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► OCEANIA

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. The Independent State of Samoa (formerly Western Samoa) is located in the South Pacific Ocean, north-east of Fiji and Tonga and 60 miles (97 kilometers) west of the U.S. territory of American Samoa. The nation is comprised of two large islands (Savai'i and Upolu) and eight smaller islands (of which only Apolima and Manono are inhabited). Combined, Savai'i and Upolu make up more than 95 percent of Samoa's 1,133 square miles (2,934 square kilometers), an area roughly the same size as Rhode Island.

Rain forests cover most islands. On the large islands, rugged mountain interiors give way to narrow coastal plains, which are surrounded by coral reefs and lagoons. Upolu lost much of its forests to lumbering, cattle ranching, and hurricanes, but extensive reforestation and preservation efforts have helped reduce the impacts. Mount Silisili, on Savai'i, is the nation's highest point with an elevation of 6,096 feet (1,858 meters).

While the climate is tropical and humid, southeast trade winds often make temperatures pleasantly mild. Temperatures seldom rise above 85°F (29°C) or fall below 75°F (24°C), but they are generally cooler inland than on the coast. Most rainfall occurs from November to March. Even during the rainy season, it is sunny for much of each day. The islands are home to a variety of unique plant and animal species, including the flying fox. Hundreds of fish species live in Samoa's coral reefs.

History. What little is known about Samoa's early history comes from oral traditions. It is generally accepted that Polynesians migrated from the west to Samoa sometime during the first millennium B.C. Samoa's closest contacts were with Fiji and Tonga. In 1722, the Dutch became the first Europeans to visit the islands. The Samoan Islands were named the Navigators' Islands due to the islanders' navigating abilities in

outrigger canoes and longboats. The islands also gained a reputation for violence, and many ships avoided docking there.

Colonization began in the 1830s, when London Missionary Society missionaries brought Christianity to the people, who quickly accepted it. Missions established by other Christian denominations soon followed. European settlers also established plantations of rubber, coconut, and cocoa. The Samoan Islands were ruled by chieftains until the 1860s, when they came under British and then eventually American and German control. An 1899 annexation agreement allowed the United States to annex Eastern Samoa (now American Samoa) and Germany to acquire Western Samoa.

After Germany's defeat in World War I, New Zealand administered Western Samoa, first as a League of Nations mandate and later as a UN trusteeship. A resistance movement, *Mau a Pule*, arose first in protest to German rule and later to the New Zealand administration. With the motto "Samoa for Samoans," the movement demanded that Samoan leaders be allowed to govern. The islands gradually were granted more autonomy, and in 1962, Western Samoa became the first Pacific island to achieve independence from the British Commonwealth. It maintains a special treaty relationship with New Zealand.

For years, many Western Samoans unofficially dropped Western from the nation's name. In 1997, Western Samoa's parliament passed a constitutional measure officially changing the name to the Independent State of Samoa. Some residents of American Samoa opposed this move, believing that it would make American Samoans appear less "Samoan."

Samoa is a largely agricultural society, and many of its citizens, particularly young people, emigrate to American Samoa,

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New Zealand, and elsewhere in search of employment. In an effort to combat this trend, the Samoan government has sought to diversify the economy and reduce its dependence on agriculture. Although tourism and other industries have grown as a result, emigration rates remain high.

THE PEOPLE

Population. Samoa's population of about 178,000 is shrinking annually at a rate of 0.27 percent. Most people are ethnic Samoans of Polynesian descent. About 7 percent are of mixed European and Polynesian heritage. Europeans comprise 0.4 percent of the population. The population is centered in and around Apia. There are no other cities, only villages, most of which are situated along the coast.

Language. Samoan is believed to be the oldest Polynesian language still in use. Many people in Samoa can also speak English, although Samoans are proud of their language and generally prefer to speak it over English.

