



Talofa, Sāmoa!

Pacific Communities and Social Change

Looking to *know* a country, not just cross it off a list? Samoa is ready to give you a warm welcome, and take you on the trip of a lifetime! From Sunday meals in open-air houses, to meetings with top government officials, to village dance-offs and stunningly-harmonized church choirs, Samoa offers a different study abroad experience for students ready to take on the challenge. I should tell you now that you don't really choose a place like Samoa... **it chooses you.**

Remember the island voyagers from your high school world history class? If you covered them at all, chances are they got a paragraph or two in hundreds of pages of text. And in those pages, Samoa and its Oceanic family were establishing a vibrant cultural foundation, forming trade networks spanning distances greater than the area of the US, and navigating outrigger canoes on voyages that could take months. Now, island societies face globalization, modernization, and interaction with Western society, phenomena which, for better or for worse, have been uniquely adapted.

Abandon all your preconceptions, eating restrictions, and individualist tendencies... Samoa is about as far outside your comfort zone as you can go, both geographically and culturally. To help with your study abroad search, here is what your adventure might look like.

Le A’oga i Hawai’i—Classes begin in Hawai’i

America’s last state, or its longest-held colony? It depends who you’re talking to. Orientation week in Hawai’i will get you acclimated to island life, as you bond with your group and gain deeper insight into an island society where modernization and tourism constantly clash with native ways and livelihoods, all while producing the Hawaiian image you know and love. The University of Hawaii’s East-West Center has catalyzed a great deal of research and advocacy throughout the Pacific, and is an ideal place to gain a deeper understanding of history, language, and current issues.



View from Diamond Head, Honolulu, HI

‘E te alu ifea? – Where are you going?

No matter where you go, you’ll hear the question, and you will need to figure out how to answer it. Where *are* you going? This Samoan greeting may throw many off guard (just as the American “how are you?” can baffle foreigners), but a straightforward or humorous approach is often best. My favorite answer to the question came to me on the island of Manono, the country’s third largest island...which takes about two hours to circumnavigate. Locals grinned as they saw walkers approach, giggling as they posed the question that everyone knew the answer to. “Hey! Where are you going?”

“Around,” we replied. And everyone was satisfied.



A fale on Manono

Le Fa'asāmoa—The Samoan Way

Many codes of conduct and respect in Samoa differ from those in the US. To make your experience easier, it is helpful to keep the following in mind:

- When you enter into a *fale* (house), stay on the side of the entrance. That side is for guests, while the other side is for those who live there.
- Whether you're in church, at home, or at the beach, keep your shoulders and knees covered. Samoans swim in shorts or *lavalavas* (sarongs) rather than swimsuits, and to avoid unwanted attention, you should, too.
- Buses that look crowded do not deter Samoans, they will simply ask to sit on your lap. This is called stacking, and can get as high as three people on a seat. If you are on the bus with friends, stack on each other when this happens!



I le nu'u—Village life

It's hard to understand anything about Samoa without getting a local perspective, and the Lotofaga homestay will give you full immersion. Play bingo with your host mother, take your siblings to school, or pull some taro at the plantation; your new family will be eager to include you!

Classes in the village are mostly experiential, and you can practice your Samoan, learn to weave fine mats, climb a coconut tree, or even cook on an *'umu* (rock oven).

Perhaps the most exciting part of the village stay is a traditional *fiafia*, or welcome ceremony. The *fiafia* is, in short, a potluck meets dance-off. Host mothers cook for their American children, then trade off songs and dances with the visitors, pulling up everyone at the end for a group dance.



At a *fiafia*

Inu le ‘ava—Drinking kava (and other ceremonies)



