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▶ OCEANIA

## BACKGROUND

**Land and Climate.** Papua New Guinea occupies the eastern half of New Guinea, the world's second largest island, and several South Pacific islands. Covering 178,259 square miles (461,690 square kilometers), Papua New Guinea is slightly larger than California. With rain forests, winding and powerful rivers, innumerable waterfalls, palm trees, coral reefs, and ash, sand, and mangrove beaches, Papua New Guinea is a rugged and beautiful country. The highest peak, Mount Wilhelm, stands at 14,793 feet (4,509 meters) in a range that forms a formidable barrier to north-south ground transportation. Swamps cover much of the coastal land, and tropical forests cover much of the rest of the country.

Unfortunately, the nation's once-pristine forests are under severe threat of decimation from foreign loggers who clear-cut pine, mahogany, and walnut trees for huge profits. Slash-and-burn agriculture is also a threat. Habitat for plants, animals, and people is being lost at an alarming rate. Recent drought, forest fires, floods, and poor harvests have further stressed the environment and its rural inhabitants.

The tropical climate varies with altitude. The northern wet season lasts from December to March and the dry season from May to October. The south and east are subject to different weather patterns, and their wet season is March to August. Temperatures average around 80°F (27°C) for the lowlands and the high 60s (18–21°C) for the highlands. Some outlying islands get much hotter. Volcanic activity and earthquakes have occurred in recent years on outer islands, causing erosion and sinking, making evacuation of some atolls necessary.

**History.** Waves of migration from Asia and the South Pacific Islands to what is now Papua New Guinea have taken place for centuries. It is believed that the people now referred to as

Highlanders were among the world's first farmers, settling the area thousands of years ago. The early Papua New Guineans worked and hunted with wood, stone, or bone tools and weapons. Indirect European contact brought the sweet potato to the island via Asia, radically changing the local diet and culture.

While European explorers visited the island as early as 1512, Europeans did not begin colonizing the area until the 17th century. Because of territorial disputes, what is now Papua New Guinea was divided into a German territory in the north and a British territory in the south. Even with colonization, New Guinea remained largely unexplored until the 1930s and virtually uninfluenced by the outside world until after World War II.

Australia governed the British area beginning in 1906 and took control of the German area after World War I. The Japanese briefly held a northern section of New Guinea during World War II. Following a 1949 trusteeship agreement, a legislative council composed mostly of Australians was formed in 1951 as the first step toward independent home rule. A House of Assembly, which had more indigenous representation, was convened in 1964, but internal self-government did not come until 1973. Independence was granted in 1975.

In 1988, an environmental protest over a copper mine on Bougainville Island escalated into a decade-long guerrilla war for the island's secession, during which some 20,000 died. In 2001, the government of Papua New Guinea agreed to allow Bougainville greater autonomy and an eventual referendum on secession.

In addition to the Bougainville issue, Papua New Guinea suffers from widespread corruption and crime, an economy heavily reliant on international aid, and a national government

## Papua New Guinea

with little control over affairs in outlying provinces. This complex set of problems presents an ongoing threat to Papua New Guinea's stability and progress.

### THE PEOPLE

**Population.** Papua New Guinea's population of about 5.3 million is growing at 2.3 percent annually. The majority of people (85 percent) live in rural areas. The capital and largest city, Port Moresby, has more than 250,000 residents.

Nearly all people are Melanesian (mostly Papuan). Within this group, there is a wide range of physical types, from shorter, muscular people of the highlands to lighter-skinned people of the coast and very dark-skinned people of Bougainville. Other groups include those of Polynesian, Micronesian, Chinese, and European descent.

Politically, the country is sometimes divided into four groups: Papuans (in the southern Gulf of Papua region), Highlanders (in the central, mountainous region), New Guineans (in the northern Sepik and Ramu River valleys), and Islanders (on outlying islands).

