

Sāmoan Culture and Language

Gagana Sāmoa ma le Aganu'u Fa'asāmoa

*O le gagana e la'ei ai le aganu'u -
Language characterises the
essence of culture*

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The Ministry for Pacific Peoples is continuing to grow and develop its role as custodian in promoting the Pacific languages and cultures of Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Niue, Tokelau, and Fiji. The diversity and richness of Pacific languages and culture is unique to New Zealand. Supporting and highlighting the language and culture of Pacific peoples is a priority for the Ministry.

Since 2010, the Ministry has supported the promotion of seven Pacific languages and cultures in an effort to improve language retention and to celebrate what is uniquely Pacific peoples' culture.

The Sāmoan ethnic group is the largest of our Pacific populations in NZ with

48.7%

(or 144,138) people are of Sāmoan heritage



As of 2013 there were

86,403

Sāmoan speakers¹

73.3%

of the Sāmoan population living in New Zealand left school with a formal qualification (level 1-4 certificate or higher) compared to 79.1% of NZ population, with 8% of the Sāmoan population having completed a bachelor degree or higher, compared to 20% of the NZ population.



Fa'asinomaga – Identity

A firm sense of identity is integral to ensuring successful Sāmoan peoples. Some important aspects on what it is to be Sāmoan include, but are not limited to Gagana Sāmoa (Sāmoan language), Fa'a Sāmoa (Sāmoan cultural customs, values and framework), names, Matai titles, family, villages and districts, and Christian religion.

Fa'a Sāmoa – The Sāmoan Way

Fa'a Sāmoa translates into 'The Sāmoan Way', like Tikanga is to Māori, speaks to Sāmoan cultural customs, values, traditions, frameworks and ways of thinking that is woven through Sāmoan culture and identity. So much of what it is to be Sāmoan depends on relationships and is rooted in an individual's place in relation to others. This includes a conceptual framework in decision making, collective consideration, shared leadership, and inclusivity.

1. Source: *Contemporary Pacific Status Report* (2016) Ministry for Pacific Peoples, New Zealand. ISSN 2537—6878 (Online).

Gagana Sāmoa – Sāmoan Language

- Gagana – pronounced ‘nga nga na’ is the Sāmoan word for language²
- Gagana Sāmoa is one of five Polynesian languages (along with Tuvaluan, Tokelauan, Pukapukan and Niuafo’ou) which make up the group of Samoic languages. It is also similar to other Polynesian languages such as Te reo Māori, lea faka-Tonga, vagahau Niue, ‘ōlelo Hawai’i and Te reo Kuki Airani (Cook Islands Māori)³



- The Sāmoan language is the **third most commonly spoken language in New Zealand**, immediately following English and Te reo Māori

- Formal, informal or ceremonial oratory context affects the phonetic pronunciation of the language.

Fa’atuatua (Faith) – Religion

83.4%

of Sāmoans identified themselves as having at least one religion in the 2013 census⁴



- Of these, the most common Christian religions are broken down as follows⁵
 - **Catholic** (22.8 percent or 31,164 people)
 - **Presbyterian, Congregational and Reformed** (17.1 percent or 23,400 people)
 - **Christian not further defined** (11.4 percent or 15,510 people).

Igoa (or Suafa for Matai) – Names

- Names are associated with Sāmoan families, villages and districts and are often passed down from generation to generation through word of mouth, folklore, song lyrics and poetry
- Some families have surnames that are their family titles
- There is often a practice of naming children after landmarks, the family’s traditional house or compound, the female or male honorific associated with their family or important event.

Matai (Chiefly) Titles

- Individual Sāmoans have a connection to at least four ‘matai’ titles and as many as one wishes to commit to. It is important in Sāmoan culture to understand the matai titles of their extended family
- Knowing the matai title is integral to tracing back roots to villages, places of origin, villages and other names associated with families
- An individual matai title signifies the hierarchal status, roles and responsibilities of that title within the village, district, country and extended families.



Aiga – Family

- The family unit is hugely important in defining Sāmoan identity
- Often individuals will involve family members in decision making
- Collective decision making is common practise in Sāmoan culture.

2. Source: Teuila Consultancy: *Mua Ō! An introduction to Gagana Sāmoa* (2009) Ministry of Education, Auckland, New Zealand ISBN 978-0-478-34186-7 item number 119346

3. Source: Teuila Consultancy: *Mua Ō! An introduction to Gagana Sāmoa* (2009) Ministry of Education, Auckland, New Zealand ISBN 978-0-478-34186-7 item number 119346

4. Source: *Contemporary Pacific Status Report* (2016) Ministry for Pacific Peoples, New Zealand. ISSN 2537—6878 (Online).

5. Source: Website: http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request_value=24708&tabname=Religion – accessed 5 May, 2017

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