



# **SAMOA TODAY**

TRAVEL TODAY FEATURE

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# SAMOA TODAY

Travel Today Feature P2

## Samoa Air Back

The growth in demand for Samoa saw the re-launch of domestic air services in Jun. Samoa Air operates a fleet of BN2A Islanders and offers five daily return services between Upolu and Savaii. The carrier is also about to launch direct services from Savaii to Pago Pago in American Samoa, and offers charter services.



## Fia Fia Nights

Most resorts in Samoa will hold Fia Fia nights one night a week, where locals and staff members will perform traditional music, dancing, and spectacular fireknife dancing. Clients should expect to get involved!

## Growing Kiwi Appeal



**Kiwis' love of Samoa is growing and in Samoa, it's impossible to wander around a resort without hearing that unmistakable Kiwi twang.**

Samoa's white sand beaches, blue water and year-round average temperature of 29C mean it's a popular fly and flop holiday destination, and it certainly has the resorts to cater to Kiwis looking for a relaxing holiday in the sun. However clients who are willing to be a little adventurous are going to get the most out of Samoa—and it has seen an increase in independent travellers who are looking to explore. Hidden in the lush green tropics are watering holes, natural waterslides made of rock, beautiful waterfalls, walkways among the treetops, caves, lava tubes, volcanic fields and the

grave of one of the world's most famous authors.

## ... Growing Attraction

New Zealand travel to Samoa has been up each month this year, thanks in part to the country celebrating the 50th anniversary of its independence, and in the year to Jul the number of departures were up by 4.7% to 45,220. This was the biggest increase by percentage in the Pacific, and in Jul Samoa was one of the only countries to see an increase of Kiwi visitor numbers. Year-to-date, the numbers are even up on pre-tsunami figures, and in Samoa itself there is little evidence of the devastating wave other than a modern new flair at rebuilt properties and attractions.

## Samoaan Sundays

Life comes to a halt on Sun in Samoa, but not before everyone has been to church, and visitors are welcome to join in at one of the many churches on the islands. Most resorts will arrange to take guests to a nearby church on a Sun morning. The service is mainly in Samoan (although our priest addressed us a few times in English), but you don't have to understand the language to appreciate the worshippers' beautiful white outfits, singing or performances by the tiny children. If clients attend a service they need to have their shoulders and knees covered, and if their outfit is white, even better. Afterwards everyone spends the afternoon eating and napping—definitely a good time to do like the locals do.



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## Overwater Fales Back

Coconuts Beach Resort and Spa has started rebuilding the overwater fales which were destroyed in the 2009 tsunami, and the resort hopes to have them completed for the New Year.

Coconuts was the only property on Upolu's South Coast to offer the popular overwater fales.

Six 'bigger and better' fales have been designed, building work is well underway. However, the property is promising that the building process will have little impact on its resort guests.



## Self Driving Samoa

Self-drive is a great way to explore Samoa—the colourful houses and beautiful vegetation provide plenty to look at and it's difficult to get lost with one main road around Upolu and Savaii, and a few that cross Upolu.

It takes around two to three hours to drive around Upolu, the most populated island and home to capital Apia, and three to four hours to circumnavigate Savaii, the largest island.

There are plenty of car rental places, and the roads are in pretty good condition. They are quite narrow though and it's a good idea to stick to the

40kph speed limit in town and 56kph out of town, as they are used as walkways by animals and people. Petrol costs about the same, or slightly less, as it does in New Zealand.

Drivers need to get their license validated (WST12) with many rental agencies able to do this.

For those after a true local experience, there are brightly coloured buses which are an experience in themselves. There are no bus stops—travellers hail a bus when they see it, ask the driver if they're on the right one, let them know where they want to go and then pay the fare (anything from WST1 to WST7) when they are dropped off.

On Savaii, the terminal is at the market in Salelologa, and on Upolu it's next to the food market in Fugalei.

### Roadside Snacks

Clients exploring the destination, especially those self-driving, should keep some change on them to buy produce at roadside stalls along the way. Villagers sell their excess produce, such as coconuts, pawpaw and pineapple, very cheaply and it's guaranteed to be fresh. The stalls are often manned by children.



### The Fale Experience

For those happy to experience a more traditional (and cheaper) stay, Samoa's beach fales are ideal. They are a platform on stilts with a thatched roof, woven blinds that can be pulled down to enclose it, a mattress on the floor and little else. The (usually beachfront) fales are open to let the breeze in, and they definitely inspire afternoon naps.

Wholesalers have noted increased demand for the fales, which usually costs \$30-\$50pp pn, including breakfast and dinner.

"There's certainly a growing interest in the traditional fale-style of accommodation," says GO Holidays' Wayne Deed.

