

Slow hospitality: Family perspectives of holiday experiences at beach fale in Samoa

Abstract

In Samoa, customarily most tourism accommodation is locally owned and operated. Against a backdrop of increasingly foreign-owned large hotels and resorts, local families have built low-cost beach *fale* accommodation (consisting of thatched beach huts) in coastal locations. These beach fale, traditionally frequented by the backpacker market, are proving increasingly popular with visiting families from overseas. A major attraction at these beach fale is the local food experience. Yet only a superficial understanding exists of the tourists' perspective on food preferences and beach fale experiences, especially for families and their children. There have been several development research studies on fale operations but none on the growing international family tourism market. This paper provides insights into the neglected family perspectives of social hospitality experiences at Samoan beach fale accommodation and to elicit the key elements of the emerging slow hospitality concept. This exploratory study is based on 10 semi-structured whole-family group interviews conducted with New Zealand and Australian families (30 parents, grandparents, and children (aged 7-17)). The findings support a trend towards families seeking more authentic, immersive, and socially interactive experiences on holiday that are more akin to the local way of life or *Fa'asamoa*. It emerged that beach fale tourism provides culturally, culinary, socially, and sensually richer experiences as part of slow hospitality offerings for families. This study contributes to broader academic debates about whole-family perspectives on holiday, slow hospitality, beach fale accommodation, seaside or thalasso tourism, and understandings of family wellbeing.

Key words: family tourism, cultural immersion, food preferences, slow hospitality, beach fale accommodation, Samoa, family wellbeing

Introduction

This paper explores family perspectives of slow hospitality experiences in coastal settings addressing a lack of links between family tourism and hospitality dimensions. Increasingly, families seek more novel or adventurous experiences on international holidays (Pomfret, 2019, 2021). As part of that, cuisine and food traditions are major motivations for visitors to travel to a certain destination (Hall & Sharples, 2008). Additionally, many families are no longer satisfied with traditional sun and sea resort holidays but want to expose their children to more holistic living with a slower pace and deeper connection to place and people, or what has become known as slow tourism (Fullagar, Markwell, & Wilson, 2012; Oh, Assaf, & Baloglu, 2016). Holidaying at the seaside has a long tradition for families and is associated with wellness benefits (Kelly, 2020) or thalasso tourism (Smith & Puczkó, 2009). A better understanding is then needed about what is perceived as novel and beneficial, in this case in Samoa, about Pacific Island hospitality for families and why families seek to immerse their children in the local culture, food, and place.

To examine hospitality experiences by the holidaying families, the focus of this study lies on more budget and family-owned beach fale accommodation for which Samoa is renowned (Haughey, 2007; Scheyvens, 2006). These traditional fale range from basic, open-sided huts with thatched roofs and woven blinds in the place of walls, to walled bungalows with small verandas. Bathroom and dining facilities are located externally to the fale accommodation and are shared with other guests. The relations between guests and those catering to their needs are more friendly than servile providing tourists with ‘genuine Samoan hospitality’ (Scheyvens, 2005b: 197) and a ‘unique experience’ (Twining-Ward & Twining-Ward, 1998: 264). Beach fale tourism is traditionally associated with backpackers rather than high-spending tourists but can contribute greatly to sustainable development because most economic benefits are retained locally and it involves cultural education of guests (Haughey, 2007; Scheyvens, 2006). These beach fale are proving popular with visiting families from overseas as offering cultural immersion into the traditional Samoan way of life or *Fa’asamoa* (Parsons et al., 2018), and as an alternative to larger commercial coastal resorts.

There have been several studies on beach fale operations from a local tourism development angle (e.g., Haughey, 2007; Park, 2003; Scheyvens, 2005a) but not from the perspective of personal meaning and engagement of visiting families. Equally, there is only a superficial understanding of the tourists’ perspectives on their food preferences - in particular, family and children’s voices are missing (Hay, 2018) - as most research is based on the development of the supply-side (Getz et al., 2014; Chang, Kivela & Mak, 2010). This study allows for insights into the neglected hospitality (including culinary) experiences of families and their children offered by beach fale in contrast to larger commercial resorts. Little is known about the hospitality experiences between guests and their social interactions (Lashley, Lynch, & Morrison, 2007) which are paramount to the memorable experiences sought on family holidays (Schänzel & Lynch, 2016). The aim of this study then is to provide insights into the family perspectives of social hospitality experiences at Samoan beach fale and to elicit the key elements of the emerging slow hospitality concept. The meaning of social hospitality here is the provision of food and/or accommodation away from home within the broader social experiences (i.e., within families), forms of sociality and sociability that can be enacted in private or commercial spaces (Lashley et al., 2007). This study contributes to broader academic debates about whole-family perspectives on holidays, slow hospitality, beach

fare accommodation, seaside or thalasso tourism, and understandings of family wellbeing. These are themes which are reviewed in the next section.

