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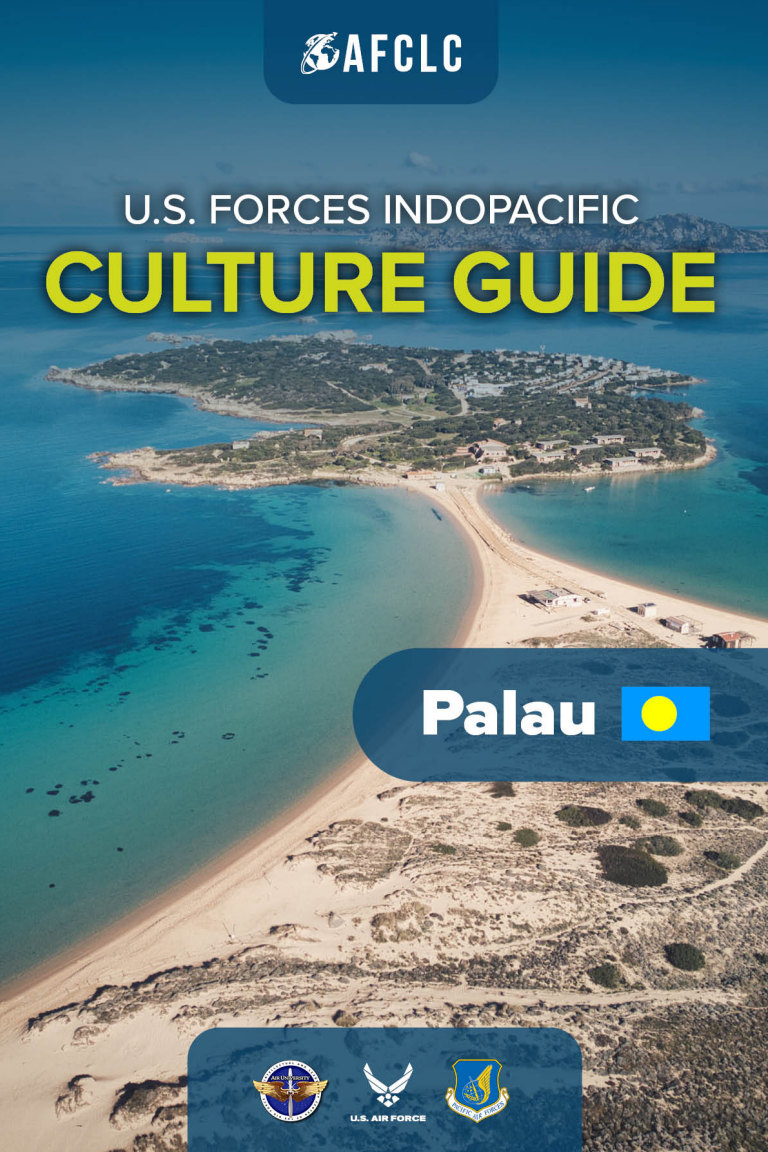
CULTURE GUIDE



Palau

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 "Culture General" provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on Oceania.

Part 2 "Culture Specific" describes unique cultural features of Palauan society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training.

For further information, contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil or visit the AFCLC website at https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/.

PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing–an image, word, object, idea, or story–represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value–freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories–what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains"–in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains–which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page)–as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural

boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview–how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

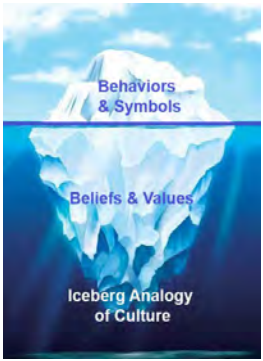
Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true–regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).



In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel through Oceania, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable, or which occurred prior to written language.

Oceania comprises some 20 sovereign nations, states, and territories that span a large portion of the Western Pacific Ocean, from Australia, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and Palau in the West to French Polynesia in the East. The region is so diverse that experts typically divide it into four sub-regions: Australia and New Zealand, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. While the people in each of the sub-regions share certain traits, all belong to the greater Oceania region. Furthermore, Oceania is characterized by distinct cultures that typically have more in common with each other than with cultures in other parts of the world. While Hawaii is notably a critical part of Polynesia, since it is a US state, it is not included in this guide.

Archaeological evidence suggests early humans first occupied Australia as early as 65,000 years ago, and parts of PNG and the Solomon Islands some 45,000 years ago. In contrast, humans only reached some islands in Polynesia as recently as 1000 BC. Historians tend to agree that early waves of migrants from Southeast Asia first settled in Australia and Melanesia, and later waves occupied Micronesia and Polynesia.

Many early inhabitants subsisted as seafaring hunter gatherers, typically consuming marine life and island vegetation. These early seafarers domesticated plants and animals, transporting

them between islands. As agricultural techniques became more advanced, residents cleared forests and transformed their island environments for cultivation and raising livestock.

Portugal's Ferdinand Magellan was the first notable European explorer to reach Oceania, when in 1521 he briefly landed on the Mariana Islands. Thereafter, English, French, German, and Spanish explorers sought to trade with and colonize the region. By the late 18th century, traders, whalers, and missionaries had settled across Oceania, bringing disease and weapons from Europe, resulting in the death of many islanders. Meanwhile, European powers and the US began to incorporate much of the region as official territories and colonies – political and social legacies that continue to influence the region today.

During the early 20th century, Japan sought to grow its influence in the Pacific Islands. When Germany withdrew its navy from Micronesia during World War I, Japan occupied the former German colonies in 1914, incorporating Micronesia into its expanding empire as an agricultural settler colony. In the 1930s, Japan built military fortifications in Micronesia before moving into Melanesia and Southeast Asia during the Pacific War. By 1942, the Japanese military had occupied large swathes of Oceania, which became the site of some of the war's most significant and violent battles. Over 215,000 Japanese, Australians, Americans, and indigenous islanders died in Oceania between 1942-45.

Over the subsequent decades, calls for independence grew across Oceania. While Australia and New Zealand had gained independence from Britain in the early 20th century, the island nations won independence much later. Samoa was the first, gaining independence from New Zealand in 1962. Several other countries achieved independence afterwards, with Palau the most recent in 1994. Others remain US or French territories. Apart from Australia and New Zealand, which joined in 1945,

most of Oceania joined the United Nations between the late 1970s and 1990s, after decolonization processes empowered them with the territorial sovereignty required for membership.

During the mid-late 20th century, many isolated islands in the region became sites for British, French, and US atomic testing and other military operations. The nuclear and missile tests have caused permanent loss of access to traditional homelands, including the forced removal of some inhabitants, and exposure to radiation causing significant health issues.

In the early 21st century, indigenous groups across Oceania began campaigns to assert their rights and culture, largely led by Aboriginal Australians and Maori in New Zealand. In recent years, many of the smaller island nations have increased attention to climate change, as rising ocean levels will affect inhabitants of Oceania to a greater extent than other regions. Several nations have joined organizations to combat climate change and promote conservation, often collaborating to amplify the small island states' pro-environment message in global fora.

Nevertheless, the region is not always united. In early 2021, Micronesian nations withdrew from the Pacific Islands Forum, an international organization that focuses on regional issues, due to a dispute over their representation in the group. Despite the recent political clash, as of 2023, Oceania remains largely stable and focused on combating the consequences of climate change, notably the rising sea levels, bleached coral reefs, and localized disasters like increasingly powerful storms and wildfires.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. European and Japanese colonial rule drastically changed society in Oceania. Further, the subjugation

of the indigenous population, import of South and East Asian workers, and arrival of European and Japanese immigrants during the 19th-20th centuries permanently altered the region's ethnic and racial makeup, which today varies by location.

While residents of Australia and New Zealand are primarily of European ancestry, those of other nations identify mostly as indigenous to specific islands. Some claim broader identities, as Melanesians, Micronesians, or Polynesians. Some nations such as Fiji and Palau also have significant immigrant populations.

Although all nations in Oceania are nominally democratic, their political structures are varied and relations with former colonial powers continue to influence present-day society. Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu are sovereign nations. Of these countries, Australia, New Zealand, PNG, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu are constitutional monarchies with parliamentary systems. Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom is head-of-state, represented by a Governor-General, and an elected Prime Minister (PM) serves as head-of-government.

Tonga is also a constitutional monarchy led by a hereditary king, who is head-of-state and commander-in-chief. An elected parliament selects a PM, who is ceremoniously appointed by the King. Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, and Vanuatu are parliamentary republics. In Fiji, Samoa, and Vanuatu, a PM serves as head-of-government and a President head-of-state, known as ***O le Ao Mamalu o le Malo*** (head-of-state) in Samoa. In Kiribati and Nauru, the elected President is head-of-state and government.

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and Palau are Freely Associated States (FAS) under three distinct Compacts of Free Association (COFA) agreements with the US. Each country's COFA outlines its unique terms with the US, while recognizing its sovereignty

and voluntary participation in the COFA, including an independent foreign policy. Under the COFA, among other terms, the US provides visa-free access to the US and payment for access to land for military installations in FAS territories.

Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and American Samoa are US territories, though their relations with the US government vary. Guam is an unincorporated organized territory, the CNMI an unincorporated territory and commonwealth, and American Samoa an unincorporated unorganized territory. While residents of Guam and the CNMI are US citizens, those of American Samoa are considered US nationals, who may reside in the US and apply for citizenship.

