

Samoa Islands

Snapshots

CURRENT EVENTS

SAMOA

New buildings and sports facilities are appearing in Apia, tourist resorts are sprouting up like coconut trees around the stunning coastline, and the modern world, in the shape of TV stations, mobile phones and Internet cafés, has arrived. But the microstate has become almost completely dependent on remittances (p32) and international aid agencies which fall over themselves to help. The Chinese government is loaning (gifting?) ST\$30 million to build a swimming pool complex. Australia hands over A\$20 million a year with a big slice going to the police, New Zealand offers NZ\$8 million a year for schoolbooks and scholarships, and Japan is renovating polytechnic buildings and wharf facilities (US\$11.6 million). A Singapore charity has helped establish a kidney dialysis centre. Even the international rugby board recently handed over ST\$7 million.

Despite decades of this government-to-government aid, the islands are still mired in Third World poverty and most want to leave. The country also looks abroad for its heroes and feels proud when a Samoan in New Zealand becomes captain of the All Blacks (Tana Umaga), wins New Zealand Idol (Rosita Vai) or records a hit hip-hop CD (Scribe).

Although poor in money, the islands are rich in culture. Life has a very Polynesian flavour (p36), and the jungly rainforests, pristine beaches and dramatic waterfalls are being given legal protection (p46). Tropical, colourful Samoa stands out as somewhere special – remote, unspoilt islands where people still have time to be friendly.

Samoans love sport, especially their Manu Samoa rugby team. During August–September 2007, the South Pacific Games (p40) will take over Apia and thousands of visiting sportspeople and spectators will send the entire country into *fiafia* (party) mode.

AMERICAN SAMOA

Hot discussion topics always include the tuna canneries (p110) which provide thousands of jobs, but may move to a lower-wage country. LBJ hospital never has enough funds and patient fees keep rising, which is tough for those on low wages. Government corruption keeps popping up like an eel from a coral hole, and in 2005 four officials in different departments were sentenced by the courts, and the governor's office was raided by armed FBI agents.

However the territory does well for itself considering its total population of 59,000 is that of a small town. Unlike in America, the police are

FAST FACTS

Samoa

Population: 177,000
Minimum hourly wage: ST\$1.60
Unemployment rate: Very high
Annual inbound remittances: ST\$200 million
Emigration: 42,000 to New Zealand in 2005 alone

American Samoa

Population: 59,000
Minimum hourly wage: US\$2.70-3.50
Obesity rate: Very high
Major employers: Government, tuna canneries
Wildlife off Ofu Beach: 300 species of fish and 150 species of coral

IN THE NAME OF CLARITY

The Samoan islands are divided into two political entities: Samoa and American Samoa. Samoa was formerly known as Independent Samoa (or Western Samoa), but in July 1997 the island nation officially adopted the name 'Samoa', which is how we refer to it throughout this book.

Several thousand American Samoans serve in America's armed forces and by 2006 seven had been killed in Iraq, and 30 wounded.

Samoa is praying that their new no-frills airline, Polynesian Blue, loses less money than Polynesian Air (ST9 million a year) and generates a tourist boom.

Thrill to epic tales of amazing ocean crossings in flimsy canoes following crude star maps in *Man's Conquest of the Pacific* by Peter Bellwood, the foremost authority on the subject.

unarmed, and people live a relaxed 'don't worry, be happy' lifestyle. The unspoiled Manu'a Islands (p124) haven't changed much since anthropologist Margaret Mead researched the sex lives of teenagers there 80 years ago. Despite an epidemic of lifestyle diseases such as obesity, diabetes and hypertension, the islands have just about maintained their religion and culture, and are among the wealthiest in the South Pacific thanks to federal grants, remittances and the tuna canneries. Everyone could emigrate to America, but they prefer a Polynesian life on a tropical island.

HISTORY

The Samoan islands were traditionally divided into a dozen or so districts, each with their own high chiefs, with no overall political unity or king. In 1899 the islands were divided into Western Samoa (now known as Samoa) under German rule and American Samoa to the east.

PREHISTORY

Samoa is in the middle of Polynesia (Many Islands), which is spread over a vast watery triangle with its points at Hawai'i, Easter Island (off the west coast of South America) and New Zealand (Aotearoa).

Polynesians entered the Pacific from the west via the East Indies and the Malay peninsula. This idea is backed up by linguistic and DNA studies, archaeological evidence and oral histories. The first Polynesians are referred to as Lapita, after a site in New Caledonia where their distinctive pottery was first found.

The earliest known evidence of human occupation in the Samoan islands are the many pottery shards of a Lapita village found under the sea near Mulifanua on 'Upolu. Carbon tests have dated the site at 1000 BC. Undecorated pottery – known as Polynesian plainware – of a comparable age has been found at Aoa on Tutuila and at To'aga (p127) on Ofu. The art of pottery was later lost.

Throughout the islands archaeologists have unearthed over a hundred star-shaped platforms (p116) which were almost certainly used to catch pigeons. The *matai* (chiefs) loved to catch wild pigeons, using tame decoy ones and a net. On Savai'i, near the village of Palauli, is the pyramid of Pulemelei (p100), the largest ancient platform structure in the Pacific. The site contains post holes, cairns, hearths and graves as well as basalt platforms, but its purpose is unknown.

Evidence suggests that in ancient times many more Samoan settlements were located inland in the valleys and on hillsides, and that the increase in coastal settlement was due to European influence and trade.

Around AD 950 warriors from Tonga established their rule on Savai'i, and then moved on to 'Upolu. But they were defeated by Savea, a Samoan chief, who was rewarded with the very high title *Malietoa*, derived from the parting words of the defeated Tongans: *malie toa* (brave warrior). The present nonagenarian head of state in Samoa bears this same proud title.

There was also contact with Fiji, from where legends say two girls brought the art of tattooing. But the Samoans never really trusted their neighbours – *togafiti* (literally 'tonga fiji') means a trick.

Visit some of the museums (p65 and p109) to catch a glimpse of pre-European Samoa.

EUROPEAN CONTACT

In 1722 Dutchman Jacob Roggeveen sighted the Manu'a Islands, but sailed on without landing. In May 1768 the French explorer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville bartered with the inhabitants of the Manu'a Islands, but merely sighted the more westerly islands. He christened the archipelago les Îles des Navigateurs (the Navigator Islands).

Next to arrive was another Frenchman, La Pérouse, who landed at Fagasa on the north coast of Tutuila in 1787. The crew exchanged beads for pigs, chickens, fruit and the favours of Samoan women – brown-skinned Venuses clad in a grass skirt and nothing else. Word evidently spread about these *palagi* (foreigners, literally 'cloud bursters') because the following day, a big crowd gathered while the sailors were collecting water at A'asu (p119). When the Samoans tried to stop the sailors leaving, rocks were thrown, the sailors fired back, and in the ensuing battle 12 sailors were killed and 20 were badly injured, along with an estimated 39 Samoans killed. A'asu was named Massacre Bay and La Pérouse departed posthaste. Polynesia wasn't just sunshine and pretty girls.

By the 1820s a few Europeans had settled in the islands, most of them escaped convicts and retired whalers who were welcomed by the unsuspecting islanders because they knew the strange ways of the *palagi* and were willing to share their technological expertise. As elsewhere, the *palagi* also brought with them diseases to which the islanders had no immunity.

THE MISSIONARIES

In August 1830, missionaries John Williams and Charles Barff of the London Missionary Society (LMS) arrived at Sapapali'i on the eastern coast of Savai'i during a civil war. A monument (p91) commemorates the event. They were followed by Methodist and Catholic missionaries, and in 1888 Mormons added to the competition for souls. Tahitian and Rarotongan evangelists helped the *palagi* missionaries, just as Samoans later helped to convert other Pacific islands.

Given the similarity of Christian creation beliefs to Samoan legends and a prophecy by Nafanua, a legendary war goddess, that a new religion would take root in the islands, the Samoans were quite willing to accept Christianity. The wondrous possessions of the *palagi* were used as proof that the white man's God was more powerful and generous than the gods and *aitu* (spirits) of the Samoans.

The Christian gospel was widely accepted and it has remained an integral part of island life to the present day. Although interdistrict warfare was not abolished for another 70 years, schools and education were eagerly adopted. An early tourist, Frederick Walpole, reported in 1848: 'Samoans of all ages rush out on you, not armed with club and spear, but with slate and pencil; and thrusting them into your hands they make signs for you to finish their exercise or sum.' Polygamy was discontinued. When he first arrived, Rev John Williams reported that 'it is common for the young chiefs to have six, eight or ten wives, but the steady, respectable chiefs seldom have more than three'.

History buffs can dig up masses of archaeology reports at www.ashpo.org.

Read fascinating, first-hand history books by Robert Louis Stevenson, British consul William Churchward and missionary George Turner online at www.samoaco.uk/history.

TIMELINE 1000 BC

Samoa islands inhabited by Lapita people, the first Polynesians, who made their way across the vast Pacific Ocean

AD 950

Samoa warriors, led by Chief Savea, defeat the Tongan invaders; the chief rewarded with the title of *Malietoa*

1787

French explorer, La Pérouse, lands at Fagasa on the north coast of Tutuila; subsequent battle results in A'asu being renamed Massacre Bay

1830

Arrival of London Missionary Society evangelist Rev John Williams on Savai'i during a civil war

EUROPEAN CONTROL OF APIA

A horde of settlers and transients – uncouth beachcombers, sailors, remittance men and drifters from Europe and America – had come in search of adventure and women and quick profits. All these *palagi* banded together and turned Apia into a bastion of *palagi* arrogance and greed, into a small Europe, notorious for its bars and political intrigues.

Albert Wendt

Both Pago Pago and Apia became major South Pacific ports. Some of the large wooden stores built along Beach Rd at this time are still standing. One Apia resident was American Bully Hayes, a notorious slaver or ‘blackbirder’, who kidnapped islanders to work on plantations in Fiji and Queensland (Australia), until he was killed by one of his own crew. The consuls in Apia had to deal with every kind of problem, but when one ‘Blackguard’ Brown complained to the British consul that his Samoan wife had run off back to her family, he was told that ‘the British consulate is not a wife-retrieving bureau’.

A German trading company bought 300 sq km of land on ‘Upolu and started a huge coconut plantation, which still stands today at Mulifanua, 40km west of Apia. But out in the villages, life carried on much as usual.

