



# Sensational Samoa

No matter what your budget, all you'll need to pack for a holiday in Samoa is a smile, your swimmers and a vow to live in the now, as **JOANNA TOVIA** discovers.

01 Laze the day away on one of Samoa's beautiful beaches (Image: Samoa Tourism) 02 Visit Sapaoga Falls on a SaMoana Resort tour 03 Kids at play (Image: Samoa Tourism)

Life is blissfully slow in the many villages dotted along the coastal roads of Samoa, and little has changed in the 12 years since my last visit. That villagers have retained their traditions, good humour and values is just one of the reasons Samoa is such an idyllic holiday destination – to come here is to disconnect from the harried pace of day-to-day life and do as they do: take life as it comes, a day at a time, to laugh often, enjoy good food, and take joy in the company of the ones we love. As for strangers? They're just friends we haven't met yet.

Children who are at first cautious of this unknown land soon fall under the spell of its open-hearted smiles. Drinking out of coconuts with a straw and donning a *lava-lava* (sarong) of a morning soon feels as natural as breathing.

Falling into the rhythms of island life is easy here. Village kids walk along the roadside on their way to school in the early mornings

dressed in their uniforms – boys wear lava-lavas, girls wear skirts, all have their hair done neatly, and many walk barefoot.

I'm travelling with my 10-year-old daughter and we soon get used to our morning wake-up call: church bells tolling, roosters crowing, dogs barking. And the wind rustles the coconut trees and stirs the warm air, hugging your every move.

Food is plentiful in this island paradise. Breadfruit trees by the roadsides hang heavy with this nourishing staple, while taro plants fill every vacant cranny in what can only be described as a lush, green jungle. Coconut trees set a stunning tropical scene along the fringes of each one of the 10 islands. Every bit of the coconut tree is used – the leaves stripped to make baskets, brooms, platters and hats; the fruit is harvested for the coconut cream used in so many traditional dishes (raw fish salad with coconut milk is an absolute delight), and the husks even make a comfy

seat when you need to sit on the black lava rock that dominates much of the island.

Holiday makers need not often resort to such dire measures for a comfortable spot to sit, however, as all budgets are catered for in this laidback slice of heaven. This is one place where families in need of a holiday don't have to break the bank.

In Savai'i, the bigger but quieter of the two main islands, the family-owned Vaisala Beach Hotel is a simple, clean and comfortable accommodation option in a fabulous beachfront position. Unpretentious and friendly, family rooms are air-conditioned and can sleep two parents and three children for as little as AU\$100 a night. Meals cost \$10 to \$15, and the kids can snorkel, kayak and swim to their heart's content at the sheltered beach out front. Visiting with villagers at home can be arranged, and there is plenty to do in Savai'i itself – don't miss the Canopy Walk in Falealupo (a treetop walk along

a lofty swinging bridge) and be sure to attend a Sunday church service regardless of your religious beliefs. The melodious singing is enough to make your heart swell with a little of the pride the children's choir will feel at having you there. Dress in your Sunday best for the occasion.

### The spirit of Samoa

If you'd prefer to stay on Upolu, where your flight will land, there is much for families to do here, too. We stayed at Sa'Moana Resort on the south coast of Upolu, about 40 minutes from Apia, the capital. This family-owned boutique resort is a standout and costs AU\$415 a night for a family bungalow on the beachfront. These well-appointed cabins have a queen bed in the loft area upstairs and a bunk bed in a bedroom downstairs by the living area. Each bungalow has a stunning private outdoor lava rock bathroom.

Tuesday night is *fiafia* (happy) night, so book your stay to fall over a Tuesday if you can. The local village church Youth Group performs admirably for almost two hours while you relax over cocktails and a traditional dinner cooked in the *umu* (earth oven). The dancing, singing, drumming and fire dancing is spectacular and the 30-strong group performs with as much enthusiasm for the small resort crowd as it would for a packed audience of thousands.



### Hot Tip

Dive into the blue waters at To Sua Ocean Trench, a stunning natural swimming pool on the Southeast coast of Upolu Island.

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Hammock chairs strung up between trees are the place to laze the day away, and the infinity rock pool by the ocean is filled with all-natural seawater. The ocean is a wonderland waiting to be explored, and snorkel gear and kayaks are available for hire.

Although there isn't much beach to speak of – the lava flowing from a long-dormant volcano means black rock lines the beachfront – a sandy expanse between the bar/restaurant/games room and the ocean means there's plenty of room for kids to roam, dig and play.

This stretch of coast is sought after by surfers, and surf-savvy kids will love heading out in search of the perfect wave with a local guide. Surf tours are not recommended for beginners, however.

We head out for the day with Tala, our happy-go-lucky tour guide, who takes us to

the former home of Robert Louis Stevenson, author of classics 'Treasure Island' and 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde', and onto the markets of Apia where we snap up some treasures of our own to take home. There are dresses, handicrafts and lava-lavas galore from which to choose. From there we head to Sliding Rocks, a natural playground where kids can shoot down slippery rocks and plunge into deep pools of clear, cool water below. Once Miss 10 works up the courage to go down once, there's no stopping her. Next, we stop off to feed the turtles in a freshwater pond. Just don't expect a lesson in turtle biology. "What kind of turtles are they?" I ask Tala. He shrugs. "Just normal turtles." We feed them banana bread left over from our morning tea. It pays to do as the Samoans do when you're holidaying here – just smile and go with the flow. ✨

### INTERNATIONAL REPORT CARD

#### Information

www.samoa.travel

#### Getting there

Flights leave daily from Sydney and Melbourne to Apia. Ferries between Savai'i and Upolu depart every 2 to 4 hours between 8am and 4pm.

#### Stay

Vaisala Beach Hotel  
www.vaisalabeachhotel.ws  
Sa'Moana Resort  
www.samoanaresort.com



# Samoa

## Speak

- Welcome Afio mai
- Hello Talofa
- Thank you Fa'afetai
- Goodbye Tofa
- Good day Manuia le aso
- Good night Manuia le po
- Please Fa'amolemole
- Excuse me Tulou lava
- Sorry Fa'atoese lava
- What is your name? O ai lou suafa?
- My name is... O lo'u suafa o...
- Australia Ausetalia
- House Fale
- Sun La
- Moon Masina
- Sea Sami
- One Tasi
- Two Lua

### Tips!

Samoa isn't too hard for English speakers to pick up. They have 17 letters in their alphabet. Consonants are normally pronounced as they are in English, except for 'g' which sounds more like 'ng'. Vowels sound a little like Spanish or Italian ones: 'a' is an 'ah' sound, 'e' is an 'eh', 'i' is pronounced as it is in the word 'it', 'o' as in 'ought', and 'u' is the same sound as in 'put'.

When you see an apostrophe, it's known as the glottal stop and indicates the hard voicing of a vowel.



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