

# in the South Pacific

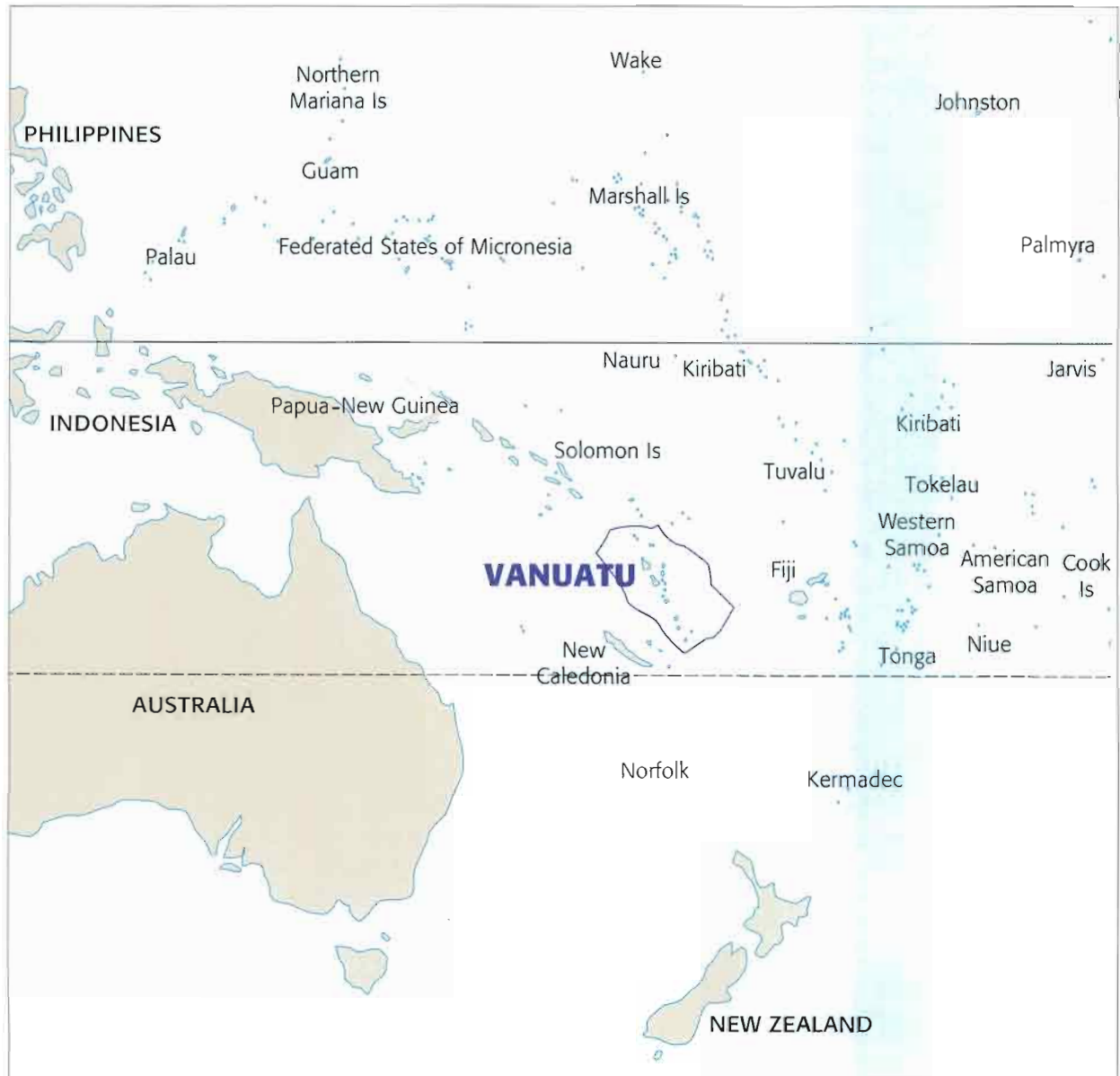
## Vanuatu

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Previously known as the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides set up in 1906, Vanuatu, "Our Land Forever", is one of the newest sovereign state in the world, born in 1980. Broadly Y shaped, the Vanuatu archipelago is made of 13 principal and many small islands, extending from North to South for about 850 km in the South-West of the Pacific Ocean. Vanuatu covers a land area of 12 190 km<sup>2</sup> and an Exclusive Economic zone of 680 000 km<sup>2</sup>. With Papua New Guinea, the Solomon

Islands, New Caledonia and Fiji, Vanuatu belongs to the subregion of Oceania called Melanesia, "black islands", distinct from Polynesia, "multiple islands" and Micronesia, "very small islands", which are the three main anthropological grouping of islands in the South Pacific.