SQUABBLING SUPERPOWERS

There were (and still are) four paramount titles in the gift of four ‘aiga (extended families), equivalent to royal dynasties, in what is now Samoa: Malietoa, Tupua Tamasese, Mata’afa and Tu’imaleali’ifano. Tutuila was under the control of the Atua district of ‘Upolu, and although Tui Manu’a was regarded as the most sacred title, it had more prestige than power. During the 1870s Samoa became embroiled in a civil war between two rival factions, led by Malietoa and Mata’afa, contending for supreme power. Samoans sold land to *palagi* to acquire guns to settle the matter.

The *palagi* were also divided as America, Britain and Germany appointed their own consuls in Apia. The Samoan civil war threatened to turn into a superpower war. By the late 1880s Apia Harbour was crowded with naval hardware as warships from Germany, Britain and America were sent there to back up their respective imperial interests. As one Samoan author put it, ‘they were like three large dogs snarling over a very small bone’.

But on 16 March 1889 nature inflicted a terrible blow on the squabbling superpowers when Apia Harbour was hit by one of history’s worst cyclones. The Germans and Americans both lost three warships each, while the British warship *Calliope* battled her way out of the harbour and escaped destruction. Ninety-two German and 54 American sailors were killed in the storm.

This disaster led to the Berlin Treaty of 1889, which stipulated that an independent Samoa would be established under the rule of a foreign-appointed Samoan king, and that the consuls of Britain, Germany and the USA would be given considerable advisory powers on ‘Upolu. Malietoa was proclaimed ‘king’, but his hold on power proved to be tenuous, and

in the ten years that followed he was continually challenged by Mata’afa. ‘I never saw such a place as Apia. You can be in a new conspiracy every day’ was how one settler summed up this period to Robert Louis Stevenson, the great Scottish writer who lived with his family near Apia from 1889 until his untimely death in 1894.

In 1899, 12 *palagi* sailors were killed (a memorial to them stands in Mulinu’u) when they were caught up in the Samoan faction fighting. This was the final straw and later in the year the Tripartite Treaty was drawn up, giving control of Western Samoa to Germany and that of Eastern Samoa to America. All guns had to be handed in. Britain stepped out of the picture in exchange for renunciation of German claims to Tonga, the Solomon Islands and Niue. The German Flag Memorial (p66), erected in 1913, commemorates the takeover.

From this point, the histories of the Samoan islands diverged.

SAMOA German Rule

In February 1900 Dr Wilhelm Solf was appointed governor and the German trading company DHPG (Deutsche Handels und Plantagen Gesellschaft der Südsee Inseln zu Hamburg) began to import thousands of Melanesians and Chinese to work on their huge plantations. Governor Solf confiscated all weapons that had been acquired during the long period of intermittent civil war. In 1903 he established a Lands & Titles Commission to determine land ownership, so that disputes could be resolved in a peaceful way without resorting to war. The governor then spoilt his good work by deposing the reigning king, Tupua Samoa, and placing Mata’afa (see p66 for his tomb) in the position of puppet paramount chief.

In 1905 Mt Matavanu erupted on Savai’i, destroying Sale’aula village. Fortunately no one was killed as the river of molten lava surged down from the mountain to the sea, leaving ruined churches (p94) in its wake.

Discontent with Mata’afa resulted in another type of eruption on Savai’i in 1908 when the Mau a Pule (Mau Movement) was organised by Namulau’ulu Lauaki Mamoe. In January 1909 he and his chief supporters were sent into exile.

New Zealand Takes Over

In 1914, at the outbreak of WWI, New Zealand troops landed on German Samoa and the takeover was not resisted. But in 1918 disaster struck when SS *Tahune*, carrying passengers infected with Spanish influenza, was permitted to dock in Apia Harbour without being quarantined. In the dreadful months that followed, more than 7000 Western Samoans, 20% of the population, died of the disease, part of a worldwide epidemic worse than Europe’s Black Death. American Samoa was not affected and their offers of medical help were refused. Anger at this mismanagement revived the Mau Movement, which used nonviolent tactics such as shop boycotts and refusing to pay taxes. The Mau slogan was ‘*Samoa o Samoa*’ (Samoa for the Samoans) and leaders met secretly in a converted German bandstand (p66).

In February 1928, 400 Mau supporters were arrested, armed military police arrived and the New Zealand authorities continued the German

Lagaga – A Short History of Samoa, edited by Malama Meleisea, is the definitive history and covers everything from legends and the infinite complexities of the *matai* (political representative) system to colonial rule and beyond from a Samoan perspective.

Read some brilliant analysis and descriptions of squabbling Samoans and *palagi* in Robert Louis Stevenson’s very detailed *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa*.

1889

A cyclone sinks three American and three German warships cooped up in Apia Harbour – 146 sailors die

1899

Tripartite Treaty gives Western Samoa to Germany and Eastern Samoa to America; Samoans hand in their guns

1905

Mt Matavanu on Savai’i erupts; lava destroys a village, but no-one is killed

1914

New Zealand troops occupy German-run Western Samoa without opposition at the beginning of WWI

policy of exiling Mau leaders. Then on 28 December 1929, Black Saturday, a big demonstration took place in Apia by Mau Movement members, who all wore purple *lava-lava* (sarong). Armed New Zealand police tried to arrest some wanted Mau members and a fight resulted. The police started firing into the crowd of unarmed people in Beach Rd, killing 11 protesters, including the movement's leader, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III. His martyrdom and philosophy of nonviolence make him Samoa's Martin Luther King, and his tomb (p66) is near the German bandstand.

It was not until a Labour government came to power in New Zealand in 1935 that relations between Samoans and the New Zealand authorities improved.

Independence

Following WWII Western Samoa became a UN Trust Territory, administered by New Zealand. In 1947 an executive Council of State was established, consisting of the New Zealand High Commissioner and two Samoan high chiefs. A legislative assembly was also established. Finally, in 1962 independence arrived (see p66 for the Independence Memorial).

Tupua Tamasese and Malietoa Tanumafili II became joint heads of state, but with very limited powers compared to the prime minister. The British-based parliamentary system reflected local custom and only *matai* were allowed to vote to fill the 49-seat Fono (Parliament). In 1990 everyone over 21 was given the vote, but only *matai* can be candidates, so the Fono is a kind of elected House of Lords.

The long-wished-for dream of independence raised hopes of rapid economic progress, but this was not to be. Samoa's exports to New Zealand at independence covered 60% of their imports from New Zealand, but this figure had declined to less than 2% by 2005.

Since Independence

The Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) has been in power for most of the period since independence. Economic development has been excruciatingly slow or nonexistent, far below population growth, but at least the country has been politically stable, unlike neighbours Fiji and Tonga (p153). Fish and tropical produce such as cocoa, coffee, bananas, coconuts and taro were expected to become big export earners, but due to mismanagement, crop diseases and destructive cyclones, this has not happened. Nowadays container ships arrive piled up with imports, but leave almost empty. Only tourism provides a ray of hope for a brighter economic future.

Forty years of generous foreign aid have failed to create or inspire any economic growth, rather the opposite. The government bureaucracy has expanded out of all proportion to the population, while the real economy has declined due to a chronically weak private sector. The only major private employers are Vailima Brewery (p79), Aggie Grey's (see box, p69) and Yazaki which employs 2000 workers to assemble electrical components for cars. The nation desperately needs a dozen more Yazakis as it still has Least Developed Country Status. Tens of thousands have voted with their feet and emigrated to American Samoa and from

there to America, and to New Zealand and from there to Australia. More Samoans now live outside the islands than on them, and they send back over ST200 million a year in remittances and bring back millions more on visits home.

The minimum wage is ST1.60 (US60¢) per hour, far below American Samoa (ST8.50 per hour) and New Zealand (ST18 per hour). Many workers are paid around ST5000 a year, less than ST100 a week, while families out in the villages depend on remittances and subsistence agriculture and fishing.

Hurricane damage is a regular occurrence in the South Pacific, and the damage to crops, buildings and infrastructure often amounts to millions of dollars. A stark example of the damage inflicted by hurricanes on the Samoan islands in the past 15 years can be seen on the Falealupo Peninsula on Savai'i (p98).

AMERICAN SAMOA US Navy Rule

The formal annexation of Eastern Samoa by the USA took place on 17 April 1900, when a deed of cession was signed by the high chiefs, although the highest ranking chief, Tu'i Manu'a, didn't sign until 1904. The islands were run by the US Department of the Navy, which agreed to protect the traditional rights of the Samoans in exchange for the naval base and coaling station. The territory's inhabitants acquired the status of US nationals but were denied a vote or representation in Washington. Until the 1960s American Samoa retained its traditional social structure and subsistence economy, and the governor at the time warned against dragging the territory too quickly into the American version of the good life.

The Kennedy Effect

In the early 1960s an influential North American magazine published an article entitled 'America's Shame in the South Seas', which examined the simple subsistence lifestyle enjoyed by the American Samoans and determined it to be poverty by US standards. In response President Kennedy appointed Rex Lee to the governorship and instructed him to oversee the modernisation of the territory. Large funds were appropriated by Congress and, almost overnight, American Samoa became a Great Society construction project.

Development was fast-tracked – roads were built and European-style homes replaced traditional *fale* (*fah-leh*; a traditional thatched house), electrification and sewerage-treatment projects were implemented, and harbour facilities, schools and the Rainmaker Hotel (p112) were constructed. In addition, an international airport, a hospital, tuna canneries and TV broadcasts soon arrived. By the time Governor Lee left office in 1967, some American Samoan leaders were already lamenting the downfall of their society and the creation of a directionless welfare state.

Increasing Democracy & Prosperity

The territory's 1960 constitution established three branches of government: executive, legislative and judicial. Between 1951 and 1977 all of the territory's governors were appointed by the US Department of the

In 1962 Western Samoa became the first Pacific island colony to achieve independence.

In 2005, 23 Samoans, including six from American Samoa, played in the NFL, America's top football league.

