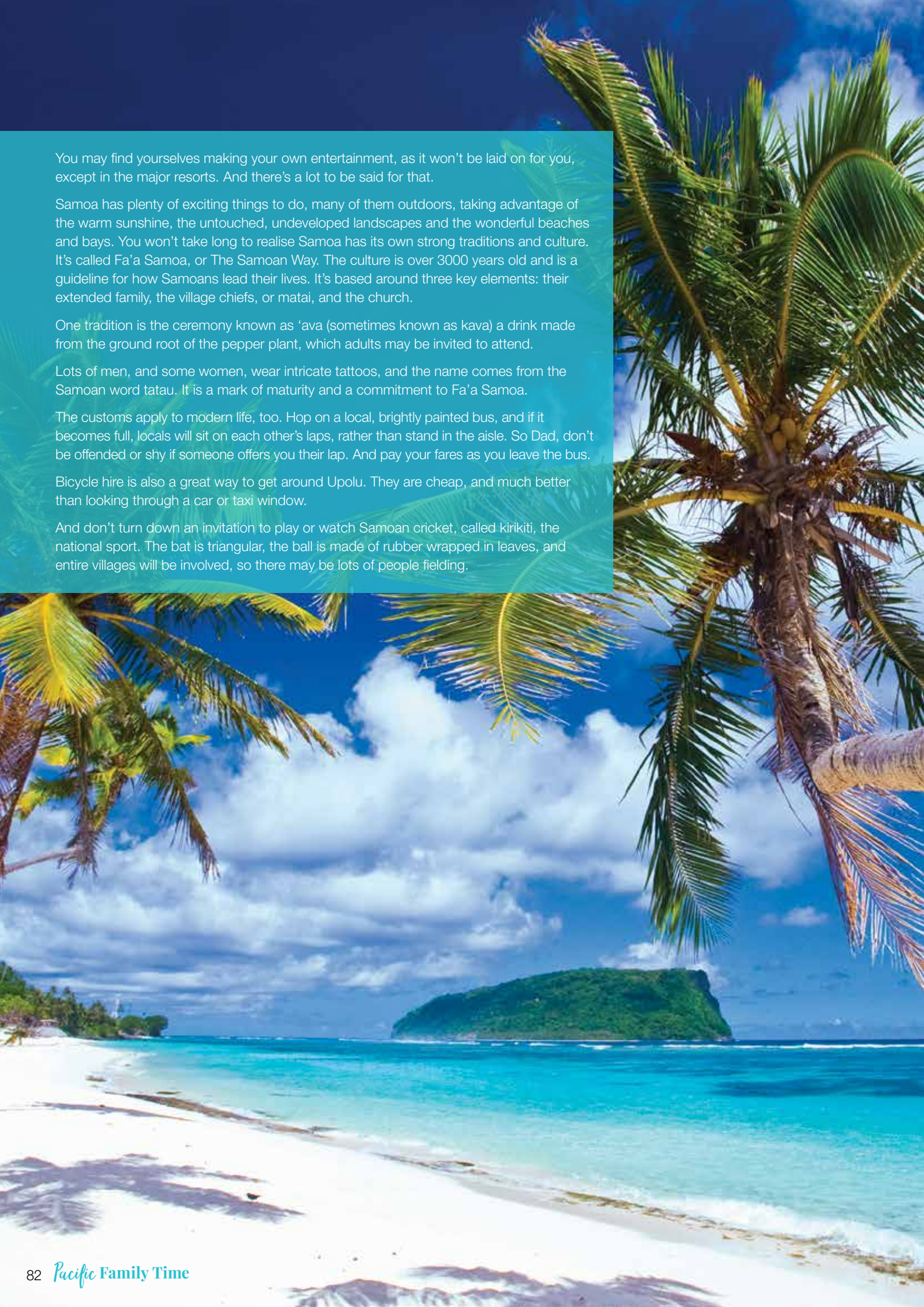


The islands of Samoa are

made for adventure

Families on holiday in Samoa are much more likely to feel part of the local community than being mere visitors or spectators, as they may experience in other islands of the Pacific. It's a back-to-basics kind of holiday place, comfortable but not flashy, where the allure of Polynesia is especially strong. The pace of everyday life is easy, and there is a strong sense of family.





You may find yourselves making your own entertainment, as it won't be laid on for you, except in the major resorts. And there's a lot to be said for that.

Samoa has plenty of exciting things to do, many of them outdoors, taking advantage of the warm sunshine, the untouched, undeveloped landscapes and the wonderful beaches and bays. You won't take long to realise Samoa has its own strong traditions and culture. It's called Fa'a Samoa, or The Samoan Way. The culture is over 3000 years old and is a guideline for how Samoans lead their lives. It's based around three key elements: their extended family, the village chiefs, or matai, and the church.

