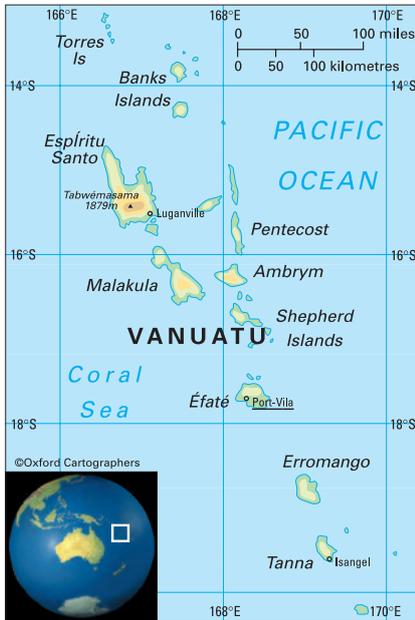




Vanuatu



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth: 1980

Population: 253,000 (2013)

GDP p.c. growth: 0.6% p.a. 1990–2013

UN HDI 2014: World ranking 131

Official languages: Bislama, English, French

Time: GMT plus 11 hrs

Currency: Vatu (Vt)

Geography

Area: 12,190 sq km

Coastline: 2,530 km

Capital: Port Vila

The Republic of Vanuatu's land area is made up of a group of islands in the south-west Pacific, lying south of Solomon Islands and east of the state of Queensland in Australia.

The country comprises six provinces: Malampa, Penama, Sanma, Shefa, Tafea and Torba.

Topography: Vanuatu is a Y-shaped archipelago, some 900-km long. It forms a double chain of about 40 mountainous islands and 40 islets and rocks of volcanic and coral origin; about 65 of these are inhabited. Some islands (including Tanna, Lopévi and Ambrym) have active volcanoes. Many of the rocky islands are steeply mountainous, the highest peaks (on Espiritu

Santo) rising to over 1,800 metres. Fresh water is plentiful.

Climate: Oceanic tropical, with south-east trade winds running May–October. The period November–April is humid, with moderate rainfall. Cyclones may occur November–April.

Environment: The most significant environmental issues are that a majority of the population does not have access to a safe and reliable supply of water (although it is improving), and deforestation.

Vegetation: The rocky islands are thickly forested, with narrow coastal plains where cultivation is possible. Forest covers 36 per cent of the land area and there was no significant loss of forest cover during 1990–2012.

Wildlife: Vanuatu is home to 11 species of bat, including white flying-fox. It is also the easternmost habitation of dugongs, also known as sea-cows. Espiritu Santo has the richest bird population, with 55 species including incubator birds which leave their eggs to incubate in hot volcanic sand from which the young birds emerge fully fledged. Seven mammal species and nine bird species are thought to be endangered (2014).

Main towns: Port Vila (capital, pop. 47,500 in 2010) and Mele (2,500) on Efaté; Luganville (13,800) and Port Olry (2,900) on Espiritu Santo; Norsup (2,400) on Malakula; and Isangel (1,700) on Tanna.

Transport: There are 1,070 km of roads, 24 per cent paved, most of which are on Efaté.

Ferries link the islands. Additionally, there are shipping services, run by a number of operators, to Australia, New Zealand and New Caledonia. The main ports are Port Vila and Luganville.

The chief airports are at Bauerfield, near Port Vila, and Pekoia on Espiritu Santo Island; there are some 30 smaller airfields.

Society

KEY FACTS 2013

Population per sq km: 21

Life expectancy: 72 years

Population: 253,000 (2013); concentrated near the coast on the four main islands; 26 per cent of people live in urban areas – Efaté

has the fastest-growing population, as people migrate to the capital; growth 2.4 per cent p.a. 1990–2013; birth rate 27 per 1,000 people (43 in 1970); life expectancy 72 years (53 in 1970).

Most of the population is Melanesian, known as ni-Vanuatu (98.5 per cent in the 1999 census), the rest of mixed Micronesian, Polynesian and European descent.

Language: The national language is Bislama; English and French are widely spoken and also official languages. There are more than 100 Melanesian languages and dialects.

Religion: Mainly Christians (Presbyterians 28 per cent, Anglicans 15 per cent, Seventh Day Adventists 13 per cent and Roman Catholics 12 per cent; 2009 census).