1918

The New Zealand administration cops the blame for the Spanish influenza epidemic that kills 7000 people in Western Samoa

1929

On 28 December, Black Saturday, armed New Zealand police gun down 11 Mau protesters on Beach Rd, Apia

1962

Ahead of the pack – Western Samoa celebrates becoming the first South Pacific island group to gain independence

1997

Independent Samoa changes its name to Samoa

Interior, but they are now popularly elected. In 1980 American Samoans were allowed, for the first time, to elect a nonvoting delegate to serve in the US House of Representatives. The Fono (the legislative branch) is composed of a Senate which consists of 18 high chiefs elected by the county councils, and a House of Representatives with 20 popularly elected members. The two tuna canneries employ 5000 workers, but the rest of the territory's workforce is directly or indirectly employed by the government, which receives a generous amount (over US\$100 million a year) from American taxpayers. A tiny population serviced by an enormous and expensive bureaucracy is a common South Pacific phenomenon.

American Samoa's territorial status has plenty of benefits besides the stack of multimillion-dollar federal grants: it allows all businesses based there, such as the tuna canneries and garment manufacturers, to export their goods duty-free to the US, yet the territory does not have to adhere to federal minimum-wage standards. Minimum-wage rates range from US\$2.70 to \$3.51, which are much lower than in the US, but far higher than in Samoa and other South Pacific islands. Even though American Samoans are American nationals, not citizens, they are free to move to America, where 130,000 Samoans already live.

THE CULTURE

More than any other Polynesian people, Samoans have maintained their traditional way of life in their sauna of a climate, and still follow closely the social hierarchies, customs and courtesies established long before the arrival of Europeans. Like the coral reefs that protect the coasts, the *fa'a Samoa* (Samoan way) has protected the community, ensuring that life is orderly and meaningful. Many visitors sense that below the surface of the outwardly friendly and casual Samoan people lies a complex code of traditional etiquette. Beneath the light-heartedness, a strict and demanding code of behaviour is upheld with expectations that can stifle individuality and enterprise.

THE SAMOAN PSYCHE

The basis of the *matai* system is *'aiga* which gives life, culture, education, dignity and a purpose to individuals from the cradle to the grave and beyond. Every village contains a number of *'aiga*, which are often rivals as well as allies, and each includes as many relatives as can be claimed. The larger the *'aiga*, the stronger it becomes, and to be part of a powerful *'aiga* is the goal of every tradition-minded Samoan.

Each *'aiga* is headed by a senior *matai*, supported by junior *matai*, who represents the family on the *fono* (village council). The senior *matai* is normally elected by all adult members of the *'aiga*, but some inherit the title. In Samoa *'aiga* have created more and more junior titles, so there are now over 25,000 *matai*, and nearly every Sione and Sina has a title, but this dilution has not happened in American Samoa. More women are being given *matai* titles, but over 90% of *matai* are male.

High chiefs have special privileges such as being allowed a two-storey house, a large tomb or a special seat in church. *Matai* are addressed by their title, so being given a title changes your name. Even today only *matai* can be elected to the national Fono in Samoa and to the Senate in American Samoa. You cannot pay your bills with a title, but *matai* are still respected and competition to acquire a high title can be intense. In the past opposing factions would go to war over a title.

Published in 1884, *Samoa – A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* by George Turner is packed with myths, legends and stories that reveal the social structure and culture of the Samoan islands long before the onslaught of outside influences.

The Samoan language has a special vocabulary of respectful words that are used at official *fono* meetings and any time when talking to a *matai*.

TIPS ON MEETING LOCALS

Samoans believe that 'greeting a guest should be like the joy of the birds greeting the dawn'. But visits to villages can be disruptive and following a few guidelines can smooth the way.

- If you visit on a Sunday to go to church, it's best for men to wear long trousers and a shirt, while women should be well covered. Sunday is a day of rest and quiet, so doing any kind of work, swimming, drinking alcohol and even playing cards is forbidden in many villages.
- Public displays of affection between couples are taboo.
- If you stay with a village family, it's only fair to pay your way by buying a sack of rice or some tins of *pisupo* (corned beef) at the local store.
- Samoans eat with their fingers and the water that's passed round after the meal is to wash your hands with and not for drinking!
- Don't play Mother Teresa and hand out sweets or coins indiscriminately to village children.
- Falealupo is not the Costa Brava. Outside the resorts, visitors should show respect to the local culture and cover up. Women should avoid wearing swimsuits and other skimpy clothing away from the beach, no matter what the temperature. For men, knee-length shorts (or *lava-lava* – sarong) are best, and shirts or T-shirts should be worn.
- Shoes should always be removed when entering a *fale*. When invited in, always sit down to talk, and cross your legs. If this is uncomfortable throw a mat over your legs as it's rude for your feet to point at anyone. Wait outside until invited in. If you walk in front of anyone, especially an elder, murmur '*Tulou*' (Excuse me).
- If in a village around 6pm for *sa*, stop what you're doing and wait for the third bell, or perhaps consider joining a village family in evening prayers.
- If you want to swim at a village beach, climb a nearby mountain or take photos, ask first. Sometimes there's a small fee. Try to find a local to show you around the village rather than snooping around on your own.
- Mangy village dogs are a pain, but shouting '*Alu!*' (Go away!) usually works. If not, bending down and picking up a stone should scare them off.
- Don't be a *palagi* and ignore people who walk by; stop and chat.

Matai are divided into two types – *ali'i* and *tulafale*. While both are talking chiefs, it is the latter who delivers speeches at official ceremonies that are full of biblical references, traditional proverbs and poetic, flowery language. A wooden staff and a fly whisk are their symbols of office.

The village *fono* consists of *matai* from each *'aiga* associated with the village. All participants are seated according to their rank. The *fono* punishes such crimes as theft, violence and insubordination with fines, reparation or ostracism. Without the *matai* system a whole lot more policemen and judges would be needed. In extreme cases the miscreants can have their house and possessions burnt and suffer permanent exile from the village. Punishments by the local *fono* are taken into account if the case also comes before the *palagi*-style court system.

In Samoa, village *fono* build and maintain the local primary school and health clinic as well as housing and feeding the nurses and teachers, while the central government pays the wages. The village women's committees raise money through levies, bingo or putting on cultural shows. Traditionally Samoa was a nation of independent village republics with a weak central authority. One *matai* told anthropologist Margaret Mead, 'In the past we had two gods – Tagaloa and the village; the greater of these was the village.'

Ifoga is a traditional apology where the guilty person and family members sit down outside the victim's house with bowed heads until they're forgiven.

In theory, all wealth and property is owned communally by caring, sharing 'aiga, and decisions about these matters are always made by the matai. You serve and give your wages to your matai, and in return your matai helps you if you become sick or need money for school fees or a trip to New Zealand. 'Aiga members share their wealth and provide welfare services to needy family members. Children belong to the 'aiga, not the biological parents, and are often adopted or borrowed by relatives.

Throughout the Samoas, individuals are subordinate to the extended family. There is no 'I', only 'we'. The lazy or incapable are looked after by their family rather than by taxpayers, and with such onerous family (plus village and church) obligations, it is a struggle for any individual to become wealthy. Life is not about individual advancement or achievement as in the palagi world, but about serving and raising up the status of your 'aiga. Unfortunately the communal ownership of land and the lack of reward for individual effort cripples economic development.

LIFESTYLE – THE FA'A SAMOA

Family Life

Parents and other relatives treat babies very affectionately, but when they reach three years old, they are pushed away, and made the responsibility of an older sibling or cousin. Fa'aaloalo (respect for elders) is the most crucial aspect of the fa'a Samoa, and children are expected to obey not just their parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, but all the matai and adults in the village as well as older siblings. It's tough to be at the beck and call of so many people! On the buses, you will see young people give up their seats to elders. Any disobedience or answering back is sternly punished. The Bible is often quoted to support this – 'the rod and reproof teach wisdom'. Samoans take a pessimistic view of human nature and believe that the devil never rests.

Children are taught the Samoan proverb, 'The path to power is through tautua' (service). But to young people this service can seem like a never-ending servitude to family, village and church. Most parents are strict and force their children to attend church, run errands and do household chores. School and homework are not the number-one priority.

Parents rarely hug, praise or encourage their children, so the youth often suffer from low self-esteem and lack confidence and ambition. Parents routinely resort to violence to punish their children, who have low status and often eat the leftovers after the adults have finished their meal. Fun family activities are few and far between – maybe only on White Sunday (p141) in October when children eat first, star in church services and are bought new clothes and toys. Some teenagers resort to musu, which is refusing to speak to anybody as a form of protest. For a desperate few the only escape is suicide, and the youth suicide rate remains tragically high despite all attempts to reduce it.

FA'AFAFINE

In general Samoans tend to share the attitude of other fundamental Christians and dislike gay men and women, but this is tempered by a tolerant but teasing attitude to fa'afafine – men who dress and behave like women. They see themselves as women trapped in a man's body, and have traditionally been outsiders who played the role of satirical jester and entertainer. Don't miss the boisterous Miss Tutti Frutti fa'afafine contest in Apia if you are around in September.

The best-selling anthropology book of all time is Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, a brilliant but rose-tinted study that describes a Utopian society on Tau in the 1920s where casual attitudes to friendship and sex supposedly fostered a stress-free transition from childhood to adulthood.

Samoan Riddle: What roots go on for ever?
Answer on p43.

ALOFA

Alofa is love. Giving your entire pay packet to your parents is alofa. Beating your child so they learn right from wrong is alofa. Letting hungry relatives raid your fridge every night is alofa. Giving US\$200 to the church every month is alofa. Forgiving a drunk driver who killed your daughter is alofa. Providing a weekly meal for the village schoolteachers is alofa. Giving up your free time to help others is alofa. Giving is never a loss, it raises your status and comes back one way or another. Don't give and you will die alone.

Fa'alavelave

Fa'alavelave (lavish gift-exchange ceremonies) are a fundamental part of the fa'a Samoa. It could be a wedding, funeral, title-installation or the opening of a new school or church; the basics are the same and can last all day. Everyone dresses up in dazzling colours as the 'aiga, village or church shows off their wealth and status. This is measured in terms of ie toga (fine mats, p43) and money gifts as well as the feast of pork, taro, chop suey and cakes. An 'ava (kava) ceremony (p38) involves the matai and honoured guests. Then the tulafale make long, poetic speeches and generous gifts of ie toga, food and money are exchanged by different groups. A careful note is made of all these exchanges and everything is done with a flourish. Afterwards youth groups may put on a fiafia with music and group dances.

