

Savai'i

The island of Savai'i offers a wilder experience of Pacific life than 'Upolu. Apart from being the largest island in Polynesia outside New Zealand and Hawai'i, it's also mostly uninhabited, which means there's more spectacular tropical terrain at hand and less signs of modern life to be encountered while you're exploring it. Most of the island's villages are speckled along the main coast road and, as you drive, bus or walk through these, you're liable to see locals dozing in large *fale* (traditional thatched house) and bathing in communal rock pools; a remarkable assortment of weathered churches; pigs scampering about, their tails swishing feverishly as they root around in the dirt or sand; and horses tethered by the roadside or being bathed in the sea, particularly along the island's east coast.

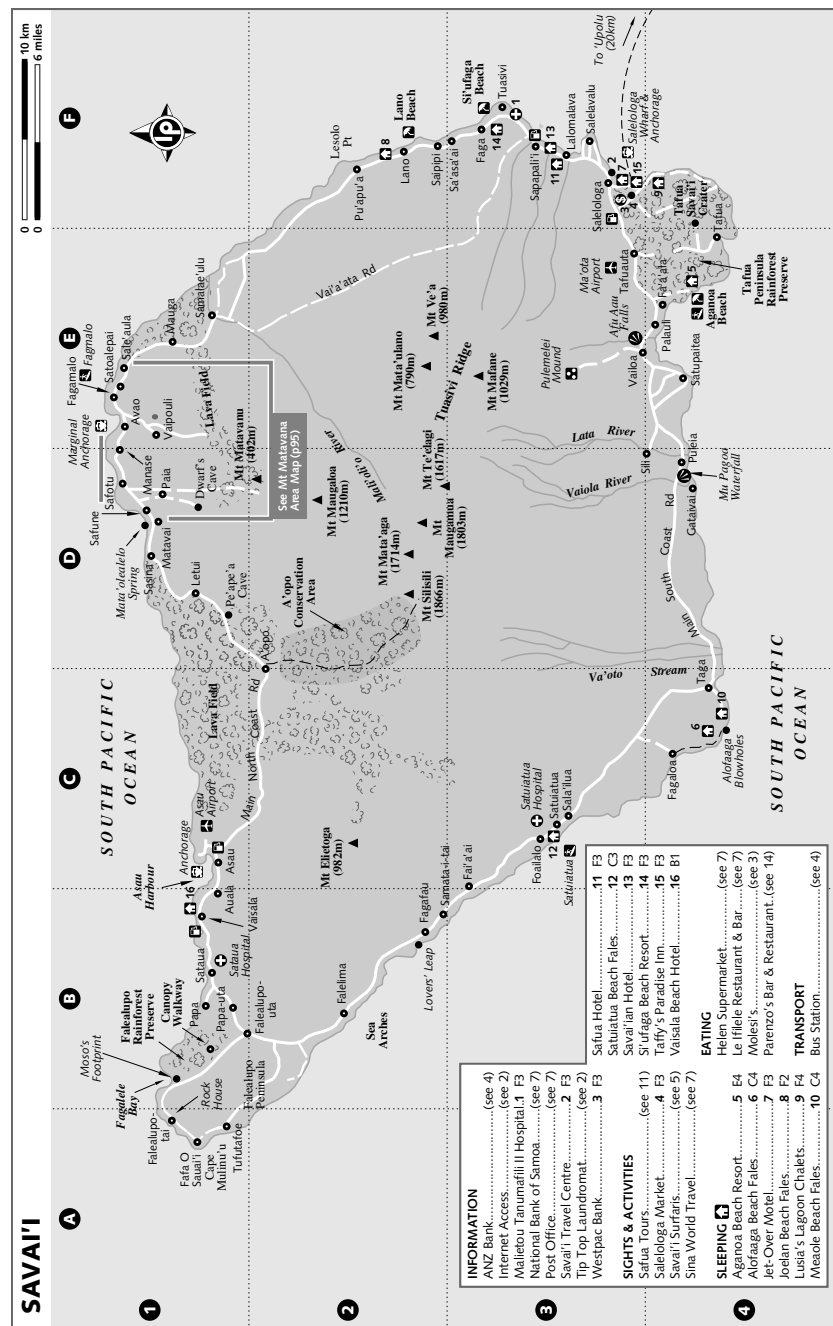
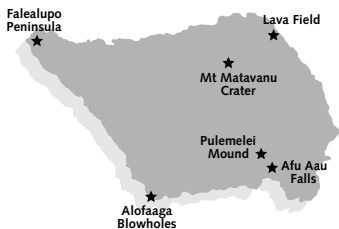
Away from the villages and their traditional ways is a wonderfully rough, legendary landscape awaiting discovery. Scattered across the island are numerous archaeological sites – fortifications, star mounds and ancient platforms – many of which have been swallowed up by the nearly impenetrable jungle. Savai'i is studded with about 450 craters, many of them along the island's central ridge, and the more accessible of these allow you to peer into the depths of a huge, silent, overgrown caldera. Violent eruptions a century ago coated much of the island's northeast with lava – pick your way through the fields of charred, broken rock and imagine what the heat must have been like. To top it all off, there are also magnificent waterfalls and hiking trails secreted within old plantations, untouched rainforests blanketing remote peninsulas, and furious blowholes making their presence felt along the stormy coast.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Plunging into the sublime pool beneath **Afu Aau Falls** (p99) before standing atop enigmatic **Pulemelei Mound** (p100)
- Watching coconuts shoot into the sky at **Alofaaga Blowholes** (p100)
- Imagining the volcanic fury that caused the desolate landscape of the **Lava Field** (p94)
- Climbing an ancient banyan tree and standing at the end of the world on the **Falealupo Peninsula** (p97)
- Staring into the eerie depths of the **Mount Matavanu Crater** (p95)

■ POPULATION: 55,000

■ AREA: 1813 SQ KM



INFORMATION	
ANZ Bank.....	(see 4)
Internet Access.....	(see 2)
Malletou Tanumafili II Hospital.....	1 F3
National Bank of Samoa.....	(see 7)
Post Office.....	(see 7)
Savai'i Travel Centre.....	2 F3
Tip Top Laundromat.....	(see 2)
Westpac Bank.....	3 F3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Safua Tours.....	(see 11)
Savai'i Beach Resort.....	13 F3
Savai'i Hotel.....	14 F3
Savai'i Paradise Inn.....	15 F3
Savai'i Surfaris.....	(see 5)
Sina World Travel.....	(see 7)
EATING	
Heien Supermarket.....	(see 7)
Le Ifiele Restaurant & Bar.....	(see 7)
Molesi's.....	6 C4
Parenzo's Bar & Restaurant.....	(see 3)
Joelan Motel.....	7 F3
Joelan Beach Fales.....	8 F2
Lusia's Lagoon Chailets.....	9 F4
Mieolae Beach Fales.....	10 C4
TRANSPORT	
Bus Station.....	(see 4)

SAVAI'I

HISTORY

All Polynesians who migrated around the Pacific carried with them legends of the homeland they had left, and many named their new home after the old. Thus, when settlers left Samoa in about AD 300, for what is now the Society Islands in French Polynesia, they named an island there after Savai'i. Hundreds of years later, when settlers again departed the Society Islands for other parts of Polynesia, they still carried with them that ancient name.