One tradition is the ceremony known as 'ava (sometimes known as kava) a drink made from the ground root of the pepper plant, which adults may be invited to attend.

Lots of men, and some women, wear intricate tattoos, and the name comes from the Samoan word tatau. It is a mark of maturity and a commitment to Fa'a Samoa.

The customs apply to modern life, too. Hop on a local, brightly painted bus, and if it becomes full, locals will sit on each other's laps, rather than stand in the aisle. So Dad, don't be offended or shy if someone offers you their lap. And pay your fares as you leave the bus.

Bicycle hire is also a great way to get around Upolu. They are cheap, and much better than looking through a car or taxi window.

And don't turn down an invitation to play or watch Samoan cricket, called kirikiti, the national sport. The bat is triangular, the ball is made of rubber wrapped in leaves, and entire villages will be involved, so there may be lots of people fielding.



UPOLU

Bustling Apia will soon have the kids buzzing, especially when you reach the Marketi Fou. The benches are piled high with produce, but also look out for fine mats, called ie toga, woven from the pandanus plant, and siapo, a printed cloth made from the inner bark of the mulberry tree.

Visit the Samoa Cultural Village to see how these items and others are made, and eat a meal served straight from an umu, or stone oven. Even the picky eaters in the family will want to try palusami, which is young taro leaves baked in coconut cream, or marinated raw fish salad, known as oka.

Seafood lovers will relish eating Samoan crayfish, snapper, octopus and tuna during their holiday. And ask for palolo, a tiny seafood delicacy. They are harvested during a single evening in October, seven days after a full moon, using nets or bare hands, and Samoans will feast on them over the next few days.

Pack togs and towels before you visit Robert Louis Stevenson's house and museum, set in his expansive mansion on the summit of Mount Vaea. Children who have read *Treasure Island* or *Kidnapped* will recognise his name. Stroll through the Vailima Botanical Gardens, and the natural pool and waterfall there is a great way to cool off.

For a bit more excitement, kids and adults can slide down the slick rocks at the Papase'ea Sliding Rocks. Better than a pool slide, any day.

The Palolo Deep marine reserve in Apia is a great place for swimming and snorkelling. Jump into the large pool fed by the sea and see the amazing colours of Samoan marine life. Reef shoes are optional but try and arrange your visit to coincide with a high tide.

Families can pack a lot into a half or full-day tour of Upolu, visiting villages, and waterfalls that cascade down lush hillsides, including Falefa Falls and the Pula Cave Pool.

Lalomanu Beach is one of the best in the South Pacific, and that's saying something. It's worthwhile spending a whole day here, relaxing and swimming. The lagoon life is protected, and the water teems with tropical marine life. Swim with rare green turtles at nearby Namua Island, just offshore.

Another little island near Upolu is Manono, accessible by boat from Manono-uta. It only takes a couple of hours for the family to stroll around it, passing the four villages. Or take one of the tracks which lead to historic sites.



SALETOGA SANDS

On the southern coast of Upolo is the To Sua Ocean Trench in Lotofaga Village. Access is down a wooden ladder, where an underground tunnel links a water hole to the ocean. The mix of fresh and salt water creates random warm spots, and the kids can entertain themselves by swimming and exploring the rock pools, while the adults relax on a fale, or beach hut, amid the lush foliage.

Southern Upolu is also the site of the 100 metre-high Papapapai Tai Falls, the Togitogiga Waterfalls and the Sopoaga Falls.

Be sure to ask if there is a fiafia night during your stay in Apia. It's a celebration of Samoan culture, and there is traditional Samoan food, dancers, musicians and storytellers. Watch out for the Samoan fire dance, known as siva afi, where the men twirl and throw flaming knives. It's exciting and dangerous. Kids, don't try it at home!

PLACES TO STAY

Saletoga Sands

Managed by a Kiwi couple, Gavin and Lou Brightwell, Saletoga Sands offers family accommodation. The restaurant is known for its fine cuisine, and there is a beautiful pool and a spa, and water sports. The family can jump on an island tour, kayak or snorkel through the reef, or enjoy a spa.

The spacious rooms have a flat-screen television, airconditioning and a private outdoor shower area. Many of the staff come from nearby villages, including Captain Patti, who is renowned for his helpful nature, singing and storytelling.

Return to Paradise

The setting for this resort is isolated and quiet, as you have to drive along a private road along the coast, then cut through rainforest to reach it. There aren't even any villages nearby.