**Language.** Linguists have catalogued around 836 distinct languages in Papua New Guinea, most of which fall within two basic language groups: Melanesian and Papuan. The country's rugged terrain accounts for much of the diversity; for centuries, most tribes lived in isolation from one another.

English, *Tok Pisin* (Melanesian Pidgin), and Motu are official languages. Although some local languages (called *Tok Ples*, literally "talk place") are used at the preschool level, and some Tok Pisin is used in lower grades, English is the language of school instruction. However, the language used at home is almost always that of one's language group. Cross-language marriages may use Tok Pisin or Motu. Tok Pisin is the country's most widely used language, allowing different groups to communicate with one another. Developed by early colonialists and their indigenous laborers, it has roots in English, German, and the local languages of the island of New Britain. Tok Pisin contains fewer than 1,800 words. Motu is the most common indigenous language, used primarily in the Papuan region. In isolated rural areas, many women and older people know only their local language.

**Religion.** The majority of Papua New Guineans are Christians. Western missionaries have heavily influenced the country for the last century, and the result has been a major conversion from indigenous religions to Christianity. However, strong beliefs in witchcraft, *puri puri* (black magic), ancestor worship, and animism (the concept that spirits inhabit both living things and inanimate objects) remain and often coexist with Christianity on both the community and individual level. People living in remote areas often follow indigenous religions exclusively.

**General Attitudes.** Papua New Guineans are proud of their diversity and resource-rich land, but feelings of national pride and cohesiveness are still only beginning to take root. Most individuals have a strong sense of belonging to a tribe or language group. They are proud of their families, their ancestors, and the land their families possess. Tribes, not the government, own the land they live on. People value their gardens and their own physical abilities, endurance, and strength.

Urban Papua New Guineans desire material things and feel inadequate in not being able to obtain them. This inability is due not only to the lack of resources but also because people do not save money for personal needs. The *wantok* (one talk) system dictates that individuals help and share income or pos-

sessions with relatives and others in their language group. So while wealth is desired, it is often not possible to accumulate. Reciprocation for sharing is always expected.

People are event oriented. Meetings or gatherings may not take place on time. Events more often begin when everyone arrives rather than according to the clock.

**Personal Appearance.** Western-style clothing is most common, with traditional attire limited to extremely remote areas. Men wear shorts or pants, but shirts are optional when men are hot or doing physical labor. Women wear skirts in almost all areas, but pants and modest shorts are sometimes acceptable in urban areas. Both men and women often wear a *laplap* (wraparound sarong). Women usually wear Western tops or brightly colored *meri* blouses, often worn over a *laplap*. In rural areas, women may go without a top when hot, working, or nursing babies. Rural Papua New Guineans seldom own shoes and often have tattered clothing. Traditional wear for special ceremonies might include loincloths, feathered head-dresses, facial paint, beads, and shells.

Most people carry *bilums* (woven string bags). Women hang them from their heads and support them with their backs to carry heavier loads. Men hang a *bilum* only from the shoulder to carry personal items such as tobacco or betel nut (*buai*); they may also carry baskets in their hand or over their shoulder.

### CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

**Greetings.** Papua New Guineans greet by shaking hands. The common question *Yu orait?* (How are you?) is often responded to with *Mi orait. Na yu?* (I'm fine. And you?). Both terms are Tok Pisin. Other greetings vary depending on the area and language group. While Tok Pisin is used between ethnic groups, people greet members of their own language group in their Tok Ples. Using one's Tok Ples is considered rude if members of other ethnic groups are present.

When one passes a stranger, a nod of the head and a smile are adequate gestures. When passing acquaintances, the gestures are accompanied by a short greeting such as *Moning* (Good morning), *Apinun* (Good afternoon), or *Gutnait* (Good evening). When addressing an important official, one uses the appropriate title with a full name. In most other cases, people address one another by first name. It is common to call an older man *papa* and an older woman *mama*.

