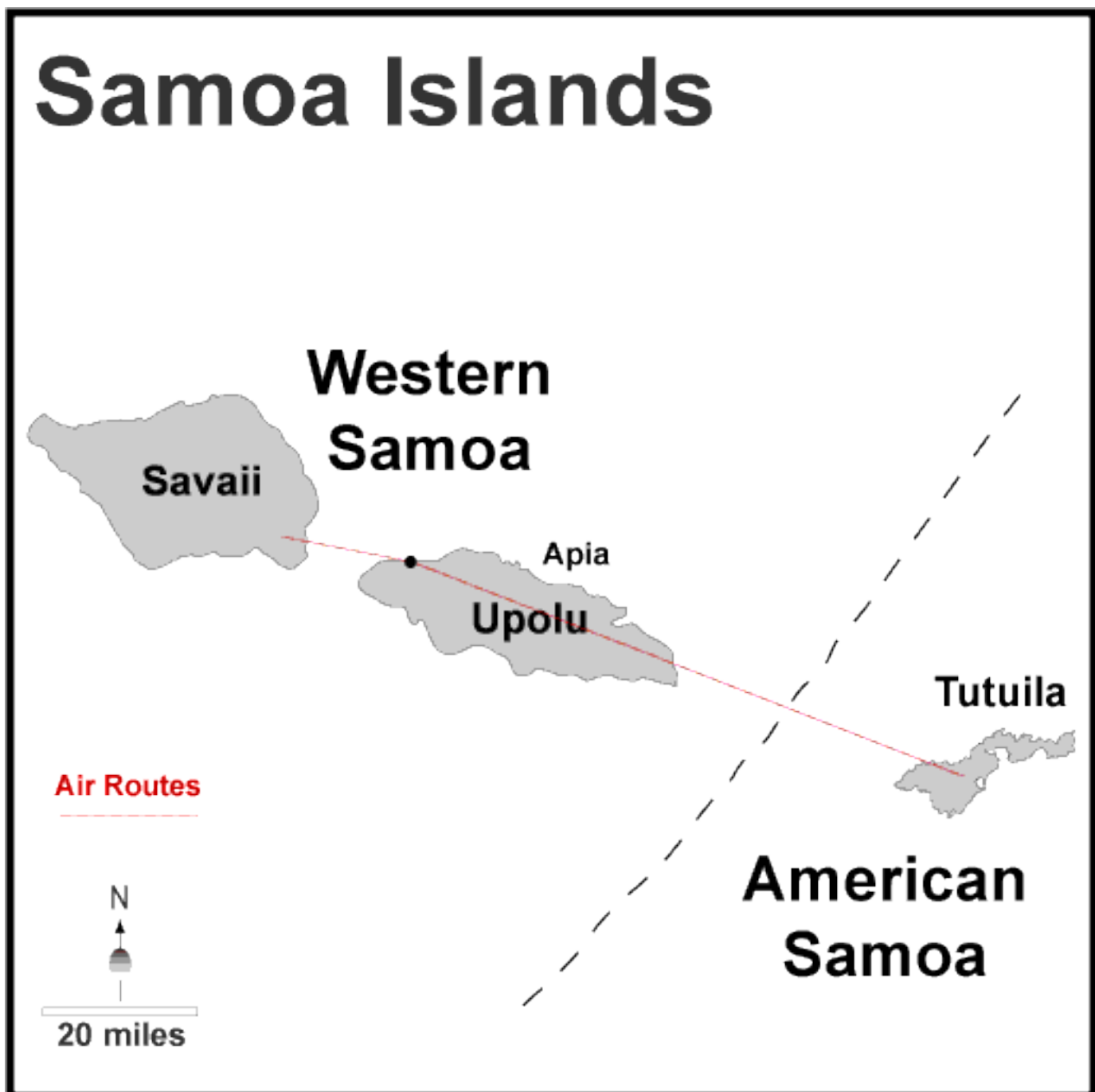


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Samoa Travel Guide



Samoa comprises two separate and independent countries - Western Samoa and American Samoa. Traditionally and historically, the two countries share a common identity. However, they were separated in 1899 when the USA took over the administration of the eastern part of the islands and so renamed them "American Samoa. Today, the countries offer a stark contrast. Western Samoa has retained its traditional way of life yet its countryside has been stripped of most of its natural forests. The beaches have been developed for tourism and whilst the main town of Apia is a modern city, the country has a low GDP with employment scarce and salaries low. American Samoa has lost its traditional identity and adopted its American way of life. However, the rich tropical rainforests have been preserved by National Parks yet tourism remains almost totally undeveloped. Instead, the country earns a high income source from its army and tuna factories.