Health: Public spending on health was three per cent of GDP in 2012. The major hospitals are in Port Vila and Luganville, with health centres and dispensaries throughout the country. Some 91 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 58 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2012). Malaria is widespread. Infant mortality was 15 per 1,000 live births in 2013 (141 in 1960).

Education: Public spending on education was seven per cent of GDP in 2008. Primary education, in French or English, is provided free of charge (with effect from 2010). Primary school comprises six years and secondary seven, with cycles of four and three years. Some 71 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2008). The school year starts in February.

Vanuatu is a partner in the regional University of the South Pacific, which has its main campus in Suva, Fiji, and a campus, the Emalus Campus, in Port Vila, Vanuatu, where 700–1,000 students per semester are enrolled for certificate, diploma, degree and postgraduate courses, using the university's distance-learning facilities. The university's law school and teaching programmes in Pacific languages and early childhood education are based at the Emalus Campus.

Institutions offering tertiary education include the Institute of Technology, which offers courses in business and technical education; Institute of Teacher Education; and College of Nursing Education, all of which are located in Port Vila. Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 94 per cent (2010).

Media: *Vanuatu Weekly* is published by the government in Bislama, French and English. Independent newspapers include *Vanuatu Daily Post*, and the weeklies *L'Hebdo du Vanuatu*, *Nasara*, *Ni-Vanuatu*, *Port Vila Presse* and *The Vanuatu Independent*.

The Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation provides public TV and radio services, broadcasting in Bislama, French and English, and there are some private commercial and faith radio stations.

Some 37 per cent of households have TV sets (2009). There are 14 personal computers per 1,000 people (2005).

Communications: Country code 678; internet domain '.vu'. There are public phones in post offices. Mobile coverage is generally good. Port Vila and Luganville have several internet cafes, and internet access is provided by some post offices.

For every 1,000 people there are 20 landlines, 593 mobile phone subscriptions and 113 internet users (2013).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, Father Walter Lini Day (21 February), Chief's Day (5 March), Labour Day (1 May), Children's Day (24 July), Independence Day (30 July), Assumption Day (15 August), Constitution Day (5 October), Unity Day (29 November), Christmas Day and Family Day (25 and 26 December).

Religious festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday, Easter Monday and Ascension Day.

Economy

KEY FACTS 2013

GNI: US\$794m

GNI p.c.: US\$3,130

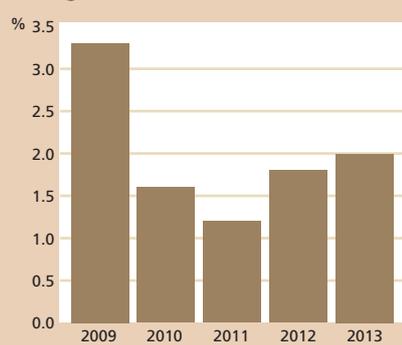
GDP growth: 2.0% p.a. 2009–13

Inflation: 2.1% p.a. 2009–13

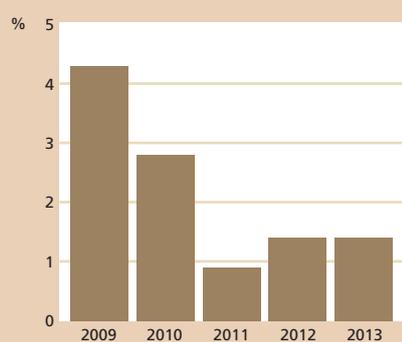
The Vanuatu economy is based on agriculture, fishing, tourism and offshore financial services. Much of the agriculture is subsistence farming. As most exports are agricultural – for example, copra, coconut oil, kava, beef, timber, cocoa and coffee, Vanuatu is vulnerable to fluctuations in world commodity prices. The country has inherent economic difficulties (it is remote and isolated, so faces heavy transport costs, and it is prone to cyclone damage) and is therefore dependent on aid for development projects.

