to assist us in sustaining the marine and land resources upon which we heavily depend for subsistence and livelihood. Our islands' residents carry centuries-old ways of caring for their land and sea resources. Yet, times have changed and new challenges in our region and shores call for modern science-based approaches to work hand-in-hand with our Indigenous practices.

Some specific areas in our community have had productive interactions with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) researchers in the recent past, and we wish to continue these friendly contacts.

We pray for your safety and health, and wish you all the best for your studies. May your findings be worthy of your effort and time to be here. Make American Samoa your home away from home and take time to enjoy our islands.

Sincerely,



Atuatasi Lelei Peau
Superintendent

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People of the Sea

“These are Islands of Navigators’,” was the first impression of Samoa recorded by the Dutch Admiral Jacob Roggeveen who crossed the Pacific from east to west on a voyage of exploration in 1722. Today, the islanders are very much in tune with their waters and land. This is most notable when we travel to the islands of Manu’a where they observe the breezes, the stars, and even the movements of insects and birds to forecast the weather and plan daily activities.

Fishers, for instance, can tell a good day and time for fishing by reading the skies and starry or cloudy nights, watching the frequency and height of sea waves, the speed of winds, and more. Furthermore, seasoned men of the waters and sea life have a keen awareness of areas most ready for harvest of certain types of seafood.



Silhouette of fautasi longboat in the ocean with mountains towering behind it. Photo: Gabrielle Fa'ai'uaso

Samoans have “good old ways” of stewarding land and marine resources. On a larger scale, Pacific Islanders in general have an inviolable respect for their environmental resources. Violation of such may result in losing of or lowering quantities and quality of food sources. For example, discarding small catches in an abusive manner may result in what is known as *teva*—to leave a place in a negative temperance resulting from mistreatment. An obvious lack of catch caused by the fishes moving to another area of waters follows the abuse. A similar loss of resources results from the abuse of land crops.

The sea is the venue for recreation as well. Besides modern-day fishing tournaments, the traditional national sport of Samoa is *fautasi* (long boat) racing between villages, where up to 40 oarsmen represent village families in each team. It is the highlight of the annual Flag Day celebrations held in April and most government nation-wide events.

Our waters provide our everyday livelihood in more than one way, starting with our daily food and sales from the fisher's catch and various seafood. The most noted provision is through the tuna fish industry, the backbone of the territory's economy. It produces our main export while employing up to 2,000 people as fish cleaners. Most profoundly though is that its income taxes generate about 80% of our local government funds.

Proverbial Sayings

Samoans flavor their everyday communications with symbolic speech and proverbial sayings. Countless Proverbial sayings originate from the waters as well as from the forest and every other area of everyday life and social interactions.

Following are examples of sayings from sea travel, fishing, and sea life.

- ***Ne'i seetia i le malū o le tai taeao.* – Do not be misled by the calmness of the morning tide.** A word of caution with initial gentleness when interacting with others or the usual smooth going at the start of any undertaking.
- ***Usiusi fa'ava'asavili* – To obey like a canoe before the wind.** To submit or agree as having no other necessary choice.
- ***Manumanu i le i'a ae masae ai le upega* – Having a relentless desire for the fish yet ignoring the risk of damaging the net.** Often applied to a stubborn pursuit at the cost of damaging relations or other negative outcomes.
- ***Ua 'o le folau alamea; or E fofō e le alamea le alamea.* - Like cures like.** Like the cure of one who treads on the spiny starfish; the starfish itself, when turned over, sucks the poison from the injury.
- ***E sola le fai, ae tuu le foto* – The skate swims away but leaves its barbs behind.** The evil that men do remains after they are gone, or as long as it is not dealt with.

Communal Land Ownership

American Samoa has retained special terms of land tenure in its affiliation with the United States. A brief overview of Samoan culture and land ownership sheds some understanding of the advised conduct for visitors while working in the community and engaging with residents.

It is vital for visitors with an interest to do any manner of work on land and marine areas to understand the inviolable beliefs concerning land. First and foremost, communal land ownership is the cord holding Samoa's culture in place. The islands of Tutuila and Aunuu were ceded by their paramount matai (high chiefs) to the United States on April

17, 1900. Four years later, the Manu'a Islands were ceded by their king the Tui Manu'a on July 16, 1904.

The Deed of Cession of Tutuila and Manu'a states the terms "unincorporated and unorganized" territory of the US, entailing the provision for the Indigenous people to maintain ownership of communal land. Thus, their extended family-centered lifestyle remains. The current move by Hawaiians to restore their Indigenous land ownership may shed more light on this subject.