Literature review

Family perspectives of holiday and hospitality experiences

Families travelling with children form the consumer base of most tourism operators and are estimated to account for about 30% of leisure travellers (Morrison et al., 2018). Family travel (defined as that undertaken by at least one adult and one child, including grandparents) is predicted to grow at a faster rate than all other forms of leisure travel, mainly because it represents a way to reunite the family and for family members to spend meaningful time with each other (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2014). For families, the holiday experiences centre on spending quality time 'with' the family (including extended family), doing fun activities that are different to normal and which create positive memories (Schänzel & Smith, 2014; Shaw et al., 2008). These trips can strengthen the sense of belonging and well-being amongst the family members because they include escape from everyday lives and a nurturing of familial relationships (Durko & Petrick, 2013). This is reflected in the increasing number of studies exploring the holiday experiences of families (e.g., Carr 2011; Cheong & Sin, 2019; Gram et al., 2019; Schänzel & Smith 2014), including limited research into coastal settings (Kelly, 2020). The direct experiences of children, however, are often missing from such studies (Hay, 2017; Pomfret, 2021; Rhoden et al., 2016), especially when it comes to accommodation and food experiences on family holidays (Hay, 2018; Schänzel & Lynch, 2016). Better understandings of hospitality experiences by children and families on coastal holidays are particularly important for the Pacific Islands, with Samoa specifically marketing towards families (see www.samoa.travel/experience/families/) but with a dearth of research to support this.

Family holidays are about ensuring quality time and generativity (passing of skills and guiding the next generation) (Gram et al., 2019; Schänzel & Smith, 2014; Shaw et al., 2008), and increasingly parents seek out tourism and hospitality experiences to instil values about deeper connections to place and people in their children. There is scant attention to the hospitality experiences of families on holiday albeit evidence that mealtimes can signify important moments of togetherness (Schänzel & Lynch, 2016). A rare study of most memorable meal experiences (Lashley et al., 2003) relates how family holiday meal experiences are subordinated to other dimensions, for example, a scenic location. Another important theme associated with shared meals is commensality, i.e., the practice of eating together (Sobal & Nelson, 2003) and promoting communal solidarity, sociability and socialization that reflect the social organization of societies (Danesi, 2012). Additionally, contemporary debates about hospitality provision focus on host-guest transactions while, in the context of family holidays with rare exceptions (e.g., Hay, 2017; 2018), neglect guest-guest relations and social interactions (Chen et al., 2020). The host-guest relationship is a social phenomenon, not just a commercial transaction, which is located at the core of hospitality (Causevic & Lynch, 2009). A better understanding is then needed of hospitable experiences within consumer encounters in commercial hospitality spaces (Lugosi, 2008) to provide guests with hospitality experiences that are personal, memorable and add value to their lives (Hemmington, 2007), as sought by the parents on family holidays.

Slow tourism and hospitality

There is increasing demand for international family holidays which promise more unique and adventurous experiences than those at home (Pomfret, 2019), and family wellbeing (Miyakawa & Oguchi, 2022; Pomfret, 2021). Part of this trend is parents seeking to expose their children to different cultures, foods, and ways of living. This exposure includes staying at more basic beach fale and immersing the family in the social, and arguably slow, hospitality offered by the host Samoan families. The implicit purpose here is to engage in slower consumption with the premise that slow ways of doing things bring more meaning, understanding or pleasure to any form of experience (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010), whether it be food or accommodation. People's increasing desire to slow down may be a consequence of their resistance to the ever-accelerating pattern of lifestyle and search for opportunities to release stress, decelerate their pace, and ultimately restore and enrich the self (Oh, Assaf, & Baloglu, 2016). This behavioural pattern is part of a countercultural wave against the plethora of products and services that emphasize speed, standardization, and convenience, such as are found at resorts, over quality of experiences (Honoré, 2004). The analysis of the fast-food concept by Ritzer (1993) explains why the quest for rationality, efficiency, control, and predictability in the hospitality sector may not be desirable or beneficial for society. The guiding philosophy of slow is partly an antithesis to fast, but there is also a connectedness to ecology and sustainable development which comes from an interest in locality and place and can be summarized in the following values: slow equates to quality time; it is about physically slowing down to enjoy what is on offer; a quality experience; meaning and engagement; in tune with ecology and diversity (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010).

The concept of slow tourism, however, is relatively new and has defied an exact definition (Oh et al., 2016). Slow tourism and its underlying experiential dimensions from the perspective of personal meaning and engagement has received little empirical research (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). According to Conway and Timms (2010) the slow tourism movement should be focused on countering the loss of distinctiveness as it relates to leisure, conviviality, sense of place and hospitality. This can be related to remoter coastal zones that have retained much of their authenticity, communal strengths, and slower-paced ambience. Like slow tourism, slow hospitality is an ill-defined yet appealing easy-to-grasp concept from a developed economy perspective. Slow hospitality is a largely unexplored concept and emerges from this study through the examination of the family perspectives describing their experiences of beach fale tourism. The concept of slow hospitality stems from the broader understanding of slow tourism and slow food. Slow food was one of the first instances of using 'slow' as a distinguishing feature of a business product. Carlo Petrini first initiated the idea of Slow Food in 1986 after being frustrated by the installation of a McDonald's at the Spanish Steps in Rome. Petrini's frustration was due to the promotion of a fast, standardised, global machine such as McDonalds, rather than that of local food production and delicacies (Leitch, 2003). Petrini's views were dedicated to the "pleasures of 'slowness' and its opposition to 'fast life'" (Leitch, 2003: 439). Today, The Slow Food Movement has grown into a global amorphous network promoting the pleasure of food with a strong commitment to community and the environment (www.slowfood.com). Slow Food is therefore placed as the antithesis of mass-produced, homogenised fast food (Ritzer, 1996) and is seen to emphasise a pleasure for localised, convivial interactions with food and its production (van Bommel & Spicer, 2011).

