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**Beach Fale Tourism in Samoa:**  
The Value of Indigenous Ownership and  
Control Over Tourism

Regina Scheyvens



**Fale Turisi Tu Matafaga i Samoa:**  
O le Aoga i Tagata Nu'u Moni o le Umia ma  
Pulea o Atina'e Turisi.



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Beach Fale Tourism in Samoa: The Value of Indigenous Ownership and Control Over Tourism

*Fale Turisi Tu Matafaga i Samoa: O le Aoga i Tagata Nu'u Moni o le Umia ma Pulea o Atina'e Turisi*

Regina Scheyvens

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## Executive Summary

This working paper reports on the findings of a research project which explores the budget tourism sector in Samoa as epitomized by beach fale tourism. Its main aim is to draw attention to the legitimacy and value of this often overlooked sector of the tourism market. As such it documents ways in which beach fale have contributed to development in Samoan villages, as well as identifying constraints to improvement of this sector. It concludes with a number of recommendations as to how sustainable, equity-enhancing development of tourism in Samoa can be supported in the future. Readers seeking a thorough understanding of beach fale tourism, including contextual information on the nature of tourism development in Samoa, and specific information concerning training and financial support for beach fale operators and impressions of tourists, are referred to an earlier paper in this series (CIGAD Working Paper No.3/2005 – see Scheyvens 2005b).

The beach fale industry has contributed significantly to the development of a number of Samoan villages. There have been widespread multiplier effects for village communities as the fale are constructed using mainly local materials and expertise, and their owners often purchase items such fruit, vegetables, seafood, and mats from the village and hire village labour during busy periods. Guests also contribute to the wider village through various means such as purchases made from village shops, use of local transport, and contributions to the collection plate when they attend a church service. Another benefit of beach fale tourism which has not been officially acknowledged is that it has restored the pride of many villagers in their home environment. Most Samoans feel genuinely honoured when people from all over the world come to visit their village and learn about their culture, and consequently community members contribute enthusiastically to village beautification efforts. Furthermore, the economic rejuvenation of some villages through beach fale tourism has reduced rural-urban migration as young people feel they now can stay in their home village and have a viable future.

Despite the significant growth of the beach fale sector and the benefits this has brought to rural communities, it has been overlooked, disregarded, and in some cases harshly criticised by various commentators. Beach fale are seemingly invisible to those estimating of the number of beds available for tourists in Samoa, for example, as they do not include beach fale accommodation in their estimates. Similarly, an Asian Development Bank report on Samoa with an entire chapter on tourism does not mention that beach fale exist. Outside consultants and investors, meanwhile, have voiced frustration with the communal land tenure system and its requirement for consensus in decisions concerning land use, as this has impeded the development of large resorts in prime beach side locations; instead, small clusters of beach fale occupy some of the best coastal sites in Samoa. This also irks some Samoans involved in the tourism industry, as they feel that there are too many run-down beach fale, forming a scar on the landscape. Related to this point, it has been suggested that the development of a strong budget tourism sector is not good for Samoa's image because a country so well endowed with natural and cultural assets should be home to high class resorts which attract high spending tourists. In addition there is some jealousy of the success of beach fale from the owners of small, lower class hotels, who now see many of their former clientele (such as staff of government agencies)

preferring to stay in beach fale; it is likely that this jealousy contributes to negative perceptions of what beach fale have to offer the tourism sector.

The Government is now introducing changes which could undermine beach fale tourism in some areas. Firstly, an amendment bill was passed in Parliament in on June 26, 2003, to encourage more foreign investment in higher class resorts. This involves the government playing a stronger role in assisting outsiders to lease land, and tax breaks being given to new hotel/resort developments, with the size of the tax relief being proportional to the size of the hotel/resort. This may see more land moving out of community hands, at least temporarily, in the future, but it is unclear if this is also signalling less government support for the small-scale beach fale initiatives. Secondly, partly in response to concerns from within the tourism industry about supposed substandard accommodation and facilities provided by some beach fale operations, staff of the Samoan Tourism Authority are formalizing planning procedures by developing 'minimum standards' which tourist accommodation providers must abide by if they want to be promoted or endorsed by the Government. Depending on the final details of these minimum standards, this may mean that less wealthy families will be unlikely to establish a beach fale venture, as greater resources will be required to meet the minimum standards.

Based on these findings and an earlier paper (Scheyvens 2005b), this working paper makes four key recommendations:

- Firstly, village leaders together with Samoan Tourism Authority (STA) personnel need to regularly monitor the development of beach fale (through personal observation, village meetings, and consultation with tourists), and to control this development where necessary:
  - a) to maximise the benefits villagers gain from the fale (for example, in order to maintain their popularity beach fale need to continue to offer tourists a unique cultural experience in a relaxed environment - if some villages are oversubscribed with beach fale enterprises and owners start haggling for custom, this is likely to deter tourists)
  - b) to minimise inconvenience/harm to local people from tourism - to date matai have effectively put in place good social controls on tourist behaviour but they may need to pay more attention to environmental issues (such as sewage disposal and use of fresh water by beach fale), and to equity issues (ensuring that beach fale development does not impinge heavily on access of local people to the beach or marine resources) otherwise resentment towards tourism could build up over time.
- Secondly, the Samoan Tourism Authority and donors such as NZAID should continue to support beach fale enterprises and to ensure that in doing so they offer assistance to a diverse range of enterprises, from the very basic to those that are now well promoted and more up-market. While it would be easy to overlook the basic beach fale enterprises, they effectively provide an important livelihood strategy particularly for those who are not in a strong economic position within their village, and it is operators of these enterprises who are in more

need of help with matters like publicity, marketing, and service provision.

- Thirdly, officials need to recognize the importance of the domestic tourism market, and to encourage development of this market both because: a) it is a very good source of revenue and it is less fickle than the international tourism market, and b) this would signal that government is interested in the recreation and well-being of its own citizens, rather than just offering up the country's best scenic assets for the enjoyment of foreign tourists.
- Fourthly, there is further potential to develop the beach fale sector, but advice needs to be provided to villagers about development of associated products and services, such as beach clothing, souvenirs, food or tours, so that they are aware of viable options which do not just replicate the basic beach fale concept. The Samoan Tourism Authority, Small Business Enterprise Centre, donors and other relevant agencies could assist villagers to identify and develop appropriate products and services to enhance the beach fale experience.

In summary, this paper shows how a unique model of tourism development centred on basic beach fale has evolved in Samoa and is reaping considerable benefits for rural people. Samoa has until recently eschewed many advances from international interests because of land tenure issues, preferring to take a path which has supported the development of a strong and dynamic budget beach fale sector (see Scheyvens 2005a, 2005b). This paper suggests that although beach fale tourism does not attract high spending tourists, it should be considered 'high value' in terms of community development because most economic benefits are retained locally, it is based upon local skills and resources, it involves cultural education of guests, it supports conservation of resources, and it does this all in the context of high levels of local ownership, participation and control.

## Aotelega Aloa'ia

O lenei pepa o le galuega ua lipoti ai fa'amaumauga o le galuega su'esu'e i le vaega tau turisi i Samoa ua taua o fale turisi tu matafaga. O le autu tonu lava o lenei pepa o le maitau ina lea o le taua ma le aoga o lenei vaega tau turisi e masani ona le amana'ia ina. I lea lava tulaga ua fa'amaumau ai auala i le sao aoga o fale tu matafaga i le atina'e ina o nu'u i Samoa fa'apea ai ma le fa'aliloa mai o vaega e ono fa'alelei ai lenei atina'e. Ua fa'ai'u le su'esu'ega i nai fautuaga i auala e fa'aaauu ma lagolago ai le atina'e ina o turisi i Samoa. O le 'aufaitau e fia malamalama atili i fale turisi tu matafaga, e aofia ai fa'amatalaga i le atina'e ina o turisi i Samoa, ma fa'amatalaga fa'apitoa i le itu tau a'oa'oga ma fesoasoani tau tupe mo i latou o lo'o faia fale tu matafaga atoa ai ma fa'amatalaga mai tagata turisi, e taga'i i le ulua'i pepa o lenei lava su'esu'ega (CIGAD Pepa o le Galuega Numera 3/2005 – taga'i ia Scheyvens 2005b).

Ua tele le aoga ua maua mai i le atina'e fale tu matafaga i le atina'e ina o le tele o nu'u i Samoa. Ua fa'ateleina le aoga i fa'alapotopotoga i nu'u i so'o se vaega ona o nei fale e fau lava e tagata o le nu'u e iai le poto masani mai mea o lo'o maua lava i totonu o le nu'u, ma o i latou fo'i e umia nei fale e masani ona latou fa'atau mai fua o la'au, fuala'au aina, figota o le sami, mea taulima mai nu'u atoa ai ma le fa'afaigaluega ina o nisi o le nu'u pea tele galuega fai. Ua iai fo'i le aoga o malo po'o tagata turisi i le manuia lautele o se nu'u e ala lea i le fa'atau i faleoloa, malaga i ta'avale atoa ai ma mea-alofa tupe i lotu. O le i si aoga o le atina'e fale tu matafaga e le'i aloa'ia o le toe fa'afo'i lea o le agaga mitamita o tagata i o latou lava aiga ma nu'u. O le to'atele o tagata Samoa e lagona le fiafia moni pea malaga atu tagata mai atunu'u i fafo i o latou nu'u e fia malamalama i le aganu'u, ma i lea tulaga e fiafia sui auai i fa'alapotopotoga e fesoasoani i le fa'amatagofieina o nu'u. O le i si foi aoga o le atina'e fale turisi tu matafaga i nisi o nu'u o le fa'aitiitia lea o le o ese atu o tupulaga talavou e nonofo i le taulaga ona ua latou lagona ua iai se mea e ao ona nonofo ai e atina'e aua le lumana'i manuia.

E ui lava i le ola lelei o le atina'e fale tu matafaga ma le aoga ua maua mai ai, e le'o amana'ia ina lava, e tu'u'esea, ma i nisi fo'i tulaga ua iai le fa'asea mai i si tagata fai fa'asalalauaga. O fale tu matafaga e foliga mai e le o lavea i fa'amaumauga a i latou o lo'o fa'amaumauina le aofa'i o moega avanoa mo tagata turisi i Samoa, mo se fa'ata'ita'iga, o le tulaga masani e le o lavea fale tu matafaga ia latou fa'amaumauga, ma e fa'apea fo'i i le lipoti a le Faletupe Atina'e o Asia o lo'o ta'ua ai i lalo o le mata'upu turisi e leai ni fale turisi tu matafaga. O tagata faufautua mai atunu'u i fafo ma i latou e fa'atupeina atina'e ua fa'aalia lo latou le fiafia i le itu tau fanua ma ona pulega i le fa'aaoga ina o nei fanua ona ua avea lea ma tulaga e taofi ai le atina'e o matafaga tetele sili ona mananaia; i lea la itu ua avea ai nisi o matafaga sili ona mananaia ua fausia ai fale tu matafaga laiti. E fa'apea fo'i le le fiafia i nisi lava tagata Samoa o lo'o galulue i le atina'e turisi ona ua latou manatu ua tele naunau fale tu matafaga ma o nisi o nei fale ua tu'ufua ma foliga mataga i matafaga ma laufanua. I le mata'upu lava lea, ua i ai le manatu o le malosia o le atina'e ina o fale turisi tu matafaga e le lelei lea mo Samoa ona talu ai o le atunu'u e malosia lana aganu'u ma le natura i lona va'aiga ua tatau ai ona avea ma nofoaga tonu mo fale sili ona lelei ma taugata e una'i mai ai tagata turisi e tele latou tupe fa'aalu. Ua iai le manatu fua i nisi o i latou e umia fale tali malo laiti vaega mauualalo i le manuia o fale tu matafaga ona o le tele o latou malo masani (fa'ata'ita'iga, tagata faigaluega i matagaluega 'ese'ese i



le malo) ua latou filifilia le nonofo i fale tu matafaga, ma ua avea ai lea tulaga fua ma itu fa'alemanuia mo fale tu matafaga i le atina'e turisi.

