

Beautiful Samoa - January 2020

These islands are absolutely stunning with little modern-day infrastructure surrounding you throughout the islands, Samoa truly is a magical place.

We were on Upola which is the smallest of the two main islands but does have both the airport & main city of Apia on it. We flew with Samoa Airways but were on an Air Malindo aircraft.

For a budget plane it wasn't too bad. There was plenty of room for your legs, provided you are not too tall. Business Class did not have lie-flat beds but there were 16 comfortable reclining seats to choose from with full leg rests.

There are no blankets or pillows in economy class so don't forget these as it is an overnight flight and the plane does get cold. Entertainment is on the back of the seat and the meal is okay. Bring your own earphones, if you forget they will provide you with a set for \$5.00 each, which you will then be able to keep.

We took off on time and arrived on schedule even with the cyclone not too far off the islands. Cash works the best in Samoa, so exchange your AUD\$ to Samoan Tala WST\$ at the airport for the best rate! It might take a little of time but remember we are on 'island time' so no stress. There are a few ATMs around, mostly in Apia and you will be caught out if you don't have cash. Even resorts/restaurant/cafes on the southern side of the island prefer cash. You can use your card at the actual resorts, but they do charge fees. Currently the exchange rate is AUD\$1 to WST\$1.83.

January is the wet season, so rain and cyclones are to be expected but even with the rain the temperature will still be around the 30 degrees mark so only shorts and t-shirts are needed. It is important to note that Samoans are very respectful, you should opt for longer shorts/skirts/dresses and t-shirts if visiting Apia. Some locations will only allow you to go down to your bikinis when right next to the waterhole!! To Sua giant swimming hole, being one them, is 30 meters down a makeshift ladder and stairs but it truly is fabulous and warm.

It did rain during our stay and especially when crossing the islands in the mountains, but with rain comes amazing waterfalls and there are many to go and see. Some are more accessible than others and are often on private property so it could cost you a WST\$20 per person depending on when and where you go. They are all worth the money as you are supporting local prosperity and they do put the money to good use making the trails easier to walk on. Plenty to see and easy to find - some even have waterholes at the base that you can swim in. I do suspect that it gets busier as the season gets drier. The best ones seem to be on the south of the island which was not far from where we stayed at Sinalei Reef Resort & Spa.

The south of the island is also awesome for surfing, but it is reef surfing, only experienced surfers are recommended. There were many surf tours out from our resort, and they were awesome.

Apparently, it takes about 4 hours to completely drive around Upola without stopping. We did it over 2 days, doing half of the island at a time. We made a stop at Seabreeze Resort for a fabulous lunch and saw great beaches, waterfalls and water holes. This restaurant has a 'no kids rule' after 5pm so lunch only for us!! There is a nasty land slide that blocks off part of the way, so you have to go on some pretty rough road to get around it. We were told that this was the result of a cyclone from a couple of years ago, but the government are still to clear it away (island time).

On the second day, with our hired car, we went west from the resort - back up through the middle of the island, on one of the two cross island roads (One on the West, the closest to the airport and the other one on the East, closer to Apia). Amazing scenery on both islands and throughout our time of travelling we counted over 160 churches popping up all over the place!!

We made a stop at Sails Restaurant on the other side of Apia for a quick lunch. This is on the complete opposite to the port and situated near the 'yacht' club. Nice little spot which, I suspect, could get quite busy through the dry season.

Apia has a few markets if you are keen to check them out, but we did not see anything particularly special. There are also shops, banks, take away shops and even McDonalds if you are desperate. A busy little city for the locals as it really is the only place to get anything. There are several little mini markets around the island for the essentials if you don't get time to get to Apia. They are 'Cash Only' though!!

There are awesome local buses that are all painted differently depending on the area and the route they take, so if you are keen this would be quite an experience.

After lunch we went for a swim/slide at the sliding rock near Apia. Great waterfalls but due to the rain it had a very strong flow so just the locals and few others went down the rocks. There are lots of stairs to get down there and go back up again, but it was worth the visit. The cost was here was WST\$5pp.

The sky had not been great today as it kept raining all day, we wanted to discover some of the roads/fords to get a very strong run off from the mountains but we barely could go through one and had to turn back when only 20 minutes from our resort. Luckily a few kids that were playing gave us directions to get back through it otherwise we would have been camping the night!! We hired a smaller Rav 4, SUV's are the hire car of choice as there are some unsealed and sealed roads that leave a lot to be desired.

Time added to our journey was two hours to go back to the cross-island road near the airport and then head the 40 minutes to our resort. Driving is very easy and very slow so don't be in a rush to go anywhere!!

Sinalei Reef Resort & Spa is very peaceful. I think that is the best way to describe it, at least in the wet season. There are not many people here and everyone has their own Tales with queen beds, a couple of chairs with coffee tables inside and out, a desk and a luggage area. Plenty of room for another rollaway if needed, there is also an outdoor shower and toilet. There is a safe and a small bar fridge with tea and coffee making facilities in your room. Really lovely & we are in the lead in GardenView Tales.

This is a resort that allows only 12-year-old and over to stay. It has a 9-hole golf course at the front near the road, lovely spa fales, couple of restaurants, a bar & gift shop. It was shuttles to Apia each day for WST\$40 pp return (if more than 2 it is cheaper to hire a car or take a private taxi). There are snorkeling tours, turtle tours, island tours, surf tours plus a giant clam tour all available to book here. We didn't do any of these as the weather was not great and you need clearer skies to get the most out of them. I'm sure they would be great during the dry season.

As there were no noisy kids around it was very quiet - so plenty of time to read (no TVs) relax or swim!!

We all really loved our time in Samoa, we would love to come back again during the dry season to check it out a bit more. This trip was worth the 5-hour flight, it truly is beautiful here!!

Cheers
Cathy

PS: Don't forget your reef shoes, bushman's spray & sunscreen - we did!!!

