

# Samoa

📍 685 / POP 190,372

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## Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Seabreeze Resort (p119)
- ➔ Namu'a Island Beach Fale (p118)
- ➔ Lupe Sina Treesort (p120)
- ➔ Dave Parker's Eco Lodge (p115)
- ➔ Joelan Beach Fales (p127)

## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Bistro Tatau (p112)
- ➔ Palusami (p111)
- ➔ Amoa Restaurant (p127)
- ➔ Sunday lunch (p281)
- ➔ Taefu T Matafeo Store (p127)

## Why Go?

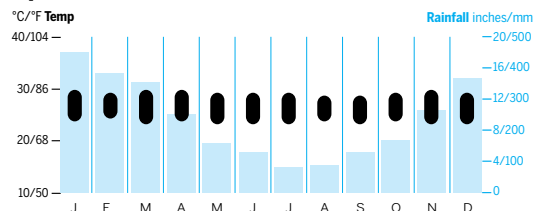
Serene but spirited, wild yet well-manicured, hushed but birthed by volcanic explosions; stunning Samoa is a paradisaical paradox. Despite its intense natural beauty – all iridescent seas, jade jungles and crystal waterfalls – this is a humble place, devoid of mega-resorts and flashy attractions, but with welcomes as warm as the island sun.

Geographically and culturally, this small nation is considered the heart of Polynesia. Though the missionaries of the 1800s were enormously influential, the country has nevertheless clung to *Fa'a Samoa* (the Samoan Way), making it one of the most authentic and traditional of all Pacific societies: in some parts of the islands you're more likely to see someone juggling fire than a house with walls.

Despite its isolation, Samoa offers accessible adventures. From the relative ruckus of Apia to the soul-stirring silence of Savai'i, you'll find a paradise that is safe, sweet and easy to get around.

## When to Go

### Apia



**Dec–Jan**  
Peak holiday  
period when  
Samoans living  
abroad visit home.

**May–Oct**  
Dry season and  
festival time.

**Nov–Apr**  
Steamy weather  
and cyclone  
season.

## UPOLU

POP 143,418 / AREA 1125 SQ KM

Enchanting Upolu may be small in size, but it's huge on options. Beach-bumming or bushwalking? Resort cocktails or billiard-hall beers? Diving or do-nothing? Whatever floats your holiday boat, odds are you'll find it here.

Home to the international airport, the capital city and the bulk of the country's population, Upolu is where nearly all travelers begin their Samoan sojourn. The majority get their first glimpse of local life on the 35km drive from the airport to Apia, where a procession of tidy villages, incongruously large churches and rickety fruit stalls line perhaps the slowest highway in the world (the speed limit is 40km/h).

Most visitors devote themselves to the dazzling strips of sand skirting Upolu's southern shoreline, with forays into pristine offshore lagoons that shelter colourful coral groves and schools of fish; the ethereal To Sua Ocean Trench attracts those keen on the surreal swim of a lifetime. But Upolu also has its fair share of terra firma treasures: the tangled rainforest of the interior; rough coastal cliffs formed by the cooling of lava rivers and fascinating craters and caves. The urban delights of Apia shouldn't be neglected either – not if you fancy the odd boogie, movie, or the country's best eating and drinking establishments.

### Getting Around

#### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Faleolo Airport is on the coast, 35km west of Apia. Many resorts and hotels offer transfers; otherwise there's always an armada of taxis ready to ferry arrivals to the city or other Upolu destinations. The fare to Apia is around ST60.

If you're travelling alone, it's cheaper to catch an airport shuttle. It pays to prebook, but you'll usually spot them waiting across from the terminal for all of the major international flights.

**Samoa Scenic Tours** (p103) has shuttles that stop at any of Apia's hotels (about ST47, 45 minutes); it also offers transfers to other Upolu resorts.

Many of the international flights arrive and depart at ungodly hours, but if you're lucky enough to have one at a reasonable time, buses are an option. Walk out to the main road and hail any bus approaching from your right to get to Apia. To get to Faleolo Airport from Apia (ST4), take any bus marked 'Pasi o le Va'a', 'Manono-uta', 'Falelatai' or 'Faleolo'.

## BUS

Buses connecting Apia with almost every other part of Upolu leave from both Maketi Fou (the main market) and from behind the Flea Market. Drivers circle between the two until the bus is full (this can take up to an hour) and are liable to veer off route to deposit locals at their front doors. There are set bus stops on the coastal road, but if you hail the driver they'll stop almost anywhere. Pay as you leave the bus. Fares within Apia range from ST1 to ST1.80. The most you'll pay for a trip anywhere in Upolu is ST8.50. Buses begin running early in the morning and stop in the early afternoon, though services are limited on Sundays.

A bus schedule for Upolu that includes fare information is available by emailing the **Samoa Tourism Authority** (Map p106; ☎ 635500; www.samoa.travel; Beach Rd; ☀ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat).

To reach the Aleipata district at the eastern end of the island, catch the Lalomanu bus. To head east along the north coast, take the Falefa, Fagaloa or Lotofaga bus. For any point along the Cross Island Rd, take either the Si'umu or Salani bus. For Togitogiga and O Le Pupu-Pu'e National Park, take the Falealili or Salani bus.

## CAR

The main roads in Upolu range from pristine to potholed. The national speed limit maxes out at 56km/h and drops to 40km/h through villages (omnipresent speed humps ensure you never forget to slow down); as there are very few stretches of road that don't pass through villages, expect to be driving at a snail's pace most of the time. The sealed Main Coast Rd winds its way around Upolu, while three roads cross over the island's east-west central ridge and divide it roughly into quarters.

Be aware: though there are very few main roads, there is an even greater dearth of street signs. Those that exist mostly point the way to obscure villages (rather than, say, the airport). Roads often veer off in the opposite direction of the one you might wish to take, with no notice at all. Don't be shy about asking for directions.

A high-clearance 2WD vehicle should be adequate for all but the roads to Uafato and to Aganoa Black Sand Beach (4WD only). Outside of Apia and the stretch between the city and the airport, petrol stations are in short supply.

## Apia

POP 36,735

Few people come to a Pacific paradise to hang around in a small city with not much in the way of beaches. But it's worth taking some time to explore the (relative) sprawl