

## Subject/ Area: American Samoa

We just spent the cyclone season in the Samoa islands, and we can attest to the fact that Pago Pago bay is a good hurricane hole, having survived a brush with Cyclone Heta without damage, (up to 70 kt gusts). The other yachts did well too, with only 1 unattended boat going ashore but not sustaining any major damage. There were never any big waves, and the surrounding tall ridges helped break the major brunt of the wind. We were lucky to be nearly 100 mi from the center of this Class 5 cyclone, and that it passed over very quickly.

American Samoa – Tutuila Island, Harbor: Pago Pago (pronounced Pongo Pongo):

Wanting to meet a good cruising friend (Scott on 'Shadowfax') who was leaving the island of Tutuila after more than 7 years (some like the place!), we arrived in Pago Pago just before Halloween '03. Had a nice, but brief reunion with Scott, who was a major player in inspiring us to take up the cruising lifestyle. It was the first time we'd seen him since he'd taken us day-sailing in Bora Bora , 13 long years ago. He blessed us with his old mooring, and we settled in for the season. We'd like to add to the very good letter of " Moonshadow" ( 12/03).

Most cruisers passing thru American Samoa have only bad things to say: The canneries stink, it's noisy, it's filthy, it's run down, there are no services, nothing is centralized. All this is true, especially if you're speaking about Pago Pago harbor. But, as in all things, there are positive aspects if you take the time to look for them. You have the advantage of low cost phone rates, and internet access with which you can order things from the United States and have them shipped reliably by the US Postal System for domestic rates without duty charges or custom agent fees. There are a great deal of US items you can actually find, and purchase here for not much more (sometimes, the same or less) than the cost Stateside and NO sales tax. You find many foods that you craved-for since leaving the US! (Root Beer, Mexican food, Snickers Bars) or you can finally afford to buy those treats! You can go out to lunch or dinner without having to mortgage the boat. And best of all, LAUNDROMATS abound! Do-it-yourself, hot water, dryers, cheap!!

If you like places where you don't feel caught in a tourist trap, this is it! Even the small Govt. Tourism office doesn't know what tourism means! The few activities that would appeal to visitors are so well hidden; perhaps the people at the tourism office will ask you too to report to them what you find so they'll know. J ! We looked around and here is what we found:

Unfortunately, cruising by boat around any of the Samoan Islands, American or Independent, is not easy. There are very few protected bays even tho on first glance, several look possible, most are deep all the way up to the reef that suddenly juts out of the depths. The bays are swelly since there are no lagoons in these atolls. If you would like to cruise the few bays that may give good anchoring, you must apply and obtain permission from each village chief concerned. Fortunately, transportation is good and cheap around the major islands.

We toured every paved road with our mopeds and you could do the same by bicycle (if you have one) if you don't mind some steep roads (sometimes, we pushed our bikes on 30 degree inclines). What we found is this: as soon as you get east of the Pago Pago Bay and west of Tafuna's commercial areas, you'll find an entirely different island with spectacular views of rugged coastlines and narrow bays. You can tour a lot by public bus with a bit of planning and finding out the general habit of the buses that go to the out lying villages. Buses do not run after 6pm or on Sunday. We did an excursion with Roy, a US expat, here over 25 yrs, who informally runs North Shore Tours, and took us to his secluded beach and to other sights. He was on time and very informative about the island history, social habits and more. (Call him at 258-3527.) Don't sit around holding your nose in the bay,

jump on a bus and see the beauty of Tutuila! Especially impressive views can be seen all along the way to Vatia Bay concluding with the off shore island called the Cock's Comb. Also exciting is the trail starting at the Turtle and Shark Legend Site.

#### Transportation:

The public bus system is colorful, and funky, and cheap. There are many buses to and from the most popular areas and buses less frequently to outlying villages. All depart from the so-called fruit and veggie market (which only has a good choice Friday nights at 10-11PM!) a few minutes walk from the dingy dock. The fares range from \$0.25 to \$1.00 or more, depending upon destination.

#### Eating:

Lunch can be an excellent value. Near the head of Pago bay, you have several "fast food" places that serve Chinese and local food cafeteria-style at \$0.50-\$2.75 per serving. Samoan people being big, the portions are big too! Most are take-out, but some have sit-down areas.