Bedding is included but clients will usually need their own towel. Bathrooms are shared, and everyone dines together on traditional Samoan food at mealtimes.

### Teuila Festival Begins

On Mon, the annual Teuila Festival kicked off in Samoa with a speech from the Prime Minister and several song and dance performances. Held on the first week of Sep every year, the festival was created to keep Samoa's traditions alive, including art, music and tattooing. The celebrations traditionally close with Miss Samoa but this year will finish with Ragamuffin—keep an eye on upcoming issues of *Travel Today* to catch the action.

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## Discovering Savaii

There are several stories around why the lava which destroyed five villages on Savaii, Samoa's largest island, failed to damage the grave of a pure virgin nun—and like any, the local legend is the best.

The last eruption on the volcanic island (home to over 400 volcanic cones) lasted from 1905 to 1911, and left a unique field of solidified lava, the likes of which can only be found in a few places in the world.

At the only village to be rebuilt, Saleaula, visitors can pay WST5 to visit the Virgin's Grave, where the lava has crumbled to reveal her final resting place, then throw in a flower and make a wish.

They can also visit the church which was abandoned after being filled with the lava, although its impressive structure still stands.

Our guide, an older Aussie gentleman named Warren Jopling with a passion for geology, has a scientific reason for why the virgin's grave is uncovered, but we'll stick to the romantic legend. The island's volcanic legacy is also evident in lava fields along the north coast, which clients can wander over for free (but be aware, in some places



the lava crust is thin), and up Tafua where they can view a volcanic crater (and try to spot rare flying foxes). Most hotels offer day tours or clients could book with Jopling, who is full of interesting facts about how and why the lava has formed the way it has. Jopling, who moved to Samoa nearly 30 years ago, takes the tours as a retirement hobby and relies on word of mouth for customers (ph +685 750 6448).

● For more photos see our Travel Today NZ facebook page.

### On Yer Bike

Cycling around Savaii is becoming an increasingly popular option, especially with older couples, says local resident Warren Jopling. Clients can hire a bike in Upolu and bring it over, or rent one in Savaii. It takes seven to 11 days to cycle around the island with plenty of stops to see everything.



### Island's Hidden Charm

Savaii is one of the largest islands in the Pacific, after New Zealand and Hawaii, but is sparsely populated. Clients travelling the isle will still find villages to call at and spot locals working, resting, weaving or playing sports like volleyball or cricket. It pays to keep a lavalava handy to cover up with in villages, and even if they're shy of approaching adults, the children are always keen to meet visitors (and won't expect anything in return except maybe a peek at themselves on camera).



### Blowholes

Samoa's blowholes are a must see. A strong swell and no wind are the perfect conditions for checking out the famous Alofaaga Blowholes (WST5 entry)—and on a good day, coconuts thrown into the holes by a local lady can shoot 70m back into the air. On a calm day and at the right time of year, humpback whales can also be spotted offshore—apparently drawn by the sound of the blowholes.



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# SAMOA TODAY

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## Dining in Samoa

Dining in Samoa is always the most delicious (and cheapest) if clients opt for local ingredients—think fish, chicken and fruit.

At resorts mains are around WST20-WST70, while supermarkets are obviously cheaper—a bottle of water is around WST2 and a Vailima (Samoa's local beer and not a bad drop) is about WST3. Cigarettes are just WST8.50 for a 20-pack of Pall Mall.

In Apia there's a McDonalds but it's pretty costly.

The best restaurant we found was Paddles, down from Aggie Grey's, where an enormous plate of fresh tuna sashimi was around WST25, and next door is the Y Not bar, apparently the best place to party. On Savaii, the restaurant at Kiwi-run Savaii on the Lagoon serves delicious fresh reasonably-priced meals.

When staying at fales, clients will get a chance to try true Samoan fare—we recommend Oka (Samoa's version of raw fish salad), palusami (baby taro leaves cooked in coconut cream) and for breakfast, banana 'pancakes' (more like deep-fried donuts).

## Rustic Adventures



For more photos, see our Facebook page  
[»CLICK HERE«](#)

**Samoa's still finding its feet tourism wise, so clients shouldn't come expecting flashy water parks—they're more likely to find themselves sliding down natural water slides made of rocks.**

This doesn't mean the attractions are any less fun though, and for many people the lack of development and crowds (except the odd fellow Kiwi) makes it all the more special.

On Upolu, Samoa's most populated island and home to capital Apia and the iconic Aggie Grey's Resort and Hotel, there are plenty of lesser-known attractions waiting for intrepid Kiwis.

Clients should be aware though that the majority of land in Samoa is owned by its people, and often they

will expect a fee for entering, even if it is just WST5 each.