It takes months to raise the money and weeks of hard work to organise these events. In American Samoa major ceremonies involve thousands of kilos of food, thousands of ie toga and tens of thousands of dollars. The large remittances sent back to their 'aiga on the islands by Samoans abroad are another burdensome fa'alavelave, and are at the expense of their own, often struggling, families. Politics is also caught up in the system and before elections constituents receive o'o (gifts). Seven villages in one constituency received 20 cattle, 10 pigs, 150 boxes of salted beef, 400 cartons of herring and ST20,000 from one candidate. Democracy is more about 'aiga alliances and fa'alavelave than a choice about policies.

The Gospel According to the Fa'a Samoa

Every village has at least one large church, and next to it is usually a church hall and a mansion for the pastor. Each village tries to build a bigger church than its neighbour. Churches don't just physically dominate the villages, they are a vital part of the social glue that holds everything together. Everyone from babes in arms to toothless grandmas dresses up in their Sunday best and goes to church at least once every Sunday. It's part religious belief, part social duty and part fashion show.

The pese (choirs) practice two or three times a week (with fines for being late or absent), church youth groups organise dance competitions and sports events, and church women's groups raise money by running bingo nights and aerobics classes in the church hall. Sunday school for the children is taken seriously with a panel of teachers and annual exams. The pastor is never a matai but as God's representative he has de facto matai status, and can mediate in disputes. Leading matai are church deacons. The church leaders sit down together for to'ona'i (Sunday lunch) and foreign guests may be invited too – a truly unique Samoan experience.

Families compete with each other to donate the most money to the church, and the amount given by each family is called out and written

Derek Freeman ignited a major controversy when in 1983 he published his look at the gloomy side of life in Samoa entitled *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*.

Just outside the front door of some houses is a large concrete grave – be buried that close to home and you can't be forgotten.

down during the service. Families often give more than they can afford (up to 30% of their income) to maintain their social standing. Some give and expect to receive back good health and other blessings since God answers prayers, and the pastor's prayers are particularly powerful. Not all denominations do this – the Mormons pay a levy depending on their income.

Sa (which means 'sacred') are evening prayers, which still take place in some villages. Around 6pm a church bell (usually an empty propane tank that is hit with a stick) sounds and local *palagi* patrol the village to make sure all activities cease. In one village a *palagi* jogger who refused to stop landed up in hospital. When the second bell is struck, *sa* begins and each family gathers together for DIY prayers and a hymn. After ten minutes a third bell is sounded and *sa* is over.

The 'Ava Ceremony

'Ava (or *kava* as it's known outside the Samoas) is the ceremonial *matai* drink. Made from the ground root of the pepper plant (*Piper methysticum*), water is added to make a muddy-looking drink whose history goes back thousands of years.

The *matai* seat themselves in a *fale* meeting house with the wooden, multilegged *tanoa* ('ava bowl) at one end. The *taupou* (hostess) sits cross-legged behind the bowl, revealing her thigh tattoos if she has them, and maybe wearing *siapo* (p42) and a fancy headdress adorned with numerous mirrors and shells. She stirs the 'ava and then the *tulafale* calls out the name of the person honoured with the first cup. The *taupou* dips a coconut shell into the 'ava and passes it to a young server, who gives it to the recipient with a polite flourish. The recipient calls out 'Manuia lava' (Cheers), spills a few drops on the ground (for the ancient Polynesian gods, as 'ava drinking predates Christianity), and drinks it in one mouthful. This is repeated until everyone has been served in turn.

Tattooing

The missionaries tried to ban tattooing, but the tradition survived and a few young people, particularly in Samoa, still choose to suffer the painful ordeal as a mark of manhood and Samoan identity, or maybe to attract more girls.

The male tattoo (*pe'a*; which also means 'bat') takes about 48 hours of work to complete, and is usually spread over two weeks to a month. It covers the body from the waist to the knees with such artistic density that it resembles a pair of dark trousers. The man receiving the tattoo lies on the floor while the *tufuga* (tattoo artist) works through the laborious process of incising the intricate design on his skin with a comb and small sticklike mallet. The process is a burning torture, a true test of guts and courage, which builds self-respect and pride. The female tattoo (*malu*) is lighter and covers only the thighs with small, decorative designs which take four to eight hours to complete.

Obtaining the tattoo involves a great deal of Samoan-style protocol, including gifts of food, money and *ie toga*. The skills and tools of the highly respected *tufuga* are traditionally passed from father to son, but it may be years before an apprentice is allowed to take charge of the tattoo combs and stick. Until then his main task is to stretch the skin tight so that the dye-filled lines of the tattoo remain straight.

Each *pe'a* is unique and the design of the geometric patterns and symbols incorporates images of fishing spears and nets, pandanus leaves,

centipedes and shellfish. Circular flying patterns signify the cycles of life, and canoes signify the voyage through life.

Contact the Samoa Tourism Authority (p64) if you want to witness a tattooing session.

POPULATION

The population of Samoa is around 177,000, the vast majority of whom are Polynesian Samoans. The country has a high rate of emigration, particularly to American Samoa, New Zealand and Australia. The big island, Savai'i (population 42,000), is the most scenic and unspoilt, but a lack of jobs, good schools and medical facilities leads to migration to 'Upolu (population 110,000) and abroad. Although over 30% of the population lives in the one urban area, Apia, most still live in small seaside villages. A tiny ethnic minority is the Chinese Samoan community in Apia, which is prominent in the retail and restaurant sectors.

The population of American Samoa is much less at around 59,000, with nearly everybody living on the main island of Tutuila and less than 2000 living on the Manu'a Islands. The territory has a high population growth rate, but this is offset by emigration to Hawai'i and mainland America. Many Samoan citizens and some Tongans work in the two large tuna canneries in Pago Pago. In addition there are some 1500 foreigners who reside in American Samoa, most of whom are Koreans or Chinese involved in the tuna or garment industries. About one third of this number are *palagi* who hold government jobs usually in the teaching or health fields.

SPORT

On weekday afternoons after school or work, young Samoans gather on the *malae* (village green) to play rugby, volleyball and *kirikiti* (Samoan cricket) in Samoa, while American football, basketball and *kirikiti* are most popular in American Samoa. *Fautasi* (45-man canoe) races are held on special occasions. Samoa's biggest competitive sport is rugby (it's more like war than rugby), and the main stadium is at Apia Park (p73). Their team, Manu Samoa, travels the world playing matches, and Samoans play for rugby teams in many countries.

Among women, the most popular sport is netball, and many Samoans play for the world-beating New Zealand netball team.

New Zealand-based boxer David Tua, born in Samoa, won a bronze medal at the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 and fought for the world heavyweight title in 2000. Most Samoan heroes are tough sportsmen.

Both Samoas offer golf courses, gyms, snorkelling, scuba diving, surfing, game fishing, kayaking and rainforest treks.

IT'S JUST NOT CRICKET

Christianity, democracy and cricket have all been through the *fa'a Samoa* mangle. *Kirikiti* is so much more fun than the staid game of cricket. The balls are made of rubber and go much further when hit, and batters are armed with a three-sided war club adapted to a new use. Sport has replaced warfare, but the annual village *kirikiti* competition in both Samoas is still fiercely contested. The batter slogs every ball and tries to hit it into the sea, over the church or anywhere out of sight. In practice games any number can play, and men, women and children all join in the fun. The fielders don't just stand around, but usually pass the time singing and dancing, so *kirikiti* is a kind of *fiafia* (party). If you see a practice match going on, stop and watch and maybe you'll be invited to join in.

Samoan Riddle: What is round during the day and flat at night?

Answer on p46.

The intricate protocol and burning agony of Samoan tattooing is caught on two documentary films – Micah Van der Ryn's excellent *Tatau: What One Must Do*, and *Skin Stories*, produced by PIC (Hawai'i) and KPBS (San Diego).

GAME ON

Apia is hosting the **South Pacific Games** (www.internationalgames.net/southpac.htm) for the second time in August–September 2007. First held in Suva, Fiji in 1963, the Games are held every four years and around 20 island nations take part. Competition is fierce as up to 4000 athletes battle it out in over 30 sports. New Caledonia usually tops the medal table, but Samoa hopes to improve on the 56 medals it won in the last games, and so does American Samoa which won only four medals.

MEDIA

Samoan newspapers have been feisty and independent ever since they first started up in the late 19th century. The *Observer* in Samoa has an outspoken editor, and the *Samoa Times* in American Samoa is a forum for virulent letters on every topic. Radio and TV tend to cast a less critical eye on social, economic and political issues. But the number one news media is beyond any government's control: coconut radio (village gossip) is a 3000-year-old South Pacific version of the Internet, which broadcasts all the latest news and rumours from one end of the islands to the other almost instantly. According to a proverb, even the lizards and grasshoppers know everything that goes on!

RELIGION

The Christian missionaries did a thorough job of converting the islands to Christianity, although Samoans have done an equally impressive job of Samoanising Christianity. The national mottos of both countries mention God.

Churches still dominate life on the islands. Every village has a number of large churches, many of the best schools are run by churches, the Mormons run off-island universities, and Sunday is still the Sabbath and a day of rest. Church is not just a matter of Sunday worship and Sunday school – regular choir practices, women's meetings and youth sports and other activities can take up time on every day of the week.

About 40% of Samoans belong to the Congregational Church, originally the London Missionary Society (LMS). Another 20% are Catholics, while 15% are Methodists, 12% are Mormons, and the charismatic churches like the Seventh-Day Adventists and Assembly of God make up the remainder. The latter are more informal and democratic than the traditional churches. The figures are similar in both Samoas. There is a wonderful Bahá'í House of Worship (p77) in the middle of 'Upolu.

Despite the spread of Christianity, most Samoans still believe in *aitu* (spirits or ghosts) who swarm around at night and can jump inside you and make you sick. *Aitu* are believed to punish wrongdoing so be respectful to grandad or when he dies his vengeful *aitu* will really make you suffer. Two famous *aitu* are twin sisters with long blonde hair who lure men into the bush, while another, Nifolooa, has a long tooth. A legend recounts that *aitu* from Apolima stole a stream from Manono. Some Samoans turn their mirrors round to face the wall at night as they don't want to glimpse an *aitu* in it. In the old days every family had a protecting *aitu* as did almost every tree and rock.

