



EXCHANGE MAGAZINE

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WORLD HERITAGE IN VANUATU

MOVING THE MUSEUM OF SAMOA



For AYAD Holly Pepper her assignment with the Museum of Samoa brought challenges and successes and filled every minute of her time as an AYAD. Discover the great work she achieved with her counterparts, preserving the cultural treasures of Samoa:

Before I left for my AYAD assignment in Samoa I had the task of packing and moving all of my gear in preparation for my year away from Australia. On my last trip, with a trailer loaded up with precious items, I managed to run my Great-grandmother's low boy into a low hanging tree, busting an irreparable hole in its side. For most AYADs this memory would have lost all significance after eight months working on their assignments, but the memory of that moment was firmly in my mind as I worked with the Museum of Samoa to move their entire collection of cultural treasures to new premises. Let's just say I wasn't feeling particularly confident about assisting with the move!

The Museum of Samoa has been housed in the Court House for the past 10 years, a significant building with a strong history. The building was built in 1906 during Samoa's German occupation and when the British/ NZ occupation force took over Samoa from Germany in 1914, the Union Jack flag was raised at the site. In 1929 the Court House was also the site where the leader of the Mau movement, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III, was shot. As such, the Court House is a great historical

landmark and a logical choice to house the museum. Unfortunately, the Court House is located right on Apia Harbor and the building is constructed entirely from wood. Historical significance aside, this means that the museum's displays and archives are currently under threat from environmental factors and makes the Court House an unsafe place to store Samoa's cultural treasures.

So the decision was made to relocate the museum to safer grounds, a block up the hill. My AYAD museum exhibition role began with me developing architectural plans of the old German school building in Malifa which the museum would renovate and relocate to. Walking around the building, measuring tape in hand, I could not conceive the transformation this decrepit building would have in four months. The building was a dusty storage room for all the government school supplies. But after four months of hard work from the government's maintenance men, the building was transformed into a character filled and impressive new museum facility.

During this construction stage I got to work on redesigning a number of graphic panels in the museum, to fill the new museum space, which would triple in size from the old location. The museum had previously had the same displays for nine years, so it was time to update the information and bring an artistic eye to the displays.



I spent four months immersing myself in history books and discovering the rich culture of Samoa. I felt like the true historian rifling through the government's newspapers photo collection from the 1970's, attempting to collect historical images to support the displays.

Along with working to develop a new permanent exhibition display, I began to negotiate with local Non Government Organisations and Government Ministries to develop some temporary exhibits relevant to the Samoan people.

Ready for the launch of the newly relocated and renovated Museum of Samoa

After four months of waiting for the renovations to be complete the museum was ready to move into. It was a massive undertaking for the skeleton group of museum staff to undertake. However, in the true Samoan way, the museum staff gathered all their family members together to pack the cultural treasures of Samoa on to the back of the family utes and relocate to Malifa. Twelve trips later and the bulk of the artifacts were moved. There were many points in the moving process that I thought I should be wearing white gloves and using a brush to dust off the old Samoan treasures. However, it wasn't until two weeks after moving into the building that the box of white gloves arrived.

The transformation of the Museum of Samoa took me up until the very last minute of my assignment in Samoa. On my last day in Samoa, I was up a ladder putting up displays and finalising small handy tasks around the building. And my last night in Samoa? My last night in Samoa was spent at the launch of the new museum.

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