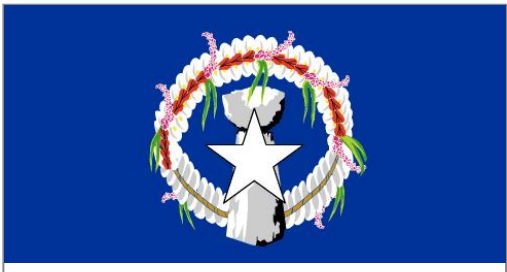


Northern Mariana Islands

Northern Mariana Islands, also called Northern Marianas, officially Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands,



Northern Mariana Islands.

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a self-governing commonwealth in association with the United States. It is composed of 22 islands and islets in the western Pacific Ocean. The commonwealth is a part of the Mariana Islands, a chain of volcanic mountain peaks and uplifted coral reefs. (The Marianas chain also includes the politically separate island of Guam, to the south.)

Saipan (46.5 square miles [120 square km]), Tinian (39 square miles [101 square km]), and Rota (33 square miles [85 square km]) are the principal islands and, together with Anatahan, Alamagan, and Agrihan, are inhabited. Another island, Pagan, was evacuated in 1981 after a severe volcanic eruption there. The capital is on Saipan.

Land

Rota, the southernmost island, consists of a volcanic base capped with coral limestone, giving it a terraced appearance. Four southern islands (Farallon de Medinilla, Saipan, Tinian, and Aguijan) are composed of limestone and have gently rolling elevations and few mountains. The islands farther north are volcanic peaks. Mount Pagan, one of the two volcanoes that make up Pagan Island, has erupted many times during recorded history; Farallon de Pajaros, the northernmost of the Marianas, and Asuncion are also active volcanoes. Agrihan

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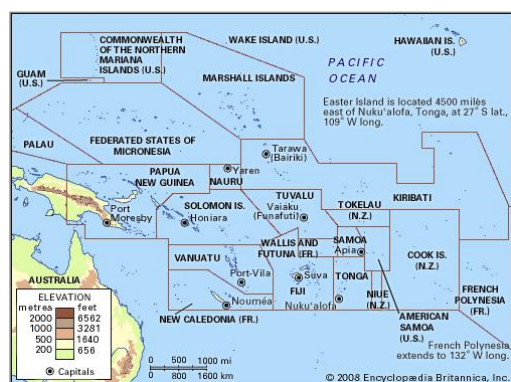
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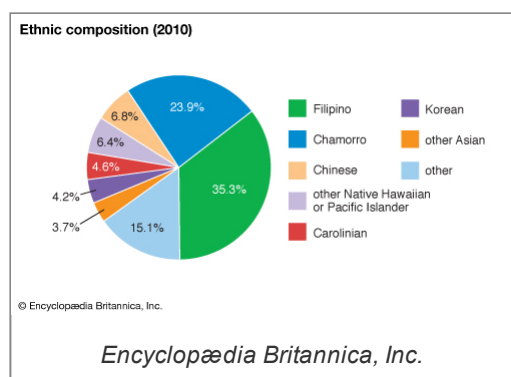
Northern Mariana Islands.

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Map of the Pacific Islands.

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volcano, the highest of the Northern Mariana group, rises to 3,166 feet (965 metres). Besides Guam, the nearest neighbours are the Bonin Islands (north) and the Federated States of Micronesia (Caroline Islands; southeast).

The climate is tropical, with average yearly temperatures on Saipan ranging between 79 and 82 °F (26 and 28 °C) and annual precipitation averaging about 70 inches (1,800 mm). Heavy rains are common, and typhoons strike the islands periodically. Precipitation is significantly less on the northernmost islands.

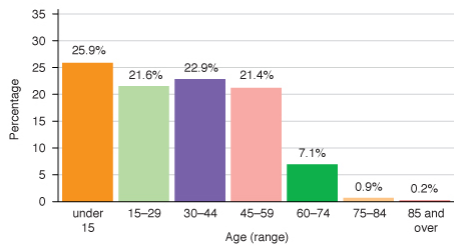
The four limestone islands have tropical or scrub forests at higher elevations and coconut palms and casuarina trees along the coast, with the exception of Farallon de Medinilla, which is barren. Where level or gently sloping areas occur, cattle are grazed. The steep slopes of the volcanic islands from Guguan northward are mostly barren. The soils in these areas are generally shallow and low in fertility. The islands are major nesting sites for many types of migratory seabirds, including several endangered species.