Ua i ai nei suiga fou a le malo e ono a'afia ai fale turisi tu matafaga i nisi o nofoaga. O le suiga muamua, ua pasia le pili i le Palemene i le aso 26 o Iuni, 2003, e una'i ai le fa'atupeina mai fafo o fale mo tafaoga vaega maualuga. O lea fuafuaga o lea fesoasoani malosi ai le malo i tagata mai fafo e lisi ai fanua ma le totogia ni lafoga mo se vaitaimi aua le atina'e ina o faletalimalo fou/fale fou mo tafaoga, ma e fuafua le umi o le le totogia o le lafoga i le tele o le faletalimalo/fale mo tafaoga. E foliga mai o lea ave'ese mai tagata le pulea o fanua mo se vaitaimi le tumau i le lumana'i, peita'i e le o manino mai pe le o le fa'ailoga lea e ta'u mai ai le fa'aitiitia o le fesoasoani a le malo i le atina'e ina o fale tu matafaga laiti. O le suiga lona lua, e tusa ai ma manatu fa'aalia mai nisi o lo'o galulue i le atina'e o turisi e fa'asaga lea i le tulaga maualalo ma fa'aletonu i nisi o nofoaga o fale tu matafaga, ua o'o ai loa se manatu i le aufaigaluega o le Ofisa Pulea le Atina'e Turisi i Samoa e fa'aaloa'ia mai ai aiaiga fa'atulaga ina e ao ona mulimuli i ai i latou uma o lo'o galulue i le atina'e o turisi i le atunu'u pea manana'o e si'itia ma aloa'ia e le malo latou atina'e. I le fa'amautuina au'illi'ili la o nei aiaiga fa'atulaga ina, o lea fa'aali mai ai le faigata i aiga ausage ona fa'atu se atina'e fale tu matafaga nai lo le tulaga o lo'o iai nei, ona o lea tele mea e mana'omia e fa'amalie ai nei aiaiga fa'atulaga ina.

I luga lava o nei fa'amaumauga fa'apea ai ma le ulua'i pepa (Scheyvens 2005b), o lenei pepa o le galuega ua maua mai ai fautuaga autu e fa:

- Muamua, o ta'ita'i o nu'u fa'atasi ai ma le aufaigaluega i le Ofisa Pulea le Atina'e Turisi i Samoa e ao ona va'ai lelei le atina'e o fale tu matafaga (e ala lea i le siaki ina, faia o fonotaga i nu'u, fa'apea feiloa'iga ma tagata turisi), ma ia pulea i le tulaga talafeagai ai lea atina'e:
  - a) ia tele le aoga i tagata o nu'u mai le fa'aaoga ina o fale (mo se fa'ata'ita'iga, afai e tumau le mana'omia pea o fale tu matafaga e ao lava ona fa'aaau le fesoasoani i tagata turisi aua le malamalama i le tu ma le aganu'u i le tulaga solo leleia – afai loa o lea i ai ni nu'u mana'o tele i totogi o fale tumatafaga ma amata ia i latou e umia ia fale ona fai nisi o auala e le tatau ai mo le tosina mai o tagata, o lea avea ma auala e 'alo 'ese ai tagata turisi)
  - b) ia itiiti le afaina o tagata a nu'u mai le atina'e turisi – e o'o mai i le taimi neio lo'o lelei pea pulega a matai i le va fealoa'i ma tagata turisi i le itu tau tuma amioga pulea peita'i e ao fo'i ona manatu loloto i mata'upu tau le si'osi'omaga (fa'ata'ita'iga, tafieseaa o otaota ma le fa'aaoga ina o vai magaloe fale tu matafaga, atoa ai ma le fai tutusa uma o tagata (fa'ata'ita'iga, ia mautinoa ia 'aua le avea le atina'e tu matafaga e taofia ai le fa'aaoga ina e tagata a nu'u o matafaga po'o le sami) e fai ai lea ma fa'atiga i loto o tagata fa'asaga i le atina'e turisi i tausaga fai mai.
- Lua, o le Ofisa Pulea le Atina'e Turisi i Samoa atoa ai ma fesoasoani mai vaega 'ese'ese pei o le fesoasoani mai le malo o Niu Sila e tatau ona fa'aaau pea le fesoasoani i le atina'e fale tu matafaga ma ia mautinoa fo'i le fesoasoani e 'ave i isi atina'e 'ese'ese, mai atina'e o lo'o tauatia'e se'ia o'o lava i atina'e ua mautu lelei ma lauiloa. E ui lava ina foliga mai e faigofie ona fa'agalo atina'e fa'atauva'a tu matafaga e ao ina silafia o atina'e fa'apea e taua i le soifua manuia i tagata o nu'u e le o malosi le

tamaoiga, ma o nei atina'e e mana'omia ai tele le fesoasoani i itu tau fa'asalalauga fa'alaua'itele, o maketi, ma galuega fai.

- Tolu, e ao i tagata ofisa o le malo, kamupani ma fa'alapotopotoga ona silafia lelei le taua o le maketi turisi i totonu o le atunu'u, ma una'i lona atina'e ina ona: a) o le auala lelei tele lea i le tupe maua ma e itiiti le fa'aletonu e ono tupu mai, na i lo le maketi fa'avaomalo, ma b) e fa'ailoa mai ai fo'i le mana'o o le malo i le ola soifua manuia o ona tagata, na i lo le tu'uina atu o nofoaga sili ona mananaia e fa'aaoga i tafaoga a tagata turisi mai fafo.
- Fa, e i ai le lumana'i i le atina'e atili o fale tu matafaga, peita'i e mana'omia fautuaga e tu'u atu i tagata o nu'u i auala e atina'e ai i si mea 'ese'ese tau turisi ma galuega fai, pei o lavalava e fa'aaoga i matafaga, suvania, mea'ai po'o malaga tafafao, ina ia silafia ai nei mea 'ese'ese na i lo le manatu lava tau na o le fale tu matafaga. O le Ofisa Pulea le Atina'e o Turisi, Ofisa Atina'e o Pisinisi Laiti, fesoasoani mai tagata lautele ma i si fa'alapotopotoga e ono mafai ona fesoasoani atu i tagata o nu'u i auala e silafia ma atina'e ai mea 'ese'ese ma galuega ua talafeagai aua le fa'aleleia atili o le atina'e ina o fale tu matafaga i le malamalama ua maua.

I lona aotelega, o lenei lipoti ua fa'aali mai ai se fa'atusa 'ese i le atina'e turisi e fa'asino tonu lea i le amata mai o fale tu matafaga i Samoa ma lona aoga tele i tagata o nu'u i tua. I tausaga ua mavae se'ia o'o mai i le taimi lata mai na te'ena e Samoa mana'oga mai fafo ona o tulaga tau fanua ma 'ele'ele, ae ua manatu e fesoasoani i le atina'e ina malosi o fale tu matafaga. O le manatu o lenei lipoti e ui lava o nei fale tu matafaga e le tosina mai i ai tagata turisi e tele latou tupe fa'aalu, e tatau ona i ai le 'aoga maualuga' i tulaga tau le atina'e ina o nu'u ma alalafaga aua o le tele o aoga o lo'o tumau lea i tagata a nu'u lava, ma fa'aaoga le poto masani ma mea o lo'o maua, a'oa'o ina o malo i le tu ma le aganu'u, puipuia o mea aoga, ma ua faia ia tulaga uma ona o le maualuga o le tulaga o tagata a nu'u lava e umia, 'auai ma pulea ia atina'e.

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Sincere thanks to all of those who made my fieldwork in Samoa such an informative and enjoyable experience. I am particularly grateful to the beach fale owners and operators, tourists, and community members who provided the bulk of information upon which this paper is based. Officials of the Samoan Tourism Authority also gave generously of their time to help me to understand their work. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the valuable research assistance of Bronwyn Tavita Sesega, the insights provided by Tapulolou Siuli Tuaillemafua, and the friendly help extended by Louise Twining-Ward. Susuga Matai'a Tavale Maiava translated these Acknowledgements and the Executive Summary for me, so I am very grateful to him. To all of you, fa'afetai tele!

In terms of official assistance, thanks to the Ministry of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for approving my fieldwork in Samoa, to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee for providing ethical clearance for this research, and to the Massey University Research Fund for assistance with fieldwork expenses.

## Fa'afetai

E momoli atu le agaga fa'afetai tele ia i latou uma na auai i la'u su'esu'ega i Samoa ua ou maua ai le agaga fiafia i le malamalama ma fa'amatalaga ua maua mai ai. E fa'apitoa la'u fa'afetai ia i latou e umia ma galulue i fale tu matafaga, tagata turisi, ma sui mai fa'alapotopotoga i nu'u na latou tu'u mai le tele o fa'amatalaga o lo'o ta'ua i lenei lipoti. E fa'afetai atu fo'i i ali'i ma tama'ita'i ofisa o le Ofisa Pulea Atina'e Turisi i Samoa mo le fa'aavanoa mai o latou taimi e fesoasoani mai ai ina ia ou malamalama ia latou galuega fai. E fa'aopoopo atu fo'i la'u fa'afetai i le su'esu'ega aoga na fesoasoani mai ai Bronwyn Tavita Sesega, le malamalama na tu'u mai e le Tofa Tapulolou Siuli Tuaillemafua, ma le fesoasoani fa'aleuo mai ia Louise Twining-Ward. O le Susuga Matai'a Tavale Maiava na ia fa'aliliu lenei Fa'afetai ma le Aotelega Aloa'ia mo a'u, ma e fa'afetai tele atu ai ia te ia. Ia outou uma lava, fa'afetai tele!

I tulaga fesoasoani aloa'ia, e momoli atu le fa'afetai tele i le Ofisa o le Palemia mo le fa'atagana e fai ai la'u su'esu'ega i Samoa, le Komiti mo le Soifua Lelei o Tagata i le Univesite o Massey mo le fa'atagana e fai ai lenei su'esu'ega, fa'apea ma le Vaega Tau Tupe mo Su'esu'ega i le Univesite o Massey i le itu tau tupe aua le fa'atinoga o lenei su'esu'ega.

## Glossary of Samoan Words

<i>'Aiga</i>	extended family, descent group
<i>Aumaga</i>	village society of untitled men
<i>Fa'alavelave</i>	important occasion such as a wedding or funeral when family assistance, including cash and material goods, should be given
<i>Fa'a Samoa</i>	Samoan customs and way of life
<i>Fale</i>	traditional house with thatched roof and open sides
<i>Fiafia</i>	performance of songs and dancing, used during traditional celebrations and also presented to tourists
<i>Fono</i>	village council, made up of all local matai
<i>Lavalava</i>	wrap around skirt, worn by males and females
<i>Matai</i>	chief (each 'aiga is headed by a matai); matai are responsible for making decisions concerning land and the general well-being of the 'aiga or village; they also enforce laws at village level and dole out punishments to those who break these laws
<i>Palagi</i>	white-skinned person
<i>Tatau</i>	Tattoo

Source: Most entries derived from Bennett et al. (2003: 25,160)

## Abbreviations

BF	Beach Fale
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FIT	Free and Independent Traveller
MPA	Marine Protected Area
SBEC	Small Business Enterprise Centre
SPTO	South Pacific Tourism Organisation
ST\$	Samoan Tala
STA	Samoan Tourism Authority (name used from 2003 onwards)
SVB	Samoan Visitor's Bureau (name used prior to 2003)
TDP	Tourism Development Plan
VFR	Tourism industry term for people who travel mainly to 'Visit Friends and Relations'

## Currency Conversion

At December 2003, ST\$1 = US\$0.35 = NZ\$0.57.

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## 1. Introduction

This working paper reports on the findings of a research project which explores the budget tourism sector in Samoa as epitomized by beach fale tourism. Its main aim is to draw attention to the legitimacy and value of this often overlooked sector of the tourism market. As such it documents ways in which beach fale have contributed to development in Samoan villages, as well as identifying constraints to improvement of this sector. It concludes with a number of recommendations as to how sustainable, equity-enhancing development of tourism in Samoa can be supported in the future.

Since the early 1990s beach fale tourism in Samoa has evolved into something of a quiet phenomenon in the realms of budget tourism experiences in the Pacific. Despite official efforts to foster more up-market tourism development, beach fale tourism has thrived. Small, oval-shaped, thatched-roofed and open-sided fale are now dotted along the Samoan coastline, often occupying prime beachside land that in most other countries would be home to large hotel or an all-inclusive resort under foreign ownership. These fale are testimony to the fact that the customary land tenure system and feelings of ambivalence about foreign involvement in the country's development have had a strong influence on the nature and spread of tourism development in Samoa ( 2005a, 2005b). Both Samoan and foreign tourists have been drawn to staying in beach fale and their custom has led to considerable rewards for many families operating beach fale ventures.

An earlier paper in this series (CIGAD Working Paper No.3/2005– see 2005b) traced the evolution of tourism development in Samoa, with a specific focus on the growth in beach fale accommodation. It drew on interviews with Samoan and foreign tourists to document the positive facets of the beach fale experience which had led to its increasing popularity, while also discussing ways in which the level of service could be improved or enhanced. The paper concluded that it may be in Samoa's best interests to promote small to medium scale tourism development and to cater for a diverse range of tourists, including domestic tourists and those travelling on a budget. Many international tourists who come to Samoa are attracted at least partly because of what a locally-controlled tourism industry can offer, namely, low to moderate prices, friendly service, basic accommodation in stunning locations, and a cultural experience.

