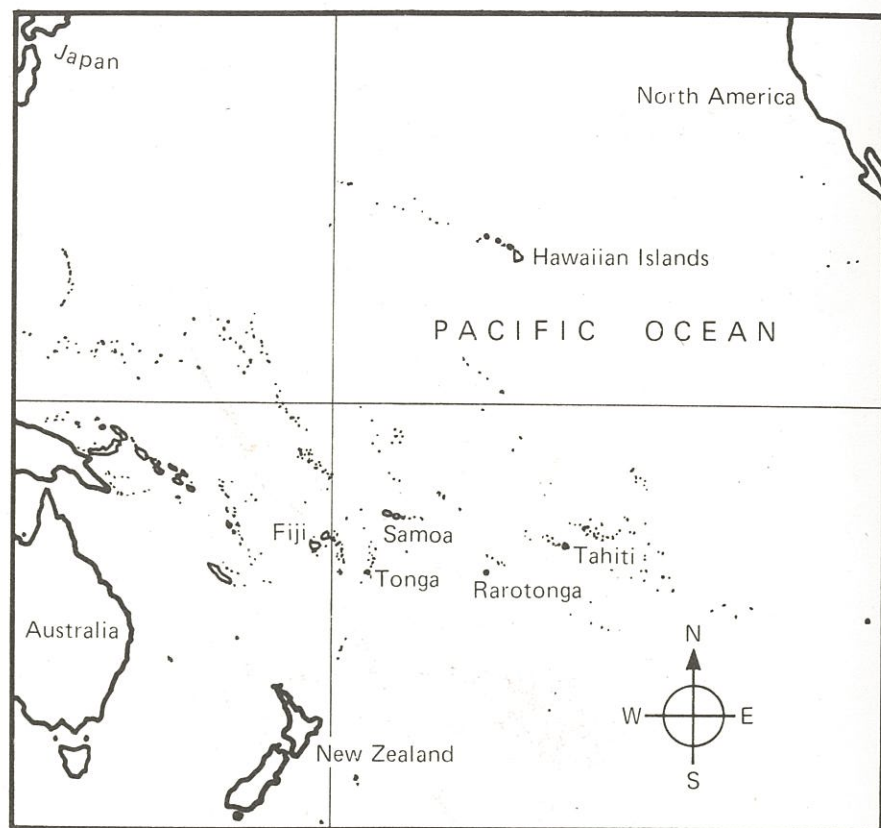


camera on

# Western Samoa





camera on

# Western Samoa

A Pacific Projects Book

Text and photographs by  
Shari and Donald Cole

**Credits:**

*Our thanks to the management and staff of Air New Zealand, Polynesian Airlines, and Aggie's Hotel for their kind and generous assistance in the completion of this book.*

*Our gratitude to those Samoan people, living and dead, who helped and taught us during the development of this book.*

**Cover Picture:**

*Song and dance are important components of social events, public and private. During an independence anniversary celebration, girls of St. Paul's College, resplendent in traditional costumes of leaves and feathers, present a sāsa (rhythm dance drill).*

