

Beach Fales: Sustainable Eco-Tourism and Cultural Preservation in Samoa

A Case Study of Beach Fales in Manase, Savai'i

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Abstract

For small island nations of the South Pacific, it is crucial that the tourism industry develops at a sustainable rate in order to prevent cultural and environmental degradation. Sustainable tourism has the potential for improving the income and living standards for local people. It can also revitalize local culture, customs and traditional crafts while playing a vital role in the preservation of the cultural heritage of a nation. Small beach fale are an example of sustainable tourism and cultural preservation at its best in Samoa. In this case study of beach fale in Manase, Savaii, the role and importance of these infrastructures is highlighted. The study is looked at through three different avenues, the Samoa Tourism Authority, the beach fale owners, and the tourists, in order to understand how beach fale are a model for sustainable tourism and cultural preservation in Samoa. Surveys and interviews will look at the impacts of the resort on both the tourists and the host-family to see how daily life and representations of Samoa are affected. Methods for research include interviews with Samoa Tourism Authority (STA) officials, interviews with beach fale guests and the host families of five different beach fale in Manase, Savai'i over a ten-day period, surveys geared towards the tourists of these beach fale, and a number of secondary sources.

It was found that beach fale accommodations in Manase, Savai'i successfully serve as an example of a culturally and environmentally sustainable tourism operation in Samoa. There are seven elements that comprise a sustainable ecotourism sight; development, adventure, nature, culture, environment, education, and economics. Examples of these themes were observed and analyzed during a ten-day case study of beach fale in Manase.

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Dedicated to...

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Introduction

In a region where there is an increasing demand for an exotic island paradise experience, Samoa has grabbed a firm hold of the reins in the tourism sector. Many island nations in Polynesia have been faced with the impacts of big-business corporate-controlled tourism, including cultural and environmental degradation, low local wages, land dispossession, high cost of living, and cultural commercialization. In addition, profits resulting from tourism infrastructures are repatriated back to the “home” countries that are the economic controllers of the host country. The peoples of the Pacific Islands pride themselves on their intimate relationship with the land and natural environment. Konai Helu-Thaman writes, “Today, knowledge and awareness of the environment are

rapidly being eroded thanks to the kinds of transformation and socialization that modern development has brought to our shores.”¹ In “Lovely Hula Hands”, another native perspective on destructive tourism development in the South Pacific is voiced when she says, “tourists flock to my Native land for escape, but they are escaping into a state of mind while participating in the destruction of a host people in a Native place.”² Despite these disparaging trends, Samoa continues to pioneer through the tourism industry at a local and sustainable level.

One example of sustainable, non-destructive tourism practices in Samoa is the beach fale accommodation, a small-scale business operation controlled by local people. Beach fales are recognized as an important element in the Samoan tourism product. The traditional open beach fale serves as a vehicle for a distinct Polynesian culture and activity-based nature experience, providing competitive advantage for marketing in the Samoa region.³

The objective of this study was to see how beach fales function in all of Manase. Tanu Beach Fales was chosen as a home base and main study site during a ten-day period. After previous personal experience with accommodation at Tanu and receiving recommendations from an officer at Samoa Tourism Authority, it was established that Tanu was a sufficient example of a traditional beach fale accommodation in Samoa. The overall research question is to discover whether beach fales in the village of Manase in

¹ Helu-Thaman, Konai. “Beyond Hula, Hotels, and Handicrafts: A Pacific Islander’s Perspective of Tourism Development.” *The Contemporary Pacific*. Spring 1993. p 105.

² Trask, Haunani-Kay. “Lovely Hula Hands: Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture”. *A Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii. Revised Edition*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999. p 137.

³ Twinning-Ward, Dr. Louise. *Report from Beach Fale Seminar*. Pasefika Inn, Apia. March 1998, p 1.

Savaii successfully act as a means of sustainable tourism and cultural preservation in Samoa.

Beach Fale Accomodation in Manase, Savaii

The development of beach fales was influenced by the need for an alternative form of income in rural areas following the devastation to plantations caused by the two tropical cyclones in 1990 and 1991 and the 1993 taro blight. Impressed by the ability of such small scale ventures to stimulate village economies, the AusAID funded Tourism Development Fund began offering grants to operators for the building of toilet and shower facilities.⁴

A beach fale is a traditional Samoan beach hut with open sides and woven blinds. It is used throughout Samoan to provide basic overnight accommodation for touring visitors as well as shelter for day visitors. Prices range from around \$50 – 100 tala/night, an appealing cost for budget travelers like backpackers and long period world travelers. Each fale sits on or close to the beach, allowing guests to experience living close to nature.⁵

Typically, beach fale accommodation is run by a local family, who lives on site or close by. At Tanu Beach Fales, the extended family lives and works on premise. As well as accommodation, beach fales in Manase serve two or three meals a day. Some places, like Vacation's, have a restaurant and bar open to the public. This is also an option for guests staying at places that do not serve lunch. Most of the food served is local and

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ Twinning-Ward, Dr. Louise. *Beach Fale Owner's Manual*. Samoa Visitor's Bureau: Apia:1999. p i.

traditional to Samoa. Meals are usually communal style dining, similar to traditional Samoan family dining.

