

CHAPTER 32 SECTION 1

OCEAN REALM

Geographers classify the islands of the Pacific as either high or low islands. High islands can be further divided into continental and ocean islands. Both types of high islands tend to be mountainous and rocky, and both may have volcanoes. Continental islands are formed from continental rock and lie on a shallow continental shelf.

Low islands form from coral. They are usually small and flat. A ring shaped coral island, or a ring of several islands linked by underwater coral reefs, is called an Atoll. The Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands is about 80 miles long, and 20 miles wide. Coral reefs have been called the rainforest of the ocean because of their biological diversity.

PHYSICAL PROCESS

High islands and low islands tend to have very different environments. The high islands' volcanic soils are usually rich and fertile. The Pacific is the site of active tectonic processes the Ring of Fire. Many islands have active volcanoes, and many more volcanoes lie deep beneath the ocean's surface. Earthquakes are common in some areas. Tsunamis can present a danger to coastal areas. Tectonic Process have also shaped the Pacific Ocean's floor. Subduction zones are plate collisions. These types of collisions are called trenches. The Mariana Trench near the Mariana Islands is the deepest trench at more than 36,000 feet.

THREE ISLAND GROUPS

Geographers divide the Pacific Islands into three large subregions—Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

Melanesia lies closest to Australia. It includes the eastern half of New Guinea.

Micronesia lies east of the Philippines, mostly north of the equator.

Polynesia is the largest of the three regions. It covers a huge triangle with its corners at Easter Island, the Hawaiian Islands, and New Zealand.

CLIMATES, BIOMES AND RESOURCES

Most of the regions lie between the tropics, so temperatures are warm to hot year round. Monsoons and trade winds effect rainfall amounts. Southeast trade winds flow from the Tropic of Capricorn. The area where these prevailing winds meet near the equator is called the Intertropical Convergence Zone(ITCZ). This area has generally calm humid air at low elevations. The warm moist air of the ITCZ condenses and cools as it rises, causing heavy rainfall. Typhoons most often occur in the western Pacific.

Rainforest conditions cover many of these islands.

Warm climates, natural beauty is beneficial to the islands for tourism. Fishing and shellfish are also important resources. Papua New Guinea and some other islands of Melanesia export timber. Papua New Guinea also has gold and copper. New Caledonia has deposits of nickel.

CHAPTER 32 SECTION 2

HISTORY AND CULTURE

It is believed that humans have lived in the area of New Guinea dating back 33,000 years. The people groups migrated across these islands through different periods of time. Cultural patterns, languages and physical traits there all differ from those in Micronesia and Polynesia. Many Melanesians seem to be genetically linked to the aborigines of Australia.

Europeans began to explore the Pacific islands in the 1500's. Ferdinand Magellan, sailing for Spain sailed across the Pacific in 1520-1521. Colonial control was limited at first. American and European whale hunters sailed into the Pacific and set some small outpost. Later colonial rule became more organized. Colonial powers set up plantations and military bases. The British brought thousands of workers from India to work sugar plantations in Fiji. WWII brought sudden changes to the islands. Many of the Pacific islands were captured by the Japanese during the early 1940's, others were under constant attacks because of military facilities and importance. At the end of the WWII the UN made many of the islands trust territories. These were placed under the control of a stronger nation until the time would allow them to move toward independence.

Today some of the islands like Guam, Wake, and the American Samoan islands are still under US control.

TRADITIONS AND CULTURE

Each of the societies of the Pacific developed its own culture. Today the Pacific Islands are home to a great number of different ethnic groups and languages. For example Papua New Guinea has about 700 different languages. Reflecting the lasting influences of colonial, English, and French are used in governments and education in many parts of the region. Pacific peoples have developed simplified languages based on English. These are called pidgin languages.

Christianity is the main religion in the Pacific Islands today. Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries spread their faiths through the area during the colonial period. There are still some groups that practice local religions.

Traditional Societies

People in the region tended to be organized into clans or tribes. On some islands like Tahiti and Tonga political status was kept within certain families. One interesting feature of Micronesia was that local groups were often matrilineal. That is, people trace their family lineage through the mothers family. When marriage took place, the husband became part of the wife's clan.

CHAPTER 32 SECTION 3

ECONOMY

The economies of most of these island nations are based on agriculture, trade and tourism. Many of the main crops are those that were raised in the region long ago. Coconut oil and copra-dried coconut meat-have been major exports. Cacao, pineapples, and vanilla are grown on plantation. Each country of the Pacific controls an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). These zones stretch 200 nautical miles from each country's shores. Which mean each country can charge a fee for economic activities that occur within that zone.

Because on an uneven distribution of resources these islands have been dependent on trade from other nations. Some countries are trying to develop some manufacturing industries to help their economy.

Tourism is an important aspect of the economies of the islands. Natural beauty, and warm temperatures create good opportunities for tourism.

POPULATION

There are few big cities in the region. Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea stands out As the largest city. Suva the capital of Fiji has a population of 170,000 people. Papeete, the capital of French Polynesia is a regional center for trade, transportation and tourism. Population movement from island to island has increased. There is a great deal of emigration or movement out of the region. Most people are looking for better job opportunities. Islands where the populations have increased are facing hardships. These increases have put a strain on the financial resources of these countries.

CHALLENGES

Population growth is a problem for some countries and loss of population causes different problems too.

Nuclear bomb testing up through the 1960's and France's testing into the 1990's has caused concern among the populations of health problems from radiation. Other environmental concerns are based on the development of mineral resources. Nauru mines phosphates that are used to make fertilizers. Though it helps the economy the process to mine the phosphate is damaging the land.

Political violence has raised some concerns in Papua New Guinea when fighting broke out in the 1970's and has continued to some degree into present times. Tension on the island of Fiji between the ethnic groups there have resulted in acts of violence.