

Listening 13

You will hear some information about Vanuatu, a country in Oceania.

1. How many islands form Vanuatu?
2. When did the Europeans begin settling the islands?
3. What made population decrease in 1935?
4. What is considered to be the basis of Vanuatu's economy?
5. Which are two of the official languages of Vanuatu?
6. How is Vanuatu's climate?
7. What happened both in 1999 and 2002?

Listening 13 (Answers)

You will hear some information about Vanuatu, a country in Oceania.

1. How many islands form Vanuatu?

Vanuatu is formed by 15 islands.

2. When did the Europeans begin settling the islands?

They began settling in the island in the (late) 18th century.

3. What made population decrease in 1935?

Disease/illnesses made the population decrease.

4. What is considered to be the basis of Vanuatu's economy?

The basis of Vanuatu's economy is agriculture.

5. Which are two of the official languages of Vanuatu?

The official languages of Vanuatu are English, French and Bislama.

6. How is Vanuatu's climate?

It is tropical or sub-tropical.

7. What happened both in 1999 and 2002?

In 1999 and 2002 there were an earthquake and a tsunami.

Listening 13 (Transcript)

You will hear information about Vanuatu.

Good morning everyone and welcome to lecture 7 in a series of 12 on the island nations of the Pacific Ocean. Today we will be talking about Vanuatu. Vanuatu is a group of about 15 islands divided into six provinces which can be found around 1700 kilometers from the eastern coast of Australia. Its capital city is called Port Vila, which has a population of more or less 30,000. The total population in Vanuatu is some 200,000.

Now, I first want to say some brief words about the history and politics of the island and then we can talk about its culture and geography.

Many of the islands of Vanuatu have been inhabited for thousands of years, the oldest archaeological evidence found dating to 2000 BC. In 1605, the Portuguese explorer Pedro Fernández de Quirés became the first European to reach the islands, believing it to be part of Terra Australis. Europeans began settling the islands in the late 18th century, after British explorer James Cook visited the islands on his second voyage, and gave them the name New Hebrides.

In 1887, the islands began to be administered by a French-British naval commission. In 1906, the French and British agreed to joint Anglo-French rule over the New Hebrides. Vanuatu suffered from a practice wherein half of the adult male population of some of the islands became indentured workers in Australia. Because of introduced diseases, the population fell greatly, to 45,000 in 1935.

During World War II, two of the islands were used as allied military bases. In the 1960s, the Vanuatu people started to press for self-governance and later independence; full sovereignty was finally granted by both European nations on July 30, 1980. It joined the UN in 1981, and the Non-Aligned Movement in 1983.

During the 1990s, Vanuatu experienced political instability, which eventually resulted in a more decentralized government. The Vanuatu Mobile Force, a paramilitary group, attempted a coup in 1996, because of a pay dispute. There were allegations of corruption in the government. New elections were called several times after 1997.

As far as the economy goes, it is based primarily on agriculture, which provides a living for 65% of the population. Fishing, offshore financial services, and tourism are the other main supporters of the economy. About 50,000 tourists visit the island group annually. Mineral deposits are negligible and the country has no known petroleum deposits.

Economic development is hindered by dependence on relatively few commodity exports, vulnerability to natural disasters, and long distances from main markets and between constituent islands.

GDP growth rose less than 3% on average in the 1990s. In response to foreign concerns, the government has promised to tighten regulation of its offshore financial center. In mid-2002, the government also stepped up efforts to boost tourism.

There are three official languages: English, French and Bislama, which is a creole language which evolved from English. In addition, over one hundred local languages are spoken on the islands. The density of languages per capita is the highest of any nation in the world with an average of only 2000 speakers per language.

Most of the islands are mountainous and of volcanic origin, and have a tropical or sub-tropical climate. The highest point in Vanuatu is Mount Tabwemasana, at 1879 m. There are several active volcanoes in Vanuatu, including Lopevi as well as several underwater ones.

A severe earthquake in November 1999, followed by a tsunami, caused extensive damage to the northern island of Pentecote, leaving thousands homeless. Another powerful earthquake in January 2002 caused extensive damage in the capital, Port Vila, and surrounding areas, and also was followed by a tsunami.

The future for Vanuatu is very uncertain. Global warming and the threat of rising sea levels puts this group of islands in imminent danger. Much of the Vanuatu land mass lies just a few feet above the waves. If sea levels do continue to rise at current rates, the inhabitants of Vanuatu may be seeking refuge in New Zealand or Australia before the end of the century.