The present working paper focuses on the beach fale enterprises from the perspective of the beach fale operators and other villagers. It has three main aims:

- a) to ascertain to what extent beach fale tourism ventures are valued by local communities and why;
- b) to document perceptions of local communities about problems associated with beach fale tourism;
- c) to determine ways in which the constraints associated with beach fale tourism can be overcome, and the benefits for communities enhanced.

### 1.1. Methodology

The research on which this paper was based was carried out in my capacity as an independent academic researcher, with financial support from Massey University.

Permission for fieldwork in Samoa was granted by the Ministry of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and ethical approval was gained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (PN Protocol 02/124).

My methodology was qualitative, with the main technique of data collection being semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders including beach fale owners and operators,<sup>1</sup> clients of beach fale, officials from the Samoan Tourism Authority, and tourism industry representatives. In many cases these were individual interviews, but in some cases family members of owners wished to participate in the interviews at the same time, and often beach fale clients were interviewed in small groups.

I was also a participant observer of beach fale during my two week stay in Samoa, travelling around both Upolu and Savaii and staying in beach fale with my research assistant, Bronwyn Tavita Sesega. Bronwyn conducted interviews with me, sometimes taking the role of translator, other times taking notes. She also provided valuable insights into Samoan culture. We interviewed beach fale owners both in areas where tourism has become a central economic activity, as well as some more remote locations where constraints to business success were more apparent. I received assistance prior to my arrival and for my first two days in Samoa from Tapulolou Siuli Tuaillemafua who had previously been employed by the Samoan Visitors Bureau. He advised me on matters concerning my itinerary, and choice of beach fale and tourism 'experts' to visit.

At the conclusion of the fieldwork, I organised a round table discussion with Siuli, Bronwyn and a specialist on sustainable tourism in Samoa, Louise Twining-Ward, in order to present my initial findings. The feedback received helped to verify my data.

## 1.2. Outline

This paper will provide an in-depth analysis of the value of beach fale tourism for local communities as well as constraints to its success, by discussing the following issues in turn:

- beach fale and local development in rural Samoa
- constraints to running a successful beach fale business
- concerns for the future

It concludes with a number of recommendations to support appropriate beach fale development in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> From this point on I will refer only to beach fale operators – some of those involved were owners, but in other cases those interviewed were family members assisting with operation of the venture.

## 2. Beach Fale and Local Development in Rural Samoa

Beach fale have contributed to local development in rural Samoa in a variety of ways. Most Samoans interviewed were very positive about beach fale development in their areas with a number citing the rejuvenation of their villages, local pride and economic improvements stemmed directly from the growth of beach fale. Thus the benefits are not just economic, and they often extend beyond the families directly involved in running the beach fale ventures:

We don't look at beach fale from just an economic perspective – [they are] for the benefit of the whole community at large (Sione, Pastor, June 2003).<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless there are constraints to the successful development of beach fale ventures, and concerns about the social and environmental impacts of beach fale development. Thus both positive and negative issues, and potential for change in the future, are discussed in the sections which follow.

### 2.1. Economic development

In three of the villages most popular with overnight beach fale guests (Lalomanu, Salepaga and Manase), many local people felt that beach fale tourism had enabled the economy to thrive. Commenting on the difference it had made to Manase, for example, a local tourism entrepreneur enthused:

The village has prospered and it [beach fale tourism] is injecting a lot of money into the village (Moelagi Jackson, Safua Hotel and Tours, June 2003).

This section on the economic development of villages through beach fale tourism will consider in turn the monetary contribution of beach fale, ways in which beach fale have expanded people's livelihood options, and the multiplier effects of beach fale tourism.

#### **Monetary contribution**

Beach fale offer budget accommodation and as such, it would be easy to overlook the significance of the revenue they generate compared to, for example, an exclusive beach resort. In fact, backpackers and other free and independent travellers (FITs) typically stay longer than other groups of tourists, thus while their daily expenditure may not be high, the total amount of money they spend can be considerable. Certainly some beach fale operators<sup>3</sup> prefer foreign guests because of the length of their stay and the fact that they spend more money locally than domestic tourists. Furthermore, FITs tend to spend more on locally-produced goods and services thus minimizing the 'leakages' commonly associated

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<sup>2</sup> Except for government officials and tourism industry representatives who agreed to have their names used in this paper, in most cases the names of research participants have been altered (in the case of beach fale operators) or are simply not used (in the case of clients). Except where it was necessary to use the real name of a beach fale or where operators explicitly agreed to use of the name of their enterprise, I have also changed their names and indicated this with an asterisk e.g. Sunshine Beach Fale\* (this is a made up name).

<sup>3</sup> From this point on I will refer only to beach fale operators – some of those involved were owners, but in other cases those interviewed were family members assisting with operation of the venture.



with resorts whereby most goods are imported and profits are sent overseas (2002b).

Palagi guests interviewed generally spent between ST\$90-120 per day, per person, and were staying in Samoa for periods of between 10 days and 4 weeks. Note that this was based upon the ST\$40-68 per person which it cost to stay in a beach fale for one night, with breakfast and dinner included, but it also allowed some 'luxuries', such as Vailimas (the local beer) and going diving or hiring a motorbike for one or two days.<sup>4</sup> This means that for a two week visit, a Palagi guest would spend around ST\$1500, much of it staying within rural communities.

Those beach fale operations catering more to domestic day visitors can still earn significant amounts of money, however, as witnessed by earnings of up to ST\$1000 on weekend days at Matareva beach, which is popular with Apia residents. These were gate takings, and few expenses would have to be deducted as the matai rely on the labour of their wives and the aumaga (untitled men) of the village to do much of the preparation, maintenance and cleaning of fale. Luisa stressed that both Samoan and overseas visitors were extremely important to her business success. During peak holiday periods and when her place was booked out for workshops or retreats, takings were around ST\$9000 per week before wages and expenses (such as food and drink) (Luisa, BF owner, June 2003). More commonly, she earned about half of this amount.

In less popular enterprises used mainly by day visitors at holiday times and weekends, occupancy rates were low overall. The manager of one such establishment noted that they would like to attract more guests on week days throughout the year. In peak periods they might cater for 60 guests per week in their nine fale and three rooms, while in quiet periods, they attracted only a handful of guests. Nevertheless, she said, they earned enough to make a small profit (Lucy, BF manager, June 2003). In Park's (2003) research, however, a number of beach fale operators interviewed were concerned about low rates of occupancy.

While most beach fale are staffed with family labour, this does not mean that family members are paid a wage. In one instance, for example, I spoke to a woman who managed a venture for her brother, who was living in Apia. She stated that he made the important business decisions and that all of the money generated was handed over to him (Lucy, BF operator, June 2003). However, individualistic Western notions of income and wages do not always apply here – it is likely that this woman was given money periodically by her brother, or that he paid for her children's school fees, had bought her a washing machine or refrigerator, or otherwise provided benefits for the extended family in return for her management of the beach fale enterprise.

### **Expanding livelihood options**

Beach fale development often provides a means of sustainable economic growth in the context of few alternative livelihood strategies (Terra Firma Associates 2001:50). Notably, beach fale tourism has contributed significantly to the economies of some remote areas. This is largely due to the adventuresome

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4 A minority of international tourists (less than 10% of those I interviewed) preferred being as self-sufficient as possible and/or were on a tight budget, staying in very basic beach fale (which cost ST\$10-20/night) and cooking their own meals, thus spending on average ST\$50-60 per day.

nature of many international tourists visiting Samoa and their interest in culture, which means they seek out places where other tourists do not go (Twining-Ward and Twining-Ward, 1998), thus spreading their money over a wider geographical area. This can mean that economically-deprived regions which have cultural or natural features of interest to more adventurous tourists also benefit directly from the beach fale tourism industry.

Through starting a beach fale, a family can diversify their livelihood options, thus spreading their economic risk. Thus if the price for bananas goes down or an aunty who had been remitting cash loses her job in Auckland, economic prospects for the family are still promising if they own a beach fale enterprise. Beach fale also fit in well with other rural livelihood strategies, so that whether a family member works on the plantation or in the beach fale kitchen that day can depend on bookings.

While during busy periods beach fale may provide most of a family's income, even successful beach fale ventures may need to call on other livelihood strategies at less popular times. One beach fale owner, for example, had a ST\$24,000 loan which she had used to construct a large communal eating house. When I asked if she ever had a problem with repayments, she mentioned that her brother had a big plantation: 'If there's no tourists, taro talks!' (Luisa, BF operator, June 2003). She continued: 'This is the Samoan way – we work together and help each other'.

**Figure 1: Farmer Returning from Plantation**



Source: author

### Use of local resources – the multiplier effect

There are a number of other ways in which members of the village benefit economically from the presence of beach fale. Multiplier effects are experienced in the local economy because tourists staying in beach fale do not demand luxurious, imported goods. Thus owners can maximise the use of local products and services. As one owner explained,

Money should be left in my village rather than going elsewhere.

Another noted:

Our idea is to help the community. We buy food products from villagers – if you need fish, arrange it with a fisherman. The same goes for building materials – buy locally.

While most of the jobs generated by beach fale enterprises are filled by the extended family members of the operators, they may employ extra staff during busy periods. For example, Mary's children are mainly responsible for running her venture, although during national holidays she will hire two or three additional people from the village. Nita, who runs a venture which is very popular with overseas tourists, hires six village people full time to cook, clean and provide security, while Peter employs two full time rubbish collectors as he feels presenting an attractive, clean establishment to guests makes an important impression on them. There was only one case in my research where an owner preferred to employ people from outside of her village, and that was because of her husband's political affiliations with another area nearby.

The following examples show that in addition to working for beach fale operators, there are a range of ways in which local people can earn revenue from beach fale enterprises:

- sale of fruit, vegetables, chickens, pigs, and seafood (when the beach fale operators and their families cannot keep up with demand for these items themselves);
- sale of twine (made from coconut fibre), sawn timber, woven blinds (made from coconut leaves), mats (made of pandanus), table cloths, cushions, and other materials used in construction and furnishing of beach fale and eating houses;
- contract work for village carpenters, electricians, and plumbers, regarding construction and maintenance of beach fale and associated facilities;
- sale of handicraft items to tourists;
- sale of firewood or charcoal to day visitors for barbeques;
- added custom for the village store from tourists purchasing drinks and snacks.

Interestingly, as some beach fale establishments are becoming more up market, their use of local resources is declining slightly while their demand for imported goods has risen. For example, one operator noted: 'As the cooking is getting more up market, we have to go further afield to buy imported products' (Maria, July 2003). For example, tomatoes, celery, red peppers and lettuce have to be purchased in Apia, and some of these products are imported. Another beach fale establishment sourced most of their produce from their own plantation but bought pineapples and tomatoes from the market, as well as buying products that are out of season.

## 2.2. Capacity building

In addition to economic benefits, beach fale operators have also gained considerable skills through running their enterprises and participating in training schemes for beach fale operators (see Section 4.1 for details of these training schemes). The types of training topics they noted as being of particular worth included ideas on making tourists feel welcome, meeting tourist expectations regarding service and cleanliness of facilities, waste management, and marketing.

There is a gender dimension to the capacity building which is occurring. There are more women than men involved in the management and day to day running of beach fale enterprises, and consequently more women than men have attended beach fale owners' seminars (Twining-Ward 1999). Paradise beach fale on Upolu used to be run by a group of matai, but the business did not function successfully until the local women's committee took over the enterprise. It appears that the opportunity to run a business has been empowering for many women in rural areas, as reflected in Fairburn-Dunlop's statement about women's involvement in the tourism industry as a whole in Samoa:

Samoan women have shown considerable initiative and used the opportunities available in the tourism industry to develop their entrepreneurial skills. In a society where there are very few income-generating avenues, tourism has provided opportunities for learning new skills and applying old skill in new fields (1994:122).

Interestingly, the pressure for families to have 'all hands on deck' to meet the needs of tourists during peak periods has led to an expansion of men's capacity in new work domains in some instances. Thus, for example, men have assisted with cleaning bathrooms, preparing bedding, and washing dishes.

## 2.3. Social development

Beach fale tourism also fosters social development in rural communities. This section on social development will cover issues relating to the social well-being of the village, specifically pride in their village, community benefits, and tourist behaviour.

