

American Samoa

National Park of American Samoa
American Samoa

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Top: Sand beach and fringing reef, framed by a dramatic volcanic landscape, comprise the Ofu unit of the park.
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Above: Coastal rainforest grows along the road south of the village of Fiti'uta on the island of Ta'u.
© STAN KORTSTAD



The Samoan flying fox is the rarer of the two species of flying fox (fruit bat) found in the park.
NPS / TOGIA



Pola Island rises over 400 feet straight out of the ocean off Tutuila. A short walk from Vatia village, Pola is an ideal

nesting site for many species of seabirds.
NPS / LARSON



The lagoon along the south coast of Ofu offers the best snorkeling waters in the park.
NPS



A wooden ava bowl (left, and in photo above) holds ava, a ceremonial drink made from the crushed root of the pepper plant. Leaders from other villages are welcomed through the sharing of ava (above).
NPS / LARSON, LEFT
© RICK SUTTER, ABOVE



Exploring the Islands of Sacred Earth

Talofa! The people of American Samoa and the National Park Service welcome you to the heart of the South Pacific, a world of sights, sounds, and experiences you will find in no other national park. Located some 2,600 miles southwest of Hawaii, this is one of the most remote national parks in the United States. There are no federally-owned lands; parkland and water are leased from native villages and from the American Samoa Government. The park preserves the only mixed-species paleotropical rainforest in the United States, habitat of flying foxes (fruit bats), and Indo-Pacific coral reefs. In keeping with the meaning of the word Samoa—"sacred earth"—the park helps protect fa'asamoa (fah-ah-SAH-mo-ah), the customs, beliefs, and traditions of the 3,000-year-old Samoan culture (see below).

As a visitor to the National Park of American Samoa, you have the opportunity to see lands and waters that are largely undeveloped. You will not find the usual facilities of most national parks. Instead, with a bit of the explorer's spirit, you will discover secluded villages, rare plants and animals, coral sand beaches, and vistas of land and sea. The 13,500-acre park includes sections of three islands—Tutuila (too-too-EE-lah), Ta'u (tah-OO), and Ofu (OH-foo). About 4,000 acres of the park are offshore and underwater. Almost all the land area is rainforest.

On the main island of Tutuila, the park encompasses the north-central part of the island, from the steep ridgeline above Pago Pago (PAHNG-oh PAHNG-oh) Harbor to the north coast. The sheer cliffs of Pola Island are home to sea-

birds like frigatebirds, boobies, white terns, tropicbirds, and brown noddies.

Sixty miles east of Tutuila are the Manu'a Islands: Ta'u, Ofu, and Olosega (oh-low-SENG-ah). The first people on the Samoa Islands came by sea from southeast Asia some 3,000 years ago. Samoans believe the sacred site of Saua on Ta'u is the birthplace of all Polynesia. From Saua around Si'u Point is the dramatic southern coast of Ta'u, where waves crash against the rocky coast and sea cliffs stairstep to the 3,170-foot (966-m) summit of Lata Mountain, the high-



Dusky clownfish
NPS

est point in American Samoa. These are some of the tallest sea cliffs in the world. Ta'u is also where anthropologist Margaret Mead conducted studies in the 1920s for her controversial book *Coming of Age in Samoa*.

National parklands on Ofu lie along the southeast coast. Here you will find coconut palms swaying in the warm ocean breeze along secluded beaches. Bring snorkeling gear to observe hundreds of species of fish, corals, and other marine life in its fringing reef. From Ofu, cross the bridge to visit rainforest-cloaked Olosega.

Explore and enjoy this unique national park in the heart of the South Pacific and the welcoming people of American Samoa.

Fa'asamoa—The Samoan Way

Samoans consider this island world to be sacred. Lands, waters, and food sources are managed to sustain them for the future. Samoan culture, customs, and traditions emphasize the importance of the extended family, the aiga (ah-ING-ah). Each aiga's lands are managed by its chief, or matai (mah-TIE), for the common good.

The Samoan people welcome visitors and many will share their homes with you on a "homestay" (see other side of this brochure). While here, observe these customs as a sign of respect:

- Always ask permission before taking photographs, using the beach, or engaging in other activities, however unobtrusive they may seem. Permission will almost certainly be granted.
- In a traditional home, called a fale (fah-LAY), sit on the floor before talking, eating, or drinking. Cross your legs or cover them.
- Sunday is for church, rest, and especially for quiet. Activities acceptable on other days, like swimming, may not be allowed.
- Each evening around dusk, villagers observe a time for prayers called Sā. If you are in a village during Sā, stop and wait quietly until Sā ends.

Song and dance are integral to fa'asamoa.
© DOUGLAS CULLARD



Rainforest

It is not necessary to stop for Sā on the main roads.

- It is considered an honor to be asked to share ava (a local drink made from the pepper plant). To show respect, spill a few drops on the ground or mat in front of you, then raise your cup and say "manuia" (mahn-WE-ah) before drinking.
- Do not eat or drink while walking through a village.