The Samoan language is divided into three categories: daily language (spoken by all); respect language (spoken by the older people); and chiefly language (spoken only by chiefs and orators during special occasions and ceremonies). The Samoan alphabet consists of 14 letters; 3 additional letters (*h*, *k*, *r*) have been adopted to accommodate foreign words. All consonants are separated by a vowel and all vowels are pronounced. Spelling is phonetic, with words written the way they sound. An apostrophe indicates a glottal stop.

Religion. Almost all Samoans are Christian, and religion plays an important role in daily life. Public meetings begin and end with prayer, and most businesses are closed on Sunday. Every village has at least one church, often the village's most costly building. Most villages have a curfew for prayers between 6:30 and 7:30 p.m., indicated by the ringing of the village bell. Some families then gather to pray, sing hymns, and read scriptures. Others may pause briefly in their work. No running, games, or noise are allowed during this time. Television and radio broadcasts provide daily religious services.

Half of all Samoans are associated with the Christian Congregationalist Church (formerly the London Missionary Society). Other denominations include Roman Catholic, Methodist, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the Baha'i Faith.

General Attitudes. Samoans are a fun-loving, friendly people who also have a strong sense of *fa'a Samoa*, or the "Samoan way." This generally means a casual way of life that is also careful to respect and preserve tradition. Respect, courtesy, cooperation, consensus, a sense of humor, hospitality, and education are highly valued. The group is considered to be more important than the individual. Sharing is more important than owning or having. In Samoa's speech-centered culture, oratory skills are revered. People take pride in their ability to verbally, rather than physically, settle disputes.

Personal Appearance. While Western-style clothing is becoming more common, most people wear traditional attire. People generally take pride in wearing clean, pressed clothing. Men wear a *lavalava* (a straight, one-piece wraparound skirt) with a shirt. They may wear a white shirt and *lavalava* with pockets to church or official meetings.

Women commonly wear a *lavalava*, a *pulefasi* (a fitted two-piece dress) or a *muumu* (a loose-fitting dress). Samoan custom forbids women to wear pants, except when participating in athletic events. T-shirts with a *lavalava* or shorts are popular with young people, male and female. Many women wear their

long hair in a bun, secured with a stick. Members of some churches wear white on Sundays.

Most schoolchildren wear uniforms. These consist of a blouse and pleated skirt for girls and a button-front shirt and shorts or *lavalava* for boys. Each school has distinct color combinations and styles.

Many people in villages go barefoot, although to go to Apia they will wear shoes or *jandals* (rubber flip-flops). *Jandals* are the most common footwear and are considered appropriate for church meetings or official functions. Chiefs often wear leather sandals.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. Samoans often greet with a handshake and smile, or they may acknowledge a person by raising the eyebrows and smiling. Family and friends often hug and kiss on the cheek. Friends address one another by first name, while strangers or community leaders are addressed by a respectful title. A general title suitable for chiefs and married or professional people is *Lau Susuga*. *Talofa lava* (formal "Hello"), *Malo lava* (informal "Hello"), and *O a mai oe?* (How are you?) are popular greetings. *Tofa soifua* means "Good-bye." Because Samoans prize eloquent speech, they may offer a respectful greeting such as *Susu mai* or *Afio mai* (meaning "Welcome" or "Come in") before beginning a conversation.

Gestures. Hand gestures are not used a great deal in daily conversation but are exaggerated in public speaking and oratory. Samoans maintain eye contact during conversation. Pointing with the index finger is impolite. Samoans point with the chin or, to beckon small children, wave all fingers with the palm facing down. Lifting the eyebrows means "yes," while furrowing the brow means "no." Scratching the head during conversation is a negative gesture, expressing either uncertainty or shyness and inferiority. A person will bow from the waist while walking in front of someone seated. People passing a house where village chiefs are gathered must lower umbrellas or other items being carried to at least hip level. Public physical displays of affection between members of the opposite sex, or even between parent and child, are generally considered inappropriate.

