

SAMOA TODAY



Samoa looks to the future; new hotels on the horizon.....	p2
Apia's new cultural village a hit with visitors	p3
Where to dine in the capital.....	p3
Plenty to offer for the adventurous traveller	p4
Samoa gets its own overwater fales.....	p4
Cultural Secrets of Samoa tour one of the world's best.....	p4
Stunning Savaii: Lava caves, swimming with turtles	p5
Return To Paradise: Samoa's newest luxury resort.....	p6
Authentic Samoa with a beach fale stay	p6
Major events heading Samoa's way.....	p7



SAMOA TODAY

Good To Know

Samoa is made up of 10 islands, with Upolu the most populated, followed by Savaii and Manono. Clients travelling to the islands will pass through numerous villages and should show respect by covering up with a lavalava (sarong), avoid walking through during prayer curfew (usually some time between 1800-1900) and ask permission before taking photos. Clients should also be aware that all land in Samoa is owned by a person or village, including beaches and tourism sites, so they may be asked for an entrance fee (usually only a few tala).

Samoa Looks Ahead

Last year marked a bumper tourism year for Samoa and while things have been a little quieter in terms of numbers in 2013, the island is humming with activity as it readies itself for busy years ahead.

In 2012 Samoa celebrated its 50th anniversary which helped drive visitor arrivals up, before the island was struck in Dec by Cyclone Evan. The cyclone's destruction led to the closure of properties including Aggie Grey's Hotel in Apia, but the majority of those have sprung back,

roads and infrastructure have been repaired and Samoa is looking at a bright future with several new hotel openings very close on the horizon.

... New Rooms

In the next three to four years, Samoa will add around 400-500 high-end rooms to its portfolio, as well as another 200-odd standard rooms, including the increasingly popular beach fales. Among them are the Saletoga Sands Resort due to open next Apr, and the Paradise Beach Resort is expected to open next Feb. Aggie Grey's is due to re-open next Jul. There are also several big events coming up, including the Commonwealth Youth Games in 2015, expected to draw an influx of visitors to the nation.

Event-Full Samoa

Upcoming events in Samoa include the Teptasi Sevens, Samoa Swim Series 2014, Samoa Half Iron, UN SIDS conference and the annual Teuila Festival which features the Miss Samoa pageant, dance competitions and more. See samoa.travel/events.aspx



Sa'Moana Revamp

Sa'Moana Resort on the South Coast of Upolu is preparing for its grand re-opening next month, after undergoing a resort-wide spruce up and rebuild following damage received in Cyclone Evan. Famous for its surfing, Sa'Moana offers a huge range of tours and activities for its guests and those at nearby resorts, including exploring Upolu's caves, jungle, waterfalls and heading into Apia. It's great for families but also a dream spot for a group of mates keen to hire a colourful bungalow and spend a week surfing and wakeboarding. The resort has a seven-night re-opening package for 17-24 Nov, including breakfast, transfers, one tour pp, mini-bar, kids eat free and a party on 19 Nov. Wholesalers have details. See samoanaresort.com



Malua Turtle Feeding

On the north coast of Upolu, just west of Apia, is Malua Turtle Pond, where anyone is welcome to turn up with some fruit (pawpaw is a favourite) to feed the friendly animals. The turtles will take the fruit from visitors' hands (tell clients to watch their fingers). Look out for the pond on the side of the road, entry is free. Sa'Moana Resort includes the turtle feeding on one of its tours.



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Souvenir Shopping

The best place for clients to pick up souvenirs like lavalavas, coconut shell jewellery, wood carvings and floral hair pieces is at the flea markets. Haggling isn't big in Samoa like it can be in other countries, but clients might get a discount if they ask. The markets are on Beach Rd just down from the information centre, and are open 0800-1600 Mon-Fri, and 0800-1200 on Sat.



Aggie's Reopening

Apia's iconic Aggie Grey's is due to re-open next Jul with rebuilt restaurant, bars and bungalows after being damaged in Cyclone Evan last Dec. Late next year it's also expected to take on the new name of Sheraton Samoa Aggie Grey's Hotel, when it and its sister resort join the Starwood family.

Apia's Culture Village



Most visitors to Samoa will spend a day in Apia and the Samoa Tourism Authority has recently introduced another reason to visit the island's capital with the opening of the Samoa Cultural Village.