Likewise, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna are French territories, whose relations with the French government vary. French Polynesia – comprising the Gambier Islands, Marquesas Islands, Society Islands, Tuamotu Archipelago, and Tubuai Islands – is a semi-autonomous overseas country. New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna are territories known as overseas collectivities.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Many of Oceania's early inhabitants led rich spiritual lives. While little is known of early religions, many were likely polytheistic. Early inhabitants recognized gods and spirits that constructed the universe and influenced everyday life, believing in connections between the natural and spiritual worlds. Accordingly, many Oceanic people venerated ancestral spirits, which influenced outcomes in agriculture, war, pregnancy, and other events.

When European explorers reached Oceania in the 16th century, they introduced Christianity for the first time. In the 17th century, Spanish Roman Catholic missionaries operating from their base in the Philippines began gaining converts across the northern part of the region. In the late 18th century, British Protestant missionaries began proselytizing in eastern Polynesia. By the 19th century, various branches of Christianity had become well established in Oceania, as Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and Seventh-day Adventists all established missions in the region.

Residents of several nations in Oceania rejected the colonial introduction of Christianity. Some spiritual leaders sought to isolate their communities from Christianity, while others combined local religious traditions with those of Christianity to form syncretic religions. However, in the 1970s, Christian movements opposed to traditional and syncretic religions flourished in the region. Many of these movements were Pentecostal.

Nevertheless, after centuries of colonization and missionary work, today, most people in Oceania are Christian. Over 90% of inhabitants in Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia identify as Christian. Of the small island nations, Fiji is the most religiously diverse. Although most Fijians identify as Christian, over 30% are Hindu or Muslim, primarily due to a large immigrant population. Notably, New Zealand is the only nation in Oceania in which Christianity is not the majority religion, as nearly half of New Zealanders identified with no religion.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called “fictive kin”).

Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of Oceanic societies. Regional inhabitants tend to maintain strong

connections with family members, supporting them emotionally and financially, while providing physical care for elderly or ailing kin if needed. Although residence patterns differ across the region, multiple generations often reside together in one household or live in close proximity. In some regions, female-headed households are common.

Most Oceania residents live in urban areas, notably 100% of Nauruans and over 92% of residents of Guam and the CNMI. However, some 74% or more of residents of PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu live in rural areas. As such, housing types vary significantly within and between nations. In much of the region, residents tend to live on one or a handful of principal islands, with the rest scarcely populated or uninhabited. Urbanization has changed life in many areas. As both men and women take advantage of the enhanced educational and employment opportunities available in urban areas, family structures have become more diverse.

Due to Oceania's diversity, courtship and marriage traditions vary significantly by group and location. While close family ties mean relatives have some influence over children's choice of spouses, men and women increasingly choose their own partners. Some couples marry in civil, religious, or traditional ceremonies, while others cohabitate but remain unwed.

5. Sex and Gender

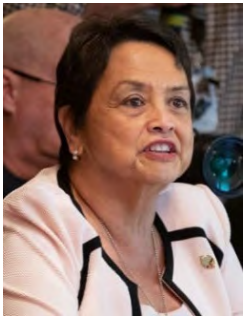
Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

Some cultures in Oceania recognize a broad range of genders besides male and female. Although the cultures of Oceania tend to be patriarchal (men hold most power and authority) and privilege the male's role as provider and leader, some societies are traditionally matrilineal (inheritance, property, and the family name pass from mother to daughter), where mothers determine

a man's rank and status. In some places, primarily in Micronesia and Polynesia, society is organized into a hierarchical system based on heredity, in which rank and status are determined by sex-defined lineages. Conversely, society is more egalitarian (the principle that all people are equal) in Melanesia, where strong, persuasive men often achieve rather than inherit power.

Despite most countries' progressive gender equality laws and policies, women face continued challenges to their participation in the workforce. In much of the region, women still assume the traditional roles of wives and mothers, often having to balance both domestic duties and employment. Workforce participation rates vary by country. As of 2022, nearly as many women as men were employed in PNG and the Solomon Islands, while the ratio is closer to 50% in Fiji and Samoa.

As of early 2023, women held nearly half of parliamentary seats in New Zealand (the world's fourth-highest rate), just over 44% in Australia, and 11% in Fiji. Women occupied 10% or fewer of parliamentary seats in most other countries in the region. Only New Zealand has had multiple women heads-of-state. Women have been historically more involved in traditional than national political affairs.



Fertility rates have fallen significantly in recent decades, with Australia, Wallis and Futuna, and Palau averaging less than two children per woman. Women in Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Guam typically have an average of three children, though the rates have declined by about half since 1960. Abortion laws vary by country. While Australia's laws are the least restrictive, Palau and Tonga prohibit abortion with no explicit legal exception.

Australia and New Zealand are the only countries in the region that have legalized same-sex marriage. Although same-sex relations are permitted in some cultures, the governments of Kiribati, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Tuvalu criminalize homosexuality.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

Oceania's linguistic diversity is unique, as the region contains more than 1,000 languages – over 20% of the world's total. PNG alone is home to over 800 languages, more than any other country in the world. Despite this linguistic variety, some linguistic groups are spoken by only a few dozen people. Consequently, some regional languages have become or soon will be extinct, as the children of native speakers opt to learn more widely spoken languages and dialects. English is commonly spoken in much of Oceania and is at least one of the official languages (in addition to indigenous languages) in most states that are not French territories.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) or culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

While education has improved across the region in recent years, quality and attainment vary. Social instability, poverty, economic inequality, natural disasters, and emigration negatively impact the delivery and quality of education. Generally, children from poor and rural backgrounds are less likely to attend school and more likely to receive a lower-quality education. While literacy rates in much of Oceania are above 90%, they are much lower in PNG and the Solomon Islands.

Public investment in education varies widely by location and does not always correlate to quality educational systems. In recent years, the Solomon Islands government has spent some 10-13% of GDP on education, though about one in four women remain illiterate. Meanwhile, Vanuatu spends below 5% of GDP on education and has a literacy rate of nearly 89%. Enrollment rates also vary widely. While over 96% of students of the appropriate age in Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, and New Zealand are enrolled in primary education, less than 75% are enrolled in PNG, RMI, and the Solomon Islands.

Many countries have 2-year community colleges but lack 4-year post-secondary institutions. Australia, New Zealand, and PNG have several colleges and universities, as do Guam and the CNMI. The University of the South Pacific was founded in 1968 with its main campus in Fiji and now has campuses in several other countries. Still, many residents travel to Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, or institutions outside the region to pursue post-secondary degrees.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. While this concept of time remains true for some countries in Oceania, in others, establishing and maintaining relationships takes precedence over meeting deadlines, punctuality, or efficiently accomplishing tasks. The workday tends to run on a similar schedule as in the US, though some businesses keep more informal hours or close for midday breaks, extending their hours into the evening. Social events often start at flexible times, after enough guests arrive.

While concepts of personal space vary by country, keeping an arm's length is the norm. Handshakes are usually the most common form of greeting, though nodding to acquaintances or

kissing close friends and family on the cheek are typical in many places. Conversational touching tends to be minimal except among close friends or family. While direct eye contact is common in places such as Fiji and PNG, intermittent or indirect eye contact is the norm in Kiribati, Samoa, and among certain groups like Aboriginal Australians.

The rhythm of daily life typically changes during national holidays, many of which reflect Christian traditions and historical events. As most countries in Oceania were colonies, many people celebrate national independence days with fanfare.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill, and style. Much of Oceania's art, architecture, dance, music, poetry, and sports reflect the region's Pacific location, colonial history, and modern global trends. Although dress varies by location and group, many people in Oceania follow recent US or European fashion trends and wear traditional attire only for holidays, special occasions, or ceremonies.

Music and dance vary greatly by country. Global rock and pop music, along with local variants that feature folk and country genres, are common across Oceania. Traditional music and dance in Micronesia and Polynesia tend to be connected with storytelling and poetry, while Melanesian dances usually emphasize movement, rituals, and the supernatural world. In Australia, indigenous dances are typically closely connected with music and song.

The most popular sport across the region is rugby, particularly in Australia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. National teams compete in rugby matches internationally and across Oceania. Some locals have relocated to play for international teams, becoming a mainstay of the sport. Some 20% of players in the 2011 Rugby World Cup identified as Pacific Islanders. In Micronesia, sports

introduced by Japan and the US are most popular: baseball in the FSM and Palau, and basketball in RMI. Soccer, known in many areas as football, is also widely played across Oceania. Other popular sports include cricket, swimming, and field athletics.

Traditional handicrafts such as woodcarving, leatherwork, and weaving are prevalent in many parts of Oceania. While literature was primarily an oral tradition in much of the region, popular novelists and poets have recently explored their unique history and cultural heritage. Australia's Patrick White won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973 for his psychological narrative work.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures, and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

While cuisine varies across the region based on local products and tastes, residents tend to rely on many of the same staple ingredients, notably seafood, starches like taro, cassava, and yams, and tropical fruits. Many dishes are cooked in coconut milk, and dried coconut is a popular ingredient. Pit-roasted pig, fish, and vegetables are common cuisine for ceremonies and celebrations in much of the region. The consumption of high-calorie, processed foods and Western-style fast food has become increasingly common in recent decades.

Health in Oceania has improved in recent decades as evidenced by decreased infant mortality rates and longer life expectancies. While Australia and New Zealand have more physicians per person than the US, all other countries have far fewer. Accordingly, many residents seek healthcare outside their home nation if immigration policies, personal finances, or government programs allow for treatment abroad. Inhabitants of isolated islands and rural areas face challenges to healthcare access.