Cultural Governance Structure

Cultural sensitivity is of the utmost concern in the relatively closed society with a firm cultural-political setup. Samoa, like many Pacific nations, has a long, rich traditional history and culture of which they are very proud and still practice today. The entire archipelago is referred to in honorific terms as, "From Saua, (the eastern most land in Manu'a), to Falealupo, (the village on the western tip of the biggest island Savaii.)" Every oratorical presentation in ceremonial or formal gatherings must start by addressing Samoa from the east to the west before addressing the village and family where the gathering is taking place.

This briefing will focus on the eastern islands namely American Samoa, or Tutuila, Aunu'u, and Manu'a islands, with some applicability to the uninhabited Swains Island and Rose Atoll.

Villages

The main residential unit is the village or *nu'u* (pronounced *noo ooh*) identified with a name post on the roadside as you enter each village. Some of the village names you may see on the eastern side of Tutuila are Aua, Lau'i'i, Faga'itua, and on the western side of Tutuila—Pava'ia'i, Leone, Amanave, and more.

The village consists of extended families or *aiga* headed by *matai* each with a title, also referred to as chiefs. For an example using the superintendent of National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa, Atuatasi is the matai title of an orator of standing in his village and district; his given name is Lelei, and Peau is his last name. His full name then becomes Atuatasi Lelei Peau. In like manner, the governor's name is Lemanu Peleti Palepoi Mauga, Lemanu being his matai title and his given name is Peleti. Lieutenant Governor La'apui Eleasaro Ale, and every other



Sign posts with village names mark the entrance of the village.
Photo: Nerelle Moffitt/NOAA.

title holder's full name is of the same format. To be respectful, it is best to address matai by their title unless invited to use their given name.

A council of *matai*, where each *matai* title carries a designated rank, governs the village. The highest *matai*, the *ali'i*, have orators, *tulafale*, to speak on their behalf and all matters pertaining to the families and village community. In turn, the village is part of a cluster of villages that further combines with neighboring clusters of villages to form one of the three districts on Tutuila.

Office of Samoan Affairs

The territorial government setup includes a division of administration for the cultural governance structure called the Office of Samoan Affairs as distinct from government departments. It is headed by an appointee of the Governor titled Secretary of the Office of Samoan Affairs. They handle land and *matai* title disputes to ensure smooth running of community affairs. Every village has an appointed mayor or *pulenu'u*, who is paid for and works under the jurisdiction of the Office of Samoan Affairs. The mayors are the government's connection with every village and its affairs. NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries works closely with the Office of Samoan Affairs on matters concerning our studies in villages and their waters.

Matai and Residences

Every *matai* title has a narrative of its origins, and the title holder is chosen by consensus of the family members; qualifications to be a candidate for a *matai* title include blood connection, character, oratorical skills, and service to the family, village, and church. All island residents are connected in this cultural setup and each respective *matai* and its rank is recognized by all Samoans. The *matai* title and rank are the basis for individual personal identities. Showing a lack of proper conduct and respect degrades one's entire family rather than the individual perpetrator, and may call for confrontation by either his own family or those he offends.

Family residences and guest houses are built on extended family plots known as the family seat in its village, and every village, land plot, pathway, mountain, water pool, or river, has a name and a narrative of its origins. The village name Fagasā, for one example, means Sacred Bay. It has a narrative from the past of the sacredness and the presence of a maid with power over its waters.

The family seat of each extended family under the headship of a *matai* of standing consists of a titled land plot. As mentioned above, the superintendent of National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa holds the *matai* title *Atuatasi*, an orator of standing who is able to speak with other *matai*. His family's residential land plot is called *Paepaetele*; as with all designated family plots, it carries an age-old narrative of its origins. Untitled Samoans must gather permission to speak at the level of *matai* on village issues even while on a paid government job.

Cultural Sites and Taboos

One of the most attractive sites for tourists is the Turtle and Shark site at the western shore of Vaitogi village. The turtle, a mother who turned into a turtle, and a shark, her daughter, would swim up to the surface at the chant of “*Laumei*” which means turtle. The story has it that the mother and her daughter, in their displeasure with treatment by family members, chose to live in the waters as a turtle and a shark.

The Rainmaker Mountain, *Pioa*, at the entrance to Pago Pago Harbor was a legendary man that turned into a mountain as did his opponent *Fao*, who became the highest mountain in Tutuila, *Matafao*, located at the mountainside of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Tropical Medical Center.

A surrounding spirit realm is in the beliefs and thinking of more than 90% of Samoans. We do reveal, with much sensitivity herewith, an unspoken belief in the presence of the spirits of ancestors buried in their family land, guarding their property and people day and night. Each family seat has land taboos, *tapu o fanua* translated as “the reprimands of the land”.



