

Vanuatu



Official name: The Republic of Vanuatu

Capital: Port Vila

Land: 12,190 sq. km

Population: 204,000 (2003)

Currency: Vatu

EEZ: 680,000 sq. km

Language: Bislama, English, French, local languages

Economy: Agriculture, fisheries and tourism

Religion: Christianity (Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Seventh-day Adventist)



(Source: www.lonelyplanet.com)

Brief history:

The first settlers are believed to have arrived approximately 3,500 years ago from New Guinea and the Solomon Islands by canoe. The islands were sighted by Pedro Fernandes de Queirois of Portugal in 1606 and were charted by the British navigator James Cook in 1774, who named the archipelago New Hebrides, after the northern Scottish islands. Competing British and French claims to the islands led to the formation of a condominium government, allowing for joint British-French rule in 1906. The islands' plantation economy, based on imported Vietnamese labour, was prosperous until the 1920s, when markets for its products declined. Diseases brought by missionaries, sandalwood traders, and others helped reduce the population from approximately 1 million in 1800 to 45,000 in 1935. The islands served as a major Allied base in World War II. After the war, the indigenous Melanesians began lobbying for independence, which in 1980 the country achieved. It was then renamed Vanuatu.

A brief rebellion by French settlers and plantation workers on Espiritu Santo took place in May 1980. Britain, France and Papua New Guinea sent soldiers, who quelled the revolt, which the new government said was financed by the Phoenix Foundation, a right-wing US group.

Political overview:

Vanuatu has a unicameral 52-member Parliament, elected to a four-year term by universal adult suffrage. The President of the Republic (Constitutional Head of State) is elected for a five-year term through secret ballot by an electoral college comprising Parliament and the Presidents of Vanuatu's six provincial governments. The Prime Minister is elected by Parliament from among its members by secret ballot.

Economic overview:

Most of Vanuatu's population lives in rural areas where subsistence farming and fishing are the main sources of livelihood. While agriculture, particularly beef cattle, is an important export industry, Vanuatu's economic growth is driven largely by tourism and construction. Tourism and tourism-related services sectors (wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants, and transport and communication) account for

approximately 40 per cent of GDP and one third of people in formal employment. Construction activity is being driven by private-sector retail, residential and a number of donor-funded government construction projects mostly on the island of Efate, particularly in Port Vila.

Education overview:

The joint French-British administration has allowed a complex system to evolve where French, English or Bislama is the language of instruction in schools, depending upon which island it is being delivered. Compulsory school attendance is for only 7 years from the age of 6 and rates of attendance are low.

At present, the Vanuatu education system recognises six levels of education. These are: Preschool (ages 3-5), Primary (ages 6-12), Junior Secondary (ages 13-16), Senior Secondary (ages 17-20), Technical Education (ages 13-18) and Tertiary Education (ages 19 and up). Since 2003, the Ministry of Education has sought to provide an additional two years of primary education and to shorten junior secondary school to two years.

Accrediting agency:

Accreditation of education and training providers is the work of the Vanuatu Qualifications Authority (VQA). The VQA will lead the implementation of the Vanuatu National Qualifications Framework and the Vanuatu Quality Assurance Framework.

Immigration:

Entry to and Residence in Vanuatu is governed by the Immigration Act (Cap 66) as amended and by Immigration Orders issued by the Minister from time to time. Entry to Vanuatu for anything more than a short tourist or business visit is strictly controlled and Permits to Enter and Reside are normally issued to those who can in some way make a positive contribution to the economic development of Vanuatu.

People from countries from which entry into Vanuatu is authorized may not need a visa for short term visits. People visiting the country for a holiday, to see relatives or research the possibility of starting a business or for the furtherance of businesses carried on outside Vanuatu (i.e. sales representative, etc.) may be issued with Visitors Permits on arrival provided they are in possession of a confirmed onward or return ticket to a place to which entry is authorized, have sufficient funds to support themselves and a valid passport.

References:

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