Additionally, tours of the island will be offered to guests by the host as well as recommendations for other activities. Some beach fale, such as Tanu and Jane's, have a small store selling food, drinks, toiletries, and handicrafts for the benefit of guests and locals. Mattresses, mosquito nets, electricity, and sleeping mats are the minimal accommodations in open beach fale. Others styles of fale are partially enclosed or fully enclosed with porches and chairs. All over Samoa, beach fale have been adapted for tourist use; some are round, some square, some open and others closed in with wooden sides. Refer to the Appendices for pictures and a map of beach fale in Samoa.

Background Information on Manase and Tanu Beach Fales

The village of Manase on the island of Savai'i, Samoa is home to four beach fale that are owned and controlled by local Samoans; Regina's Beach Fales, Vacation's Beach Fales, Jane's Beach Fales, and Tanu Beach Fales. Stevenson's at Manase, which is owned by a New Zealander, provides hotel, villa, and beach fale accommodation. Raci's Beach Club, a water sports rental business, is owned by a Swiss couple living in Samoa who has leased land from the family who Vacation's Beach Fales. The same couple who

owns Raci's runs an Internet Café and computer school (for local students and teachers) across the street.

Taitomuese Tanu is a chief of Manase and also the owner of Tanu Beach Fales. He is married to Rasela, and their eldest son, Vaea, is the manager along with his sister Lagi. The business started as picnics on the beach in 1993 and later flourished into a business when Taito realized that it could be an economic benefit to accommodate guests in the fale on the beach. In 1994, they started accommodating people in 5 – 6 fale. By the year 2000, Tanu had built up 25 fale. Between 2000 and present day, Tanu boasts 36 fale and nine rooms, for the guests who prefer more privacy or better shelter from stormy weather. Tanu was the first beach fale in Samoa of its kind and helped to bring up the economy. Tanu's reputation and tourist flow was built up mainly by word of mouth. Another important marketing scheme was hosting writers and journalists who then would publish articles about Tanu.

At Tanu Beach, the busiest time is between April and September, which is when they receive the most international tourists. In November and December, they see a decrease in tourists and an increase in overseas Samoans who are looking for somewhere to stay while visiting family during the holidays. During these slow months, Tanu gets the opportunity to catch up with maintenance and quality family time. Unlike the majority of beach fale in Manase, Tanu does not have any hired employees. The business is run solely by nuclear and extended family members. The money made from the business helps pay for school fees and uniforms while also feeding the family.

The main goals of Tanu Beach Fales are to give the tourists a full Samoan experience. This is accomplished through serving traditional food, creating a family

atmosphere, and providing friendly Samoan hospitality. Vaea admits that these are ideas he and his family “try 100% everyday to work on.” Some of the challenges he faces include preventing government and private organization intervention and trying to satisfy the needs of all different kinds of tourists. Staying at Tanu Beach *Fales* allows the guest to experience the Samoan way of life up close and personally. Vaea agrees, stating, “This is the reality.”⁶

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, information was gathered through interviews, surveys, and secondary sources. The secretary of the National Beautification Committee was interviewed through an online questionnaire to obtain basic information about the goals and history of the organization. The Principal Planning and Development Officer of Samoa Tourism Authority was interviewed regarding the government involvement with beach fale operations and sustainable tourism initiatives. Dr. Steve Brown, Assistant CEO of GEF (Global Environment Facility) Services in Samoa, served as an advisor for this project and assisted in providing necessary resources. A ten-day study was carried out in the village of Manase in Savai’i, Samoa, a village known for beach fale accommodations. Sixteen surveys were conducted among tourists of five different beach fales to obtain qualitative data on the tourist experience. Also, representatives of each of the five beach fales were interviewed to obtain basic information on the function of a locally controlled eco-tourism business. Similar interviews were also conducted with

⁶ Tanu, Vaea. Manager of Tanu Beach Fales. Personal Interview. Tanu Beach Fales, Manase, Savai’i, Samoa. 3 May 2008

other local business owners to understand their place in Manase and sustainable ecotourism.

Several constraints limited the volume of survey information. It was found that the only successful way to obtain surveys from beach fale guests other than Tanu, where the main study was conducted, would be during inconvenient times. Therefore, most of the surveys are from guests of Tanu Beach Fales and Regina's. During a ten-day study, at Tanu Beach Fales, the number of guests ranged from 7 – 20 guests per night. These low numbers of tourists hindered the range of survey results. In addition, beach fales in Manase typically do not perform a *fiafia* if there are not enough guests to make the performance worthwhile. The presentation of this unique cultural performance might have influenced survey results.