Pioa, also known as Rainmaker Mountain, on upper left of the photo, and a person paddling a *paopao* (outrigger canoe) on the lower right of the photo. Photo: Nerelle Moffitt/NOAA

Requesting Permission

Understanding that places hold important cultural meaning, brings us to the initial requirement of asking and receiving permission to set foot or conduct studies on family properties. Furthermore, you should ask permission for subjects such as photographing

or audio and videorecording members of the public, properties, or traditional events in villages. The people are friendly as mentioned before, and will gladly agree.

If you want to access a beach or property for leisure or personal interest, please approach the home on the land and request entry. You may have to submit a short description of what your study covers and its objective.

* **Protocol Point #1 - Permission:**

Our first word of caution is to ALWAYS secure permission for studies through cultural protocol:

- Water sites, communal land, and their taboos require formal request for and receiving permission to conduct studies on family and village land or water sites. **These requests are not to be made to just anyone you meet in the village.**
- Formal requests are to be handled by your local co-sponsor agent who directs the request to the *matai*. In some cases, they can be channeled through the Office of Samoan Affairs.
- Basically, the islanders are friendly people, and the village *matai* are supportive of the work of the national marine sanctuaries.

Respectful Conduct

Communal versus Individual Identity

Everyday life in American Samoa is communal. Simply put: Your conduct, successes, hurts, daily toiling, and everything else is the concern of your entire family and village, which in turn becomes everyone else's concern. The concept of individuality was introduced at the time of western contact, and it is fair to say that its recognition is minimal. Each and every individual from the top to the last tier of social stratification is identified by his/her extended family with a *matai* title carved in the village structure and the entire Samoan islands.

Be mindful of the Va

Ia teu le va is translated literally as "Do not violate the sacred space between people, you and others," and is the basic social value of Samoa. *Va* (pronounced: *vah*) literally means "the physical space between" two people or items. It applies to the sensitivity that must exist between you and others. Thus, social interactions known as *va fealoa'i* (pronounced: *vah feh al low ah ee*) are regarded as of the utmost concern, and must be seasoned with language of mutual respect for one another, their families, and others including visitors.

The brother and sister covenantal relation is sacred. We would advise male visitors to be very wary of the respect between the men and women in villages and elsewhere. Samoan men risk their lives to protect the honor of their “sisters,” the female members of their families.

Your actions as a visitor will reflect your agency. When one shows respect in manners, in speech, dress, and in carrying themselves amongst the villagers, it is a sign of honor and acceptance by otherwise different people, as with the expats amongst us. Mannerisms, speech expressions, and dress are highly valued, and they should come from a heart of acceptance. A visitor’s respect for culture can open doors for communication and will be reciprocated immediately by the hosts. Residents are taught to reciprocate respect and good manners accordingly, please do the same while you are visiting.

* **Protocol Point #2 - Mannerisms:**

Assume that you will be seen as visitors in this small community where most people know everyone else by name and family. They are most impressed when visitors, not necessarily Samoans, show respect and sensitivity in their interactions with individuals and groups.

- **Demonstrate that you have respect for their culture and values.**
- **Greet courteously, even if in English; be friendly showing humbleness.**
- **A smile goes a long way in the islands.** It shows your acceptance of others.
- **Bending while walking in front of people and saying, “*Tulou*” (pronounced *too low oo*) is an act of noble self-abasing.**
- **Sit down when drinking or eating.**
- **Remove your shoes before entering a fale or home.**
- A single poorly mannered group reflects poorly on the entire group. Keep in mind that Samoans have known some biased and poorly behaved expatriates.

* Protocol Point #3 - Attire:

Modesty and respect is very important at public places in American Samoa, especially when elders or young children are present. Following these tips regarding attire will help you avoid unintended disrespect.

General Attire

- When you leave your hotel or walk around, the best practice is to wear an 'ie *lavalava* over shorts or leggings. It gives a sense of belonging when visitors wear this two-yard informal wrap around. They can be purchased at most convenience stores.
- As a general rule, we strongly advise modest clothing, covering shoulders and avoiding low-cut tops. Dresses, shorts, and skirt lengths should be below the knees. We recommend wearing an 'ie *lavalava* over leggings when not actively engaged in an athletic activity.
- Slippers (aka flip-flops) are a common footwear choice and can be worn most places. They are not recommended for hiking and may not be appropriate for formal meetings or events.

Fieldwork and Beach Attire

- Clothing worn at the beach or in the field should be modest. T-shirts and long shorts are common swimwear. Swimsuits in the water are acceptable as long as you cover up on shore. Avoid wearing shorts without coverups of an appropriate length.
- Rash guards and surf leggings are recommended for modesty and protection from the sun and ocean creatures. Swim trunks are appropriate for men.
- While most of the beaches are sandy, keep in mind this is a volcanic island so walking over rock should be expected. Water shoes, such as neoprene booties, are recommended.