**Gestures.** Head, eye, and eyebrow gestures carry important meanings in Papua New Guinea. For example, one might answer the question "Where are you going?" by slightly lifting the head, raising the eyebrows, and moving the eyes in the direction planned. Simply raising the eyebrows can show agreement or acknowledgment. A short hiss and sideways motion of the head indicate disgust or derision. A "tsk-tsk" noise (made by the tongue on the roof of the mouth), accompanied by shaking the head from side to side, can mean surprise, awe, or sympathy. The "thumbs up" sign is considered offensive to some. Staring at a person of the opposite sex is very offensive. To flag down a *public motor vehicle* (PMV, a bus or truck used for public transportation), one points to the pavement or waves a hand down and toward the road. Shaking the open hand, palm angled downward, is a gesture of refusal meaning "I don't want any," "No," or "Sorry, the bus is full." Members of the same sex often hold hands in public as a sign of friendship, but public affection is not acceptable between members of the opposite sex.

**Visiting.** Papua New Guineans may spend a large portion of each day visiting, often stopping in at the home of a relative or

friend to discuss the day's news, share some food, smoke tobacco, or chew betel nut (see Diet). Visits are welcomed, whether impromptu or planned; they are usually informal and often lengthy. Visitors often bring gifts of food, but such gifts are not required. Hosts who receive food as a gift also give a gift when they visit. During an unscheduled visit, hosts do not always stop what they are doing.

Visits from relatives can last days or weeks. The host family provides food and shelter for as long as the guests stay. Hosting long-term guests is becoming especially difficult for urban families because of the high cost of living.

**Eating.** In general, Papua New Guineans eat two large meals and snack throughout the day. Breakfast is called *moning kai-kai* (morning food) and dinner is *apinun kaikai* (afternoon food). Some people also eat lunch (*belo*). The most common utensil is the spoon. Hands are used otherwise. Tin or plastic plates, bowls, and cups are common throughout the country, but large leaves are still used for plates in rural areas. An important person—a village elder, guest, or parent—carefully divides the food. Food of all kinds (fruit, cake, meat, etc.) is often piled into a small mountain on top of a base of rice. Guests are expected to eat at least some food and then either take the rest home or give it to others at the gathering. There are rarely second helpings, and asking for them can imply the host has not provided adequately. Most Papua New Guineans sit on the ground or floor when eating, although urban dwellers might use tables.

## LIFESTYLE

**Family.** The extended family is the basis of support for most Papua New Guineans. While a household usually is occupied by the nuclear family, a child often refers to having more than one mother or father and numerous siblings, who in Western society would be called aunts, uncles, and cousins. The nuclear family is usually large, with an average of six children. In polygamous societies, each wife has a separate house and the husband rotates between them. Couples who are infertile or have recently lost a child are often given a child by relatives. A great deal of obligation and duty is associated with family. Extended family members share food, wealth, and work. A family clearing a garden area expects help from relatives and will feed those who provide assistance. Extended families live near one another and often form small village hamlets. The most able family members take care of aging parents.

A majority of family structures are patriarchal, although there are some matriarchal societies in Papua New Guinea. Men usually handle construction activities, such as house or boat building or clearing land. They also wage relatively frequent tribal fights. Bows and arrows are traditional weapons, but modern weapons and acts of *payback* such as arson, mob destruction, and kidnapping are common in some areas. Women usually prepare food and take care of small children, animals, and the garden. In cities, both men and women may work outside the home.

**Dating and Marriage.** Dating traditions and marriage ceremonies vary greatly among the many cultures of Papua New Guinea. A marriage ceremony may take place over a period of days or weeks and involves a great deal of feasting, all-night singing, and exchanging gifts and food. A woman is officially purchased and her family compensated for its loss through a negotiated bride-price, which is exchanged in a ceremony before the wedding. A typical price might include several pigs, money, and food. The groom's extended family contributes to

the bride-price and the bride's extended family shares it.