Sustainable Eco-Tourism and its Place in Samoa

Sustainable ecotourism can be described as a concept that describes a form of development that respects tradition and culture, protects and preserves the environment, educates and welcomes visitors. Most importantly, it ensures that all activities contribute as far as possible to the sustainable development issues and priorities in a particular

place.⁷ From a development perspective, tourism should help to meet basic needs, enhance a community's sense of pride and dignity, contribute to self-reliance, and sustain their livelihoods.⁸ Ecotourism represents a viable option for Pacific Island states to participate in the global economy, but only if this option is carefully considered and, if taken up, even more carefully regulated. Like culture, sustainable development is not a steady state-system but a dynamic one. Sustainability, whether culture or development, changes form and levels with time and the use of resources available.

Sustainable tourism in small island nations like Samoa can bring improved income and living standard for local people. Tourism can also revitalize local culture, especially traditional crafts and customs. It can stimulate the rural economy by creating demand for agricultural produce and, through infrastructure development projects, it can inject capital into rural areas. Informed and expert tourism also has the potential to play a vital role in the preservation of cultural heritage of a nation. Maintenance and preservation of cultural heritage can lead to increased awareness of, and pride in, history and civilization. Tourism can also help preserve and develop national culture by providing a wider patronage for handicrafts and traditional performing arts.⁹

Beach fale tourism provides the 'high value, low volume' ecotourism ideal. This ideal assumes that it is in the best interests of the natural environment and local communities that countries attract small numbers of higher spending tourists. Also, beach fale tourism serves a high value in terms of; community development, cultural education

⁷ Twinning – Ward, Dr. Louise. "Indicator Handbook: a guide to the development and use of Samoa's sustainable tourism indicators". Apia: SPREP, 2003.

⁸ Scheyvens, Regina. "Growth of Beach Fale Tourism in Samoa: The High Value of Low-Cost Tourism".

⁹ Engelhardt, Richard A. "Culturally and Ecologically Sustainable Tourism Development Through Local Community Management". Culture and Sustainable Development in the Pacific. Australia: Asia Pacific Press, 2005. p 177.

of guests, locally retained economic benefits, conservation of resources, and high levels of local participation and control.¹⁰

According to Richard A. Engelhardt in “Culturally and Ecologically Sustainable Tourism Development Through Local Community Management”, carefully planned, managed and controlled tourism that services and enhances heritage preservation is an attractive alternative and can be economically profitable if the following objectives are maintained:

- use of the country’s cultural and natural resources to stimulate the development of a tourism industry which will play a significant role in the national economic growth
- development of tourism as a tool in the conservation of the country’s cultural and natural heritage and the preservation of the complex linkages between culture and environment
- enable tourism related to the country’s cultural and natural heritage to prosper without damaging that heritage or endangering social problems
- development of tourism in a manner that keeps control and operation in the hands of local peoples and allows local peoples to reap the fruits of the business¹¹

Refer to the appendices for a detailed list and graph of Samoa’s sustainable tourism objectives.

D.A.N.C.E.

The set-up and main themes of this paper are influenced by information provided by Dr. Steve Brown, a former eco-tour operator. More specifically, findings from my

¹⁰ *Ibid* p 189.

¹¹ Engelhardt, Richard A. pg 185.

fieldwork are woven into the acronym “D.A.N.C.E.”, (development, adventure, nature, culture, environment and economics). According to Dr. Steve Brown, seven crucial elements comprise successful sustainable ecotourism activity; Development, adventure, nature, culture, environment, education, and economics.¹² The correct combination of all these factors allows both tourists and locals to benefit from tourist activity while maintaining environmental preservation.

Development

The 2002 – 2005 Tourism Development Plan for Samoa states that

Sustainable tourism development will be undertaken at a rate and in ways that will generate continuing economic benefits throughout Samoan society, contribute to a general improvement in the quality of life in Samoa, reflect, respect, and support *fa’asamoa*, conserve and enhance the country’s natural and built environments, and enhance tourists experiences in Samoa.¹³

This section of the Tourism Development Plan stresses sustainability goals and suggests that tourism in Samoan needs to be developed in an environmentally responsible and culturally sensitive manner, follow a policy of “low volume, high yield” and attract discerning and environmentally aware visitors. To ensure that tourism development in

¹² Brown, Dr. Steve. Assistant CEO-GEF Services. Interview. Apia, Samoa. 9 May 2008.

¹³ Tourism Development Plan of Samoa 2002 – 2006.

Samoa is carried out at a sustainable rate, Samoa Tourism Authority carries out a series of awareness programs.

