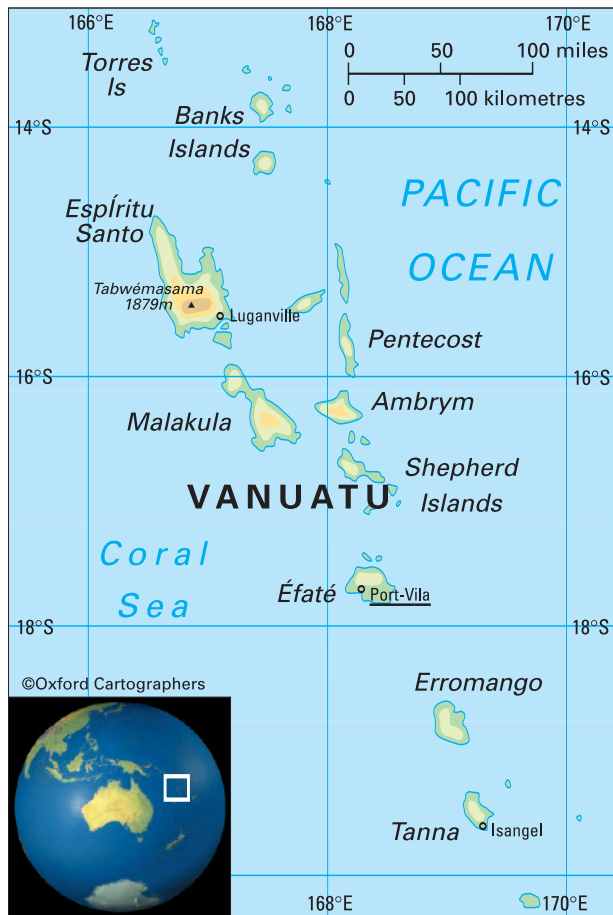


Vanuatu



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1980
Population:	240,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	-0.2% p.a. 1990–2008
Official languages:	Bislama, English, French
Time:	GMT plus 11hr
Currency:	vatu (Vt)

Geography

Area:	12,190 sq km
Coastline:	2,530km
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.

Main towns: Port Vila (capital, pop. 41,200 in 2009) on Éfaté; Luganville (15,400) on Espiritu Santo; Norsup (3,100) on Malakula; and Isangel (1,560) on Tanna.

Topography: Vanuatu is a Y-shaped archipelago, some 900km 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 1,800m. Fresh water is plentiful.

Climate: Oceanic tropical, with south-east trade winds from May to October. The period from November to April is humid, with moderate rainfall. Cyclones may occur between November and 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 about 37% of the land area.

Wildlife: Vanuatu is home to 11 species of bat, including the white flying-fox. It is also the easternmost habitation of the dugong, or sea-cow. Espiritu Santo has the richest bird population, with 55 species including the incubator bird which leaves its eggs to incubate in hot volcanic sand from which the young birds emerge fully fledged.

did you know?

Vanuatu is an archipelago comprising a double chain of about 40 islands and 40 islets and rocks of volcanic and coral origin (about 65 inhabited), some islands having active volcanoes and many are steeply mountainous, rising on Espiritu Santo to over 1,800m; fresh water is plentiful. The country has more than 2,500km of coastline.

Vanuatuans enjoy life expectancy of 70 years.

Transport: There are 1,070km of roads, 24% 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 Pekoa on Espiritu Santo Island; there are some 30 smaller airfields.

Society

KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 20
Life expectancy: 70 years
Net primary enrolment: 81%

Population: 240,000 (2009); concentrated near the coast on the four main islands, 25% living in urban areas – Efaté has the fastest-growing population, as people migrate to the capital; growth 2.9% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 30 per 1,000 people (43 in 1970); life expectancy 70 years (53 in 1970).

Most of the population is Melanesian, known as ni-Vanuatu (98.5% 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 31%, Anglicans 13%, Roman Catholics 13% and Seventh Day Adventists 11%; 1999 census).

