

## I. Economic Impact of tourism

The importance of tourism vs. other economic sectors is virtually seen as an untapped financial resource compared with other economic sectors. American Samoa's tuna industry remains dominant with the corporate giant tuna factories exporting on average US\$360 million worth of tuna during 1998-1999. The import garment factories on average have reported to export US\$14 million from 1996-1999. Together the tuna canneries and the garment factory provided over 3,500 jobs at minimum wage from about US\$3.00 per hour.

Within our Tourism Industry over 500 are employed with the three airlines, hotels and motels, car rentals, tour and travel operators, restaurants, special tour operators, and travel agents. Hawaiian Airlines our national carrier has two flights a week to Honolulu and gateway to national and international destinations. Polynesian Airlines provides an international link to Samoa and the Pacific Region. Our local airline Samoa Air offers two daily flights to the islands of Manu'a besides daily service to Samoa, and a weekly flight to the Kingdom of Tonga. Minimum wage jobs in this sector vary from US\$2.50 hourly.

Total foreign arrival figures have continued to increase steadily with 7,000 tourists in 1999, an increase of about 1,200 more than 1998. The United States continues to be our principal tourism market indicating 59% of all tourist arrivals. The New Zealand and Australia tourist market follow with 36% and the European visitors make up about 5% of the total tourist arrivals.

Our Cruise Ship Season brings in the bulk of tourists that are actually not counted as tourists but transits. In 1999, over 10,000 passengers were documented with about the same number of crew during the October-April season.

Table 14.4 Export of Commodity By Value FY 1996-1999

Commodity	1999	1998	1997	1996
Total	345,113,537	414,780,172	424,281,172	312,783,720
Finished Garments	4,598,766	15,445,709	26,253,367	11,290,434
Canned Tuna	334,219,881	390,759,653	389,425,477	295,222,835
Pet Food	4,188,522	7,897,765	6,951,274	5,115,711

Source: Department of Treasury, Customs and Excise Tax Division

Each cruise ship season boosts our economy as cruise ship passengers spend money on tours, souvenirs, rental cars, etc., This is our priority market as our visitors arrive for the day to spend their money before departing that evening on their luxury cruise ship. We anticipate cruise ship passengers spending between US\$50.00-and more leaving behind at least an unreported three quarters of a million dollars.

Table 7:2 Visitor Arrivals by Purpose of Travel: 1996-1999

PURPOSE	1999	1998	1997	1996
Total	49,060	41,050	29,997	41,201
Business	7,073	7,149	6,835	5,484
Tourist	6,863	5,680	4,514	6,475
Employment	7,773	5,378	4,368	6,199

Source: Department of Legal Affairs: Immigration Division

## 2. Current State of ecotourism and potential of further expansion.

(a) The definition of eco-tourism we have adopted stems from a 1994 Eco-tourism Business Planning Guide developed by the Pacific Business Center at the University of Hawaii.

*“A concept that describes a form of development that respects tradition and culture, protects and preserves the environment, and educates and welcomes visitors.” In addition, ecotourism should be economically sustainable over the long term. We perceive this to define ecotourism nationally as well as locally.*

(b) Our principal eco-tourism product is the American Samoa National Park, established in 1988 by the United States Congress. However, it wasn't until a few years later that the lease agreements were signed by all the village councils involved that the National Park became a reality, and part of the United States National Park System. The 6,000 or more acres of the National Park stretch over the islands of Tutuila and Manu'a and include the beaches of Ta'u and Ofu Islands. The National Park offers homestay programs with the villages providing a typical Samoan village experience, with hiking, diving and traditional fishing as options during their stay. Educational and recreational ecotours include observing marine and wildlife, traditional and medicinal plants, and archaeological and historical sites on Tutuila and Manu'a Islands.

(c) Principal threats to the sustainability of ecotourism products is mass tourism. The fragile environment of the National Park is closely watched by staff to ensure that the National Park remain intact and not destroyed by tourists. The National Park staff also educates villagers to utilize the park site area for low impact tourism development. Homestay programs are initiated vs hotel development, coordinated tours by villagers vs organized group tours, educational ecotours of park sites vs shopping tours, etc. Other principal threats include the effects of population pressure on our natural resources. Ancient forest areas have given way to business developments and our international airport. Reef blasting has caused significant damage to our marine resources and legislation has been passed to deter local fisherman from this destructive fishing practice. Our mangroves and wetlands are also protected by law but the sensitive land issue of communal land vs government regulation are challenged in court and tied up in litigation as families continue to reclaim their wetland areas to build homes and businesses.

(d) The challenges and opportunities for the expansion of ecotourism. Initially some of the challenges we face in expanding our ecotourism products is the probability of island wide environmental degradation. The opportunities for expansion of our territory's ecotourism program will depend on conserving our natural environment and the development of a comprehensive ecotourism management plan. We can learn from the development of the American Samoa National Park and its general management plan. The community, village councils, local government officials and federal U.S. officials had conducted meetings and hearings on the proposed park villages, for over two years before the U. S. Congress established the National Park in 1988. During that time federal environmental assessments and comprehensive research projects studied and catalogued natural resources, marine and wildlife, archaeological and historical sites, the history of the Samoan people, it's culture, and the communal land system. As the foremost land lease park in the National Park system, the lease agreement is renewed every few years with all the village councils of the National Park. It has proved so successful for the villagers that legislation to include more acreage on the Manu'a Islands is now being drafted by our Congressman Eni Hunkin.