The Beach Fale Owner's Manual, compiled by the Samoa Visitors Bureau, is a result of the Beach Fale Seminar, "The Road to Success" held in Apia in March 1998. The manual is designed in the form of simple and easy-to-use check list of ideas and handy ideas for beach fale owners. Training programs and seminars are held annually by STA in order to assist beach fale owners in improving hospitality, management, financial planning, marketing, and staff training.

Since the Tourism Development Plan, millions of dollars have been spent to beautify Samoa, provide clean energy and drinking water, and put the "eco" back into "ecotourism", just so that tourists will come to Samoa.¹⁴ Not only does this create benefits for the tourist's experience, but demand for development in Samoa has also increased the standard of living and livelihoods of local people.

Adventure

Ecotourism has been the latest buzz-term in international travel. Samoa's natural features; its lush tropical vegetation, the waterfalls, rugged volcanic interior and palm-fringed beaches are central to its attraction to ecotourists. Raci's Beach Club, which sits in the middle of four beach fales in Manase, serves as a means to perpetuate the ecotourist's adventure craving. Raci's offers snorkel and kayak tours, led by an environmentally aware guide. Tourists may also individually rent snorkel gear, fishing poles, kayaks and push bikes. The services provided through Raci's allow guests of the nearby beach fales to further fulfill ecotourism activities and enables them to see more of

¹⁴ Brown, Dr. Steve. Interview. 9 May 2008.

the natural environment of Savai'i. Tourists tend to stay longer at the beach fale when they are provided with different possibilities for activities, which is profitable for both Raci's and the local community.¹⁵

While many guests of beach fale value their interaction with local people, it is equally adventurous for Samoans to meet *palagi*. Daisy a worker at Vacation's Beach Fales noted that one of the favorite parts of her job was interacting with tourists.¹⁶ The cross-cultural experience between the tourists and the Samoan hosts are one of the unique double-sided benefits of beach fale accommodations. In the surveys conducted in Manase, Savai'i during a ten-day period, it was found that getting to know the people at a more intimate level and being close to the locals was one of the motives for staying at a beach fale.

Nature

Beach fale accommodations have been more than profitable for the avid eco-tourist; it has helped put life back into the environment as well and create a newly increased demand for environmental awareness. By building new walking trails, restoring archaeological sites, establishing conservation areas, and setting up a network of qualified village-based guides, the government has helped to stress and apply the importance of "ecology" in eco-tourism. Beautifully combed beaches, freshly cut lawns, and flourishing gardens help define the aesthetic appeal of beach fale in Manase. Not

¹⁵ Jerg, Zita. Owner of Raci's Reach Club. Interview. Manase, Savai'i, Samoa. 5 May 2008.

¹⁶ Daisy. Worker at Vacation's Beach Fales. Interview. Manase, Savai'i. 8 May 2008.

only is this pristine natural paradise pleasing to the eye, but it also serves as a means in motivating environmental management efforts.

An important product of the beach fale operation in the environmental conservation sector has been the realized income alternative to forest logging and deforestation. “An alternative to rainforest logging is a form of tourism that will channel ‘tourist dollars’ directly into village development”.¹⁷ Local and tourist participation in beach fales as an alternative source of income helps to enhance the cultural integrity of all Samoans and ensure the conservation of Samoa’s remaining tropical forests.

Cyclone Ofa destruction reshaped Samoa in February 1990, when it hit the shores of Samoa with winds up to 260 kilometers per hour, followed by a second Cyclone Val in December 1991. The effects of these natural disasters left a devastating impact on many villages and the natural environment of Samoa. In response, cabinet established the Natural Beautification Committee (NBC) to aid in the development of Samoa. “The Committee was tasked to ensure a beautiful and healthy Samoa through its promotion of selective competitions and awareness programs.”¹⁸ Some of the main goals of the organization are to clean Apia and the surrounding villages, conduct inspections of the appearance of the country, and oversee a bi-annual cleanliness competition. Since its creation in the early 1990’s, the organization has had a positive impact on the environment of Samoa and attitudes of the people. It has helped re-build the natural landscape and environmental awareness through their national beautification efforts. These beautification initiatives have also attracted tourists to Samoa, which in turn benefits local tourism operations such as beach fales in Manase.

¹⁷ Simmons, Graham. “Secret Garden: Samoa says *talofa* to eco-tourism”. *Pacific Wave*. p 77.

¹⁸ Leavai, Lauao. Senior Planning Officer for Samoa Tourism Authority. Interview. Apia, Samoa. 26 March 2008.