### **Pride in villages and culture**

Several people interviewed commented that communities with successful beach fale ventures were now more vibrant and attractive places to live in, with more jobs on offer, and that young people were moving back to the villages from Apia. For example, a pastor who had recently returned to Samoa after 24 years in the United States commented on the changes he had noticed in rural areas, many of them associated with beach fale development:

Beach fale tourism has helped to boost the morale of communities and helped people to cater for their day to day needs.... It's also helped them to improve their surroundings, their gardens etc. (Sione, Pastor, June 2003).

Three young men (aged 17, 20 and 21) spoken to on the road through Manase village one evening, all of whom lived in the village and helped on their family's plantation or looked after elderly family members, said they felt tourism was very good for Manase because: firstly, people from all over the world were visiting

their village now and finding out about their culture; secondly, these visitors interacted with local people in positive ways; and thirdly, local people made great efforts to beautify their village so that it would look good for their guests. When asked where they would most like to live and work, comparing Manase, Apia or an overseas location, all three young men said Manase, as this would mean they were closer to their family, fellow villagers, and church. A young woman who was waiting tables at a beach fale business in Manase during study break from a tertiary institution in Apia, likewise wanted to work close to home. While the qualification she was seeking would have allowed her to access jobs in Apia or overseas, she said her ideal plan was to return to her home village to work.

Thus, as observed by one tourist, 'traditional culture' should not be seen as static, and there need not be a negative relationship between tourism and culture:

[Beach fale] could be a disruption to the traditional way of life...but what is this? And they could help the traditional way of life to survive because beach fale keep people in the villages (NZ male, 44, June 2003).

Palagi tourists' interest in culture was noted by a number of beach fale operators, which led to a genuine sharing of ideas, stories, and skills between some 'hosts' and 'guests' (as discussed in Section 5.2). Villagers in general felt proud about their villages and culture when visitors showed an interest in talking with them, visiting their churches and homes:

Some Palagi like very much to learn about Samoa. One Swedish boy had the whole tatau, and would only wear a lavalava. Others learn just a little – they're here for a short time. My mother and I demonstrate weaving if they [guests] are interested.... We like to show our culture and our life (Luisa, BF operator, June 2003).

**Figure 2: Village with Attractive Planting Alongside the Road**



Source: author

### **Community benefits**

As discussed above under 'Economic Development', beach fale owners tend to use local resources and labour as much as possible, in order to ensure economic benefits to fellow villagers are maximised. In addition to buying food or services from individuals, owners supported community groups and community initiatives in a number of ways. For example, if Luisa has a group booking and the group wants a kava demonstration or to see a fiafia show, she employs village groups to do this. A dancing group she regularly employs had saved ST\$3000 in their account (Luisa, BF operator, June 2003). The manager of another popular beach fale noted that when big groups of tourists booked into his family's establishment, village groups (such as women's committee, school groups, church groups, aumaga) were asked to help out and their group would receive a donation for their assistance (David, BF Manager, June 2003).

There is also evidence that beach fale operators make generous contributions to church and community initiatives at times. In one village where a church was being rebuilt, a beach fale venture donated ST\$2000 to the pastor to buy food for the carpenters and labourers working on site.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, churches benefit from the tourists who come to participate in a Sunday service, who often contribute money to the collection plate.

One beach fale manager claimed that there was a reciprocal relationship between beach fale enterprises and villagers. If the beach fale ensured a flow of benefits to the wider village, they would be unlikely to have security problems (for example, theft of guests' property). In general, beach fale operators reported a lot of support from other villagers for beach fale development, a fact they attributed to the wider community benefits which were received. For example, Peter noted that even though he was born in another part of the Pacific so is somewhat of an outsider in the village where he and his Samoan wife have set up a beach fale business, local people are quite cordial to him because he buys a lot of produce from them (Peter, BF operator, June 2003).

There are also a few communally-run beach fale ventures whose funds are at least partly diverted back into the community. For example, the Women's Committee running Paradise Beach have donated money to renovate the pastor's house, while the matai (chiefs) running Matareva Beach have donated money to the local school. In each of these cases, a yearly dividend is also paid out to those on their committee who have assisted with work at the beach fale.<sup>6</sup>

### **Tourist behaviour**

In many developing countries there is a major concern that behaviour by tourists has a negative impact on local people because of a lack of respect for cultural norms. While the cautious attitude to tourism development and concerns about tourists explained in an earlier working paper (see 2005b) are informed by such views, it was interesting to find that beach fale operators and villagers in general actually had few complaints about Palagi tourists, who were said to be largely very well behaved: 'They're very good – school teachers, doctors, professional

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5 As some commentators have discussed, however, there can be a real tensions between meeting such obligations in terms of fa'alavelave and running a successful business (Shar Drake and van Diermen 1998).

6 Some earnings may also be used for the benefit of individuals, however. For example, some of the takings at Matareva are spent casually on items that those matai on the gate may desire during the day: for example, they may send a boy off to the shop to buy cigarettes.

people – they're not fussy with food or anything' (Maria, July 2003). This may be partly because guests are often informed about appropriate behaviour and cultural protocol when coming to stay in a beach fale.

While there were occasional problems with drunkenness and associated vandalism, urinating on the beach or disruptive behaviour, beach fale operators said these behaviours were associated with Samoan tourists,

Local tourists are a problem if they have too much beer; then they become inconsiderate of bar staff and don't eat at meal times, only when they are hungry. This can be inconvenient for owners and employees. The village has a 10pm curfew and they have to be reminded to adhere to curfew times (Maria, BF operator, July 2003).

Concerns that were expressed about Palagi tourists related to either excessive bargain consciousness of a small number of visitors, cultural intrusiveness, or a combination of the two, such as when Palagi were invited to stay with a local family but overstayed their welcome and did not fairly compensate the family for the hospitality provided:

There is the cheap tourist who comes here [to Samoa] and has budgeted ST\$10 a day and expects *us* to pay for their holiday. I give them a piece of my mind – I tell them if you can't afford it, you may as well stay at home. I say to them that I can't go into a hotel in Germany and say 'This is too expensive for me, I'll only pay \$10'.... I ask them 'why should *we* pay for your holiday...if I don't have enough money, I don't get on that plane (Moelagi Jackson, Safua Hotel and Tours, June 2003).

It really bothered one or two beach fale owners when such tourists, who were often long term overseas travellers who had been through Asia and were used to bargaining for every product and service, tried to beat down the price of a night's accommodation:

There's always some that come and ask you if they can stay for such and such an amount of money, and when you think of all your service, food, and staff etc, it's not worth it (Maria, July 2003).

Overall, however, these 'cheap' tourists were a small minority, and in general tourist behaviour was not regarded as undermining social development in the villages in any way.

#### 2.4. Local control/self-determination

In addition to the economic and social benefits of beach fale tourism, beach fale also contribute to development in a political sense in that they are controlled by local families or community groups, and this means that prime beach sites remain under the management and ownership of local people: 'The beach fale industry is about Samoan people owning and manipulating tourism to fit in with their practices and traditions, not the other way around' (Park 2003:44). This challenges foreign domination of the tourism sector which is characteristic of tourism in many small island states (Scheyvens 2003). This local control is possible because of the communal land tenure system described earlier in this paper, because of the strength of fa'a Samoa and people's support for ensuring protection of their culture and land.

Matai play a key role in terms of leadership and decision-making in rural communities. Beach fale tourism is overseen by the fono (council of matai) of each village, which set rules to ensure that village life is not adversely affected by beach fale operations, and that visitors feel welcome and safe. Thus for example, beach fale operators are expected to instruct their guests in cultural protocol with respect to how they must dress when entering a village, that they must wait quietly during evening prayer time rather than wandering around the village, and at what time noise from the beach fale should stop in the evenings. If the fono decides that a fiafia must finish by 10pm, or that there should be no noise from beach fale after 11pm, operators have to ensure compliance. One beach fale manager noted that if a business next door to her had guests who were making noise late at night, she could be fined for not reporting them (Lucy, BF manager, June 2003). Larger beach fale establishments thus employ security guards both to protect guests and their possessions, and to preserve the peace by ensuring their behaviour does not get unruly.

While tourism writers commonly draw attention to culturally insensitive and inappropriate behaviour by tourists seeking hedonistic experiences in tropical locales, it is clear that local people can exert some control over tourists' behaviour and experiences (see for example Malam, 2005). Turning around Urry's (1990) concept of the 'tourist gaze' therefore, Park asserts that 'By bringing tourists "home" into the villages, it is the tourists that are really under the gaze of Samoans and this suits Samoans perfectly' (2003:61).

There are, however, divergent opinions on the value of such strong local control over tourism. As discussed above under Section 5.3, control over tourist behaviour in some cases means direct restrictions on their leisure activities, especially on Sundays. Return to Paradise beach is closed on Sundays in order to minimise disturbance from tourists (see the Beach Fale profile on the following page). Another beach fale operator did not think beach fale needed to close on Sundays, but he believed it was important to show respect on this day (Sione, June 2003):

All Samoans have to be at church on Sunday. But for tourists it's just another day on the beach. It's sending the wrong message... Sunday is a day to worship the Lord. Don't swim. Swim on Saturday and every other day. [Sunday as a holy day is] one of the things that makes this place unique (Sione, BF operator, June 2003).

Thus on Manono Island, to the ire of the NZ tour operator mentioned earlier, tourists were not allowed to swim or engage in leisure activities such as canoeing on Sundays, and could only leave the domain of their beach fale to attend church.

While some villages had strict rules about activities associated with tourism on Sundays, others were more relaxed about this and welcomed the opportunity to earn tourist dollars any day of the week. Thus the Sunday closure of Return to Paradise beach has led to a windfall for the group of matai who run the neighbouring Matareva beach, as they now get inundated with day visitors from Apia on Sundays. Much depends on the attitude of the pastor/s and matai in the village concerned, whose responsibility it is to balance the economic benefits with the potential social costs of tourism development in the interests of their community.



### **Beach Fale Profile: Return to Paradise Beach Fales**

*Return to Paradise Beach Fales are located on the Southern coast of Upolu on a beach popularised by the 1951 Hollywood movie which became its namesake. While located within easy driving distance of Apia, this enterprise caters for relatively small numbers of overseas and Samoan tourists partly because of its basic facilities, and also because it is closed on Sundays. The fale here are run by a community group, not by a family.*

At Return to Paradise beach, the beach has always been open to visitors but beach fale were developed more recently. The beach is closed on Sundays because the road to it passes through the centre of the village, and in the past there were disturbances caused by car loads of noisy (and sometimes drunk) people passing through village. This decision to close the beach on Sundays was made by the fono following a strong plea from the local pastor.

The local women's committee took over management of the fale in 2001 after they became run down and were not returning a profit under matai control. Members of the committee have attended STA training for beach fale owners, and they take turns to collect fees from guests, to clean up the beach, and to provide security for overnight guests (two women check around the fale every hour during the night when there are overnight guests). When matai were running the venture, they had problems with theft and 'peeping toms'. Villagers are now not allowed in the vicinity of the beach fale during the day or night when there are guests staying. If they breach this rule, they are taken to the village council where they are fined.

The women's committee wants to improve on the existing fale so visitors can stay overnight in better conditions. They have thus built communal bathroom and toilet facilities and have improved the surrounding area with new plantings. In the future they hope to build walls on some beach fale to provide more privacy for overnight guests.

Funds from the venture have thus mostly been poured back into improving facilities, although a small dividend (ST\$50) was also paid to committee members at the end of one year. Takings are around ST\$10,000, so for the 40-50 members this dividend used up no more than ST\$2500. They also contribute money to community ventures, for example, renovation of the pastor's house.

### **Restrictions and controls placed on villagers**

While beach fale tourism has certainly enhanced local development in a number of ways, it is important not to overlook some restrictions which have been placed on villagers not involved in beach fale tourism. While this was a difficult subject to approach with local people, who seemed overwhelmingly in support of beach fale (as per comments above on rejuvenation of villages and economic development), it is important to note ways in which the everyday activities and movements of villagers have been restricted to some extent because of beach fale development. This could in the long term lead to resentment, thus impacting on the impression that tourists have of their time in Samoa.

In villages where beach fale tourism had attracted significant numbers of Palagi tourists there were restrictions on the behaviour of local people in order to protect the security and/or respect the privacy of guests. While many Palagi tourists romanticised the open nature of the beach fale and their experience of sleeping in such unique accommodation, the reality for many was a sense of nervousness about the security of their possessions. There have been cases of

theft from beach fale, and 'peeping toms', so the most common measure to prevent these incidents is that at night time, family members patrol the area. As one owner noted, 'In the early days I didn't get any sleep because I was worried about security for my guests – worried about my reputation' (Nita, BF operator, June 2003). For this reason the matai in some villages have decreed that villagers are not permitted to be on the beach at night and they face fines – typically a pig or a box of tinned fish - if found here.

