



Samoa's capital city, Apia

Some practical tips and advice for the business traveller.

Visas

A free, 60-day visa is granted to all visitors to Samoa (except Chinese nationals who require a visa in advance). However, you do need an onward ticket and a passport with at least six months validity.

Currency/Money

The local currency is the tala, currency code WST (or ST for short). It was worth AUD\$0.434, NZ\$0.565 or USD\$0.433 as at 7 December 2010.

ATMs and currency exchange outlets can both be found at Falelolo International Airport, and ATMs can also be found around Apia on the main island of Upolu and in Salelologa on Savaii.

Travel to and from Samoa

Each week, Polynesian Blue runs 14 flights from Auckland, three flights from Sydney and one flight from Brisbane; Air New Zealand has daily flights between Auckland and Apia; and Air Pacific operates less frequent flights to Fiji's Nadi Airport. Local carrier Polynesian Airlines flies regularly to Pago Pago in American Samoa.

Unfortunately, Air New Zealand's weekly service from Los Angeles to Apia, which also connected Samoa to Tonga, ended at the end of January 2011.

Falelolo International Airport is 35km from Apia (about 40 mins drive, approximately ST\$60 by taxi—the main hotels will arrange transfers for you).

When you depart Samoa, you will need to pay a ST\$40 departure tax.

Getting around

Taxis. Taxis are abundant in Apia, although many are not in great condition. The most comfortable vehicles can be arranged through your hotel.

Car hire. Numerous car hire alternatives are also available. The roads on the main islands of Upolu and Savaii vary from good to poor quality. You will need to acquire a Samoan driving

licence. These can be acquired from the Ministry of Transport, Works and Infrastructure or some car hire companies. You should also ensure you take out adequate insurance. Be aware that Samoans now drive on the left hand side of the road as of 1 September 2009.

Ferries. Most economic activity is on Upolu, but if you want to reach the larger island of Savaii, a popular tourist spot, Samoa Shipping runs regular ferry services.

Jasons Travel Media produces both a handy visitor map and visitor guide to Samoa, which can be picked up from the Samoa Tourism Authority fale in town and at the main hotels.

Climate

Samoa lies close to the equator and therefore experiences relatively hot and humid conditions all year round. The dry season is from May to September, while the wettest months of the year are December and January. There is a high risk of cyclones during the wet season.

Time zone

Samoa is located just east of the international dateline, meaning that the time is 11 hours behind GMT/UTC (the same time zone as Hawaii!). This is worth keeping in mind because it means that on Monday in Australia/New Zealand, it is still Sunday in Samoa (which is why no one is answering your call).

Business etiquette

Business attire is informal. Jackets and ties are dispensed with, and many executives can be seen sporting the lavalava (sarong), colourful island-style shirts and sandals.

Business hours

Shops and government offices generally operate from 8am to 4.30pm. Samoa is a very religious country and so Sunday is a fairly quiet day, with most shops closed.

Electricity

The current in Samoa is 240V AC 50Hz using Australian-style plugs.

Safety

Samoa is considered very safe for visitors, although the usual sensible precautions should be exercised. If walking outside of Apia's city centre, beware of aggressive stray dogs.

Health

Although there is no malaria in Samoa, dengue fever (a mosquito-borne disease nicknamed 'bone-fever') is a problem and a strong insect repellent is recommended. Health facilities are quite good by Pacific standards and there is even a private hospital in Apia, Medcen Samoa (www.medcen.ws). In any event, it is very important that you obtain comprehensive health cover prior to travelling.

Communications

Internet. Internet access, in Apia at least, has improved rapidly. Wireless broadband is available in the better hotels. There are also a few internet cafés in Apia—we'd recommend the Computer Services Ltd one. Mobile. International GSM phones can now roam in Samoa. Coverage is very good. The two providers are GoMobile (offered by soon-to-be-privatised SamoaTel) and Digicel. If you are staying long enough, you can also pick up a local SIM card from one of the two local providers and enjoy lower rates. Media. The Samoa Observer (www.samoaoobserver.ws) is the main newspaper. Radio Australia is broadcast on 102FM in Apia. Several local radio stations, including Radio 2AP (540AM), source news from Radio New Zealand.

Accommodation

In Apia, most visiting business travellers stay at the iconic Aggie Grey's Hotel & Bungalows (www.aggiegreys.com), located on Beach Road, a few minutes walk from the main commercial area.

It offers comfortable executive rooms, and amenities such as cable TV, room service, wireless internet, and a decent gym. But what makes staying here such a pleasure is the hotel's great atmosphere and warm-hearted staff.

The recently-opened Tanoa Tusitala Hotel (www.tanoahotels.com) near the Flea Market is a quality alternative—clean, well-run and with modern features, including internet.

The new Manumea Resort (www.manumearesort.com) is an 'all-suite' boutique property a few minutes out of town, in the slightly cooler climate of the Vaillima district (near both the brewery and the Yazaki plant).

About 40 minutes away from Apia, very close to the international airport, is Aggie Grey's Lagoon, Beach Resort & Spa, Samoa's first large-scale resort.

More accommodation options can be found on the Samoa Tourism Authority's excellent website (www.samoatravel).

Restaurants & entertainment

There is no shortage of great places to eat in Apia, with fish and seafood the highlights. *Business Advantage's* straw poll of local restaurants in Apia indicated that Australian-run Bistro Tatau, Sails, and Paddles—spread out along Beach Road—are the current local favourites.

The Apia Yacht Club is a good informal option, while Aggie Grey's Hotel has an upmarket option, a great coffee shop, and a poolside fale restaurant. The latter presents a memorable Fia Fia cultural show on Wednesday nights.

Other recommended lunchtime options include Sydneyside Café, which also has great coffee, and Cappuccino Vineyard. Both are located in the pedestrian precinct in the centre of town.

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