

# Beautiful Pacific

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## American Samoa Travel Guide

American Samoa is a collection of seven islands administered and influenced by the USA and lying about 100 km to the south east of Apia in Western Samoa. Tourism is extremely low-key and there are few holiday resorts. There are six daily flights from Apia to Pago Pago Airport on Tutuila Island, taking about 40 minutes, as well as direct international flights from Hawaii with connections to Los Angeles. Tutuila Island is by far the largest and most populated island of the group. Its coast is rugged, with few beaches and its mountains steep and covered in tropical rain forest. Pago Pago is the capital set against steep mountains and a deep and extremely attractive harbour.

Pago Pago is the main centre and capital town for American Samoa. Pago is a rather seedy place dominated by two large tuna canning factories. Pollution of the stunning harbour has recently been addressed and a conscious National clear up campaign has helped its image. The town retains its clapboard buildings and red light district so romantically written about by Somerset Maugham in his book *Rain*. There are few distinct attractions about Pago except for the fine views offered from its hills.

There are several hotels and inns in downtown Pago Pago, all relatively expensive compared to Western Samoa, the most upmarket being Sadie Thompson Inn, and the cheapest being the budget rooms at Evalani's Motel. One of the icons of American Samoa is the Rainmaker Hotel, set alongside a picturesque beach just south of town.

Matafao Peak, the highest point on American Samoa, stands at 653 metres and has the beautiful Nuuli waterfall at its base. South of the airport at Fogagogo is a pleasant beach with the small discreet beach resort of Maliu Mai. From the beachside restaurant you get a great view of the wild coastline and blowholes. Two other roads lead down from the inland highway to the south coast: one to Vaitogi where virgin tropical rainforest has been preserved along the rocky coast. You can stay along this peaceful coast at the pleasant Turtle & Shark Lodge which is located at the end of the road and backs on to a small blowhole.

The main tourist attraction of Tutuila is its splendid tropical scenery and coastal views. The scenic south coast road extending west from the airport to Cape Taputapu and beyond

to Fagamalo Village at the end of the road is particularly beautiful. The historical whaling town of Leone has several ancient archaeological sites including its rock quarries in the hills above town and the grinding holes along the coast where rocks were fashioned into tools. Beyond Leone, the coastal road winds through small fishing villages up and over coastal hills with panoramic views. The road from Pago Pago to Fagamalo Village takes about two hours one way.

Another stunning coastal drive heads west from Pago Pago, also along the south coast. Alega Beach has perhaps the most picturesque beach on Tutuila although the surf here can be dangerous for all but the best swimmers. Further along the coast are several other picturesque beaches including Pyramid Rock and the sweeping beach at Tula Village at the very eastern point of the island. The weather station nearby at Cape Matatula has stunning views along the south coast to Aunuu Island and along the remote north coast to Pola Island and the National Park. There is no access road along the north coast with the coastal highway stopping at the village of Onenoa.

Almost the entire north coast is inaccessible except for three roads that lead over the hills into three separate bays. One of these is Vatia Bay in the heart of the National Park. The access road for Vatia starts at the east side of Pago Pago harbour directly across the bay from Pago Pago Town and leads up through Afono Pass. From the Pass, there are splendid views back to Pago Pago and the harbour as well as looking north into the Park. The highlight of the journey into the Park is the stunning view of Vatia Village with its twin volcanic peaks looming above and the rocky Polar Island. A track leads from the village along Vatia Bay to the tip of Pola Island.

The Manu'a Islands, 100 km to the east of Tutuila is a stunning collection of three islands with superb scenery and is the traditional birth place of Samoa with lots of interesting archaeological sites. The main island is Ta'u, 15 sq. miles in size half of which is administered by the National Park of Samoa. The Park offers excellent bird life and incredible sea cliffs rising over 3000 feet from sea level. Neighbouring Ofu has a stunning white sandy beach, over 2 miles in length, with excellent snorkelling offshore and a handful of guest houses.