In other cases the restrictions are more severe with local people not allowed on the beach during the day time if tourists are present. Concern of local access to the beach was even noted with relation to a specific area of Savaii in the TDP 2002-2006 (Tourism Resource Consultants 2002:116). For example, in Lalomanu the beach fale operators lobbied the matai to stop young people from 'bothering' tourists on the beaches, and a ban was formalised through a fono decision. Rather than seeing this as a rule to keep local people off the beach, Susan, a trainer in the hospitality industry, argued that it was '...more about respect for tourists who have paid to come and use the facilities' (June 2003).

While undoubtedly this was appreciated by some tourists, other tourists commented on their preference for a 'living beach', that is, one utilised by local people for daily activities including leisure (for example, young men throwing a rugby ball around on the beach before sunset; local children playing with Palagi children), and fishing, and rather than other villages where the beach appeared to be the exclusive domain of tourists. It appears that a compromise is possible, whereby local people can still utilise the beach for livelihood or leisure purposes, while not unduly disturbing guests:

The nicest place we stayed was [village 'X']. I think because it was a *living* beach – it was part of the village. You had your little fale which was your world, but you'd look out in the morning and see children collecting sand on the beach. In the evenings everyone went for a swim – you didn't feel isolated. At the same time they [local people] had an incredible sense of understanding. The children knew this part of the beach belonged to [family 'X'], so you don't swim there. They were there [on the beach] but had respect for this 30 metre piece of sand [where the beach fale were] (NZ man, 43, June 2003).

In the Aliepata area, the creation of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) has led to further restrictions on local use of the beach, with no fishing being allowed in order to restore marine life in the area. It is important to note that the MPA was not *imposed* on the local people,<sup>7</sup> however it is clear that those with tourist enterprises in the area could see that the MPA could boost tourism, while other local people who are more dependent on fishing as a livelihood activity may become resentful of the MPA restrictions over time.

In Manase village there are not such rigid restrictions on use of the beach as there are at some beaches on Upolu. One beach fale operator noted that 'Children can come and swim here as they please, but they should not disturb people in the resorts [beach fale] – if they do, it's the owner's job to move them on'. However, the paramount chief (Taito) of Manase, Tanu, has put in place

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<sup>7</sup> There is a Marine Protected Area office within the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, but their role is limited to research, information and advice. It is a committee of elected villagers which, in each area, makes decisions about what is and what is not allowed within the MPA, such as designating no-take zones.

strict rules to make the village a safe and pleasant place for outsiders to visit. For example, dogs must stay in one's yard and pigs must be in pens: if they are found wandering around the village, the owners will be fined. Such rules have contributed to Manase being awarded the most beautiful village in Samoa a number of times.<sup>8</sup>

Crimes against tourists, though relatively rare, are treated with great seriousness by village councils. In one case, a young man working at his relative's beach fale stole money from a guest. When the fono met to discuss this case, they were so angered by his actions and the potential impact on the reputation of the village, that both he and his mother were expelled from the village for a three year period.

## 2.5. Environmental impacts

One issue not explored in depth in this study, but which has been raised in previous studies and the latest Tourism Development Plan, is that of environmental concerns associated with beach fale. To date, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) only have to be completed for large developments on freehold or government land, thus beach fale have been exempt.<sup>9</sup> Beach fale are, by nature, located very close to fragile marine ecosystems. A major issue for most beach fale operators then is effective disposal of sewage, which can otherwise leach into marine areas. Most use septic tanks, however some respondents felt that septic tanks were an environmental disaster waiting to happen because of the risk of leakage from them. Another concern is disruption to ecosystems because of clearance of natural vegetation on the beaches in order to create the pristine expanses of white sand desired by tourists; this can destabilize coastal areas leading to heightened erosion. The 2002-2006 TDP highlighted the following additional environmental issues:

- poorly maintained toilets in close proximity to the sea
- only 2% of beach fale use secondary or tertiary wastewater treatment
- deterioration of sea water quality (algae bloom)

(Tourism Resource Consultants 2002:92, 116).

Access to safe drinking water has been identified as an environmental issue in some areas (Twining-Ward and Butler 2002), and where potable water is in insufficient supply this has certainly constrained the development of beach fale initiatives. Finally, concerns have been raised about the heavy use of some natural materials in construction of beach fale.

An exercise to identify and monitor sustainable tourism indicators (STIs) for Samoa (Twining-Ward and Butler 2002) found significant environmental concerns. For example, only 50 percent of villages where tourism played a significant role passed Samoa Water Authority tests, and a mere 8 percent of accommodation providers used secondary or tertiary sewage treatment. The latter is particularly of concern for establishments like beach fale which are in the coastal zone where

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<sup>8</sup> The STA run a biannual Village Beautification Competition which is hotly contested. This was initiated in order to encourage communities to rebuild their villages and restore pride in the villages after the devastating effects of the two cyclones in the early 1990s (Park 2003:89).

<sup>9</sup> Even when an EIA is conducted prior to establishment of a new venture, there is no on-going monitoring by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Rather, they only assess a particular venture if there is a complaint about something such as heavy erosion along the beach.

there is potential for seepage from septic tanks into the delicate marine environment.

While some legitimate concerns about the environmental impacts of beach fale tourism have been expressed, most respondents felt these effects were benign compared to those caused by other forms of tourism:

*Q: Are there any negative environmental effects caused by beach fale?*

No. In fact I think they're an environmentally friendly tourism product. There's not much invasion of the environment as opposed to other types [of tourist accommodation] (Samoan tourist, June 2003).

This has gotta be the most low impact way I could think of having tourism (NZ man, 44, June 2003).

A key reason behind such perceptions is that beach fale put less pressure on the natural resource base. For example, guests have cold showers instead of warm, so no energy is required for heating and this means that showers are shorter, so less fresh water is wasted. Similarly, beach fale tourists are happy to swim in the sea, rather than expecting a fresh water swimming pool. There are neither fans nor air conditioning in the fale, rather, tourists rely on the cool sea breeze which filters through their open fale.

Beach fale can directly benefit the local environment too, in part because tourists' interest in natural areas has led local people to place higher value on conservation of natural resources:

Local people now appreciate the environmental significance of different areas, because these areas attract tourists (Mary, BF operator, June 2003).

**Box 3: Saanapu Mangrove Conservation Project**

At Saanapu, guests can pay ST\$10 for a guided nature trail or ST\$20 for a guided canoe ride through the mangroves. When I and my research assistant participated in the nature trail the informative guide told us about medicinal plants, traditional legends associated with a fresh water spring in the mangroves, pigeon mounds, and the importance of the mangroves to local fisheries. Interpretive signs had been provided through funding from NZAID. There are both beach fale and basic bungalows available for overnight visitors on a lovely beach adjacent to the mangroves. Yet visitor numbers remain low: they receive only 10-15 visitors per week. Communal labour is used to maintain the sites (e.g. the aumaga is responsible for maintaining the track), and benefits are communal. Thus when the women's committee ran out of medicine, the matai decided funds from tourism could be used to buy new supplies.

Park's (2003:66) research on beach fale also found that local attitudes to environmental conservation had improved because beach fale operators realised that an attractive environment and well preserved corals were key draw cards for tourists.

There are a few cases in which beach fale have been established within a wider project which has a specific conservation agenda. As mentioned above, a Marine Protected Area has been established in the popular tourist area of Aliepata in order to help restore the coral and fish populations within the reef. Undoubtedly the fact that tourist dollars contribute significantly to the local economy and that many of these tourists like to snorkel in

the lagoon, helped to influence local decision-makers to support the idea of the Marine Protected Area. In addition, there are a few places where beach fale development has gone hand-in-hand with a conservation project (see Box 3). In such cases then tourism has been initiated in order to provide local communities with a direct economic benefit from conserving their resources.

### 3. Constraints to running a successful beach fale business

The paper so far has shown that tourists were overwhelmingly positive about beach fale tourism, and while there may be some concerns relating to restrictions on villagers and the environmental impacts of beach fale tourism, beach fale have undoubtedly contributed significantly to the economic and social development of villages. Nevertheless there are factors which stand in the way of the success of beach fale as detailed in the sections below. In turn the following constraints are considered: location; business viability issues; publicity; and competition.

#### 3.1. Land access and location

Every individual and family in Samoa is not able to establish a beach fale venture. Fundamentally, in order to do so, they need not only access to capital, but access to a pleasant beach:

You notice the difference between the villagers who've adopted beach fale and benefited from it.... Two minutes around the point a guy has got two kids running around in rags – but he has no beach to speak of. Beach fale don't benefit him (Australian male, 24, June 2003).

Where a family is part of a larger group which owns land by the beach, this does not guarantee them the right to establish a beach fale business on it. Matai have control over land matters,<sup>10</sup> and they may choose to support or decline the wishes of a particular family to set up a beach fale business on communal land. In Park's (2003:4) research, all 6 beach fale enterprises studied were run by the immediate family of a matai. While the relationships between beach fale operators and matai were not explicitly studied in my research, it became clear that matai were increasingly allocating land to nuclear families at their discretion, which sometimes led to conflicts. The owner of a popular beach fale initiative on Upolu admitted that it had been very difficult to start her venture in the early 1990s because of disputes within her family over use of the land. Not all of the extended family agreed that she should be allowed to set up a beach fale venture on prime beach side land. This dispute over land is ongoing, with extended family members seeking to have her operations removed from the beach in 2000 (Nita, BF operator, June 2003).

In addition, beach fale ventures are far more likely to be successful when located in an accessible area where there is a good supply of fresh water (see Box 4). The beach fale at Cape Muliunu'u in the north-west of Savaii are located on a beautiful, wild stretch of coastline, but they are in one of the least accessible

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<sup>10</sup> Although through the Land and Titles Court there are opportunities for people to claim title to land where they have evidence that they are descendents of those who originally planted the land (Meleisea, 1980:26, cited in Park, 2003:5).

locations in the country. Essentially, they are on an unsealed road 7 kilometres from the main road, a distance tourists would probably have to walk as few buses, which are usually the main source of transports for FITs in Samoa, would drive on an unsealed road. In addition, owners of these beach fale are reliant on rain water collected in tanks which makes it difficult for them to meet the needs of guests. Such enterprises are never likely to be as successful as those in areas closer to Apia or clustered in existing popular locations with good access to services such as water and electricity.

### 3.2. Business viability

Business viability issues include some that affect all businesses in Samoa, others that relate to the tourism industry, and those specific to the viability of individual beach fale enterprises.

The viability of the tourism sector as a whole in Samoa rests in part on the shoulders of the airlines that bring tourists to the country: Polynesian Airlines and Air New Zealand. Neither the beach fale sector nor the more up market ventures can succeed without these services. In the past, changes in airline routes have affected accessibility, and high prices in relation to neighbouring destinations have meant that Samoa does not always appear to be a value-for-money tourist destination. There is a strong suggestion that the airlines servicing Samoa have become complacent about providing a competitive service in the face of the large guaranteed VFR clientele coming to Samoa. Meanwhile Fiji and Cook Islands, for example, do not have such a large VFR market and are more likely to post competitive travel and accommodation packages which appeal to regional travellers. Thus in Fiji, Air Pacific and the Fijian Visitor's Bureau work together to package transport and accommodation deals for tourists, however there is no such cooperation between Polynesian Airlines and STA.

A lack of sufficient business know-how on the part of the owners means that some beach fale ventures are simply not viable (Terra Firma Associates 2001). In most cases owners do not have previous experience of running their own venture and they have little experience of being tourists either, so it can be difficult for them to understand and cater for the needs of tourists while running an effective business. For example, many people have difficulty in turning traditional Samoan hospitality to visitors into a financial transaction and thus charge too little for their services. Others simply do not understand their clients well so they fail to differentiate their basic product (the beach fale experience) in ways that could attract more visitors. For example, word of mouth ensures that those which provide aesthetically pleasing touches such as flowers in the fale, and good quality meals, remain popular, while others with a standardized product do not always do so well. Some beach fale operators also have difficulty in accessing capital to invest in their business, which is required to enable them to add a communal eating house or toilet and shower facilities for overnight guests. Availability of such facilities can be the difference between success and failure of two neighbouring businesses. STA training for beach fale owners and the Beach Fale Owner's Manual both make significant strides to address shortfalls in business know-how, while the SBEC and the Tourism Support Fund can help owners access additional funds (Twining-Ward 1999).