New Zealand's Maori people remembered the ancient homeland as Hawaiki, Cook Islanders as 'Avaiki, and Society Islanders as Havai'i (though the Society Islanders' Havai'i is now named Ra'iatea). The largest island of the Hawai'ian group was also named after it. So in a sense, Samoans are right when they claim that Savai'i is 'the cradle of Polynesia'.

It was on Savai'i, in the village of Safotula-fai, that the Mau Movement was formed. Its original objective was to replace the German administration with one more respectful of Samoan affairs, an aim that was extended throughout the years of the New Zealand administration.

During the 20th century, Savai'i experienced several natural disasters. The first was the eruption of Mt Matavanu between 1905 and 1911, which caused wholesale devastation in the island's northeast. Savai'i was also devastated by Cyclones Ofa and Val, which struck in February 1990 and December 1991, respectively. Many of the villages in the northwestern corner of the island were completely destroyed.

TOURS

A good option for Savai'i sightseeing and cultural excursions is **Safua Tours** (Map p89; ☎ 51271; Safua Hotel, Main South Coast Rd, Lalomalava), based at the Safua Hotel (p93). The owners command an impressive knowledge of local geography and customs, and conduct separate day tours (ST125) of the island's south and north coasts. Sites visited include beautiful Afu Aau Falls, Pulemelei Mound, Tafua Savai'i crater and the Alofaaga Blowholes. They also organise village stays for around ST60 per person, which includes transport and meals. Rates are negotiable for groups.

Sina World Travel (Map p89; ☎ 51499; Blue Bird Mall, Salelologa) offers everything from laid-back

beach tours to hikes up Mt Silisili. Half/full-day tours cost ST75/150 and a minimum of three people is usually required.

If you're considering going to Savai'i to surf, contact **Savai'i Surfaris** (Map p89; ☎ 58248; fax 58007 for local inquiries), based at Aganoa Beach. Bookings are through **Atoll Travel** (☎ 03-5682 1088; www.atolltravel.com) in Australia. Seven-night surfer packages, excluding airfares, cost around A\$960 per person (A\$870 per person for twin-share) staying in beach *fale*, with two daily meals, transfers and surf accommodation included. Seven-night packages for nonsurfers cost from A\$660/570 for single/twin-share accommodation in *fale*.

Apia-based **Green Turtle Tours** (Map pp62-3; ☎ 22144, 29229; www.greenturtle.com) operate a daily hop-on, hop-off bus service around Savai'i and also do day tours of the island. For more information, see p67.

GETTING AROUND

Whenever a plane arrives from 'Upolu at Ma'ota Airport, nearly every taxi on Savai'i is waiting for it, so there's no problem finding transport. The taxis, however, are relatively expensive. To Salelologa, the fare is ST7.80 and to Tuasivi (about 13km), ST22. Public buses are very convenient for getting to Salelologa from the airport, but if you're travelling to Tuasivi or further north, you'll have to change buses at Salelologa. Airport transfers can be arranged with most hotels, provided you book in advance. Buses and taxis also greet every ferry arrival.

Bus

The buses of Savai'i are mostly the crowded, vibrantly coloured affairs blasting Samoan-style pop music that most travellers usually encounter first on 'Upolu. But newer, generic buses are becoming a more common sight on the island's roads. The market in Salelologa is the main terminal for Savai'i buses. All buses display the name of their destination in the front window. Fares are paid to the driver.

To head north to the Lava Field (ST2.50), take the Lava Field Express, which goes to Fagamalo. To go a little further west to Manase (ST3.10), take the Manase or Sasina bus. The Falealupo bus will take you up around the Falealupo Peninsula (ST4.50), while the Salega or Fagafau buses trundle past the Alofaaga Blowholes (ST2) and Sa-

tuiatua Beach (ST3). The most you'll pay is for the bus ride to Asau (ST5). Ferry passengers will have the most luck connecting with buses to out-of-the-way destinations – that is, beyond the cluster of villages along the southeast coast – as such buses mostly depart as soon as the ferry comes in.

Car

It's a joy to motor along the sealed Main Coast Rd that winds around the island, but keep an eye out for stray children, pigs, dogs and chickens. Off the main road you'll encounter a few bumpy tracks where at the very least you'll need a high-clearance 2WD (or 4WD if there's been heavy rain). These include the steep, rocky climb up Mt Matavanu and the plantation tracks leading to Pulemelei Mound and through the Tafua Peninsula Rainforest Preserve.

There are several petrol stations along the east and north coasts.

Cars can be hired in Salelologa from several operators, including **Sina World Travel** (Map p89; ☎ 51499; Blue Bird Mall, Salelologa), from about ST150 per day. Note that a ST2500 insurance excess will apply if you cause an accident.

Taxi

Taxis are relatively expensive on Savai'i and useful only for short trips.

SOUTHEASTERN SAVAI'I

The southeastern chunk of Savai'i is where most of the island's business is conducted, namely in the banks, shops and marketplace of Salelologa. But once outside the shabby strip of commerce running north from the ferry terminal, you'll encounter some superb beaches and the lush wilds of the Tafua Peninsula Rainforest Preserve.

INFORMATION

Most of Savai'i's main facilities are in Salelologa and nearby in Tuasivi.

ANZ Bank (☎ 51213; Salelologa; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) Situated beside the market, it has a 24-hour ATM.

Internet access (Salelologa; per 30min ST14; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) In the same building as Savai'i Travel Centre.

Main post office (Blue Bird Mall, Salelologa; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-noon Sat) Doubles

as a call centre (using phonecards). There are also post offices at Tuasivi, Asau, Fagamalo and Sala'ilua (not open weekends).

