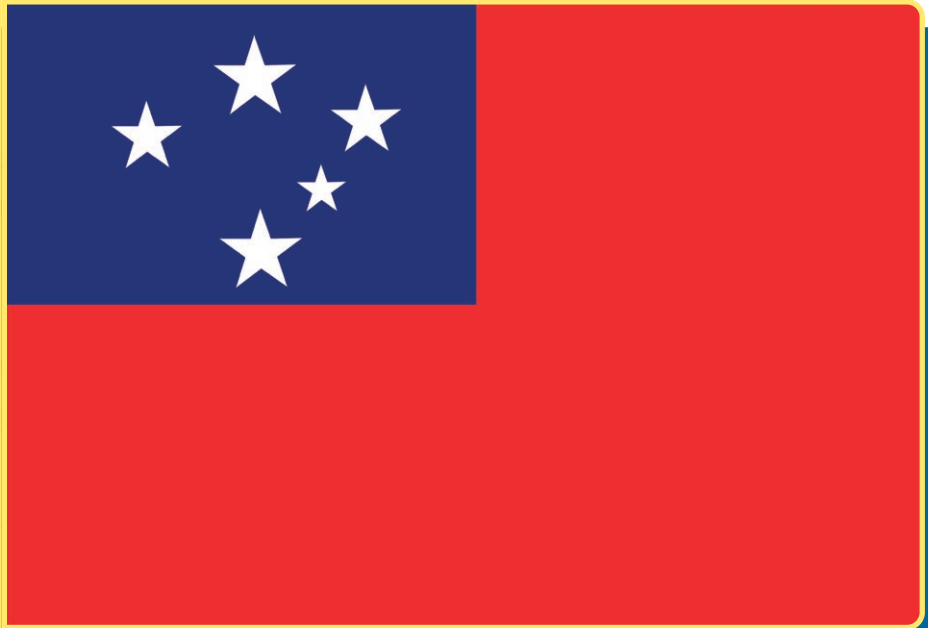


# The Independent State of Samoa

Samoa sits within the Polynesian subregion of Oceania, in the central South Pacific Ocean. It is just south of the equator, about halfway between Australia and Hawaii. Samoa is an archipelago made up of two main islands, Savai'i and Upolu, and eight islets (small islands).



The Samoan islands were first inhabited by the Lapita people around 3,500 years ago. The Lapita were prehistoric Austronesian people who lived in the Pacific Ocean. Samoans have strong historical, genetic and social ties with Fiji and Tonga, with a long history of inter-island travel and marriage.

During the 1820s and 1830s, English and American missionaries, whalers and traders arrived in Samoa. They stopped in Samoa to collect fresh drinking water, firewood and provisions, and to recruit Samoan men as crewmen on their ships. Samoa was occupied by New Zealand from 1914 until 1962 when it gained independence. Samoa has two royal families, the Sā Malietoa and the Sā Tupua and is part of the Commonwealth.

The population of Samoa is around 19,700 (2019). The official languages are Samoan and English. Samoans are predominantly Christian (98%) but have a traditional belief system that coexists with their Christian beliefs, which includes gods, goddesses and complex creation stories.

The capital of Samoa is Apia. Apia is the economic and political centre. Apia is on the island of Upolu, which is home to 75% of the population. The currency is the Samoan tālā (WS\$). Samoa's primary industries are agriculture, fisheries and tourism. The majority of Samoa's export crops are produced from coconut.

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Samoaan culture is based on the concept of Fa'a Samoa, the Samoan Way. Fa'a Samoa is based on the idea that people should live by celebrating and embracing traditional values, culture and the environment. Important to Fa'a Samoa are the matai (chiefs), aiga (extended family) and church.

Traditional Samoan art forms include tattoos, siapo, a naturally dyed bark cloth and dance.



Tattoos, or tatau, are adorned by men and women and are provided as a rite of passage. Siapo is a naturally dyed bark cloth decorated with intricate geometric patterns that are representative of different things found in Samoa. Siva is a traditional Samoan dance that has gentle movements that tell a story. Sasa is a dance where people perform synchronised movements to the beat of wooden drums. Fa'ataupati is a dance performed by males who slap different parts of the body to create a rhythm. Traditional Samoan clothes include the lavalava for men, which is worn like a sarong, and the puletasi for women, a fitted two-piece outfit. Traditional Samoan buildings are called fale, which is a large thatched hut with a domed roof and no walls. Fale can house up to 20 people who sleep together on the floor. During the day fale are used for socialising and relaxing.

Eating is a social event in Samoa and the ocean provides much of the food eaten by Samoans, including fish, shellfish and seaweed. Bananas, taro, tropical fruits and vegetables, pork and coconut, are also commonly found in Samoan dishes. An umu is a traditional Samoan method of cooking. An umu is an above-ground oven that uses hot stones to cook. Banana leaves are used to line the oven and wrap the food.