Located 800 km west of Fiji and respectively 540 and 1 770 km east of New Caledonia and Australia, the archipelago of Vanuatu is made of rugged mountains, plateaus, coastal terraces and offshore coral reefs. With 35 % of the land above 300 m and the highest mountain (Mt Tabwemasana, 1877 m) on Espiritu Santo, the largest island, it shows that



Vanuatu consists mainly of high islands, and counts no atolls except in the North (Reef Island) and in the South (Aniwa).

Active volcanoes are to be found on the islands of Tanna (Mt Yasur), Ambrym (Mt Benbow and Mt Marium), Matthew and Hunter, notwithstanding several submarine volcanoes. Because Vanuatu is located on the margin of the Pacific plate where it collides with the Indo-Australian plate, the country experiences significant seismic activity, with earthquakes of a magnitude up to 7.4 in 2010.

Vanuatu's climate is tropical (from wet in the North to sub-tropical in the South). There are severe contrasts between seasons: May to October being the dry season with fresh south-easterly breezes producing fine days and cool nights; November to April being the wet season, when higher temperatures, heavy rains and occasional cyclones are experienced. Average rainfall is over 2 m in Port Vila and over 3 m in Luganville!

Mainly Melanesian, the people of Vanuatu (called Ni-Vanuatu or, simply, Ni-van) speak more than 100 languages, beside Bislama, a pidgin which is a national official language beside English and French. Just before becoming Vanuatu, the population of the New Hebrides accounted for 110 000 in 1979. The end-year 2009 estimate gave the population of Vanuatu as 243 000, an increase of 54 000 over the total of 186 000 estimated in 1999, itself an increase of 44 000 over the estimate of 142 000 in 1989. Some 76% of the total population of Vanuatu was recorded as residing in rural areas in 2009, compared to 78.5 in 1999, 82% in 1989 and 84% in 1979. Almost 50% of all agricultural household members in Vanuatu are less than 20 years old, 44% being between 20 and 59 years old.

The GDP (Purchase Power Parity) was in 2009 about US\$ 4 700 per capita. The four pillars of the Vanuatuan economy are agriculture, tourism, off-shore financial services, and cattle raising. Vanuatu constitution rules land rights: "All land belongs to the indigenous custom owners and their descendants", making adjustments for foreigners and expatriates through a leasing system under government control. Agriculture remains a very important sector of the economy of Vanuatu. Household income from agriculture comes mainly from crop gardens and some cash crops. Exports are made up mainly of agricultural products (about 73% of the total exports in 2007). Exports are dominated by copra, kava, coffee and beef, and sometimes cocoa and timber. But the level of production and exports have varied considerably over the years. Value for imported rice and wheat flour in Vanuatu has more than doubled over the last ten years, meaning imported food is covering by now 27% of the nutritional needs of the whole population, even if market gardening is developing in the peri-urban areas of Vila and Luganville. As a

