

SAMOA, APIA

TUPUA TAMASESE MEAOLE HOSPITAL

Talofa (hey)!

It is difficult to summarise, but if you asked me to in one word then I would say beautiful. Samoa was beautiful. Green was everywhere, in every direction, at every turn... and the flowers?! I made it my mission to find as many different flowers as I could during the month that we had there, and I am happy to say that I might have to return to complete my mission. The islands were just breathtaking, with the hiking trails, the beaches, lookouts, blowholes, lava fields and – my personal favourite – the cave pool. The wildlife too... I hope I never forget swimming with the sea turtles and with all the rainbow fish. The nature alone is sufficient to make the trip worth it a hundred times over.



Piula Cave pool, Apia,
Samoa



One of my favourite
flowers from our
adventures around
Apia

As beautiful as Samoa itself was, though, it paled in comparison to the people who called it home; the people that gave the islands life, and that jumped to share this life with us, for nothing else but the love and generosity they carry with them wherever they go. With every encounter, it became so clear that family, friends, community – these were the things that the people of Samoa treasured. They really belonged to each other, in every sense of the phrase... and not theoretically... because after all, what good was the extra food while a brother was hungry? What good were the extra clothes when a sister was cold? What good were skills and talents if not for making each other smile, be better and shine as a collective? What good is our language except for encouraging and blessing a soul who is lacking courage or confidence?

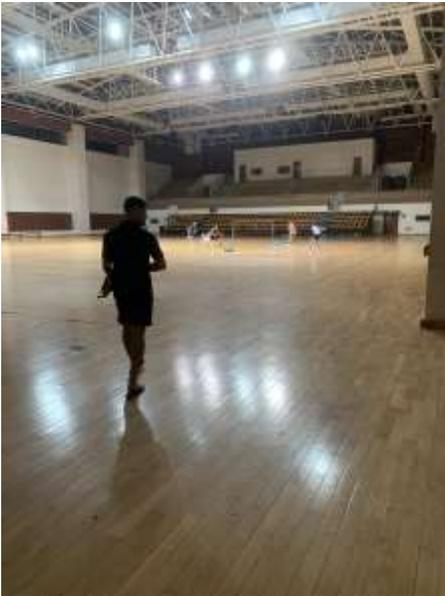
Jesus asks, “for what profit is it to a man if gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” Samoa was so clearly the opposite of this verse. It was the stark contrast, the reality of what it means to work hard so that you can provide for those around you, and moreover the joy of doing so... it was the reality of working hard to gain a quality education or skills, and to share them with those around you, so that the collective standard increases... it was the reality of food being shared without discussion, as something naturally presumed... They showed us what it means to share everything they possessed... and the fruit? Joy, genuinely just joy... because people – with their smiles, hopes, dreams, aspirations and all of their lives – are the treasure that can never be bought with anything except love.

I think this is all the more reason why attending liturgy in Samoa was an especially extraordinary experience for me. Yes, it is a predominantly Christian country. Yes, there are churches on almost every street... But, I saw churches first and foremost on the streets, in the people, and then liturgy became a continuation of that encounter.



Attending liturgy with Isobel (left) and Esther (right), who became like a sister to us.

So thank-you, Samoa, for giving me another glimpse of what He meant by love being perfect in laying down your life for those around you. Thank-you to Dr. Papa and his family in particular who hosted us from the moment they met us. Thank-you for the gentleness, the patient teaching, the generosity... thank-you for opening your hearts, and your home. People are the treasure in Samoa, but food might be a close second, so thank-you for filling our bellies as much as you did as well. The umu, the taro, the fish, the coconut dessert; everything. Thank-you for making us feel very much like family, through action and word, and going above and beyond day in and day out even though we were strangers.



Following around Dr. Papa wherever he went (even after hours) like the adopted brother he never asked for (but hopefully wanted).

As for the placement itself, the disease burden was like that in the most under-privileged parts of Australia. The difference, however, was far less funding, fewer medical practitioners, and sparse referral options for complex cases. This was precisely the reason we signed up to undertake placement in Samoa, however, to see what the practitioners who remained operated in spite of these limitations and boy was I amazed. This is why I must say thank-you to the students who were on paediatrics with me at the time. I have never met such hard working, dedicated and yet kind and forgiving students in my life. You guys genuinely humbled me in the best way possible, and I hope to have even half of the tenacity, creativity, patience, compassion, and faith as you all do. It would be my privilege to work with you again. Thank-you also to Dr. Sila, to Dr. Ben and to my supervisor Dr. Tito for the breadth of teaching, the hospitality, and for the support. I hope I never forget Dr. Tito's laugh in particular; it really moved mountains during dire days. I know you are exposed to so much, and from day one, but you are all phenomenal and your ability to keep going with the grace that you do and uplift everybody despite all of the limitations you have imposed on you is a testament to your beautiful characters.



Back (Left to right): tilo-mai, Teri, Tiare.

Bottom (left to right): Alicia, Trina, Angelo (me).



Back (Left to right): Ben, Papa, Teri, Angelo, Alicia, Trina.

Bottom (left to right): Sila, Tilo-mai, Tiare.

So, I guess in summary, all I have to say is thank-you Samoa. I hope I see you again, and it has been my honour to have experienced all of the beauty you have to offer. I wish I could show all of the group photos, and the aunties, and the dinners, and the youth, and the communities.

faafetai lava Samoa, faafetai lava Uso Papa. faafetai lava team.