Fishing for food
© DOUGLAS CULLARD

From the mountaintops to the ocean's edge, the islands are covered with mixed-species, paleotropical (Old World) rainforests. They are closely related to those of Asia and Africa, as opposed to neotropical (New World) rainforests of Central and South America. In mixed-species forests, no single tree or plant species dominates. This is the only rainforest of its kind in a US national park. About 9,500 acres are protected here.

Depending on elevation, the forest can be characterized as coastal, lowland, ridge, montane, or cloud forest. In addition to many species of trees, plants found here include vines, ferns, lichens, epiphytes (air plants), and mosses.

Because fa'asamoa is important to this park, subsistence farming is allowed on some parklands. You will see small plantations of taro, coconut, banana, breadfruit, papaya,

mango, and other crops grown for family consumption. Don't confuse these crops with native rainforest.



Uunu tree
NPS / TOGIA

Coral Reef

Each island of American Samoa supports a coral reef ecosystem in its coastal waters. Rose Atoll and Swains Island are coral atolls with well developed reef systems. The five volcanic islands are surrounded by narrow fringing reefs. Tutuila and 'Aunu'u also have barrier reefs offshore.

These coral reefs support a variety of marine life typical of tropical Indo-Pacific waters. To date, over 950 species of fish and over 250 species of coral have been documented. The park's fringing reef on Ofu is a well-preserved example and easy to reach for snorkeling. Remember that coral is made up of living organisms and can be easily damaged. It is unlawful to collect coral—or any other marine life.

Birds and Bats

Bats are the only native mammals found in American Samoa. The two species of flying fox (fruit bat) and one insect-eating bat species are harmless to people. The Samoan flying fox and the white-collared flying fox have wingspans close to three feet. They play an essential role in the rainforest by pollinating plants and dispersing seeds. The Samoan flying fox has the habit of flying during the day as well as at night. You might see them along the ridges of the Amalau Valley on Tutuila.

Birds are the most abundant and diverse animals in American Samoa, as they are on most oceanic islands. The park is home to over 35 resident and migratory species, including seabirds, water birds, forest birds, and shorebirds. The cliffs and sea stacks are ideal nesting habitat for seabirds like boobies and frigatebirds. The rainforests are home to collared kingfishers,



Red-footed booby
NPS / TOGIA

cardinal and wattled honeyeaters, blue-crowned lorries, Samoan starlings, purple-capped fruit doves, many-colored fruit doves, Pacific pigeons, and banded rails.

Samoa: The Heart of the South Pacific



With a secluded sand beach and fringing reef, the Ofu unit of the park is an ideal place to snorkel or

simply enjoy the solitude. The island of Olosega rises in the distance.

NPS / LARSON



Samoaans weave mats for various purposes like sitting, sleeping, or cultural gifts.

© ROCK SUTTER



Clouds cover the national park area above Pago Pago Harbor. Rainforest descends from the mountaintops to

the coast. The tan-colored areas indicate fringing reef.

© LARRY MADRIGAL



Subsistence farming continues within the park; crops grow next to native rainforest.

© ROCK SUTTER



Si'u Point is a good place to view the south coast of Ta'u. Some of the tallest sea cliffs in the world staircase

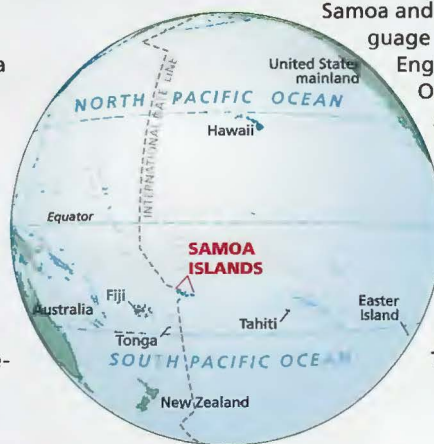
over 3,000 feet to the summit of Lata Mountain.

NPS / LARSON

The Pacific Ocean occupies a third of Earth's surface. Of the thousands of islands scattered throughout this vast world of water, most are not large enough or hospitable enough for humans. Some, like the Samoa Islands, possess such beauty and exotic quality that they have inspired famous works by artists and writers.

The Samoa Islands are part of Polynesia, a triangular area of the Pacific bounded by Hawaii, New Zealand, and Easter Island. The Samoa Islands have been populated for 3,000 years, but known to the western world for little more than two centuries. So important is Samoa to Polynesian culture that many believe this was where all Polynesian people originated.

The Samoan archipelago includes the US territory of American Samoa and the inde-



pendent nation of Samoa (formerly Western Samoa). The island chain stretches east to west for over 300 miles between 13° and 15° south latitude.

