

# American Samoa? Go!

Once you get past the main harbor's stench and garbage, this U.S. territory in the South Pacific Ocean delivers all the conveniences of home, along with a wealth of natural beauty.

There's something very special about American Samoa, and if you can stay in the anchorage just long enough to get past first impressions, you may find it surprisingly intoxicating. Like some American cruisers who are seduced by its convenience and distinctive charm, you may very well decide to stay for years.

If you arrive expecting an idyllic tropical setting, you haven't done your homework. You'll be hugely disappointed, as a sublime anchorage this is not. The capital city and commercial harbor of Pago Pago (pronounced pangopango) on the island of Tutuila not only boasts the highest annual rainfall of any harbor in the world — a staggering 20 feet — it's also a busy fishing port and home to a StarKist tuna cannery that operates around the clock and regularly belches out a pungent odor that smells distinctly of rotten cabbages.

The fresh trade winds that funnel from open ocean into the harbor quickly become contaminated with this stench, carrying it downwind all the way to the yacht anchorage, which lies at the very dregs of the harbor.

When it rains, which is often, runoff from the towering cliffs that surround Pago Pago quickly drains sediment, countless McDonald's cups and plastic soda bottles into the harbor, turning it into a giant, litter-strewn, muddy kava bowl. My wife, Catherine, and I

had been anchored here for two weeks on *Dream Time*, our 1981 Cabo Rico, and not once dared to swim or run our watermaker.

And in an effort to assault all your senses, the relentless drone of a generator plant, ideally located on the very edge of the harbor next to the StarKist cannery, mingles with the stench of rotten cabbages and is wafted directly to your boat.

It is a noise that when it enters your consciousness becomes almost impossible to ignore. No, Pago Pago is most definitely not a tranquil anchorage. Yet despite all these rather unsavory distractions, we learned to love it here.

The island has a sweaty tropical appeal dripping with exotic charm, a relaxed local vibe, and a primeval beauty that is best appreciated while touring on a public bus. These boast colorful paint jobs, custom graphics and names like "Happy Valley," "Titanic Hero," "Samoan Warrior" and "Sunset Express." They're oddly out of scale and proportion, especially when you consider the substantial size of the average Samoan riding on them.

They trundle around the island for the bargain price of just \$1 to \$2 a ride, blasting rap, Polynesian, country or classic rock music so loud it literally makes the plexiglas windows vibrate. Drivers are wedged into holes cut out of plywood floors that would make a



*The inexpensive public buses on the island of Tutuila, in American Samoa, are colorful showcases of daily life and carry names like "Samoan Warrior" and "Titanic Hero."*



*Dream Time, the author's Cabo Rico, is nestled in the harbor along with other boats, not far from the StarKist tuna cannery.*

## WAYPOINTS

quick emergency exit impossible, and with pimped-out interiors adorned with dangling trinkets, tassels, fake fur or feathers, dozens of tiny mirrors, air fresheners and dashboard shrines dedicated to everyone from Bob Marley to Mother Teresa, well, it's amazing they can even see out the window.

When you board you're greeted with "talofa!" (Samoan for "hello") by big, round, strong, smiling Samoan faces that seem genuinely happy to see you, and as you rattle along the coastal road, with the glittering South Pacific Ocean on one side and the lush, steaming tropical rain forest on the other, you

find yourself smiling too, for no particular reason other than you just feel happy to be here.

We've toured the entire island, exploring deserted surf-beaten, wind-ravaged coastlines from the land of the lost, where black basalt spires capped with lush vegetation rise impressively from turquoise lagoons that lap quiet, undisturbed sandy shores.

We've driven over the island's bony volcanic ridge to watch giant flying foxes (fruit bats) glide majestically on thermals like frigatebirds, and we've relaxed with locals in traditional fale, open-sided thatched huts, in secluded Samoan villages that seem all but forgotten by the modern world.

There's virtually no tourism here, and in addition to the rugged, unspoiled beauty of this southernmost U.S. territory, what makes American Samoa so enticing is that a proud and traditional Samoan culture works in conjunction with Uncle Sam to provide and support a range of services, supplies and conveniences that, for cruisers, are among the best in the South Pacific.

