

Samoan perceptions of travel and tourism mobilities – the concept of *malaga*

Abstract

Tourism is a global phenomenon yet non-Western travel and tourism mobilities are under-researched and lack theoretical development. In the South Pacific, a region which is increasingly receiving geopolitical attention, there is substantial knowledge of inbound tourism but outbound and domestic forms of travel are less known. To understand the travel and tourism mobilities of Samoans, a concurrent mixed methods design of surveys supplemented by interviews with both urban and rural Samoans was employed. Samoan understandings of travel and tourism are expressed via the concept of *malaga*, which has a range of meanings including ‘migration’, ‘movement’ or ‘travel back and forth’. For Samoans, travel was for cultural and familial purposes, including the maintenance of cultural bonds through *fa’alavelave* (traditional obligations) and visiting friends and relatives (VFR). The migration of Samoans to various Pacific countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the USA has generated more need for travel and has helped to make mobility a routine aspect of Samoan social life. The travel mobilities of both urban and rural Samoans were influenced by a mix of cultural and familial obligations, leisure and tourism goals, and work-related purposes, blurring the lines between tourism and other forms of mobility. This paper advances knowledge of Samoan forms of travel and tourism mobility, providing important insights into the travel practices of a Pacific Islander people at a time when the South Pacific is becoming a site of intensifying geopolitical competition.

Keywords: Tourism mobilities; domestic travel, international travel, mixed methods; South Pacific; Samoa; *fa’alavelave* (traditional obligations); travel preferences; *malaga*; Pacific Islanders

Introduction

Modern approaches to the study of tourism have been viewed from a predominantly Eurocentric perspective (Cohen & Cohen, 2015a). In that paradigm, tourism originated in the West and through processes of industrialization and urbanization became a global yet distinctly Western phenomenon (Hazbun, 2009). As such, the host – guest relationship became characterised as

Westerners travelling internationally in the quest for authenticity or in search for the 'exotic Other' (Bandyopadhyay & Ganguly, 2018). But this singular world view has been extensively challenged over the past decade or so by a range of tourism researchers, including practitioners of the mobilities paradigm (Chen & Chang, 2015; Etemaddar, Duncan, & Tucker, 2016; Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006; Hazbun, 2009; Urry, 2007). The mobilities paradigm provides an alternative to the Eurocentric perspective by recognizing the increasingly blurred boundaries between tourism and other forms of movement across local, regional, national and international levels (Cohen, Duncan, & Thulemark, 2015).

A mobilities perspective considers how tourism is comprised of diverse flows of tourists, workers, currencies, vehicles and objects (Rickly, Hannam, & Mostafanezhad, 2017). Tourism is thus not a discrete sphere of social life but wholly integrated with the everyday and entangled with other forms of mobility such as commuting and migration. Conventional Western understandings cannot readily account for the diversity of practices that make up tourism. For example, the long history within Islam of revering travel that integrates elements of tourism, pilgrimage, spirituality and learning (Hazbun, 2009), or the profusion of museums displaying mundane activities such as candle making or shop working, are not easily explained by reference to long established Western theories of tourism (Urry & Larsen, 2011). A mobilities approach can conceptually deal with more diverse, everyday, and culturally nuanced forms of travel as it does not prioritise tourism mobility over other forms of mobility and it rejects binaries such as home/away, work/leisure, host/guest, domestic/international and mundane/extraordinary (Kaaristo & Rhoden, 2017). Mobilities theory is also quite flexible as it has been used to upgrade, adapt and respond to various pre-existing theories (Sheller & Urry, 2016).

Migration and mobility have long been integral features of Pacific Island life, from Polynesian migration prior to the arrival of Europeans (*palagi*) to recent travel mobility. Although there is increasing mobility in terms of education and employment in the Pacific, travel as a tourist for leisure is still a relatively uncommon practice. But that does not mean leisure tourism is non-existent. In Samoa, the presence of the beach *fale* (traditional thatched hut) as an accommodation type to attract budget tourism has facilitated the growth of domestic and international mobilities to Visit Friends and Relatives (VFR) or diaspora tourism (Scheyvens, 2007). Furthermore, the links developed by diasporic mobilities and the need for Pacific Islanders to maintain kinship

bonds and relationships has meant that long distance travel is becoming increasingly commonplace, while motivations for travel are diversifying (Hall & Duval, 2004).

Discretionary travel has long been motivated by the desire to visit friends and relatives, to partake in various activities for cultural and/or religious reasons, and it has often blurred the boundaries between obligation and voluntariness, and between leisure and toil (Etemaddar et al., 2016; Hazbun, 2009; Iaquinto, 2018). A mobilities perspective can help understand forms of travel undertaken for multiple purposes, such as social and familial obligations, tourism and leisure, and VFR. The extent to which Samoans perceive themselves as tourists and understand their travel practices as tourism has much to contribute to current debates regarding tourist identity, travel motivations, and the fluctuating mobilities which comprise the contemporary social world (Adey, Bissell, Hannam, Merriman, & Sheller, 2014). While the mobilities paradigm is itself a Western invention, it is useful for overcoming the Western bias in tourism scholarship as it ‘does not distinguish between a centre and periphery of tourist activity; it does not assume a single point of dissemination of tourism; and it does not prioritize a particular kind of motivation for tourism’ (Cohen & Cohen, 2015a, p. 163).

Tourism scholars are increasingly aware of tourism mobilities which are non-Western and/or performed in conjunction with other reasons for travel (Cohen et al., 2015; Etemaddar et al., 2016). We provide a distinctive example of such mobility in the concept of *malaga*, a Samoan word for ‘migration’, ‘movement’ or ‘travel back and forth’ (Muliaina, 2017). It is also the polite expression for *alu* (go) and *sau* (come) and entails both visiting and returning with no set duration. In Samoa, the word *malaga* is used to represent travel to and from diverse social spaces (*Vā*) to pay respect, demonstrate and maintain kin relationships both domestically and internationally, thus challenging conventional migration views of unidirectional mobility where migrants are permanently relocated (Ala'ilima & Ala'ilima, 1994; Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009). The *malaga* of Samoan people and “their acts of giving and receiving, as manifested in letters and remittances, all symbolise *Vā*” (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009, p. 21).

