

American Samoa

American Samoa (ⁱ/əˈmɛrɪkən səˈmoʊ.ə/; **Samoan**: *Amerika Sāmoa*, [^aˈmɛrɪka ˈsaːmoa]; also *Amelika Sāmoa* or *Sāmoa Amelika*) is an **unincorporated territory** of the **United States** located in the South **Pacific Ocean**, southeast of **Samoa**.^[2]

American Samoa consists of five main islands and two coral **atolls**. The largest and most populous island is **Tutuila**, with the **Manuʻa Islands**, **Rose Atoll**, and **Swains Island** also included in the territory. American Samoa is part of the **Samoan Islands** chain, located west of the **Cook Islands**, north of **Tonga**, and some 300 miles (500 km) south of **Tokelau**. To the west are the islands of the **Wallis and Futuna** group.

The **2010 census** showed a total population of 55,519 people.^[3] The total land area is 199 square kilometres (76.8 sq mi), slightly more than **Washington, D.C.** American Samoa is the southernmost territory of the U.S. and one of two U.S. territories (with **Jarvis Island**) south of the Equator. Tuna and tuna products are the main exports, and the main trading partner is the United States.

History

18th century: First Western contact

Contact with Europeans began in the early 18th century. **Jacob Roggeveen** (1659–1729), a Dutchman, was the first known European to sight the Samoan islands in 1722. This visit was followed by the French explorer **Louis-Antoine de Bougainville** (1729–1811), who named them the *Navigator Islands* in 1768. Contact was limited before the 1830s which is when English **missionaries** and traders began arriving.

Early Western contact included a battle in the eighteenth century between French explorers and islanders in Tutuila, for which the Samoans were blamed in the **West**, giving them a reputation for ferocity. The site of this battle is called **Massacre Bay**.

Mission work in the Samoas had begun in late 1830 when **John Williams** of the **London Missionary Society** arrived from the **Cook Islands** and **Tahiti**.^[4] By that time, the Samoans had gained a reputation for being savage and warlike, as violent altercations had occurred between natives and European visitors. Nevertheless, by the late nineteenth century, French, British, German, and American vessels routinely stopped at Samoa, as they valued **Pago Pago Harbor** as a refueling station for coal-fired shipping and whaling.

In March 1889, a **German** naval force invaded a village in Samoa, and by doing so destroyed some American property. Three American warships then entered the **Apia** harbor and prepared to engage three German warships found there.^[5] Before guns were fired, **a typhoon** wrecked both the American and German ships. A compulsory **armistice** was called because of the lack of warships.^[5]

At the turn of the twentieth century, international rivalries in the latter half of the century were settled by the 1899 **Tripartite Convention** in which Germany and the United States partitioned the **Samoan**

American Samoa

[Islands](#) into two parts:^[6] the eastern island group became a territory of the United States (the Tutuila Islands in 1900 and officially Manu'a in 1904) and is today known as American Samoa; the western islands, by far the greater landmass, became known as [German Samoa](#) after Britain vacated all claims to Samoa and accepted termination of German rights in [Tonga](#) and certain areas in the Solomon Islands and West Africa.^[7] Forerunners to the Tripartite Convention of 1899 were the Washington Conference of 1887, the [Treaty of Berlin of 1889](#) and the Anglo-German Agreement on Samoa of 1899.

Protectorate of the United States of America

The following year, the U.S. formally occupied its portion: a smaller group of eastern islands, one of which surrounds the noted harbor of [Pago Pago](#). After the [United States Navy](#) took possession of eastern Samoa on behalf of the United States, the existing [coaling station](#) at Pago Pago Bay was expanded into a full naval station, known as [United States Naval Station Tutuila](#) under the command of a commandant. The Navy secured a [Deed of Cession of Tutuila](#) in 1900 and a [Deed of Cession of Manu'a](#) in 1904. The last sovereign of Manu'a, the [Tui Manu'a Elisala](#), was forced to sign a Deed of Cession of Manu'a following a series of U.S. Naval trials, known as the "Trial of the Ipu," in Pago Pago, Ta'u, and aboard a Pacific Squadron gunboat.^[8] The territory became known as the U.S. Naval Station Tutuila.

