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SAMOA – NATURE and WILDLIFE

The combination of tropical climate and fertile soil make Samoa the perfect breeding ground for rainforests and other lush landscapes (mangrove and wetland areas), alive with native wildlife, like skinks, flying foxes, geckos, many types of birds as well as unique flora.

Knowing how vital these vulnerable rainforests are to life in this part of the world, the government, environmental groups and many villages are putting in a lot of effort to protect them.

One of the best remaining rainforests is **O Le Pupu-Pue National Park** on Upolu, which runs from the southern coast up into the mountainous interior of the island. If you love exploring nature by foot and are a bird lover to boot, then you'll fall in love this place – there are walking tracks galore and a whopping 42 different bird species to discover.

Another bird lover's paradise is the **Tafua Peninsula Rainforest Preserve** in the southeast. If you're lucky, you might even spot the rare Samoan tooth-billed pigeon here – plus there's a lovely walk up to the volcanic crater, which rises above Tafua village.

One very special rainforest on Savai'i is the low-lying tropical **Falealupo Rainforest Reserve** in the northwest of the island. This serene piece of paradise truly reminds you of what Adam and Eve must have lived like. The highlight of the preserve is a **treetop canopy walkway** built about 40 metres above the ground amidst the many arms of a giant Banyan tree or two. The elevated walkway is worth crossing for the sense of how old the trees are, and for the slightly cooler air so far above the ground! You will be asked to pay a small entrance fee to the local elders, and it pays to keep in mind that this money helps the local people preserve the rainforest rather than open it up for logging.

Tafua Crater is located within the Tafua Peninsula Reserve, not far from Salelologa. The forest is ideal for bird watching with great potential to sight flying foxes and the tooth-billed pigeon. The activity of the birds is a pleasant experience to watch and the continuous chirping of the birds echoing in the surrounding atmosphere gives a different feel to the place.

Natural history tours which are provided by Safua Tours usually take visitors to the top of the crater which provides magnificent views of neighbouring coastal villages. Visitors are recommended to bring good shoes, a camera and binoculars.

FUIPISIA FALLS

Situated off the pass road in the village of Lotofaga is Fuipisia Falls, a spectacular 55m high jungle waterfall. An excellent place for bird watching and relaxing on the cliff tops. Open daily.

LAKE LANOTO'O

Lake Lanoto'o (part of the Lake Lanoto'o National Park) is Samoa's own internationally recognized Ramsar wetland. A beautiful volcanic crater lake positioned in Upolu's uplands amongst tropical rainforest offers stunning views and great bird watching. Look for the goldfish that live in the lake. A rough 4wd access road leads to the beginning of the 2hr return hike.

SWIMMING WITH TURTLES

Swimming with turtles is located in the village of Sato'alepai. It is one of the most common sites visited by tourists in Savaii. Swimming with turtles is a family project that has developed over the years and still is well kept and maintained. There are also budget units with shared facilities on site and is available for \$60.00 per head including breakfast and dinner. Most of the accommodation properties in Savaii use this site as part of their island tour package. Visitors can swim with the turtles and pond is not deep. Children are to be supervised by parents/ guardians when swimming.

NAMU'A ISLAND

Namu'a Island is one of four small picturesque islands situated off the south eastern tip of Upolu. A 10min boat ride from the mainland, it's a great place to go swimming with the turtles in their natural habitat. Overnight stays in the beach fales can be booked directly via www.samoa.travel.

-ENDS-

For more information please contact:

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Notes to editors:**Samoa: The Treasured Islands of the South Pacific**

The islands of Samoa - The Treasured Islands of the South Pacific - are the true heart of Polynesia. Ten islands of stunning wild beauty, Samoa - or Independent Samoa as it is now known so as to avoid confusion with American Samoa, is paradise waiting to be explored. From powder soft beaches, to warm tropical seas, colourful coral reefs alive with marine life. The rugged, lush interiors reveal endless wildlife, waterfalls and hiking trails.

Images available upon request.