

Narration for Vanuatu Country Background Video

Vanuatu, meaning 'country that stands up', is a Y-shaped collection of over 80 islands in the South Pacific Ocean. Australia lies to the west.

Inhabitants are known as Ni-Vanuatu. Most of these 310, 000 residents are rural. Many are of Melanesian descent with a Polynesian minority. Port Vila is the largest city with 45,000 residents.

Vanuatu people use just under 100 **dialects**. Children usually start with their village language or Bislama. English and French are used for school instruction.

Vanuatu's **flag** is green, yellow, black, and red. These colours stand for vegetation, gospel light, the people, and the blood of boars and men. The emblem consists of boar tusks, and crossed namele leaves symbolizing peace.

Vanuatu has a tropical, humid climate moderated by trade winds between May and October. Temperatures in the northern islands average 27° C with an annual rainfall of about 3,000 mm. Common natural disasters including earthquakes, cyclones and volcanic eruptions. Rising sea levels threaten to erode the land.

The World Day of Prayer artwork created by Vanuatuan artist, Juliette Pita, illustrates the weather and resiliency of the people. The painting shows a mother bending and praying over her child during Cyclone Pam in 2015. The waves crash over her but a palm tree with strong roots bends protectively.

Three-quarters of these mountainous islands, outlined with narrow coastal plains, are covered by natural vegetation. Primary lower forests include tropical lowland evergreens and small areas of broad-leaved deciduous. The giant Banyan on Tanna Island is one of the largest trees in the world.

Less than 2% of land is arable, and is used primarily for cattle grazing and cash crops rather than vegetable gardens. This has contributed to malnutrition.

Habiscus, the unofficial flower of Vanuatu, is plentiful.

Bats are the only native mammals.

An interesting Vanuatu bird is the megapode which lays its eggs in hot volcanic soil. Its young, which emerge fully feathered, can run immediately, and fly within 24 hours.

Sanctuaries have been created for turtles to restore their dwindling population.

Colourful schools of small fish are a feature in many coral gardens and reefs. Nearby large fish include bonito, yellowfin tuna, and sailfish.

Staple foods include yam, taro, banana, coconut, sugarcane, tropical nuts, greens, pork, fowl, and seafood. The national ceremonial dish is *lap lap*. It is a pudding made of grated root crops or plantain mixed with coconut milk and sometimes greens and meat, and wrapped in leaves,

Vanuatu ancestors lived on their own islands, in their own villages. Each had their own government, languages, food, styles of clothing, traditional healers and midwives. Homes had thatched roofs.

Although people had been living on the islands for three thousand years, in 1774, Captain James Cook named the islands “New Hebrides” as they reminded him of his Scottish homelands.

Blackbirding was prevalent between 1847 and 1904. South Pacific islanders were kidnapped, tricked or coerced into working for very little or no pay on plantations in Queensland, Fiji and Hawaii.

By 1906, New Hebrides became a colony with a more centralized government ruled jointly by Great Britain and France.

Political independence and a home-grown constitution were established in 1980.

Vanuatu has a literacy rate of 64 percent. Secondary education enrolment was 35% in 2015. There are strategies to increase this figure significantly by 2030.

Vanuatu’s economy is largely based on tourism, construction and offshore financial services. Big hotels and resorts are owned by foreigners. A minor income earning activity is Nagol, which involves men climbing flimsy 100-foot wooden towers and diving headfirst into empty space, with nothing to break their fall but vines tied to their ankles. Others sell their traditional weaving. Manufacturing industries contribute only 5 to 9% to the Gross Domestic Product. Education curriculum points youth to white-collar jobs.

In the current Vanuatu democracy, the Constitution provides for gender equity but there is limited political will to implement it. In the 2020 federal election, no women were voted into power.

Women represent 40% of the labor force in both public and private sectors, and are often the primary caregivers for family members.

Gender-based violence is a serious issue affecting women and girls. Approximately 60% of women in Vanuatu have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence.

Access to healthy foods, safe drinking water and adequate sanitation are concerns, especially for children, in many areas of this republic. Most deaths in those under 5 years of age are due to malnutrition. There has been an increase in stunted growth and development in children.

Before the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 19th century, each island had its own god. They believed there was a creator somewhere in the heavens, and sacrifices were offered to that being.

Christianity is now the major religion at 83%.

World Day of Prayer was introduced to Vanuatu by two female Canadian missionaries in 1946. Current focuses are employment and educational opportunities for young, rural women, maternal and children’s health, and cancer.

In 2021, we pray with all Vanuatu women.