Noncommunicable diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease, account for most of the deaths in Oceania, though communicable diseases account for over 22% of deaths in Kiribati and the Solomon Islands and over 30% in PNG. Indigenous and low-income inhabitants often face more health challenges than their compatriots. Obesity is a significant problem – of the world's 10 countries with the highest rates of obesity, 9 are in Oceania. The availability of imported processed and preserved foods are largely responsible for Oceania's high levels of obesity.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

Prior to colonization, most regional inhabitants subsisted on fishing, farming, and localized trade. In the colonial era, foreign governments and companies extracted natural resources such as minerals, agricultural products, oil, and fish. Today, tourism is the largest sector in much of Oceania. While Australia and New Zealand have advanced economies and financial markets, most other nations rely on foreign aid. Many inhabitants are also reliant on remittances from relatives living abroad. Economic dependence on foreign governments and organizations has caused many governments in the region to pursue rapid expansion of their tourism and extractive industry sectors.

Australia is by far the largest economy in Oceania, with GDP over $1.67 trillion in 2022. GDP per capita in Australia and New Zealand is more than double that of other countries in Oceania. Fiji, Palau, Nauru, and the US and French territories tend to have relatively high living standards, with GDP per capita generally above $10,000. On the other hand, GDP per capita in Kiribati,

the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu is below $3,000, where many residents live below the poverty line.

From 2020-21, Oceania confronted the collapse of the tourism industry and decreased remittances, largely due to COVID-19 pandemic. Assuming the pandemic continues to recede and trade and tourism rebound, experts suggest GDP growth will average 4% in 2023 before stabilizing at 3% in 2024-2027.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Roads form the primary infrastructure in Oceania, though quality varies by country and tends to deteriorate in rural areas. Ports and piers are vital for local transportation and trade. Though air infrastructure is substandard in many places, airports are essential for tourism and reducing many islands' isolation.

Despite some investment in solar energy on outer rural islands, Oceania is largely dependent on fossil fuels. Apart from Australia, much of the region has limited energy resources and must import oil and gas to meet growing energy needs. Some countries, notably New Zealand, generate a large share of energy from hydropower.

New Zealand ranks highest in Oceania in a 2022 worldwide press freedom ranking. Observers generally consider media to be free in much of the region, though journalists are sometimes victims of government intimidation, threats of censorship, and eroding independence. Telecommunications infrastructure varies. As of 2021, Palau had the highest rate of mobile phone users at over 130 subscriptions per 100 people, compared to less than 40 in the FSM and RMI. Internet use ranges from about 15% in the Papua New Guinea to nearly 96% in Australia.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Oceanic society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Palau.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

The westernmost nation in the Pacific Ocean's Caroline Islands, Palau (known locally as Belau) comprises over 400 islands, eight of which are inhabited. For centuries, local communities traded with other Pacific Islands. The first notable contact with Europeans occurred in 1783, when British merchants wrecked their ship in southern Palau. In the ensuing centuries, Europeans and Japanese colonized the islands. After becoming a United Nations (UN) Trust Territory administered by the US in 1947, Palau experienced political turmoil before declaring independence in 1994. Since then, the country has become a steadfast advocate of environmental causes and a global leader in conservation.

Early History

Archeological evidence suggests that early inhabitants arrived in the islands comprising Palau around 1400 BC. Scholars believe these early settlers arrived on long-distance ocean canoes from present-day Malaysia, Indonesia, New Guinea, and the Philippines. Some inhabitants began building large-scale structures around 2,000 years ago. Basalt stone monoliths on the island of Babeldaob indicate the existence of a large ***bai*** (community meeting house) that likely served as a gathering point for the local community.

Two Confederations

While written records are scarce, before the 18th-century arrival of Europeans, Palauans likely divided into two loose coalitions of villages that some scholars classify into northern and southern confederations. One alliance was based in Oreor village on

Koror Island in the South and the other in Melekeok village on Babeldaob Island in the North. In each confederation, a council of women appointed the titular head-of-state, the high chief. The ***Ibedul*** was the high chief of the Idid clan of Oreor, and the ***Reklai*** was that of the Uudes clan of Melekeok.

Scholars believe the two equally powerful confederations often engaged in ceremonial warfare that followed strict rules of engagement and served to redistribute resources across the island communities. Although confrontations sometimes ended in fatalities, the number was usually previously agreed upon, and leaders typically halted conflict before losses became too great.

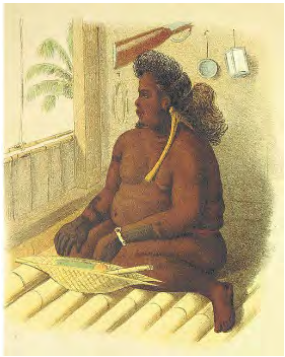
The British Arrival

While Spanish explorers briefly landed in the Caroline Islands and made initial contact with locals around 1710, Europeans' first significant exchange with Palauans came decades later. In 1783, the British East India Company's Captain Henry Wilson wrecked his ship, the Antelope, off the Rock Islands south of Koror. As the crew came ashore to organize repairs, the *Ibedul* sent men to investigate and greet the stranded traders. Communicating in the Malay language, Captain Wilson and the *Ibedul* established friendly relations. Subsequently, the Palauans provided the British with much-needed supplies and assistance to repair the Antelope.

In return, the *Ibedul* asked Wilson for support against the rival confederation, and so the British supplied him firearms and ammunition. With their new weapons, the *Ibedul*'s fighters defeated the northern confederation. This victory ended the historical balance between the confederations and tipped the political divide in favor of the *Ibedul* and Oreor of the South. Upon the British crew's departure 3 months later, they left weapons for the *Ibedul* and took his second son, Lee Boo, to London. Although he died of smallpox within months of his arrival, Lee Boo's highly publicized reception in Britain greatly increased European interest in Palau.

European Trade and Conflict

Seeking to profit from the largely unregulated trade in the Caroline Islands, other Europeans established permanent trading posts in Palau in subsequent decades. In 1843, Scotland's Andrew Cheyne arrived in Palau and bartered British tobacco, metal, and firearms for local products with the *Ibedul*. Cheyne later established some of the island's first plantations, using Chinese laborers to work the land and develop small coffee, cotton, and sugar industries. Another trader, Irish-American David Dean O'Keefe, controlled trade between Koror and present-day Micronesia's Yap Islands in the 1870s. Traders from other countries, such as Germany and Spain, also visited the islands.



The merchants had conflicts with local communities that led to foreign intervention. When Cheyne attempted to profit from the ongoing conflict between the two confederations by selling weapons to both the *Ibedul* and *Reklai*, the *Ibedul* had him killed in 1866. Later, conflict between the *Reklai* and O'Keefe prompted members of the northern confederation to mistreat some of O'Keefe's crew, who had wrecked in their territory. Both events caught the attention of the British government, and in 1883, it dispatched a naval expedition to Palau that forced the high chiefs to sign a peace treaty.

Brief Spanish Rule

Meanwhile, Britain, Germany, and Spain had been competing for formal ownership of Palau. In 1885, Pope Leo XIII (the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, Italy) settled the dispute between the rival European powers by issuing the Protocol of Rome. The document recognized the territorial claims of Spain, which already had a colony based in present-day Manila in the Philippines. However, the Protocol also allowed Germany and Britain to continue their commercial enterprises in Palau.

In 1891, Spanish Capuchin missionaries introduced Catholicism to the region and established the first permanent Catholic mission in Palau (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). However, since the Spanish Empire was weak and its influence minimal, in 1898, Spain lost the Spanish-American War and was forced to cede the Philippines to the US. With the loss of Manila and a ruined navy, Spain could no longer govern its Pacific territories, which included Palau. Spain sold them to Germany a year later.

Short-Lived German Administration

Administering Palau from its protectorate in present-day Papua New Guinea, Germany entrusted Jamaican-born Englishman James Gibbons with most governance tasks. As head of the local police, Gibbons enforced German prohibitions on the consumption of alcohol, limited the use of firearms, and collected taxes from European tourists visiting the islands. Gibbons, who married into the *Ibedul*'s clan, was also a founding member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Palau (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

In the early 20th century, German Capuchin missionaries, who began to replace their Spanish counterparts, assisted Gibbons in establishing lucrative copra (dried coconut) and phosphate industries on the islands (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*). Although the Germans invested heavily in the new sectors, agricultural pests and Palauan apathy to European commerce prevented their significant expansion. Meanwhile, local governance was stringent, as the Germans sought to minimize conflicts between northern and southern confederations and reduce the scope of traditional religious celebrations (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). The latter effort caused tensions with some Palauans.

During this period, Palau was the focus of extensive academic research. As part of a ***Südsee*** (South Sea) expedition, German anthropologists visited Palau in 1908-10 to record cultural

practices and social structures. Their published work became the first comprehensive account of Palauan culture in Europe.

Japanese Invasion and the South Seas Mandate

Meanwhile, Japanese companies sought to establish their own copra and fishing industries in Palau. In 1914, Germany (together with Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire) entered World War I (WWI) against the Allies (Britain, France, Russia, Japan, and the US). Exploiting Germany's weak hold over its Pacific colonies, Japan invaded Palau. Upon WWI's 1918 end, the League of Nations (the precursor to the UN) formalized Japan's control over the Caroline Islands, including Palau, in the South Seas Mandate.