Printed by Executive Printing, Auckland, New Zealand

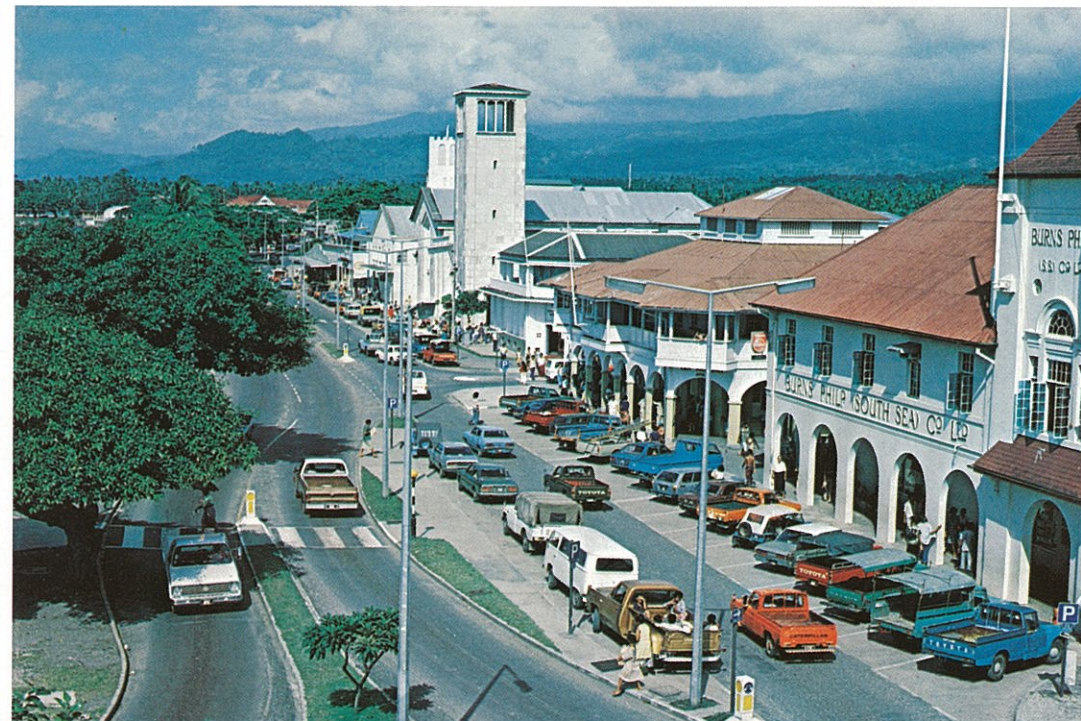
Copyright 1978 by Pacific Projects Ltd, 2/14 Gordon Rd., Rotorua, New Zealand  
All rights reserved. This book or any part thereof must not be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the publisher.



To preserve the old and to choose from the new that which is in harmony and can be shaped to fit the basic cultural pattern is a delicate task, one for which Samoans have a recognised talent. While other people, riding the wave of contemporary interest in roots and ethnic identity, search through old books and fading memories for lost skills and forgotten traditions, Samoans merely increase their efforts to plug the cultural leaks. The renaissance is on. Under more frequent observation by foreigners – diplomats, tourists, Peace Corpsmen, journalists – Samoans display the more enthusiastically their fa’asamoa, the Samoan way.

*Left – Like many another sea-washed cove, this beach near Lefaga village, original filming location for “Return to Paradise”, changes little with the centuries.*

*Below – Apia, capital and primate city of Western Samoa. Once a random sprinkling of villages around the harbour, Apia has become a rambling conurbation of shops, offices, hotels, warehouses, homes, gardens, schools, churches, and sportsgrounds. Yet in spite of its bustle, the atmosphere is still country-town. Plantations reach inward behind the built-up road frontages which reach outward into the countryside. Most of the nation’s industry is focused here and in the industrial park at nearby Vaitele. Lack of costly power, water, waste disposal, and heavy transport facilities elsewhere dictates that Apia will continue to grow, attracting more workers from faraway villages. Together with New Zealand’s immigration policies, Apia’s economic opportunities provide the stopper for Samoa’s brain drain.*





*Below Mafa Pass, looking toward Upolu's north shore. In the region of the 300 metre pass, forest gives way to sweeping grassland where range a few beef cattle. Cattle are also raised on the government trust coconut plantations, where they control weeds.*

Fa'asamoa is set against climate and terrain which agree admirably with its needs. We can hardly say that a way of life is the product of its physical environment any more than of its own previous traditions. New Zealanders are not Japanese, despite similarities of geography, and the two would probably not grow any more alike if they were to develop in isolation for another hundred generations.

Doubtless the ancestors of Samoa brought with them the seeds of their culture when they voyaged out of Southeast Asia from island to island, across the long, rolling centuries of the Pacific – or when they were created, along with their homeland, at the beginning of the world, as their legends claim. Samoan genealogies and legends can be dated back to about 1250 A.D., but some archaeological finds are thought to be as old as 3000 years. There is no memory of the use of pottery in ancient times, yet potsherds have been found, and stone platforms, centuries-lost in the bush, emerge with no legends to explain them.