People

The native people of the Northern Mariana Islands are Micronesians. Only about one-fourth of the total population are Chamorros, descendants of the original inhabitants, who intermingled with Spaniards, Mexicans, Filipinos, and various other Europeans and Asians. About one-third of the people are Filipino, and there are smaller proportions of Chinese, Koreans, and other Pacific Islanders. There is also a small minority of Carolinians, descendants of people who migrated from the central Carolines during the 19th century. About two-fifths of the Northern Marianas population is native-born; small numbers come from Guam, the United States, or nearby island states. More than half of the people are nonresident aliens, or guest workers, mostly from Asia and largely employed in the garment industry. Since the late 1990s the government has

attempted to control and reduce the number of nonresidents.

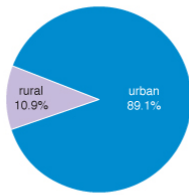
Age breakdown (2014)



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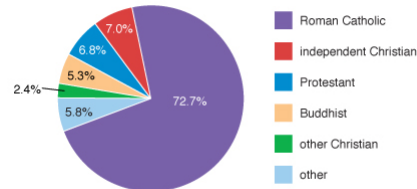
Urban-rural (2014)



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Religious affiliation (2000)



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Having lost most of their original Pacific Islands culture, the people of the Northern Mariana Islands have a mode of life that is Spanish Roman Catholic but is influenced by American culture. Saipan has more than nine-tenths of the commonwealth's total population. Chamorro, related to Indonesian, is the principal language. Chamorro, Carolinian, and English are official languages; Chinese and Filipino are also widely used. About nine-tenths of the population speaks a language other than English at home. Although Roman Catholicism predominates, there are significant minorities of independent Christians, Protestants, and Buddhists.

Economy

Tourism is the principal economic activity. Saipan and Rota are the main tourist centres and offer luxury hotels. The tourists are mainly Japanese and Americans. Subsistence farming, including the cultivation of taro, cassava, yams, breadfruit, vegetables, and bananas, is practiced extensively by many islanders to supplement their cash income. Investors from Korea, China, and the Philippines have expanded the islands' production of clothing and accessories, making the garment industry a major component of the Northern Marianas economy. The investors

are attracted by duty-free and quota-free access to the U.S. mainland. However, the employment practices in the factories have been criticized. Labour and immigration regulations have been relatively lax, and it has been alleged at times that working conditions are sweatshoplike. The U.S. government has taken steps to improve conditions for workers.

Saipan, Tinian, and Rota have paved roads; public transportation is almost nonexistent, but shuttle buses serve major towns. Transportation between the islands is largely by air, with some boat traffic primarily for cargo. Saipan is the largest port, followed by Tinian and Rota. Saipan has an international airport; there are smaller airports on Rota and Tinian.

Government and society

Part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands granted to the United States by the United Nations in 1947, the Northern Marianas voted in a plebiscite for status as a U.S. commonwealth in 1975. Some aspects of the commonwealth status were implemented in 1976, and the full commonwealth became



effective upon the dissolution of the trust territory for the Marianas by the U.S. government in 1986. Eligible residents of the commonwealth became U.S. citizens at that time.

According to the constitution of 1978, the U.S. president is head of state. The head of government is a governor, who is elected by residents to a four-year term, as is a lieutenant governor. The bicameral legislature consists of a 9-member Senate and an 18-member House of Representatives. The commonwealth also elects one representative to the U.S. House of Representatives.

All inhabited islands have primary schools and hospitals. Schooling is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16. There are public and church-run secondary schools on Saipan. Northern Marianas College, a public institution with its main campus on Saipan and branches on Tinian and Rota, was established in 1981. A high percentage of students earn university degrees, notably from the University of Guam and the University of Hawaii.

Cultural life

The cultural diversity of the Northern Marianas has increased rapidly since the late 20th century. There are growing Filipino, Chinese, and Korean communities, although they have limited political representation. The Carolinian community, which has lived on Saipan since the 19th century, is represented in the legislature. The local Chamorro population, with its tradition of extended families, is dominant in political, economic, and cultural matters. A local arts council has promoted folk arts and cultural events in the community, and there are small museums and libraries. Public beach parks and preserves as well as golf courses and other sports facilities provide recreation; scuba diving is particularly popular among tourists. American national holidays and several local holidays are celebrated. The Guam daily newspaper, which provides some local coverage, supplements two local weekly newspapers; all are published in English. There are several radio and television stations, and mobile phone usage, though low, was increasing in the early 21st century.