Culture

Fa'asamoa molds the tourism industry in Samoa and beach fale operations perpetuate this mold. A tourist in Manase described the people of Tanu Beach Fales as “an example of traditional *fa'asamoa* in modern application”. As seen at Tanu and seen at several other beach fale in Manase, tourists who frequent beach fale often have a genuine interest in the Samoan culture, since *fa'asamoa* is an inevitable part of their experience. A worker from Stevenson's at Manase, found that guests often ask questions about Samoan traditions and daily life. Tourists at Vacation's Beach Fales have accompanied the owner to church service on Sunday mornings to experience the religious aspect of Samoan life. Jane's Beach Fales has weaving basket and coconut husking displays for the education of tourists who are interested in daily Samoan life.

Another guest was said, “[staying in beach fale] gives you a more genuine Samoan experience and you get an idea of the Samoan way of living”. At Tanu Beach Fales, the family incorporates the guests into important family holidays and celebrations. During a ten-day period, two family birthdays were celebrated where guests were served pig cooked over an *umu* oven, which is traditional to Samoan feasts. On Mother's Day, May 11, 2008, guests were also invited to join in on the family's traditional celebration, gift giving, and *to'ona'i* brunch feast. Through these integrated displays of traditional Samoan celebration, the family has an outlet for sharing and perpetuating their traditional cultural values and practices.

When properly applied and maintained, cultural development is an instrument and an objective of sustainable development. It has the ability to revive a potentially eroding

culture. To be proud of one's culture and display it and have *papalagi* respect the cultural protocol is a viable means for cultural preservation. "Culture plays a much more significant role in national economies and national life of Pacific countries than it does in most regions of the world."¹⁹ Beach fale operations are no exception to this idea.

Environment

When discussing eco-tourism, a look at the positive and negative impacts of tourism on the environment is imperative. Richard A. Engelhardt argues, "the small and environmentally fragile countries in the Pacific region are some of the most susceptible in the world to both the negative and positive effects of tourism."²⁰ If the rate of ecotourism development is too rapid and there are not sufficient planning, regulations, and monitoring systems, the environment will suffer from tourist activity. Some of these effects include destructive changes in animal and plant composition, pollution, erosion, or depletion or destruction of natural resources and scenery. On the other hand, if the ecotourism project is sensitive to the natural environment, it has many potential community benefits. Potential environmental benefits include conservation through environmental management, provision of appropriate infrastructure, and creation of environmental awareness.²¹

Before undergoing construction, beach fale operations must acquire approved development consent from the Ministry of Natural Resources. This development consent will

¹⁹ Hopper, Anthony. "Culture and Development in Pacific Discourse". Culture and Sustainable Development in the Pacific. Australia: Asia Pacific Press, 2005. p 6.

²⁰ Engelhardt, Richard A. "Culturally and Ecologically Sustainable Tourism Development Through Local Community Management". Culture and Sustainable Development in the Pacific. Australia: Asia Pacific Press, 2005. p 176.

²¹ Liu, Dr. Juanita C. Pacific Islands Ecotourism: A Public Policy and Planning Guide. Honolulu: Pacific Business Center Program. 1994. p 59.

determine whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required or not. This depends on the scale of the development. Since beach falea are mostly small scale, they are only required to get development consent.²²

On a more internal level, beach falea serve as an alternative tourist accommodation that has little negative impact on the natural environment. By going to Manase and sitting on the local beach, living in a small fale, and eating local foods, tourists are participating in tourism in a far more environmentally sustainable manner than they would be if they stayed at a big four star resort.

Observation during ten days at beach falea in Manase, noted that the majority of tourists were environmentally aware of their surroundings and steps that need to be taken to achieve environmental sustainability in the area. Snorkelers who had come back from their adventures noted the care that they took in making sure not to damage the live coral. Tourists were also observed inquiring information to locals and the owner of Raci's Beach Club concerning protected marine areas, waste disposal and recycling, and water use. Stevenson's at Manase posted a sign in the lobby warning guests that they do not provide towels in order to conserve water. The combined efforts of locals and tourists allow beach falea to serve as an environmentally sustainable operation.

Education

Education on sustainability through ecotourism activities can be a useful tool if carried out in an appropriate and informative manner. One of the challenges STA faces in working with local ecotourism business owners is creating an understanding of concepts

²² Leala, Christina. Principal Planning Officer, Samoa Tourism Authority. Interview. 14 May 2008.

surrounding sustainability and ecotourism. No national strategy for ecotourism exists, but the demand for product development is increasing.²³ Currently, STA, the Peace Corps, and several other organizations are conducting an ecotourism workshop.

STA struggles with how best to assist ecotourism providers. The type and location of workshops are issues and needs assessments may need to be done to determine what training owners/managers want or need. Some of the owners and managers don't realize the importance of trainings, management of finance, and caring for customers, so they don't come to trainings.²⁴ One of the reasons that beach fale owners don't send representatives to trainings is because of the distance needed to travel. One of the managers, Vaea, who does not often travel from Savai'i to Upolu for STA trainings says that while STA was helpful in an avenue for sharing information to improve business, he didn't feel as though some of the trainings were necessary enough or worth it to make the trip all the way to Upolu. In addition, Vaea mentioned, "it's not about things you know, it's about how you do it"²⁵, which suggests that trainings should be more accessible and based around the individual specific needs of beach fale owners.