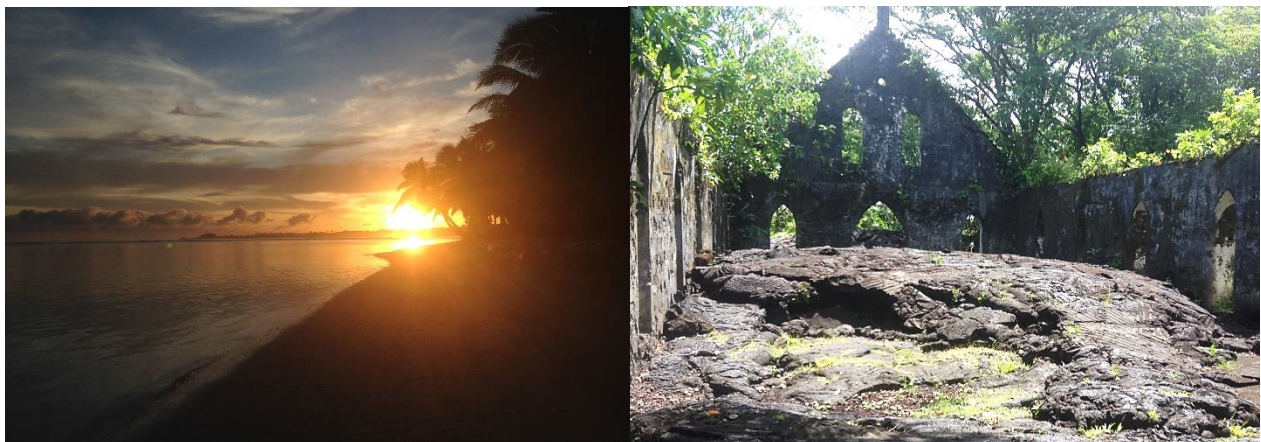
Kava may not be tasty, but it is inevitable. This muddy beverage, made from the roots of the kava plant, will relax its drinker, and often fuels hours of *talanoa* (talking story). You may have one cup in Samoa, or have over ten in Fiji, but you must learn to keep a straight face as the drink's bitterness hits your tongue! This drink is had at most ceremonies and major events, and the ceremony itself (with or without kava) can occur at government sessions, welcomes, weddings, and even club meetings.

Weddings and funerals are huge events, and involve a great deal of trade and gift-giving. The communal nature of Pacific culture requires that you strive to give to others: give company, give food, give spirit. Some gifts, like canned goods and *lavalavas*, are tangible, others are more symbolic.

Matāfaga, Mauga Mū, Sami—Beach, Volcanos, Ocean

Although Savai'i is Samoa's largest island, it holds only a quarter of the country's population. This is due to the relative newness of the island; it was formed volcanically after its neighbor, Upolu, and its soil is not yet suitable for growing crops. Here, you will be able to see environmental change first-hand, from sea-level rise and erosion to the constant regeneration of volcanic hotspots.

Savai'i is known for its geography and natural landmarks, and on your tour around the island, you will see all of the features that make it special: lava flows, caves, tunnels, land bridges, blowholes, and craters. *And*, most likely, have your own private beach or lagoon. Culture on the island is even more laid back than on Upolu, which is why it has remained a vacation spot for Samoans for hundreds of years.





Le Malaga i Amerika Sāmoa—Trip to American Samoa

Kept by the US as an unincorporated, unorganized territory, American Samoa is both isolated and central. It is a hub of tuna canneries and a major military base, providing food and protection to mainland Americans, and yet it is a place of cultural clash and contradiction. American Samoans do not have American citizenship, but have the highest amount of military recruits per capita. On the other hand, the national parks on the island are privately-owned, and the US government pays rent to the local villages for them.

These contradictions and many more will surface on the trip east, which, though a short flight, will bring you to a new, and often familiar, world. Host families and members of a local community college are eager to welcome new students into their homes and show you around.

Le Malaga i Fiti—Trip to Fiji

Yes, you are going to Fiji! This will not be the Fiji of resorts and honeymoons, though. Whether you're living with host families, practicing Hindi on the busy streets of Suva, or taking a trip to the highlands of Viti Levu, Fiji will show you how cultures can come together (or not) in the islands, in a country with a similar start but vastly different finish from Samoa.



Atop the sand dunes in Kulu-Kulu

ISP- Brainstorm, Research, and Explore

As a capstone to your trip, you will need to write an ISP, or Independent Study Project. The project will be a vehicle for further interacting with academics, entrepreneurs, and other citizens in Samoa, allowing each researcher to build off of classes so far in a more personally-tailored way. Some past topics and projects have included:

- **Suicide Prevention**

Work with local mental health organizations and NGOs to examine how suicide is perceived, quantified, and addressed by Samoan people and authorities.

- **Tattoo Culture and Art**

Interview local tattoo artists, examining how tattooing can be associated with status, family, and wealth. There is no better place for this than Samoa, the birthplace of the tattoo!



- **Compulsory Education**

Interview government officials and teachers, sit in on some classes, and assess the strengths and weaknesses of Samoa's education system in the context of local culture.

- **Fa'afafine Narratives**

Meet the fa'afafines, people identifying with Samoa's third gender. Sometimes beloved, sometimes victimized, these people have an important place in Samoan society, and a story to tell.



- **Farm to Table**

On a tropical island where so many delicious fruits can grow, many people leave them to rot, preferring cans of corned beef and herring from abroad. Meet local restaurateurs and farmers active in the fight to bring back traditional foods.

- **Poverty**

According to many Samoans, poverty does not exist in communal society. Discover why this may or may not be true.