Research scientists walking into the ocean wearing rash guards, leggings, and snorkeling gear. Photo: Nerelle Moffitt/NOAA.

Work and Formal Attire

- We advise formal attire, a collared dress shirt with a tie for men and business wear for women, while conducting business and attending meetings with government leaders and officials.
- Women may consider making two-piece local-styled outfits, called *puleta*, at any of the many sewing shops along the roads.

- Men's pocket *lavalava* or wrap-around for formal wear, called '*ie faitaga*, may be purchased at the local clothes shops.
- For everyday regular work and non-formal meetings, do feel comfortable with daily work wear.



Group photo of stakeholders at the Ocean Exploration Trust workshop at the Tauese P.F. Sunia Ocean Center. Photo: Iosefa Siatu'u/NOAA.

* Protocol Point #4- Speech:

Your effort to speak Samoan is highly appreciated. It is impossible to learn a new language in a few days, but these are a few words that may suffice as starters. Feel free to ask for more terms.

- **Talofa** - [tah loh fah] - instead of **Hello**; says much about your efforts to be culturally sensitive.
- **Ioe** - [ee oh eh] - Yes
- **Leai** - [leh ah ee] - No
- **Faamolemole** - [fah ah mo leh mo leh] - Please
- **Faafetai** - [fah ah feh tah ee] - Thank you
- **Tulou** - [too low oo], - Excuse Me, when walking in front of others
- **Tofa Soifua** - [toh fah soh ee foo ah] Fare Thee Well. *Note that **Tofa**, like Goodbye, is commonly used.
- **Uma** - [oo mah] Finished, Done
- **Sau** - [sah oo] Come
- **Alu** - [ah loo] Go
- **Tasi** - [tah see] - One; **Lua** - [loo ah] -Two; **Tolu** - [toh loo] - Three
- **O lo'u igoa** - [oh low oo ee ngoh ah] - My name is ...

Translation services are available at request.

Cultural Ceremonies and Practices

Cultural ceremonies and practices are meticulously observed. You may see a gathering in a village *fale* (open guest house) or well-dressed people along the roads and open field spaces in villages. They may be attending an extended family or village meeting, a celebration, a funeral, or hosting a visiting party from the neighboring islands or the United States.

‘Ava Ceremony

The ‘ava drinking ritual is the highest form of ceremony of cultural welcome or opening of a gathering executed by *matai*, men of standing, and untitled men who perform the preparation and serving of the ceremonial ‘ava drink. You may witness a hearty oratorical speech at the ceremony, and every word spoken and each movement follows strict protocol, the violation of which is an offense to be dealt with. Most, if not all, of the lines are either proverbial or figurative. The orator must first make significant thanksgiving and praises to God’s sovereignty and loving hand. Then comes acknowledging *matai* ranks from the highest *alii* first, then the next *matai* in line, and all the way to the last but not the least. He has to recite the traditionally acknowledged historical events or *taeao*, the purpose of the gathering, and closing or clearing of the skies from misfortunes.

The actual distribution of the ‘ava cups of drink follows with all its formalities that must be said and done. The caller of distribution is a *matai* while those who mix and serve the drinks are untitled men. A village renowned virgin *taupou* or her male counterpart *manaia* can perform exclusively the ritual of mixing the ‘ava.

Christian Faith

You will see at least two church buildings in each village along the road. In most village units, there are more church structures inwards from the main roads, and at least thirty different church denominations on island. According to the last census, 90% claimed to be Christians.



Matai gather with special guests seated in a fale for a traditional ‘ava ceremony. Photo: NMSAS



Traditional setting for an ‘ava ceremony is in a fale. Photo: NMSAS

Since Christianization in 1830, Christianity has become an intricate part of everyday living, and it is inseparable from the traditional culture. Every child is taught that “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom,” and faith in the Almighty protection of God’s hand prevails over evil demonic spirits that come to harm. There are numbers of Bibles and hymn books in almost every single Samoan household.

Sunday Holy Day

The commotions of work, business, cultural ceremonies, recreation, and daily domestic activities are for the six days from Monday to Saturday. Sunday is the holy day to worship and thank God for life and all. It is a day of rest and fellowship with the rest of the community at the church and replenish spiritual strength. Heavy lunches *to’ona’i* follow the morning services at church.

Church attendance on Sunday is part of the culture. In church services, visitors hear firsthand the four-part choral singing Samoans are known for, and Sunday wear is of the color white, symbolizing purity. Women cover their heads with white formal wear hats in accordance with the Bible teaching that women cover their heads as a sign of humbleness towards the heads of households.

Recreational activities and regular weekly business are forbidden on Sunday, and swimming is banned in villages, with the exception of some locations on island accommodating tourists on Sunday.