**Diet.** The staple food in the highlands is *kaukau* (sweet potato). On the coast and in the lowlands, *saksak* (a starchy extract from the sago palm) is the main source of calories. Taro is a staple of both regions, as are a myriad of fruits and vegetables from bananas to yams. Greens (*kumu*) of many kinds are common. Along the coast, people add seafood and coconuts to their diet; they boil most foods in *gris* (coconut water). Those inland also do this when they can get coconuts. Throughout the country, families raise pigs for feasts. Small marsupials, wild pigs, birds, and eggs are supplemental sources of protein. Some rural people eat bats, eels, and tree kangaroos. Store-bought items such as rice and tinned meats are staples wherever there is money, but they are luxuries elsewhere. The typical family cooks in a pot or hollow piece of bamboo over an open fire. For large groups, food traditionally is steamed in a *mumu* (ground oven). Beer is popular as a status drink among men. Many people chew betel nut, which has a mild narcotic effect. The nuts are chewed with lime and mustard. They are exchanged constantly and are the most important gesture of friendship, peace, and agreement.

**Recreation.** The national pastime is to sit and talk (*stori*). Men (and occasionally women) enjoy playing cards. The organized sport of choice is rugby, but basketball, volleyball, soccer (which is taught in school), and netball (a game similar to basketball) are also popular when a ball and field are available. Community tournaments are sometimes held, often in connection with a celebration or political campaign. Gambling is becoming common in urban areas. People also spend leisure time fashioning useful items such as *bilum* bags or weapons. Boys and men hunt birds and wild game with slingshots and bows and arrows.

**The Arts.** Arts and crafts vary greatly from region to region. Many clans paint tribal symbols on canoes, masks, drums, totems, and human bodies. Ceremonial masks may be carved of wood or constructed of painted *tapa* (bark cloth) made in northern villages. Bark paintings, knitting, pottery, decorative shields, and basketry are common, and body painting and personal decoration are the main art forms of some areas. Wooden storyboards are a popular medium for portraying events from village life.

Music and dance are central to tribal culture. The famous *Sing-Sing* (intervillage ceremony) of the highlands involves thousands of costumed dancers. Traditional instruments include the *kundu* (hourglass-shaped drum covered with lizard skin) and the *garamut* (log with a small hollowed-out portion where a stick is rhythmically beaten).

**Holidays.** Papua New Guinea's national holidays include New Year's Day (1 Jan.), Queen Elizabeth II's Birthday (first Monday in June), Independence Day (16 Sept.), Christmas, and Boxing Day (26 Dec.). Boxing Day is named for the British tradition of giving small boxed gifts to servants and tradesmen the day after Christmas. It is now a day to relax and visit friends and family.

Each province also has its own holiday. Local festivals include the Port Moresby Show, featuring traditional and modern events (June); the Yam Harvest Festival of the Trobriand Islands (June–Aug.); the Mount Hagen (July) and Goroka (early September in even-numbered years) cultural shows; the North Solomons Festival of the Arts (1 Sept.); and the Tolai Warwagira two-week festival in Rabaul (Nov.).

**Commerce.** Businesses are open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and 8 a.m. to noon on Saturday. Markets and small

## Papua New Guinea

shops may have extended or irregular hours and are often open on Sunday. Most prices are fixed and bartering is not common, except for crafts or artifacts sold by individuals. Outdoor markets are common. Larger villages may have family-run stores that sell staple goods, while supermarkets and department stores are found in cities.

### SOCIETY

**Government.** Papua New Guinea is a parliamentary democracy within the Commonwealth, and Queen Elizabeth II of Britain is the ceremonial head of state. She is represented in the country by a governor-general (currently Sir Silas Atopare). The prime minister (currently Sir Michael Somare) is head of government and is selected by the majority coalition or party in Parliament. There are 109 members in the elected National Parliament. Members are elected to five-year terms. Each of Papua New Guinea's 20 provinces has a provincial assembly, as well as a governor appointed by the central government. At the village level, elected council and committee members settle local disputes. Each village has a "big man" or leader (*bikman* or *kukurai*). The voting age is 18.