WOMEN IN THE SAMOAN ISLANDS

A proverb states 'the women's row of thatch was completed but the men's was not' and it is still true. Samoan women don't usually hold the status positions, very few are in the *fono*, but behind the scenes they are the key

organisers in village life. They run family, village and church events, raise funds, make handicrafts and sell produce in the markets as well as doing housework, looking after children and doing a million and one other things. Brothers were always taught to respect and guard their precious sisters. Equality does not exist yet, and domestic violence is all too common, but nowadays more women hold *matai* titles, and the pastor's wife often plays a key role in village life.

ARTS Dance & Fiafia

A *fiafia* is a group music-and-dance presentation in which drummers keep the beat while the dancers, usually sitting on the floor, sing traditional songs illustrated by coordinated hand gestures. The slap dances are fun, but striptease dances haven't been seen since the missionaries arrived. A *fiafia* traditionally ends with the *siva*, a slow and fluid dance performed by the village *taupou* (usually the daughter of a high chief), dressed in *siapo* (decorated bark cloth) and with her body oiled seductively. Her beauty and grace is accentuated by male dancers who cavort around, climbing up house posts or rolling around on the floor. Larger hotels in Apia (p73) and Sadie's Thompson Inn (p114) in Pago Pago put on lavish *fiafia*, along with a hefty buffet dinner, which end with an exciting, but not traditional, fire dance.

Just to prove that Samoans don't only excel at sport, Neil Ieremia leads New Zealand's most original modern dance troupe, the all-male Black Grace.

Faleaitu

Faleaitu means 'House of Spirits' and is a traditional entertainment when the youth of the village are allowed to satirise and make fun of their seniors in a series of skits. It provides a safety valve and allows young people to let off steam and have a rare chance to express themselves freely. Samoan comics have made an impact in New Zealand, with successful comedy groups like the Naked Samoans, the Laughing Samoans and the TV cartoon series *bro'Town* carrying on the *faleaitu* tradition.

Literature

Albert Wendt is Samoa's (and the South Pacific's) most renowned novelist and scholar. His many novels deal with the *fa'a Samoa* coming up against *palagi* ideas and attitudes. His greatest novel, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, won the New Zealand Wattie Book of the Year Award. *Sons for the Return Home* is an earlier, best-selling novel, set in 1970s New Zealand and Samoa, that tells the story of two lovers (one white, one Samoan) and their families' response to their relationship.

Samoan performance poet and writer Sia Figiel uses traditional storytelling forms in her work. Her powerful first novel, *Where We Once Belonged*, tells the exuberant story of a young girl growing up and searching for identity in a traditional Samoan village. The in-your-face, episodic novel deromanticises Western perceptions of Pacific island women and tackles head-on issues such as domestic violence and youth suicide.

The Beach at Falesa by Robert Louis Stevenson is a brilliant story set in Samoa by a master stylist with inside knowledge of the South Pacific.

Music

Singing and dancing come as naturally to Samoans as talking and walking. Don't leave without hearing at least one church choir. Traditional

The Falealupo Rainforest, which the village agreed to preserve in return for \$755,000 towards a new primary school, has a tree-top canopy walkway.

Since 2000 the South Pacific Business Development Bank has been providing small loans to female entrepreneurs to set up businesses such as jewellery making, bakeries and vegetable selling.

Race relations in 1970s New Zealand are neatly skewered in *Sons for the Return Home*, a film by Paul Maunder of Albert Wendt's no-holds-barred novel about two young Samoan-*palagi* lovers and their parents, who disapprove of their relationship.

music is normally sung in Samoan but can still be enjoyed by visitors. *We Are Samoa* by Jerome Grey is Samoa's unofficial national anthem.

A dozen villages in Samoa still maintain brass bands, which date back to German rule, but the top one is the Police Brass Band, which marches from the police station in Apia every weekday at 7.45am and performs as the national flag is raised in front of the new government offices (p66).

Buses in both Samoas are mobile discos that play the latest local and international hits. Head to the RSA Club (p73) in Apia to join the locals dancing to great live bands. Local songbirds Katrina, Random and Anisetu Falemoe have had success abroad, while in New Zealand Samoans King Kapisi and Scribe (www.samoanz.com) are the lords of hip-hop.

Architecture

The best example of traditional Samoan architecture is the *fale*. These Samoan homes or meeting halls have an oval structure without walls, which maximises the cool breezes inside. The thatched coconut-frond roof is lashed to wooden rafters with *sennit* (coconut-husk string) and supported by wooden posts. The floor consists of a platform of wood, coral rock or pebbles, covered with woven pandanus mats. The entire house is one room and without exterior or interior walls privacy is impossible, and chickens, dogs and even pigs sometimes have to be chased out. Palm-frond blinds, a Robinson Crusoe version of Venetian blinds, can be lowered when necessary to keep out wind and rain.

Traditional *fale* are found throughout Samoa, but *palagi*-style square homes with walls, louvre windows and doors, though uncomfortably hot and requiring fans, have more status and are becoming more common. In American Samoa they have almost completely replaced the traditional *fale*.

Visit the Hotel Kitano Samoa (Tusitala) in Apia (p69) to see a fine modern *fale*. The many churches throughout the islands run the gamut of styles from Gothic to Wedding Cake to plain Mormon 'boilerhouses'. The iconic 19th-century wooden storefronts along Beach Rd in Apia deserve preservation. Inside the Catholic cathedral in Pago Pago is a carving of Christ wearing a *lava-lava* and holding an *'ava* bowl.

Handicrafts & Fashion

New materials are being incorporated into traditional designs, so plastic shopping bags are cut into strips and woven into pandanus bags or hats, while brightly coloured woollen playing card designs are woven into pandanus mats, and *lava-lava* have dollar bill designs on them as well as palm trees and hibiscus flowers. *Ula* (garlands) were traditionally made of flowers or seashells, but nowadays they are often made of plastic flowers or sweets. Visit the flea market (p65) for the best handicraft stalls.

SIAPO

The bark cloth known as *siapo*, or *tapa*, is made from the inner bark of *u'a* (the paper mulberry tree), and provides a medium for some of the loveliest artwork in the Samoas. The bark has to be soaked, scraped and flattened before being stamped with traditional patterns or painted on freehand. Geometric designs represent fishing nets, pandanus leaves, birds and starfish. Originally used as clothing, *siapo* is still used in customary gift exchanges. You can see *siapo* production in Palauli village (ask at the Samoan Tourism Authority for details) on the south coast of Savai'i, and don't miss the exquisite *siapo* wallpaper in Robert Louis Stevenson's former home (p74) overlooking Apia.

IE TOGA

Woven from pandanus leaves that have been split into very narrow widths, *ie toga* (fine mats) take months of painstaking work to complete. When finished they can have the look and feel of fine linen or silk. Nowadays they are only made in Samoa, and a few may be on sale in the market. They're never used as mats: *ie toga* are a traditional currency, and along with other woven mats, *siapo* and oils, make up the most important component of the 'gifts of the women' that must be exchanged at every *fa'alavelave*. Agricultural products comprise the 'gifts of the men'.

DRESS

Western T-shirts and shorts are common, but many Samoans (and visitors) wear the unisex *lava-lava*, a wraparound of brightly coloured cotton decorated with floral or geometric designs, and *aloha* (Hawaiian) shirts. Women also wear *puletasi*, a long skirt worn under a matching tunic, a cover-up fashion introduced by the early missionaries. Local designers in Apia are using Samoan-style fabrics and vibrant colours to make glamorous designer clothing. If a woman wears a flower over her left (or is it right?) ear, it means she's available. Fancy white hats appear on heads every Sunday when everyone dresses up for church.

The Samoan equivalent of the business suit is the *ie faitaga*, an undecorated *lava-lava* of suit material worn with a plain shirt. This outfit is ideally accompanied by a briefcase, a chunky watch and a rotund physique, all of which denote high social status. Police wear a version of this with sandals. The kilt-like clothing helped make Robert Louis Stevenson feel at home in Apia despite being thousands of kilometres from his native Scotland.

ENVIRONMENT

THE LAND

The Samoan islands are made up of mostly high but very eroded volcanic islands with narrow coastal plains that lie in the heart of the vast South Pacific, 3700km southwest of Hawai'i. Tonga lies to the south, Fiji to the southwest, while Tuvalu is to the northwest, Tokelau to the north, and to the southeast are the Cook Islands and Tahiti.

Samoa, with a total land area of 2934 sq km, consists of two large islands, Savai'i (1700 sq km) and 'Upolu (1115 sq km), with two small inhabited islands, Manono and Apolima, lying in the 18km-wide strait that separates the two larger islands. All are of volcanic origin, and lava blowholes (p100), lava tubes (p98) and lava fields (p94) can all be explored by the traveller. The highest peak, Mt Silisili on Savai'i, rises to an impressive 1866m and is often covered in cloud, which creates a special rainforest habitat.

American Samoa, 80km to the east, is made up of seven islands (six are inhabited) and a few rocky outcrops. Its land area is only 197 sq km. Tutuila (145 sq km) is a narrow, indented island 30km long and up to 6km wide, consisting of a sharp, winding ridge and plunging valleys. The highest peak is Mt Lata (966m). The island is nearly bisected by Pago Pago Harbor, a deep indentation in its eastern coast. The Manu'a Group, about 100km east, consists of three small islands, Ta'u, Ofu and Olosega, although the latter two are joined by a bridge. All are wildly steep and beautiful examples of volcanic remnants.

Mama by the Mt Vaea Band brings to life the infectious Samoan songs heard over the years at the legendary Apia nightclub, the Mt Vaea Club.

A superbly illustrated book, *Samoan Art & Artists* by Sean Mallon, covers every artistic genre from architecture to weaving, and contains interviews with contemporary Samoan artists on and off the islands.

Tapa of the Pacific by Neich and Pendergrast is a useful, illustrated booklet on *tapa* styles right across the Pacific from the Solomon islands to Tahiti.

Check out traditional *tapa* (bark cloth) artwork at www.siapo.com.

Riddle Answer: Family roots.

Meet Samoa's marine and terrestrial creatures in Meryl Rose Goldin's beautifully illustrated *Field Guide to the Samoan Archipelago* which also covers their habitats in the coral reefs, rainforests and protected areas.

THE SEX LIFE OF CORAL

Sex is infrequent for coral as the mass spawning that creates new coral only takes place once a year – but when it happens, it's fireworks. The big event comes in late spring or early summer, beginning a night or two after a full moon and building to a crescendo on subsequent nights. Suddenly, right across the reef tiny bundles of eggs and sperm are released, and start floating upward towards the surface. Divers who have seen the event report that it looks like a fireworks display or an inverted snowstorm.