It is well known that fa'a Samoa places an additional constraint on some businesses, particularly because of heavy expectations on small beach fale

operators to contribute to communal activities or fa'alavelave (Twining-Ward and Twining-Ward 1998). As mentioned under Section 6.3, beach fale operators may be expected to contribute large amounts of money to the construction of a new church. While this benefits the community, it can cripple individual businesses if the expectations are too high.

In other cases the key constraint to the success of a beach fale initiative is the lack of human resource capacity. For example, in one case an elderly woman was struggling on her own to meet the needs of guests and to carry out maintenance on her family's four beach fale, while also working in the family's plantation and caring for her grandchildren periodically. She wanted one of her sons or daughters to move back from Apia to assist her, but they were unwilling to do so.

The fact that some beach fale enterprises struggle to attract paying guests has led commentators to suggest that there are too many beach fale in Samoa (Pearce 2000:200). As discussed earlier, most beach fale enterprises have emerged only in the last decade as an alternative livelihood option following successive cyclones and a disease which ravaged the taro crop. In the last few years, families have started beach fale ventures upon seeing the success of similar businesses run by other villagers, or because they have been asked to take the overflow of tourists from a relative's beach fale enterprise during peak periods. Hailey (1987:24, cited in Park 2003:51) sees this 'copy cat mentality' as evidence that Pacific entrepreneurs generally are 'poor innovators but good imitators', leading to an excess supply of some businesses.

Some commentators from within the tourism industry have become concerned that this rapid growth in the number of beach fale enterprises in prime beachside locations represents 'uncontrolled development' of 'substandard infrastructure' which will ultimately harm the Samoan environment and the image of Samoa internationally. Thus while supportive of beach fale in general, Fu'a Hazelman, former head of SVB, argued that tourism could be transformed into something more negative for Samoans if uncontrolled growth was allowed. She noted that in the 1990s when one popular beach fale enterprise had only three fale 'it looked really good and inviting', but now it had many more fale on the same site and she felt tourists were being crowded in too much. A government employee agreed with this perspective:

Poor old Lalomanu beach is suffering a lot. The aesthetics of it and the beauty of the island offshore has deteriorated a lot (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment employee, July 2003).

In contrast to these views, beach fale operators and others were not necessarily concerned about the number of beach fale around the coastline. They felt that even though some beach fale enterprises did not get consistently high numbers of visitors, they played an important role in taking the overflow of visitors during busy periods. These views were supported by some industry players as well, such as a hospitality industry trainer. When asked on the beach at Lalomanu, perhaps the beach most 'crowded' with beach fale, if there were there too many fale, she replied: 'No. This is lovely. They're still utilising the free spots' (Susan, June 2003). As two visitors to this same beach said, 'Growth is good'; 'There's not enough beach fale here, in this place - especially on weekends, it's packed' (Samoan tourists, June 2003). Even the Manager of Marketing and Promotions at STA, someone who supported institutionalisation of minimum standards for beach

fale (see below), and who welcomed foreign investment in more up-market tourism ventures, did not criticise those who were trying to set up new beach fale ventures with little knowledge of whether their venture would be viable:

If we tried to tell people not to build fales they'd say, 'Well, what will you do for us then? We're trying to help ourselves' (Sala Pio Tagiilima, STA, July 2003).

Others have responded to the critics by noting that an alternative to growth of beach fale is growth of resorts, which may have fewer benefits for the country and change the nature of tourism to Samoa in negative ways:

Growth is only good if it's maintained at this level...we don't want flashy development. I know foreign investors might come in and want to change the way that tourism is structured now [But] this [beach fale tourism] is unique – development should be controlled (Sione, June 2003).

The critics, though, note how those which prove to be less popular with paying guests often fall into a state of disrepair, thus detracting from the scenic coastline. This has sometimes happened in the case of beach fale built in anticipation of internationally-significant events held in Samoa (see Box 4). Despite the frustration experienced by those who did not receive many guests after these one-off events, they did not always feel that their efforts were in vain. For example, some families around Cape Muliunu'u who had been disappointed by tourist numbers after the Millennium celebrations are starting to repair or build new beach fale, with one man claiming that he felt positive about tourism development in the area because it offered 'a guaranteed income' (July 2003). While driving in this area I counted approximately 25 fale in 5 different locations, and none appeared to have guests using them. Maybe this suggests a different interpretation of business viability from the conventional Western sense. Because beach fale do not require a huge investment in materials, some people in this area seemed happy to be involved in tourism even if they receive a small number of guests. Similarly, in cases where families do not rely too heavily on their beach fale enterprise, perhaps only establishing fale to take the overflow from a relative's business during peak periods, operators were not really concerned about a lack of guests during much of the year. Rather, they treated the occasional day visitors on weekends or over the busy Christmas holiday season as a bonus, while during most of the year they could focus on other economic activities and use the beach fale to house visitors or for their own leisure purposes.



**Box 4: Custom from one-off events**

When an International, week-long, Tatu Convention was planned in Salepaga, the Ministry of Youth Affairs which coordinated the event advised local people to start beach fale enterprises as they would have confirmed custom. However, once the Convention was over, many of the beach fale failed to attract a steady number of tourists.

Similarly, as the Millennium approached Samoa sought to exploit its location just to the East of the International Date Line by promoting itself as the ideal place for visitors who wanted to experience 'the last sunset of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century'. Residents of the North-Western part of Savaii around Faleolupu and Cape Mulinu'u were thus advised to build beach fale to cater for an influx of visitors. While some guests (mainly Samoans and expatriates) did turn up on New Years Eve of 1999, many drove back to a nearby hotel rather than staying in a beach fale.

In the few years hence many of the beach fale built in anticipation of the millennium celebrations have been pulled down, as they have received only a trickle of guests.

### 3.3. Publicity

Closely related to viability concerns is the issue of publicity. With the increasing choices open to international travellers looking for a sun and sea experience, it is likely that future success of beach fale tourism in Samoa will depend partly on publicity. Already this paper has shown the importance of culture in differentiating the Samoan tourism product and thus attracting a number of tourists to Samoa. But how do potential travellers find out about Samoa as a tourism destination, and beach fale in particular?

The current tourism plan suggests that Samoa concentrates on the regional tourism market, especially Australia, New Zealand and American Samoa (Tourism Resource Consultants 2002:51). However even travel agents in this region have limited knowledge of Samoa as a desirable destination, and they provide little assistance in promoting beach fale tourism in Samoa as beach fale are a non-commissionable product.

Effectively beach fale are most widely marketed on the internet and through guide books. Many of the beach fale which are popular with international tourists are listed in the Lonely Planet and Moon guides to Samoa (see Stanley 2000; Bennett et al. 2003). Some beach fale ventures also have their own website. These websites are presently used mainly to advertise a beach fale enterprise and its facilities, and while there may be an associated email address, bookings cannot usually be done online. Other websites endorsing beach fale were mentioned in Section 5.3. In addition, word-of-mouth is an important means of publicity, with almost 60 percent of participants in the 1997-98 Samoa Visitor

**Box 5: Publicity for Tanu's Beach Fale**

As the instigator of one of the earliest and most high profile beach fale enterprises in Samoa, high chief Tanu was interviewed for the popular Australian television travel programme, *Getaway*, in the mid-1990s, which led to a lot of custom. Nevertheless Tanu's son who now manages the 32-fale business, the largest beach fale establishment in Samoa, claims that word-of-mouth is still the best form of publicity they have. Word of mouth publicity is partly facilitated by the family link between Tanu's Beach Fale and Seipepa, a cultural home stay option for tourists in Apia, as Seipepa regularly refers its guests on to Tanu's. Seipepa also sends an email newsletter to clients all around the world, regularly reminding them about Samoa's key drawcards, including accommodation at Tanu's (Samoa Experience, 2005).

Bureau's survey of beach fale citing 'Recommendation from a friend' as their first or second reason for choosing to stay in a beach fale.<sup>11</sup>

A number of beach fale enterprises have established regular clientele through links with businesses within Samoa which might, for example, ensure that the accommodation was booked out by a single client for several weeks of the year.

In addition, a few beach fale ventures have benefited from relationships developed with other tourism providers (see Box 5). For example, Aggie Grey's hotel in Apia takes guests for day trips to specific beaches on the south coast of Upolu, while tour company Ecotour Samoa offers several guided tour options for clients which involve staying at beach fale for some or all of their stay. In addition, the Green Turtle bus run by Ecotour Samoa had a regular itinerary around Upolu and Savaii allowing flexible travel by clients who could hop-on and hop-off at designated stops, taking from one day to several weeks to circumnavigate one of the islands. Sixteen of the designated stopping points along the way were at beach fale establishments. I asked Steve Brown, co-owner of Ecotour Samoa, if he was intentionally helping out beach fale operators and their villages by encouraging guests to stay in beach fale:

Researcher: 'That must be really helping the beach fales that you have incorporated into your route'.

Steve Brown: 'Well let's turn that around. They're really helping us. We wouldn't have a product without them'.

As he went on to explain, he felt that the beach fale were offering a unique cultural experience to the guests (Steve Brown, Ecotour Samoa, June 2003).

Staff of STA claim that the publicity they provide for beach fale is somewhat limited by their multiple functions and their budget: while the Fijian Visitor's Bureau's budget is specifically for marketing, STA has to use their money for marketing as well as development of the tourism industry in Samoa. STA staff do attend some international travel fairs, such as those in Berlin and London, and they have occasionally brought with them brochures from beach fale establishments. Perhaps more significantly, the Information Fale in Apia run by

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<sup>11</sup> Primary data from this survey was provided by Louise Twining-Ward. NB in some cases this 'Recommendation from a friend' was probably a recommendation from another accommodation provider e.g. see Box 5.

STA refers tourists to beach fale, although only brochures for a handful of beach fale establishments were available at the time of my visit. Not all beach fale businesses have printed brochures, and those that do provide brochures may not have printed sufficient copies.

### 3.4. Competition between beach fale enterprises

There are areas where in-fighting between beach fale operators is a persistent problem (STA official, July 2003). One or two respondents admitted that there was a sense of jealousy in their village, with some people envying the success of the most popular beach fale establishments. An STA official said that in some areas people had reported that thefts were committed by rival beach fale operators wanting to tarnish the reputation of a competing enterprise. On a lesser scale, other beach fale operators simply refuse to cooperate with one another even when they have shared interests. For example, when Peter, a beach fale operator, mentioned to the manager of another very successful beach fale business that he wished others along the beach would upgrade their services and their fale as this would improve the image of their area in tourists' minds, the other manager said, 'No, leave them to it'. Peter felt such operators thought too individualistically, focusing on their own profits (Peter, BF operator, June 2003).

However, most beach fale operators were reluctant to reveal any competition or conflict between operators. For example, Mary claimed that 'There's absolutely no rivalry' (Mary, BF operator: June 2003). Rather, most stated that they worked together, especially when it came to accommodating large numbers of guests when group bookings were made. In the most formal attempt to date to encourage cooperation among beach fale operators, a Beach Fale Association was formed a few years ago for those located along the stunning Lalomanu-Salepaga strip of coastline. There was cooperation for a short time among the 22 beach fale operators as they worked together to organise accommodation for participants in a major boat race which passed through the area. It was also hoped that formation of an association would allow them to access donor funds, as donors aim to support wider communities rather than assisting an individual or family who are running a business (Park 2003:54). However cooperation in the Beach Fale Association did not last as some owners were not keen on agreeing on fixed prices for day visitors and overnight stays: they wanted more autonomy and flexibility.

## 4. Concerns for the Future

While this paper has highlighted the growing popularity of beach fale and demonstrated the many ways in which beach fale tourism is contributing to local development in Samoa, it has also discussed some constraints which may be impinging on the success of these enterprises. In addition, there are concerns about beach fale development that will need to be addressed in the future. Specifically, the Government is introducing changes which may threaten beach fale tourism in some areas, or which may preclude poorer people in rural areas from operating a beach fale venture. Firstly, it is encouraging more foreign investment in large scale tourism enterprises, and secondly, it is considering the imposition of 'minimum standards' for beach fale. These points are detailed separately below, along with a discussion of a more insidious matter: a lack recognition of the value of the beach fale sector.