A long occupation, then, must have affected both land and people, though the high rainfall (287 centimetres per year average) and slight variation of temperature, night to day, season to season, encourage a swift regrowth of forest as soon as man turns his back. Even within this century, lava has flowed over village and plantation erasing the patient work of man and nature. In turn, man cuts trees for his use and propagates the semi-domesticated plants which these islands, or others long ago, gave him for his needs.

The islands gave stone and coral, but not iron; shell and whalebone, but not jewels. They gave eternal summer, which is leisure in which to elaborate a culture. And they gave isolation, which is freedom from the future. From all these, things given and things withheld, Samoans fashioned a way of life.

*The beach at Papa, Savai'i, a classic sandy bay with fringing coral reef. On this side of the island, in the rain shadow of volcanic mountains up to 1857 metres in height, fresh water is so scarce that clothes and cooking pots are washed in the sea.*





*Independence festival in Apia. Mountains of sugar cane arise in preparation for the celebration. For a few cents, a stalk of cane provides treats for a family of children, and the pile provides seats for people-watchers.*

*Dignity and the wisdom of age exemplified in an old woman of Papa. In her coconut leaf basket she gathers sea-polished bits of white coral to build up the floor of her family's house.*



Most food consumed in Western Samoa grows on small plantations owned and worked communally by extended families. These families include several generations of people related by birth, marriage, or adoption, under the leadership of a matai, who is responsible for the administration of family affairs. His duties include the assignment of work, collection and redistribution of money earned by family members, and, most important, the apportionment of land for residential and farming use and the sharing out of its produce. In return, he is honoured by respectful obedience and the best food, correctly presented according to custom.

A typical plantation has an upper storey of tree crops – coconut, banana, breadfruit, perhaps cocoa – and an understorey of ground crops such as talo (taro). A few of these plants and a few of those provide what the family needs, and are less tempting to insect pests than would be an extensive area planted to one crop. Some plantations are placed among larger forest trees. This multi-storey pattern follows normal forest structure and protects the soil from exhaustion by heavy rains and strong sunlight, a major problem in altering tropical ecosystems.

*Breadfruit grows on trees and is seasonal. Different varieties have round or oval fruits and leaves of somewhat differing shapes. These leaves provide motifs frequently used in tapa painting and related crafts. (See ladies' garments, page 16.)*



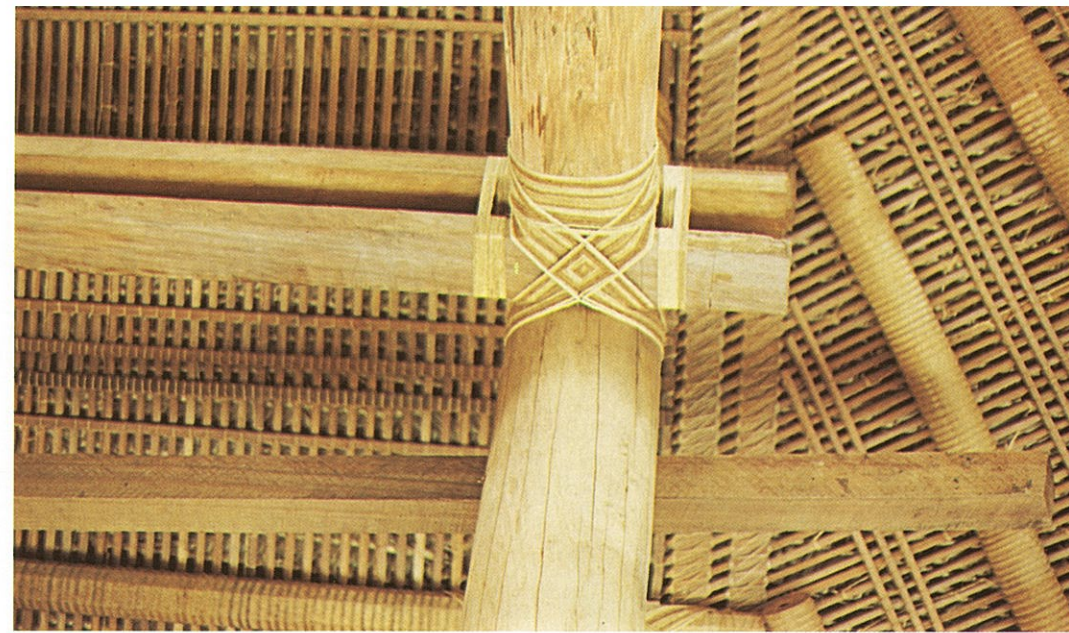
*Arranging prepared food on hot stones in the umu – clockwise from top: coconut shells filled with fish in coconut cream; palusami (coconut cream and onions with talo leaf baked in round envelopes of banana and breadfruit leaf); whole fish in banana leaves (long packages); fa'ausi (pudding of grated talo with coconut cream, in square banana leaf packages); whole talo (white objects among stones); and peeled unripe bananas. Over these go fresh banana leaves, used leaves from the last umu, and burlap sacking. In the length of time required to make a coconut leaf food basket the umu will be ready to open.*