Japan quickly unified the South Seas Mandate with its growing empire in East Asia, sending waves of Japanese immigrants, who soon outnumbered the Palauans, to establish businesses in Koror. The government in Japan paid closer attention to the islands than prior European administrations. The Japanese sought to impose their culture and loyalty to the Japanese Emperor. Further, Japanese officials established the islands' first mandatory educational program, with instruction in Japanese (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Japan's efforts to expand its influence in the Pacific soon conflicted with the provisions of the South Seas Mandate. As a result, Japan formally left the League of Nations in 1935. As the number of Japanese immigrants continued to grow over the next

several years, Japan began to consolidate and militarize its Pacific holdings. By 1940, some 27,700 Japanese lived in Palau, compared to around 7,000 native Palauans.

The Pacific War

In 1937, Japan invaded China, igniting the Second Sino-Japanese War that eventually became part of the greater conflict of World War II (WWII). At the same time, Japan began rapid construction of military installations in Palau. In late 1940, Japan entered WWII on the side of the Axis Powers (Nazi Germany and Italy). On December 7, 1941 it launched a surprise air attack on US naval forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. This event triggered the Pacific War, a term that refers to WWII events in the Pacific and East Asia. Expecting a US invasion of Palau, Japan enlisted Palauans to build defenses in Koror and southern Babeldaob. By mid-1942, the US was making gains in the Pacific War. To avoid casualties during US air raids and potential defections to US warships that docked off Palau, Japan evacuated many Palauans living in Anguar and Peleliu to jungles on Babeldaob.

In mid-September 1944, the US invaded the southern Palauan islands of Angaur and Peleliu. Expecting to take Palau within days, US forces encountered heavily reinforced Japanese defenses. As a result, the fight for Palau lasted over 2 months. Relying on guerilla tactics, the Japanese took cover in the dense forests of Angaur, slowing the US advance and resulting in high numbers of casualties. The Battle of Peleliu was even more difficult, as the island was covered in dense brush, and its multiple ridges exposed the US Marines to attack. Further, the Japanese used Peleliu's dense cave system to their benefit, storing supplies and surprising US troops from hidden tunnels. Nevertheless, by November 1944, US forces had secured both islands, though the fighting caused some 11,000 Japanese and 2,000 US deaths. Although few Palauans were killed in combat, hundreds likely died from starvation and disease.

Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

Over the next 50 years, the US governed Palau under various arrangements. Upon the Allies' 1945 victory, the US Navy administered the islands. In 1947, the newly created UN designated Palau and several other regional islands as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, which the US would administer. Under the UN guidelines, the US had significant leeway in governance and was authorized to use Palau for military purposes, though it also was compelled to submit periodic reports to the UN Security Council.

In the 1950s, various US government agencies developed roads and some businesses. Further, the US established schools which used English and the local language for instruction (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Nevertheless, some Palauans were critical of the US administration and began advocating independence.

To respond to these and other critiques and demands, the US convened the Congress of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands in 1964, with representatives attending from the regions of modern-day Palau, the Northern Mariana Islands, Marshall Islands, and Federated States of Micronesia. The US tasked the attending delegates with negotiating the terms of the diverse island groups' relationships with the US and the form in which they would organize politically. In the ensuing 14-year negotiations, Palau was represented by John Ngiraked and Lazarus Salii.

During the negotiations, the delegates created a new territorial designation, the Freely Associated State (FAS). The FAS terms gave the US government special military (including nuclear) rights in exchange for financial aid and other privileges such as citizens' right to live and work in the US. Not only did the island groups have to decide whether to ratify the FAS compact with the US, but also whether to join together as a political union or

as independent nations. The proposal was controversial across the region. Many Palauans were divided, with delegate Salii leading a faction that proposed unification with Micronesia.

Nevertheless, Salii's political opponents led a successful separatist campaign, and in a 1978 vote, some 55% of Palauans rejected political union with Micronesia. In this way, the boundaries of present-day Palau were set (see p. 1 of *Political and Social Relations*), and efforts to ratify a compact with the US would dominate Palauan politics for the next 16 years.

The Republic of Palau

The next task on the path to independence was to draft a constitution, which in 1979, Haruo Remeliik led a delegation to do so that included revisions to the US-proposed terms of the compact. The constitution, as drafted, would extend Palau's maritime borders and prohibit nuclear materials in Palauan territory. Despite US opposition, Palauans voted to adopt the constitution without modification in 1980. On January 1, 1981, the constitution took effect, formally establishing the Republic of Palau.

While still under UN-designated US trusteeship, Palau held its first presidential election in 1981. Haruo Remeliik, the favored candidate of followers of the Modekngei religion (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*), emerged victorious. Although Remeliik sought to ratify the compact to access US funding, ratification constitutionally required approval by at least 75% of the electorate. Due to opposition from rival politicians, particularly the *Ibedul*, who remained a political force, and environmental groups, attaining such a result was nearly impossible.

Remeliik's administration faced several other challenges. In 1981-82, government workers went on strike and paralyzed the country with violent demonstrations. Only after the US Congress dispensed special funds for wage increases did the unrest subside. Then, in 1983 and 1984, ratification of the compact failed in separate referenda. Although Remeliik won reelection in 1984, the controversy surrounding the compact continued, contributing to significant political infighting and instability.

Palau in Crisis

Compounding the political disorder, Palau defaulted on its debt in early 1985, when payment came due for a costly power plant that the Remeliik administration had contracted from British firm International Power Systems Company Ltd. (IPSECO). When IPSECO sued Palau for payment, the country faced economic ruin (see p. 2-3 of *Economics and Resources*). Stepping in, the US government identified corruption in the contracting process, namely that former delegate Lazarus Salii, then-Ambassador to the US, and the *Ibedul* had accepted bribes from IPSECO.

On June 30, 1985, the night before he was expected to appear on TV to speak about the IPSECO scandal, President Remeliik was assassinated, plunging Palau into political crisis. Minister of Justice Thomas Remengesau Sr. briefly became interim President until Vice President Alfonso Oiterong could return from the US to take office. In 1993, former delegate John Ngiraked and his wife, political rivals of Remeliik, were found guilty of Remeliik's murder.

The Salii Administration

Despite his association with the IPSECO scandal, Salii won the presidential election in late 1985, garnering support primarily through his close ties to the US and the family of the *Reklai*. In the hopes of easing passage of the compact, the US softened its stance on its nuclear provisions and increased the associated aid that would come with ratification. Nevertheless, public support for the compact did not

meet the 75% threshold required for ratification. In 1986-87, three referenda regarding the compact and one proposing a constitutional amendment lowering the 75% threshold failed.

Salii's failure to ratify the compact and the growing focus on his involvement in the IPSECO affair weakened his political support. In August 1988, Salii committed suicide. Vice President Thomas Remengesau Sr. became the provisional President once again, until a special election could be scheduled.

Independence

In the 1988 election, Ngiratkel Etipson narrowly won the Presidency. A prominent businessman, Etipson faced the same financial and political challenges as his predecessors, and the compact failed to pass for a seventh time in 1990. However, public opinion regarding the compact gradually began to change during this period, primarily due to a chronic shortage of government funds, which would substantially increase should the compact pass. For the 1992 election, President Etipson submitted a motion to include a referendum on a constitutional amendment lowering the threshold for approval of the compact from 75% to 50%. Further, the US agreed that it would increase its payments to Palau and reduce the duration of the compact from 50 to 15 years, with the opportunity for renewal upon review. Although Etipson lost the presidential election to his Vice President, Kuniwo Nakamura, voters approved the constitutional amendment.

In a 1993 vote, some 68% of Palauans voted in favor of the compact, finally approving its ratification on the eighth attempt. Consequently, President Nakamura assumed the task of guiding the world's last trust territory to independence. As was formerly determined, the US retained the right to establish and operate military installations in Palau in exchange for US funding and the right for Palauans to live and work in the US as non-immigrants. President Nakamura also settled with the British banks that had funded the IPSECO deal, ending the financial hardship that had

lasted nearly a decade. On October 1, 1994, Palauan leaders signed a formal declaration of independence, and the Compact of Free Association (COFA–see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) with the US became effective. Palau was finally independent and later became the 185th member of the UN.

First Compact Period

After the political turmoil of the previous decade, the first 15-year compact period was largely stable, with the government focused on consolidating the new Palauan state. In the 1996 election, Nakamura won a second term in office, although voters rejected an attempt to convene a second constitutional convention, thus avoiding the possibility of returning to complex negotiations with the US. Instead, newly independent Palau used the funding it received under the COFA to develop its economy (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*) and conserve the environment.

In 2000, Thomas Remengesau Jr., son of Thomas Remengesau Sr. and known as "Tommy," became President, having run on a platform to preserve regional sea and forest ecosystems. After easily winning reelection in 2004, Remengesau founded the Global Island Partnership organization, a voluntary partnership of island nations, whose purpose is to develop sustainable and resilient communities. He was also a proponent of a similar initiative titled the "Micronesia Challenge." Signatories agreed to conserve at least 30% of coastal marine and 20% of terrestrial resources by 2020. Another significant but unrelated initiative required by a constitutional provision was moving the capital from Koror to the hill of Ngerulmud on Babeldaob in 2006.

During this first compact period, the Palauan government improved relations with Japan and Taiwan and distanced itself from China (see p. 8 of *Political and Social Relations*). While it shared historical ties with Japan, and many Palauans have Japanese ancestry, Palau sought to nurture political, economic, and diplomatic ties with Taiwan, in part to

counteract perceived Chinese aggression (see p. 8 of *Political and Social Relations*). In 2009, in exchange for US funding, Palau resettled several Chinese Uighur-minority detainees that had been held in the US prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This move enflamed tensions with China and was one of a few events that eventually led China to ban tourism to Palau in late 2017 (see p. 4-5 of *Economics and Resources*).