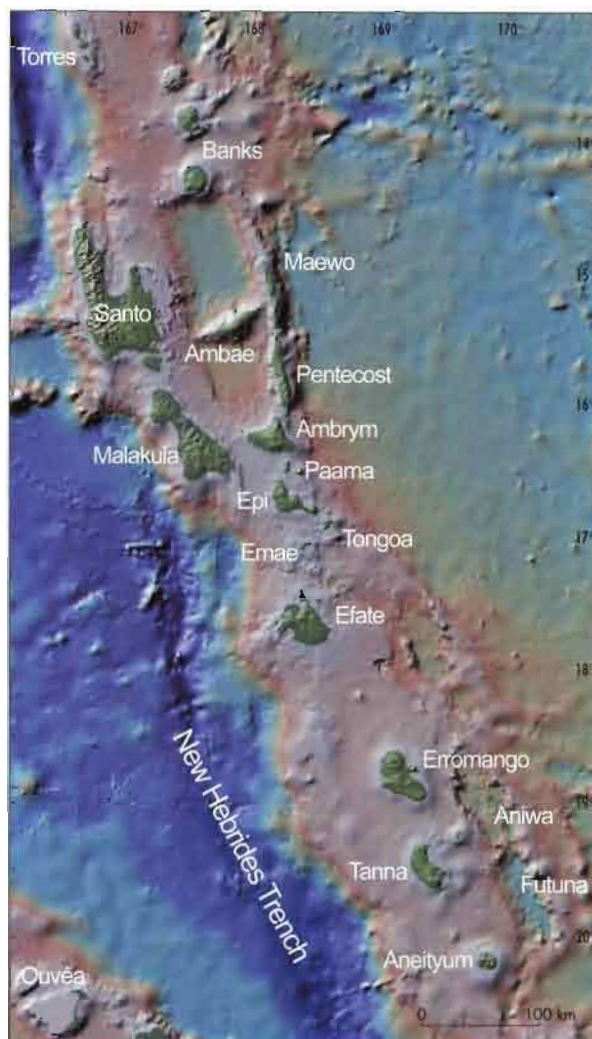


Figure 2: The archipelago of Vanuatu extends over 7 degrees of latitude and is bordered to the west by the New Hebrides Trench. Source: GeoMapApp, <http://www.geomapapp.org>.

consequence, external trade is totally imbalanced, the value of imports outnumbering the value of exports. Tourism brings in foreign exchange, as Vanuatu is widely recognized as one of a premium vacation destination. Foreign visitors were close to 200 000 in 2008, a sharp increase from 2000, when there were only 57 000 tourist arrivals.

Under the Anglo-French rule, the condominium was divided into four Districts (Southern, Central No. 1, Central No. 2, Northern) each under the joint charge of a French and a British agent, Port Vila and Luganville having their own town advisory board. Five years after New Hebrides became Vanuatu, Districts were replaced by eleven Local Government Councils, with the ambition that local control would solve the injustices and imbalances of the past, and shape more appropriate development strategies targeted at, and implemented by, the local people under the central government's supervision. In 1994, Councils were replaced by six Local Government Provinces (Tafea, Shefa, Malampa, Penama, Sanma, Torba) with the view, once again, that the local people should be involved in local development.



The Republic of Vanuatu is a parliamentary democracy, with President, Prime Minister and Parliament. Besides national authorities, Vanuatu also has high-placed people (chiefs and leaders) at the village level, giving a sense of place to the locals as Vanuatu government is still believing in community-based development. The constitution provides for the establishment of village courts to deal with questions of customary law. The constitution also gives clear recognition to the rights and interests of traditional landholders, who remain the principal managers and users of biological resources and systems in Vanuatu.

Vanuatu has joined several multinational institutions. Since 1980, Australia, the United Kingdom (until 2005), France, and New Zealand have provided the bulk of Vanuatu's development aid. However, more recently China has been providing increasing amounts of aid but Australia is still providing most of the external assistance.

In terms of international biodiversity networks and conventions, Vanuatu is a member of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP; <http://www.sprep.org/members/map.htm>), or *Programme Régional Océanien de l'Environnement* (<http://www.sprep.org/Francais/PROE.htm>).

Vanuatu is, since 1989, a Contracting Party to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES; <http://www.cites.org/>). Vanuatu also ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1993 (<http://www.cbd.int/countries/?country=vu>), under which it completed its National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy in 1999, and submitted its Third national report in 2006. Vanuatu is not yet a contracting party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, nor to the Global