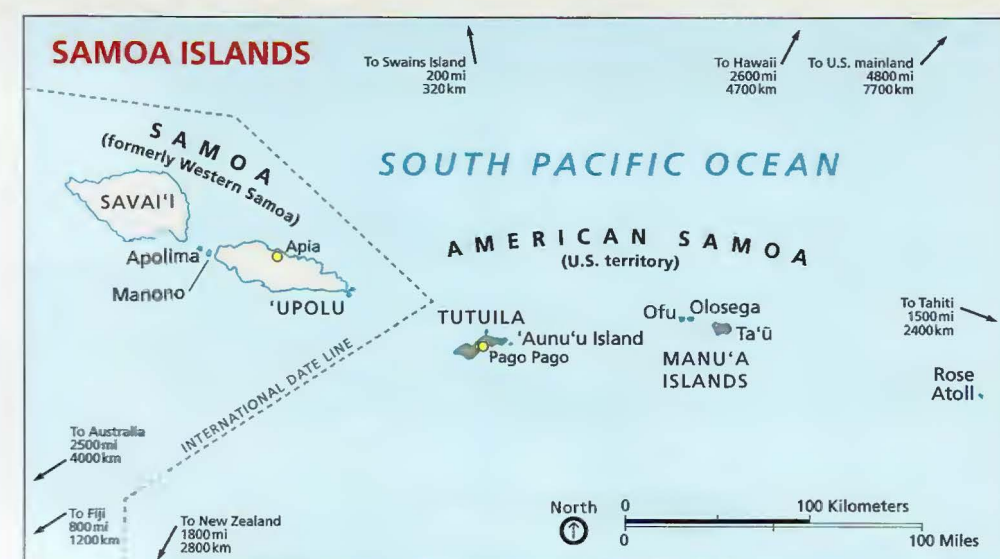
Your trip to this part of the South Pacific should include both Samoa and American Samoa, which share a common language and culture, yet have distinct natural features. English is widely spoken throughout the islands. On opposite sides of the international dateline, American Samoa is one hour earlier than Hawaii and Samoa is one day earlier.

American Samoa, the only US territory south of the equator, consists of seven islands: five rugged, highly eroded volcanic islands and two coral atolls. The land area totals 76 square miles. Approximately 70,000 people live here, most on the main island of Tutuila.



A High Talking Chief's fly whisk, or fue (foo-AY). During speeches, the whisk is used with a staff, to'oto'o (toe-OH-toe-Oh).

NPS / LARSON



Exploring the Park

Getting Around
American Samoa is a plan-as-you-go destination. Park rangers at the visitor center can tell you about local travel and lodging on all the islands. On Tutuila, the main island, you can use local, unscheduled "aiga" buses or taxis, or rent a car. On the smaller islands of Ta'u and Ofu, you have to walk or catch a ride from a friendly local. You will

need to schedule a plane or boat to reach Ta'u, and a boat from Ta'u to reach Ofu.

Where to Stay
You can stay in hotel-style lodging or with a Samoan family. Samoaans are hospitable and eager to share their culture with park visitors. Ask a park ranger how to arrange a "homestay." Camping is prohibited within the park.

Climate
Expect temperatures in the low 90s°F (30s°C), high humidity, and frequent showers.

Clothing
Samoan custom calls for lightweight, casual clothes that cover most of your body. Even while swimming, wear modest clothing—no bikinis.

What to Do In the Park
Tutuila: Stop first at the visitor center in Pago Pago to learn about the national park units on the islands. Be sure to get information about homestays and hiking. Afterward, enjoy these drives:
• Rt. 005 over scenic Fagasā Pass at the southern tip of the national park to the village of Fagasā.
• From Aua, take Rt. 006 over

Āfono Pass to the village of Āfono, then on through Amalau Valley and around the headlands to the village of Vatia. While in the Amalau Valley, look for the Samoan flying fox, which flies during the day.

Ta'u: Walk to the park from Fiti'uta. Hike to Si'u Point for a spectacular view of the rugged south coast. If you want

to explore these mountains, you will need to hire a local guide. Wherever you go, watch the sky for flying foxes.

Ofu: Hire a boat in Ta'u to reach this island. Visit the ranger station to learn more about the pristine beaches and coral reefs. Bring snorkeling gear with you; none is available here.

For a Safe Visit
Tropical sun is intense! Wear sunglasses, sunscreen, a hat, and protective clothing. • Carry insect repellent. • When hiking, carry 2 to 3 liters of water per person. • Ask at the visitor center about trail conditions. • Always snorkel with a partner. • At the beach, watch out for falling coconuts. • Don't touch coral! Cuts from coral take a long time to

heal. • Watch your step on coral rubble and rocky areas. • Medical treatment is available only on Tutuila. • Service animals are welcome. • The park and the territory are underdeveloped for accessibility; inquire before you come. • For firearms regulations see the park website.

More Information
National Park of American Samoa
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www.nps.gov/npsa

National Park of American Samoa is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. Learn about national parks at www.nps.gov.

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Tutuila



The Manu'a Islands