The term 'slow', from a philosophical perspective, is associated with taking time, and thinking through our actions. Sen (2000) uses terms such as consideration, reflection, rumination and ponder to expand on the understanding of 'slow' actions. While Slow Tourism, like Slow Food, began to gather momentum in the early twenty-first century, the prefix 'slow' has, in fact, been visible in a range of other sectors (slow cities, slow money, slow media, slow parenting, etc.). Today 'slow' is viewed as "a credible metaphor for stepping off the treadmill, seeking work-life balance or refusing the dominant logic of speed" (Fullagar, Wilson & Maxwell, 2012: 1). Adopting a consumption perspective of Slow Tourism, an understanding is needed not just of a broad tourism definition, but of all its component parts (e.g., accommodation, food, culture, community), the overarching aspect of sustainability, and moving away from individualistic perspectives. Slow Tourism, therefore, becomes an unmanageable entity. As emerged in this study, the term slow hospitality is used, as it is more closely associated with the holiday experiences found in the Samoan beach fale accommodation.

We argue that the premise of slow hospitality is strongly linked to the guest-host and guest-guest relationships amongst family members and their experiences are associated with local life, traditions, and characteristics. Slow hospitality can refer to what Lash (1999) refers to as the 'forgotten ground' which is a reconnection with the physical ground or space where the encounters of hospitality are taking place, but also by investing time, feeling the sense of temporal belonging in the community and the traditions which they possess (Varley & Semple, 2015). The works of Varley and Semple (2015), and Varley, Farkic, and Carnicelli (2018), display the issues of slow hospitality in outdoor spaces, adventure, comfort, and community which further demonstrate that slow hospitality is continuing to develop and becoming an attraction for a growing and varied demographic. However, the experience of slow hospitality from a family perspective and in coastal settings is absent from the literature.

Development of beach fale accommodation in Samoa and Samoan hospitality

Over the last two decades, tourism has become the major driver of economic growth in many Pacific Island countries, most notably Fiji, Cook Islands, Vanuatu, and Samoa. However, the structure of the hotel and guest house sector can be quite different across Pacific Island states. Whereas new institutional players, in the form of transnational hotels and resorts, have an important role in tourism development in Fiji, they are much less apparent in Tonga and Samoa (Harrison & Prasad, 2013). Samoa is chosen for this study because its tourism industry is characterised by small- and medium-sized enterprises, which are owned mostly by Samoan families, made up of coastal resorts and by low-cost beach fale (Harrison & Prasad, 2013; Parsons et al., 2018; Scheyvens, 2005a). Samoan beach fale are a unique niche product that differs from 'sun-sand-sea' resort style beach tourism elsewhere in the Pacific (Haughey, 2007). Samoa received many plaudits when it adopted a series of sustainable tourism indicators (Twining-Ward & Butler, 2002). However, these indicators then proved too complex to implement and Samoa with the arrival of Sheraton as the first internationally branded resort in 2015 (Wilkinson, 2015) is now at a crossroads in terms of large-scale tourism development.

Samoa actively promotes beach fale accommodation run by family members and there are 19 listed on the Samoa Tourism Authority site (www.samoa.travel/dirpreview/beach-fale-accommodation-in-samoa). Beach fale are an indigenous, home-grown initiative. The first beach fale were built in response to the leisure needs of local people in Samoa, and the concept has since been adapted and expanded to meet the needs of domestic and foreign tourists. Beach fale

first became an important feature on the tourism landscape in Samoa in the early to mid-1990s when there was a serious move to diversify livelihood options after the devastation caused by two cyclones and taro leaf blight (a highly infectious plant disease) (Scheyvens, 2005a). The beach fale usually offer half board, shared breakfast, and dinner, for a price of about NZ\$ 30-50 (about UK£ 15-25) per person and have no wifi connection. Beach fale are a distinctly Samoan way of accommodating tourists in that they incorporate traditional hospitality, local control, and ownership with tourism (Park, 2003).

Early studies characterised Polynesian hospitality as particularly sympathetic and of generous character (Burgess, 1982), making Polynesians famous for their hospitality (Campbell, 1981). Later authors drew attention to the importance of welcoming a guest as an essential part of being a host in Polynesian society where traditional social interactions are based on concepts of social obligation, generosity, reciprocity and *arua* (meaning love or kindness) (Berno, 1999). The historical legacy of Polynesian hospitality continues today. However, the extent to which it is congruent with the tradition as opposed to a commercial appropriation in the face of increasing visitor numbers may be questioned. There have been concerns raised about differing expectations between the cultural context of *Fa'asamoa* the fale operate in and the tourists staying there (Haughey, 2007) and the international tourist gaze that is widely tied to notions of paradise and friendly 'natives' (Cheer et al., 2018). What cannot be denied is that notions of *Fa'asamoa* are inseparable from the hospitality offered at beach fale and can be considered part of the commercial home experience (Lynch et al., 2009) offered as an alternative to larger commercial resorts in Samoa.