The resort prides itself on offering a real Samoan experience, traditional singing and fiafia nights. There is a wide range of family accommodation in suites, villas and standard rooms, and a stunning beach.



TAUMEASINA ISLAND RESORT

Taumeasina Island Resort

Families visiting Samoa will enjoy the best of both worlds at Taumeasina Island Resort. The handy location is just a few kilometres from the beating heart of downtown Apia. But when you're in the resort looking out across the sparkling sea, you'll feel like you're on the other side of island. Apia location. Island feel. And it works a treat. There are activities galore. And a range of family friendly room options too. Particularly the two and three-bedroom self-contained villas that come with a full-size designer kitchen and other essentials like a washing machine and dryer.

Sheraton Samoa Beach Resort

The resort has a good kid's programme and a safe beach for enjoying watersports. There are miles of tramping tracks, a gym, the Manaia Polynesian Spa, tennis and volleyball courts.

The four restaurants and bars offer a variety of cuisines, and there's a barbecue and picnic area. The rich harmonies of Samoan musicians are often heard around the resort. Start the day with a big buffet at Apolima Fale. There is a cultural show and dinner on Friday nights.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Taumeasina Island Resort in Samoa offers families a relaxing, tropical island paradise, yet it's within easy reach of sightseeing, shopping and entertainment in Apia township.

The resort offers a great family escape, with a range of Ocean View hotel rooms and spacious two or three-bedroom self-contained villas, all with water views and easy beach access.

With two swimming pools, a tennis court, kayaks, snorkelling gear, catamarans and a daily activities programme there is definitely plenty to keep everyone occupied. There's also a great children's playground for the young ones to run around on.

Bar service is offered around the pool so parents don't have to move from their spot while they enjoy the wonderful tropical ambience. A full buffet breakfast is included in the rates and provides a great assortment of hot and cold dishes to ensure everyone has plenty of energy for the day. There is also an à la carte menu and themed buffet dinners, plus kid's meals and snack menus are available. For a good dose of Samoan culture, be sure to experience the spectacular Saturday Fia Fia Night, with dinner and a show, including fire dancing.

When a little indulgence is on the agenda, book a time at Fofo Samoa Day Spa and enjoy a relaxing massage or an invigorating facial. There is also a fully equipped gym and plenty of space around the island for a run or a nice evening stroll.

Babysitting services are available for parents who would like some time out or to enjoy a romantic dinner.

The Taumeasina staff offer friendly Polynesian hospitality and they are always ready with a welcoming smile.





Samoa's Premier Island Resort





Escape to paradise and experience a relaxing getaway at Taumeasina Island Resort. Offering deluxe island hotel and villa accommodation, 4 star facilities and services along with world class dining, it's everything you want in a holiday and more!

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SAVAI'I

If your family wants to take another step back, the island of Savai'i is like Upolu a generation ago. It is less developed and there are fewer people. The ferry crossing from Upolu to the main town of Salelologa takes about 90 minutes and there are several departures every day. You'll meet and chat to lots of colourful local folk.

Salelologa might be small but there's plenty going on. Buy food and drinks, rent bicycles or a car, or stock up on produce from the market. There is a local bus, but no bus stops, just give the driver a wave. Spend a day driving around Savai'i on the well-maintained road.

The locals in the village of Satoalepai are working hard to raise endangered green turtles and help revive the population. They care for the young turtles until they are big enough to fend for themselves and hopefully find a mate and lay eggs.

Remember to bring snorkels, masks and fins so you can all swim alongside the turtles as they move in their gentle, stately manner in the sanctuary. Older children can hold pieces of pawpaw to encourage the turtles to feed. There is a modest entry fee.

The Tafua Peninsula Rainforest Reserve is a lush area of rainforest with numerous trails, including one up to the volcanic crater. You will also see Samoa's own flying fox bats, or pe'a. Ask a local about some of the myths and legends associated with the pe'a.

With a vertical drop of 220 metres, Sinaloa waterfall is the highest in Samoa and it's certainly worth a visit. The Afu Aau, or Olemoe Falls are hidden in thick rainforest. The swimming hole below the falls is an excellent place to swim. Access is via a 20-minute walk, or a four-wheel-drive will take you right up to the falls.

When the tide is high and the swells are from the southwest, head for the Alofaaga Blowholes at the village of Taga. The sea forces its way into the blowholes and shoots up as high as 30 metres like a giant cold geyser. The locals may throw coconuts into the holes, which are then blasted into the air like they've been shot out of a cannon. See if you can spot mini-rainbows in the spray.

Mataolealelo Pool, a natural spring, is a great way to cool off from the heat. It's a significant historic site relating to the origin of the coconut palm tree in Samoan legend.