Second Compact Period

Taking office in 2009, President Johnson Toribiong continued to pursue initiatives to protect the environment, and Palau became the world's first country to establish a shark sanctuary in its territorial waters. In the same year, the COFA received its first 15-year review. The US and Palau agreed to extend the COFA for another 15 years, to be reviewed again in 2024.

In 2012 and 2016, Remengesau Jr. became the first person elected to third and fourth terms as President. During these 8 years in office, he expanded policies prioritizing environmental protection and sustainable economic growth. Palau joined the Climate Vulnerable Forum in 2015, highlighting its focus on combating climate change and promoting conservation. Further, in 2017, Palau implemented an immigration policy called the Palau Pledge. Upon entering Palau, tourists must sign a stamped pledge in their passports promising to act in an environmentally responsible way during their stay in the country.

In recent years, Palau has continued to promote environmental protectionism on the global stage and sustained relations with many Asian and Pacific countries (see p. 7 of *Political and Social Relations*). In 2019, Palau established the Palau National Marine Sanctuary that comprises 80% of its sea territory (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*). In 2020, Surangel Whipps Jr., Remengesau Jr.'s brother-in-law, was elected President. Shortly after taking office in early 2021, President Whipps removed

Palau from the Pacific Islands Forum, an international organization that focuses on regional issues. Due to a dispute over Micronesian states' representation in the group, Palau's withdrawal, followed by that of other Micronesian nations, threatens the Forum's future. As such, despite its small population, Palau continues to exercise diplomatic influence in the Pacific.

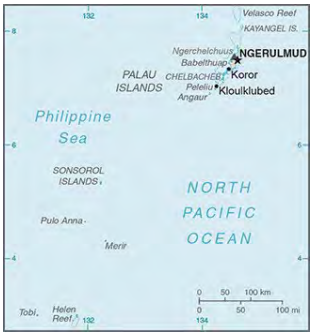
Myth

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Many Palauan myths tell the stories of early Pacific islanders or are semi-fictionalized tales of legendary warriors, who became famous for their bravery during various conflicts. Craftsmen preserved some of these stories by carving them as pictorial storyboards into the beams of *bai* (see p. 5 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*), where they are still used to pass Palauan traditions to younger generations.

The Origins of Palau: The story of Chuab explains the creation of Palau. Chuab was a giant born to Latmikaik, a sea goddess, who resided in the shallow waters between Angaur and Peleliu. One of three children, Chuab quickly grew much larger than her siblings, and her appetite grew so much that the local islanders had difficulty satisfying her hunger. Soon, the people of Angaur and Peleliu realized they could not sustain Chuab, even after buying more land from the god of the sky and building ladders to reach her mouth. Straining under their obligations, the villagers approached Latmikaik with a plot to defeat her child. After the villagers obtained Latmikaik's blessing, they set fire to Chuab, whose burning body was scattered across the Pacific, creating the Palauan islands. Today, some Palauans still refer to the shape of their islands in relation to parts of Chuab's body.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
Republic of Palau
Beluu er a Belau (Palauan)



Political Borders
Coastline: 944 mi

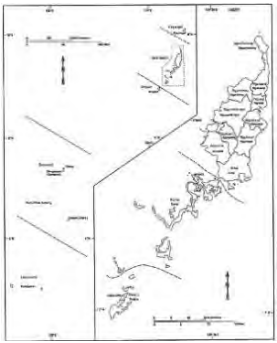
Capital
Ngerulmud

Demographics
Palau's population of about 21,779 is growing at an annual rate of 0.39%. About 82% of the population lives in urban areas, primarily concentrated on the islands of Koror and Babeldaob. Although Palau consists of hundreds of islands and even more islets, only eight are inhabited.

Flag
Adopted in 1981, Palau's flag has a light blue background with a large yellow circle slightly off-center towards the hoist side. The blue signifies the ocean and the yellow circle the moon, a symbol of peace, love, and tranquility for Palauans.

Geography
Palau comprises over 400 islands on the western edge of the Pacific Ocean's Caroline Islands, an expansive archipelago that also includes the Federated States of Micronesia. Palau's total land area is 177 sq mi, some 2.5 times the size of Washington, DC, and the islands are scattered over 243,000 sq mi of ocean, an area nearly the size of Texas. The largest island, Babeldaob, contains 10 of Palau's 16 states and some 5,000 residents. Palau's most populous state is Koror, comprised of a main island of the same name and several others that are home to over 11,000 residents.

Koror lies southwest of Babeldaob, and a bridge connects the two islands (see p. 1 of *Technology and Material*). The other states are sparsely populated and include Kayangel, the northmost island group, and Angaur and Peleliu, which are located southwest of Koror. Each of these three states lies within 50 mi of Koror. Sonsorol and Tobi, known as the Southwest Islands, are states located some 250 and 375 mi southwest of Koror, respectively.



Palau's islands generally divide into three groups based on their location and geological composition. Kayangel, north of Babeldaob, is a coral isle. The central islands of Babeldaob and Koror are primarily comprised of volcanic rock, while the southern islands (also called ***Chelbacheb***, or "Rock Islands") are limestone. Many *Chelbacheb* are tiny (less than 1 sq mi) and uninhabited. Located in northern Babeldaob, Mount Ngerchelchuus is Palau's highest point, reaching 794 ft.

Climate

Palau has a hot and humid tropical climate with little variation in temperature, averaging 77°-87°F. Humidity is typically between 85-90%, and rainfall averages 150 in per year. A rainy season occurs between June-November.

Natural Hazards

While Palau is located outside the normal range of typhoons (powerful tropical storms) in the Pacific, extreme events occasionally occur and cause flooding and infrastructure damage. In 2012, Typhoon Bopha caused

extensive damage to many homes in the states of Angaur, Peleliu, Ngchesar, Melekeok, Ngiwal, and Ngaraard, leaving hundreds homeless. Although no fatalities were reported, the storm also destroyed infrastructure, crops, and buildings.

Environmental Issues

Much of Palau's environmental policy is based on ***bul***, traditional bans on overharvesting a natural resource. However, the effects of climate change, overfishing, and pollution have degraded Palau's ocean environment. To combat this environmental damage, the government established a protected oceanic zone, the Palau National Marine Sanctuary, comprising about 80% of Palau's sea territory, some 193,000 sq mi or 1.2 times the size of California (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*), in 2019. Palau bans commercial fishing and drilling within the zone. Seawater and leaks from septic tanks and landfills occasionally have contaminated Palau's freshwater supplies from rivers and underground sources.

Government

Palau is a presidential republic divided into 16 states, each led by traditional and constitutional governments. Traditional governments consist of multiple tiers of chiefs, who advise elected officials on traditional Palauan customs and affairs. Although they have no formal political power, chiefs exert significant influence over elected politicians. By contrast, constitutional governors and legislatures are elected directly by constituents. Adopted in 1981 and last amended in 2020, Palau's constitution separates power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches and outlines the basic rights and freedoms of the Palauan people.

Executive Branch

Executive power is vested in the President, who is both chief-of-state and head-of-government. An eight-member Council of Ministers, a Council of Chiefs, and a Vice President support the President. The Vice President is chosen in a separate election and runs independently of the President. The President is

elected by absolute majority vote to serve up to two consecutive 4-year terms and is allowed to run again after another President serves one term. If no candidate receives a majority in the initial round of voting, a run-off is held. President Surangel Whipps Jr. took office in 2021 for his first term. He was born in Maryland to a Palauan father and American mother and moved to Palau as a small child.

Legislative Branch

The two-chamber ***Olbiil Era Kelulau*** ("House of Whispered Decisions," or National Congress) consists of a 13-seat Senate and a 16-seat House of Delegates. All legislators serve 4-year renewable terms. The 13 Senators are directly elected from a single national list of candidates. Constituents in each of the 16 states elect a single Delegate. The *Olbiil Era Kelulau* controls most legislative powers, particularly lawmaking and approving treaties.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary is based on a combination of civil, common, and customary law and includes a Supreme Court, Common Pleas Courts, Land Courts, and a National Court. The four-member Supreme Court is comprised of a Chief Justice and three associate justices, who organize into appellate and trial divisions. One justice adjudicates cases in the Trial Division based in Koror, while the Chief Justice and two other justices hear cases in the Appellate Division in Ngerulmud. The President confirms the judges nominated by a seven-member independent panel that consists of judges, presidential appointees, and lawyers. Judges may serve until mandatory retirement at age 65.

Political Climate

Palau has maintained a democratic system since ratifying its 1981 constitution. The federal and local government structures mirror those of the US as prescribed in the Compact of Free

Association (COFA – see p. 10-12 of *History and Myth*). Similar to US states, each state-level constitution establishes directly elected governors, local councils, and representatives. In addition, Palauan state governments have panels of traditional chiefs, elders, and high-ranking clan members, who provide guidance on maintaining governance traditions and local affairs. The smallest states, some of which have as few as 50 people, are over-represented in government, since every state sends one Delegate to Congress.

Palau has no political parties. Rather, politicians run on individual platforms promoting various political ideologies. Palau's most recent federal elections, held in November 2020, resulted in voter turnout of around 61% and President Whipps attaining 57% of the vote against incumbent Vice President Raynold Oilouch. Whipps' platform focused on tax reform and the creation of revenue sources other than tourism, the most significant component of Palau's economy (see p. 4 of *Economics and Resources*). He also pledged to sustain positive relations with Taiwan and continue resisting diplomatic pressure from China (see "Foreign Relations" below).