Sā or Evening Curfew

Daily evening curfews, *Sā*, are strictly kept in most villages for about 15 minutes shortly before sunset, usually between 5:30 p.m. – 7 p.m. Every person must be in the house while the organization of village untitled men *Aumaga* watch for violators. The curfew is to enforce daily evening devotions where families worship and give thanks for each and every blessing. It is the time to offer prayers and supplications for peace and protection from disasters, natural or manmade. The head of each household prays for every request for the family, village, government, the United States, the visitors, and making sure not to miss praying for our sons and daughters serving in the U.S. military, working or schooling off-island, and more.

Sā is announced by the ringing of bells in the village (old oxygen canisters hanging by the roadside). The first bell is a warning that *Sā* is about to start. The second bell signifies the start of *Sā*. The *Aumaga* will take their places at side roads, stores, and along the main road to enforce the quiet period. *Sā* ends when the bell is rung the third time and the *Aumaga* leave their posts.

✱ **Protocol Point #5 - Observing Sunday Holy Day and Sā:**

- Recreational activities and regular weekly business are forbidden on Sunday, and swimming is banned in villages, with the exception of some locations on island accommodating tourists on Sunday.
- The exact time for Sā varies for each village and may change with the seasons. Some villages do not observe Sā. If you have business in a village during the evening, ask your village contact about their Sā, so you can plan accordingly. If you do not know someone in the village, be aware that you may have to pause your activities for Sā.
- Please drive slowly and turn down your radio if you happen to be driving through a village at the time of Sā (the curfew). Do not pull off the road because once you leave the main road you will not be allowed out of your car or back on the main road until the curfew has expired. You may be asked to pause for Sā when driving through secondary village roads. Do not try to enter or exit businesses or homes during this time, stay in your car or in the building until Sā has passed. Similarly, if you are walking through a village when the Sā bell rings, you will be asked to sit quietly until after Sā. Plan accordingly if you will be walking or jogging through a village in the evening.

Conclusion

We reiterate our appreciation of your gracing us with your visit to conduct work and study of our lands and waters, our main source of daily sustenance. We humbly request that if we have failed to be of help and be your family away from home, we ask for your kind pardon.

We hope you had time to visit some of our community cultural activities, our museum, and historical landmarks, to name some of our attractions.

When we come to the end of your visit, and you launch your voyage homeward, sail with our orations and prayers for “Clear Skies” — *la matafi ma ia mamao ni ao lagilagiā ma ni peau laga, ae folau i manū lou sa. Taunuu i aiga ma fanua i le alofa o le Tautai Sili*. Dark clouds, rough weather, and sudden undercurrent uprise be kept at bay as you navigate through calm seas.

May the love of the Master Mariner take you safely to your loved ones.

Soifua.

Frequently Asked Questions

Preparing for your Trip

Is entry to American Samoa like Hawai'i?

U.S. Passport Holders: If you travel on a U.S. passport (must be valid 6 months from entry) and have a confirmed round trip ticket, you do not need an entry permit nor an "OK Board" as we are a Territory of the United States. However, if you are traveling on a one way ticket to board a vessel or for an extended stay, you may need an "OK Board" from the immigration office to allow entry.

Foreign National Travelers: Foreign national travelers to American Samoa need an entry permit approval to enter the territory. This requirement may be waived with a request from the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa superintendent with proof of their U.S. residency, i.e. Work Visas or Green Card. This waiver includes the medical and police clearances from their home country. If they plan to arrive in American Samoa via Independent Samoa or depart American Samoa and travel to Independent Samoa, then the Consulate General of Independent Samoa and the American Samoa Immigration Office must clear the "OK Board." For a co-sponsored mission, National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa may be able to assist with this process, but make sure to give ample time (a few months) for processing. Failing to prepare a timely request for an "OK Board" or entry permit approval may result in denial of entry, causing delays.

How do I get to American Samoa? What about the Manu'a Islands?

American Samoa is served by one international airline, Hawaiian Airlines. It has two regular weekly flights to and from Hawai'i, and sometimes an additional third flight during peak season (May to September). <https://www.hawaiianairlines.com/>

Regional and interisland flights are offered by Samoa's airlines Samoa Airways and the privately owned Talofa Airways. Both airlines fly between the islands of American Samoa and Independent Samoa. Samoa Airways also offers flights to the Manu'a islands. Samoa Airways does not provide online booking, so you may need to work with a travel agent to reserve flights to Manu'a prior to your arrival. <https://samoaairways.com/> and <https://www.talofaairways.com/>

In addition to the interisland flights, there is a regular ferry service aboard the M/V Manu'atele that travels from Pago Pago Harbor to the Manu'a Islands. If you need to send cargo to Manu'a, it may be sent via the Manu'atele services. <https://portadministration.as.gov/services/water-transportation-wtd>

The *Lady Samoa IV* provides ferry service to Apia, Samoa. For more information please check the website: <https://www.ssc.ws/timetable-and-fares>

How can I plan and set up meetings and visits to the sites for research and studies?