#### 4.1. Foreign investment in large scale developments

The Tourism and Hotel Development Incentive Act was passed in Parliament on June 26, 2003, with the aim of encouraging more investment in higher class hotels and resorts. This involves government playing a stronger role in assisting outsiders to lease land, and tax breaks being given to new hotel and resort developments, with the size of the tax relief being proportional to the size of the resorts. Specifically, hotels with a capital investment between ST\$1-3 million would receive a tax exemption for 5 years; those with a capital investment of ST\$3-20 million would receive a 10 year exemption; and those with a capital investment of over ST\$20 million would receive an exemption for 15 years. Since this Act was passed a number of new developments have gone ahead. Specifically, the 140 room Aggie Grey's Resort and Spa adjacent to the international airport is due to open in June 2005, and there are plans for the Fijian-based Warwick Hotels to develop another hotel at the international airport and to build an exclusive resort on the south east coast of Upolu. A 5 star resort in traditional Samoan style, the Mulivai Palm Beach Resort, is also being planned for the south coast. The 4 star beach front Hotel Elisa has opened in Apia, and another hotel is being built in the east of the city (Samoa Experience 2005).

This suggests a different direction to tourism development from the cautious approach adopted to date. Contradictions were exposed in the 2002-2006 TDP whose goals seemingly espoused sustainable tourism based on nature and culture, with widespread benefits throughout Samoan society, yet which projected far higher demand for hotel than beach fale accommodation and focussed on ways of supporting further investment in the hotel and resort sector in particular. For example, on the same page it is stated that 'The high rate of Samoan owned businesses offers the country a significant marketing edge because it can offer a truly indigenous tourism experience', while arguing that the Planning and Urban Management Authority 'must develop the capacity to assist developers [to] resolve land issues' because there is likely to be a demand from developers for more beach front land (Tourism Resource Consultants 2002: 72). Apparently the government wants the appearance of a sustainable tourism sector, while passing legislation which could encourage large scale initiatives which will often require foreign investment. This could see more land moving out of the control of communities in the future, and less indigenous control over tourism development. Tensions may arise from this in the future.

However, this does not necessarily, signal that there will be less government support for the small-scale beach fale initiatives. It is possible to encourage investors in higher class hotels and establishments while concurrently ensuring that local owners of budget accommodation such as beach fale still get the training and access to credit which they need. What might be more fraught, however, are situations whereby a foreign investor wants to locate a multi-million dollar resort on one of the beautiful beaches currently dotted with beach fale. It is unclear who the government would support in such a situation.

#### 4.2. Lack of recognition of the value of the beach fale sector

Despite the significant growth of the beach fale sector and the benefits this has brought to rural communities, it has often been overlooked or disregarded in official reports. For example, estimates of the number of beds available for tourists in Samoa do not include beach fale accommodation (for example, Pearce

(1999:145) states that in 1996 there were 740 rooms in 36 establishments). Similarly, an Asian Development Bank report, *Samoa 2000* (ADB 2000), which is purported to 'provide a comprehensive analysis of current economic and key sector developments in Samoa' does not even mention that beach fale exist, despite having an entire chapter devoted to tourism. Claims in this ADB report that domestic tourism in Samoa is very small are not accurate because the beach fale sector is not considered.

Others have overlooked the value of beach fale because they are more interested in development of high class tourist facilities which they feel will earn the country more foreign exchange (see ADB, 2000; Pearce, 2000), and would enhance the country's reputation as a provider of quality tourism. Such people are not happy to see beach fale occupying prime beach side locations. For example, some private sector stakeholders felt that there were too many beach fale around the two main islands now, many of which were 'eyesores':

Since beach fales came up in Samoa we've had a sort of unchecked rash of huts [develop] all over the place. A perfect example is Aleipata: that whole strip used to be a beautiful place but now it's just *littered* with beach fales (Tour company owner, June 2003).

This person was particularly concerned that Samoa might be projecting itself as a backpacker destination: 'It shouldn't be [a backpacker destination] because it is such a beautiful place... Having all these beach fales all over the coastline...it's just giving that wrong impression' (Tour company owner, June 2003).

It appears that negative feelings towards beach fale operations from operators of mid-range motels and hotels have grown in direct proportion to the growing popularity of beach fale. That is, hotel owners feel slighted when their potential guests choose to stay in beach fale. There was what one respondent called an 'outcry' from hotel and motel owners who were particularly offended that beach fale had become a desired option for government agencies taking 'retreats', as discussed in an earlier working paper (see 2005b) (Moelagi Jackson, Safua Hotel and Tours, June 2003). Some motel/hotel owners argued that the government should not endorse beach fale operations in this way when 'they don't even pay taxes or VGST'.<sup>12</sup> It is likely that this jealousy contributes to negative perceptions of what beach fale have to offer the tourism sector. Another hotel manager, however, claimed that while hotel owners had negative feelings towards beach fale when they first started to grow in popularity, some of them could now see that beach fale were good for the country's economic development. He recommended beach fale to hotel guests at times (Kolone Vaai, Vaisala Hotel, Savaii, July 2003).

Overall the efforts of beach fale operators and their contribution to the tourism product in Samoa has not been recognised by all parties, perhaps because unlike resort-style tourism, the budget tourism sector will never be associated with luxury and glamour. Of concern is the fact that negative perceptions from sometimes influential tourism industry players may be informing the direction of future policies impacting on the tourism sector, such as the minimum building standards discussed in the next section. Advocates of beach fale tourism need to

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<sup>12</sup> NB this is not true for most beach fale ventures; any business earning a net profit of over SAT\$8,000 does have to pay tax, and those few beach fale enterprises earning over SAT\$52,000 net profit have to be VGST registered (Twining-Ward 1999:40).

ensure that such negative perceptions of beach fale do not impede beach fale operators from getting the support they need in the future, be it access to networks of tourism providers, training or credit, while more up-scale forms of tourism absorb increasing time and energy of STA staff.

#### 4.3. Minimum building standards for beach fale

Despite tourists' overwhelmingly positive impressions of beach fale accommodation, as discussed in Section 8.2 some people have expressed the view that only a handful of beach fale operations are 'up to scratch', that is, of an acceptable standard for international tourists. The motivation to devise a set of minimum standards for beach fale has come from such industry players and staff of STA who feel that it is important to offer a quality product, particularly when servicing overseas guests. Thus staff of the STA are formalizing planning procedures regarding beach fale by developing minimum standards.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 3: Dilapidated Beach Fale**



Source: author

While most of the tourism accommodation sector has to comply with the building code enforced by the Ministry of Works, traditional structures, including fale, have been exempt from these regulations. The intention is that minimum standards for beach fale will ensure the following:

- safety (ensuring buildings are sound and secure);
- hygiene (such as ensuring well-functioning bathroom facilities and septic tanks, and good practices in food preparation and storage);
- good service/hospitality;

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<sup>13</sup> The minimum standards were being devised during the time of my fieldwork (mid 2003). Since then I have heard anecdotally that minimum standards have been devised for all accommodation providers, not just beach fale, but I was unable to confirm this or to find out how the standards were to be applied before publication of this report.

- Samoan design.

With respect to this last point, the main concern is with retaining an *appearance* of authenticity of the beach fale concept, rather than adhering strictly to traditional building methods and design. For example, the Manager of Planning and Development at STA suggested that those beach fale accepting overnight guests should combine Samoan and European styles, in the way that Jane's Beach Fale in Manase had done (Figure 5) (Sealii Malietoa Melepone Isara, July 2003). Jane's beach fale have walls and lockable doors, which appealed to STA staff because of concerns of overseas guests about security. They also said that local materials should be used to give an authentic appearance to beach fale which were incorporating non-traditional materials. For example, if corrugated iron roofing was used for durability, operators would be encouraged to cover this with coconut leaves.

**Figure 4: Jane's Beach Fale, Manase**



Source: author

Staff of STA insist they are not trying to replace beach fale with more up-market accommodation. They recognize the inherent value of beach fale as a tourism product:

The beach fale concept is unique in the Pacific – in the whole world. You can't compare beach fale to a room in a luxury hotel because there are people who want different types of experiences (Sealii Malietoa Melepone Isara, STA Manager of Planning and Development, July 2003).

Thus according to the STA Manager of Training and Cultural Affairs, beach fale are not 'littering' beaches, as some industry players claim, however it would be beneficial to encourage them to reach the high levels of standard achieved by only a handful at present: 'We want another step up in terms of the standard of their accommodation, service etc' (Chin Ete, June 2003). This was reiterated by the former head of SVB: 'Our plan was to upgrade, improve the beach fale...not to change the concept, just to do things nicely' (Fu'a Hazelman, June 2003).



Similarly, Moelagi Jackson, who is very supportive of beach fale, stressed that standards were necessary:

I am supportive [of beach fale] but there has to be some control and you have to know that the facilities are up to standard...we don't want to sell Samoa as a 'cheap' destination (Moelagi Jackson, Safua Hotel and Tours, June 2003).

It was claimed that many beach fale ventures had not been successful because they did not have any standards in place (Chin Ete, STA Manager of Training and Cultural Affairs, June 2003). As an example, tourists do not usually want to share toilet and bathroom facilities with the family running the beach fale venture. Thus the standards are not intended as just a regulatory device, rather, the aim is that they will provide villagers with a set of guidelines which will help them to operate a good quality, successful business. At present villagers rarely approach STA for advice before building fale for a tourism venture, instead they just copy what their neighbours are doing and hope that tourists will come in due course.

STA's Manager of Planning and Development recognized there may be a cost associated with upgrading of beach fale, but he did not envisage that all developments would have to 'start from scratch', and he noted there would be tangible benefits for those who complied with the standards. Thus, rather than strictly policing the standards and forcing people to comply, only those who had met the standards would receive official endorsement from STA (through their website and information fale):

The selling point to it is that we will not be marketing their beach fale if they don't adhere to the standards (Sealii Malietoa Melepone Isara, STA, June 2003).

Furthermore, the plan is that in future the Tourism Support Fund criteria will also require that minimum standards are met.

While encouraging good standards of service and traditional design for beach fale is a positive initiative, partly because this is what appeals to many tourists, it is likely that the planning process which eventuates around minimum standards could be costly and too formalized for many beach fale enterprises to comfortably deal with. In particular, the exercise of applying minimum standards may impede poorer families from initiating or running a viable business. Poorer families will be even less likely than at present to be able to establish a beach fale venture, as greater resources will be required to meet the minimum standards. This is unfortunate as when there is a wide range of standards of beach fale available, they can meet the needs of different parts of the market. For example, very basic beach shelters are usually quite acceptable to day visitors, while more sophisticated beach fale which are partially walled and have light fittings can provide well for the needs of foreign overnight visitors. A major challenge for STA will be that of ensuring that specific beach fale ventures are not undermined by the establishment of minimum standards, and finding ways of supporting those beach fale entrepreneurs with poor access to capital.



## 5. Recommendations

Recommendations will now be presented based on the preceding discussions about tourist impressions of beach fale tourism, ways in which beach fale are contributing to local development in Samoa, constraints to running a successful beach fale enterprise, and concerns for the future. These recommendations accord with the idea of strengthening and supporting the beach fale sector in Samoa in recognition of its contribution to overall development in the country, particularly the way in which it is grounded upon indigenous control over tourism, it has increased tourists' understanding of Samoan culture, and brought significant benefits to Samoan people.

### 5.1. Monitor and control beach fale development

Beach fale development needs to be monitored in order to:

- a) maximise the benefits villagers gain from the fale, and
- b) minimise inconvenience/harm to local people from tourism.

There was a disparity between the views of Samoans, Palagi tourists, and some tourism industry players regarding the number of beach fale in popular locations. While a few Palagi tourists and industry players perceived there was crowding and an unpleasant outlook in places where long rows of fale were dotted along the beach, Samoan tourists and STA staff were more pragmatic, arguing that all villagers had the right to try to set up an economic enterprise, and noting that there were still insufficient beach fale to meet demand during popular periods in some locations.

As beach fale development is still in a relatively early stage, it would seem worthwhile for some ongoing monitoring of effects on the village community and on tourists. This should be coordinated by village leaders, with the assistance of STA, and could take place through a combination of personal observation, village meetings (with space for tourism stakeholders and individuals and groups not involved with tourism to speak),<sup>14</sup> and consultation with tourists.

It may be necessary for matai to control beach fale development in popular locations:

- to maximise the benefits villagers gain from the fale (for example, in order to maintain their popularity beach fale need to continue to offer tourists a unique cultural experience in a relaxed environment - if some villages are oversubscribed with beach fale enterprises and operators start haggling for custom, this is likely to deter tourists)
- to minimise inconvenience/harm to local people from tourism - to date matai have effectively put in place good social controls on tourist behaviour but they may need to pay more attention to some issues in future.

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<sup>14</sup> It may be possible to use the STA's Village Awareness Raising programme as an avenue to gather information concerning local people's impressions of the positive and negative impacts of tourism.