While Palau maintains an overall stable political climate, some instances of political violence and government corruption have occurred. For example, Palau's first President, Haruo Remeliik, was assassinated while in office in 1985, following several years of unrest (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). More recently, in 2019, the governor of Ngiwal, Ellender Ngirameketii was arrested for financial misconduct while in office. In 2020, the former governor of Ngarchelong, Browny Salvador, was charged with misuse of government funds and property while in office. Although the government has recently implemented improved measures to combat corruption, their effectiveness is yet unknown.

COFA: Signed initially in 1994, the COFA outlines the terms of Palau's special association with the US. The COFA recognizes Palauans' sovereign right to self-determination and their voluntary participation in the COFA, among other terms. The agreement allows Palau to develop and conduct its own foreign and environmental policies and outlines various aspects of its relations with the US. Further, the COFA stipulates that the US will provide financial assistance to Palau and allows the US to establish and operate military installations on Palauan territory. After the initial 15-year period, Palau extended the compact in 2009 for another 15 years (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). The US and Palau will review the COFA again in 2024.

Defense

Since Palau has no military, the US provides for Palau's defense and permits Palauan nationals to join the US military under the terms of the COFA. As of 2022, some 500 Palauans serve as volunteers in the US Armed Forces.

While the US currently maintains no permanent military presence in Palau, the Palauan government invited the US to build defense installations on the islands in 2020. In late 2022, the US announced plans to install over-the-horizon radar in Palau by 2026. US Forces also partner with local law enforcement to protect Palau's maritime boundaries and territory. Australia and Japan have also provided defense assistance, sending financial aid and military hardware to Palau's Division of Marine Law Enforcement, a local police force that patrols the waters to halt trespassers and illegal fishing operations.

Security Issues

Ships from Vietnam, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Japan, and other countries have frequented Palauan waters to engage in illegal fishing. While deterrence measures have largely failed in the past, the Palauan government has recently implemented harsh punishments for violations and requested foreign assistance to increase ocean patrols. In 2015, Palauan authorities made headlines by capturing and burning part of a fleet of trespassing Vietnamese fishing boats, imprisoning the captain and leaving two ships intact to deport the crew of 77 back to Vietnam. While Palauan law enforcement has minimal resources, international allies such as Australia and Japan have donated ships to bolster ocean patrol effectiveness.

Foreign Relations

Palau maintains friendly relations with the Asian-Pacific countries and territories of Taiwan, Japan, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). Palau, FSM, and RMI share close ties as independent nations protected by US Forces under the COFA (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*) and as part of the geographical group of Pacific islands collectively called Micronesia. Palau is also a member of international peace and economic organizations such as the UN, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank.

Relations with Japan: As a former Japanese colony (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*), Palau's language and culture still retain significant Japanese influence (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*). Today, Japan is Palau's largest foreign aid donor, overtaking Australia and the US, providing significant support for large infrastructure projects. The countries share a profitable seafood trade, and Japan remains the only country permitted to fish in the 20% of Palauan waters not protected by the special oceanic zone. Japanese citizens constitute a large

portion of annual visitors to Palau, and in 2015, Japanese Emperor Emeritus Akihito visited the country on a diplomatic mission.

Relations with Taiwan: Palau and Taiwan established diplomatic relations in 1999, and Palau remains one of the few nations that recognizes Taiwan as an autonomous state. Palau and Taiwan share close diplomatic and economic ties, collaborating on infrastructure development, agriculture, fisheries, medicine, and educational initiatives. In early 2021, Palau and Taiwan established a so-called "travel bubble" that suspended COVID-19 travel restrictions between the countries (see p. 6 of *Sustenance and Health*). Further, Palau has repeatedly rejected Chinese offers of partnership and financial support in favor of maintaining strong ties with Taiwan.

Relations with China: Due in part to its ongoing support of Taiwan, Palau and China have strained relations. The countries previously had strong economic ties, and China made sizeable investments in Palau's tourism sector. However, in 2009, Palau accepted the resettlement of Chinese Uighur detainees from the US despite China's warnings against the move (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). In 2012, law enforcement fired shots at a Chinese vessel illegally fishing in Palauan waters, resulting in the death of one Chinese crewmember and detention of the others. Relations have continuously worsened as Palau has repeatedly refused to recognize China's claim to Taiwan. As a result, the Chinese government banned its citizens from visiting Palau in 2017. The move significantly impacted Palau's economy, since a large share of tourists previously came from

China (see p. 4-5 of *Economics and Resources*). China remains one of the most frequent transgressors of Palauan maritime sovereignty, with Palauan law enforcement regularly catching Chinese boats trespassing and illegally fishing in protected waters.

Relations with the US: Palau's relations with the US date to the end of World War II, when the US defeated the Japanese, who had governed Palau for decades (see p. 5-6 of *History and Myth*). After decades of US administration, and since gaining independence in 1994, Palau and the US have maintained close diplomatic ties regulated by the COFA. As of 2022, the US has provided Palau over $296.4 million in financial aid as part of the Compact Trust Fund under the COFA.

Some Palauan citizens live, work, and study in the US as lawful non-immigrants and share close bonds with family and friends in the US. Besides serving in the military, Palauans have attended US universities for decades. In addition, the Palauan and US governments work closely on various initiatives. As of early 2023, the US has committed to participate in numerous Pacific regional programs with Palau, primarily focusing on disaster preparedness, combating climate change, and protecting oceanic resources. Further, Palau has one of the highest voting coincidences with the US at the UN.

Ethnic Groups

According to Palau's 2020 census, some 71% of residents identify as Palauan, a term which typically refers to people of

mixed Micronesian, Malayan, and Melanesian descent. Many Palauans also have European, Japanese, or American ancestries due to foreign occupation since the 18th century (see p. 2-7 of *History and Myth*). Further, some residents identify with specific ethnolinguistic groups such as Tobian and Sonsorolese, native to the southwestern islands of Palau (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*). Around 26% of residents identify as Asian, followed by Carolinian (1%), Caucasian (1%), and Black (less than 0.1%), while a small portion of the population self-identifies as "other." Palau is home to several diaspora groups, notably around 4,000 Filipinos, who comprise about 20% of the population.

Social Relations

Traditionally, Palauan society divided along male-female, clan, and village federation lines. Although these divisions are less prevalent today, Palau remains a matrilineal society in which bloodlines are traced through the mother's side of the family (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). Likewise, clan-based relationships that were historically important in the confederation rivalry (see p. 1-2 of *History and Myth*) still play some role in politics today. Notably, six of Palau's eight elected Presidents trace their ancestries to the confederation based in Koror (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*).

The separation between citizens and foreign nationals is Palau's most significant social division. Notably, Palau has no naturalization process, and citizenship can only be obtained through a parent of Palauan descent. Foreign nationals lack certain rights and cannot own land or work in major industries such as tourism without a Palauan business partner. Laws grant foreign national workers few protections, and minimum wages apply only to Palauan citizens (see p. 1 of *Time and Space*). Relatedly, Palau's lower classes are comprised disproportionately of foreign nationals, primarily Filipino and Bangladeshi immigrants.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

According to the 2020 census, about 80% of Palauan residents are Christian, almost 5% followers of the Modekngei religion, and about 6% Muslim. Palau also has small numbers of Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The constitution establishes Palau as a secular state, recognizes freedom of religion, and stipulates that the government may not compel, prohibit, or hinder the exercise of religion. While the law prohibits religious instruction in public schools, it allows the government to provide assistance to "private or parochial" schools for "nonreligious purposes." Religious groups may register with the government as nonprofit organizations to receive tax exemption status and apply for foreign missionary permits.

Early Spiritual Landscape

Palau's early inhabitants led rich spiritual lives. Although scholars know few details of early inhabitants' beliefs and practices, they likely recognized several spirits and gods, who constructed the universe and influenced daily life. One legend explains that a series of gods once lived in Palauan waters, and one god's body eventually became Palau (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*).

The traditional ***bai*** (community meeting house – see p. 5 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) was a center for Palauan religious practices. Early Palauans built *bai* as meeting houses and carved images onto storyboards decorating the buildings' exteriors. Some images symbolized gods and their associated powers or characteristics. For example, the goddess Dilukai was frequently depicted on the front of *bai*, possibly as a symbol of fertility and communal order (see p. 6 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Other common images

included the ***pokolai*** (sorcerer), who could inflict pain or illness upon a community through ***temall*** (sorcery), and the ***melecholb*** (healer), who performed ***techolb*** (white magic) against the sorcery (see p. 4 of *Sustenance and Health)*.

Some traditional religious practices involved abstaining from certain foods such as giant clams, bananas, and mangrove crabs. Many Palauans also believed that taro plants were introduced by demi-goddess Iluochel, resulting in their careful cultivation. Traditional beliefs taught that upon death a person's spirit traveled to the southern coast of Angaur, where it ascended to the spirit world. During the Spanish and German administrations of Palau in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (see p. 3-4 of *History and Myth*), missionaries sought to abolish traditional religion by destroying temples and banning traditional practices. Although many Palauans subsequently converted to Christianity, others maintained their traditional beliefs in private.

