

Whales return to local waters

Humpback whales are returning to American Samoa! Whales can be seen in the waters around American Samoa from about mid July to November, though dates of arrival can vary from year to year. These long-distance migrants arrive from the feeding grounds in the Antarctic. They spend winters in the warm waters of the South Pacific. Amazingly, they do not feed at all while they are here, but instead spend their time mating and giving birth.

Visitors regularly see them from land at any point on the island that has a view of the ocean, especially sites on the western side like Sliding Rock. Mothers, especially, can spend time very close to shore with their young calves. Visitors should make sure their eyes are peeled!



Exploring the depths

The exploration vessel, *EV Nautilus* owned by the Ocean Exploration Trust under the direction of Dr Robert Ballard (who discovered the shipwrecks of the 'Titanic' and the battleship 'Bismarck') has partnered with the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa to undertake deep sea research around American Samoa at the end of this month. *EV Nautilus* will collect baseline information on deep-sea and mesophotic habitat, conduct seafloor mapping, and targeted sampling for potential discovery of new species!



New signage points the way

A new tourism initiative has seen the erection of new signs across the islands. The Visitor Sites project aims to identify significant sites, and to design a sign concept that is both eye catching and uniquely Samoan. Although this is a small project, it is part of a broader Tourism Masterplan that aims to promote local offerings. To enhance the visitor experience even further, these locations (along with a description of their history or significance) may also be added to the recently launched American Samoa App.



National Park creates new exhibition space

The National Park of American Samoa, one of the island's main visitor attractions, has expanded its visitor centre in Pago Pago. The extra space was put to good use immediately with special exhibits and demonstrations taking pride of place. The new exhibits showcase the cultural heritage and natural history of Samoa. The centrepiece of the new exhibit features a sperm whale skull. In 2015, a sperm whale carcass washed up in the park in Ofu. Park staff spent over three years preparing the bones for display and designing and installing an exhibit. Other exhibits feature a six foot by six foot siapo (tapa cloth) created by local community college students and an 'enu fish basket woven with traditional materials by a local craftsman. Every morning, traditional weavers join park staff in the visitor centre to talk about the importance of weaving to Samoan traditions while giving live demonstrations of their craft.



Vaeafe appointed SPTO Chairman

Anyone who has worked with travel in American Samoa will no know the smiling face of David Vaeafe. David has been Executive Director of the American Samoa Visitors Bureau for many years, and he now has an additional role as the new Chairperson of The South Pacific Tourism Organisation.

David brings more than 20 years of experience in the national and regional tourism industry and is looking forward to his role as Chairperson, "It's an exciting time to continue moving the organisation forward and remain relevant in the changing global climate. This is the first time that two members of the smaller island states are holding positions of the Chair and Deputy Chair." (The Deputy Chair is Mrs Felicity Bollen from Niue).

SPTO has a new Strategic Plan for 2020-2024 and is committed to elevating tourism to the ministerial and leaders level through stronger advocacy. "This is part of our strategy to support SPTO as the organisation that will promote and develop regional tourism as a priority for the region," David said.



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