This study uses a mix of interviews and questionnaires to examine Samoan perceptions of tourism and tourists. It assesses the extent to which Samoans participate in travel for leisure as compared to cultural motivations for mobility that are linked to traditional kinship obligations and reciprocity domestically and internationally. In particular, it explores the concept of *malaga*

and how it is reflective of a Samoan view of travel and mobility. In-depth interviews were used to examine Samoan perceptions of ‘who is a tourist’, and whether they consider themselves tourists, while the quantitative surveys were used to capture the incidence of domestic and international mobilities to provide a profile of Samoan mobilities.

Samoan Travel & Tourism: Introducing *Malaga* Mobilities

The mobilities paradigm emerged around the early to mid-2000s in response to the perceived ‘sedentarism’ of the social sciences (Sheller & Urry, 2006). It was argued the social sciences had underplayed the importance of movement in modern society in which stability and fixity were considered ‘normal’ while flux and change were considered ‘abnormal’ (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Tourism has been a consistent topic of research since the advent of the mobilities paradigm (Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004; Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2004). Researchers have examined the technologies, objects and infrastructures making tourism possible, paying attention to both the mobile tourists and the less mobile workers who serve them (Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Barry, 2018; Hannam, Butler, & Paris, 2014; Sheller & Urry, 2004). While in this study we are interested primarily in the physical travel of people, travel can also be virtual or imaginative (Urry, 2007).

Cresswell (2010) describes mobility as an entanglement of movement, representation and practice. Movement is the physical act of mobility – the recognition that some people, objects, information and capital move. Representation refers to the meanings associated with movement. For example, mobility is different depending on whether people move by choice or by force. Practice is the experience of mobility – is it comfortable, stressful, exhilarating or boring? Also important is a focus on immobility as ‘stillness is thoroughly incorporated into the practices of moving’ (Cresswell, 2012, p. 648). For example, fixed infrastructures such as roads are essential for facilitating mobility, while the movements of some people requires others to be immobile (Hannam et al., 2006; Straughan, Bissell, & Gorman-Murray, 2020). In this paper the main interest is in the representation of mobility – the ways that Samoans understand their travel as being touristic or otherwise. But also important is a recognition of immobility in Samoan travel, as it forms part of their everyday mobile lives.

This paper thus helps to address two main gaps in the tourism and mobilities literatures. Firstly, by focusing on Samoan travellers and the concept of *malaga*, it helps to address the critique of

tourism and mobilities research as being overly Western centric (Chen & Chang, 2015; Cohen & Cohen, 2015a, 2015b; Hazbun, 2009). Secondly, the concept of *malaga* further demonstrates diverse motivations for travel (Muliaina, 2017). For many people, tourism is not simply a leisure pursuit but entangled with many other factors, desires and obligations motivating travel (Cohen et al., 2015; Rickly et al., 2017; Urry, 2007).

Conventional Western understandings of tourism provide little consideration for the extent to which culture, community and traditional obligations are key motivators for travel mobility. Recent studies have critiqued existing approaches to tourism, travel and leisure as being Eurocentric or Anglospheric in nature (Chen & Chang, 2015; Cohen & Cohen, 2015a; Hazbun, 2009; Wijesinghe, Mura, & Culala, 2019) and overly indifferent to non-Western tourism (Hazbun, 2009). Indigenous forms of travel do not always conform to rigid definitions of tourism (Peters & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2012), and this is particularly evident in Samoa where the term '*palagi*' refers interchangeably to Europeans and to tourists (Tcherkézoff, 2008). Samoan outbound travel is influenced by cultural obligations, migration, education and employment. Domestically, Samoa's thriving beach *fale* sector is frequented by VFR international visitors and local Samoans at weekends and public holidays (Samau, 2018). As many Samoans return to their homes each day, they could be considered 'excursionists' rather than 'tourists'. While the domestic travel and leisure practices of Samoans might be excluded from more conventional analyses of travel and tourism, a mobilities perspective does not privilege one form of mobility over another and so it can help expand knowledge of various forms of travel and tourism that do not conform to conventional Western understandings.

Samoa

Samoa is an archipelago consisting of ten volcanic islands of which Upolu, Savaii, Manono and Apolima are inhabited. This study was conducted on Upolu which is the second largest island. Samoa has a predominantly homogeneous society with a population of 195,979 in the 2016 Census (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The Samoan economy is traditionally dependent on development aid, tourism, agriculture and family remittances with tourism contributing 25% of its total GDP in 2017 and providing around 6,000 jobs (Curtain, Dornan, Doyle, & Howes, 2016).

In the last twenty years tourism has become “the major driver of economic growth and sustainable development in many Pacific Island Countries (PICs)”, providing much-needed economic benefits, foreign exchange and employment (Harrison & Prasad, 2013, p. 1). Despite the development of tourism and increased visitors to the Pacific, inbound and outbound travel by Pacific Islanders for leisure is limited. However, Pacific Islanders who reside in countries such as New Zealand, Australia, United States, and Canada preserve their cultural links by regular travel to their “external homeland” (Hall & Duval, 2004, p. 89) which in turn serves to maintain the practice of sending remittances which, in countries such as Samoa, are important to the local economy (Duval, 2003). Along with tourism, remittances are the largest foreign exchange earner to the country, as noted by the Governor of the Central Bank of Samoa, Maiava Atalina Ainuu-Enari (Nataro, 2019b).

Table 1: Mobility and economic indicators for Samoa.

	Stock of emigrants	Resident population	Emigrants / Population	Remittances / GDP	GDP per capita (2005 US\$)
Samoa	87,949	190,390	46.2%	28.2%	2,668

Source: Curtain et al. (2016)

As Table 1 demonstrates, Samoa receives remittances equivalent to 28 per cent of its GDP from a population of 87,949 emigrants. These remittances are mainly from Samoans who have migrated for employment in the fields of fisheries, mining, agriculture and professional sport (Curtain et al., 2016). Flows of money and tourists to Samoa (and the flow of Samoan workers away from Samoa) are highly important to the Samoan economy. Remittances are sourced from predominantly two locations: New Zealand and Australia (Table 2).