Other useful plants are included with the food crops. Several varieties of pandanus provide coarse to fine material for floor, sleeping, and ceremonial mats. Paper mulberry for tapa cloth and flowers for ornament and perfumery are cultivated, while trees yielding dyes, decorative seeds, and fibrous bark grow wild. Properly used, the same trees will serve many generations.

Foods from the plantation provide the basis of traditional Samoan cooking done once or twice a week in the umu, an on-the-ground oven made by boxing a fire between two logs, adding black lava stones, then removing the remains of the wood and arranging the hot stones with tongs (see above).

Most villages are near the sea, close to fishing grounds and easy transport by water, and where the wind drives away insects and heat. Houses surround a malae (village green) which may be grassy, stony, or sandy and which serves as a focal point for ceremonial events. The meeting house, traditionally a round structure, stands nearby, and there the matais of all families meet one day a week to conduct village business. Maintenance work is assigned, with inspection to follow and fines to be levied upon those who do not complete their share of the work satisfactorily. Indeed, many personal wrongs and small crimes are still settled at the village level by fines of food and by formal apologies, without recourse to the modern court system.

*A Samoan fale is a joy to see and to inhabit. Open to every cooling breeze, with woven coconut leaf blinds to pull against slanting sun and blowing rain, it is admirably suited to the climate. The floor is a stone platform covered with small bits of white coral over which go mats for sitting and sleeping. Furniture is a modern innovation, not necessary, but convenient for storage. Maintenance and cleaning are minimal. Though a hurricane may tear away the thatch, only the worst storm in a generation is likely to damage the superstructure.*



*Fale roof detail – Builders are among the most highly honoured professionals in Samoan society. For their skills and painstaking craftsmanship they are fed during the entire construction of a fale and paid lavishly in food, goods, and honourific fine mats – the highest medium of exchange. No nails are used in a fale. Every bit of wood, even the curved end pieces (which are really many pieces, notched to fit together into a curve), is tied in place with miles of sennit (coconut fibre rope). Thatch sections are similarly laced on, using a wooden needle resembling a crochet hook.*

Whereas houses in cold climates incorporate all functions in one building, dividing it into rooms, Samoans, like many tropic peoples, build rooms as separate buildings for those functions which require rooms at all. The main house, which today may be of timber and iron, square instead of oval, is for visiting, eating, sleeping, and craftwork. The kitchen is a small hut protecting the umu from rain. Usually this cooking fale is near the edge of the bush, at some distance from the main house, to keep smoke, flies, and noise away and to be closer to firewood and plantation. Bathing and laundry are outdoor activities done at a stream or a freshwater pool built by the seaside, though some families in heavily populated areas where water is piped have built outdoor shower stalls. Almost all villages have a guest fale where travelers and visiting parties from other villages sleep and are entertained and fed.