Around the island tours of Savai'i, provided by outside organizations or through the beach fale management, are options for tourists to further experience the natural and cultural environment of the island. Although, when the tours are not carried out in an appropriate and informative manner, guests can be left feeling cheated and unsatisfied. In a survey conducted with 11 beach fale guests in Manase who had experienced an all-island tour of Savai'i, nine out of eleven guests were unsatisfied with their experience. All guests participated in tours provided through beach fale hosts, not affiliated

²³ Leala, Christina. Principal Planning Officer, Samoan Tourism Authority. Interview. 29 April 2008.

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ Tanu, Vaea. Interview. 3 May 2008.

professionals. Seven of these guests were enraged by the service and demanded their money back. These seven guests, who all took a tour through Stevenson's, complained of being charged too much for the service, not being given prior notification about extra entrance fees at each attraction, acute lack of information about the sites they were visiting, and a negative empathetic relationship between the tour guide and guests. One guest said mentioned that she didn't like how the tour guide made her feel and said

Usually, on tours I've been on, the guides are eager to answer any and all questions and seem to have a knowledge and desire to share that knowledge. But, this tour guide made me feel like a dumb white person who only wants to taken around to different sites to get a good picture.

Three other guests, who took the island tour hosted by Tanu Beach Fales, said that the tour was good and informative in the beginning, but towards the middle and end there was a lot of singing and very little information about the sites. Understanding tourist expectations is needed to run successful and sustainable cultural tours. Ecotourism and beach fale operations depend heavily on word of mouth recommendations so tourists must get a fully satisfying experience. Working on trainings with locals regarding tours hosted by beach fale management is one possible arena that can be improved upon. Also, surveying ecotourists and beach fale guests would be a useful tool to determine needs and demands of the tours to ensure it continues to be a sustainable operation.

Economics

One of the more obvious sustainable beneficial aspects of beach fale operations, economically, is the direct monetary flow back into the local community and people. The Pacific Islands Ecotourism Public Policy and Planning Guide writes,

The evidence suggests that ecotourism would provide higher multiplier values compared to mass tourism and therefore have a greater per unit contribution to the economy. This occurs due to greater linkages (purchases of goods and services) in the local economy and thus, fewer leakages. Leakages are ways in which the income “leaks” out of the economy through imports of goods and services; expatriated wages and salaries of imported labor; remittances of profits, interests, and rent; travel abroad and purchases by residents; and non-local taxes.²⁶

Beach fale, an example of a small-scale locally-owned ecotourism business, promotes the use of local products and labor, which then encourages local ownership and entrepreneurship and can substantially raise the multiplying effect of the tourist dollar.

Tanu Beach Fales, for example, is solely a family operation, with no hired employees. Profits gained from tourist activity directly supports family needs such as food, school fees, and school uniforms. During the busy season, the family often enlists the help of people from the surrounding local villages. In addition to providing physical labor, local villages also supply food for guest and family meals. In return, the owner of Tanu, and high chief of Manase, then repays individual families with an appropriate monetary sum, which is also the standard sign of respect in *fa'asamoa*, or Samoan way of life.²⁷

A survey was conducted over a ten day period in Manase to understand beach fale operation from a tourist's perspective. Sixteen people were surveyed. More than a quarter of the people chose to stay at beach fale because of the local benefit. When asked about advantages in staying at a beach fale, some of the survey comments included, “money goes to family”, “supporting local people”, and “locals benefit directly”. Not only were

²⁶ Liu, Dr. Juanita C. Pacific Islands Ecotourism: A Public Policy and Planning Guide. Honolulu: Pacific Business Center Program. 1994.

²⁷ Tanu, Vaea. Interview. 3 May 2008.

tourists aware of the local benefits, they consciously chose to contribute to the locally sustainable operation.

Over this same ten day period, representatives of five different beach fales were interviewed about their experience and the history of the operation. All of the fales employed either extended family members of the owner or manager, or people from nearby villages. A worker from Vacations, Daisy, mentioned the benefits of employment at the beach fales versus finding employment in Salelologa or Apia, the two main towns in Samoa. Working close by to her home means that she doesn't have to spend money for transport into town and she is able to spend more time with her family.²⁸ This is especially important to local life because of the importance of *'aiga*, or family, in the aspects of *fa'asamoa*. Results from this study in Manase indicate that well managed, beach fales can provide an important and sustainable source of income and employment in rural areas.