Perhaps our primary challenge we all must cope with is the fact that acts of terrorism can happen at any moment and at any tourist destination. The concern of safety and security and public health issues such as HIV Aids, chemical and biological germ warfare has risen as a major problem to the overall growth of the travel and tourism industry.

### **3. Role of the Government, policies and initiatives.**

The role of government policy will be to promote ecotourism as a priority blueprint of tourism development. The priority issue in developing tourism for American Samoa has always been what the impact would be on the Samoan culture, traditions, environment, and people. Former Governor Lutali was presented an international environmental award from Brigham Young University for introducing and passing legislation that would protect our fruit bats from extinction.

It was also under Governor Lutali's administration that the National Park was initiated and developed. Today, local and federal laws prohibit construction on archaeological sites discovered during the construction phase. However, enforcing the law is another matter, especially if the archaeological site is found on the builder's own property. The American Samoa National Park has set precedence for our island territory in environmental management and planned tourism development. Sustainable development of tourism has a direct impact on the quality of life, and the economy. The creation of the American Samoa National Park has united the community and village councils with local and federal government officials, in an alliance towards quality tourism development.

Thus, as partners we share a common agenda to protect our cultural and natural resources and uphold our Polynesian lifestyle.

Most recently conservation zones have been drawn to outline ecotourism development, in coastal and wetland areas, and within historical and archaeological sites. The District of Fagatogo has been officially designated the Historic Village of Fagatogo, citing the 1900 signing of the Deed of Cession by United States officials and Chiefs of Tutuila Island. United States Historic sites on Tutuila have been documented in a Fagatogo Walking Tour booklet now available to visitors.

*The Historic Preservation Office* developed and published the booklet and responsible for preserving American Samoa's historic and archaeological sites, and is organized as part of the *Governor's Office*. The Historic Preservation Office also welcomes visitors and encourages tourists to contact their office for tours of historic and archaeological sites. The HPO has also conducted workshops for tour, bus and taxi operators to promote this cultural tour to potential visitors.

*The Marine and Wildlife Resources Department* has also played a major role in conserving our marine and animal wildlife. The government agency co-sponsored legislation to stop reef blasting, hunting of our Samoan fruit bats, and exporting of tropical fish and shells.

The establishment of the *U.S. Coral Reef Initiative* empowers government officials and *Coastal Zone Management Programs* to study the global effects of our fragile coral reef areas. Governor Tauese Sunia is a member of the Coral Reef Initiative and is steadfast in his support to safeguard our coral reefs from destruction and environmental degradation.

*The National Marine Sanctuary* is a marine reserve area that is closely monitored by visiting scientists and local staff. Organized tours are only available to the site by designated employees. Accessibility to the site is difficult and permission from the surrounding communal families and chief is necessary before visitors are able to access the marine sanctuary site. As a United States Territory we are also required to enforce federal regulations in the hunting or selling of classified endangered species.

The formulation of sustainable ecotourism strategies and policies need to be coordinated in a management plan. Although independent government agencies have successfully implemented conservation measures to protect our natural environment and traditional way of life, we must work together in planning for our youth and future generations. In this light an interagency environmental organization *Le Tausagi*, was formed to promote education awareness in protecting our island environment. Some of their successful programs include a summer discovery camp for youth, get hooked on fishing not drugs campaign, and community recycled art competition.

The American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency is also at the forefront in assisting the Office of Tourism in the Keep Samoa Litter Free program. A beautification competition has been very successful in motivating villagers to keep our island clean, more so that we have expanded the duration of the beautification village contests. The Tourism Office was instrumental in establishing the interagency Anti-Litter Task Force and legislation to increase littering fines. Other contests have been popular in promoting ecotourism, such as our traditional village signage project, recycling aluminum can contests, and annual Moso'oi Festival featuring Samoan sports, and cultural and traditional performing arts.

#### **4. Recommendations for the development of ecotourism.**

Since the catastrophic tragedy of September 11 , 2001 safety and security is a critical issue and one of the greatest challenges in the development and sustainability of ecotourism. Thus, within our ecotourism management plan, we must incorporate a damage and crisis contingency plan to protect our community as well as visitors. In addition to the HIV Aids crisis, a new Public Health issue has risen in the form of chemical and biological warfare. Our government has established an emergency preparedness task force, coordinating agencies to work together on a strategic plan of action. Nationally, a Homeland National Force that includes the National Guard, Coast Guard, and Military Reservists are on full alert for any sign of potential terrorist activity. The Ecotourism 2002 Year is on the Pacific Horizon and will demand revolutionary change. Thank-you for this opportunity to share our thoughts with you and discuss ecotourism development strategies and opportunities as a prelude to the Ecotourism 2002 Year.

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