Western Samoa Travel Guide

Upolu Island is the main island in Samoa, although at 1100sq km it is smaller than neighbouring Savaii. The island is volcanic in nature, with mountains rising in the interior, the highest point being Mt. Fito at 1158m. Much of the original rain forest on Upolu has been cleared, and now only a few pockets exist. The capital of Samoa, Apia, sits on the north shore with large villages extending along the coastal road to the east and west. Apia is a charming town of about 45,000 people with a pleasant harbour setting and is the hub of tourist activity and hotels. The International airport is 30km west of Apia at Faleolo.

The pleasant beach road is the main stretch for shops, some excellent restaurants and lively bars and the towns many hotels. Beach Road follows the harbour wall with its wide promenade and makes an excellent place to stroll. The only beach area is a ten minute stroll from central Apia at Vaiala which has several guest houses with ocean views but the main attraction here is not the beach but snorkelling at the Palolo Deep Marine Reserve with its deep blue hole and colourful fish. Apia has many colourful historic buildings to visit including the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum and the bustling fish and local produce markets.

Exploring Upolu is the main attraction with a good coastal road and lots of scenic lookouts, waterfalls and beaches along the way. It takes just over 3 hours to drive right around the island. Green Turtle Tours offers an excellent hop on hop off package which enables you to spend as many nights as you like at off the beaten track beach fale locations. The tour can also be taken as a day tour and works an excellent guide to the island so you can plan where you want to spend your time. Heading east from Apia, the coast is tropical and rugged with pleasant mountain views and small villages along the rivers and a few picturesque beaches but few swimming opportunities.

The coastal highway cuts inland at the picturesque Falefa Falls and a small dirt off-road

follows the coast to Utulua Point passing some of the best accessible coastal scenery in Samoa. The paved road ends at the attractive village of Saletele, but you can walk right around Fagalua Bay along a rough dirt track to the village of Taelefaga where a sealed roads takes you back on to the main highway. For the very adventurous, you could continue along the coast all the way to the vibrant Uafato Conservation Reserve. The reserve has some of the last remaining natural tropical forests in Samoa and bird life thrives.

The road between the two villages coast is the quietest stretch on Upolu and is a good place for walking, taking about an hour and a half. Other great beaches include Vavau, Maninoa and Salamanu, although swimming is not great. There are some world class surfing breaks off this coastline and a couple of small luxury resorts.

Just 4 km off the west coast of Upolu surrounded by a turquoise lagoon is the small island of Manono. This tranquil little haven has just four fishing villages, with most houses being traditional fale. The beauty of Manono is there are no cars and no barking dogs at night - just the stars and the lapping waves. It takes a leisurely two hours to walk around the coastal track, passing several palm fringed beaches with good snorkelling. Inland trails lead to several interesting archaeological sites including an ancient star mound on top of Mt. Tulimanuiva, the highest point at 110m. You can stay at Manono in a traditional overwater fale (bungalow) with stunning views back to Upolu.

Savaii is a complex geographical island dominated by its active but presently dormant volcanic activity. Every 150 years or so, eruptions take place, creating a new crater and spilling lava down its mountainous landscape and into the lagoon. Travelling up the east coast of Savaii gives a typical picture - long stretches of black rocky coastline and lava pools followed by fine stretches of golden sand and snorkelling lagoons, and suddenly at Sale-aula, the arid landscape of volcanic lava flow from the last eruption between 1911-1916. Sightseeing on Savaii is fantastic with lava fields, lava tubes, a forest canopy walk, sea arches, blowholes and black sand beaches.

The most popular beach location on Savaii is at Manase Village on the north coast, a few miles beyond Satoalepai Lava Fields and the Turtle Sanctuary. The swimming beach at Manase stretches for several miles with good swimming and snorkelling and makes a great spot for strolling and with the local villages along the shoreline. The only upmarket resort on Savaii, Le Lagoto Resort is on this beach. Other accommodation includes four budget beach fale, the pick of the bunch being Vacations Beach Resort which offers the most authentic style fale with excellent food and service. Savaii takes a full day to travel around - Green Turtle Tours is the best day tour company.

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.