## ... Wild Water

One of the most popular tourist sites on Upolu is the To Sua trench (pictured), a giant swimming hole which feeds to the ocean and a steep ladder descending to the water. It costs WST15 adults, WST12 for kids.

Other popular attractions include the Papase'ea Sliding Rocks, around 6km from Apia where visitors can slide down rocks into a deep pool; Piula Cave Pool, great for swimming, snorkelling and picnics; and Peapea Cave, a lava tube beginning at Togitogiga Falls. Clients will need a torch, water and tramping experience for the 2 ½ - 3 hour track.

## All About Apia

Apia is a 'city' but not overly touristy. Clients looking for souvenirs can head to the flea market near Hotel Kitano Tusitala, which runs daily and behind is the fish market, best before 1100. There's also a marine reserve near Aggie's called the Palolo Deep Marine Reserve, where clients can snorkel, dive and swim (visitors are advised to plan snorkel trips for high tide), and the waterfront is beautiful for walking along but not really for swimming.

## Lalomanu Beach



Lalomanu, one of Upolu's most easily accessible beaches, was one of those most affected in the tsunami. Three years on and the beach is idyllic as ever, with fales lined up along the ocean and a small restaurant. If clients are interested in seeing evidence of the wave's devastation however, the surrounding area still bears scars.

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# SAMOA TODAY

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## Family Fia Fia

Hanging with the locals is a highlight in Samoa. At Tanu Beach Fales we ate a delicious communal dinner of traditional food, watched an enthusiastic and very funny fia fia performance by the family and joined them for an impromptu dance party. Apparently fia fia nights at smaller family-run properties are often like this, and although the performances aren't as polished they're definitely as entertaining.



## Aggie Grey's For Kids, Golf And More

Aggie Grey's Resort and Spa is building a new golf club and convention centre to go with its PGA-approved 18-hole golf course. The resort remains a favourite with Kiwis, and is one of the only resorts in Samoa to offer a kids club. Both the resort and hotel have stay seven, pay five or stay five, pay four at the resort; and stay five, pay three at the hotel, for sales to 30 Sep and travel by 31 Mar. The deals include breakfast and airport transfers, and the resort has akids stay, play and eat free for under 12s.

## Events Add Appeal

Samoa, the island, has been stepping up its cultural and sporting events in a bid to give Kiwis more reasons to visit—and this year even attracted some special guests, including UB40 and New Zealand's own Savage.

The island nation celebrated the 50th anniversary of its independence this year, a milestone which saw UB40 play in Apia (and drew thousands of people to Samoa's sunny shores).

This week the destination staged its annual Teuila Festival, and for the first time this year it will culminate not with the ever-popular Miss Samoa pageant (which is on tonight) but the first annual Raggamuffin concert.

The reggae music festival, a favourite in New Zealand, has crossed the ocean, bringing with it artists including Savage, Swiss and Spawn-breeze.

Samoa Tourism Authority's Peter Sereno says the festival marks Samoa as the 'cultural centre of the South Pacific'.

"Samoa is regarded as the cradle of Polynesia and we celebrate our cultural roots every year during the Teuila Festival. Raggamuffin is an excellent way to mark the end of our festivities—what better way to finish off the celebrations than some serious island beats from the world's best reggae, hip hop, funk, dub and soul talent?"

For more photos, see  
our Facebook page

>>CLICK HERE<<

## Sporting Challenges

Samoa has introduced new sporting events and enhanced existing ones this year. The island nation also has big plans to continue building its sporting credentials.

This year the Samoa Swim Series saw three swims held over three days, including the Falefa Falls and Mulivai-Sinalei, and was so popular that next year it will include a long course.

For 2013 the organisers plan to tack on a triathlon, meaning next 01-10 Aug will see nearly two weeks of action.

According to the 'Action Capital of the Pacific' plan for the next three years by Samoa International Events' SetiAfoa, the destination can also look forward to the Samoa Iron Series, International Marathon, Ultra Adventure Race, International Paddle Board competition and Upolu—Savaii Swim Relay.

In the near future, the nation is also hosting the 2012 ICC World Cricket League Division Eight; SIFA Samoa Open; Inselfehmarn Food and Wine Fair; and Samoa vs Scotland Netball Series.

To keep an eye on Samoa's calendar, see [samoa.travel/events.aspx](http://samoa.travel/events.aspx)



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# SAMOA TODAY

Travel Today Feature P7

## Treasure Island

One of Samoa's unique claims to fame is its link to famous Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson (think *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*). Stevenson lived out his days in Samoa, and clients can visit the mansion he lived in with his wife (now a museum), and learn the story of his family. Entry is WST15 adult, WST5 under 12s. Stevenson is buried nearby on Mt Vaea and while it doesn't cost anything to walk the 30-45 minutes to his grave it won't be the same without the moving story of his funeral (especially if it's told by the lovely Margaret). Those wanting to climb up to his grave are advised to do so early in the morning or late in the afternoon, when it is cooler.