Amid the swarm, it's not easy for an individual sperm to find an egg of the same coral species, but biologists believe that spawning over a short period reduces the risk of being consumed by marine predators. Once fertilisation has occurred, the egg cells begin to divide, and within a day have become swimming coral larvae known as planulae. These are swept along by the current for several days before they sink to the bottom and, if the right spot is found, the tiny larvae become coral polyps, and a new coral colony is formed.

Darwin's theory about the life of a Pacific island can be traced by travelling west to east through the Samoan islands. Savai'i is a relatively young island and a volcano erupted there only a hundred years ago. Just to the east, the subtle peaks and ridges of 'Upolu show that it is still a fairly new island. But Tutuila and the Manu'a Group, further east, are heavily eroded and many of the volcanic craters they once contained are broken and submerged in the sea.

Swains Island is a tiny coral atoll – the coral has built up on top of an ancient, eroded volcano – that has been owned by the Jennings family since 1856. Uninhabited Rose Atoll, the easternmost island, is a bird and turtle sanctuary. Ultraprotected, it is easier to visit the moon than Rose Atoll.

WILDLIFE Animals

Because the Samoan islands are so remote, few animal species have managed to colonise them. Apart from the Polynesian rat, the sheath-tailed bat and two species of flying fox, mammals are limited to the marine varieties. The flying foxes (p115) are now protected throughout the islands after being hunted close to extinction. Whales, dolphins and porpoises migrate north and south through the Samoas, depending on the season. Most common are pilot whales, frequently seen in the open seas around the islands. Humpback whales may be seen in September and October.

Pili (skinks) and *mo'o* (geckos) can be seen in the bush, including on the hike up Mt Vaea to Stevenson's tomb (p76). The green house gecko patrols walls and ceilings, hunting for insects. The harmless *gata* (Pacific boa) snake is found only on Ta'u, and the green turtle and endangered hawksbill turtle are rare visitors. The hawksbill breeds on the Aleipata islands (off 'Upolu) and very occasionally on remote beaches on Savai'i, Tutuila and the Manu'a Islands. The green turtle nests on Rose Atoll, and tagged ones have been discovered as far away as Fiji and Tahiti. Other turtles occasionally visit American Samoa, where killing one can result in a US\$10,000 fine. The cliffs at Vaitogi village (p118) are the best place to see a turtle and maybe a shark too.

The only land creature to beware of (besides the unloved and unlovely dogs) is the giant centipede which packs a surprisingly nasty bite.

Over 50 species of birds can be seen or heard, including sea birds such as petrels, white-tailed tropicbirds, boobies, black noddies, cur-

The Samoan moss spider, *Patu marplesi*, is hard to spot because it measures 0.3mm and is the tiniest of the planet's 35,000 species of spider.

For the lowdown on Samoa's colourful avian population pick up a copy of the classic *Field Guide to the Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific* by Pratt, Bruner and Berrett.

lew, frigate birds and terns. The most beautiful bird is the tiny, bright red cardinal honeyeater. Other species include the nearly flightless, endangered banded rails, the barn owl, seen occasionally in the Manu'a Islands, and the superb blue-crowned lory, which the Samoans call *sega*. While walking in the rainforests, listen for the haunting call of the rare multicoloured fruit doves (maybe only 50 survive on Tutuila) and the beautiful green and white Pacific pigeons, found throughout the islands.

The coral reefs that ring the Samoan islands are home to brilliantly coloured tropical fish that look like they are on their way to a fancy-dress party, and countless species of shellfish, starfish and crustaceans. Over 200 species of coral and 900 species of fish have been identified, including several shark species which are generally small and remain outside the reefs and lagoons.

Plants

On all the islands, upland areas that haven't been altered by agriculture or logging are covered in green rainforest, predominately broadleaf evergreens, which are clothed in mosses, tree ferns and vines. Valleys, waterfalls and volcanic craters take on an otherworldly aspect in the jungle, and the highest peaks provide a unique cloud forest habitat as the sun rarely shines there.

The *aoa* (giant banyan tree) dominates the landscape of the higher areas, especially on Savai'i and 'Upolu. Known as the strangler fig, it grows in the upper reaches of a host tree, shoots out roots to the ground, and then slowly strangles its host to death. Other parts of the Samoas are covered by scrublands, marshes, pandanus forests and mangrove swamps. All round the islands brilliant tropical flowers, such as the *teuila* (red ginger), bloom all year round.

The Samoan rainforests are a natural pharmacy, containing some 75 plant species that are used by *jofa* (traditional healers) to treat many types

For a raise-a-smile blog about coconut trees and their cannonball-like seeds look at www.coconut.com/blog.

Cluny and La'avasa Macpherson interviewed 22 *jofa* (traditional Samoan healers) about their use of exorcism, psychology, medicinal herbs and massage in their pioneering study *Samoan Medical Belief*.

THE WORLD IN YOUR PALM

Samoans revere the tree of life, the coconut palm, a swaying South Seas icon with more uses than there are days in a year. The rich milk that is squeezed from the silky white flesh of the coconut is the soul of Samoan cuisine, and coconut water is a delicious, pure and refreshing drink. But there's a whole lot more to be gained from this 'milk bottle up a tree', so much so that it's difficult to imagine life on Samoa without it.

Copra is made by sun-drying the white coconut flesh, or placing it in a kiln and using the coconut shells as fuel. The copra is then pressed to produce coconut oil, which is made into margarine, soap, candles and cosmetics. Samoan women use it, together with *moso'oi* flower petals, to make a healing, scented massage oil which is sold in Apia market. The pressed flesh can be fed to cattle or pigs.

Coconut shells are used as drinking vessels in the 'ava ceremony and, when burned, make excellent charcoal. Polished shell is also fashioned into buttons and tourist souvenirs.

The stringy coconut husk is braided into string and used to make mats, fishing nets and to hold a *fale* together (in place of nails). In the villages you can still see old men rolling the strands on their knee to make it into string.

Coconut fronds are woven to make thatched roofs, blinds, baskets, hats, fans and food trays, while brooms are made from the frond spines. The trunk of the tree is used to make furniture, fences, firewood and posts for *fale*.

Coconut palms live for more than 70 years and produce about 60 coconuts a year. Climbing a coconut tree is an adventure sport rewarded with a refreshing drink.

NONU THE WONDER FRUIT

In need of a pick-me-up? Samoan *nonu* juice, a vile-tasting, olfactory-repulsing potion, made from the fruit of the *nonu* plant, has been hailed as a genuine cure-all. It's prescribed by some Samoan practitioners for ailments such as diabetes, digestive diseases, kidney disorders, high blood pressure, asthma and arthritis, to name just a few. Many Samoans swear by it, believing that a dose a day keeps the doctor away.

While this may be true, there's very little, if any, scientific evidence to prove its efficacy. Still, anything that tastes and smells this bad has to be good for you, right? At least the Samoans hope so, particularly as it's become a lucrative international export (marketed as the Tahitian *noni*). You can pick up a bottle in several shops around Apia for between ST10 and ST20 – or buy it for NZ\$38 (473g) in New Zealand.

of illness. The bark of the *mamala* tree is being investigated for use as an AIDS medicine.

CONSERVATION AREAS Samoa

On the southern shore of 'Upolu is O le Pupu-Pu'e National Park (p80), which contains a cross section of island habitats from the coastline up to the misty heights of Mt Fito (1100m) around the spine of the island. Togi-togiga waterfall is nearby. Development in the park is limited but there are a couple of walking tracks, as well as opportunities to observe native forest and bird life. A drawback of building more paths is that some locals will use them to shoot flying foxes and pigeons, even though it is illegal. Apparently, barbecued flying fox tastes better than chicken.

Lake Lanoto'o (p77) is a large crater lake that is designated to become a national park, but is difficult to access. Legends say it was filled by the tears of To'o after he heard about the death of his brother in one of Samoa's all-too-common wars.

The Uafato Conservation Area (p77), the Sataoa and Sa'anapu Conservation Area (p80) and the Aleipata Islands Conservation Area (p83) are also protected. In the Apia area, conservation areas include Palolo Deep Marine Reserve (p64) and Mt Vaea Scenic Reserve (p74).

A couple of villages have established their own protected areas – the Falealupo Rainforest Preserve (p97) and the Tafua Peninsula Rainforest Preserve (p92), which contains two tree-filled volcanic craters.

American Samoa

American Samoa's major contribution to nature conservation is the 4000-hectare National Park of American Samoa, which consists of three separate areas: firstly a large chunk of the upland forest, wild coastline and offshore waters of northern Tutuila (p115); secondly a magnificent stretch of beach and coral along the southern shore of Ofu (p127); thirdly the offshore waters, rugged cliffs and rainforested volcanic highlands of southern Ta'u (p129). Combined, these areas cover the largest tract of wilderness in the Samoas, with most of the island ecosystems represented.

Currently there is just one major walking trail – the track leading to the top of Mt Alava on Tutuila. Future plans for the park include establishing hiking trails, basic camp sites and a rainforest canopy walkway in the Ta'u section of the park. Contact the National Park Visitor Information Centre (p108) for more information.

Other protected areas are the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary (p118; www.fbnms.nos.noaa.gov) on Tutuila, and isolated Rose Atoll

Samoan Herbal Medicine, by Dr W Arthur Whistler, is an overview of the plants used and the ailments treated by traditional Samoan healers.

Riddle Answer: Sleeping mats.

(p123), a vital wildlife sanctuary for nesting turtles and seabirds. Pago Pago Harbor, Nu'uuli Pala Lagoon and the Leone wetlands are special management areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES Samoa

Deforestation is probably the most serious environmental challenge facing the country. Population pressures, and demand for wood both locally and to generate much-needed export revenue are the major threats. Much of the lowland rainforest has already been cleared and the rainforest now covers less than 37% of the land area. The current rate of forest depletion is about 3000 hectares per year – 80% due to agriculture and other activities, 20% the result of logging. The protection of Samoa's forests is crucial for the conservation of water and soil resources as well as to ensure the survival of flying foxes and unique island ecosystems.

Several key areas on 'Upolu and Savai'i have been declared protected areas, and visitors can help conservation efforts by only visiting and staying in villages that operate 'ecofriendly' activities and have pledged to protect the environment. Ask at the Samoa Tourism Authority (p64) for more details.

