National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa is located in the cradle of Polynesia’s oldest culture. It comprises six protected areas covering 13,581 square miles of nearshore coral reef and open ocean across the Samoan archipelago. The sanctuary protects extensive coral reefs, deep-water reefs, hydrothermal vent communities, and rare marine archaeological resources. NOAA co-manages the sanctuary with the American Samoa government and works closely with local communities, all within the context of Samoan cultural traditions and practices. “Ua o gatea! Le futa ma le umele!” (We must be of one mind in the undertaking).

Above
The Ava Ceremony is a unique part of Samoan culture led by matais (chiefs) consisting of traditional speeches and a ceremonial beverage distributed according to village hierarchy. The tanoa (bowl) usually belongs to the high talking chief or orator of the fale (house) who is hosting. The ceremony symbolizes respect, humility, and service. The cup that is shared at the gathering promotes unity and consensus for the good of the village and not the individual.

About the Artwork
Samoan culture, customs, and language underpin a traditional way of life and stewardship of marine resources. The poster features an ava bowl used for ceremonial practices, a Samoan fale (house) found in villages, and ava or long boat canoe. Underwater, tropical coral gardens teem with marine life, including iconic humphead wrasses, endangered hawksbill sea turtles, giant clams, massive Porites corals, and colorful parrotfish, while an oceanic whitetip shark and yellowfin tuna swim near the reef edge.

America's Underwater Treasures
NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 620,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. The network includes a system of 15 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments. For more information on the National Marine Sanctuary System, visit: sanctuaries.noaa.gov

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