Media: *Vanuatu Weekly* is published by the government in Bislama, French and English. Independent newspapers include the *Vanuatu Daily Post*, and the weeklies *The Vanuatu Independent*, *Nasara* and *Ni-Vanuatu*.

The Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation provides public TV and radio services, broadcasting in Bislama, French and English.

There are 14 personal computers (2005) and 71 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

Education: Public spending on education was 4.8% of GDP in 2009. Primary education, in French or English, starts at age six and is almost universal and provided free of charge with effect from 2010. Some 73% of pupils complete primary school (2006). 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.

Malapoa Teachers' Training College and Tagabe Agricultural School also provide tertiary education, and there is a school of nursing in Port Vila. Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 94% (2008).

Health: The major hospitals are in Port Vila and Luganville, with health centres and dispensaries throughout the country. 83% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 52% of people have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2009). Malaria is widespread. Infant mortality was 14 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (141 in 1960).

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.

There are 30 main telephone lines and 527 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

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

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

Economy

KEY FACTS 2009

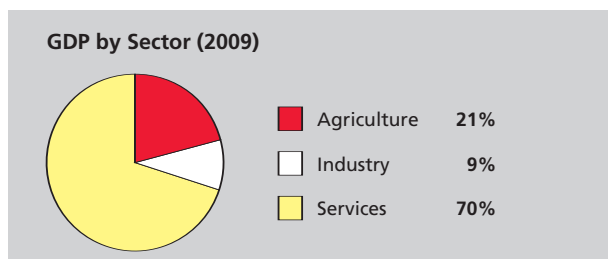
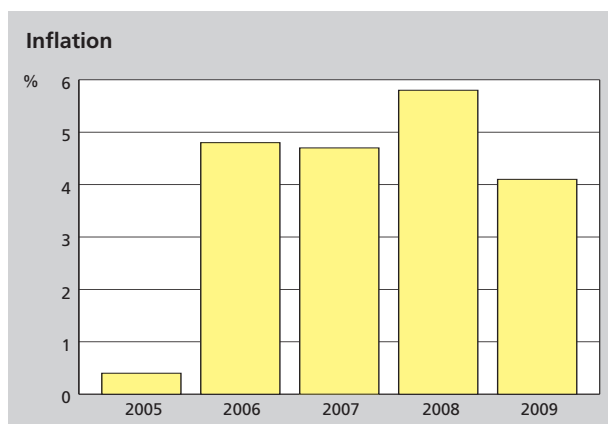
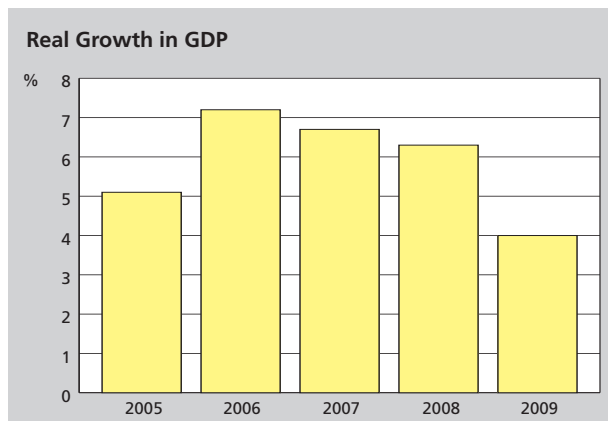
GNI:	US\$627m
GNI p.c.:	US\$2,620
GDP growth:	5.9% p.a. 2005–09
Inflation:	4.0% p.a. 2005–09

Overview: 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, 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% of GDP. However, from the late 1990s this tax-haven came 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 (CRP). At the core of this were structural reforms, including reducing the public sector, tighter fiscal control and boosting exports.

While the government continued in the 2000s to be committed to encouraging the private sector and foreign investment, improving living standards and reducing economic inequalities, its commitment to the much-needed CRP and structural reforms was less than wholehearted. In 2001–02 the economy shrank by more than 2% p.a. It then recovered and the growth rate strengthened, averaging 5.9% p.a. over 2005–09, a recovery that has been



attributed to sound fiscal and monetary management, increased private capital inflows and better donor relations. Vanuatu maintained a good growth rate in 2008 (6.3%), 2009 (4.0%) and 2010 (about 3%), despite the adverse international economic climate.