Maliotua Tanumafili II Hospital (☎ 53511; Main North Coast Rd, Tuasivi; ☎ 8.30am-11pm) Doctors are on call around the clock. There are other basic hospitals at Safotu, Sataua and Foailalo.

National Bank of Samoa (☎ 51398; Blue Bird Mall, Salelologa; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11.30am Sat)

Savai'i Travel Centre (☎ 51206; savaiitravelcentre@lesamoa.net; Salelologa) Arranges travel around the island. Also an agent for Polynesian Airlines (☎ 22737, 22738).

Sina World Travel (☎ 51499; Blue Bird Mall, Salelologa) Also for travel around the island.

Tip Top Laundromat (Salelologa; wash/dry ST5/6; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Shares a building with Savai'i Travel Centre.

Westpac Bank (☎ 20000; Salelologa; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Mon-Wed, 8.30am-4pm Thu & Fri)

SALELOLOGA

Salelologa is a scrappy, ramshackle, heavily littered settlement strung out along the 1.5km road leading north from the ferry terminal to the junction with the Main South Coast Rd. Most travellers stop long enough to stock up on petrol and other supplies and grab a bite to eat, then move on.

The handicraft stalls at the **market** (☎ early-late Mon-Sat) are worth a browse. At the rear a large group of men sit blearily around several large drums from which 'ava (also known as *kava*) is continually ladled into small black cups.

JOHN WILLIAMS MONUMENT

In front of the London Missionary Society (LMS, or Congregational) church at Sapapali'i is a small stone monument commemorating the landing of the former British ironmonger turned missionary, Reverend John Williams, who arrived on his makeshift vessel, the *Messenger of Peace*, in 1830. He didn't stay long but succeeded in converting a powerful warrior chief, Malietoa Vainu'upo, to Christianity, which in turn encouraged other Savai'ians to convert.

There's a gorgeous **rock pool** beside the monument. Ask for permission before taking a plunge.

EAST-COAST BEACHES

Along the east coast between Salelologa and Pu'apu'a are nice beaches and good snorkelling spots. Many of the villages charge

beach-access fees of ST2/5 per person/car. The best beaches are at **Si'ufaga**, which boasts a magnificent turquoise-coloured lagoon, and **Lano**. The area also has numerous freshwater pools and springs for bathing.

PU'APU'A

There are two freshwater **bathing pools** in Pu'apu'a village. The pool on the eastern side of the road is for women and the one on the western side is for men. If you'd like to swim here, the locals will be flattered that you chose their pool, but it's still best to ask villagers' permission before jumping in.

On Pu'apu'a's foreshore is an eye-catching *fale*-shaped **shrine** raised up above a three-pointed mound of black rock and framed by potted flowers, with a large statue of Madonna and child tucked inside. Further south in Lano is another creative **shrine** – a blue tiered structure with Madonna perched on top in a Pope-mobile-style plexiglass bubble.

TAFUA PENINSULA RAINFOREST PRESERVE

The **Tafua Peninsula Rainforest Preserve** (admission ST2) occupies much of the Tafua Peninsula. It's one of Samoa's most accessible and beautiful stands of rainforest and contains rugged stretches of lava coast studded with cliffs, sea arches and blowholes. A highlight of the preserve is the extinct **Tafua Savai'i crater**, which rises above the village of Tafua. The crater is choked with vegetation and has a lost world feel to it, enhanced by glimpses of the relatively rare Samoan flying fox circling the treetops. You may even see the definitely rare *manume'a* (Samoan tooth-billed pigeon).

To get here, take the road signposted off the Main South Coast Rd opposite Ma'ota Airport; you pay the custom fee about 50m down this road. About 2.6km from the main road turn left on to a pair of ruts (if you reach the Tafua village sign, you've gone too far). At this turn-off you may be accosted by a local family demanding another access payment, but politely refuse. Now drive for 650m along this bumpy track (OK for 2WDs except after heavy rain) to where there's a small, car-sized clearing on the right, opposite a large tree (if the road starts sloping downwards, you've gone too far). The trail to the crater (15 minutes) is easy to follow

from here. You can also approach a Tafua villager to guide you to this trail.

After reaching the crater's edge, the trail continues to the left around the rim. Follow it until you're on the southern side of the crater, from where you'll have the best view of the bats and a far-ranging view of the island's southern coastline and crater-studded highlands.

At the western end of Fa'a'ala village is a track leading to lovely **Aganoa Beach** (nonsurfer/surfer ST5/20), dotted with picnic *fale*. There are strong currents here so swim with care. Pay fees at Kahuna Bar & Grill (opposite).

SLEEPING & EATING

Salelologa

Jet-Over Motel (☎ 51565; Blue Bird Mall; r ST110-120; 🚗 🚰) This motel is located at the rear of Blue Bird Mall – reception is at the kiosk in the middle of the mall's downstairs concourse. Its rooms are pricey but big and well-equipped, with a fridge, TV and microwave. Cheaper rooms look out on an adjacent lumber yard, while the costliest have a marginally better view.

Taffy's Paradise Inn (☎ 51544; r per person ST35) This particular 'paradise', about 800m north of the wharf, unfortunately resembles a construction site, but it's OK as a budget option if you want a room as opposed to a *fale*. There are four no-frills rooms upstairs in the blue house, all of which get ample natural light and share a bathroom, sitting area and an antique fridge.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Lusia's Lagoon Chalets (☎ 51487, 25018; www.lusiaslagoonchalets.ws; fale per person ST35-45; 🚗 🚰) Lusia's is located 1km southwest of Salelologa's wharf and is a superb place to stay. It's spread out over a small, bushy slice of land and has *fale* raised up over the waters of a sublime little cove sometimes visited by sea turtles. Hire a snorkel (ST5) or canoe (ST10) to explore offshore, sunbake on the waterfront deck, swim in a sea-fed rock pool, or slurp cocktails (ST15) at the bar. The onsite restaurant (mains ST8-25; 🍷) breakfast, lunch & dinner) utilises the freshest seafood wherever possible, without frying all the taste out of them, and does splendid home-baked desserts.

Le Ifilele Restaurant & Bar (☎ 51299; behind Blue Bird Mall; meals ST9-40; 🍷) breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Le Ifilele has a handful of tables on a small terrace beside a tiny bar and within several nearby waterside *fale*. The restaurant has a nice, open feel and a menu full of goodies not often served elsewhere on Savai'i, such as eggs Benedict and surf 'n' turf (New Zealand beef smothered in a seafood sauce). A traditional Samoan spread (ST12) is served on Friday.