There is little academic literature on tourism in Samoa compared with the larger Pacific Island destinations of Fiji and Hawaii (Parsons et al., 2018; Pratt & Harrison, 2015; Twining-Ward & Butler, 2002). Yet Samoa is within easy reach from New Zealand, with New Zealand making up the largest visitor market (46%) followed by Australia (20%), with a total of 181,000 tourists arriving in 2019 (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/>). Tourism now contributes more than 20% of Samoa's GDP and employs approximately 10% of the population (Parsons et al., 2018). Samoans who return to visit friends and relatives (VFRs), or diaspora tourism, make up 44% of international tourism arrivals in 2018, mainly from New Zealand (53%) and Australia (24%) (Gibson et al., 2020), illustrating the strong linkages between these countries. Whilst several studies exist on the development of beach fale operations (e.g., Haughey, 2007; Park, 2003; Scheyvens, 2005a), a better understanding is needed on the demand side, especially the increasing family market. It has been suggested that a more market-oriented approach to tourism development in Samoa is required (Haughey, 2007). Additionally, beach fale accommodations are less expensive compared to a large-scale hotel making it more affordable for New Zealand and Australian families looking for unique lodging and food experiences in the Pacific. There are other examples around the world of family-owned small-scale forms of hospitality that promote interaction with the local population (e.g., Caribbean (Conway & Timms, 2010)) and share similarities with the Samoan fale accommodation. However, this is the first study to provide whole-family perspectives into slow hospitality, especially in a coastal setting.

Methods

The study adopted a whole-family qualitative approach to capture family dynamics and fully probe the viewpoints of parents and their children and was conducted with holidaying families (Pomfret, 2021; Schänzel, 2010) in Samoa in April/May and July 2015 (Easter and winter school holidays in

New Zealand). Permission for fieldwork was granted by the Ministry of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in Samoa, and ethical approval was gained from the University Human Ethics Committee at AUT in New Zealand.

The focus of this study is on the 10 semi-structured family group interviews conducted with a range of Australian (one family) and New Zealand families (nine families) at various beach fale sites: six couples; two single mothers; one blended family; one multigenerational family, reflecting a diversity of families. All families were travelling with between 1-4 children. As children are ‘rarely treated as active agents’ in family tourism research (Li et al., 2020: 14), it was important to include them as participants in this study. Consent was sought from the parents and the children, and all children over six years were invited to take part in the family interviews. Children had the option of not participating but all opted to contribute in some way with several being vocal in expressing their opinions. In total there were 30 participants: 18 adults (11 women and 7 men) and 12 children (aged 7-18) (See Table 1). The participating families were recruited at the accommodation sites using convenience sampling and then interviewed as a family group around the communal table outside of mealtimes. The interviews took on average an hour and were all digitally recorded and later transcribed. On site interviewing of families at hotel sites had been previously conducted by Hay (2018) with children. The nature of family interviews including the voices of children is reflected in the quotes.

A qualitative methodology is better suited to reveal the social meanings present in the experiences of family groups (Schänzel & Smith, 2014). The choice of methodology is underpinned by the philosophical perspective of interpretivism with the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Compared with previous development studies which interviewed some backpackers as part of their focus on beach fale operations (e.g., Haughey, 2007; Park, 2003; Scheyvens, 2005a), this study focused on visiting families only. Since those studies in the mid-2000s the number of families staying at beach fale has increased significantly. As displayed in Table 1, half the families also stayed at more up-market hotels/resorts and for most children this was their first time to Samoa, although some (grand)parents had travelled to Samoa before. This indicates that the stay at beach fale was used as a unique cultural experience for the children rather than just a budget option.

Table 1: Characteristics of participating families interviewed in Samoa

Country of residence (participant #)	Number of (grand)parents	Age of children	Stay at beach fale only	Length of stay at fale	First time to Samoa for the children	Total participants
NZ1	1 mother 2 grandparents	Boy (9) Girls (7)	No	4 days	Yes	5
NZ2	1 mother	Girls (11 & 17)	No	1 week	Yes	3
NZ3	1 mother	Girl (7) Boy (12)	Yes	1 week	Yes	3
NZ4	1 mother 1 father	Girl (3) not participating	No	8 days	Yes	2

AUS1	1 mother 1 father	Girls (3 & 5) not participating	No	4 days	Yes	2
NZ5	1 mother 1 father	Girls (12 & 13) Friends	No	1 week	Yes	4
NZ6	1 mother	Girl (17)	Yes	10 days	No	2
NZ7	1 mother 1 father	Girl and 2 boys (under 5) not participating	Yes	1 week	Yes	2
NZ8	1 mother 1 father	3 boys (11,13 & 16) 1 girl (toddler)	Yes	2 weeks	Yes	5
NZ9	1 mother 1 father	2 girls (4 & 6) not participating	Yes	4 days	Yes	2

Based on the literature, participant families were asked questions on: how Samoa was perceived in comparison to New Zealand/Australia and other Pacific Islands; how beach fale accommodation differs from staying at hotels/resorts; the positive and negative aspects of hospitality provision at hotels/resorts compared to beach fale; on the hospitality dimension of staying at beach fale (accommodation space and culinary experience); the (social) meal experience, and the overall cultural experience offered at the beach fale. The interviews were transcribed and subjected to the six steps of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Four major themes were identified culminating in the overall theme of slow hospitality: uniqueness of Samoa compared to other Pacific Islands; accommodation space experience akin to local living; uniqueness of the culinary and social meal experience as a Samoan family event; and beach fale social hospitality experience compared to that of hotels/resorts, as discussed below.