Table 2: Remittance receipts by country.

Source	2017/18 Samoan Tala (millions)	%
New Zealand	203.87	49.66
Australia	162.28	39.53
American Samoa	17.63	4.29
Fiji	3.13	0.76
Other countries	23.63	5.76
Total	410.54	100.00

Source: Nataro (2019a).

Whilst many destinations in the South Pacific are considered leisure based tourism destinations, Samoa is one of the major beneficiaries of the VFR market (Cheer et al., 2018). For Samoa, the

inbound VFR market represents 44% of international tourism arrivals (Samoa Tourism Authority, 2019) with the tourism sector contributing 20% to GDP (Samoa Tourism Authority, 2014). The VFR market to Samoa has grown from 49,002 in 2017 to 75,912 in 2018 an increase of 54.9% (Samoa Tourism Authority, 2019). The key source markets are New Zealand (52.7%), Australia (23.5%), American Samoa (11.4%), and USA (7.6%) (Table 3), and with more than half of these visitors being migrant Samoans returning home on holiday expounds the importance of diasporic (VFR) tourism to Samoa’s economic development.

Table 3: Samoa’s visiting friends and relatives (diaspora tourism) market.

Source Markets	2017	2018	% of Market (2018)	% Increase 2017-2018
New Zealand	24,306	38,817	52.7	59.7
Australia	12,233	17,326	23.5	41.6
American Samoa	6,625	8,414	11.4	27.0
USA	3,383	5,604	7.6	65.7
Fiji	628	1,188	1.6	89.2
China	243	671	0.9	176.1
Asia	183	660	0.9	260.7
United Kingdom	160	403	0.5	151.9
Germany	87	121	0.2	39.1
Japan	80	117	0.2	46.3
Korea	17	104	0.1	511.8
Canada	46	102	0.1	121.7
Scandinavia	27	42	0.1	55.6
Benelux	10	32	0.0	220.0
Cook Islands	7	13	0.0	85.7
Other Pacific Islands	650	1,091	1.5	67.8
Other Europe	118	717	1.0	507.6
Other Countries	199	490	0.7	146.2
Total	48,028	73,601	100	

Source: Samoa Tourism Authority (2019)

Cultural aspects of Samoan Mobility

Central to Samoan conceptions of mobility are the maintenance of social connections rather than geographic borders (Ala'ilima & Ala'ilima, 1994). *Malaga* (used as a noun) refers to formal parties undertaking a traditional ceremonial visit. Lilomaiava-Doktor (2009) explained a number of cultural metaphors related to Samoan mobility, for example *malaga* (movement or travel), *i'inei* (local, here, home) and *fafo* (abroad, overseas) including movement from village/metropolitan areas, core/periphery. Young (1998, p. 298) stated that in the Pacific, societies differentiate between 'being kin' and 'knowing kin' and the participation needed to engage in society involves mobility but is not necessarily considered tourism or travel for leisure:

‘Being kin’ is encoded in relations where sibling hierarchy, gender, and age structure social relations while ‘knowing kin’ embodies memories where the distinctions between past and present relationships are both personal and shared. ‘Being kin’ is not enough—one has to live it through participation, reciprocity, and obligation, whether one resides in one’s birth village or away from it. One may be part of a kindred, but if not maintained and expressed in *tautua* (service) and *va fealoa’i* (balanced social space), the *‘āiga* loses legitimacy.

In Samoa *fanua* (land) is in many cases communally owned and considered more than a physical resource or somewhere that provides shelter and sustenance, but includes emotions of belonging, identity and clan/tribal membership, with concepts of land and home being intrinsically linked. For example, despite the mobility of the Samoan community at home and abroad (Shankman, 2018), they continue to maintain ties to the land belonging to their *i’inei* as it is the foundation of their spiritual wellbeing, political and economic power (Lilomaiva-Doktor, 2009). Cultural concepts of land are reciprocal, with people caring for the land and the land in turn nourishing them. However, in Samoa, as with elsewhere in the Pacific, on occasion people may have to *malaga* (travel) in order to *tausi fanua* (care for the land). For Samoa, this population movement happens in part to maintain relationships between family members at home and abroad as well as to sustain family who remain at home (*i’inei*) and look after family land. Reciprocity and service are vital features of Pacific Island communities and more specifically Samoan mobility (Muliaina, 2017).

The outward labour migration of Pacific athletic talent for rugby league, rugby union, Australian Rules Football and soccer are key motivations for mobility that are strongly linked to traditional kinship obligations and reciprocity (Liki, 2001). For example, Samoan youth, especially young men “are expected to enter global kinship networks of reciprocity and exchange, ultimately contributing to the development of the *‘āiga* (family) back home through remittances” (Kwauk, 2014, p. 304). The transnational and socioeconomic mobility of young Samoans engaging in international sport is expected to facilitate prosperity and through *tautau* (service) strengthen international extended family ties. Today, Pacific communities are no longer organised around a single village, but exist across multiple borders with the maintenance of kinship-based transnational communities providing the necessary emotional, spiritual and material support

(Nakhid, 2009). By focusing on Samoan travel, this paper addresses the overly Western centric nature of much tourism research and highlights how travel is not exclusively a leisure activity but incorporates diverse motivations.

Research Methods

Broadly, the research provides an in-depth examination of tourism mobilities in Samoa and socio-economic and cultural barriers of travel. This study explores Pacific Island typologies of tourism participation, especially with respect to recreational travel, cultural (and religious-based) travel, the VFR market and business travel. It includes cultural conceptualisations of citizenship and home, notably from the perspectives of communities in Samoa. To appropriately fulfil the research objectives, mixed methods were used in this research. In this case, quantitative surveys were the primary method, supplemented by qualitative interviews. Responses from the paper surveys were entered into SPSS v26 (IBM Corp., 2019) for further analysis. The responses in the database were checked for any errors and cleaned where necessary. Predominantly, descriptive statistics were used to answer the research objectives. For the qualitative data, interviews were recorded and later transcribed into text. Manual coding was undertaken to identify themes from these interviews. While both methods were conducted concurrently, the interviews were used to expand upon the survey data. Mobilities research has been dominated by qualitative methods but it is a methodologically innovative field and is thus accepting of a range of methods including mixed methods.

