



# Samoa

## KEY FACTS

**Joined Commonwealth:** 1970

**Population:** 190,000 (2013)

**GDP p.c. growth:** 1.9% p.a. 1990–2013

**UN HDI 2014:** World ranking 106

**Official language:** Samoan

**Time:** GMT plus 13–14 hrs

**Currency:** Tala or Samoan dollar (T)

## Geography

**Area:** 2,831 sq km

**Coastline:** 403 km

**Capital:** Apia

The name Samoa, from *Sa* ('sacred') and *Moa* ('centre'), means 'Sacred Centre of the Universe'. Samoa (formerly Western Samoa) is an archipelago of nine islands at the centre of the south-west Pacific island groups, surrounded by (clockwise from north) Tokelau, American Samoa, Tonga, and Wallis and Futuna. The nine islands of Samoa are Apolima, Manono, Fanuatapu, Namu'a, Nuutele, Nuulua, Nuusafee, Savai'i (the largest, at 1,708 sq km including adjacent small islands) and Upolu (second largest, at 1,118 sq km including adjacent small islands). Five of the islands are uninhabited.

**Topography:** The islands are formed of volcanic rock, but none of the volcanoes have been active since 1911. The highest point, about 1,858 metres, is on Savai'i. Coral reefs surround much of the coastline and there is plentiful fresh water in the lakes and rivers. Much of the cultivated land is on Upolu.

In September 2009 a violent earthquake in the South Pacific, some 190 km south of Samoa, caused a huge tsunami, which devastated coastal regions of the islands, killing at least 129 people and destroying hundreds of houses.

**Climate:** Tropical maritime. Hot and rainy from December to April and cooler, with trade winds, from May to November. Samoa is prone to hurricanes and cyclones which sometimes cause devastation. Cyclone Val, in December 1991 – the worst storm to hit the islands in over 100 years – destroyed over half the coconut palms. The country was again devastated in 1998.

**Environment:** The most significant environmental issue is soil erosion.

**Vegetation:** Dense tropical forest and woodlands cover 60 per cent of the land area, having increased at 1.4 per cent p.a. 1990–2010. Arable land comprises about three per cent of the total land area.

**Wildlife:** Animal life is restricted to several species of bats and lizards and 53 species of birds. Birdlife includes the rare tooth-billed pigeon, thought to be a living link with prehistoric tooth-billed birds. Due to over-hunting, all species of native pigeons and doves are approaching extinction. Two mammal species and five bird species are thought to be endangered (2014).

**Main towns:** Apia (capital, pop. 36,726 in 2011), Vaitele (7,182), Faleasiu (3,745), Vailele (3,647) and Leauvaa (3,168) on Upolu; Safotu (1,500 in 2010), Sapulu (1,200) and Gataivai (1,100) on Savai'i.

**Transport:** There are 2,337 km of roads, many being rural-access roads, 14 per cent paved. Apia on Upolu is the international port. There is a ferry service between Upolu and Savai'i, and weekly services to Pago Pago in American Samoa.

The international airport, at Faleolo (34 km west of Apia) can take Boeing 747s, but Samoa, like other Pacific island countries, is remote from world centres and too small for commercial airlines to run frequent flights. The national carriers, Polynesian Blue and Polynesian Airlines, fly to several regional and international destinations.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2013

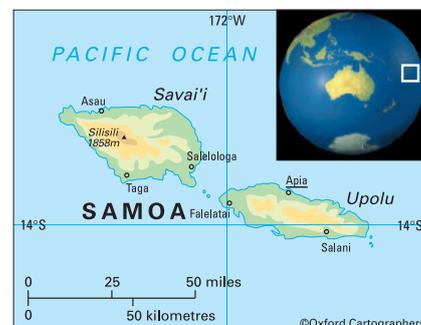
**Population per sq km:** 67

**Life expectancy:** 73 years

**Net primary enrolment:** 95%

**Population:** 190,000 (2013); 19 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 0.7 per cent p.a. 1990–2013, depressed over this period by emigration, mostly to New Zealand; birth rate 26 per 1,000 people (39 in 1970); life expectancy 73 years (55 in 1970).

Predominantly Polynesian population, with small minorities of Chinese, European, or other Pacific descent. The people live mainly in extended family groups, known as *aiga*. These groups are headed by a leader, known



as *matai*, who is elected for life. The population is largely concentrated in villages close to the shore. There are 131,103 Samoans living in New Zealand, more than half of whom were born there (2006 New Zealand census).