Findings

Uniqueness of Samoa compared to other Pacific Islands

Overall, the families commented on Samoa being very friendly, not as commercialized, relaxed, safe, clean, and preferable to other Pacific Islands (mainly Fiji and Cook Islands which are more developed tourism wise) for those reasons, whether or not they had actually visited those islands. The families chose visiting Samoa and staying at beach fale to expose their children to a different cultural experience which was perceived as unique and affordable. As one father mentioned: *Fiji is the most organized although food is generally pretty dull. Here is like a more laid-back version to Rarotonga [Cook Islands] to me. Much more laid back actually.* (NZ4)

Reasons for visiting Samoa included being a safe destination and close to New Zealand but still allowing for a unique cultural experience compared to similar flying distances to Australia or Fiji (which had a dengue fever outbreak in 2014), as related by a mother:

Somewhere where it is a different culture but where it is safe for the children. Somewhere where it does not cost too much money and we didn't want to fly too far. (NZ7)

Samoa as a destination was perceived as more accessible in terms of flight distances and culturally because the Samoan people are friendly and there is a more laid-back approach to life which is often referred to as 'island time' or a slower pace of life.

Accommodation space experience akin to local living

The main attraction of staying at beach fale was the ease and closeness to the beach and swimming in the sea compared to predominantly swimming in pools at resorts. This was related by a couple travelling with their 3- and 5-year-old daughters (AUS1):

Father: *We had a fale, but we didn't have private facilities, but it didn't really matter. We were right at the beach. We walked down the steps and it was really cool. We had a beach for ourselves. Not many people there and it was really easy for the kids because there was one double bed and three single beds in a fale, so we had plenty of room.*

A couple with two children (4 and 6 years old) commented on the simplicity of the fale which provided a unique experience for them (NZ9):

Father: *I wanted this because it is really basic. It's just nice to be in bed and hear the ocean and you can have the front open and the wind comes through and you are just on the beach front.*

Mother: *It's a bit like camping... "what do you mean our bathroom is not in our room?" that kind of thing.*

Father: *And the showers are cold!*

Mother: *It's just those kinds of things and sleeping under a mosquito net...*

Father: *I think it's part of the appeal that it's that basic. I actually really like that. I mean you kind of get woken up when it's a big downpour, but you go back to sleep. It's the simplicity of it which is appealing.*

Mother: *It's an experience.*

A 12-year-old girl related how she preferred the closeness to the sea:

It's cool because you get a nice breeze going through with the insect guards and no insects inside. And here you are right there next to the sea. Our resorts were usually quite far away, you have to do a walk before you can actually get to the sea. (NZ5)

This statement contrasts with some comments made by adults on the simplicity and lack of comfort offered at the beach fale, especially bedding and shower facilities were mentioned as the main reasons why some families chose not to stay there for the whole holiday as commented by a mother:

They only had their mattresses on the floor...I mean probably because of the circumstances we really liked it, but I probably wouldn't go there for two weeks. (NZ1)

And a father:

What I would like ideally is kind of a fale but with insect screens, doesn't need anything else. And ideally a shower would be nice. These ones without a shower, communal shower is kind of too close to camping for us. And I think a lot of people want more comfort. (NZ4)

Lack of Western bathroom facilities and basic accommodation layout were generally accepted because the location close to the beach and exposed to weather events provided a simpler but more authentic engagement with nature. The showers offered are what the locals are used to and beach fale represent traditional ways of sleeping. This then provides an experience more akin to traditional living in Samoa. However, it was also acknowledged that the basic facilities provided might be the reason why beach fale are considered a more short-term holiday option.

Unique culinary experience and social meal experience as a Samoan family event

The visiting families mentioned the sociality, generosity and local dishes provided by the hosts that resembled more a traditional Samoan family meal, especially on Sundays when a big lunch is usually served. A single mother travelling with her two children (7 and 12 years old) commented on the shared meal experience (NZ3):

If you stay in a fale you have to eat together because they only do one setting. You can't just turn up when you want...Most of the fale we stayed the food was awesome. And the food at the fale, let me say, it's much better than the food at the hotel and we don't pay nearly half as much.

A 13-year-old girl commented on how she prefers home cooked Samoan meals at the fale:
I like the food because it is cooked fresh cause some restaurants and places just get something frozen and already cooked and they just heat it up. And I don't know, it just doesn't taste as nice as stuff that's cooked fresh. (NZ5)

A 17-year-old holidaying with her single mother commented on the practice of eating together that allowed for a social and informal experience:

I really like the idea that most of the fale have got the big long table. It just keeps you talking to people and meeting people from other places, speaking other languages. Whereas usually in resorts they have a formal restaurant with little tables. So, you just sit with people you are staying with, and you don't really interact so much with other tourists. (NZ6)

A blended family with their four children commented on the authenticity of the Samoan food such as taro, breadfruit, coconut, banana porridge, crayfish and Palusami (taro leaves with coconut inside) served at beach fale and their generous approach to hospitality (NZ8):

Father: *We have been introduced to a new food in most of the different places which has been fantastic...We have got to eat quite a lot of the real Samoan food.*

11-year-old son: *It's just really good, they make it really well. And it's new kind of food. It's different from New Zealand.*

Mother: *It is one of the reasons why the boys loved it because they had lots of meat.*

Father: *I think part of their hospitality is to feed people. To feed people and to feed them well. So, if you don't let them do that then I guess you are missing a whole heap and insulting them at the same time. It is important to let them do that and they feel like they need to do that.*

Staying at beach fale then allows families to get an insight into what Samoan hospitality looks like with food served in generous proportions, home cooked meals and different dishes based on the local cuisine. Several children commented on the different taste sensations that the local food provided, such as coconuts or bananas straight from the trees and freshly caught fish, reflecting their ability to have a choice in their food options. It also highlights the social act of eating together at one long table in one sitting that allowed for conversations with other guests and more informal food encounters that resembled a traditional Samoan family meal or feast.