Located near the STA information centre next to the Government Building on Main Beach Rd, the village gives visitors the chance to learn about traditional Samoan culture, including tattooing, carving, weaving, tapa cloth making and massage. Every Thu (and when a cruise ship is in town), there's the added bonus of an umu demonstration, where

Samoa favourites like taro, fish and palusami (a delicious mix of baby taro leaves in coconut cream) are cooked on hot rocks.

Visitors can watch the umu being prepared, then wander around to check out the other demonstrations and perhaps buy a tapa cloth or carved wooden bowl while the food is cooking.

They'll then be summoned back to sample the umu, which is similar to a hangi, while being entertained with music and dance.

Anyone can join the free tours, which start from 1030.



Where To Dine

Apia boasts some great cafes and restaurants for clients keen to have a break from resort fare, including Tatau Bistro, possibly the most upmarket restaurant in the town; Scalini's, run by a Samoan Kiwi who used to own a restaurant of the same name in Auckland; and Paddles (tuna sashimi pictured), popular with locals and visitors alike. Paddles' owners this week opened a new café in town called Milani, featuring European favourites like wraps and salads (priced from around WST20). For a traditional experience, on Fugalei St there's Maketi Fou, the food markets, with local produce, dishes and sweets.

Getting Arty

There are a number of galleries in town for clients keen to take home a piece of local artwork—try the Madd Gallery on Ilfiifi St, operated by contemporary artist Momoe von Reiche.

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Stevenson's Museum

Famous author Robert Louis Stevenson spent his final years in Samoa, and his home has been turned into a museum where visitors can gain insight into his life (entry is WST15 adults, WST5 under 12). Those who are keen can trek up Mt Vaea to his grave.



Overwater Fales

Watch out Tahiti—Samoa now has its own overwater fales, with Coconuts Beach Club opening two in Jun and four more in Sep. The high-end fales are already proving popular with guests, particularly honeymooners.

Adventurous Samoa



Samoa is obviously great for fly and flop holidays but the travellers who will get the most out of the island paradise are those who are keen to explore beyond the resort lifestyle.

There is surfing, kayaking, hiking, cycling, rocks to slide down, canopy walks, snorkelling and any number of other natural attractions to keep active clients entertained.

... Ocean Swim

The folks at Sa'Moana Resort are keen adventurers and can take clients on a huge range of trips exploring the island.

Their most popular option includes the To Sua Trench, a giant natural

swimming hole and one of the island's most recognisable attractions.

Any visitor can drive in, pay WST15, brave the steep ladder and go for a plunge in the pool, but the Sa'Moana guides take it one step further, swimming through a secret underwater tunnel into a cave before guiding guests out into the ocean.

Even among Samoans the swim is little-known and a definite adrenaline thrill for confident swimmers. The guide can also point out other ocean caves to explore and jumps to brave nearby.

The tour costs WST120 and while the resort is kept pretty busy with its own guests, agents are welcome to enquire. See samoanaresort.com

Cultural Secrets

For clients keen to learn about local Samoan culture, Polynesian Xplorer's Cultural Secrets of Samoa tour was recently named one of the top 100 day tours in the world by Lonely Planet.

Taken by one of the company's incredibly charming guides, clients will gain an insight into how Samoan village life works as well as learn about their history and traditions.

The company has a focus on authentic and responsible tourism, and is also developing its soft adventure range.

Wholesalers including GO Holidays have details, and the tours are also bookable on the company's 'Extranet' system for agents and wholesalers. See samoaaccommodation.com



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Stunning Savaii

Most visitors to Samoa will opt to spend at least a day or two on Savaii, Samoa's largest island, brimming with lava caves, waterfalls and turtle pools.

The island is less populated than Upolu, and famous for the eruption of Mt Matavanu (1905-11) which covered the surrounding area in lava.

Trees and flowers are growing through the fertile soil, making a unique sight while travelling through villages, and there are secrets to discover like a church filled with lava and the 'virgin's grave', which the lava is said to have flowed around and spared.

A leisurely drive around the island takes around four hours and there are plenty of fales and resorts if clients are keen to stay longer.

The ferry trip from Upolu takes about an hour and costs WST12.50 for adults, or around WST90 to take a vehicle (there are also vehicles to rent on Savaii).

There's also Samoa Air's now infamous pay-by-weight system for clients who want to fly.

Savaii Waterfall

Clients can drive right up to the Afu A'au Waterfall before jumping in to the deep fresh water pool for a swim, or lingering under the smaller pools for a unique back massage. Entry costs WST5pp.