Salelologa market (🕒 early-late Mon-Sat) At the back of this market are food stalls serving cheap fried snacks and sweets, and behind it is a cluster of tiny general stores selling inexpensive staples.

Self-caterers can also stock up at:
Helen Supermarket (Blue Bird Mall; 🕒 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-1pm Sat)
Molesi's (Main South Coast Rd; 🕒 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat, 6am-8pm Sun)

Around Salelologa

Aganoa Beach Resort (☎ 50180; www.atolltravel.com/samoa/samoasavaii.htm; Fa'a'ala; nonsurfer/surfer ST80/100) This resort caters mainly to surfers keen to ride the reef breaks only a short paddle offshore. Accommodation is in two- to four-bed *fale* (the beds make a nice change from thin mattresses) and prices include breakfast and dinner. Day visitors pay ST5 and day surfers ST20; the surfing fee goes to the local conservation committee. Basic lunches are available at the Kahuna Bar & Grill (meals ST6-15; 🍷) lunch).

Joelan Beach Fales (☎ 7781956; Main North Coast Rd, Lano; fale per person ST50) At Joelan's, eight simple *fale* are planted above the high tide mark on a great curve of beach at the northern end of Lano village. A volleyball net has been strung up and there's great snorkelling offshore. Price includes breakfast and dinner; other supplies can be purchased from the small village kiosks.

Savai'ian Hotel (☎ 51296; savaiian@lesamoa.net, Main South Coast Rd, Lalomalava; s ST45-125, d ST65-150; 🚗 🚰) The accommodation here is mainly in motel-style units (continental breakfast included) that look across a swathe of lawn to remote breakers and the hazy outline of 'Upolu. Behind the units are some *fale*, which are plain but have their own bathrooms and are protected from the wind.

Si'ufaga Beach Resort (☎ 53518; www.siufaga.com; Main North Coast Rd, Tuasivi; s ST70-320, d ST90-350;

SUNDAY LUNCH

On Sunday mornings you'll find the islands shrouded in smoke as villagers everywhere light fires to warm stones needed for the *umu* (ground ovens) used to bake *to'ona'i* (Sunday lunch). Visitors sometimes complain that nothing happens in Samoa on Sunday, but it's hardly true – after a small breakfast (on account of the looming lunch) Samoans go to church and sing their lungs out, at noon they eat an enormous roast dinner and in the afternoon they sleep.

You may be lucky enough to be invited to a family *to'ona'i*. A typical spread includes baked fish and other seafood (freshwater prawns, crabs, octopus cooked in coconut milk), suckling pig, baked breadfruit, bananas, *palusami* (coconut cream wrapped in taro leaves), salads and curry dishes.

🚗 🚰 Located opposite palm tree-lined Si'ufaga Beach, this resort offers several types of units. The 'deluxe' models are closest to the glorious beach and have bathrooms, cable TV, fridge and hot water. Behind these are 'superior' units, some of which cater for disabled travellers, followed by relatively inexpensive 'standard' units that each have a bathroom and fridge. The picnic table at the end of the small spit opposite reception, which is at Parenzo's Bar & Restaurant, is a good place for your morning cuppa.

Safua Hotel (☎ 51271; fax 51272; safuahotel@yahoo.com; Main South Coast Rd, Lalomalava; fale s/d/f ST80/110/140) This hotel inhabits an overgrown compound well off the main road, away from the beach. It offers reasonable beds in distinctive enclosed *fale*-bungalows (breakfast included in price) but is looking a bit shabby these days and you should inspect the rooms before committing yourself. There's a nightly dinner buffet (ST38) and a small bar with a pool table that's usually commandeered by locals. The highly knowledgeable Safua Tours (p90) is based here.

Parenzo's Bar & Restaurant (☎ 53518; Si'ufaga Beach Resort, Main North Coast Rd, Tuasivi; mains ST25-40; 🍷) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun; 🚗) The outdoor terrace of stylish Parenzo's affords great views of beautiful Si'ufaga Beach and is perfect for an early evening meal and a glass of red. The pasta is tasty but nothing

to rave about, though they do take their garlic bread seriously – don't expect to be able to breathe on anyone for several days. Seafood dishes are also available and they brew a strong coffee.

NORTHEASTERN SAVA'I

Neighbouring 'Upolu remains in distant view as the coastal road heads north from Pu'apu'a past the sun-baked lava that flooded over a large slice of Savai'i's northeast a century ago. This region gets the most attention from the island's visitors, who come here to scramble over the volcanic debris, swim with turtles, scale spectacular Mt Matavanu and mingle with fellow travellers at Manase.

Raci's Beach Club (RBC; ☎ 54003; Main North Coast Rd, Manase; 🕒 8.30-11am & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat) provides Internet access (ST10 for the first 10 minutes, ST0.50 each subsequent minute) and also hires bikes (ST20/30 per half/full day), kayaks (ST25/35 per half/full day) and flippers (ST5 per day).

LAVA FIELD

The Mt Matavanu eruptions between 1905 and 1911 created a moonscape in Savai'i's northeastern corner as a flow of hot lava 10m to 150m thick rolled across plantations and villages, destroying everything in its path. The Main North Coast Rd between Samalae'ulu and Sale'aula crosses this **lava**

field, a vast expanse of twisted dark rock peppered with green plants, and provides access to several fascinating sites.

The village of **Mauga** (Map p89), which means 'mountain', encircles a nearly perfect crater. This shallow crater is filled with banana palms (excepting the centre, which is occupied by a *kirikiti* – cricket – pitch) and ringed by modern *fale* with corrugated-iron roofs. A massive **Catholic church** looms over the village entrance, close to where Savai'i's first Catholic church was destroyed by lava in 1906. If you'd like to be shown around, most villagers will be happy to oblige. You get your first good look at the lava field about 1.5km north of Mauga: a desolate field of black stretching down to the sea.