Beach fales not only stimulate and diversify the village economy, but also provide a ready market for village-based environmental and cultural tourist attractions. Tanu Beach Fales and Stevenson's at Manase offers an "all island tour" service that visits popular environmental and cultural attractions around the island of Savai'i. For a flat fee, Tanu would pile interested guests into the Tanu Beach Fale van to sight see places such as the lava fields, canopy walk, and Virgin's Cave. Along the way, Tanu provides commentary on the sights, sharing his historical knowledge, as well as entertaining the guests with traditional Samoan songs. At each stop, tourists would be required to pay an entrance fee to the local owners of each attraction. These tours contribute both to the

²⁸ Daisy. Worker at Vacation's Beach Fales. Manase, Savai'i, Samoa. 8 May 2008.

hosting beach fale and several other community based ecotourism operations in Savai'i, further adding to the local income.

Benefits Gained from Being a Tourist at a Beach Fale

While locally controlled tourism structures, such as beach fales, are an excellent and successful means for preservation of the culture, it is also important to consider the impact it has on visiting international tourists. Fifteen out of 16 beach fale guests surveyed in Manase claimed that their knowledge of Samoan culture has been influenced due to their stay at a beach fale. One explained,

In my opinion, if you were to compare Samoan culture experienced here with the Tanu Beach family and any other traditional Samoan family you'd find them to be pretty much identical...ie working as collective towards a common goal, responsibility and aiga, welcoming and friendly, etc.

At Tanu Beach Fales, all family members (whom are also the workers behind the beach fale operation) live on premises in close proximity to the guests. One guest mentioned that it is this set-up that gives the feeling that you are somehow integrated into their big family, which is essential to understanding Samoan culture and life. Another guests of Tanu, who has Samoan background and is more familiar with Samoan culture, mentioned, "The importance of *aiga* and the sharing of *alofa* is quite evident in the way these people live".

While the majority of the surveys revealed a broad understanding of Samoan culture, two out of 15 surveys, mentioned a more specific example of cultural understanding. Both guests cited observations that had made about the role of women in Samoan society. "I've seen that women are the real workers, everything depends on

them” while the other wrote, “[in Samoan culture] females do things more efficiently than males”. While these statements may or may not be pertinent of all modern Samoan communities, there is value in the fact that international tourists are able to observe and make assumptions about gender roles through staying a short time at a beach fale. Through careful observation, interviews, and surveys of beach fale guests in Manase during a ten-day period, it is evident that after their stay, tourists walk away with an enhanced and unique understanding of *fa’asamoa*.

Conclusion

In this case study, beach fales in Manase, Savai’i were examined through seven lenses; development, adventure, nature, culture, environment, education, and economics. The combination of these elements creates a unique operation that perpetuates sustainability in the tourism industry, the natural environment, and the culturally rich livelihoods of local Samoans.

Beach fales in Manase are an example of a local case where tourism development has worked smoothly with traditional communities, to the obvious satisfaction of both

sides. Local benefits include providing local employment opportunities, and contributing to raising the standard of living of the people of the area to comparable national levels, contributing to their long-term welfare and allowing them to maintain the integrity of their social and cultural traditions.²⁹ The tourist receives a heaping taste of Samoa's natural beauty and an intimate and personal understanding of traditional Samoan life.

Equitable and sustainable human development is the new development paradigm for Samoa, especially since previous development efforts in the South Pacific have altered societies, weakened cultures, and encouraged the depletion of natural resources. "Essentially, it is about low-impact tourism where the tourists, the tour operator and the locals all benefit. It's a win-win situation for everyone."³⁰ Culturally-responsible tourism plays a very important role for the future of Samoa as a unique unspoiled tourist destination and the sustainability of Samoa's natural and cultural environment.

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²⁹ Engelhardt, Richard A. p 184.

³⁰ Brown, Steve in Mark Daffey. "Eco-adventures". *Global Adventure*. p 34.

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Observation:

- Tanu Beach Fales, Manase, Savai'i Samoa. 2 May 2008 – 12 May 2008

Appendix A: Survey Questions

Name of Beach *Fale*: _____ Age: _____ Sex: M F

1. How long is your stay at the Beach *Fales*?
2. Is this your first time staying at a Beach *Fale* Resort?
3. What is the main purpose of your stay? (please circle one)

Vacation Business Research In-transit Other _____.