Canopy Walkway

Clients with a head for heights can frolic in the treetops at the Falealupo canopy walkway to the island's west. There's a short walk through the jungle to reach a staircase to the bridge through the treetops. At the other end is an impressive banyan tree which keen visitors can climb for views over the surrounding jungle canopy. Entry is WST20 which includes a number of other sites to explore in the jungle.



... Le Lagoto

Savaii's most popular and highest end resort is Le Lagoto. The resort sits on a sheltered sandy beach perfect for snorkelling and swimming, and it's named after its famous sunsets.

The resort offers beachfront and oceanview bungalows, there are tours available around the island and just opposite the resort is Dive Savaii and a popular pizza restaurant.

See lelagoto.ws



Turtle Swimming

In the village of Satoalepai in the north of the island, villagers have walled off an ocean pool where visitors can swim with sea turtles. The turtles are not frightened of guests in the slightest and will happily swim around them, as long as there is food involved (which the villagers will provide). Entry is WST7.



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Dining At Lupe's

While both Situated Sinalei Resort and Coconuts Beach Club are well known for their food, if clients are looking to dine with the locals there's a small restaurant called Lupe's in between the neighbouring properties. Dishes cost from WST10 with cocktails around WST15, the restaurant can be found by walking on the beach between the resorts.



Sinalei Luxury

The epitome of luxury in Samoa has long been the Sinalei Reef Resort and Spa on Upolu's South Coast. The resort offers activities like snorkelling, kayaking, tennis and golf as well as its own spa with treatments including barefoot Samoan massages. The friendly staff are guaranteed to charm clients and the food is among the top on offer in Samoa. See sinalei.com

Samoaan Luxury



Samoa is upping its game when it comes to luxury with around 400/500 new high-end rooms due to be added to the island's portfolio in the next few years, starting later this year with the opening of **Return To Paradise**.

The brand new resort is currently in construction on the south coast of Upolu, on the beach made famous in the 1953 *Return to Paradise* [movie] starring Gary Cooper.

Aside from the movie, the resort has another claim to fame with its kitchen, which was designed by Masterchef's Simon Gault. He also had a hand in the menu and in choosing the resort's head chef.

Sample menus include octopus carpaccio with pineapple salsa and mango aioli; Samoan lobster tacos with avocado, spring onion and island spicy sprinkle; and lamb rump with horopito seasoning, caramelized eggplant puree and golden raisin and almond caper sauce.

The resort will eventually boast around 75 rooms, as well as conference and wedding venues, a selection of bars and restaurants (including pizza and tapas) and two swimming pools.

Return to Paradise is set for a soft opening in Dec but its official opening is planned for around next Feb. See returntoparadiseresort.com

Fale Favourites

While everyone loves luxury, many visitors to Samoa also add a night or two in a beach fale for a 'true' Samoan experience.

The fales usually consist of a platform with a mattress and some woven blinds. Guests share a basic bathroom and breakfast and dinner are usually included—often considered one of the highlights.

For a slightly different fale experience, Virgin Cove on Upolu has set its fales amongst greenery and back from its sheltered beach (frequented by sea turtles).

The resort was badly damaged by Cyclone Evan but is rebuilding, see virgin-cove.ws



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Lonely Paradise

Lalomanu Beach was this year named one of the Top 10 Paradises on Earth by Lonely Planet, recognised for its swimming, snorkelling and 'amazing sunsets'. For the full experience it recommends sleeping in a fale on the beach, like the ones offered by Taufua Beach Fales. See samoabeachfales.com



Samoa Swim Series

An increasingly popular event with overseas visitors is the Samoa Swim Series, which this year included lagoon swims, waterfalls and the ocean where contestants spotted marine life including turtles. Next year's event in Jul will offer three swims in three days as well as the Pacific Open Water Challenge. See samoaswimseries.com

Samoa's Festivities



Samoa is expecting an influx of visitors in the next few years as it hosts major events including the United Nations Small Island Developing States conference next year and Commonwealth Youth Games the year after.

However the island is already home to some popular tourist events, the biggest of which is the Teuila Festival.

Held every year in the first week of Sep, the festival was started by Samoa to help keep the nation's culture and traditions alive.

Apia, which is currently undergoing something of a makeover, comes over all festive with decorations,

displays and events during Teuila.

There are demonstrations like carving and tattooing, markets, nightly entertainment on the main stage in town (definitely worth a look), local favourite the Miss Samoa pageant and sporting events.