Visiting. Samoans enjoy visiting wherever they meet: in the home, in the village, on the road, or at church. Women also visit while sewing, weaving mats, or making handicrafts. Unannounced visits to the home are common and may last until late at night. When a guest enters a home, the host delivers speeches of welcome and the guest makes an appropriately formal response. In traditional homes, the host lays out floor mats for visitors to sit on; more modern homes have chairs. It is customary to leave one's shoes outside and sit cross-legged on the mats. The legs also may be tucked behind a person. Legs may only be stretched out in front if they are properly covered (particularly with a mat); pointing the feet at someone when sitting down is offensive. Hosts give guests refreshments (fresh coconut, soda, cookies), usually without asking them if they would like some. If a guest is not hungry, he or she takes a small amount to show appreciation. Speaking to someone in the home while standing is impolite.

Eating. Samoans generally eat two meals a day. Cocoa and rice or bread is a typical breakfast. The family eats a heavier meal when members return from work and school. Most Samoan foods are eaten with the fingers. After a meal, a bowl of water and hand towel are provided for washing hands. Traditionally, families ate while seated on floor mats, but now many gather

around a table. Older children (and sometimes women) commonly serve the meal and eat after the others have finished. Eating and drinking while walking or standing is considered rude.

Weekday meals are usually prepared using an open fire, an electric or gas burner, or a modern oven. Sunday meals (*toonai*) and traditional feasts are prepared in an *umu* (ground oven). The *umu* is made by heating rocks with a wood fire, wrapping the food in leaves and placing it among the rocks, then covering the rocks with burlap or banana leaves. Meals prepared in an *umu* typically include roast pig, chicken, or fish, but may include a variety of other dishes.

LIFESTYLE

Family. Samoan men traditionally fished, hunted, tended the garden, and made the *umu*, while women wove mats, cared for the children, made clothing, and served the food. Today, however, both spouses may work outside the home, especially in Apia. In these cases, grandparents often care for the children. In fact, grandparents may adopt a grandchild to care for them in their aging years. Children are taught to respect authority, sustain the culture, support their parents in their old age, and not bring shame upon the family. Discipline within the home is generally strict. An adult relative may freely scold or discipline a child—and even a younger adult—when necessary.

In the extended family or kinship group (*aiga*), a *matai* (male or female chief) holds authority. The *matai* is selected by members of the group, primarily based on one's *tautua* (loyal service) to the *matai*, family members, and village community. Other traditional qualifications include oratory skills and a *pe'a*, or body tattoo (from waist to knees). This hierarchical order forms the basis of the Samoan political system, family life, economic livelihood, and social life. A typical Samoan village is comprised of a number of families. A family member is anyone related to the *matai* by birth, marriage, or adoption. The *matai* of a village form the *fono* (village council). Each *matai* is responsible for the labor, activities, well-being, and housing of his or her extended family, which generally numbers 20 or 30.

Dating and Marriage. Western-style dating is rare in Samoa. Instead, the youth meet at school or at village or church activities. They may court by sending messages back and forth through a mutual friend, or the boy may visit the girl in her home. A chaperon usually accompanies the couple on any activity outside the home.

Because of the cost of weddings, common-law unions are prevalent and acceptable. Wedding receptions are extravagant with a great deal of food, singing, dancing, and speeches. After the reception, the bride's family offers *ulumoeaga* (mats) to the groom's family. The *ulumoeaga* includes both *ietoga* (fine mats) and *falaninii* (sleeping mats). The groom's family reciprocates with money equal to or exceeding the value of the mats.

Diet. Taro has long been a staple of the Samoan diet. Although a blight in the early 1990s nearly destroyed the taro crop, it has partially recovered due to efforts to introduce disease-resistant varieties. Other staples include *ta'amu* (a larger, coarser root), rice, fish and other seafood, yams (*ufi*) and green bananas (*fa'i*). One or more of these are served at nearly every meal. Roast pig and chicken are enjoyed at Sunday meals or other special occasions. *Pe'epe'e* (coconut cream) is a popular sauce made by adding salt or lemon juice to a strained mixture of warm water and mature coconut meat gratings. It is used in a

variety of dishes, such as *palusami*, which is made by baking *pe'epe'e* in taro leaves.