Social hospitality experience: Uniqueness of beach fale compared to hotels/resorts

Overall, the families preferred staying at beach fale for the more traditional and social hospitality experience provided. A couple (with two daughters aged 3 and 5) compared their stay at beach

fale with staying at a resort preferring the beach fale for their social interaction with the staff (AUS1):

Mother: *In terms of what is more unique and more memorable definitely the stay at [name of beach fale]...*

Father: *It's more local...*

Mother: *...we had more interaction with the staff because you see them every day...and they tell you their stories.*

A couple with two children (4 and 6 years old) commented on the cultural experience that is perceived as different to resorts (NZ9):

Father: *I think for me if you are in a nice resort, it could be in Samoa or Fiji or anywhere in the world, it's pretty much the same. Whereas this is quite unique and for me it's probably the experience...you are closer to the people, more of a cultural kind of experience.*

A 13-year-old boy commented on why he preferred staying at beach fale encapsulating the way children express their holiday experiences and what matters to them, fun and social interactions: *They are cool because the beach fale cost less, they have the better people, nicer people, so they are really fun.* (NZ8).

A 17-year-old girl who had been coming to the same beach fale for eight years was commenting on why she prefers the informal and more intimate experience provided (NZ6):

I feel much more involved with the locals and the village life...I just like the idea more of being with the villagers as opposed to in a resort where you are enclosed a little bit and it's lots of tourists and you don't really feel like a part of village life...it's completely different. We didn't really interact with locals at all when we were in the resort. And the staff was very much professionally trained. I guess you felt like they were waiting on you whereas the staff here you feel more like you are friends with them you interact with them more. It doesn't feel that formal.

The families then perceived the social hospitality experience provided at beach fale as more local, informal, equal, and allowing for better social interaction with the hosts, themselves, and the other guests. As one father (NZ8) stated, it allowed “*to do something together as a family, do the whole bonding thing, but something that was gonna be an adventure*”. Some fale also offered a family show as part of their accommodation experience as commented on by a single mother (children 7 and 12 years old) interviewed at the end of their holiday (NZ3):

They are all family and cousins, you know, it's the whole family. And then after the show they put on the music and we all just danced, and it was really fun. They put on a good show, it was really amazing. Probably the highlight of the whole trip was staying in this place...because they get you involved, and everyone is family...you become a part.

The fale experience then was perceived as a highlight because it felt authentic, fun, socially inclusive and a family affair rather than something staged for the guests. The interviewed families felt that they became part of a community event organized by their hosts instilling a sense of belonging. The sociality and sociability created at the beach fale then represent the *Fa'asamoa* of sharing generosity and perceptions of becoming part of a Samoan family event with its emphasis on spontaneity, storytelling and sharing. Thus, the beach fale hospitality was

perceived by the families as a genuine Samoan cultural experience that is not available as a serendipitous event at an upmarket resort.

Discussion

Increasingly, families are looking for more unique experiences when on holiday as part of creating lasting family memories (Kelly, 2020; Shaw et al., 2008) through having family adventures (Pomfret, 2019, 2021) and exploring a new destination together. Staying at traditional beach fale accommodation and being immersed in the local hospitality was considered more conducive to memorable family experiences. The families in this study chose beach fale because they preferred the informality, simplicity, and perceived authenticity provided there. This choice could be interpreted as quests for authenticity by Western tourists who are in search for the ‘exotic’ (Gibson et al., 2020). However, we would argue it has more to do with yearning for a slower pace of life with no technological interferences, capturing nostalgia to family holidays of the past (Rugh, 2008), such as the Kiwi tradition of beach holidays (Barnett & Wolfe, 1993). Compared to the pampered luxury offered at resorts, beach fale embrace some discomfort and limitations – not so much as pleasures in and of themselves but as reminders that less is often more. This lack of comfort also put restrictions on the length of stay in that simplicity was accepted for some families only for a certain period of the holiday. Combining stays at resorts with beach fale supports the notion that both fast and slow tourism should be viewed as coexisting, complementary means to achieving travel goals (Oh et al., 2016), rather than exclusive of each other.

From an accommodation space perspective, the attraction of the fale was their simplicity located right at the waterfront and exposed to the elements offering a more sensual experience (the sound and feel of wind, rain, and the ocean). Staying close to the ocean invited the healing properties of the sea through exposure to sea air and immersion in warm sea water feeding a desire to ‘return to the sources’ (Charlier & Chaineux, 2009). These are liminal beach spaces of heightened sensibilities where the stress of normal working lives is suspended and cultures merge (Preston-Whyte, 2004). The accommodation space close to the sea then allowed a feeling of openness, including to the senses or embodied experiences, inducing a general sense of wellness as part of thalasso tourism. Wellbeing improvements (emotional, physical, and psycho-social) have previously been reported by Kelly (2020) on family beach holidays and are further strengthened at the beach fale accommodation through providing a perceived sense of affinity between culture and nature.