Some examples of issues which it would be useful to raise with villagers in order to ensure that equity issues are addressed and that resentment does not build up towards tourism over time include:

- how beach fale development impinges on access of local people to resources and their freedom of movement;
- impacts of tourism on the environment, including concerns about sewerage, rubbish disposal, and fresh water usage;
- tourist behaviour, especially with regards to respecting fa'a Samoa, and how to ensure that tourists develop a good basic understanding of Samoan culture.

Consultation with tourists is important in terms of understanding what they see as both positive and negative aspects of their stay. In order to maintain their popularity, beach fale need to offer tourists a unique cultural experience in a relaxed environment - if some villages are oversubscribed with beach fale enterprises and operators start haggling for custom, the types of tourists who presently are attracted to beach fale may simply stay away. Likewise some tourists may be deterred by negative responses from local people when they inadvertently fail to respect cultural protocol, or by restrictions on activities on Sundays. Understanding what tourists think and feel about their beach fale tourism experience could certainly help village leaders to plan for appropriate development of tourism and to ensure tourists are provided with sufficient information (particularly about culture) on their arrival.

#### **Recommendation for village leaders and STA**

The village fono should regularly evaluate the growth and impacts of beach fale tourism in popular beach fale destinations, using this as the basis of future planning and decision-making. Regular meetings should be scheduled with beach fale operators to discuss progress and or concerns relating to this sector, and to communicate recommendations about issues such as information for guests on cultural protocol. Meetings with other villagers should also be held to ensure they are not being adversely affected by beach fale development.

STA could support village leaders in this endeavour by sending out an officer every six months to gather information, copies of which would be given to village leaders before departure. Alternatively, STA staff conducting the village awareness programme could use this as an avenue to gather information concerning local people's impressions of the positive and negative impacts of tourism.

Main groups to consult:

- a) Samoan and Palagi tourists, regarding their perceptions of beach fale accommodation and services in the area.
- b) Villagers and beach fale operators, regarding impressions of the growth and nature/density of beach fale in the area, impacts on local development, and tourist behaviour.

## 5.2. Support a diverse range of beach fale operations

The Samoan Tourism Authority and donors such as NZAID should continue to support beach fale enterprises and ensure that in doing so they offer assistance to a diverse range of enterprises, from the more basic to those that are now well promoted and more up-market. While it would be easy to overlook the basic beach fale enterprises, they provide an important livelihood strategy particularly for those who are not in a strong economic position within their village, and it is these enterprises that are in more need of help with matters like publicity, marketing, and service provision.

In recent years, funding from NZAID has played a critical role in assisting STA to provide support for beach fale operators, especially through mechanisms such as workshops for beach fale operators and the Tourism Support Fund (TSF). This should continue, as there is space for improving some ventures to meet the needs of the diverse range of clients they are attracting. Those that presently pay extra attention to providing good service, for example, by instituting an effective booking service, supplying clean hand towels in the bathrooms, and adding personal touches such as a flowers on the pillow, are reaping the rewards of good custom.

A major challenge for STA will be that of ensuring that the less up-market beach fale are not undermined by the proposed establishment of minimum standards, as discussed in Section 8.3. This is especially important if the government wishes beach fale tourism to be seen as 'pro-poor tourism',<sup>15</sup> which supports economic growth that benefits a wide range of people in rural areas, including those from poorer households.

### **Recommendations for STA, SBEC, NZAID, and other donors**

Donors should continue to support beach fale tourism as there is clear evidence that it has provided rural people with a viable, alternative livelihood strategy and it has boosted economic development in villages.

- Workshops for beach fale operators should thus be ongoing, with particular emphasis on issues relating to business viability such as marketing, and issues relating to service, as highlighted by beach fale tourists (such as hygiene; meals; booking systems; fair pricing systems). There is the need to support those enterprises which are not yet providing an adequate level of service to tourists, but there should also be space to support the more up-market beach fale enterprises that wish to provide a higher level of product and service thereby attracting a different type of clientele.
- STA should promote a wide range of beach fale enterprises in its marketing efforts, not just those that are more up-market and already well promoted (with their own websites or listed in guide books). Appropriate marketing mechanisms include brochures, maps and the internet. It would be particularly useful for a freely available map like the Jason's map to locate all operational beach fale enterprises, perhaps with a symbol indicating whether the accommodation is suitable for overnight stays (with meals and bathroom facilities provided) or just day visits.

- The TSF should also continue in some form, but information about conditions surrounding the availability of funds should be clearly expressed to villagers as there has been confusion and disappointment resulting from misunderstandings about the TSF in the past. Any changes to this fund related to the implementation of minimum standards for beach fale should be carefully considered to ensure that poorer people such as those without access to capital, and/or less well-connected people, can still have access to funding.
- SBEC should continue to provide support for beach fale to enable them to access commercial loans, but ways of helping operators of more basic establishments to access credit should also be considered.

### 5.3. Support and encourage domestic tourism

Common to many countries of the globe, government officials in Samoa have the impression that international tourism is of paramount importance. According to Fu'a Hazelman, former head of SVB, staff are not concerned with attracting domestic tourists because the attitude is 'they'll come anyway' (June 2003). The Samoan government needs to encourage the domestic tourism market in Samoa because:

- a) It is a very good source of revenue in some coastal villages, where it provides clientele for both up-market and more basic beach fale establishments (see 9.2), where the latter rarely attract foreign tourists.
- b) Domestic tourists are not as fickle as international tourists, the domestic market is less subject to seasonality, and domestic tourism conserves foreign exchange (Scheyvens 2002a).
- c) It signals that government is interested in the recreation and well-being of its own citizens, rather than just offering up the country's best scenic assets for the enjoyment of foreign tourists. Recreation is important to Samoan people, as explained by the following woman who valued times she could get away for a weekend with her family to enjoy a beach fale holiday:

We spend month on month working in Apia – us working Mums don't have time during the week to see our children.... If you enjoy getting down to the basics, away from the frills, beach fale have it all (Susan, Instructor in the Hospitality Industry, 40s).

- d) Encouraging domestic tourism enables local people to benefit from government investment in tourism infrastructure, including national parks and reserves. This challenges the colonial mentality evident in many Third World countries where attractions are developed mainly for the enjoyment of foreign tourists and the interests of foreigners are prioritised (Scheyvens 2002a).

#### 5.4. Assist people to diversify products and services offered to beach fale clientele

There is further potential for villagers to tap into the economic success of existing beach fale, not by replicating them, but through the development of associated products and services. While there are a number of ways of earning revenue from beach fale tourism which have already been harnessed, as discussed under Section 6.1, there are other possibilities which remain unexplored. Although beach fale ventures commonly provide snorkelling gear and canoes for guests to use, either free of charge or at a small price, most of them provide no other services, products or activities aside from meals.

Either beach fale operators or other villagers, particularly those who do not have connections to matai and find it difficult to access land for beach fale development, could initiate different ventures as discussed below, but they would need assistance in identifying and developing viable products and services which are desired by tourists. Potential products and services are considered below:

- Firstly, there could be a good market for products for tourists, especially items not usually available in village stores, which could be sold through casual road side or beach stalls, or at a weekly village market on the beach (perhaps on Saturday mornings, catering to both Samoan and foreign tourists). Items offered could include clothing (such as t-shirts, hats, and lavalavas), fresh fruit, ice creams, postcards, calendars or handicrafts. Even in those villages where beach fale tourism is thriving it can be hard to find a postcard for sale.
- Secondly, a number of beach fale operators said they had to travel to Salelologa or Apia to purchase more specialised fruits or vegetables, some of which could be grown locally if advice and support was provided to farmers. In some countries in the Caribbean, government agriculture staff have worked together with rural people and hotel owners to ensure regular supplies of desired fruit and vegetables – in St Lucia, they have an 'Adopt a Farmer' scheme matching farmers to specific hotels (Tourism Concern 1999). All village families have a plantation, so this would seem to be an ideal way of minimising leakages outside of the village economy.
- Thirdly, there is room for further development of guided tours and activities for tourists, such as the canoe tours of the Saanapu mangrove conservation project discussed in this paper. While many tourists are content to laze on the beach, swim or go for a paddle in a canoe provided by their hosts, others would like to explore nearby villages and natural attractions, yet they feel uncomfortable doing so on their own. Canoe tours of a lagoon, walking tours of the rainforest or lava fields (in Savaii), or a cultural tour of a village could all be potential money earners for enterprising villagers, especially in areas with a concentration of beach fale enterprises. Most beach fale do not own a van which could be used to transport tourists on tours, but one operator had recently purchased a van specifically to pick up tourists from the airport. This van could be used to take short tours around the area as well. In other cases, the colourful public buses could be used to enhance the cultural experience of a guided tour. Good suggestions on how to run successful tours of local attractions are made in Twining-Ward (2000).

### **Recommendation for STA, SBEC, donors and other relevant agencies**

Various agencies should assist villagers to identify and develop appropriate products and services to enhance the beach fale experience.

- SBEC could run village-based workshops for villagers wanting to set up small shops, stalls, or a regular market to provide goods for tourists.
- STA could facilitate networking between interested villagers, beach fale operators and government agriculture staff so that speciality fruit and vegetables could be supplied locally.
- STA could help interested villagers to develop simple tours based upon local culture and attractions, and to market these through existing beach fale establishments.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has shown how a unique model of tourism development centred on basic beach fale has evolved in Samoa and is reaping considerable benefits for rural people. This led one commentator to insist that 'Beach fale tourism is the best thing that's happened to Samoan tourism' (Steve Brown, Ecotour Samoa, June 2003). The general feeling among beach fale operators and villagers was that beach fale development had been very positive because of both economic benefits and the renewed sense of pride which had developed in villages which attracted tourist clientele. Many operators feel obligated to assist and support not only their extended family, but also other villagers, and this ensures that there are significant multiplier effects from beach fale development.

A critical factor behind the success of beach fale has been the strong sense of culture which has guided beach fale development. It is certainly not the case then that *tourism controls development* in these communities (although it does contribute to development). Rather, from rules set by matai concerning noise at night through to protocols regarding dress and religious observances which tourists are expected to respect, it is clear that *culture exerts control over tourism*, and this in turn influences the nature of development which is occurring. In this context it is not surprising that tourism officials feel that tourism preserves culture in Samoa and that beach fale operators are not concerned about tourism leading to cultural erosion (Park 2003: 40).

Tourists who most appreciated the unique cultural experience offered by staying in a beach fale were also those most likely to express concern about changes which may affect Samoan tourism in the future:

I just so hope this place doesn't change, but if it does, it'll be because *we* [tourists] stuff it up (Australian man, 22, June 2003).

While the way in which beach fale tourism evolves in the future should certainly be of concern in terms of environmental, social and economic well-being, exactly how beach fale tourism develops will depend on a number of factors, only one of which is foreign tourists. As suggested above, it is the Samoan people and the State which has dictated the way in which tourism has evolved in Samoa to date, and their initially cautious approach to tourism is why the industry is strongly under local ownership and control today.

Samoa appears to demonstrate that a country with strong indigenous control of the tourism sector can be economically successful. Indeed, this success flies in the face of those who advocate the need for major foreign investment and large scale tourism development. Samoa has until recently eschewed many advances from international interests because of land tenure issues, preferring to take a path which has supported the development of a strong and dynamic budget beach fale sector. One of the most attractive and unique aspects of the beach fale sector is that it has allowed a wide range of people, including some who are not so well off, to have an entrée into the tourism industry – not as maids or waiters or cleaners employed by an outsider, but as owners of their own tourism accommodation business.

A key concern about the future of beach fale tourism is that formalisation of planning procedures and the idea of 'minimum standards' may force out some small businesses, and that land owners will be put under pressure from the government who have put in place legislation to encourage foreign investment in tourism. While recognizing that foreign investment will allow development of more high class hotels and resorts, it does not necessarily equate that this will bring more benefits for the Samoan people. Greater official recognition of the value of beach fale is needed, and this should lead on to continued support for beach fale businesses both in terms of training in areas concerning efficient and effective service provision, and also support for diversifying the products and services offered by beach fale.

Overall it is hoped that Samoa's future tourism development will continue to be controlled by its leaders in ways which prioritise the interests of Samoan people and their culture. There is little point in trying to turn Samoa into another Fiji or Tahiti:

We [the Pacific Islands] are all very similar destinations. I'm convinced that if we do things right [in Samoa] we can be this niche: strong culture, involvement of the locals, and 70-75% Samoan-owned (Fu'a Hazelman, former head of SVB, June 2003).

From a community development perspective which stresses reliance on local skills, knowledge and resources, and emphasises local ownership and control, improved standards of living for rural communities, respect for environmental and cultural assets, and local level empowerment, beach fale tourism in Samoa has been a very positive and innovative development.

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# Beach fale tourism in Samoa: The value of indigenous ownership and control over tourism

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