Vanuatu created an offshore tax haven in 1971, with a very liberal financial regime. Many banks set up in the country and by the late 1980s the offshore financial sector contributed 12 per cent of GDP. However, from the late 1990s this tax haven came

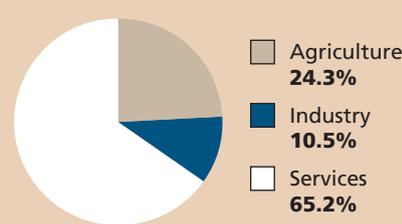
Real growth in GDP



Inflation



GDP by sector (2013)



under growing pressure from the OECD's campaign to counter money laundering and many of the more than 100 banks closed. By 2003 only seven banks were able to comply with the tighter regulations the government introduced to meet the OECD's requirements.

A long strike by public-sector workers in 1993–94 and subsequent dismissal of all those involved plunged the country into crisis, which was only resolved when the Asian Development Bank agreed (in 1997) to financial support to lift the economy, but its support was tied to a Comprehensive Reform Programme. At the core of this were

structural reforms, including reducing the public sector, tighter fiscal control and boosting exports.

The government continued in the 2000s to be committed to encouraging the private sector and foreign investment, improving living standards and reducing economic inequalities. In 2001–02 the economy shrank by more than two per cent p.a. It then recovered and the growth rate strengthened, averaging more than five per cent p.a. over 2003–08, a recovery that has been attributed to sound fiscal and monetary management, increased private capital inflows and better donor relations. From 2009, in the adverse international economic climate, the economy grew more slowly, showing growth of one to two per cent p.a. in 2010–13, then picking up in 2014 (estimated 3.5 per cent).

History

The islands of Vanuatu have been inhabited since 500 BCE, and the region was part of the Tongan Empire into the 14th century CE. European sailors visited it briefly and at long intervals from early in the 17th century. The name 'New Hebrides' was given to the islands by Captain James Cook on his visit in 1774. In 1789 the islands were called at by rescuers seeking Captain Bligh and his officers, who had been turned loose with provisions in an open boat after the mutiny on the *Bounty*.

During the 19th century French and English Christian missionaries and some traders and planters settled on some of the islands which became an Anglo-French condominium by 1906. The New Hebrides, as it was then called, was ruled by separate British and French administrations, laying the foundations for some of the problems that have erupted since independence.

After World War II, a power struggle developed between the dual colonial interests and the indigenous islanders, initially over the alienation of land by the Europeans. The first major change was agreement, at a meeting between France and the UK in 1974, to set up a representative assembly (with a majority elected by universal franchise) to replace the colonial advisory council. The first national elections followed in November 1975, but disagreements among the four chiefs

Vanuatu on the international stage

The New Economics Foundation cited Vanuatu as number one in its Happy Planet Index in 2006, deeming its people the happiest in the world.

At the 2013 CHOGM in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Vanuatu offered to host CHOGM 2017.

Kali Jacobus, born in 1974 in Malekula, won the UBO World Super Middleweight Boxing Championship in 2009.

representing traditional interests delayed elections to the seats reserved for chiefs.

Just a few months after the assembly had come into full operation in early 1977, a second boycott brought its operations to a halt. The largest party, the Vanua'aku Pati (VP), led by an Anglican priest, Father Walter Lini, objected to the reservation of six seats for members of the Chamber of Commerce. Reluctant to make any compromise agreement, the VP went on to boycott the ensuing conference in Paris in July 1977 and the subsequent general election. A government of national unity was formed in 1978 and, with advisory help from France and the UK, a new constitution providing for independence in 1980 was adopted in October 1979. Elections in November 1979 gave victory to the VP, and Lini became Prime Minister. The archipelago gained independence on 30 July 1980 as Vanuatu and joined the Commonwealth.

After independence, the VP remained in power for 11 years, under the leadership of Lini. During this period an attempt at secession, supported by the Na-Griamel movement and some francophone inhabitants, was suppressed. Lini was twice re-elected Prime Minister (1983 and 1987). After the 1987 elections, Lini was challenged for the party leadership by Barak Sope, who subsequently formed a new party – the Melanesian Progressive Party (MPP) – and for a brief period became Prime Minister of an interim government, pending elections. However, before these elections could be held, Lini resumed as Prime Minister. Sope and several members of the interim government were arrested on charges of treason. They were convicted but their prison sentences were subsequently quashed following appeals from the international community. In September 1991, Donald Kalpokas succeeded Lini as leader of the VP and Prime Minister.