Samoans raise much of their own fruits and vegetables in home gardens. These include cabbages, tomatoes, eggplants, breadfruit (*ulu*), pineapples, avocados, lemons, oranges, limes, and two apple-like fruits, *vi* and *nonu*. Ripe papaya is often served with lime juice. Ripe bananas are mashed and mixed with *pe'epe'e*.

Recreation. Samoans enjoy participating in sports, and competitions are often sponsored by churches or government organizations. Rugby is the national sport, and Samoa sponsors a team that plays internationally. Girls play netball, a sport similar to basketball. The most popular sport for both men and women is a local version of cricket known as *kirikiti*. *Kirikiti* is played with a three-sided bat (rather than the two-sided bat used for standard cricket), making the ball more difficult to hit. Also popular are volleyball, basketball, soccer, golf, and tennis. Favorite evening pastimes include watching TV and videos, and playing cards and checkers.

The Arts. Samoans are fond of singing and dancing. At a *fiafia* (feast/party), individuals or groups perform music, dances, skits, and recitations. The event usually concludes with a traditional dance (*taualuga*) by a *taupou*, the daughter of the village high chief. Dances, either improvised or standard, involve graceful hand and body motions. Samoan music features guitars, ukuleles, and drums (often made from hollowed-out logs or empty kerosene cans).

Women make *siapo*, a traditional fabric, by repeatedly pounding bark with a mallet. The fabrics are printed with geometric patterns in dye made from clay and plants. A large *siapo* is very valuable and requires many workers. Neighbors come together to make them for weddings and funerals. The application of the traditional *pe'a* tattoo remains a common practice among males. The *pe'a* covers the torso from mid-back to the knees; the intricate designs represent family lineage. The tattooing process is long, painful, and highly ritualized.

Holidays. Public holidays in Samoa include New Year's (1–2 Jan.), Anzac Day (25 Apr.), honoring soldiers killed in World War II, Independence Day (1–3 June), Arbor Day (first Friday in November), and Mother's Day (last Thursday in November). Independence Day celebrations include parades, competitive songs and dances, and horse and longboat races between different regions. September's *Teuila* Week (named for the national flower) is a cultural festival featuring parades, competitions, a beauty pageant, cultural demonstrations, and village beautification contests.

Samoa celebrates Christian holidays, such as Christmas, Easter, and Whitsunday (second Sunday in October). Whitsunday is a day honoring children. People dress in their best white clothing and walk in procession to church, where children have seats of honor and lead the services. Afterward, families celebrate with a large feast. Children receive gifts and are allowed to eat before their parents.

The Swarm of the *Palolo* is celebrated each year when the *palolos* (coral worms) emerge to propagate their species (usually in late October and early November). The *palolos* rise at night to the surface of the lagoons when the moon and tides are just right. To gather the *palolos*, considered a delicacy, Samoans take lanterns and paddle their canoes into the lagoons, capturing the worms in nets. Samoans enjoy them raw or cooked.

Commerce. Business hours generally extend from 8 a.m. to noon and from 1 to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Shops

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and some banks are open on Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon. The business atmosphere is informal. Because most manufactured goods are imported—and therefore subject to shipping costs, duty, and tax—prices tend to be high. Supermarkets are found only in Apia, but other areas have small shops that sell basic food stuffs, such as flour, rice, and canned foods. Local produce and fish are sold at outdoor markets.

SOCIETY

Government. The Independent State of Samoa is a constitutional monarchy under Chief Susuga Malietoa Tanumafili II, who has served as head of state since 1963. After his death, the next head of state will be chosen by Samoa's 49-seat Legislative Assembly (*Fono*) for a five-year term. A prime minister (currently Tuila'epa Sailele Malielegaoi) serves as head of government. The prime minister selects the members of a 13-member executive cabinet. Only the *matai* may become members of the Legislative Assembly. Elections are held every five years. The voting age is 21. Samoa's judicial system includes a separate court that handles traditional matters, such as disputes over land and chiefly titles.