Trade: Main exports are copra, coconut oil, kava, beef, timber, cocoa and coffee.

Constitution

Status:	Republic
Legislature:	Parliament
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.

Politics

Last elections:	September 2008
Next elections:	2012
Head of state:	President Iolu Johnson Abbil
Head of government:	Prime Minister Sato Kilman
Ruling party:	coalition led by People's Progress Party

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 Father Walter Lini who had broken away from the Vanua'aku Pati (VP). From 1991 political life in Vanuatu has been characterised by coalition governments with fluctuating support and the splitting off of political parties.

The NUP itself split in mid-1993, with Lini's group joining the opposition, alongside the VP, the Melanesian Progressive Party (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.

The May 2002 general election saw the coalition partners comfortably returned to power, the UMP with 15 seats and the VP with 14, and Willie Jimmy's NUP with eight. Despite their coalition agreement the victorious partners put Natapei forward to be prime

minister, with 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. Though the UMP (15 seats) emerged from the election with the most parliamentary seats, it appeared that the ruling VP (14 seats) – in coalition with NUP (eight seats) – would be able to form a new government. 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 confidence vote went against Vohor and Ham Lini, NUP leader and brother of Walter Lini, was elected as 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 by 28 MPs as prime minister. 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.



History

The islands of Vanuatu have been inhabited since 500 BC, and the region was part of the Tongan Empire into the 14th century. 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 the Second World War, 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 setting 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 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 became independent 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 as 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.

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 Progress Party 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.

International relations

Vanuatu is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Non-Aligned Movement, Pacific Community, Pacific Islands Forum and United Nations.

Traveller information

Local laws and conventions: Drinking kava, a locally produced non-alcoholic drink, is an ancient tradition in Vanuatu, but it should be drunk in moderation. Visitors wishing to explore the islands must be aware that Vanuatu has strict land-ownership regulations. Most local residents will allow visitors to take their photograph but permission must always be sought first.

Visitors to Vanuatu should show respect at all times for the country's traditional values and its people's strong Christian beliefs; and should also avoid wearing revealing clothing in public.

Informal wear is suitable for most occasions. Business is normally conducted in English or French. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0730–1130 and 1330–1630.

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for at least six months beyond the intended length of stay and visitors must hold a valid onward or return ticket. All food, fruits, animal products and plants must be declared on entry into Vanuatu.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the right and visitors can drive on their national driving licence. Cars can be hired from international agencies located in Port Vila. There is no public transport on Vanuatu. Private buses and minibuses run but there are no timetables. The most common way of catching a bus is to flag one down and tell the driver where to go. Taxis are also available and are metered.

Inter-island travel is by boat from Port Vila and Espiritu Santo, or by Vanair, the domestic airline. However, both services can be infrequent, so should be confirmed before travel. Visitors should exercise caution when considering visiting active volcanoes on any of the islands in Vanuatu, and should check with the Vanuatu Tourist Office for latest reports on volcanic activity before travelling.

Travel health: Medical facilities in Vanuatu are adequate for routine treatments. Visitors should ensure they have comprehensive medical insurance, as serious cases will require air evacuation to Australia or New Zealand for treatment.

Malaria and dengue fever are common, and visitors should ensure they have insect repellent and suitable clothing to protect against mosquito bites.

Mains water is chlorinated and safe to drink; bottled water is widely available.

Money: Local currency is the vatu, though Australian dollars are accepted in major cities. There are ATMs at the ANZ and Westpac banks, and the use of credit cards is mainly restricted to Port Vila and Luganville. Travellers cheques are widely accepted. Banking hours are Mon–Fri 0800–1500.

There were 101,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

Further information

Government of Vanuatu: www.governmentofvanuatu.gov.vu

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

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