Homes in much of Apia follow the cold climate plan, but with better ventilation. All over the islands, but particularly near the city, permanent materials are gaining ground as rising costs, scarcity of cane thatch, and a shortage of really expert thatch-makers increase the difficulty of acquiring a proper fale.



From natural products of plantation and bush the women once made all that was necessary for the household – mats, mosquito nets, tapa for sheets and ceremonial clothing, jewellery, baskets, and food storage containers. Today many people still make these things, both for their own use and for sale as handicrafts. Many of the processes are complicated and time-consuming.

*Left– A woman of Upolu weaves a sleeping mat from pandanus leaf (seen drying in the sun, p.11). The leaves must be gathered, dried (and for the better mats, bleached by soaking in the the sea), rolled, midrib and edge removed, and the remainder sliced into even strips (about 6 mm wide) before weaving can begin.*

*In the market, Apia. Surplus food from the family plantation and products which city people have no time to make for themselves are available here. In left foreground: strainers for squeezing coconut cream, bottles of perfumed coconut oil for hair and skin, and hand brooms made from coconut leaflet midribs. Above: fine mats (absolutely necessary for presentation at certain events) and braided sennit rope. At right: rolls of pandanus for mat-making, and baskets containing husked drinking nuts and other foods.*







Ceremony and oratory are the most highly developed art forms of Samoa. Every chief has his talking chief, an orator who represents him, puts forth his arguments, and is responsible for their success or failure. It takes a lifetime to become a fine orator, to know the chiefly language, the legends, and the proverbs, full of subtle allusions, which make a formal exchange unintelligible to the ordinary person.

Observances such as the annual independence celebration draw song, dance, and sports teams from many villages. Schools, Women's Committees, and youth groups march in uniform before the nation's most honoured citizens and their diplomatic guests, including even prime ministers of other Pacific nations.

*Left – Orators and manaia (chief's son, centre) of a malaga party come from Manu'a in American Samoa to perform in honour of Western Samoa's independence anniversary. The manaia wears a tuiga, an ancient ceremonial headdress used on certain occasions by sons and daughters of chiefs of sufficient rank. Staff and flywhisks signify the orator's office.*

*Below – Evening in Apia shortly before independence celebrations. Fautasi (longboat) crews conclude months of training for the great race. Helmsman, time keeper, and fifty-odd rowers will compete over a five-mile course with crews from Savai'i, Apolima, Manono, Upolu, and Tutuila for prizes and glory.*





*Studying war no more, Samoans now study blood sports, like Rugby football, instead.*

Both team and individual sports are popular in Western Samoa. Cricket (pronounced kilikiti) becomes a pageant, with drumming, outfield dancing and cheering as important as the actual game, particularly in women's cricket. In Samoa, at least, we cannot say that, "Baseball has the advantage over cricket in that it is sooner finished." Any sport is interesting to watch and is played with style and determination. From volleyball to boxing, Samoans play to win and laugh when they lose.

*Left – An act of bravery in itself, the tattoo is a mark of honour only allowed to persons of proper status, and many elect to have it done. The pigment is aged soot from burned candlenut. It is applied with toothed combs struck by a mallet. Women are tattooed only on the thigh.*