The commensality and sociability enacted through a more informal food encounter at the beach fale was more conducive to social interactions amongst guests or guest-guest relationships which have been neglected in the hospitality literature (Lashley et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2020) but highlighted as important for children on family holidays (Hay, 2017, 2018). Beach fale served home cooked meals for breakfast and dinner and provided an insight for the holidaying families into Samoan hospitality with their (legendary) generosity, use of local ingredients and based on more sustainable principles. Like other developing economies (Fathimath & Milne, 2011), resorts in Samoa usually serve up a version of “Westernised” international food with a lack of attention towards local cuisine. According to Berno (2015) up to 90% of food in some of the larger resorts in Samoa is imported neglecting changing food preferences for guests, particularly younger guests, who want to experience a destination’s food culture. Hotel food services largely

fail to meet the needs of children offering them little choice, not accounting for their increasingly sophisticated tastes (Hay, 2018). For many children a highlight at beach fale was that they got to sample dishes that they had never tried before, making for unique and memorable taste sensations rather than the standard fare at resorts (e.g., fish & chips). This supports how important it is for children to have novel food choices available to them (Hay, 2018).

Additionally, embodiment and sensory experiences are particularly relevant for children and are remembered long after the event (Schänzel & Lynch, 2016) which is why holiday food memories are so prevalent in children acting as signs of authenticity (e.g., coconut off the tree, banana porridge, fresh fish). As the Samoan prime minister Malielegaoi reflected: “Food is a gateway into all cultures. For Samoa, our food expresses our intimate relationships with the land, the sea, and our ancestors” (as quoted in Berno 2015: 340). Through these culinary and authentic social experiences as an expression of local culture, the families are getting more culturally immersed into the traditional way of hosting visitors compared to more formal service and Westernised food encounters at larger commercial resorts. The meals became a socially inclusive experience and were perceived as akin to a Samoan family ‘home hosting’ event which was cherished by the children and parents.

The social hospitality experience included the hosts and becoming part of their family, as a 17-year-old girl commented (NZ6): “*people are just so lovely, and they make you feel like home*”. A mother mentioned (NZ2): “*basically when they welcome you, they welcome you into the family*”. The experience of this kind of ‘mundane welcome’ along with gaining a sense of trust and security in our lives is particularly important for day-to-day hospitality practices (Lynch, 2017). The generosity and genuine love or kindness in Samoan hospitality (Berno, 1999) then provides a welcome to an emotional home for the guests. This is part of the *Fa’asamoa* value system (worldview or cosmology) as it is lived every day (Parsons et al., 2018) that is extended to the visiting families through inviting them into their homes and into their emotional hearts. The beach fale then succeeded in providing social with a significant private home dimension which was preferred as a unique experience by these families to larger commercial resorts.

Samoan hospitality extended to the guests at the beach fale contained elements of impromptu dancing and singing or serendipity rather than a cultural show staged just for the visitors. Grit (2010) argues that serendipitous experiences are highly valued by hospitality guests as being more enriching leading to a critique of existing notions of hospitality, with its creation of predictable, commonplace, and calculated settings. Through a Deleuzian analysis he points to the highly structured nature of many commodified hospitality experiences which adhere to a MacDonaldised management approach (Ritzer, 1996) and which thereby constrain the quality of the hospitality encounter. Instead, it is the perceived genuine welcome and joy provided at these beach fale that felt informal and authentic making it a culturally immersive, fun, and more memorable experience within the Samoan extended family. Having fun on holiday is particularly important to children (Shaw et al., 2008). As a single mother travelling with two children (aged 7 & 12) summed it up (NZ3):

It’s something worth doing with the kids. They will always remember it. It is something different. If you would ask them about Fiji [staying at a resort] they probably couldn’t tell you much but ask them about this trip they can tell you more. Even though they might have moaned and groaned a bit here and there but at the end I think they enjoyed this the most.

While the focus of the study was not on negative family dynamics and stress (see Backer & Schänzel, 2013), complaints from children did emerge but were subsumed as being part of a more memorable experience. Beach fale tourism then becomes about more personal and serendipitous experiences shared within the family which aid in the creation of memories so important for families (Kelly, 2020; Shaw et al., 2008) and collective wellbeing outcomes (Miyakawa & Oguchi, 2022).

The findings from the primary research indicate several aspects that place Samoan fale beach accommodation as a form of slow hospitality. The premise of fale accommodation is perceived as the antithesis of a fast-paced modernity as stated by Ritzer (1996). Fale are not focused on homogenisation, standardisation, or mass production, but are constructed (slowly) around tradition, social interaction, family, and togetherness which is valued for what it is, rather than something to be endured. The uniqueness of the Samoan hosts and their *Fa'asamoa*, laid back pace of life, commensality experienced at meal times, local dishes, and the overall social and often informal hospitality experienced are key indicators of a 'slower' hospitality. In the case of fale beach accommodation in Samoa, the slow hospitality experienced there valorises the heritage, space, and tradition of the destination, by presenting authentically perceived encounters of hospitality between local and visiting families. The various themes and elements of slow hospitality emerging from this study are captured in Table 2.

Slow Hospitality Theme	Slow Hospitality Elements
Engagement with nature	Beach location; slower pace of life; simplicity; sensual experience.
Basic accommodation facilities	Living in manner closer to traditional local way of living.
Food	Home cooked; local cuisine; sustainable ingredients; eating well; freshness; taste sensations; generous proportions; sociable; family meal; family seating; informal; one sitting.
Cultural experience	Involvement; inclusive; immersive; becoming part of a family/community event; part of village life; storytelling; traditional hospitality; fun; authentic; commensality; unique and memorable; alternative way of living.
Slow commercial hospitality	Cost and non-exploitation; local control and ownership; economic benefits retained locally; welcome to an emotional home; people more 'real'; less formal host-guest relations; power relations: more equal; social interaction with staff and guests; belonging; spontaneity; serendipitous; intimate experiences; social hospitality; wifi free.