**Language:** Samoan is the official language; English is used in administration and commerce and is widely spoken.

**Religion:** Mainly Christians (Congregationalists 32 per cent, Roman Catholics 19 per cent, Latter-day Saints 15 per cent, Methodists 14 per cent; 2011 census).

**Health:** Public spending on health was six per cent of GDP in 2012. Health provision includes the national hospital in Apia, the four district hospitals and the many health centres. Most medical training is undertaken at the Fiji School of Medicine. Patterns of illness and death are shifting to those of a developed country, with longer life expectancy and a rising incidence of lifestyle diseases. Some 99 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 92 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2012). Infant mortality was 16 per 1,000 live births in 2013 (134 in 1960).

**Education:** Public spending on education was six per cent of GDP in 2008. There are eight years of compulsory education starting at the age of five. Primary school comprises six years and secondary seven, with cycles of two and five years. The government began to introduce free education in 2009. As well as state schools, there are several faith schools. Some 77 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2010). The school year starts in February.

The principal tertiary institution within the country is the National University of Samoa,

which was established in Apia in 1984. Samoa was one of the founders of the regional University of the South Pacific, which has its main campus in Suva, Fiji, and the Alafua Campus in Apia, Samoa, where the university's Samoa Centre, School of Agriculture and Food Technology, and Institute for Research, Extension and Training in Agriculture are located. The Alafua Campus was established as the university's agricultural campus in 1977. The USP Samoa Centre relocated from Malifa, where it had been launched in 1976, to the Alafua Campus in 1998. Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 99 per cent (2010).

**Media:** *Samoa Observer* and *Samoa Times* are dailies. *Le Samoa* (weekly), *Savali* (fortnightly), and *Talamua Magazine* (monthly) are in both Samoan and English.

The Samoa Broadcasting Corporation provides public radio and TV services; there are several privately owned radio stations and TV channels.

There are 24 personal computers per 1,000 people (2006).

**Communications:** Country code 685; internet domain '.ws'. Samoa has its own analogue mobile phone system. Internet connections are available in Apia and a few other places across the islands.

There are 153 internet users per 1,000 people (2013).

**Public holidays:** New Year (1–2 January), Mothers' Day (Monday in May), Independence Day (1 June), Fathers' Day (Monday in August), Lotu-a-Tamaiti (Monday after White Sunday, in October), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Religious festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday and Easter Monday.

## Economy

### KEY FACTS 2013

**GNI:** US\$665m

**GNI p.c.:** US\$3,430

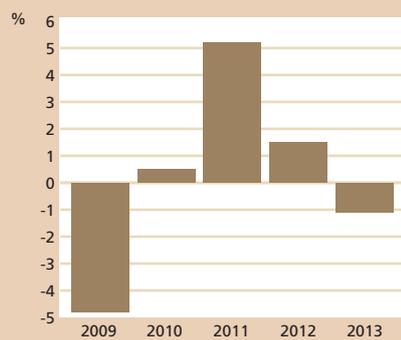
**GDP growth:** 0.2% p.a. 2009–13

**Inflation:** 3.0% p.a. 2009–13

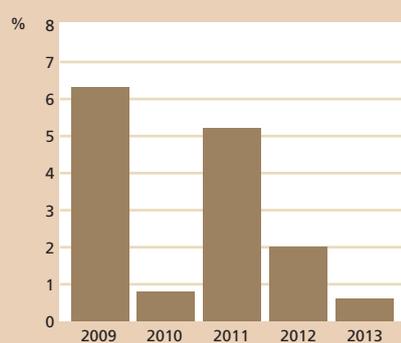
In addition to remittances from Samoans living overseas, mainly in New Zealand, the economy relies heavily on subsistence agriculture, with cash crops, notably coconut, grown for export. It is therefore vulnerable to natural hazards, such as cyclones and crop diseases, and to fluctuations in world prices for commodities. GDP grew by 0.4 per cent p.a. 1979–89.

There was serious cyclone damage in 1990, 1991 and 1998, when the coconut and

### Real growth in GDP



### Inflation

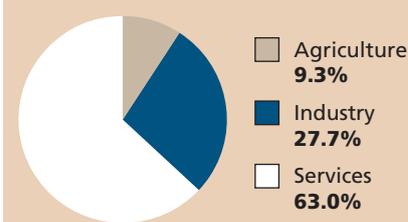


banana crops were devastated. Compounding the problem was the taro leaf blight in 1993, which led to a further drop in agricultural output and exports. These setbacks resulted in fluctuating and often negative annual growth.