In Sale'aula, 5km north of Mauga, are the remains of several **lava-ruined churches** (admission ST3). The local guides (from the Information Fale) can be quite disinterested, so it's often better to explore the site by yourself. To the left of the Information Fale (as you face it from the road) is a trail leading to the **LMS Church**, where 2m of lava flowed through the front door and was eerily imprinted by corrugated iron when the roof collapsed. A mango tree has now taken root inside the ruined walls. Beside the church is an old **cemetery**, many of its graves still marked by smooth, water-rounded boulders. Behind the LMS church, a short trail leads to a rest *fale* at the edge of the lava field – clamber over the rubble to your heart's content, but watch the kiddies on this deeply cracked

terrain. A short walk north of the LMS church is the **Virgin's Grave**, the subject of a legend stating that a *taupo* (high chief's daughter) who died of tuberculosis was so pure that the lava flowed around her grave, leaving it untouched. Though venerated by some, to others this 2m-deep pit is not much more than an ill-defined strip of lime cement surrounded by colourful plants.

TURTLES

Signposted off the Main North Coast Rd in the village of Satoalepai is a **turtle enclosure** (Satoalepai; admission ST10; 🕒 8am-5pm); look for the sign 'Turtle Swimming'. At the end of a short side-road you'll find a purpose-built lagoon containing over 15 healthy-looking turtles in a clear mixture of fresh- and saltwater. The admission fee allows you to swim with these fascinating creatures. You can also hire snorkels (ST5), and the lagoon is surrounded by several *fale* in which to lounge.

For some issues you might want to consider before visiting this enclosure and similar wildlife-viewing places, see Responsible Choices, opposite.

FAGAMALO & AVAO

The waters off Fagamalo generate some fine **surf** when there's a swell coming from the north, usually between December and April. Scuba divers should check out **Dive Savai'i** (☎ 59622; www.divesavaii.com; Main North Coast Rd, Fagamalo), which conducts four-day PADI open-water courses (ST1000) and organises regional dives (one/two dives ST150/220).

At **Avao**, 3km west of Fagamalo, is the site where early missionaries began translating the Bible into Samoan in 1834, a task that took 11 years. The pulpit of the LMS church is carved from the stump of the tree that shaded the translators as they worked. There's also a monument to them at the site where the tree actually grew.

SAFOTU

The long, strung-out village of Safotu, west of Manase around several rocky headlands, has three large and prominent **churches** in a row. The medieval-looking one is the Sacred Heart Catholic Church – much of its original whiteness has now flaked off. Next door is the LMS church and further along, the Methodist – both new churches replacing older buildings. West of the churches

are a series of **freshwater pools** for bathing or swimming. Some are for men and some for women, so be sure to ask which ones are which.

MOUNT MATAVANU CRATER

Mt Matavanu is the culprit responsible for the volcanic rubble blanketing large swathes of northeastern Savai'i. The mountain's remote **crater** is a spectacular sight, an eerily silent pit cloaked in jungle and overseen by gliding swiftlets. The track leading here presents a great opportunity to experience some of Savai'i's wild interior.

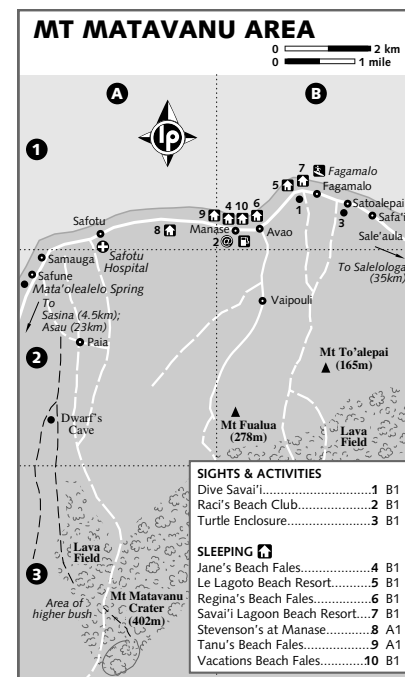
From Safotu take the turn-off to Paia and from there the signposted track to the mountain. Lots of people hike the 8km route from Paia, which leads through lush countryside and up over the ragged old lava flow. You can drive up the mountain in a high-clearance 2WD, but it's steep and rocky and a 4WD is recommended. You'll eventually reach a blue *fale* occupied by 'Da Craterman', a cheerful bush-knife-wielding local who maintains the **crater track** (admission ST15; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) on behalf of Paia. He'll accompany you for

RESPONSIBLE CHOICES

Most of Savai'i's conservation initiatives are genuine efforts to safeguard fragile environments, including the animals that live there, and to empower local people to take responsibility for them. But occasionally ventures are established that look like conservation projects, but are in fact primarily money-raising schemes. It's hard to blame villagers for wanting to make more *tala*, but, in the interests of responsible tourism, travellers at the very least need to be aware of what they're supporting.

The turtle enclosure at Satoalepai (opposite), for instance, is undoubtedly a pleasant and well-maintained spot. But the family running this venture admit it's a business rather than a conservation effort. This, and the fact that the turtles have been removed from their natural environment, is worth remembering when deciding whether or not to visit it. We saw no sign of the animals being manhandled when we visited, but this would also be something to watch out for.

A far less salubrious case in point is the so-called turtle pond in the neighbouring village of Safa'i. It comprises three turtles that are trapped in a murky, wire-enclosed pool and are badly manhandled – when we visited, a boy yanked one of the animals out of the water and waded it upside down to show off its exposed underbelly. In the interests of animal welfare, we urge you not to support it.



the next kilometre to where the climb to the crater begins, at the sign reading 'Lemalola Aimasi Park' (which roughly translates as 'no rest, eat biscuit'). The crater track is lined with handmade signs – you can commission your own for ST35 – which, while raising more money for Paia, are an unfortunate eyesore. Up on the crater rim, a path winds along it to the left; don't get too close to the edge. If Da Craterman isn't at the *fale* when you arrive, just head up the track and you'll doubtless run into him soon.

The main track continues for another 3km from Mt Matavanu to Mt Maugaloa, but at the time of writing this part of the track still required clearing and was not open. Ask Da Craterman for an update.

DWARF'S CAVE

Legend has it that this cave, actually a lava tube, was a hide-out for a tribe of dwarfs with magical abilities. One man who stumbled upon them found that he was able to make food appear by simply wishing for it. When his wife questioned the source of this extraordinary ability, the man revealed the secret of the dwarfs' hide-out and instantly fell dead.

The turn-off to the cave is signposted off the Main North Coast Rd, just west of the Mt Matavanu turn-off. In Paia look for the faded red signpost on the right and wait outside the blue *fale* at this intersection. Someone should appear to guide you to the **Dwarf's Cave** (Paia; guide per group ST20; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Sat). You need a guide as the way to the cave involves several turn-offs (you can drive the 1.5km to the cave entrance) and the trail through the cave splits several times. Everyone should carry their own torch and reliable footwear, as the lava tube is slippery.