Two locations were preselected during the design of the research project: one urban (Apia, the Capital), and one rural location (The Aleipata District), both on Upolu. Apia was selected as it is the main urban centre and capital city of Samoa. The villages of Vailoa, Vavau, Saleapaga, and Lalomanu were selected as the main rural location on Upolu because of their rurality and proximity to beach *fale* resorts and communities linked to tourism. Convenience sampling meant that researchers visited the different locations and explained to people both in English and Samoan what the research involved and asked whether or not they were interested in completing the survey in exchange for a five *tala* phone card. At the market, as with elsewhere, the study was explained to all stall holders/potential respondents and the survey completed by those who were willing, with the assistance of English and Samoan speaking researchers who included local university lecturers, students and alumni with a specialization in tourism and hospitality.

For Aleipata, the research project was explained to participants at prearranged village meetings and permission given by chiefs for the surveys to be completed by all adult attendees over the age of 16. In this sense, the choice of rural district was purposefully sampled. As the community hall was the venue for the research, residents who attended were conveniently sampled. In the villages, respondents were taken through the survey, question by question in Samoan and any queries explained by the researchers. For the resort staff and Samoan visitors in the Aleipata District, respondents were approached individually, the research explained, and they were then asked to complete the survey which was provided in Samoan or English as requested.

Conducting research in a Pacific cultural context is time consuming, however, it is considered rude to start interviewing straight after the welcome ceremony and to leave straight after the research has been completed (Evening, 2000). Access to rural communities in Samoa required a cultural methodology to be integrated into the study in line with traditional protocol. In the case of Samoa, permission to enter the Aleipata District which included the villages of Vailoa, Vavau, Saleapaga, and Lalomanu on Upolu Island had to be obtained from a number of Government Ministries and appointments made with the four rural villages and beach *fale* resorts. Although traditional protocol required a small quantity of *kava*, the social exchange required the engagement of someone familiar with Samoan *launga* (oratory) and tradition to perform the traditional ceremonies required for the researchers to enter and leave the villages, explain the survey in detail, and facilitate the completion of the survey and semi-structured interviews.

At the end of each visit, the researchers were offered lunch and presented with a gift of a suckling pig, *taro* and *palusami* which had been cooked in the *umu* (underground oven). Before the researchers left Aleipata District, it was necessary to return to each of the villages to present them with a suckling pig in appreciation for their participation in the study. The community were very grateful to be considered for the study, and requested that we return to share our findings. As governments in the South Pacific do not collect and disseminate information on domestic and outbound travel, this research will fill important knowledge gaps and allowed a comparative analysis across geographic boundaries.

Quantitative Survey

The surveys in Apia, in the most part were disseminated in English, however, challenges with English literacy levels in rural Samoa meant that surveys were translated into Samoan and

disseminated by the research team. Specific data collection points for this study included resorts, hotels, offices, universities, marketplaces, and social environments such as villages, and schools. The survey instrument covered collected domestic and international travel experiences, travel motivations, expenditure and activities as well as a standard set of sociodemographic questions. At the end of the data collection period, a total of N=308 completed surveys were collected. This led to a maximum sampling error of $\pm 5.6\%$.

The profile of the respondents for the survey is shown in Table 4. The sample profile is representative of the wider Samoan population. By ethnicity, Samoa is very homogeneous, almost everyone surveyed was Samoan. Respondents tended to be in the young adult to middle aged age bracket with almost two in five respondents being aged from 16 to 24 years with a similar segment aged 25 to 44 years. There was a range of respondents from various education levels.

Table 4: Profile of respondents.

N=308	%		%
Ethnicity		Religion	
Samoan	99.7%	Christian Other	43.2%
Fijian	0.3%	Catholic	20.9%
Gender		Methodist	18.6%
Male	39.7%	Seventh Day Adventists	6.3%
Female	60.3%	Hindu	0.3%
Age (years)		Non-believer	0.3%
16-24	38.3%	Other	10.3%
25-44	41.6%	Highest level of education	
45-64	17.2%	Primary School or less	9.1%
65+	2.9%	Secondary/ High School	30.8%
Marital Status		Vocational College	21.0%
Single	49.5%	Bachelor	33.2%
Married/In a Relationship	46.5%	Post Graduate Degree	5.8%
Divorced / Widowed	4.0%		

Qualitative Interviews

A mix of convenience sampling and purposeful sampling was used to select interviewees, as noted above. This sampling method was chosen to maximize depth and richness of the collected data. Twenty semi-structured interviews were also undertaken in Samoa, that is, ten urban and ten rural locations. Table 5 shows the profile of the qualitative research participants. The profile reveals a mix of genders, age and occupations. Topics of the semi-structured interviews included

an examination of ‘who is a tourist’, and whether they considered themselves as tourists when they travel. The in-depth interviews explore the cultural interpretation and meaning of travel. Detailed notes were taken in the interviews and themes were extracted, noting similarities with themes derived from previous research (Peters & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2012).

Table 5: Qualitative interviews participant profile.