4. Why did you choose to stay at a Beach *Fale* rather than a hotel or resort?

All Vacation

4. Why did you choose to stay at a beach fale rather than a hotel or resort?

- Ambience...enjoys simplistic living and close proximity to the beach
- People...an example of traditional fa'asamoa in modern application, get to know people at a more intimate level...close to locals, they benefit
- Low price...cheaper than staying at a resort...cheaper...good price...better value for money...better value...price...budget stay...much more economical...simple and cheap
- Beach fale are typical for Samoa...one can stay in hotels or resorts all around the world, staying in fale is a Samoan specificity...didn't come to a tropical paradise to stay in a resort...more of a cultural experience...more the Samoan way, likes the traditional side better...more traditional...get to know more about the Samoan traditions
- No need to book ahead
- Dislikes resorts, don't see real country
- To meet other travelers

5. Do you see any advantages in staying at a beach fale?

- Freedom of movement
- Close to beach (x10), close to nature, beautiful location
- Meet others at communal meals...communal dining a good opportunity to meet
- Simplicity appropriate to setting
- Money goes to the family, supporting local people, locals benefit directly
- Cheap (x5), affordable (for guests and hosts), economical travel
- Good shelter from the heat
- Romantic
- More genuine Samoan experience, you can get an idea of the Samoan way of living, families running them are super helpful, getting closer to the real people, see more of culture, great people, friendly Samoans, liked contact with locals, meet locals often
- Simple lifestyle

6. Do you see any disadvantages in staying at a beach fale?

- Lack of connectivity to the outside world
- Bed is hard, sand in everything
- With potentially disruptive young children it can be stressful keeping the peace, which could be easier if more sound proof accommodation
- Not the best service at Tanu (didn't ever clean the fale after one week), no option to store clothes, food is not the best/no menu
- Less privacy, not that private
- Shower/toilet facilities are minimal, no restaurant
- No A/C or hot water, cold showers, no hot water
- Security (no where safe to keep passport)
- No place to store luggage
- Long way to toilet

7. Has your view of Samoa or Samoan culture changed due to your stay at a beach fale? If yes, please explain...

-In my opinion, if you were to compare Samoan culture experienced here with the Tanu Beach family and any other traditional Samoan family you'd find them to be pretty much identical...ie working as collective towards a common goal, responsibility and aiga, welcoming and friendly

-Learnt small things about Samoan life

-Never thought that the family had such strong traditions. Because the family at Tanu Beach lives at the same place with the tourists, I saw how people live during the day.

-Have a better understanding from staying at Tanu and being able to talk more openly with the people. And also just by being here you're able to see and experience it for yourself. The importance of aiga and the sharing of alofa is quite evident in the way these people live

-Since I have not been to Samoa before, my view of Samoan culture has been influenced by my stay at different fales

-Staying with Samoan families has taught me a lot, whether from them or other people staying at the fales

-More friendlier and safer than I expected

-It's the only way to get around

-I've seen that women are the real workers...everything depends on them

-Females do things more efficiently and effectively than males

-Learned most about Samoan culture during stays at Beach fales from the hosts, you are somehow integrated in their big family which is essential to understanding Samoan culture

-I didn't know that Samoans live as simple as this and that it is normal that they don't have furniture and so on.

8. What traditional Samoan foods have you been served during your stay at the beach fale? Would you prefer more or less traditional food?

-All prefer more traditional food...I'm not in Samoa to eat McD....a choice would be good...always given enough, but didn't like all of it

9. Is there anything you would change about your stay? (write on the back if needed)

-Next time I would choose the fale more carefully so I can consider my interest (snorkeling, food, tours, etc)

-I brought a couple of necklaces I made as gifts for my hosts but I wish I brought more...it seems like a nice thing to do since everyone was so friendly to me

-less fatty American food

- Variety of food options, security
- A long stay is perhaps too long
- I like to change to other Beach Fales after 3 or 4 nights so it's not going to be boring and see other families and other beaches

Appendix C: Pictures of Beach Fales in Manase

A typical fale at Tanu Beach Fales. Manase, Savai'i.

A row of fale at Tanu Beach Fales. Manase, Savai'i.

The inside of a fale at Tanu Beach Fales. Manase, Savai'i.

A birthday Celebration at Tanu Beach Fales. 2 May 2008.

The outdoor beach bar at Jane's Beach Fales. Manase, Savai'i.

The guest dining area at Tanu Beach Fales.

Appendix D: Map of Beach Fale Locations in Samoa

Appendix E: Samoa's Sustainable Tourism Objectives

Twinning-Ward, Dr. Louise. "Indicator Handbook: a guide to the development and use of Samoa's sustainable tourism indicators". Apia: SPREP, 2003.

Samoan Glossary of Terms

'Aiga - family

Alofa - love

Fa'asamoa –“the Samoan way of life”

Fale – the traditional Samoan house

Fiafia – a formal period of entertainment during which different groups take turns performing

Palagi – a white person or foreigner, literally “heaven burster”

To'ona'i – the huge Sunday meal eaten after church consisting of many different traditional Samoan foods, slow-cooked in the *umu* earth-oven.

Umu – the earth-oven in which traditional Samoan foods are slow-cooked. Consists of a hole in the ground in which the foods are layered along with fire-heated rocks, then covered by palm leaves and mats and cooked for a number of hours.