The Introduction of Christianity

In 1710, Spanish Jesuits briefly made contact with Palauans (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). Despite this initial exchange, no Europeans established formal religious missions in Palau until nearly 2 centuries later. In 1885, Pope Leo XIII (the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, Italy) recognized Spain's claims to the islands (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). A year later, members of the Spanish Catholic Capuchin Order arrived in Koror, opening a permanent mission there in 1891 and a school in 1892 (see p. 1-2 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Besides attempting to spread Christianity, the Capuchins led efforts to eradicate traditional beliefs like sorcery, remarriage, and ***klomengelungel*** (the practice of keeping a concubine, or mistress). Although many Palauans resented the Capuchins' repression of their traditional practices and resisted conversion, the missionaries won the favor of some Palauans by providing medical care during an 1892 influenza outbreak.

Religion in the Early 20th Century

After Spain sold Palau to Germany in 1899 (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), German Catholics assumed the Capuchin mission, and Protestants established the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When most of the Spanish Capuchin missionaries left Palau following a 1906 typhoon, the German Capuchins sought to expand the Catholic Church's role in Palauan society and opened a new mission in Babeldaob. Meanwhile, church and colonial authorities continued to repress and persecute traditional religious leaders.

In 1914, Palau came under the control of Japan (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*), and like the Spanish and Germans, the Japanese repressed traditional religious practices. However, the Japanese allowed the German Catholic missionaries to continue their work, though a 1922 typhoon that destroyed their mission in Babeldaob compelled them to shift their focus to Koror. Generally, the German Catholic missionaries were successful, with membership in the Catholic Church growing from 400 to 1,000 between 1921-30.

Japanese tolerance of the Catholic missionaries' activities ended in the 1930s, when the authorities prohibited some Capuchins from preaching. In 1940, the Japanese built a large Shinto shrine (Shintoism is a religion that originated in Japan and was Japan's state religion at the time) in Koror, though they did not force Palauans to convert. Religious restrictions increased during World War II (WWII), when the Japanese authorities imprisoned and killed several Christian missionaries.

The Founding and Development of Modekngei

According to local accounts, a god appeared to a healer named Temedad in northern Babeldaob around 1915. While Temedad had previously communicated with a local village god known as Ngirchomkuul, he believed this encounter signaled something new. Inspired by the event, Temedad and other villagers founded a movement called Modekngei, meaning "coming together," that incorporated the worship of ancestors and traditional gods with certain Christian beliefs and practices. For example, in Modekngei ***kesekes*** (hymns), Ngirchomkuul and Jesus Christ are combined as Ngirchomkuul Eskristo.

The religion spread rapidly for several reasons. First, Modekngei loosened some strict traditional practices, such as permitting the consumption of formerly prohibited foods. It was also inclusive and encompassed beliefs and gods from across the islands, not just from the more populated Koror and Babeldaob (see p. 1-2 of *Political and Social Relations*). For example, when visiting the southern island of Peleliu, Temedad refrained from mentioning Ngirchomkuul, focusing instead on Ngirabeleliu, the god familiar in that region.

Some scholars note that Modekngei's growth could be related to the repression of traditional beliefs and practices which Palau's foreign rulers conducted for decades. In the 1920s, the Japanese imprisoned Temedad and other Modekngei leaders, accusing them of swindling and adultery. Temedad died in prison in 1924.

Religious freedom in Palau returned with the US occupation at the end of WWII. Over the decades, Modekngei acquired more followers, and in 1974, the Belau Modekngei High School opened in Babeldaob (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*). In the early 1980s, Modekngei followers proved to be critical to the election of Haruo Remeliik, Palau's first President (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*).

Religion Today

While Palau is a predominantly Christian nation, since gaining independence in 1994 (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*), it has welcomed significant numbers of religious minorities from other Asian countries. Around 500 Bangladeshi Muslims have moved to Palau seeking better opportunities. In 2009, with US financial support, Palau resettled a group of Chinese Uighur Muslims (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). In the same year, asylum seekers from Myanmar, including two Buddhist monks, resettled with financial support from a local Catholic Church. Relations between religious groups are generally peaceful.

Christianity: As of 2020, some 46% of the population is Roman Catholic, 26% are members of evangelical churches, and roughly 5% belong to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. About 13% of the population are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Assemblies of God, or Baptist churches, among other denominations. Of the approximately 4,000 Filipinos living in Palau (see p. 10 of *Political and Social Relations),* over half belong to the Philippine Catholic Church.

Modekngei: Many followers of Modekngei live in Ngatpang state in central Babeldaob. Today, Modekngei remains a hybrid religion that blends traditional beliefs with Christianity. Some Modekngei practices include walking silently to daily church services, abstaining from alcohol, and blessing and cleaning village roads. The singing of *kesekes* remains an important part of Modekngei religious practice and serves to transmit doctrine, convey foundational myths, and relate the pantheon of dieties.

Islam: Most of the estimated 672 Muslims in Palau are Bangladeshis. One report claims that the relocated Chinese Uighur Muslims left Palau and were resettled in an undisclosed location. As of 2021, Palau is home to two mosques located in Koror and on nearby Malakal Island.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

Clans (extended families) are the foundation of Palauan society and trace their ancestry through the mother's side of the family (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). Clans typically serve as economic, social, and emotional support systems for relatives.

Residence

Most Palauans live in urban areas, primarily on the principal islands of Koror and Babeldaob (see p. 1 of *Political and Social Relations*). Housing conditions tend to vary by income level. While some residents live in apartments with few amenities, most Palauans reside in single-family houses, often on inherited land. Many Palauan houses are built from lightweight materials such as plywood and painted with oil-based paint to repel water due to the islands' tropical climate. Some affluent residents build their houses with heavier materials, such as cinder blocks or cement, to better withstand tropical storms.

Many dwellings have windows that are often kept ajar during the day to cool the home, as air conditioning is uncommon. Palauan homes typically have two or three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living area. Bathrooms are sometimes detached from the house. If a family has several children, the bedrooms are usually divided between boys and girls.

First House Ceremony: Known as the ***ocheraol***, Palauans celebrate the construction of their first home with an elaborate housewarming ceremony. Family and friends visit the new home and enjoy food, music, and dancing. Most importantly, the hosts expect visitors to contribute money to help the new homeowners pay their mortgage. The event is a reciprocal form of gift giving, as most Palauans contribute to others' mortgages through the

ocheraol. Historically, only the clan chief could call an *ocheraol*, though today any family member may organize one.

Family Structure

Familial relationships are an integral aspect of Palauan daily life and social organization. Some households include extended family members, who live nearby. Traditional family structures placed the mother as the head-of-household. However, today, the father or eldest male is often the breadwinner and head-of-household in many families (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). Once children become adults, many move out of their family house, though traditional obligations require them to return and care for their aging parents. After marrying, many men move to their wife's neighborhood or village.

Children

Historically, Palauans had many children, but today, they usually have 1-2. Extended family members typically assist with raising the children, who often begin working at a young age. Both girls and boys learn homemaking skills such as cleaning and cooking around age 5. Palauans expect all older children to cook for their families and contribute to maintaining the home.

Birth: After the birth of their first child, many women undergo one of Palau's most significant rituals, the ***ngasech*** (first childbirth) ceremony. Although specific customs vary by clan, a new mother typically waits several weeks after birth before participating in an ***omesurch*** (hot bath), a bathing

ritual meant to heal women's bodies after pregnancy and birth. Over a span of 2-3 days, female friends and family anoint the new mother with oils and herbs and bathe her in hot water. In the second part of the ritual, known as ***omengat*** (steam bath), the woman soaks in coconut oil and yellow ginger, a mixture meant to heal her skin and give it a glowing appearance. To complete the ritual, the woman typically dresses in a grass skirt and headdress, often with a necklace made of old Palauan stone money, which her husband's family provides. Once the ritual is finished, the extended family holds a large celebration to honor the new mother and child, who has unified two clans.

Rites of Passage

Palauan Christians mark life's milestones with rites of passage (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). For example, Christian families tend to baptize babies within a few weeks of birth. Many children celebrate communion and confirmation rites of passage into the Catholic community at ages 10 and 14-16, respectively.

Dating and Courtship: Boys and girls typically begin dating in their early teens, often meeting at school or through friends or leisure activities. Relationships are often kept private until both partners are committed, as many Palauans consider dating to be a serious affair resulting in marriage. As they grow up, many Palauans choose to live with their partner in common-law arrangements and consider themselves married even if they have not been legally wed.

Weddings: Palauan weddings include traditional, religious, or civil ceremonies. Some Palauan citizens marry in traditional, or customary, weddings. Traditional ceremonies comprise an exchange of money and gifts between families and are more commonly held in rural areas. The law does not recognize traditional marriage between Palauans and foreign nationals, so a judge or ordained minister must marry the couple in a civil or

religious ceremony. Today, some Palauan couples choose a church ceremony followed by a large reception at which guests share dinner (often Palauan seafood dishes and other fare – see p. 1-3 of *Sustenance and Health*), dance, and listen to music.

Divorce

While precise figures are unknown, divorce is common in Palau. According to Palauan law, couples must provide a reason for requesting a divorce. Reasons may include adultery, neglect, abuse, desertion, habitual intoxication, imprisonment, or a variety of other explanations.

Death

Funerals are one of the most important events in traditional Palauan society, and extended families are expected to help with arrangements and donations to cover expenses. While there is no set amount for donations, social norms require relatives to give as much as their own family was given at their last funeral, or as much as they can afford. Among Christians, the family of the deceased typically holds a vigil or wake at their home or in a funeral facility. During this period, friends and relatives visit to pay their respects, sing hymns, grieve, and reminisce with the family of the deceased. A day or so later, a priest leads a funeral mass in a church. Subsequently, the mourners accompany the coffin in a procession to the cemetery or a designated place on family property, where the priest presides over the burial.