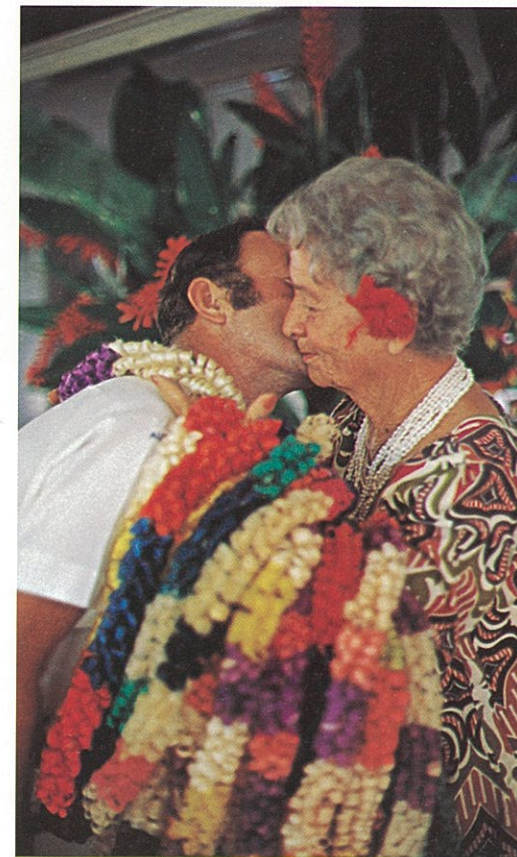
*Loading lumber from the sawmill at Asau, Savai'i. Emphasis has shifted from production of fine cabinet woods for export to supplying first the domestic demand for construction timber. Reafforestation projects employing village labour are underway, but costs and land tenure problems interfere with full development of this renewable resource industry.*

No nation today stands alone. If Western Samoa is to have the desirable components of western civilisation – good medical care, higher level education, reliable transportation and water supply, and a few imported items to increase agricultural output and personal comfort – it must pay for them. Exports of copra, bananas, and cocoa are subject to fluctuations in the world market and to interference by storm damage and disease. (The best control for coconut beetle is still a weekly hunt for grubs by all the members of a village. Thousands may be destroyed in a day.) Feeding a rapidly growing population means improving large-scale government and private agriculture with modern inputs of equipment and safe pest and disease control. It also means upgrading plantation roads to encourage village planters to produce surplus food for marketing.

Another aspect of economic development involves establishing local industry to produce items which were formerly imported, thus providing jobs and improving the balance of foreign payments. Many of these small industries process foods – biscuits, ice cream, soft drinks, snacks – which have become popular, and which are bulky to ship or require special handling, further increasing their cost in overseas exchange. Clothing factories, custom garment shops, and a factory which cuts and assembles the ubiquitous rubber sandals employ many people. Concrete blocks, nails, and roofing iron are now fabricated locally for the building trade.

In education, the curriculum formerly patterned after western models is being examined and changed to better suit it to the needs of Samoan children and the adults that they will become. A communal and agricultural society needs more well-informed farmers and competent tradesmen than it needs secretaries.

Samoa's well-loved culture may turn out to be its best export. Though hotels and transport require high initial investment, much of this is already done. Hotels of various styles and standards now operate in Western Samoa (see list inside back cover). Samoan life itself provides the interest and entertainment needed for a successful visitor industry. Among those who live it, there is a new awareness of the uniqueness of fa'asamoa; among those who watch, a greater awareness of the value of unique cultures in a world increasingly homogenised by technology and mass communication.



*Forty years of tradition continue in Aggie Grey's early morning farewell to the departing crew of a submarine – a kiss and an ula to all. Servicemen far from home were her best club customers during World War II, and though Aggie's famous hotel is larger today, it's still a family establishment.*