Table 2. Slow Hospitality as evidenced through Samoan beach fale

It is evident therefore that the concept of slow hospitality is amorphous and an antithetical counterpoint to a similarly vague concept of fast hospitality perceived as normative within

developed economies. Both concepts are easier to define by association with certain characteristics and attributes. Accordingly, our definition of hospitality as emerged from this study is the following: Slow hospitality is a concern with being rather than simply doing, with immersion rather than transience, with sensuous pleasures as opposed to functional consumption, with serendipity rather than predictability, with people and relationships instead of service and performance, with craft and endeavour favoured over production and manufacture, and with community in lieu of individuality.

Conclusions

The understanding of slow hospitality is developing in popularity from a family, social and experiential perspective and has strong links to slow food (Leitch, 2003), slow tourism (Fullager et al, 2012), and the broader understanding of slow as a philosophical gaze (Sen, 2000). The Samoan hospitality offered at beach fale accommodations succeeded in providing a fun experience for the visiting families that was perceived as unique, culinary explorative, sensory stimulating, and sociable through the cultural immersion in *Fa'asamoa* or Samoan way of life. Beach fale tourism for families is then perceived as culturally educational and memorable for the children through providing commensality and embodiment. Disconnecting from technology and modern amenities allowed the families to feel more connected to themselves, others, and nature allowing for 'mindful authenticity' (Kelly, 2020) and family wellbeing (Pomfret, 2021). The unique experiences offered at beach fale are part of a trend towards families seeking more experiential and adventurous family holidays (see Pomfret, 2019), fitting in with the success of Airbnb's quirky/varied accommodation offerings (Dolnicar, 2017), that are more in tune with place and people. These experiences can be summed up and defined with the term slow hospitality, related to slow tourism (see Oh et al., 2016; Conway & Timms, 2010), but focused on the provision of accommodation and food experiences rather than being concerned with mobilities. The social or slow hospitality offered at beach fale transcends the host-guest dichotomy and invites serendipitous encounters (Grit, 2010) and embodied events. It allows for spaces of hospitality that serve as reminders of a simpler, home-like, and more connected life and as an alternative to the faster and more contrived hospitality at resorts. In this sense the slow hospitality created at beach fale signifies a disruption to the service culture and commercialization prevalent at coastal resorts. It offers an alternative theorization to hospitality that acknowledges the impossibility of rendering the genuine welcome into a packaged commodity.

The purposiveness of providing a deeper connection to Samoan place and people for their children is what increasingly leads these New Zealand/Australian families to stay at beach fale and aids in creating lasting family memories. This is part of the social identity and legacy formation that is taking place through parents, and grandparents, teaching their children family values and traditions on holiday (Gram et al., 2019; Schänzel & Smith, 2014) by "*keeping it real*", as one father related. The generativity or transfer of moral principles from one generation to the next contains elements of nostalgia in their recreation of simpler times and beach holidays of the past (Barnett & Wolfe, 1993). There are also benefits for the families through the local living and human-seascape interactions or thalasso tourism as part of the body-mind-spirit spectrum of health tourism (Smith & Puczko, 2009) as families felt particularly relaxed staying at coastal settings (Kelly, 2020). This encompasses Western imaginations of the beach that assume liminality associated with the temporary suspension of normal states (Preston-Whyte,

2004). Beach fale hospitality then allows a slowing down in nature settings that encourages more eudaimonic experiences acknowledging ecological and ethical principles and cultural diversity within more sustainable parameters.

Family holidays centre on social interactions and memorable experiences and this study sought to capture deeper insights and theorisations into issues of society, culture, social hospitality, slow living, wellness, and international seaside tourism. Beach fale accommodation as an indigenous initiative is part of a portfolio of hospitality experiences offered in Samoa for families, which can be mixed and matched with larger commercial hotels/resorts adding to the tourism product development in Samoa. This supports the notion that both faster and slower forms of tourism should be viewed as coexisting and complementary to each other (Oh et al., 2016). The value of slow hospitality experiences offered to overseas families at beach fale operations should not be underestimated, socially, culturally, and in terms of family wellness. All part of a trend towards families seeking more authentic and eudaimonic holidays offering not only more memorable and meaningful experiences (see Pomfret, 2021) but also supporting more sustainable alternatives to larger commercial resorts. However, staying at beach fale appeared to be more about the unique experience than ethical consumption choices or sustainability imperatives. What becomes obvious is that families increasingly seek more authentic hospitality experiences with the family market becoming not only more diversified but also more critical of standard offerings, especially local food cultures and options for children (see Hay, 2018). This study was based on New Zealand and Australian families which make up the predominant family market in Samoa. However, more research is needed on hospitality encounters on holiday of ethnically diverse families to better understand their preferences, including ethical behaviour, and inclusive of children's voices. In addition, further research is required into slow hospitality experiences at other settings to further refine and generalise the elements identified in this qualitative study here.

This study was conducted pre-COVID-19 and Samoa has been closed to tourists since the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020). Going forward, fale accommodation with their slow hospitality offering could well prove attractive for overseas families seeking closer to nature, localised cultural experiences, and for family wellbeing benefits.

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