Unfortunately Samoan marine resources are under serious pressure as overfishing combined with modern, nonselective fishing techniques have resulted in declining fish stocks. Coastal habitats have been damaged by the illegal use of dynamite and poisons to catch fish as well as by an increase in siltation and pollution. Coral has been seriously reduced by cyclone damage and outbreaks of crown-of-thorns starfish (which may be the result of unnaturally high volumes of nutrients feeding the young starfish).

Mangrove swamps and wetland areas, which provide vital feeding and breeding grounds for fish and other sea creatures, are being reduced by land reclamation schemes. Vaiusu Bay, the largest mangrove area in eastern Polynesia, was used for many years as Apia's rubbish dump. The mangroves there are still being reclaimed, and leachate from the disused dump remains a threat to the marine environment.

Waste disposal is a growing problem, but the introduction of a waste pick-up service for many villages on 'Upolu and a few on Savai'i, where the rubbish is taken to designated land-fill areas, has helped. In 2005 a can-recycling plant was established and a new incinerator was built for hospital waste. Many houses are surrounded by litter-free gardens of

Mouse-click your way to the best Samoan environmental database at www.mnre.gov.ws/biodiversity.

www.nps.gov/npsa is a brilliant site with a comprehensive guide to the terrestrial and marine environment of American Samoa.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Much of Samoa is relatively unspoiled and the government wants to keep it that way. As tourist numbers increase, so too does the need to ensure that this growth does not wreck the environment or damage social structures, both of which can be fragile. While 'ecotourism' (whether genuine or simply tours wrapped in green packaging) is a buzz word, 'sustainable tourism' is much broader in its approach. It involves improving or reducing waste disposal, increasing the proportion of the tourists' *tala* (money) that is spent on locally grown or made goods, and increasing the share that trickles down to the ordinary workers or local landowners.

The aim is to reduce the negative impacts that have been felt on other South Pacific islands like Fiji and Tahiti, where small villages have been swamped by mega resorts, and the fishermen have all become waiters and barmen, so that their families now live on tinned fish. A string of small, ecofriendly beach *fale* homestays have been developed around the islands which provide an authentic Samoan experience and put the philosophy into practice.

flowers and fruit trees, and Tidy Village competitions help make villages in Samoa less messy than in American Samoa.

Another waste-disposal problem is the contamination of groundwater and lagoons resulting from inadequate sewerage systems in private homes, which range from septic tanks to drains into the sea. The government and conservation groups, such as the O le Siosiomaga Society, work hard to persuade people to recycle waste and build composting toilets.

Detailed mapping has been carried out of coastal areas that are most at risk from rising sea levels associated with global warming. Around 75% of Samoa's coastline has been identified as highly vulnerable to coastal erosion, and 93% of the narrow coastal strip, the flat area where most of the population lives, is expected to be in a flood hazard zone in 50 years. Hazard maps have been presented to each village for discussion about the need to build new sea walls and shift roads and power lines inland.

A lack of town planning in Apia has resulted in traffic congestion, overcrowding, poor segregation of industry and dwellings, and some very ugly buildings. Pressure is mounting on the limited urban infrastructure as more people crowd into the capital from Savai'i and remote villages.

American Samoa

The biggest issues affecting the environment in American Samoa are a high population growth rate, the increased generation of waste, greater demand for treated water and the development of the limited land available for homes and other uses.

The main source of industrial waste are the two tuna canneries that operate inside Pago Pago Harbor. For many years, cannery waste was discharged directly into the harbour in front of the canneries, and sludge was disposed of in pits on the island. Since the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) brought in strict waste-disposal requirements, the canneries have installed a pipeline to the outer harbour, and now transport most of the waste to an ocean dump site 9km from the harbour. An upgraded filtering system has reduced the smells coming from the canneries.

WHEN IT'S RAINING CATS AND DOGS

Jan Allen is about to face another day of desexing. She and her colleagues wait in a remote Samoan village for their clients to arrive. A small boy carries in a dog almost as big as himself. A young family brings a litter of female puppies. A man arrives on a bicycle carrying three cats in a rice sack. Jan whips out a scalpel and gets to work.

Jan is a veterinarian with the **Animal Protection Society of Samoa** (APS; www.samoa.ws/aps), placed by **Australian Volunteers International** (www.australianvolunteers.com). Her role is to provide animal health services in remote areas.

Samoa has large numbers of unwanted and unclaimed dogs and cats. These animals pose a significant health risk, especially in poor or rural areas, so the APS has embarked on a nationwide desexing programme to reduce the population. The programme includes regular village visits, where APS vets examine and desex animals, and humanely euthanise sick or neglected animals.

Jan reports that the programme is slowly but steadily making progress. 'The village visits are always successful in the numbers of animals treated, and also provide a wealth of community education. We have returned to villages five times because it's become the 'cool' thing to get your dog desexed.'

As the sun sets, Jan and her colleagues pack up and head back to the truck. They've picked up some extra cargo – the female puppies, for whom they'll find a home in Apia. Another day is over, and the rain of cats and dogs has slightly eased.

The government of Samoa has plans to outlaw plastic bags in shops as well as plastic containers and even disposable nappies.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

- The Samoan islands have limited facilities for waste, so try to minimise the amount of packaging you buy.
- Most land in the Samoas belongs to someone, so ensure you ask permission before you create your own tracks.
- Don't purchase items or souvenirs made out of endangered resources like black coral or sandalwood.
- Never fish, collect shells or other specimens in any of the marine reserves or national parks in the Samoan islands.

One study found the fish in Pago Pago Harbor to be contaminated with heavy metals and organochlorine compounds, probably related to waste disposal practices of the ship repair yards and power generation plants. Further action is required to reduce harbour pollution.

Solid waste collection on Tutuila is inadequate and garbage on the streets is an eyesore. After heavy rain (almost a daily occurrence), Pago Pago Harbor is ringed with floating rubbish carried there by streams and land drains. Litter task forces have been reintroduced and people caught littering can be fined US\$50. The recycling programme deals only with aluminium cans and Vailima beer bottles, but any profit from recycling other materials during previous trials was cancelled out by shipping costs.

Increased land clearance for development is causing erosion and a degradation of water quality. Less than 28% of the native rainforest remains on Tutuila, but the National Park of American Samoa protects key remaining areas, and conservation group Le Tausagi is campaigning to protect the lowland Ottoville rainforest.

Many coastal mangrove swamps, inland freshwater marshes and some cultivated taro fields have been lost to development. In recent years up to 5% of the wetlands have been lost each year. To try to halt this decline, a village-based programme has been designed to make the public aware of their economic value and environmental significance.

FOOD & DRINK

Samoans love food, glorious food, and skinny Samoans are as rare as hawksbill turtles. Traditional Samoan meals consist of root vegetables, particularly *talo* (taro), *niu* (coconut products), *fuata* (breadfruit), *pua'a* (pork), *moa* (chicken), *i'a* (fish) and other seafood such as shellfish, octopus and lobster. Young coconuts have delicious coconut water and a little jelly-like white flesh, mature ones have coconut water and firm white flesh, while sprouting ones are full of a spongy white substance called *popo*, Samoan ice cream.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

The best way to sample the local cuisine is to stay in a village, be invited into a Samoan home or take part in an *umu* feast. An *umu* is a traditional Polynesian oven that uses hot rocks to cook the food, and is much better than a microwave. *To'ona'i* (Sunday lunch) is usually cooked in an *umu*. A few hotels in Apia offer excellent *to'ona'i*, including the Pasefika Inn (p68).

View www.samoa.co.uk for a worthwhile site on all things Samoan, including food 'n' drink.

For an *umu* meal, wrap taro, breadfruit, pork and *palusami* in leaves, put them on rocks heated in a fire and pile more leaves on top.

Feasts are held in honour of every festive event, such as a wedding, birthday, investiture of title, the opening of a building or the arrival of VIPs. Typical foods offered include the ubiquitous chicken and fish, and the more prestigious roast suckling pig; cooked green bananas, taro and yams; *pisupo* (corned beef), which is surprisingly tasty when fried up with onions; dishes utilising coconut cream, such as scrummy *palusami* (young taro leaves baked in coconut cream); *oka* (marinated raw fish); *supo esi* (papaya pudding); *fa'ausi talo* (taro in coconut cream); *supasui* (chop suey noodles), which is now part of the *fa'a Samoa*; and cakes or fresh fruit salad which make up dessert. Garlands of fresh flowers and wrapped sweets are hung round the necks of the more important guests.

TASTES OF SAMOA

Oka

500g fresh skipjack or yellowfin tuna (or other reef fish, such as mullet)
1 cup lemon or lime juice
½ cup coconut cream
½ cup finely chopped onion
½ cup finely chopped tomatoes
½ cup diced cucumber
1 tsp chopped chilli peppers
salt to taste

Cut fish into cubes and rinse with cold water. Marinate in lemon or lime juice for at least two hours, or overnight in the fridge. Drain the juice and set aside. Mix together remaining ingredients, add some of the juice to taste and pour over fish. Serve chilled.

Palusami or Lu'au

12 young taro leaves
250g corned beef, shelled prawns or sweet potato
1 tin coconut cream
1 finely diced onion
salt to taste

Mix the meat, prawns or sweet potato with the coconut cream, onion and salt. Divide the mixture into 12 portions and wrap each in a taro leaf. Wrap each parcel in foil, place in a baking dish and bake in a medium oven for one hour.

Supo Esi

papayas
sago
coconut cream
lime leaf
sugar to taste

This refreshing and not-too-sweet dish can be enjoyed any time of the day, but is often eaten for breakfast. Take as many papayas as required, remove seeds, scoop out the flesh and place in a saucepan. Add water to the level of the fruit and ½ tsp of sago to every cup of water. Simmer the mixture until the sago is cooked (the sago will turn clear). Add ½ cup of coconut cream for every cup of water, sugar to taste if required, and one lime leaf. Cover the pan and simmer for five minutes. Remove lime leaf and allow mixture to cool.

TRAVEL YOUR TASTE BUDS

Dancing Spaghetti

Some time in October or early November, usually on the seventh night after a full moon, the *palolo* reef worm suddenly shifts into reproduction mode. Over the course of a few hours millions of the segmented coral worms break into two, and the back half – sacks of eggs and sperm – float up to the surface of the sea and indulge in a reproductive frenzy. The blue-green, vermicelli-like *palolo*, rich in calcium, iron and protein, taste like creamy caviar and are said to be a great aphrodisiac.