Participant	Area	Gender	Age (Years)	Occupation
A1	Apia	Male	25	Receptionist
A2	Apia	Male	34	Bank loans officer
A3	Apia	Female	30	Shop assistant
A4	Apia	Female	55	Resort owner
A5	Apia	Female	37	Lecturer
A6	Aleipata District	Female	60	Resort owner
A7	Aleipata District	Female	60	GM/Resort owner
A8	Aleipata District	Female	61	CEO Travel agency
A9	Aleipata District	Male	25	Activities guide
A10	Aleipata District	Male	42	Taxi driver
A11	Apia	Female	45	Admin Assistant
A12	Aleipata District	Female	60	Farmer
A13	Apia	Male	35	Taxi driver
A14	Aleipata District	Female	61	Nightclub owner
A15	Apia	Female	40	Administrator
A16	Apia	Male	35	IT Manager
A17	Apia	Male	29	Trainee manager
A18	Aleipata District	Male	37	Teacher
A19	Aleipata District	Male	20	Waiter
A20	Aleipata District	Female	35	Housekeeping maid

University alumni were contacted and asked to recruit a cross-section of local residents for the study. Further snowballing took place until a point of data saturation was reached where future interviews would not provide new information. The interviews were undertaken in a variety of locations including markets, village hall, resorts, offices, homes, and taxis when on long trips.

Results

To understand mobilities in the Samoan context is to realize the importance of *fa'alavelave* (traditional obligations) such as chiefly installations, weddings, funerals, christenings, significant

birthdays, reunions etc. The majority of travel was for *fa'alavelave*. The motivations and reasoning behind these traditional obligations is outlined below.

Facilitators of Mobility

One of the prerequisites to travel is having the financial means. In terms of employment, Table 6 shows evidence of Samoa being a MIRAB (Migration Remittances Aid Bureaucracy) country with 27.8% of respondents reporting they are employed by the Samoan Government (Bertram & Watters, 1985). Tourism is also an important part of the Samoan economy. Almost 46% of respondents reported working in tourism, hospitality or the hotel industry, demonstrating the importance of the tourism industries to Samoa. When asked to rate their financial situation, over a third (35.2%) stated low income and another third (35.6%) stated lower middle income. Only 8.5% consider themselves high income earners.

Table 6: Financial situation.

Current Occupation	
Government Official	27.8%
Student/pupil	22.5%
Professional	9.9%
Domestic Work	9.9%
Self-employed	7.6%
Skilled Occupation	7.3%
Labourer	4.6%
Between Jobs	4.3%
Other	6.0%
Work in tourism, hospitality or hotel industry	45.8%
Self-assessed Financial situation	
High Income	8.5%
Higher Middle Income	20.7%
Lower Middle Income	35.6%
Low Income	35.2%

Source: Quantitative Surveys

Respondents were also asked on what they spent their income as financial resources are a pre-requisite for travel. Almost half of all respondents stated saving their disposable income, potentially to be used for travel while 8.1% and 6.5% of respondents explicitly stated they used their disposable income for international travel and domestic travel respectively (Table 7). These savings are needed for future traditional obligations. It also should be noted almost a quarter of respondents declared they have no disposable income with which to save. Almost three in 10 Samoans have a credit card and one in five have a debit card, again making travel more

financially possible. Three out of four (76.0%) respondents stated they have at least one passport, a further facilitator of international travel.

Table 7: Expenditure and assets.

Disposable Income Spent on...	
Savings	49.0%
Shopping beyond necessities	28.2%
Dining out / Partying / Alcohol	15.6%
International Travel	8.1%
Domestic Travel	6.5%
No Disposable Income	24.4%
Number of Valid Passports	
0	24.0%
1	66.0%
2	8.7%
More than 2	1.4%
Own a	
Credit Card	29.2%
Debit Card	19.2%
Car / Minibus	39.9%
Scooter	3.2%
Paddle boat/canoe	6.8%
Motor boat	2.6%

Source: Quantitative Surveys

The qualitative interviews expanded on the insights from the survey. The commitment to *fa'avelave* meant that most Samoans have a number of jobs and regularly save a percentage of their wages for this eventuality.

In Samoa the main reason we travel is for fa'avelave. There is always a wedding, funeral, chiefly installation or important birthday that we have to attend. I have one fulltime job and two part-time jobs and have a separate savings account just for fa'avelave. My parents are old and retired so I have to save the money to give on their behalf as well as my family. I come from Apia and only go to Savai'i for fa'avelave. Our pension scheme recognises the cost of this and we can withdraw from it to pay for fa'avelave (A15, Female, 40 years, Apia).

We get a lot help from our families overseas for fa'avelave, not only do they send us money but they also travel from overseas to here. A lot of them rent cars, buy food and

mats from the handicraft market and stay in beach fale so this means more money into our economy (A18, Male, 37 years, Aleipata District).

Thus the mobilities of *fa'alavelave* depend on periods of relative immobility as Samoans remain in their workplaces earning money to afford travel. Samoans travel to pay their respects at funerals and weddings irrespective of their social status or wealth. If they do not have money to give, they present gifts in kind e.g. mats, tapa, bundles of taro, fish, a pig, corned beef, or provide labour during the function. In Samoa there is a saying “*E mativa fesaga'i le Samoa*” [Samoans face each other irrespective of their economic status]. The important thing is you made the effort to attend, not what you brought (Doktor, 2009, p.16).

It is important to attend fa'alavelave especially if you are closely related. Usually when I go overseas my brothers and sisters help out with arrangements and with the financial side of things for me, even when I went for studies they helped me (A5, Female, 37 years, Apia).

My family and I mostly travel for fa'alavelave in Samoa and to New Zealand. We have been to Sava'ii for weddings, birthdays, funerals and village events. If my husband and I cannot go we give money so someone else in the family can represent us. It is important to save and support your family at these times, but it is expensive because we have to take gifts and give money. Many people borrow money and give what they cannot afford because they don't want to shame their family (A14, Female, 61 years, Aleipata District).

Apart from travelling to the University of the South Pacific [in Fiji] to study, the only time I have travelled is for my Uncle's funeral in Auckland. My brother is getting married in Sydney next month and I will be taking my wife and children to the wedding. We are lucky my wife works and have been saving for a year to go. (A16, Male, 35 years, Apia).

I have only been to Fiji to study and my only travel there was on field trips. Since I have been back I work to support my family and give to fa'alavelave and do not have time and money to go overseas. At weekends we sometimes go to beach fale like Lalomanu for the day (A17, Male 29 years, Apia).