## Festive Samoa



**Each year Samoa puts on a week-long show of culture, sports and entertainment for tourists and locals alike at the annual Teuila Festival.**

Held on the first week of Sep, the festival was started by the Samoa Tourism Authority to help keep Samoa's traditions and culture alive.

Apia comes over all festive with demonstrations of carving, tatau (tattoo) and weaving, while market stalls sell Samoan food as well as souvenirs such as fans, lavalavas and jewellery.

There are games, umu demonstrations, cocktail competitions, swimming races and this year the launch

of the Scotsman's Challenge (a race up Mt Vaea where Robert Louis Stephenson is buried) and riggamuffin (outrigger) competition.

A highlight is the fiercely-contested fautasi (longboat) race, which sees teams of locals race each other on waka-like canoes along the waterfront and makes for a fairly nail-biting watch (especially if clients hop aboard a boat and watch from the water).

Meanwhile a local favourite is Miss Samoa, where visitors can join the crowds as they cheer for their favourite beauty (it gets pretty warm so tell clients to bring a fan).

## Cool Evenings

In the evenings when the weather cools down, the entertainment begins on Teuila's main stage, including a variety show.

Like watching an episode of Samoa's Got Talent, the show brings together talented dancers (both modern and traditional), singers and, while we were watching, some very funny fafainis (pictured).

The square is packed and there is a great atmosphere with the local Samoans cheering on their favourites—and there's plenty of English translations so the jokes aren't lost on the tourists.



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# SAMOA TODAY

Travel Today Feature P8



## Travelling In Style

Transport to the Raggamuffin Beach Party may look as if it was designed just for the day, but in fact this is how locals get around every day in Samoa—on brightly coloured, creatively-named buses. The insides are often as decorated as the outside (think fairy lights and feathers), and clients may want to bring a cushion to sit on. There are no bus stops—clients can hail a bus from the road, check it's the right one and let the driver know where they want to be dropped off.

## Samoa Gets Its Own Raggamuffin

Kiwis were given another reason to head over to Samoa this year—the Teuila Festival concluded not with Miss Samoa, but with the country's first staging of the popular Raggamuffin festival.

The reggae music festival brought together stars including Spawnbreezie, Savage, Swiss, Monsta G and Joe Coffee, and as well as being a big hit with local Samoans it drew a few Kiwis over too.

Infinity packaged up holidays and it was 'great to have something different to promote', says South Pacific product manager Melissa Bramley. "We've noticed an increase in customers travelling for specific events," she says. "Raggamuffin has a large following domestically so would be great to see this flow onto the international stage."

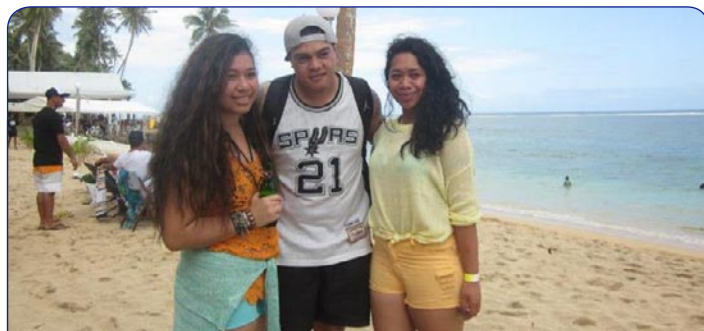
The Samoa Tourism Authority (STA) has entered into a three-year contract with Raggamuffin organisers, so clients will get another chance to mingle with the stars next year.

Local STA manager Fasitau Ula says both Raggamuffin and the Teuila

Festival are expected to continue attracting more New Zealanders. "The Teuila is a growing annual event and is becoming a popular festival amongst Kiwis. I had a chance to talk to a few tourists and they all expressed that they enjoyed the festival and the Raggamuffin—and they said they will return next year."

## Star-Spotting At Aggies

Staying at Aggie Grey's Hotel at the end of last week was a little like being in a music video—in fact, as we ate lunch we watched Swiss serenading Miss Samoa as he filmed the video for his latest single. Savage could be spotted most days lounging by the pool with a beer, and the presenters from New Zealand television shows *I AM TV* and *Tangata Whenua* were usually somewhere nearby.



## Mingle With The Stars At The Beach Party

The day before the concert was the Raggamuffin Beach Party, a very chilled out affair with a huge Samoan lunch, very cheap cocktails (think a long island iced tea for WST10—and Samoans don't skimp on the alcohol) and lots of stars wandering around who were more than happy to take photos with fans. Tickets to the party were included in Infinity packages, and also available individually for WST80 including transport and food.



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