If you shop at the True Value Hardware area, M-F, do not miss the excellent lunch buffet at Sunny's Restaurant

( 699-5238 ) about 300 yds direction Pago Pago (opposite FLY Inc. A funky "super"market with many unique products worth checking out). For dinner around town, check the excellent value all-you-can-eat buffet Thus. night at Sadie Thompson's Inn (14.95\$)( 633-5981). Sooks Sushi ( 633-5524 ) has good Japanese food in a very clean, pleasant, uncrowded restaurant located between the anchorage and the public market. Or enjoy Mexican food and movie-night with other yachties, every Sunday, at Evalani's Restaurant and Disco ( 633-4776 ) (head of the bay).

Tisa's Barefoot Bar puts up a beach umu (Polynesian underground oven) every Wednesday. Don't miss it! Take the public bus marked TULA, (\$1.25) to get there in the early afternoon, enjoy the beach and sunset, a great feast, and hitch hike a ride back with some other customers (no bus in the evening). The driftwood décor and your hosts, Tisa and Candy Man make it a relaxed and friendly evening. They book up fast, call (622-7447) for resv. While there, ask about their unique eco-village, and bush hike tours.

#### Provisioning:

There's no such thing as one-stop-shopping here. No supermarket has everything, nor is there a central shopping area. At the head of the bay are a pretty good little grocery, and two bakeries. KS Mart ( 699-4727 ) in Tafuna offers a very wide selection of fresh & frozen food, in an immaculate (and A/C) store (free delivery for \$200 or more). Cost-U-less in Tafuna ( 699-5975 )(200 yards before KS Mart) offers a mini Costco selection of merchandise. No store on the island has it all and if you see it, get it ... as the next shipment may take a while to come! ACE Hardware, True Value and the Tool Shop offer a good selection of not-just-hardware products. ACE has a bit of everything, also, whatever is in the nation-wide catalog, can be special ordered (may take awhile). Nadine and Rich, upstairs in the special orders dept. were very friendly and helpful in ordering Marine Goop, and Castrol Super Clean (both great products, by the way), and the cost was the SAME as what we paid in California! In the True Value Hardware area and about a quarter-mile each side, you can find hardware, variety stores, groceries, fast Internet connection, cinema, and Sunny's restaurant.

#### Shipping:

Big advantage of a US territory is that you can use the US Postal System! Much cheaper than UPS, FedEx or DHL. Express Mail the surest method, takes about 5-10 days, and Priority Mail about 7-14 days, (ask for a tracking number with priority, an extra \$0.45, well worth it). Many companies, like W. Marine, will mail by US Priority Mail if you request. There are only 2 planes/ wk to the island (Fri and Mon nights), and if planes are full, mail gets bumped, except Express, then Priority. If you can wait some, you'll save a lot on shipping. If your item arrives in Hawaii, and gets on the flight the same

day, you'll get it very fast. Luck of the draw applies sometimes, if the item is outrageously late, ask if you can look yourself at the PO in Samoa. Some items have been known to be "invisible" to the personnel. If items must be shipped by boat, there are ships leaving every 2 weeks from the West Coast.

Fuel at about 1.20\$/gal, if ordered by truck (min 100 gal), or at about 2\$/gal at the pump, is a good deal after French Polynesia. The truck is not especially enthusiastic to come for the small amounts yachts take compared to the Fishing Fleet.

One special place for cruisers is the welcoming Pago Pago Seafarer's Center located between the head of the bay and the canneries. While the center was originated to assist the foreign crews of fishing boats that come in to offload fish at the tuna canneries, Diane & Don, Baptist missionaries running the center, also welcome cruisers and help them in many ways! The center is open daily from noon till about 9pm. You can get your mail sent here (your name, c/o Seafarer's center, PO Box 7248, Pago Pago, AS 96799), for reasonable rates, you can use the phone, fax and Internet connection (on their computer or on your laptop). They've the best book exchange for hundreds of miles around. Unless you want to have a few drinks (check the Yacht Club, just out of town), the Seafarer is the place to go for friendly atmosphere, to play pool, watch movies, read magazines or socialize. They also appreciate folks volunteering to help in the Center, or yachts taking "care packages" to other islands, so if you've got room....

Long-timers in the area who are helpful to fellow cruisers are: Mitch on "Komfy", Commodores Karen and Cliff, on "Odyssey", who give out a cruiser's info package, and are Ham Radio Volunteer Examiners, and Texas John on "Sur le Pont".

June 2004

Luc & Jackie on s/v Sloepmouche