For many of the respondents their main experience of travel was for *fa'alavelave*. It is an expensive yet obligatory travel practice that reduces other opportunities for mobility given the financial commitment required, resulting in extended periods of relative stillness.

Barriers to Mobility

In line with the findings above, a certain section of the community did not have the disposable income to travel, especially in those communities who were not associated with tourism and still recovering from the tsunami. They rarely travelled domestically, even into Apia, and never internationally.

Our village was very damaged by the tsunami and we are still trying to rebuild it. We have little money, eat from the plantation and sea and spend our money on educating our children. I don't think of travel, and even fa'alavelave is hard for us (A12, Female, 60 years, Aleipata District).

While a clichéd view of Pacific Islanders is that they do not have the financial means to travel, the qualitative interviews reveal a general lack of interest or desire to travel. In contrast to much research on immobility (Cresswell, 2012; Straughan et al., 2020), staying relatively still was for some Samoans a choice rather than an imposition. One participant who worked in Apia and went home to Lalomanu at the weekend, when asked if he was interested in travelling domestically also answered:

Why? In front of my house I have a beautiful beach, I just have to open my front door and cross the road, why would I take my family to another beach, I have my own, I don't want to go to one that belongs to someone else (A10, Male, 42 years, Aleipata District).

A young employee of one of the beach *fale* resorts, when asked if he would like to be a tourist and go overseas on holiday stated:

Why? Look this is one of the most beautiful beaches in the world, all these people have travelled from all over the world to visit us, swim, dive and learn about our culture. This is my home, I do this every day for free, why would I want to pay to go and do this somewhere else? (A9, Male, 25 years, Aleipata District).

When asked what he meant by ‘leisure’ one participant replied:

I mean short trips, just going out and eating and drinking – random unplanned trips that do not necessarily mean going to the beach, just around town. I like to do things that are familiar and do not require much travelling. I do not like travelling. (A1, Male, 25 years, Apia)

Others, when asked about their travel experiences, disliked the length time involved in travel, did not consider themselves ‘tourists’ but explained these as follows:

Our home is close to the sea and beach, so we do not travel often. I get car sick and do not like to fly, so we stay close to home. (A2, Male, 34 years, Apia).

I travel from Apia every weekend but this is not for tourism purposes. My children live in Savaii so I visit them most weekends. I see it as going home and not for tourism (A3, Female, 30 years, Apia).

I own a beach fale resort and work seven days a week, so when I go on holiday, I fly to Auckland, book myself into a hotel, order room service and sleep for two weeks, then I come back again rested and go back to work. (A6, Female, 60 years, Aleipata District).

Samoan Travel Patterns

To assess a broad measure of mobility, respondents were asked which area they grew up and which area they currently reside. Table 8 shows that overall there has been a certain degree of urbanization. Approximately 57% of Samoans grew up in in the village but only 50% of Samoans currently reside in rural area / villages. The decrease in those living in the village means that both urban and suburban areas have seen an increase in Samoan residents, suggesting a degree of urbanization.

Table 8: Residential mobility.

	Area where Grew Up	Currently Reside
Rural/Village	56.9%	49.7%
Urban/City	23.4%	26.2%
Suburban/City outskirts	19.7%	24.2%

When asked if they have ever travelled internationally, 57.5% of respondents reported they have while 79.9% of respondents have travelled domestically outside their island (Upolu residents going to Savaii or *vice versa*).

Among the four in five Samoan residents who have travelled domestically, the average number of domestic trips is 3.46 trips to another island in the last 12 months and 6.07 trips on average to another district. In the last 5 years, Samoan residents take on average 7.09 trips to another island and 13.29 trips to another Province. The average length of stay on another island is 5.17 days and in another province is 4.76 days.

Among the 57.5% of respondents who have travelled internationally, Samoans took 1.64 mean trips in the last 12 months (median = 1) and 4.48 trips on average in the last five years (median = 2). The average length of stay is 47.3 days with a median value of 15 days. For those who travelled internationally, out of all trips, the most frequently visited countries were New Zealand (42.8%), American Samoa (14.6%), Australia (14.1%), Fiji (9.8%) and USA (5.6%).

Table 9 shows comparable travel characteristics for Samoans who undertook domestic and international travel. Not surprisingly, given the remote island location of Samoa, international travel involves air transportation. The only accessible destination by water is American Samoa. Domestic travel involves a wider variety of transport modes from boat to car to buses and even taxis. In terms of purpose of trip, VFR is the most prominent reasons for travel for both domestic and international travel, although some leisure travel is also prominent. Travel for education and business is also a relatively common motive for international travel. It is important to acknowledge that each of these reasons for travel would involve periods of relative stillness as Samoans resided in place for the purposes of VFR, education or business. Thus the relationship between mobility and stillness is one of integration and interdependence rather than opposition.

Whilst motivations for travel were based around *fa'alavelave* and visiting friends and relatives, how Samoans engaged in tourism, where they stayed, and the extent to which they undertook holidays as 'tourists' varied and was impacted by socio-economic status.

I am a taxi driver and during the week I live in Apia in a shared house with other taxi drivers. On Saturday afternoon I go home to my family. My house is on a very

beautiful beach, so I am happy. I save my money for my children's schooling and for fa'alavelave. (A13, Male, 35 years, Apia).

My family own a luxury resort and I have been privileged to travel for my education, work and also to visit friends and relatives all over the world. My son lives in Brazil and this Christmas we will be going to join him and then take a Cruise to the Falkland Islands and Antarctica. We look forward to spending this time together (A7, Female, 60 years, Aleipata District).

My husband is from Europe so we visit his family, and also recently he needed medical treatment so we went back there. Otherwise I travel for work, and also for pleasure to see our family (A8, Female, 61 years, Aleipata District).

As elaborated in the interviews, many participants travelled for education and better employment opportunities that would allow them to send remittances home to their families, and contribute to *fa'alavelave*.

Many Samoans go overseas to earn money or to get a better education or degree so they can help their families. My children are overseas studying and working. When they come home they believe that with money and education they can help build their 'āiga. However, on their return they must go through traditional protocols such as consulting with matai (chiefs) and the extended family who have been looking after the land whilst they were away (A4, Female 55 years, Apia).