PLACES TO STAY

Savaii Lagoon Resort

This small, intimate resort is easily accessible on the bus service from the ferry, or hire a taxi, but confirm the fare first, as the trip takes about 40 minutes.

There is a beautiful, safe and sheltered beach for children. Snorkel out to the coral, or just relax on the sand under an umbrella. Or book a trip on the resort's own catamaran. Play petanque, or learn how to husk a coconut, make coconut cream or weave a basket. The resort also offers various tours.

The restaurant serves local fresh produce where possible, and look out for lobsters on the menu.

Accommodation is in a range of beachfront and garden bungalows and beachfront studios, and they all have a small kitchen. A special filtration plant ensures all the water at the resort is safe to drink.

The fiafia night, performed by the resort's own staff, includes a spectacular fire dance and a traditional ava ceremony.



Families should be careful to observe some local protocols when entering Samoan villages or accessing beaches, waterfalls and swimming holes. They are all part of Fa'a Samoa.

Avoid walking through villages during evening prayers. Listen for the sound of a bell or a conch shell, and wait for the note to play three times before continuing on your way.

Don't wear skimpy clothing in villages. A lavalava is good. Nudity is not allowed anywhere in public, and women must not go topless on the beach.

Sunday is a day of rest. Behave quietly and travel slowly through the villages. If you want to attend a Sunday church service, dress conservatively in smart casual clothes.

Take off your shoes before you enter a fale. When elders are seated in a fale, you should not stand. When sitting in a fale, avoid pointing your feet at others. Tuck your feet away, cross them or cover them.

Most coastal land is privately owned. Ask permission at the nearest village. Someone will usually be along shortly. Be prepared to pay a small entry fee. Always ask permission before taking photos in a village.



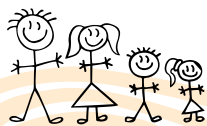
Luxury Comfort Splendour

Saletoga Sands Resorts is a quality 4 star resort offering exceptional value accommodation, food & activities. With rooms to suit families of five or those on a budget there is something for all. Nestled within its own private bay on the South Coast of Upolu in Samoa.

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FAMILY FAVOURITES

Soaking up Samoa.

Samoa is paradise for families who love getting out and about. Which made it the perfect fit for company director, Sarah Balfour, her winemaker husband, Esteban and their two adventure-loving children.

Why did you choose this destination for your family holiday?

We chose Samoa because we wanted a relaxing tropical family holiday at the right budget, and were keen to get out and adventure easily and not be restricted to a resort. We had heard Samoa was easy to get around and not "over-touristy".

How many times has your family been there?

Just the once.

Which property did you stay at?

We stayed at Return to Paradise Resort on Upolu's South Coast.

What was your reason for choosing the resort?

Our travel agent put together a couple of packages and Return to Paradise represented the best value and location, as well as being family-friendly. We also chose this resort because it is Samoan owned and provides employment and opportunities in the local and surrounding villages.

How old are your children?

We have a girl aged seven and a boy aged three.

What did the family love most about Samoa?

They loved practising their Samoan and saying "Talofa" every chance they got, running around in lavalavas we brought from the local markets in Apia, splashing around in the resort pools and ocean pool, drinking the local lemonade and exploring the beach and rock pools.

What did you love most about the island?

Cocktails! Plus the relaxed laid back vibe and friendly people eager to share their culture. I loved To Sua Trench - an other-worldly saltwater swimming hole where you can jump off a small jetty into crystal clear water then float around gazing up at the ferns and other plants that grow all through the trench. Also the fact that Samoan culture is very family oriented - nothing was a problem with kids, which made everything so easy!

What were your top three family activities?

1. Piula Cave Pool

Relaxing with Samoan families at the Piula Cave Pool - a freshwater pool with open fales for lounging around - perfect for a picnic and they do hot chips and lemonade on-site.



Balfour family



2. Fiafia Night

At our resort the fire dancing and drumming were amazing and we got to try Samoan food from the umu - palusami which is coconut cream wrapped in baby taro leaves, and suckling pig.

3. Cruising by car

Rent a car for a couple of days and explore Upolu - from the golden sand and aquamarine waters of Lalomanu and lots of little villages along the way. It was great having a car to be able to stop and take a look at the churches around Upolu, buy supplies from local stores and chat to locals.

What are your top tips for taking a family away here?

Take your reef shoes for snorkelling. There can be sharp bits of coral on the beach and you can't use flippers as they damage the reef. Take some Samoan cash (tala) with you or get some out at the ATM at the airport - ATMs can be few and far between outside Apia. Renting a car and getting out and about was easy and often cheaper than a lot of the resort tours - we loved the freedom it gave us!