The general election of December 1991 brought in a new government, a coalition led by Maxime Carlot Korman, leader of the

francophone Union of Moderate Parties (UMP). The coalition surprisingly included members of the National United Party (NUP), a party formed by former Prime Minister Lini who had broken away from the VP. The NUP itself split in mid-1993, with Lini's group joining the opposition, alongside the VP, the MPP and the Fren Melanesia Party (FMP). Korman maintained his majority, governing until the general election of 1995. The immediate result of the 1995 elections was a coalition government led by Serge Vohor (UMP). After two months, he was replaced by Korman. Less than eight months later, in September 1996, Korman lost a vote of no confidence and resigned after members of his coalition government were criticised by the national ombudsman in her report on the uncovering of a massive bank fraud. Vohor once again became Prime Minister.

Divisions within the government over implementation of the Asian Development Bank-funded economic reforms led to its defeat in November 1997 and to the dissolution of Parliament. On 12 January 1998 a state of emergency was declared following rioting in Port Vila, which broke out as 500 people attempted to withdraw their investments in the National Provident Fund, following allegations that politicians had misused the fund. There was an early general election in March 1998, when a record 220 candidates contested 52 seats (increased from 50 since the previous elections in 1995). The VP won 18 seats, the UMP 12, the NUP 11 and other parties 11; no party had an overall majority. However, after 12 days of negotiations Donald Kalpokas (VP) and Lini (NUP) formed a coalition government. Kalpokas was elected Prime Minister, with the support of 35 members of Parliament; he appointed Lini as Deputy Prime Minister. In October 1998, Kalpokas dismissed Lini, excluding the NUP from the coalition, and formed new alliances with the UMP and the John Frum Movement (JFM). Vanuatu's leader at

independence and first Prime Minister (1980–91), Father Walter Lini, died at the age of 57 in February 1999.

During August 1999 opposition parties won three of the four by-elections to be held, giving them control of 26 of the 52 parliamentary seats, and putting them in a strong position to defeat the government, which finally occurred in November 1999 after two government members defected to the opposition and Barak Sope (MPP) was elected Prime Minister by 28 votes to 24. However, the new government was soon involved in political controversy and its authority was undermined by leaks of cabinet documents to the press. In April 2001, after nine members of the ruling coalition defected to the opposition, Sope lost a no-confidence vote, and VP leader Edward Natapei became Prime Minister and immediately announced there would be an inquiry into the previous government's controversial deal with a Thai businessman.

Constitution

Status: Republic

Legislature: Parliament of Vanuatu

Independence: 30 July 1980

Vanuatu is a republic with a non-executive presidency. The President is elected by Parliament together with the Presidents of the regional councils and serves a five-year term. The single-chamber Parliament has 52 members, directly elected every four years by universal adult suffrage with an element of proportional representation. Parliament appoints the Prime Minister from among its members, and the Prime Minister appoints a council of ministers from among the MPs.

The constitution provides for a certain amount of decentralisation, intended to promote regional autonomy and local participation. In 1994, the 11 local councils were replaced by six provincial governments. The district councils of chiefs elect the National Council of Chiefs, which is consulted, and makes representations, on customary law and traditional factors affecting government.

In October 2004, Parliament passed constitutional amendments designed to reduce political instability. These amendments included banning no-confidence votes in the first and last 12-month periods of a parliamentary term and, after the first 12 months of a term, required a by-election in any constituency where the member crossed the floor. Before taking effect these amendments were to be put to the electorate in a national referendum.

Further information

Government of Vanuatu:	www.governmentofvanuatu.gov.vu
Parliament of Vanuatu:	www.parliament.gov.vu
Vanuatu National Statistics Office:	www.vnsso.gov.vu
Reserve Bank of Vanuatu:	www.rbv.gov.vu
Vanuatu Tourism Office:	vanuatu.travel
Commonwealth Secretariat:	www.thecommonwealth.org
Commonwealth of Nations:	www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Vanuatu

Media

Islands Business:	www.islandsbusiness.com
<i>Vanuatu Daily Post</i> :	www.dailypost.vu

Politics

Last elections: 30 October 2012

Next elections: 2016

Head of state: President Baldwin Lonsdale (2014–)

Head of government: Prime Minister Sato Kilman

Women MPs: 0%

From 1991 political life in Vanuatu has been characterised by coalition governments with fluctuating support and the splitting off of political parties.