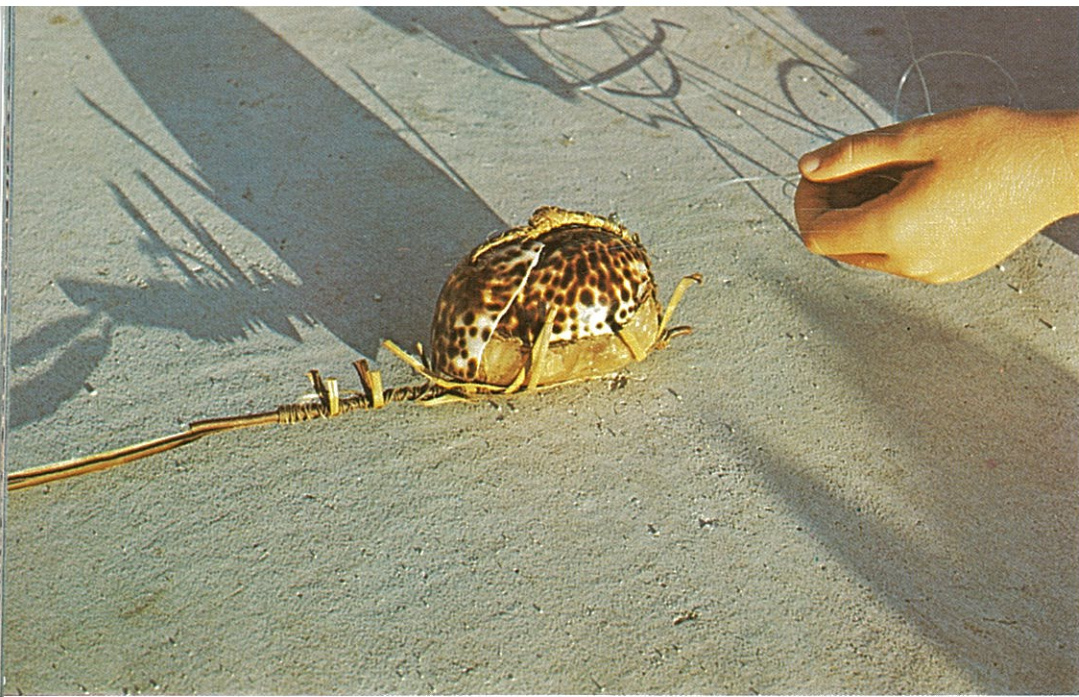
with varying success, to use these rivalries in establishing puppet kings through which to rule Samoa as a colonial possession. Eventually the islands were partitioned, Tutuila and Manu'a to America; Savai'i, Upolu, and the smaller islands to Germany, which compensated Britain elsewhere. After World War I, New Zealand was asked to administer Western Samoa, until, after more than a century of foreign presence, the country celebrated full independence on New Year's Day, 1962.

The new government resembles parliamentary democracy, but is truly Samoanised. Some practices are set forth in the constitution and some only known by those whose business it is to know them. Members of parliament are matai chosen by councils of matai. Yet a matai is chosen by the adult members of his extended family after endless talks which reach a consensus rather than a majority. Form and substance are different things.

*In a land of rain and mountains, waterfalls abound. Fuipisia plunges 55 metres through remote forest near the top of Mafa Pass.*

*Ephemeral and delicately scented, the futu blossom opens, moving visibly, and falls, all in less than an hour. Undisturbed it lies on the ground, its stamens rippling gently with each breeze, but pick it up and it shatters.*





*Once long ago a rat stood crying for its life on a rock awash with the incoming tide. Hearing his cries, an octopus said, "Climb onto my head, and I'll take you to safety," which he did. But a rat is a rat – rude, untrustworthy, and disrespectful toward better people than himself. As he leaped ashore, the ungrateful rat laughed and defecated on his rescuer, which is why the octopus has a black spot on his head. "You dirty rat" shouted the octopus. "If you or your children come near the water again, I and my children will pull you under and drown you," which is why this rat lure of cowrie shell and stone works for catching octopuses.*