History

Early period

Archaeological evidence at Chalan Piao on Saipan indicates that the Northern Marianas were settled by an insular people originating in Southeast Asia. They made a distinctive form of red-slipped pottery, sometimes incised with lime-filled decoration, closely related to Philippine ceramics. By AD 800 a plain, unslipped pottery style was in use. Stone architecture had also developed, characterized by parallel rows of upright pillars topped with hemispheric capstones (*halege*). According to early Spanish accounts, the pillars were supports for structures called *latte* (for which term the culture is named), which may have served as houses or canoe sheds. Each village had from one to several *latte* structures. Stone and shell tools were used and betel nuts were chewed, as shown by extended burials most often located between the rows of *latte*.

The Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan was the first European to arrive on the Marianas when he stopped there briefly in 1521. There is some historical question as to which island he actually visited, but Magellan named the islands the Ladrões (Spanish: "Thieves") because while he was there some of the islanders took a small skiff that he had trailing behind one of his ships.

In 1565 Miguel López de Legazpi landed at Umatac, Guam, and proclaimed Spanish sovereignty over the Ladrões; some priests went ashore to perform mass. No colonies were started at that time, however, because the Spanish were more interested in conquests in the Americas, the Philippines, and the Moluccas. The British adventurer Thomas Cavendish was the next to visit the Marianas, in 1588 aboard the *Desire*. He traded briefly, and as he left he ordered his men to open fire from the rear of the ship to discourage the islanders from following.

The effects of the early explorers and those who followed them to the islands were mixed. On one hand the Europeans provided ironware and cloth, which was traded for fresh produce. On the other hand they introduced infectious diseases, including influenza, smallpox, leprosy, venereal diseases, and tuberculosis, which severely depleted the indigenous population.

Spanish colonial rule

The permanent colonization of the islands began with the arrival of the Jesuit priest Diego Luis de Sanvitores in 1668. With him were priests, laymen, women, and some Filipino soldiers. Mariana of Austria, the regent of Spain, financed his mission, and he renamed the islands the Marianas in her honour. Sanvitores and his colonists established churches and religious schools. A series of revolts attended those efforts, since the islanders resisted conversion to a religion that did not fit traditional beliefs. In response, the Spanish moved the population of the Marianas into enclaves and segregated the people into villages. Many islanders were killed in the process of relocation. Others died from the rapid spread of disease in the settlements, thus further decreasing the population.

In 1680 the Spanish sent reinforcements led by José Quiroga, who was interim governor of the Marianas from 1680 to 1696. He subdued the islanders after a series of revolts, sieges, murders of missionaries, and burning of churches that was known as the “Chamorro wars” and that resulted in many islanders fleeing to the hills. In reprisal, the entire native population was relocated from Saipan and Rota in the northern Marianas to the island of Guam. Finally, the Chamorro people took the oath of allegiance to the king of Spain, accepted Spanish customs, and began to wear Western-style clothes, cultivate corn (maize), and eat red meat—some of the cultural traits that the Europeans associated with “higher” civilization. Artisans were sent to the villages to teach sewing, spinning, weaving, tanning, iron forging, stone masonry, and other crafts. By 1698 the subjugation of the Marianas was complete.

The Spanish branched out from the Marianas into the rest of Micronesia, meeting only mild resistance. Guam became a regular stop for the Spanish galleons traveling between the Philippines and Mexico.

By the 19th century the Marianas had become involved in European colonial rivalries. German and British soldiers and settlers began to encroach on Spanish claims in Micronesia, and difficulties were averted in 1886 by the mediation of Pope Leo XIII, whose efforts in this regard prevented war between Germany and Spain. But Spain’s empire was weakening, and by 1898 war with the United States was at hand. After American naval forces under the command of Commodore George Dewey defeated the Spanish fleet in the Philippines and took Guam, Spain decided in 1899 to withdraw entirely from the Pacific. It subsequently sold its possessions—including all of the Marianas except Guam, which the Americans still held—to Germany.