However, Samoa was early to embark on structural reforms and throughout the 1990s the government was controlling public-sector costs, encouraging diversification to reduce reliance on the agricultural sector and pursuing a programme of privatisation. These policies led to enhanced growth from the latter 1990s. Fisheries were developed, new manufacturing enterprises emerged and an offshore financial sector launched. Tourist numbers increased steadily.

Overall, the economy staged a remarkable recovery, showing generally good growth from 1995. But it remained vulnerable to natural disasters and international

### GDP by sector (2013)



downturns, which have caused pauses in growth and rapid rises in inflation. In 2008–09 this generally good growth was interrupted both by the global economic downturn and then, in September 2009, by the devastating tsunami, causing the economy to contract by 4.8 per cent in 2009, before recovering in 2010–15.

### Fisheries

Since the mid-1990s there has been substantial growth in offshore fishing, using fish aggregating devices, and in fish farming. Fish and fish products are the major exports.

### History

Samoa seems, on archaeological evidence, to have been inhabited at least as far back as 1000 BCE by Austronesian-speaking people. Evidence from legends and from genealogies shows that the country had frequent contact with Fiji and Tonga from the mid-13th century CE. There was some European contact in the first half of the 18th century, and settlement by refugees and beachcombers until the early 19th century. The Christian missionary John Williams came to Savai'i in 1830.

In 1889, Britain, the USA and Germany, all seeking influence in Samoa, held a conference in Berlin and signed a treaty giving the Samoan islands an independent government, with British, American and German supervision. Later in the same year, Britain relinquished its interest in the country, and the other two agreed that Germany should annex Western Samoa and the US Eastern Samoa. In 1914 the New Zealand

## Samoa on the international stage

On 29 December 2011 Samoa advanced the clock by one day, moving to the west of the international date line, so as to be in the same time zone as its main trading partners such as Australia and New Zealand.

Two Samoans have been regional winners in the Commonwealth Writers' Prize: Albert Wendt, born in Apia in 1939, won with his novel, *Ola*, in 1992, and again with *The Adventures of Vela* in 2010; and Sia Figiel, born in Matautu Tai in 1967, won with her novel, *Where We Once Belonged*, in 1997.

Weightlifter Ele Opeloge, born in 1985 in Apia, holds the Commonwealth women's weightlifting record in the over 75 kg category. Her brother Niusila is also a Commonwealth gold medallist in weightlifting.

army occupied Western Samoa, and in 1919 the League of Nations gave New Zealand a mandate to administer the country. An epidemic of influenza broke out in 1918; the Samoans at the time had no immunity to the disease and 20 per cent of the population died in a few weeks.

Samoans resisted New Zealand's rule, with non-violent action (1926–36), culminating in the Mau uprisings. After World War II, the country was made a UN trust territory, with New Zealand's role now being to guide Western Samoa to independence.

A Legislative Assembly was set up in 1947. A constitution, which aimed at combining the traditional lifestyle with modern-style government, was adopted in August 1960. At a plebiscite organised by the UN and held in 1961, the nation voted for independence. The country achieved independence on 1 January 1962, the first South Pacific island country to do so.

In 1970 Western Samoa joined the Commonwealth as a full member. Since 1962 it has had a Treaty of Friendship with New Zealand.

At elections in 1991, the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP), led by Tofilau Eti Alesana, won 30 of the 49 seats in the Fono, defeating the other main political party, the Samoan National Development Party.

In April 1996, the HRPP was returned, Tofilau retaining his position as Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs with the support of 34 members of the new Fono.

In July 1997, by act of Parliament, the country changed its name from Western Samoa to Samoa. This change had been under discussion for some time, but was delayed by awareness of the sensitivities of American Samoa which, in the end, offered no opposition.

In November 1998 Tofilau resigned as Prime Minister; he became Senior Minister without Portfolio and his deputy and Finance Minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, succeeded him. Tofilau had been Prime Minister from 1982 to 1985 and from 1988 to 1998. He was 74 and had had problems with his health for several years. In March 1999 he died.

In January 2000, a memorandum of understanding was signed with American Samoa for mutual assistance on trade, health, education, agriculture and policing.