Economy. More than half of the population in Samoa is employed in agriculture, which is responsible for 90 percent of the country's export earnings. Major exports include coconut oil and cream, copra (dried coconut meat), cocoa, bananas, and timber. However, imports greatly outweigh exports. Other than fish caught locally, fruits and vegetables raised in home gardens, and some livestock (pigs, chickens, and cattle), most food is imported. Fishing and tourism are major sources of income. Many families rely on family members who live and work abroad and send remittances home. People can support basic needs, but opportunities for personal advancement are limited. The currency is the *tala* (WST).

Transportation and Communications. Most Samoans do not own vehicles. They will typically walk several miles to a destination, though bus travel is common throughout much of the country. Taxis are used in Apia, and private car ownership is increasing. Boats and airplanes provide interisland transportation, and a ferry travels between Upolu and Savai'i several times a day.

Telephones are common in Apia; service to villages is spreading. International telephone, fax, telex, and telegram services are available. Samoa has local television and radio stations and several daily newspapers.

Education. The government of Samoa seeks to mandate education for those between the ages of six and fifteen; however, inadequate finances and facilities limit educational opportunities. Students must also pass exams to qualify for secondary and higher education. The government provides teachers and materials to villages that construct a school building. Village committees administer their own schools. Secondary schools are often administered by churches. The language of instruction is English, although primary school classes often are taught in Samoan. Samoan culture and language are emphasized heavily in the curriculum. The nation has several institutions of higher learning, including the National University of Samoa. Many students travel to New Zealand and other countries for higher education.

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	70 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women	NA
Real GDP per capita	\$6,180
Adult literacy rate	99 percent (male); 98 (female)
Infant mortality rate	31 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	67 (male); 73 (female)

Health. The healthcare system of Samoa is funded by the government. Hospital facilities and medical care are provided free to citizens. Most babies are born in hospitals or medical stations. The government pays for the training of doctors and nurses. However, medical professionals receive inadequate pay, and medical equipment and supplies are sometimes in short supply. Private care is available to those who can afford it. Apia has a private hospital. Traditional healers and herbal treatments are still common, particularly in outlying villages. As more and more Samoans adopt a Western lifestyle and diet, the prevalence of diabetes, obesity, arthritis, asthma, tooth decay, and diseases of the kidneys, heart, and lungs has dramatically increased.

AT A GLANCE

Events and Trends.

- An outbreak of rubella prompted the Samoan government to approve funding equaling \$185,000 for a mass vaccination program in October 2003.
- As part of a reform effort, the Samoan government merged its various agencies in April 2003, bringing the total number down from 27 to 14.
- Several thousand people protested in Apia and in Wellington, New Zealand, in March 2003 to voice continued opposition to a 1982 New Zealand law that rescinded the New Zealand citizenship of Samoans born during the period of New Zealand's administration.
- In March 2003, Tuiloma Neroni Slade, Samoa's former ambassador to the United Nations, was sworn in as one of the 18 judges of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands.
- The prime minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark, visited Samoa in June 2002 to attend a ceremony commemorating the 40th anniversary of Samoa's independence. She officially apologized for injustices committed against Samoans during New Zealand's colonial administration.
- Prime minister since 1998, Tuila'epa Sailele Malielegaoi retained his position when his centrist Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) won 28 of 49 seats in 2001 elections for the Legislative Assembly. The HRPP has been in power for most of the past two decades. The conservative Samoan National Development Party (SNDP) is Samoa's other major political party.

Contact Information. Permanent Mission of the Independent State of Samoa to the United Nations, 800 Second Avenue, Suite 400J, New York, NY 10017; phone (212) 599-6196. Samoa Tourism Authority; web site www.visitsamoa.ws.

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