German and Japanese control

The Germans promptly established an administrative centre at Saipan, which had served as the seat of the Spanish administration after the Americans captured Guam in 1898. This period marked the permanent division between Guam and the Northern Marianas. Schools, a hospital, and other public buildings were erected in the Northern Marianas, and colonists were encouraged to emigrate from Germany. Large coconut plantations were started, as were other agricultural projects. Copra production was the main German agricultural interest.

German control in the Northern Marianas ended abruptly with the outbreak of World War I. In October 1914 the Japanese navy took possession of the Northern Marianas and the rest of Micronesia. Japan’s authority for this seizure was based on several secret agreements with the British designed to keep the peace in Asia in the event of war. After World War I, Japan received the Northern Marianas by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, and then later as a mandate under the League of Nations on Dec. 17, 1920. The United States, which continued to hold Guam, recognized this mandate on Feb. 11, 1922.

Japanese rule in the Northern Marianas was direct and allowed the islanders little part in local government. The basic laws of Japan were extended to the islands with only a few modifications to meet local conditions. Formal educational facilities were restricted, with emphasis placed on learning the Japanese language. Public health conditions, however, were improved, and hospitals were established. Economic development was Japan's main interest, and large sugarcane plantations and refineries were started at Saipan and Rota. Large numbers of labourers and investment capital were made available. There was also full employment.



U.S. Marines advancing against Japanese positions on Saipan, Mariana Islands, 1944.

U.S. Department of Defense

With the start of World War II in the Pacific in December 1941, the Japanese immediately took Guam from the United States and made their domination of the Marianas complete. The larger islands of Saipan, Tinian, Rota, Pagan, and Agrihan, along with Guam, became bases for Japanese expansion to the south and east. In 1943 U.S.-led Allied forces began to reduce Japanese strength in Micronesia, and in June–July 1944 the Marianas were neutralized with the recapture of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. The three islands then became Allied bases for the bombing of the Japanese home islands; the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were flown from an air base at Tinian.

Events since c. 1950

The U.S. invasion of the Marianas during the war destroyed the Japanese-created economy in the islands, and after the war the United States began the task of rebuilding. In 1947 Pres. Harry S. Truman signed an agreement with the United Nations (UN) to administer the Northern Marianas as a district within the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands in Micronesia. Responsibility for the civil administration was given to the U.S. Navy. Then, on July 1, 1951, following the signing of the peace treaty with Japan and the renouncing of all Japanese claims to the Northern Marianas, responsibility for the UN Trusteeship was transferred to the U.S. secretary of the interior. A special designation of “strategic” trusteeship was made, placing ultimate jurisdiction of the Marianas under the UN Security Council. The other Micronesian island groups of the Marshalls and the Carolines were also covered under this trusteeship agreement.

The United States pledged to “promote development...towards self-government or independence as may be appropriate.” In 1969 political status talks began between Micronesians from the entire trust territory and U.S. representatives. In 1973 the Northern Marianas began separate negotiations with the United States that led to a plebiscite in 1975, in which the people approved a commonwealth status in association with the United States. The new government began operations under its own constitution and an elected

governor, who was installed in January 1978. Eligible residents of the Northern Marianas became U.S. citizens. The United States declared the trusteeship officially ended on Nov. 4, 1986. On that day, a Covenant Agreement established that the Northern Marianas would exist in political union with the United States, with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Insular Affairs, administering federal funds allocated to the Northern Marianas. In 2008 the commonwealth elected a delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time; the delegate may introduce legislation but may vote only in committees.

Beginning in the late 20th century, the Northern Marianas became a production centre for garment manufacturers. The commonwealth was exempt from many of the labour standards of the United States and from provisions of federal immigration and nationality law. As a result, factories imported workers from Bangladesh, China, the Philippines, and other Asian countries without restriction and maintained poor working conditions. After international attention focused on the alleged exploitation of workers, the U.S. government enacted minimum-wage legislation in 2007 that encompassed the Northern Marianas for the first time and instituted other measures to improve conditions; tax breaks were also created to offset the economic impact on small businesses. Industry suffered, however, from increased competition from China and other countries where labour costs remained lower. In addition, beginning in 2000 several typhoons damaged infrastructure and caused widespread property damage in the islands.

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