It is best to consult your co-sponsor agency prior to your visit to evaluate the best approach to fit your project. Submitting a brief description of your project to your co-sponsor agency will be very helpful to help them guide you. Please find time for an in-person meeting with the co-sponsor agent upon your arrival to tie any missing links in your advance notice, and to ensure an effective schedule.

Is asking village permission the same as requesting permits for official work?

Traditional permission for studies on family properties is NOT the same as acquiring permits for research and shoreline or reef for official work involving resource extraction through the government Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources. Your co-sponsor agency may mediate with government agencies, the Office of Samoan Affairs, village mayor, and the family to gain access for co-sponsored activities.

Requests for agency permits or consultations (National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa, NOAA Fisheries, American Samoa Government, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park of American Samoa) are usually handled by the project lead by working directly with the agencies, but may be assisted by the co-sponsor agent upon request.

Communications and Printing

Is there Wi-Fi or internet service in American Samoa?

Yes. There is internet at your hotel, its restaurant, and at some of the government offices. It may not be as steady as the internet in Hawai'i or mainland USA.

You may need to request that the hotel staff reset the wireless router or give you updated internet passwords multiple times during your stay. If your work requires a conference call, inquire with the co-sponsor agent about how they can best assist you, as this function is not widely available.

Can I use my mobile or cell phone in American Samoa?

Yes, but you may have to plan ahead to ensure that your phone or plan will work:

1. Your mobile phone plan from Hawai'i or the U.S. mainland may not work in American Samoa. To ensure that you have good communications during your visit, have your phone unlocked by your carrier before you travel and purchase a local SIM card or eSIM.
2. If you have a roaming number, we suggest you adjust your settings or see Bluesky at Laufou Shopping Center or American Samoa Telecommunications Authority to adjust it for you. Roaming for most carriers is very expensive and it will likely be cheaper to obtain service through the local carrier.
3. There are sometimes problems calling in and out of American Samoa, so keep trying or ask for assistance.
4. For further information, visit Bluesky at www.bluesky.as, or ASTCA <https://www.astca.net/> or customerservice@astca.net.

Where can I make copies or print needed materials for my work?

Your co-sponsor agency may be able to make copies and limited printouts for you. However, if you need large amounts of printed materials, it may be best to have it printed at your location and bring it with you.

For large volumes or if agency printers are not available, there are commercial printers listed below for your convenience. Keep in mind that they may not be able to access large files via the internet and plan to bring a copy on a portable drive.

Where can I ship materials or mail?

The main U.S. Postal Service branch is located in the Lumana'i Building which is along the main road in town near the Port of Pago Pago and the Jean P. Haydon Museum. CSL Cargo in Tafuna on Procurement Road is also an authorized U.S. Postal Service provider.

DHL serves as a good option for expedited shipping of items that can not be shipped via USPS. Their office is located in Tafuna and is usually open 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday.

CSL and iCS are two cargo handling companies that can provide cargo shipment by both air or water. Both are located in Tafuna. Hawaiian Air Cargo provides shipping to Honolulu and is located at the airport.

Food, Water, and Supplies

What type of food is available in American Samoa? What if I have food and dietary preferences or restrictions?

The usual island staples including taro, cooked/raw banana, breadfruit, coconut cream, palusami/luau (cooked taro leaves with coconut cream), fish, and more may not be your usual choice. However, you will find your usual selection of food on our local restaurants' menu.



A traditional Samoan plate made of woven coconut fronds with foods cooked from an 'umu, such as breadfruit, fai 'ai i'a, moa, and taro. Photo: Alisha Gill/NOAA.

If you are on a set diet or have special dietary restrictions, feel free to advise your hosts, or ask for assistance in locating shops that may carry your preferred dietary supplies.

Otherwise, bring with you the rare diet-related items such as supplements that you may be able to pack in your luggage.

Is it safe to drink tap water in American Samoa?

The American Samoa Power Authority and American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency work hard to ensure clean, safe tap water for American Samoa. Unfortunately, there are times when the tap water is unsafe. In those times or if you want to be extra careful, you can purchase bottled water, refill

bottles at water filtration kiosks, or boil the water for at least one minute before drinking.

You can check this page: <https://www.aspower.com/water.html> for the latest boil water notices. As of August 2024, there is a large area affected due to sediment contamination of the Tafuna well field during heavy rains. This area affects customers from Iliili to Pago Pago on the oceanside of the main road. If you are staying at Tradewinds Hotel or Sadies by the Sea, these hotels are affected and you should not drink the tap water.