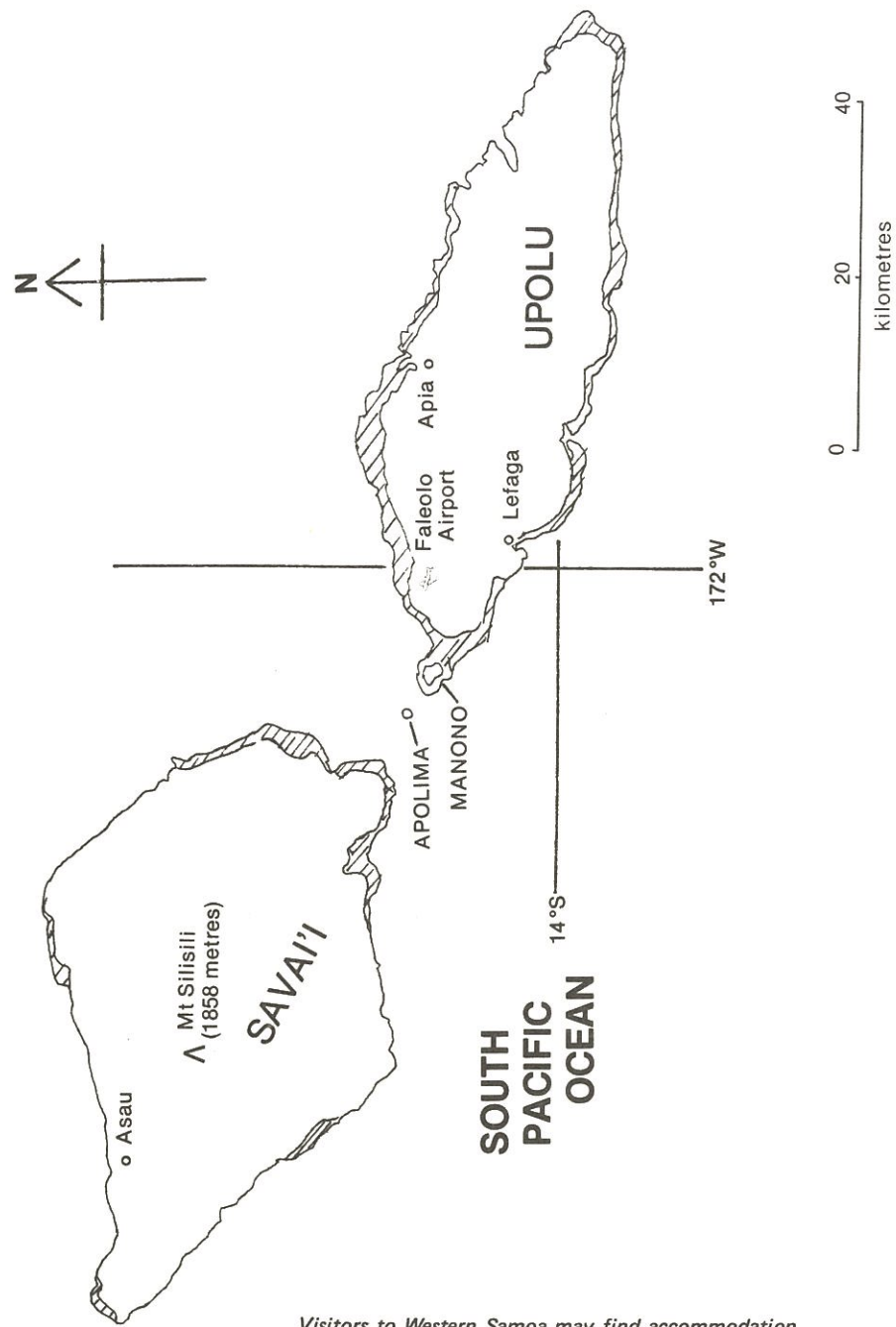
To the sea Samoans turn for most of the protein in their diets. Between the outer edge of the reef and the shore is an area rich in its varieties of life, many of them edible. Women and children walk the reef at low tide gathering shellfish and sea urchins from under rocks and catching with bare hands small fish trapped in tide pools. Men and women with years of experience can see where a pebble has been turned over since the last tide, indicating that an octopus is at home. An expertly manipulated stick tempts the octopus to grasp it and be pulled from his hole. (The octopus on page 28 is freshly caught. The fisherman has given it to a small relative to carry home.)

One ingenious means of trapping fish in shallow water involves piling up slabs of coral to provide artificial hiding places for the colourful reef fish. After a few days the area is surrounded by nets and the slabs removed, exposing the inhabitants.





There are so many ways of fishing in Samoa because sometimes none of them works very well.



Visitors to Western Samoa may find accommodation at the following establishments:

- |                          |                               |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Aggie Grey's Hotel       | Maota O Le Alofa              |
| Apian Way Hotel          | Olivia's Casual Accommodation |
| Betty Moors' Guest House | Paradise of Entertainment     |
| Hotel Tusitala           | Samoa Hideaway Hotel          |
|                          | Tiafau Hotel                  |