Throughout the cave are small pools (basically mixtures of bird droppings and water – not the best for swimming) and some underground waterfalls. Apparently some people have been invited to slide into a waterhole that marks the end of one of the side-trails, but this waterhole is deep and we'd recommend declining such an offer if it's made.

MATA'OLEALELO SPRING

This ample, bubbling **freshwater spring** (Safune; car ST5; ☎ 7am–5pm Mon–Sat) is officially claimed by Safune village, although it lies opposite

the sign for Matavai village. From the road, head across the *kirikiti* pitch to indulge in a refreshing jet-bath type of swim.

PE'APE'A CAVE

It's easy to find **Pe'ape'a Cave** (Map p89; Main North Coast Rd; adult/child ST5/1; ☎ 8am–5pm), which is right beside the road just south of Letui. Fiu Pisimati or a family member will guide you through this short lava tube. The whole excursion takes only 10 minutes, but you'll see white-rumped Polynesian swiftlet nests up close, the birds chittering sharply as they swoop around you in the dark. Bring your own torch.

SLEEPING & EATING

A number of basic beach *fale* have sprung up along the northeast coast in recent years, most charging between ST40 and ST50 per person, including at least two meals. Manase has become crammed with accommodation in recent years and is now a certified resort area. Many travellers get off the 'Upolu ferry and head straight to its shallow, sandy beach. Many Manase accommodation providers will pick up from the ferry in Saleolaga.

Regina's Beach Fales (☎ 596026; Main North Coast Rd, Manase; fale per person ST50) Regina's is overwhelmingly friendly, relaxing and great value for money, as the rate includes three delicious meals served up at a communal dining table. The *fale* have some colourful touches and are right on the beach, removed from the road by a strip of soft lawn. It's at the eastern end of the Manase strip.

Jane's Beach Fales (☎ 54066; Main North Coast Rd, Manase; fale per person ST50) Jane's has become one of the most popular places on the crowded Manase strip. There are lots of *fale* side by side here, each of them enclosed and with a little deck, but somehow Jane's avoids feeling crowded – must be that sporadic Manase Beach. Rates include breakfast and dinner. There's a bar here and canoes can be hired for ST10.

Le Lagoto Beach Resort (☎ 58189; lelagoto@samoa.ws; Main North Coast Rd, Fagalamo; s & d ST250–450, each extra person ST22; ☎) This resort's nice, low-key but expensive bungalows are fanned out along a wonderful little beach. Each can accommodate four people and is well-equipped with its own bathroom, kitchenette and TV. **Le Lagoto Restaurant** (breakfast &

lunch ST15, dinner ST30–40; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) operates within a large *fale* and serves pastas, curries and fried meats, as well as a half-dozen vegetarian choices. Appended to it is a small bar fronting a calm, gorgeous cove.

Vacations Beach Fales (☎ 54024; www.pacific-resorts.com/samoa/vacations-resort; Main North Coast Rd, Manase; fale per person ST70) Vacations is pricey when compared to some of its neighbours, although you may decide this is justified by its long, comfortable *fale*, equipped with thick mattresses. Another temptation is the airy Jetty Bar, which has a beachfront deck and is the best place in the area for a drink.

Savai'i Lagoon Beach Resort (☎ 54168; savaiilagoon@samoa.ws; Main North Coast Rd, Fagalamo; s & d ST260, each extra person ST30; ☎) Next door to Le Lagoto is this friendly accommodation, with a half-dozen modern units painted a startling white inside and positioned to take advantage of any sea breeze. Rooms get lots of light and have good facilities, though they lack any real beachy character.

Tanu's Beach Fales (☎ /fax 54050; Main North Coast Rd, Manase; fale per person ST50) Tanu's has long dominated Manase's accommodation scene. It resembles a small village of *fale*, some spread along the beach and others arranged closer to the road. In the midst of this is a communal dining *fale* and a shop selling basic supplies. Tanu's has, however, grown so big that it lacks intimacy and seems increasingly impersonal. Rates include breakfast and dinner.

Stevenson's at Manase (☎ 58219; fax 24166; Main North Coast Rd, Manase; hotel d ST50, villa d ST250; ☎) The hotel rooms at Stevenson's are very cheap (they were being renovated when we visited and prices may rise) and the beachfront villas are spacious and attractive, but overall the place looks ragged and has a slightly barren atmosphere. It's an option if elsewhere in Manase is booked up, but check it out first.

NORTHWESTERN SAVAI'I

Western Savai'i ends at the remote Falealupo Peninsula, a snout-shaped piece of land where travellers can wobble across a rainforest swing bridge, acquaint themselves with some of Samoa's ancient le-

gends and (technically) look into the future. Meanwhile, committed hikers can trek from A'opo up into the island's wild heart.

A'OPO CONSERVATION AREA & MOUNT SILISILI

It's possible to climb **Mount Silisili** (1866m), the Samoas' highest point, and at the same time experience the splendid natural confines of the **A'opo Conservation Area**. The peak itself is nondescript – really little more than a volcanic knob, much like scores of other little cinder cones in the area – but the two-day return trip takes you through some stunning and rarely visited rainforest. The lower part of the track is a plantation road; sections of the upper part are still covered by deadfall from the cyclones of the early '90s, which makes for slow going. Mt Silisili is part of the high Tuasivi Ridge, which affords great views from the road either side of A'opo.

Those interested in climbing Mt Silisili should speak to the *pulenu'u* (mayor) of A'opo (ask in the town's small shop for directions), who can arrange a guide for the trek. The charge is ST40 per person per day. You'll need to carry food and water for two (possibly three) days and provide supplies for the guide. It can be quite cold on the mountain at night, so also bring warm clothing, a sleeping bag and a tent. Sturdy walking boots are essential.

FALEALUPO PENINSULA

The wild and beautiful Falealupo Peninsula is where you'll find rock pools, caves, ancient star mounds and spectacular sunsets. **Cape Mulinu'u** is the most westerly land point on earth – the only place where you can see tomorrow. Take great care swimming around Cape Mulinu'u, though, or you could end up in the Solomons.

There's a good swimming beach at **Papa** on the northeastern side of the peninsula. Ask a local which track you should take off the main road to get here. Beach fees on the peninsula are usually ST5/2 per car/individual.