Domestic travel involves travel with a range of travel companions mostly with family and relatives (75.2%) but also alone (30.5%) with friends (28.5%) and work / study colleagues (25.6%). International travel follows a similar pattern. Although still the highest, international travel with family and relatives is lower than for domestic travel while the incidence of solo travel is higher and travel with work / study colleagues is similar to the domestic case.

In over 50% of cases of domestic and international travellers the trip is financed by family or relatives. About a quarter of international trips are sponsored by employers. The qualitative findings illuminate the survey results here. Whilst the main motivation for domestic and international travel was *fa'alavelave*, with international travel being paid for or sponsored by family / diaspora, the most enjoyable forms of *fa'alavelave* were weddings and birthdays.

The most enjoyable were fa'alavelave trips which are weddings. I enjoy these because of meeting family I seldom see and it is usually on high spirits. The two or so weeks I go, I will always have cousins picking me up or dropping by the house to chat and catch up or go shopping or sightseeing. Otherwise there is always something to do around the house which is a good feeling to do something for them in return. Usually I pay for my own fare and some pocket money, but for sure I don't need to use any of it when I am there as family love to buy things for me and take me places. (A5, Female, 37 years, Apia).

Accommodation used by both domestic and international travellers follows a similar pattern whereby Samoans predominantly stay with their family and friends. There is a higher incidence of international travellers staying at mid-range and high-end accommodation, as often this is paid by employers and government rather than out of their own pocket, as it is business travel.

Table 9: Travel characteristics.

	Domestic Travel	International Travel		Domestic Travel	International Travel
Mode of Transport*			Travel Companions*		
Public / Scheduled boat	47.2%	14.7%	Family / Relatives	75.2%	62.7%
Private / hired car	44.7%		Self	30.5%	53.7%
Public Bus	38.2%		Friends	28.5%	10.7%
Taxi	28.5%		Work / Study Colleagues	25.6%	25.4%
Cruise ship	12.6%	4.0%	Packaged tour	1.2%	2.3%
Plane	6.9%	90.4%	Other	2.4%	1.1%
Scooter	2.4%		Sponsor*		
Other	4.1%	2.8%	Family / relatives	57.7%	53.1%
Purpose of Trip*			Self	47.6%	46.9%
VFR	38.2%	67.2%	My employer	19.1%	26.0%
Leisure/Recreation	29.3%	44.1%	Friends	7.3%	4.5%
Business/Work	17.9%	32.8%	A religious organisation	5.7%	6.2%
Religious Activities	11.8%	8.5%	Other	2.8%	13.6%
Education	10.2%	24.9%	Accommodation Used*		
Sports/Cultural	9.8%	6.8%	Family / Friends	77.6%	79.1%
Shopping	5.3%	9.6%	Budget accommodation	26.4%	22.6%
Wellness	4.9%	9.6%	Mid-range accommodation	14.6%	24.9%
Other	3.7%	2.8%	High-end accommodation	4.5%	13.6%
Cost of Domestic trips (WST)					
Median	\$200.00	\$3,500.00			
Mean	\$1,451.33	\$8,548.04			

* Multiple responses allowed so percentages will add to > 100%

Samoan perceptions of mobility

All participants when asked to identify 'the tourist' made reference to the '*palagi*' never considering themselves as tourists. The main holiday periods are school holidays, Easter and Christmas. Whilst some participants from Apia travelled domestically within Upolu for leisure i.e. day trips to beach *fales* on Lalomanu. Most of those interviewed stated they had never been to Savaii (the other main island) and were unlikely to go except for *fa'avelave* or work as they considered it to be too slow-paced, despite Savaii being a major tourist attraction for international visitors.

Apart from references to '*palagi*', when asked to reflect on what was meant by 'tourism' respondents mentioned leisure, accommodation, resorts, hotels and the cost of travel, participants stated:

When you ask me about tourism I think about attractions, tourism is about attracting and marketing a destination like our village, so we have to keep our village clean and maintain our village stories (A2, Male 34 years, Apia).

*From what I see the Palagi people save to travel and Samoans save for *fa'avelave*. We have to work hard and save for our large families, cultural and village activities and things we need to do. I am happy living in Samoa and never want to leave (A3, Female, 30 years, Apia).*

There is no one Samoan word for 'tourism' and words can mean different things depending on how they are used. The definition of tourism in Samoan is just a description of what it is and the actions carried out when people engage in tourism (A18, Male, 37 years, Apia).

*Tourism is an important industry in Samoa, many of us work in tourism. I am a taxi driver and pick up tourists at the airport and drop them at their resorts and beach *fales*, then I drive them round the island and to the beaches and *Fiafia* nights at the hotels (A13, Male, 35 years, Apia).*

In the main, Western concepts of the tourist as predominantly of European origin are supported by Samoans, hence the use of the term *palagi*. However, local motivations for travel are bound

by culture, *fa'alavelave* and traditional obligations, and in this respect the visiting friends and relatives / diaspora segment of travel. Urban residents from Apia may engage in travel as a form of leisure at the weekends or when returning home to their rural villages.

Samoans are a very proud people, willing to share their culture with visitors but showing little curiosity to visit other countries, explore different cultures and attractions. Thus they often opt for relative stillness over relative mobility by voluntarily limiting their travel. Their most popular destinations for travel were Australia, New Zealand and USA to visit Samoan relatives and diaspora or undertake *fa'alavelave*, however their propensity to travel was also highly influenced by their socio-economic status and the ability of their families, churches or other community organisations to pay. Thus, Samoan immobilities were sometimes imposed by financial limitations.

I think the main hindrance to travel for Samoans is the money to do so. But it is quite weird that people do not have the money to relax but when the fa'alavelave comes around, they always have the money to contribute (A5, Female, 37 years, Apia).