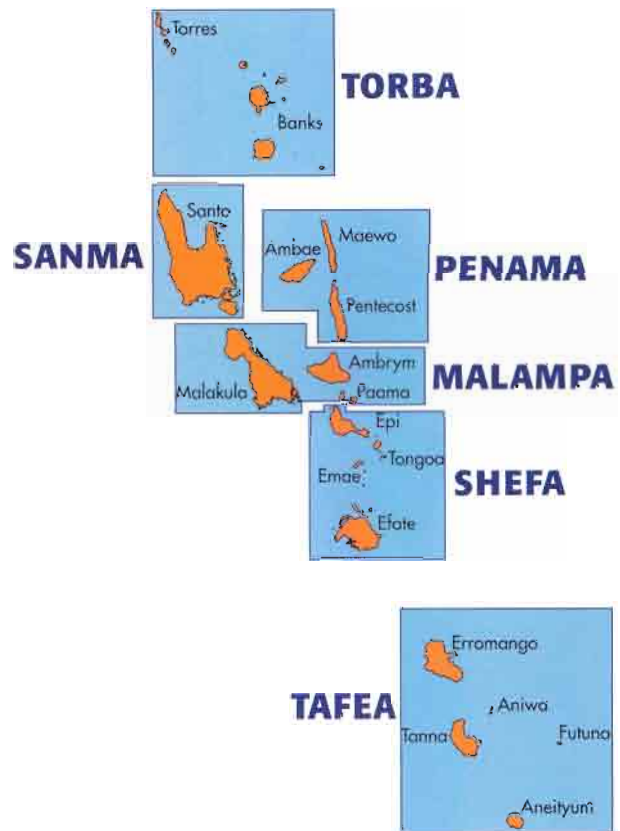
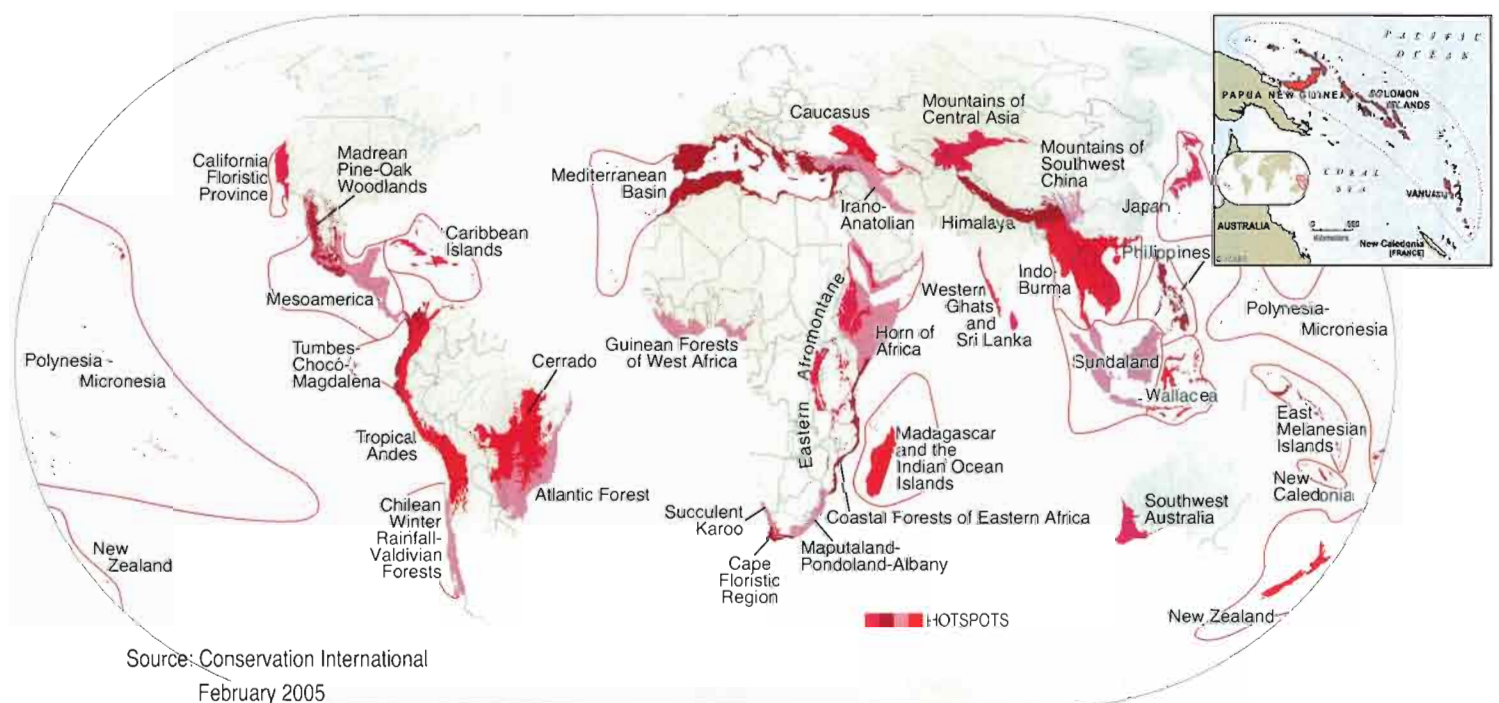


Figure 3: Administrative divisions of Vanuatu. The province of Sanma derives its name from the islands of SANTo and MALo.

Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF).

Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, the Bismarck and Admiralty Islands (Papua New Guinea) constitute *Conservation International's* East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot (Fig. 4, below). Together with Solomon's Santa Cruz Islands (Temotu Province), Vanuatu also constitutes one of *Birdlife International's* Endemic Bird Area.



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