Samoa On Facebook

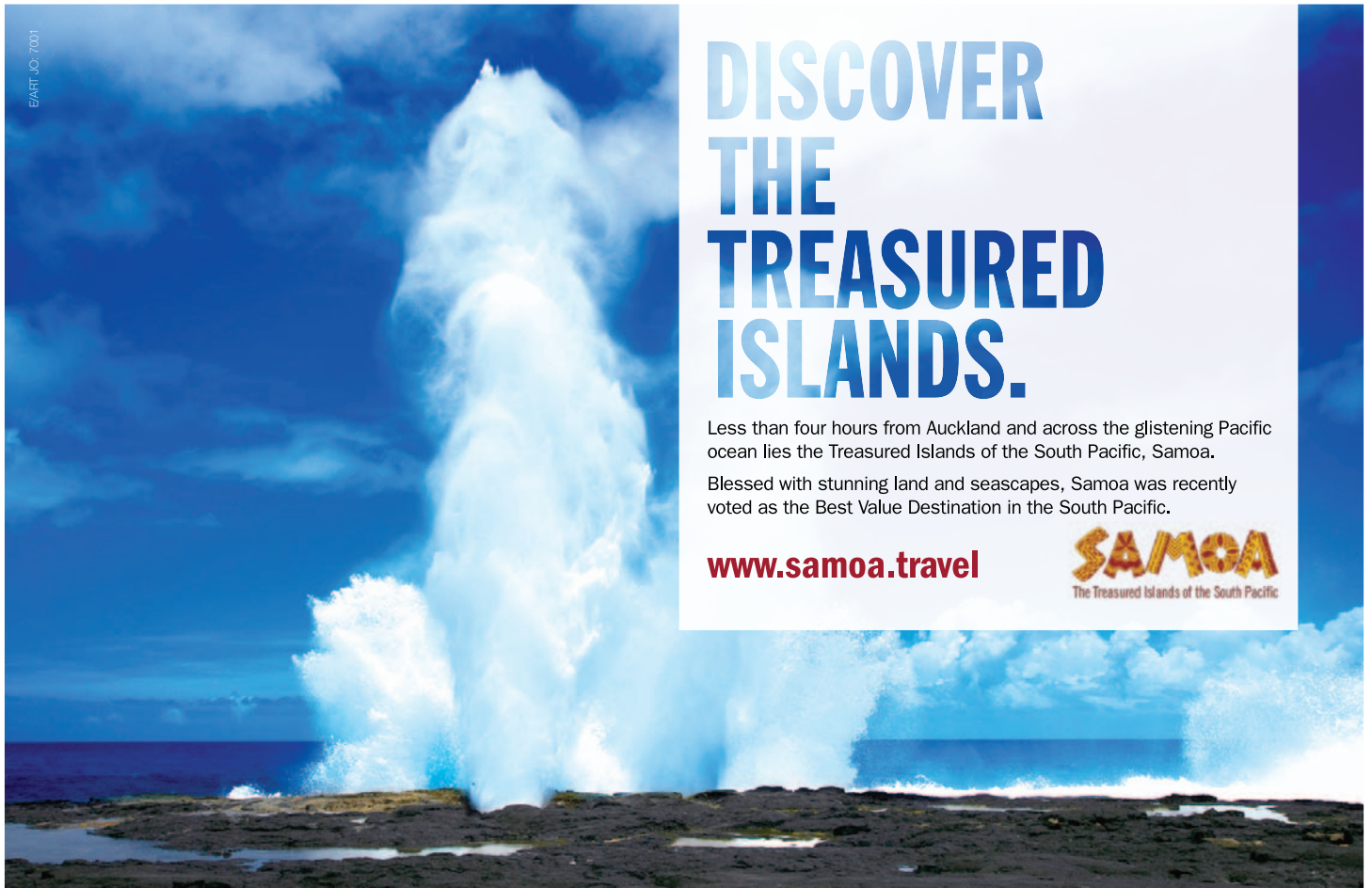
Samoa Tourism's Facebook page has just undergone a revamp, and now offers more information on packages, deals, sales, events, property updates and competitions.

The site has been up and running for three years and has over 20'000 followers. See facebook.com/samoatourismauthority

White Sunday

Religion is an important part of Samoan's lives—visitors won't be able to miss the enormous churches dotted amongst the small villages in the country—and guests are often encouraged to attend a Sun church service during their stay. Clients can ask at their resort for the nearest church, where they'll be welcomed but they should be respectful—cover shoulders and knees, and if their outfit is white, even better.

Every second Sun in Oct is White Sunday, which celebrates children, giving them special privileges like being served first at meal times. In church there are Bible re-enactments and dance performances.



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