Are there places where I can shop for my personal and uncommon supplies?

Yes. You will not miss the biggest department stores and many general merchandise shops along the main roads. They carry most, if not all of your daily needed supplies. Specialized products or uncommon items may be more difficult to find. Consider bringing specialized supplies with you or ask your agency contacts for advice on availability.

Do note that many stores and businesses will close by 5 p.m. or 6 p.m. during the week, at 2 p.m. on Saturday, and will be closed on Sundays. Exceptions to this are some restaurants, many village marts and gas stations, Cost-U-Less, and TSM Mart.

General Supplies (groceries, personal care items, etc.)

- **Forsgren's Laufou Shopping Place** Nu'uuli Main Road; 684-699-6711
- **Cost-U-Less** Airport Way, Tafuna; 684-699-7959 (open Sunday)
- **KS Mart** Ili'ili Road, Tafuna; 684-699-4727
- **TSM Mart** Airport Road, Tafuna; 699-6312 (open Sunday)
- **Pelene's Store** at Pava'ia'i Village, 684-699-8140
- **Aveina Store** locations at Matu'u and Nu'uuli
- Other general merchandise and grocery shops along the road

For Hardware, Informational Technology, Electronics, and stationery supplies, visit the following:

- **ACE Hardware / Neil's Ace Home Center** – Malaeimi, Western District; 684 699 9770
- **CBT Ho Ching & Co. Nuuuli** - 684 699 9866
- **CBT Warehouse**, Tafuna – 684 699 4823
- **GIAS**, Tafuna Airport Road, 684 699 0866; printing available
- **Hawthorne MACHINERY of Samoa** – Industrial Park Tafuna, 684 699 4360
- **Island Business Center** – Nuuuli Place Cinema Building, 684 699 8195; printing available
- **TMO Hardware** – Fagaima Rd, Tafuna - 684 699 9335

- **Tool Shop** – Tafuna/Nuuuli Airport Road - 684 699 2420
- **Transpac** Tafuna, Senator Inouye Industrial Park 684-699-2589
- **Mee Won Inc** - Commercial Fishing supplies - Nu'uuli - 684-699-8625

For more information visit: www.southseasbroadcasting.com/directory

Medical

How about medications, and in the case of a medical emergency, is medical care guaranteed?

Bring sufficient prescription medication for your stay as the pharmacy may not stock your specific medications or it may be out of stock during your visit. A number of stores stock common over the counter medications, but options may be limited.

The one hospital, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Tropical Medical Center, located in Tutuila, is equipped with doctors and facilities for health care and emergency issues. It may not carry the state-of-the-art equipment and the standard of facilities in mainland USA, and your specific prescribed medications, but it is sufficient for your basic medical care.

The emergency room is open 24/7. The current emergency room registration fee for non-residents is \$50. Medical evacuation is uncommon, and you may want to consider traveler's insurance if you will engage in risky activities or have complicated health issues that may require evacuation.

Other

What stores, services, and activities are available on Sunday?

Hotels and their associated restaurants are open on Sundays. Some restaurants, village stores, gas stations, Cost-U-Less, and TSM Mart are also open, but may have limited hours. Attractions like Two Dollar Beach and Tisa's Barefoot Bar are often open on Sunday and are an allowable place to recreate. You can call ahead to check on hours of operation for weekends or holidays. National Park Service trails are open, however, the trails that connect or start in the village of Vatia, should not be used on Sundays.

I see beach contamination warning signs. Is it safe to swim at the beaches?

The American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency monitors popular recreational beaches weekly. You can check the latest results at: <https://www.facebook.com/AmericanSamoaEPA/> or you can contact ASEPA at

684-633-2304 or info@epa.as.gov. Results are also posted in the local paper, Samoa News: <https://www.samoanews.com/>.

A good rule of thumb is to avoid going into the water near streams and drainages after heavy rains and to rinse your face and ears thoroughly after swimming at beaches in the harbor area or near drainages. Some people also use commercial swimmers' ear drops or "ear beer" after swimming in these areas to avoid ear infections.

What banks operate in American Samoa?

Currently the only bank in American Samoa is the Territorial Bank of American Samoa (TBAS). TBAS has ATM machines conveniently located throughout the island of Tutuila. There is a fee for cash withdrawals using outside banks in addition to any charges your bank may assess. ATMs at the bank branches in Utulei and Tafuna are available 24/7. Other ATMs are available during the location's business hours (<https://www.mytbas.com/location-hours>). ATMs are not always available in Manu'a so it is best to bring sufficient cash to cover your expenses during your stay.

What should I do if I encounter an aggressive dog?