## Constitution

**Status:** Republic

**Legislature:** Parliament of Samoa

**Independence:** 1 January 1962

Samoa is a democracy, with a unicameral legislature, the Fono; a Prime Minister who selects the cabinet; and a head of state, similar to a constitutional monarch. Under the constitution, the head of state is elected by the Fono for five years. However, by a special arrangement decided on in 1962 when the constitution came into force, Malietoa Tanumafili II (who died in 2007) and one other senior chief (who died in 1963) were to hold the office for life.

The Prime Minister, who must be a member of the Fono and be supported by a majority of its members, is appointed by the head of state. The Prime Minister chooses 12 members to form the cabinet, which has charge of executive government. The head of state must give their assent to new legislation before it becomes law.

The Fono has 49 members, 47 elected in 41 constituencies by universal adult suffrage, to be contested only by *matai* title holders (chiefs of *aiga*, or extended families, of whom there are around 25,000), and two elected from separate electoral rolls comprising those of foreign descent. The Fono sits for five-year terms.

Until 1991 only the *matai* were eligible to vote, but following a plebiscite universal adult suffrage was introduced in time for that year's elections. The *matai*, whose office is elective for life, still administer local government in the traditional manner. They are trustees for customary land held on behalf of the people, which makes up about 80 per cent of all the land in the country.

## Politics

**Last elections:** 4 March 2011

**Next elections:** 2016

**Head of state:** Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi (2007–)

**Head of government:** Prime Minister Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi

**Ruling party:** Human Rights Protection Party

**Women MPs:** 6%

In the general election in March 2001, the ruling Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) – with 23 seats – won more seats than any other party, but was nonetheless challenged by the combined strength of the United Independents (12 seats) and Samoan National Development Party (SNDP; 13). On the resumption of Parliament, however, HRPP leader Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi was re-elected Prime Minister and enough independents joined the HRPP to give it an absolute majority.

The general election in March 2006 saw a return to power of the HRPP, increasing its number of seats to 33 with gains from both the Samoan Democratic United Party (formerly SNDP, with ten seats) and independents (six).

Malietoa Tanumafili II, head of state since independence in January 1962, died in May 2007 aged 94. According to the constitution, in June 2007 the Fono elected Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi as his successor for a five-year term.

In the March 2011 general election the HRPP and Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi were returned with an increased majority. The HRPP and independents supporting the HRPP together secured 36 seats. The opposition Tautua Samoa Party won 13 seats.

In July 2012 the Fono re-elected Tupua unopposed for a second five-year term as head of state.

## International relations

Samoa is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Pacific Community, Pacific Islands Forum, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

At the Eighth World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Geneva in December 2011, Samoa's terms of entry were adopted and the country became a full member on 10 May 2012.

## Further information

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|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Government of Samoa:        | <a href="http://www.govt.ws">www.govt.ws</a>                                                                 |
| Electoral Commissioner:     | <a href="http://www.oec.gov.ws">www.oec.gov.ws</a>                                                           |
| Parliament of Samoa:        | <a href="http://www.parliament.gov.ws">www.parliament.gov.ws</a>                                             |
| Samoa Bureau of Statistics: | <a href="http://www.sbs.gov.ws">www.sbs.gov.ws</a>                                                           |
| Central Bank of Samoa:      | <a href="http://www.cbs.gov.ws">www.cbs.gov.ws</a>                                                           |
| Samoa Tourism Authority:    | <a href="http://www.visitsamoa.ws">www.visitsamoa.ws</a>                                                     |
| Commonwealth Secretariat:   | <a href="http://www.thecommonwealth.org">www.thecommonwealth.org</a>                                         |
| Commonwealth of Nations:    | <a href="http://www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Samoa">www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Samoa</a> |

### Media

|                         |                                                                      |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Islands Business:       | <a href="http://www.islandsbusiness.com">www.islandsbusiness.com</a> |
| <i>Samoa Observer</i> : | <a href="http://www.samoaoobserver.ws">www.samoaoobserver.ws</a>     |

## Traveller information

**Immigration and customs:** Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of departure. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals.

**Travel within the country:** Traffic drives on the left (since September 2009). Visitors

wishing to drive will need an international driving permit.

Daily flights and a ferry service operate between the two main islands. Buses cover most of the islands, though there are no timetables. Taxis are available, but are not metered, and fares should be agreed in advance of travel.

**Travel health:** Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever, diphtheria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid.

There were 116,000 tourist arrivals in 2013.



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