On July 17, 1911, the U.S. Naval Station Tutuila, which was composed of Tutuila, Aunu'u and Manu'a, was officially renamed American Samoa.^{[9][10]}

Early 20th century and World War I

[Swains Island](#), which had been included in the list of guano islands [appertaining](#) to the US and bonded under the [Guano Islands Act](#), was annexed in 1925 by Pub. Res. 68-75.^[11]

After [World War I](#), during the time of the [Mau movement](#) in [Western Samoa](#) (then a League of Nations mandate governed by New Zealand), there was a corresponding American Samoa Mau movement,^[8] led by Samuelu Ripley, a World War I veteran who was from Leone village, Tutuila. After meetings in the United States mainland, he was prevented from disembarking from the ship that brought him home to American Samoa and was not allowed to return because the American Samoa Mau movement was suppressed by the U.S. Navy. In 1930 the [U.S. Congress](#) sent a committee to investigate the status of American Samoa, led by Americans who had a part in the overthrow of the [Kingdom of Hawaii](#).

Interwar period

Pan American and first trans-South Pacific flight

In 1938, the noted aviator [Ed Musick](#) and his crew died on the [Pan American World Airways](#) S-42 [Samoan Clipper](#) over Pago Pago, while on a survey flight to [Auckland, New Zealand](#). Sometime after take-off, the aircraft experienced trouble, and Musick turned it back toward Pago Pago. While the crew began dumping fuel in preparation for an emergency landing, a spark in the fuel pump caused an explosion that tore the aircraft apart in mid-air.^[12]

American Samoa

World War II and aftermath

During [World War II](#), U.S. Marines in Samoa outnumbered the local population, having a huge cultural influence. Young Samoan men from the age of 14 and above were combat trained by U.S. military personnel. Samoans served in various capacities during World War II, including as combatants, medical personnel, code personnel, and ship repairmen.

In 1949, Organic Act 4500, a U.S. [Department of Interior](#)-sponsored attempt to incorporate American Samoa, was introduced in Congress. It was ultimately defeated, primarily through the efforts of Samoan chiefs, led by Tuiasosopo Mariota.^[13] These chiefs' efforts led to the creation of a territorial legislature, the [American Samoa Fono](#), which meets in the village of [Fagatogo](#).

From 1951 to 1999

By 1956, the navy-appointed governor was replaced by a locally elected one ([Peter Tali Coleman](#)). Although technically considered "unorganized" since the U.S. Congress has not passed an [Organic Act](#) for the territory, American Samoa is self-governing under a constitution that became effective on July 1, 1967. The U.S. Territory of American Samoa is on the [United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories](#), a listing which is disputed by the territorial government officials, who do consider themselves to be self-governing.

American Samoa and [Pago Pago International Airport](#) had historic significance with the [Apollo Program](#).^[14] The [astronaut](#) crews of [Apollo 10](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), and [17](#) were retrieved a few hundred miles from Pago Pago and transported by helicopter to the airport prior to being flown to Honolulu on [C-141 Starlifter](#) military aircraft.^[15]

While the two Samoas share language and ethnicity, their cultures have recently followed different paths, with American Samoans often emigrating to [Hawai'i](#) and the U.S. mainland, and adopting many U.S. customs, such as the playing of [American football](#) and [baseball](#). Western Samoans have tended to emigrate instead to New Zealand, whose influence has made the sports of [rugby](#) and [cricket](#) more popular in the western islands. Travel writer [Paul Theroux](#) noted that there were marked differences between the societies in Samoa and American Samoa.

21st century

Due to economic hardship, military service has been seen as an opportunity in American Samoa and other [U.S. Overseas territories](#),^[16] this has meant that there have been a disproportionate number of casualties per population compared to other parts of the United States. As of March 23, 2009, there have been 10 American Samoans who have died in [Iraq](#), and 2 who have died in [Afghanistan](#).^[17]

American Samoa

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