You may encounter aggressive dogs when walking through a village or residential area. Be aware of your surroundings and keep an eye out for dogs. Should you encounter an aggressive dog you can pretend to reach down to pick up a rock to throw at it or forcefully shout "*Halu*" (Hall - OOH).

Things to Do in American Samoa

What are some things to do while I am in American Samoa?

- **National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa.** Learn about the six marine sanctuary areas across the seven American Samoan islands. Schedule a tour or visit the Tauese P.F. Sunia Ocean Center located in Utulei village between Sadies by the Sea Hotel and the Port of Pago Pago. Phone: 684-633-6500 | Website: americansamoa.noaa.gov
- **National Park of American Samoa.** Hiking, fruit bats, and more. Learn about natural and cultural resources at the NPS visitor center located in Malaloa village, across from the Pago Way Service Station. Phone: 684-633-7082 | Website: <https://www.nps.gov/npsa/index.htm>
- **American Samoa Visitors Bureau.** For additional travel resources, visit the ASVB office at the Tedi of Samoa Building in Fagatogo Square next to the Fagatogo Market. Phone: 684-633-9805 | Website: americansamoa.travel

- **Kayak / Stand up paddle board rentals.** South Pacific Watersports has recreational watercraft for rent. Located in Utulei village, next to DDW Beach Cafe. Phone: 684-633-3050 | Website: <https://www.touramericansamoa.com/>

- **Diving / Fishing / Boating Charters.** Contact Pago Pago Marine Charters (<https://pagopagomarinecharters.com/>) or Crux Marine Charters (<https://www.cruxmarine.com/charters>) for charter options and availability.

- **Guided Group Tours.** Book a guided group tour around Tutuila island with Pago Pago Tradewinds Tours (call 684-256-9383 or email genevieve@pagopagotradewindstours.com). Experience the unique island of Aunu'u with Samriel's Aunu'u Island Getaway. (<https://saigetaways.weebly.com/>)



Colorful 'aiga buses are a great mode of public transportation around the island. Photo: Alisha Gill/NOAA.

- **Aiga Bus Rides.** Ride like a local on an 'aiga bus, which operates on an unscheduled but frequent basis. Just stand at any bus stop by the road and wave at the bus driver. Bus rides are about \$2 (cash only) to most villages.

- **Travel to Aunu'u Island.** Travel between Tutuila and Aunu'u island via small 'alia boat (double hulled aluminum motor boat) from Auasi Harbor on the east side for \$2 (cash only) each way.



'Alia are double hull aluminum water taxis that provide transportation to and from Aunu'u island. Photo: Nerelle Moffitt/NOAA.

- **Travel to Manu'a islands.** By ocean, the M/V *Manu'atele* passenger ferry takes trips every other week. Loads on Wednesday and leaves Pago Pago on Thursday morning. Arrives in Manu'a the same afternoon. M/V *Manu'atele* normally remains alongside overnight in Manu'a and departs on Friday morning, arriving back in Pago Pago on Friday afternoon. A one way trip to Manu'a costs \$30 for adults and \$15 for students, and cargo is free of charge.

<https://portadministration.as.gov/services/water-transportation-wtd>. By air, travel to Manu'a with Talofa Air (<https://www.talofaairways.com/>) or Samoa Air (<https://samoaairways.com/>)

For additional information and assistance, please contact:

National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa
Tauese P.F. Sunia Ocean Center
P.O. Box 4318
Pago Pago, American Samoa 96799

Phone: 684-633-6500

Website: americansamoa.noaa.gov

Email: americansamoastaff@noaa.gov

Glossary

aiga	extended family
alamea	crown of thorns starfish
ali'i	high chief
'alia	fishing vessels based on traditional design
aumaga	untitled men
'ava	kava
Fa'a Samoa	traditional Samoan way of life
fa'afetai	thanks
fale	open guest house
fanua	land
fautasi	Samoan long boat manned by up to 40 oarsmen to represent village families in each team
fesoasoani	resource help
'ie lavalava	two-yard informal wrap around
'ie faitaga	pocket lavalava or wrap around for formal wear
laumei	sea turtle
matai	chief
nu'u	village
pulenu'u	appointed mayor
puleitasi	two-piece local-styled outfits for women
ola	traditional basket for juvenile fishing (enu)
palolo	epitokes of polychaete worm <i>Palola viridis</i>
palusami	bundles of taro leaves with coconut milk
pua'a	pig
Sā	village curfew
sami	ocean
siapo	Samoan cloth made from bark of the paper mulberry tree
siva ma pese	song and dance
taupou	village princess

tautua	service
teva	to leave a place on a negative temperance resulting from mistreatment
to'ona'i	Sunday family feast
tulafale	orator
umu	above ground hot stones oven
tulou	an act of noble self-abasing