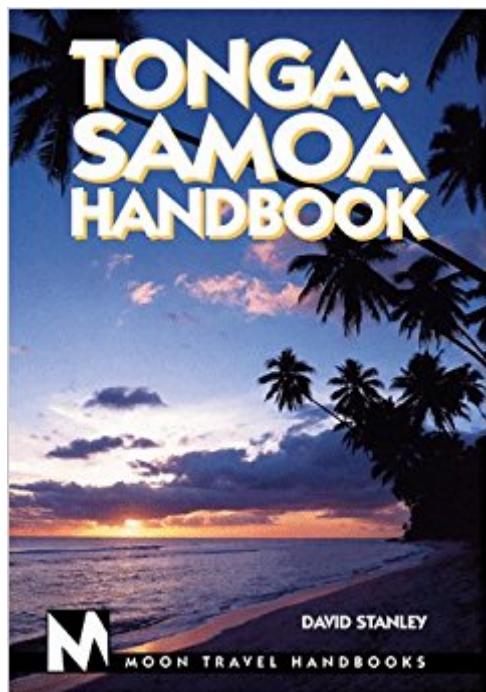


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Moon Handbooks Tonga-Samoa



Synopsis

David Stanley presents legends about demigods and directions to undersea caves and canyons in Tonga, as well as the history of tattooing rituals and budget breakfast bowls of cocoa and rice in Western Samoa.'

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

David Stanley has spent much of the past three decades on the road. He has crossed six continents overland and visited 181 of the 193 United Nations member countries. His travel guidebooks to the South Pacific, Micronesia, Alaska, Eastern Europe, and Cuba opened those areas to budget travellers for the first time.

First I have a confession to make - I am nuts about the South Pacific so any guidebook to the area has to really win me over. It must provide an accurate history and a concise background to the region as well as informing me about agreeable places to stay, enjoyable places to eat, how to get around easily, decent maps and of course the places and things to avoid. This guidebook comes up trumps in all these areas and will certainly be my trusty companion for the next trip. In this 320 plus page first edition (an amalgam of two previous separate ones by the same highly knowledgeable author) the extensive detail of Tonga and Samoa's history, politics, flora and wildlife provides a thorough background and could be a volume in itself. It also includes American Samoa and Niue so encompasses an entire area of the Pacific. Importantly, Stanley states that he does not accept

'freebies' from tourist boards etc. but pays his own way, a very significant point as it makes him objective not having to return favours. This certainly comes across in the places I know from personal experience and his reviews about hotels for instance are usually brief but mostly valid about the ones I have stayed at. A key factor for my buying a guidebook is the quality of the maps, they make a huge difference and inaccurate poorly drawn ones are worse than useless. Previous Moon guidebooks were let down by the maps which were thin and skimpily done on paper with a lot of 'show through' which made them confusing. Thankfully rectified in this edition, they are now excellent. I like it even more because it is not aimed solely at backpackers at one end or expense account travellers at the other unlike some other guidebooks. It is broader based and not condescending should you wish to stay in local huts and eat off market stalls or the best hotels and eat the finest meals in Tonga and Samoa. Quite rightly, Stanley doesn't lead you to expect too much in an area that is not wealthy by Western standards of affluence, although rich in other ways with scenery and people which are the stuff of collective dreams planted in our psyche by Gauguin, Robert Louis Stevenson and others more than a century ago. He puts these countries into context with the reality of what they have to offer and prepares you in advance to expect what you would think is only second rate in say New York but this is the Pacific and that's as good as it gets. Considering the frugality of how most of the population of these countries live themselves it is more than good enough. So if you are crossing the Pacific with a stopover in these countries and are considering a guidebook, take this one. It will take you deftly through these 'paradise islands' yet neither lead you astray or to expect too much, just like a good friend which it will surely become.

As president of Sea for Yourself snorkeling tours, I'm obligated on behalf of my clients, to stay informed about the destinations we visit. Although we've been operating programs in Tonga for many years that allow snorkelers to actually swim with humpback whales, we keep a copy of David's Tonga/Samoa Handbook in the office in order to answer questions from clients about areas other than Tonga. In addition to Tonga, this book has extensive coverage of Samoa, American Samoa, and Niue. In this book, the reader will find all the practical info (that continues to distinguish all of David's books) including travel tips, accommodations, meals, etc. I also appreciate the special attention given to cultural background, political and economic elements, and particular vignettes (such as the explanations of coral reef ecology and the palolo worm). However, the sections I personally find most useful include the pages on Internet sites, email addresses, and the bibliography. I started using David's books (South Pacific Handbook) in 1982, and they have always been valuable and trusted travel companions. We always take this book with us on our programs to

Tonga because it makes a useful reference for both staff and participants. Plus, since this book is easily available, I'm always happy to refer our clients to David's Tonga/Samoa Handbook when they are seeking to purchase a single accurate source of both practical and background information about this section of the Pacific.

David Stanley has done it again. Following his excellent and thorough guides on Fiji and Tahiti, he has put out THE guide to Tonga and Samoa in the South Pacific. This 320+ page tome is in fact indispensable to travelers intending to see and experience Tonga and Samoa. From his intro section on the land, flora & fauna, history, people, etc. through travel tips etc. Stanley seems to leave no stone unturned. The country sections include thorough and detailed descriptions of the towns, districts, areas, etc. plus recommendations on lodging, restaurants, activities, etc. Whether a backpacker looking for budget digs or a traveler seeking a holiday resort experience, you'll find it and more in these pages. Stanley shares his wealth of knowledge of and about travel in Tonga, Samoa, American Samoa and Niue with an eye for detail. He covers just about every possible aspect of travel in the islands. The book is loaded with excellent detailed maps that are easy to read and follow. There are also very helpful and practical sections on Resources-Information Offices, a great Bibliography, and an Internet list with numerous contacts for South Pacific culture, history and information, lodging, travel, dining, activities, tours, etc. For travelers planning to visit Tonga and Samoa, this is the one guide you need to have. It'll be in my bag next trip to the islands.

David Stanley says he always travels incognito and never takes any "freebies" from any travel purveyors, so he doesn't get any special treatment that you wouldn't get and he doesn't "owe" anyone a good review. And you can sure tell. He is not afraid to give his opinion on anything and everything. Isn't that what you really need from a guidebook? If I want a sanitized version, I can get that for free from the tourist bureau. I like to know if a company is disreputable or if a hotel is unsafe--especially for a woman traveler. I also especially liked the introductory sections that give you a good background of the culture of the peoples and info on the unusual flora and fauna.

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