Food can be purchased at Cost U Less, a warehouse-size wholesale store packed to the girders with savory treats. Sacks of cornflakes, tubs of peanut butter and slabs of steak are available at prices that, when compared to French Polynesia for example, are impossible to resist. An Ace Hardware stocks all manner of tools, fasteners and fittings, and if they don't have what you need, you can ship packages from North America to the Pago Pago post office (ZIP code 96799) at rates so low it's no wonder the U.S. Postal Service is losing money.

Within just two weeks of arriving we collected a new Tides Marine mainsail track, six-gallon water heater, wind generator, cockpit cushions and an assortment of boat treasures, gear that in many South Pacific countries would either not be available, or would simply cost too much, or take too long, to ship.

For convenience, potable water is available behind the gas station adjacent to the anchorage, which also pumps gasoline and diesel for less than what it costs in the States. Laundromats in every village boast



Larry Rouen's Dawn 41 NEPENTHE's last suit of Tape-Drive sails served him well for 11 years.

## SHAPE THAT'S BUILT TO LAST

### SPECTRA TAPE-DRIVE® CRUISING SAILS

If you're considering trying to get another season out of your old, blown-out sails that have lost their shape, here's three things that you should know:

1. Blown-out sails will cause the boat to heel more, making many cruising situations less comfortable and less fun,
2. Worn sails are slower, so it takes you longer to reach your next destination and you can't cruise as far, and
3. Sails that have lost their shape won't let you point as high, making sailing to windward a more difficult, slower process.

UK Sailmaker's Spectra Tape-Drive sails have a life expectancy close to Dacron®, but unlike Dacron they hold their shape. They are light weight, easy to trim, and soft to the touch. Perfect for years of cruising in comfort.

**UK Sailmakers:**  
*Buy with confidence*  
*Cruise with confidence*



Scan to learn more about Spectra Tape-Drive sails.



**UKSailmakers.com**  
**1-800-253-2002**

Well established international reputation for award winning, handcrafted, custom built multihulls over the last 27 years.



Building Chris White designed Atlantic 57' & the all new Atlantic 47' MastFoil™ high performance cruising cats, twelve already delivered.



## ALWOPLAST S.A.

Valdivia - Chile - Camino a Niebla Km 8,5  
ph: +56-63-2203200 - rpp@alwoplast.cl - www.alwoplast.com

## WAYPOINTS

rows of gleaming washers and dryers that operate for just \$1.25 a load (a tenth of the price in Tahiti). There's free Wi-Fi in the McDonald's by the dinghy dock, and if you want it on the boat it's just \$25 a week for unlimited use, or \$50 a month, the best rates we've found in seven years of cruising.

Health and dental care in American Samoa are excellent, and inexpensive too. A visit to the dentist for cavity work will cost you just \$20, and a full cleaning a mere \$30.

The currency is the U.S. dollar, of course, and a \$5 phone card will have you talking to friends and family back home for almost an hour.

Paths that wind over the mountain ridges and through dense tropical jungles, that would be nothing more than narrow goat trails on other South Pacific islands, are groomed, marked and regularly maintained by enthusiastic National Park rangers. Even here in the tropics they wear the logo of an Indian spearhead containing a bison roaming the plains of the snow-capped Rocky Mountains. Friendly Samoan coast guard, police and border patrol officials — yes, I said friendly — keep the streets and coastline safe, and at least once a day the familiar and nostalgic wailing of American emergency sirens echoes around Pago Pago Harbor, making it sound, if only for a moment, like we're back home in New York.

But when the sirens faded in the early evening, they're replaced with the whistles and chirps of thousands of excited nesting tropical birds.

Fruit bats circle your mast in a gentle, fading light that seems to transform the jungle canopy into a soft blanket of velvet.

And then a warm waft of rotten cabbages drifts over your boat along with the droning of a distant diesel generator, reminding you exactly where you are, and it is unmistakably American Samoa. There is nowhere else quite like it.

*Read more about the cruising experiences of Neville and Catherine Hockley at their website, [zeroXTE.com](http://zeroXTE.com).*

inreachdelorme.com



## THE WORST PLACE TO BE ON A BOAT IS STRANDED.

The world's first satellite communicator with built-in navigation.



- ✦ Send and receive text messages
- ✦ Trigger an interactive SOS
- ✦ Navigate and create waypoints
- ✦ Plan, track, and share your journey
- ✦ 100% global satellite coverage from Iridium
- ✦ Contract-free and annual plan options