Falealupo Rainforest Preserve

Considered sacred by the villagers of Falealupo, this 1200-hectare area of lowland rainforest on the northern side of the peninsula became the first customary-owned conservation area in Samoa in 1989. This

GATEWAY TO THE UNDERWORLD

The Falealupo Peninsula figures prominently in local legend. The natural beauty of the area belies the dark significance it holds for Samoans, who believe that the gateway to the underworld of the *aitu* (spirits) is found here: the place where the sun sets in the sea. According to tradition, there are two entrances to the underworld, one for chiefs and another for commoners. One entrance is through a cave near Cape Mulinu'u and the other is on the trail made by the setting sun over the sea. During the night, these spirits wander abroad, but at daybreak they must return to their hellish home or suffer the unpleasant consequences of being caught out by daylight.

was achieved thanks to the assistance of Dr Paul Alan Cox, an American ethnobotanist and founder of the conservation foundation Seacology. Dr Cox was working with indigenous healers in Falealupo when he discovered that the *matai* (chief) of the area had reluctantly signed a contract with a Japanese logging firm in order to pay for the construction of a primary school in the village.

After watching the whole village weeping over the loss of their rainforest, Dr Cox decided to personally guarantee the money for the school. On learning of this, Chief Fuiono Senio ran 9km through the forest to stop the bulldozers toppling another tree. Unfortunately, the reserve suffered serious damage during the cyclones of the early '90s (60% of the trees were destroyed, and bird and bat numbers dropped significantly), but it is slowly and surely recovering.

Canopy Walkway

The prime attraction on Falealupo Peninsula, besides its natural beauty, is the **Canopy Walkway** (Falealupo Rd; admission ST20; ☎ 7am-6pm), which allows you to scale a stately 225-year-old banyan tree, and even sleep up there, too. Technically it's not really a 'canopy walkway' as there's no canopy as such, but still, it's an impressive engineering feat and well worth visiting.

The walkway consists of a 24m-long swing bridge hoisted 9m above the rainforest floor (it has a mean sway to it), and a 20m stair-

way that ends in the uppermost reaches of the banyan tree. The tree house at the end of the climb is really just a platform (no roof), but the view is spectacular and it can be a magical place to spend the night; for more info, see opposite.

The fee for admission, which also covers entry to the Rock House and Moso's Footprint (keep the receipt as proof), is payable at the *fale*-kiosk off Falealupo Rd, beside the primary school.

Moso's Footprint

The ancient 1m by 3m rock enclosure called **Moso's Footprint** (Falealupo Rd; admission incl in Canopy Walkway ticket; ☎ 7am-6pm) is easy to miss – look for the red signpost beside a large white church. Legend has it that the giant Moso made the footprint – which is garlanded by seashells and reveals that Moso had one hell of a big toe – when he stepped from Fiji to Samoa. There is said to be another 'footprint' on the Fijian island of Viti Levu that marks his point of departure.

The scientific explanation is a bit more complicated. When lava cools and contracts, it breaks into blocks. These blocks are often lifted and moved by tree roots growing down into the joints. Once they're on the surface, a cyclone could easily clear them away, leaving various indentations in the crust.

Falealupo Ruins & Rock House

Cyclones Ofa and Val struck the peninsula in 1990 and 1991, completely destroying the village of Falealupo, which villagers have rebuilt slightly inland and renamed Falealupouta; the original village is now known as Falealupo-tai. The ruins of the old **Catholic church** (Falealupo Rd) are eerie, particularly when you stand amongst them, look out at the ocean and imagine the winds and waves that shattered the stonework.

About 300m southwest of the church are the two closely associated lava tubes known as the **Rock House** (Falealupo Rd; admission incl in Canopy Walkway ticket; ☎ 7am-6pm). Inside is a crude stone armchair and stone benches around the sides. Legend has it that the Rock House is the result of a competition between the men and the women of Falealupo to find out which sex was more adept at house building. At the end of the first day of construction, the men were winning so the women decided to stay up and work through the night while the

men were asleep. The women won, of course, and the men were so angry about it that they never finished their house, leaving the obvious hole in the ceiling.

Fafa O Sauai'i

At Cape Mulinu'u you'll find **Fafa O Sauai'i** (Falealupo Rd; car ST10; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat). A guided tour takes you a few minutes inland to see the small, watery Vaatausili Cave and a mossy, near-empty pool mysteriously called Blood Well, before doubling back to the real attraction – a chance to scamper over large blocks of lava and stand on the tip of Cape Mulinu'u, the westernmost point of land in the world. A big white 'X' has been painted there for your convenience. While you're out here, take a swim in the lovely ocean pool created by the lava outflow.

The admission price isn't really worth it if you've driven here on your own, but is arguably reasonable for a group.

WEST-COAST BEACHES

There are pleasant beaches at **Fai'a'ai**, about 16km southeast of the Falealupo Peninsula, and nearby at **Foailalo** and **Satuiatua**. The custom fee for day use of any of these beaches is usually ST5/2 per car/person.

Satuiatua has an excellent left-hand surf break. Surfers pay a ST10 levy, which is used to support the local school. Unfortunately we found a disturbing amount of broken glass in the sand at the northern end of the beach.

SLEEPING & EATING

Vaisala Beach Hotel (☎ 58016; fax 58017; off Main North Coast Rd, Vaisala; s/d/tr/q/ff from ST90/105/115/125/140; ☎) Except for one budget room (single/double ST60/70), all rooms here face the ocean beyond an attractive little beach. The serene vistas from the first-floor balconies are highly recommended. The hotel restaurant (lunch ST6-15, dinner ST38; ☎ lunch & dinner) resembles a large dining hall and has a great outdoor deck. It does good set-menu dinners and guests are occasionally serenaded by local musicians, one of whom is a whiz on the 'Samoan cello' (a unique arrangement of overturned bucket, stick and twine). Breakfast is included in the price.

Banyan tree (per person ST50) The Canopy Walkway (opposite) in the Falealupo Rainforest Preserve offers accommodation in the

top of a banyan tree. The tree house sleeps up to six people and mattresses and mosquito nets should be provided, as should shelter in bad weather (there's no roof). Breakfast and dinner are included in the price and are served down below, so banish any hopes of tree-top room service. And keep your liquid intake low, as it's a long climb down to the toilet. There's no telephone number for bookings but it's highly unlikely the tree house will be booked up.