**Economy.** Few people have regular employment in the formal sector. Most are subsistence farmers, growing their own food and usually a small cash crop like coffee. Copra, coffee, palm oil, cocoa, tea, and coconuts are the principal agricultural products. Chief industrial products include coconut oil, plywood, gold, copper, and silver. Land leasing and development can be problematic due to the traditional concept of communal ownership. Economic infrastructure is undeveloped. Most mining employs few native workers. Australia is the country's main trading partner and donor. Papua New Guinea imports most of its manufactured goods. The nation's currency is the *kina* (PGK).

Most of the population lives in poverty. However, because of the system of tribally owned land (*papa graun*), even the poorest have land by birthright. There are no deeds or surveys; anyone can go to their tribal property and build a house and subsist there. Economic growth may improve conditions if revenues are used to reform social institutions and create or expand economic opportunities. Without reform, the rising generation has little expectation of a better life.

**Transportation and Communications.** Due to Papua New Guinea's rugged terrain, travel between cities is often by air. Except for the Highland Highway, which links the highland region to the coast at Lae, the road system is limited and often not suitable for travel. Highways and city roads usually are paved, but rural roads are not. Public travel is inexpensive because of the PMV system composed of privately owned buses and trucks. Cars travel on the left side of the road. Travel by boat and ship between coastal and island towns is common. Foot travel on trails and roads is particularly common in the nation's rural areas.

Most people do not have telephones, except in metropolitan areas. Communication in remote areas is made possible by one-way radio, word of mouth, and two-way radios operated by government health centers. Television, newspapers, and postal service generally are confined to major towns and government (district) stations.

### DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	132 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women	106 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$2,570
Adult literacy rate	71 percent (male); 58 (female)
Infant mortality rate	55 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	56 (male); 58 (female)

**Education.** For Papua New Guineans, schooling is a privilege. Tuition and other expenses make the cost of sending children to public schools prohibitive for many. About three-fourths of the nation's seven-year-old children begin grade one. About half of these students finish the six grades of primary education, and perhaps one-third pass on to secondary school (grades 7–12) after taking a comprehensive scholastic test. Unfortunately, going to secondary school is expensive because of tuition and living costs, so even qualified students often do not enroll. Secondary school graduates are encouraged through government scholarships to attend the university in the capital or technical and teacher colleges.

**Health.** Papua New Guineans are covered under a national healthcare system that usually requires only a small fee for services and medicine. Hospitals are located in provincial government centers but often are not well equipped. Health aid posts are located in rural areas, but people must often walk for hours to reach them. Traditional herbal medication is still common. Many believe *puri puri* can be used to both inflict and cure illness. This belief allows serious diseases like AIDS to spread more rapidly among rural people. Infant mortality is higher in remote areas. Typhoid and other water-borne diseases and infections are common, along with hepatitis and respiratory and sexually transmitted diseases. Malaria is common on the coast, in the lowlands, and on islands. Roughly 60 percent of the population lacks access to safe water and sanitation.

### AT A GLANCE

#### Events and Trends.

- In December 2003, the governments of Papua New Guinea and Australia reached an agreement for 230 Australian police to help Papua New Guinea combat crime. The agreement also calls for 70 Australian civil servants to take posts in Papua New Guinea's public sector as part of an effort to reduce corruption. Australia proposed the deal following other recent initiatives to improve stability in the Pacific region.
- In July 2002 elections, Sir Michael Somare defeated incumbent Mekere Morauta to become prime minister. Somare is a veteran of the nation's politics; he served as prime minister in two previous governments and led Papua New Guinea when it gained independence in 1975.

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