

# Samoa

HAAPI: Did You Know?



## Country

Samoa is a Polynesian island country consisting of two main islands (Savaii and Upolu), two smaller, inhabited islands (Manono and Apolima), and several smaller, uninhabited islands. The capital city is Apia.



Samoa lies approximately 80 miles west of American Samoa, 1,800 miles northeast of New Zealand, and 2,600 miles southwest of Hawaii. The total land area is smaller than the US state of Rhode Island.

## History

The Samoan islands were first settled some 3,500 years ago as part of the Austronesian expansion. Both Samoa's early history and its more recent history are strongly connected to the histories of Tonga and Fiji, nearby islands with which Samoa has long had genealogical connections and shared cultural traditions.



## People

About 203,000 people live on the Samoan islands. About three quarters of all Samoans live on Upolu.

The official languages of Samoa are Samoan and English. "Talofa" means "hello" and "tofa" means "goodbye".



About 98% of all Samoans are Christians, mainly Protestants.

## Culture

*Fa'asamoa* means the Samoan way - the way of our ancestors, a Samoan chieftain system of hereditary ranks, aiga (extended family), and the church.

Traditional tattoos: *Pe'a* for male and *Malu* for female (the popular sleeve is not traditional).



## Food

- The most popular dishes are *panipopu* and *palusami*. Both dishes include coconut milk and taro leaves.
- Most Samoan dishes include coconuts, fruits such as mango, pineapple or star fruit, root vegetables, chicken or fish.
- Almost any festivity or celebration is centered around food. Samoans use an *umu*, a traditional outdoor method of cooking on lava rocks which are scolding hot and wrapped in banana leaves.



## Fun Facts

- In Samoa, you can swim with turtles and watch dolphins in clear lagoon waters.
- Because of Samoans' seafaring skills, they were referred to as the "Navigator Islands".
- "Sa" means sacred and "Moa" means center, considered the heart of Polynesia.
- Disney's *Moana* is based on a mix of Polynesian culture, mainly Samoa (*Moana* means ocean in Samoan).



## Government

Samoa is a unitary parliamentary democracy with eleven administrative divisions.

Samoa gained independence from New Zealand in 1962. The country was referred to as Western Samoa until 1997.

## Samoans in the US

Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson is the most recognized Samoan in the US.

According to 2019 US Census data, there were about 204,000 people residing in the US.