Satuiatua Beach Fales (☎ /fax 56026; Main South Coast Rd, Satuiatua; fale per person ST65) The beach here is good for snorkelling and surfing, and breakfast and dinner are part of the package. But this doesn't really justify the unusually high accommodation rate. *Fale* sleep two to eight people and some sport mattresses on a futon-style arrangement. The restaurant (lunch ST6-12, dinner ST25; ☎ lunch & dinner) is set up on a spacious outdoor deck and does good dinners, from chicken schnitzel to meat balls and fish curry.

There are several groupings of basic fale off the sandy track that runs around Falealupo Peninsula between Tufutafoe and Falealupo-tai. Most charge ST40 to ST50 per person for accommodation, breakfast and dinner. A few years back this area was subject to regular thefts and travellers have since tended to stay away. We couldn't confirm if these problems are ongoing or not. Talk to other travellers and to the Samoa Hotels Association in Apia (see p64) before sleeping beside the fabulously wild ocean here.

SOUTHERN SAVAI'I

Hidden off plantation tracks between the southern slopes of Tuasivi Ridge and Savai'i's southern coastline you'll find the ancient Polynesian marvel known as Pulemelei Mound and, nearby, Afu Au Falls, one of the loveliest waterfall and swimming hole combinations you could hope for. As if to make up for the absolute serenity of these two sites, the south coast also yields the mighty gushing antics of the Alofaaga Blowholes.

AFU AAU FALLS

On the Letolo Plantation, once the biggest plantation on the island, is the utterly beautiful **Afu Au Falls** (off Main South Coast Rd; person/car

ST2/10; ☞ 7am-5pm), one of the highlights of a visit to Savai'i. Also known as Olemoe Falls, this jungle waterfall plunges into the crystalline waters of a 3m-deep pool, which is marvellous for cooling off on a hot day. The waterfall is on the Falealila Stream, a small watercourse that frequently dries up. An underground spring feeds the pool, however, so the water level remains constant.

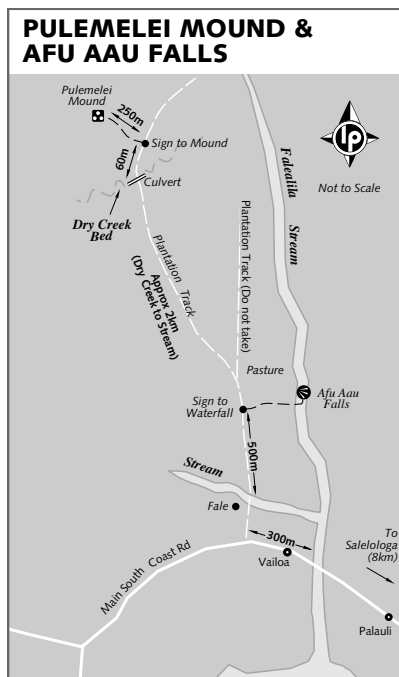
The plantation track to the falls leads off the main road about 300m west of the iron-girder bridge at the western edge of Vailoa village. The turn-off is marked by two tall iron poles and the track itself is bordered by low stone walls. Several hundred metres along the track is a *fale* where you pay admission to the falls; the fee also covers entry to Pulemelei Mound, accessed off the same track. From the *fale* you cross a rocky stream (which may not be passable after heavy rain) then continue for 500m to the waterfall sign. Leave your car here if you've driven and follow the side-trail across a small valley, usually occupied by grazing horses. After scaling the hill at the eastern end, you look down on an idyllic little chasm with the waterfall at one end. The path down to the waterhole is steep and slippery, with a makeshift ladder near the bottom.

You can normally negotiate the bumpy plantation track in a high-clearance 2WD, except after heavy rain when it becomes muddy.

PULEMELEI MOUND

Polynesia's largest ancient structure is **Pulemelei Mound** (off Main South Coast Rd; ☞ 7am-5pm), which is also known as Tia Seu Ancient Mound. It's on the Letolo Plantation, not far from Afu Aau Falls; the entry fee for the falls also covers admission to the mound. This large pyramid, measuring 61m by 50m at its base and rising in two tiers to a height of more than 12m, is almost squarely oriented with the compass directions. It's a wonderfully enigmatic place – standing on top of it, you can see south all the way to the ocean in one direction, while in the opposite direction trees are wrapped in enormous vines and other jungle foliage. On sunny days, butterflies of all colours swarm across the mound.

Samoan oral traditions imply that all ancient Polynesian monuments, such as



Pulemelei, were used for pigeon snaring. However, given its similarity to religious structures in Central America and mid-western USA, archaeologists have difficulty believing this. The complexity of its design and the effort expended in its construction leads them to believe that it may have had a religious purpose, perhaps even a strategic one considering the sightline to the coast.

Follow the directions given in the Afu Aau Falls section to reach the waterfall sign. Continue past the sign and follow the main track as it veers to the left (ignore the track that continues straight ahead). You'll soon reach the short signposted walking trail which leads to the mound. You can drive all the way to the start of this trail, but the walk through the lush heartland of Letolo Plantation is well worth it.

ALOFAAGA BLOWHOLES

The impressive **Alofaaga Blowholes** (Taga; adult/child ST5/2.50; ☞ 7am-6pm) are best seen at high tide, preferably when a storm is whipping up the ocean and white foam is soaring up over the black rocks along this stretch of

coast. Pay the entry fee at the first *fale* and park your car at the second *fale*, near the main blowhole; if you drive into the accommodation compound you'll be charged ST5 to park there. Locals often demonstrate the power of the waves by tossing a coconut into the blowhole at just the right moment to send it flying up to 60m into the air. A word of warning – don't get too close to the edge of the blowhole or lava coast. Huge freak waves can appear from nowhere to wash you off your feet.

Keen walkers can follow an old track around the coast to the now deserted village of **Fagaloa** (three to four hours return).

SLEEPING & EATING

Alofaaga Beach Fales (☎ 594406; Taga; fale per person ST60) Located just opposite Alofaaga's main blowhole are five newish *fale*. The noise of surf hitting this rocky coastline may not suit light sleepers. The phone number belongs to the 3-Corner Store in Taga; ask for Juna. Price includes breakfast and dinner.

Meaole Beach Fales (Taga; fale per person ST70) These *fale* lie to the east of the Alofaaga Blowholes in a distinctive tropical setting, planted on black volcanic sand on the edge of a rough and rocky beach. Makeshift benches are arranged under leaning coconut palms. The price is high but includes all meals.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'