The May 2002 general election saw coalition partners Union of Moderate Parties (UMP) and Vanua'aku Pati (VP) comfortably returned to power, the UMP with 15 seats and the VP with 14, while Willie Jimmy's National United Party (NUP) took eight. The victorious partners put VP leader Edward Natapei forward to be Prime Minister, with Serge Vohor – whose UMP had won the most seats – his deputy. During 2003, relations between the NUP and the government improved, but despite some discussion on its joining the coalition, the NUP continued in opposition.

During 2004 the presidency changed hands several times before an early general election in July 2004. A coalition of NUP (with ten seats) and VP (eight) emerged from the election with the most parliamentary seats, UMP having secured nine seats. However, when the Parliament convened, some VP members crossed the floor and Serge Vohor of the UMP was elected Prime Minister. In the fourth round of the subsequent presidential election, Kalkot Mataskelekele emerged as President. In December 2004 a no-confidence vote went against Vohor, and Ham Lini, NUP leader and brother of former Prime Minister Father Walter Lini, was elected Prime Minister.

In the general election of September 2008 the VP won 11 of 52 seats and NUP eight. These two parties agreed to work together and VP leader Edward Natapei was elected Prime Minister – with the support of 28 MPs. He was opposed by Maxime Carlot Korman (the candidate of the Vanuatu Republican Party) who received 24 votes.

At the end of President Mataskelekele's term, in August 2009, Korman, the Speaker of Parliament, became acting President. Presidential elections were held by Parliament in September 2009 and Iolu Johnson Abbil was elected in the third round.

In December 2010, while he was travelling to the UN Climate Change Conference in Mexico, Prime Minister Natapei lost a parliamentary no-confidence vote (15–30), and the leader of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and of the opposition Alliance bloc in Parliament, Sato Kilman, was sworn in as Prime Minister.

On 24 April 2011, following a parliamentary no-confidence vote against Kilman and his cabinet, Serge Vohor of the UMP was elected Prime Minister by Parliament. Then on 13 May 2011, when the Court of Appeal ruled that Vohor's election was unconstitutional, Kilman was restored to office. On 16 June 2011, after the Supreme Court had ruled that Kilman's election in December 2010 had also been unlawful, Natapei was appointed to lead a caretaker administration until a fresh parliamentary vote was held on 26 June 2011, when Kilman defeated Vohor (29–23) and resumed as Prime Minister.

On 19 November 2012, in the parliamentary vote that followed the general election of 30 October, Kilman defeated Natapei (29–23); to be re-elected Prime Minister at the head of a new coalition government. Although Natapei's VP had won eight seats in the election and Kilman's PPP six, Kilman secured the support of the majority of the members of the new Parliament, who represented a total of 16 parties as well as a number of independents, and included no women.

Facing a motion of no confidence in Parliament, Prime Minister Kilman resigned on 21 March 2013 and Moana Carcasses Kalosil was elected unopposed by 34 members of parliament to succeed him on 23 March.

Prime Minister Kalosil was defeated by Joe Natuman in a no-confidence vote on 15 May 2014 (40–12) and Natuman became Prime Minister.

During September 2014, on completion of President Abbil's term of office, presidential elections were held by Parliament. Baldwin Lonsdale was elected in the eighth round of voting on 22 September.

On 11 June 2015 Prime Minister Natuman was ousted in a no-confidence vote (27–25) and Sato Kilman elected Prime Minister by Parliament. He defeated Ham Lini (28–22).

International relations

Vanuatu is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Non-Aligned Movement, Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, Pacific Community, Pacific Islands Forum, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

The World Trade Organization approved Vanuatu's accession in October 2011; the Vanuatu Parliament passed enabling legislation in December 2011; and the country became a full member of the organisation on 24 August 2012.

Traveller information

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of departure. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals. Prohibited imports include most fresh food; plants and animals, and plant and animal products; and soil and agricultural products. There are restrictions on the import of dry and processed foods.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the right. Visitors can drive with a foreign driving licence.

Inter-island travel is normally by air, and services fly daily to the principal islands; inter-island ferries do not run very frequently. Air charter is also available. Taxis operate in urban areas and are metered.

Travel health: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever, diphtheria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, malaria and typhoid.

There were 110,000 tourist arrivals in 2013.

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