On the night when the *palolo* rise, hundreds of excited Samoans gather on beaches that have reefs just offshore, and then wade into the sea armed with lanterns, makeshift nets and buckets to scoop up the once-a-year delicacy. Some gatherers eat them raw, but others fry them up and serve them on toast, or cook them with coconut cream and onions. A big plateful costs ST15 to ST35 in the market.

We Dare You

- Sea cucumber innards in a murky liquid are sold in soft-drink bottles at Apia market.
- Raw sea urchins look disgusting and taste worse.

Food from the sea includes tuna, shark and other open-sea fish as well as lagoon fish, such as parrotfish and perch, lobster, squid, octopus, crabs and *limu* (a crunchy seaweed). Popular with Asian visitors is *sea* (sea cucumber), a turd-like creature that hoovers up detritus from the reef floor.

Tropical fruits grown locally include bananas, papayas, guavas, passionfruit, pineapples and *vi* (Tahitian apples). Mangoes are available from late September.

Unfortunately most food is now imported – for instance tins of fish have largely replaced fresh fish – and unless you spend time at a homestay out in a village, you can have a hard time finding traditional foods. Apia and Pago Pago both have more Asian than Polynesian restaurants.

Local people, especially in American Samoa, are experiencing severe health problems, such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease, as junk food, fatty meats and imported supermarket items replace the healthier diet to which Samoans have long been accustomed. Small village stores are often a nutrition nightmare, stocked with crisps, *pisupo*, instant noodles, processed white bread and fizzy drinks as well as cigarettes and Vailima beer. A diet of sausages, mutton flaps (belly meat), turkey tails and corned beef would soon supersize even Kate Moss.

DRINKS

Nonalcoholic Drinks

The most refreshing drink available is the water inside an immature coconut, which is naturally carbonated and absolutely delicious. After cutting off the fibre surrounding the coconut, the top of the nut is taken off with a machete and a straw put in. Drinking coconuts are cheap and available year-round just about everywhere, although climbing up a tree to get one is not as easy as it looks.

Another delicious drink is *koko Samoa*, a chocolate bevy made with locally grown and roasted cocoa beans, sugar and water. Because they lack the bitterness of beans produced elsewhere, Samoan cocoa beans are considered to be the best in the world.

Corned beef is called *pisupo* because early missionaries brought tins of pea soup to the islands and *pisupo* became the word for any tinned food.

Tuck into your Pasifica faves such as *panipopo* (coconut buns) and *koko araisa* (cocoa rice) with help from www.samoaa.as/recipe.htm.

'AVA

'Ava is a time-honoured South Pacific drink made from the dried root of the kava plant. Traditionally mixed by the virgin daughter of the highest chief, 'ava is the ceremonial drink imbibed at all important Samoan ceremonies and meetings (see p38). It has a muddy colour and a peppery taste. Although not alcoholic, it can have a mild sleep-inducing and numbing effect. Drunk in large quantities, it's a sedative, muscle relaxant and diuretic. In recent years the beverage has become controversial with some touting it (in pill form) as a New-Age cure-all, recommended for treatment of stress, anxiety and depression. It had become a small but growing export earner for Samoa, until in 2001 medical researchers linked 'ava with liver failure, and exports collapsed. Although usually reserved for special occasions and restricted to *matai*, a big wooden bowl of 'ava is often available at the market in Apia.

Real brewed coffee, some of it locally produced, can be found in quite a few places around the islands, though it's often made very weak. Tea is generally served black with lots of sugar.

A drink you might come across is *vaisalo*, made from coconut milk and flesh that is thickened with starch. Rich and nourishing, it is traditionally the first food offered to women after they have given birth. You may see people drinking it early in the morning at the markets.

Despite the variety of fruit on hand, fresh juices aren't always easy to come by. You're more likely to be served a sugary cordial or fizzy drink than freshly squeezed juice. Soft drinks and locally produced bottled water can be bought everywhere. Most of the milk available is the imported long-life variety.

Alcoholic Drinks

Samoa's locally brewed lager, Vailima, is available just about everywhere in both Samoas, and is popular with visitors and locals alike. *Manuia!* (Cheers!) Apia's restaurants and bars stock a range of imported alcoholic drinks, including wines and beers from Australia and New Zealand. In American Samoa you can choose from American and other imported beers such as Budweiser, Coors, Miller's and Steinlager (although you'd have to be *mad* to turn down a Vailima for a Bud!).

CELEBRATIONS

Every celebration is accompanied by a splendid *umu* feast which includes whole roasted pigs, baked fish, lobsters for VIP guests, chicken, leaf-wrapped *palusami*, big platters of corned beef, taro, breadfruit and chop suey, a coconut drink, sweet black tea, and is finished off with fruit salad and coconut milk. Guests take home what they cannot finish.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Apia and, to a lesser extent, Pago Pago have a range of restaurants, but outside these towns, options are very limited for eating out. Samoans don't eat out much, so most menus cater for Western tastes with seafood, steaks, pizzas and pasta, though some Apia hotels put on island-style buffets. Chinese restaurants in Apia are a good bet, while reasonable Mexican and Korean food and excellent Japanese food is available in American Samoa. Sometimes the more ordinary-looking places offer better food.

In Samoa a cheap main meal costs from around ST8, an upmarket feed from ST25. In American Samoa you'll pay US\$5 for a cheap meal or takeaway, US\$30 for a splurge.

Written by an experienced restaurateur, Sue Chambers, *The Flame Tree Cookbook* serves up heaps of Asian/South Pacific flavours with a tropical twist.

Two hundred island-inspired recipes can be found in *Taste of the Pacific* by Parkinson, Stacy and Mattinson, including such delights as breadfruit bread, coconut egg curry and taro cakes.

Out of town, travellers have to rely on hotel restaurants or home-cooked food provided by the proprietors of beachside *fale*. Apia has a small fish market (go as early as possible), but elsewhere it's difficult to buy fresh fish and seafood to cook up yourself.

Supermarkets in Apia and Pago Pago are well-stocked, but high transport costs to the islands can make some items more expensive than you might expect. Every village has a store but they only stock the basics.

Quick Eats

The cheapest quick eats are in the markets in Apia, Salelologa on Savai'i, and Pago Pago, where a few *tala* or dollars will buy doughnuts (called pancakes) and hot cocoa, or a plate of fish and vegetables. Bakeries are best for a quick snack – try *panipopo* (buns dripping in coconut cream). Locally made breadfruit chips are healthier than crisps. *Masi* (cabin biscuits, a 19th-century seaman's staple), *sua fa'i* (banana porridge) or *koko araisa* are breakfast possibilities, while fresh fruit and coconuts are good bets. Fast food establishments can be found in both Apia and Pago Pago.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

It's tough. In Apia you can buy *palusami* and fresh fruit in the market, veggie burgers at Gourmet Seafood, vegetarian pizzas at Giordano's, a salad at McDonald's or a tofu dish in a Chinese restaurant. A few restaurants such as Sails will cook up something vegetarian if asked.

In Pago Pago, Hong Kong House has the best range of vegetarian meals, while Mom's Place has pancakes, Matai's has vegetarian pizzas, and Good Food Bakery has tempting snacks.

EATING WITH KIDS

Both Apia and Pago Pago have fast-food joints that sell burgers, chips, pizzas, fried chicken and fried fish, as well as Asian takeaways and restaurants, bakeries and ice cream shops, while the markets have piles of fresh tropical fruit.

Families eating out are unlikely to face any problems. Children may even be adopted by restaurant staff and given a free reign, although up-market restaurants may be less tolerant.

SAMOA'S TOP FIVE RESTAURANTS

- Bistro Tatau (p71)
- Aggie Grey's Fale Restaurant (p71)
- Gourmet Seafood (p70)
- Sails (p71)
- Lusia's Lagoon Chalets (p92)

AMERICAN SAMOA'S TOP FIVE RESTAURANTS

- Tisa's Barefoot Bar (p117)
- Sook's Sushi Restaurant (p113)
- DDW (p112)
- Rubble's Tavern (p120)
- Sadie's Restaurant (p113)

Kava, the Pacific Elixir by Lebot, Merlin and Lindstrom is an exhaustive New Age study of the South Pacific's oldest beverage.

Fans of the wonder root kava should head to www.kavaroot.com.

Samoa Riddle: What small boat floats on a brown sea?

Answer p54.

DOS & DON'TS

If invited home to a *fale* for a meal:

- Sit cross-legged on a floor mat to eat.
- Eat with your fingers and wash them after the meal.
- Reciprocate by buying some groceries or bringing a present.
- Guests often eat first so don't scoff the lot (probably impossible anyway) as what you leave will be shared by the family.
- Don't tuck in immediately as grace is sometimes said before a meal.
- Don't bring alcohol as the family may have religious objections to booze .

HABITS & CUSTOMS

Food, like everything else, is seen as something to be shared. So don't be surprised if someone on the bus gives you some fruit or a bun. Village families are hospitable and may invite you home for a meal, which is an opportunity to experience Samoan family life at first hand.

FOOD GLOSSARY

ai – eat

'ava – ceremonial drink made from *kava* roots

'ava malosi – liquor

esi – papaya

fa'i – banana

fala'oa – bread

fale'aiga – restaurant

fasi povi – meat

fuala'auaina – fruit

fuata – breadfruit

i'a – fish

kofe – coffee

koko Samoa – local cocoa drink

limu – edible seaweed

maketi – market

masi – cabin biscuits

mea taumafa – food

moa – chicken

niu – young coconut

nonu – native fruit marketed as *noni*, a cure-all

oka – raw fish marinated in coconut cream, lemon juice and onion

palolo – coral worm that provides a feast once a year

palusami – young taro leaves cooked in coconut cream

panipopo – buns in coconut cream

pia – beer

pisupo – tinned corned beef

popo – sprouting coconut

povi masima – salt beef

pua'a – pig

supasui – Samoan chop suey

supo esi – papaya pudding

susu – milk

ta'amu – giant taro

talo – taro, the staple root vegetable

ti – tea

to'onai – Sunday lunch

uaina – wine

umu – oven made with hot rocks

vai – water

vai mama – mineral water

vaisalo – drink made with coconut and starch

Riddle answer: An
'ava cup.

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