The results from the quantitative survey support this. Samoans were also asked if they won a fully paid one-week holiday to any country of their choice, where would they like to go, Table 10 shows that USA followed by New Zealand and Australia are the three most desired countries to travel to. This represents their aspirational travel but ironically these are the top three destinations that Samoans are already travelling to. These destinations also have the largest number of friends and relatives residing. So even if the travel destinations are unlimited, the pull of VFR is particularly strong.

Table 10: Aspirational travel countries.

USA	23.5%
New Zealand	20.8%
Australia	18.3%
Italy	5.2%
France	4.5%
Greece	3.1%
Israel	3.1%
Japan	2.8%
Fiji	2.4%
Other	19.5%

Findings from these interviews reveal that the pressure put on Samoans to contribute lavishly to *fa'alavelave* and the status this afforded families and communities, meant that such traditional obligations were extremely costly, and given that these obligations are inevitable.

“most families have savings accounts and in some cases work extra jobs just so they can make these contributions and maintain their status within Samoan society” (A11, Female, 45 years, Apia).

Discussion and Conclusions

There is a significant amount of mobility among Samoan residents. Almost three in five have travelled internationally and four in five have beyond their island. While there is a degree of leisure tourism financed by Samoans themselves, much of their mobility revolves around the family. These mobilities are enabled by periods of relative immobility given that the high cost of travel requires extended periods of employment. Regular travel is required to visit family and relatives overseas particularly in New Zealand and to a lesser extent in American Samoa, Australia, Fiji and USA. These trips are often financed by family and friends. Samoans commonly consider tourism to be a *palagi* concept as *fa'alavelave* (traditional obligation) drives a lot of the mobility among Samoans. But this is not to say there were no leisure or tourism-related practices conducted among Samoans who travelled abroad or domestically. Samoans are more likely to stay with friends or family and not in hotels or resorts, although this is slowly changing amongst the diaspora. While the primary purpose of travel might be VFR, business trips or for educational purposes, Samoans will undertake leisure activities such as shopping and eating out at fast food restaurants.

As demonstrated above, a mobility approach highlighted the multifaceted mobile experiences characterising Samoan social life. While there were no noticeable differences in travel mobilities across genders, some possible class differences were observed as those with careers, particularly in the public sector, were more likely to have travelled for work. Somewhat surprisingly, the younger generation were less likely to have travelled. One reason for this is that young adults are starting their careers and often funding their families' *fa'alavelave* travel. Older Samoans, who often had more time to travel, were more likely to travel for *fa'alavelave*. In Samoan society, the elderly are highly respected. Their mobility for the purposes of traditional obligations are given

more significance, both from the receiving kin and the extended family they represent. Thus the mobilities of older Samoans depended to some extent on the immobilities of younger Samoans.

This research extends our understanding of mobilities in what Cohen and Cohen (2015b) call emerging world regions. Samoans would rather be at 'home' than travel for purely leisure purposes to another destination. That is not to say they do not travel. Travel is very much wrapped up in the concept of *malaga*, where formal parties undertake a traditional ceremonial visit. The cultural aspects of the travel and the ceremonies performed are paramount to the culture and spirit of the Samoan people. Where travel among Westerners is often driven by leisure and relaxation, the Samoan view of travel is to establish, maintain and strengthen cultural bonds through *fa'alavelave* (traditional obligations) such as chiefly installations, weddings, funerals, christenings, significant birthdays, and reunions. VFR is driven by more than familial bonds but also a recognition that these peoples are coming from the same land. Land for Pacific Islanders and in this case Samoans is the centre of their collective identity, the source of their genealogical roots and defines their roles, responsibilities, and heritage (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009; Muliaina, 2017). Family is what drives their sense of identity. As such, travel and mobility is framed around this.

Mobilities researchers have argued evocatively for theories more attuned to the complexity of contemporary tourism. This study has provided an example of an existing form of travel performed for multiple motivations, one which serves various purposes, and that cannot be separated from everyday life. By applying the Samoan concept of *malaga*, the paper helps to advance tourism theory by moving beyond Western understandings of tourism that are not able to account for the diversity of contemporary tourism. Travel is often motivated by a range of desires and social obligations as well as leisure pursuits. More than just VFR travel, the importance of fulfilling family obligations as a travel motivation, that is, Samoans experiencing extreme shame if they cannot meet these needs, highlights the interplay between mobilities, social structures and culture. This contrasts with how Western tourists often see leisure. By being open to such diverse motivations, researchers are becoming much more aware of how travel and tourism mobilities re-shape the contemporary social world.

While the mobilities paradigm has been considered 'new' by Western social scientists (Sheller & Urry, 2006), mobility has always been an important feature in the lives of Pacific Islanders. Just

as mobilities researchers have argued for the need to incorporate a sense of flux into social theory, the concepts of *malaga* and *fa'alavelave* illustrate the importance of movement to the everyday lives of Samoans. Establishing binary distinctions between work and tourism, home and away, choice and obligation, is unhelpful for explaining the perceptions of travel and tourism among Samoans, particularly as the case of Samoan travel illustrates how mobility and stillness were not opposites but complementary. Instead, a perspective based on 'lifestyle mobilities' in which the reasons for travel are fluid and variegated (Cohen et al., 2015) is potentially more helpful. In a region that has long experienced the presence of the international tourism industry, it is helpful to consider the ways Samoans themselves experience travel, mobility and immobility. As tourism becomes increasingly entangled with a geopolitical contest gaining pace in the South Pacific (Tolkach & Pratt, 2019), greater cultural understanding of the region and its people is urgently needed.

As with any research, this paper has its limitations, which provide an avenue for future research. While we have noted that the findings for Samoa are similar to other Pacific Island Countries and Territories and indeed, other indigenous peoples, there will be differences. These differences can be explored by other researchers, as this study involved only Samoa. Furthermore, we only studied Samoans in Samoa. Expanding the fluidity of the mobilities paradigm, we did not cover Samoans who had immigrated to New Zealand or Australia to understand their travel patterns and decisions. A comparative study among Australians and New Zealanders of Samoan ethnicity and those who immigrated from Samoa would make a riveting study in terms of how they experience *malaga*.

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