Before covering the coffin at the burial, family members toss in flowers or keepsakes. On the 4th day after the death, Palauans offer food to the deceased, and on the 9th day, they place stones on the gravesite. According to traditional beliefs, a deceased person's spirit travels to the southern coast of Angaur, where it ascends to the spirit world (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Historically, the Palauan social system was both matrilineal (inheritance, property, and the family name passed from mother to daughter) and matriarchal (women held most power and authority). Centuries of foreign occupation (see p. 3-8 of *History and Myth*) helped change this dynamic. Today, men hold most positions of power in government and business, while women retain high ranking in society.

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Women were historically the heads-of-household and primary decisionmakers in family affairs. Women are typically responsible for domestic work, such as cleaning, cooking, childcare, and managing the finances, while men typically fish and perform manual labor. While in recent years Palauan men's share of household work has grown, women often remain the primary homemaker.

Labor Force: As of 2020, about 73% of women worked outside the home, significantly higher than the US rate (56%) and the nearby Federated States of Micronesia (FSM – 46%) and Marshall Islands (28%). Women are well-represented in most sectors of the Palauan economy, with most working in services sectors like healthcare, sales, education, and commerce (see p. 5 of *Economics and Resources*). As of 2020, women held some 46% of managerial positions. Nevertheless, some reports suggest women are paid lower wages than men for similar work. Studies also indicate that women have more difficulty than men finding jobs and experience some discrimination in hiring.

Gender and the Law

Palau's constitution guarantees gender equality, and women generally experience equal treatment under the law, which

protects their rights. Both domestic and spousal rape are punishable by up to 25 years in prison. Domestic violence and harassment are also criminal offenses. Despite substantial legal protections, some Palauan women experience domestic abuse and an often-unfair division of domestic labor. In addition, Palau is notably one of only seven countries that has not signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Gender and Politics

Palauan men and women first gained the right to vote in 1979, just a year prior to the country's first presidential election (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*). Women hold significant influence in traditional affairs. High-ranking chiefesses appoint the councils of chiefs that advise elected officials in state and national government (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*). Nevertheless, women's political participation is somewhat limited. In 2000, Palauans elected their first female Vice President, Sandra Pierantozzi for one term, though she was defeated in the 2004 election. Palau's second female Vice President, Jerrlyn Uduch Sengebau Senior, was elected in 2020 and remains in office. As of 2023, Palau's parliament is comprised of about 7% women, on par with FSM (7%) and the Marshall Islands (6%), but lower than the Philippines (27%), Indonesia (22%), and the US (29%).

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

While the government has taken steps to protect women, like passing the 2012 Family Protection Act to provide greater resources for female victims of human rights violations, GBV remains a problem in Palau. A 2014 survey found that 25% of Palauan women experience some form of domestic violence. A different survey in 2013 revealed that about 18% of students in high school, notably some 16% of girls and 20% of boys, reported being forced into sexual relations. While the number of domestic violence reports is low, a 2014 study found that 37% of abused women had never told anyone about the violence, and

some 66% never sought help from formal services or authorities. Although human trafficking is not a significant issue for many Palauans, female residents from the Philippines and China, often recruited legally to work in Palau, are particularly vulnerable to the practice. Some of these women fall victim to sex trafficking.

Sex and Procreation

While data is scarce, Palau's birthrate declined from 2.8 births-per-woman in 1990 to 1.7 in 2023, making it the lowest in the region. Palau's fertility rate is slightly lower than the rates of Wallis and Futuna (1.71) and Australia (1.73). While legal, the reported use of contraceptives is low. As of 2020, only about 65% of Palauans reported family planning needs met through contraceptives compared to an average of 78% in the region and 77% globally. However, Palau's relatively low birthrate suggests that contraceptive use is underreported. Palauan law prohibits abortion with no clear legal exceptions.

LGBTQ Issues

In 2008, Palauans voted to pass a constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage. Although Palau subsequently decriminalized homosexual activity between men in 2014 (it was already permitted between women), same-sex couples do not receive the same legal protection as heterosexual couples. For example, same-sex couples cannot jointly adopt children. Further, the law is ambiguous about changing legal gender. In 2019, then-President Remengesau expressed support for legalizing same-sex marriage, though since then there has been no legislative progress to rescind the amendment.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Palauan and English are Palau's national languages, and some states have their own official languages. English is the principal language of business, government, education, and the media, while Palauan is primarily spoken at home.

Palauan

About 65% of residents speak Palauan, a Malayo-Polynesian language. Due to the relatively high number of speakers in the younger generation, Palauan is not considered endangered, unlike some other languages in the region. Traditionally an oral language, Palauan today is written in the Roman alphabet or the Japanese ***katakana***, a formerly prevalent writing system, whose use has recently declined in Palau.

Many Palauan words, such as the capital, Ngerulmud, begin with the letters Ng, which are pronounced with the tongue on the roof of the mouth, like in the end of the word "ring." Location names often include the Palauan prefixes ***Bab*** (Upper/North) or ***Lou*** (Lower/South). For example, Bablomekang is the northmost and Loulomekang the southmost island in the Omekang island group.

English

English has been a central foreign language in Palau for centuries. Due to early British contact (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*), some Palauans spoke English by the 18th century. Following World War II (WWII) (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), the US launched English-language programs on various islands across the region through government-sponsored schools and the Peace Corps (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Today, Palauans use English for official documents and the law. When speaking and writing informal English, many Palauans incorporate words from other

languages, such as Palauan, Japanese, and Tagalog (the official language of the Philippines, spoken by Filipino residents in Palau – see p. 10 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Other Languages

Palau is also home to speakers of several other languages. Tobian and Sonsorolese are native to the southwestern Tobi and Sonsorol Islands (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*), where the languages share official status with English but not Palauan. Tobian and Sonsorolese are mutually intelligible with some other regional languages, particularly on islands in Micronesia, though not Palauan. Less than 500 people, primarily in Tobi, Sonsorol, and Koror, speak each language. Due to the low number of speakers, both languages are considered endangered. Additional languages spoken in Palau are Tagalog, Chinese, Korean, Bengali, and other primarily Asian and Pacific languages.

Japanese: Due to the Japanese colonization of Palau from 1914-44 (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*), some older Palauans speak Japanese or use Japanese *katakana* to write Palauan. The state of Angaur is home to a small population of Japanese speakers due to Japan's establishment of a phosphate mining industry there in the mid-20th century (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). Japanese is still an official language in Angaur, along with Palauan and English. Further, some Palauans learn Japanese in school to pursue further education or work in Japan. Palau is also a popular destination for Japanese tourists.

Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Palau requires knowledge of Palauan and English, as well as the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation

initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Palauans' communication patterns reflect their regard for close personal relationships, family, and respect for elders. Palauans are typically polite and reserved among strangers, though they tend to be more talkative once a friendship is established. During their interactions, Palauans strive to emphasize respect for their conversation partners and their social status, particularly in business meetings and in interactions with elders or social superiors, while avoiding embarrassment to themselves or others. As Palauans view silence as a form of respect, foreign nationals should allow for conversational pauses instead of striving for uninterrupted dialogue.

The emphasis Palauans place on politeness is evident in a widely held preference for indirect or non-specific answers. As such, Palauans often provide a positive response to most requests. However, this "yes" answer is not necessarily a promise of action. Foreign nationals should not interpret an affirmative or noncommittal answer to a request as neutral. Instead, such an answer might actually be negative. Some Palauans avoid making prolonged eye contact with clan elders as a sign of respect (see p. 3 of *Time and Space*). Further, some Palauans regard extended eye contact as an attempt to intimidate the speaker. Similarly, Palauans avoid sitting or standing above a clan elder or chief during a conversation, as this act may be seen as an attempt to assert superiority.

Greetings

Traditionally, Palauans do not shake hands or touch while greeting, and some older Palauans may still be hesitant to shake hands. However, the handshake is now a common form of greeting among many residents. In formal settings, Palauans

typically greet the eldest or highest-ranking person in the room with a bow or nod, then greet all others present. Some informal greetings include raising the eyebrows and making a "ng" sound and tilting the head back and shouting "Oi!" Palauans also use a variety of other verbal greetings, most of which refer to the time of day. ***Ungil tutau*** ("good morning"), ***Ungil sueleb*** ("good afternoon"), and ***Ungil kebsengei*** ("good evening/night") are the most common.

Names

Palauan names typically comprise a first and last name. During Japan's occupation of Palau, many Palauans adopted Japanese last names, and some altered them by affixing the suffix -***sang***, a Palauan modification of the Japanese term for respect, ***san***. However, unlike in Japan, Palauans with Japanese names use the western naming order in which a given name comes before the surname. Many other Palauans have indigenous names, while some have a first English or American name and a Palauan last name. While traditional titles are typically passed through consensus of high-ranking women in the village (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*), surnames are often passed from a father to his children.

Forms of Address

Forms of address depend on age, relationship, and social status but are generally formal and courteous. In many cases, Palauans use honorifics like military ranks and professional or personal titles of respect such as ***ngira*** ("Mr.") and ***dirra*** ("Mrs."), often combined with a person's last name. Elder males are often called ***rubak*** (elder man) and elder females ***mechas*** (elder woman). Notably, the titles ***Ibedul*** and ***Reklai*** describe chiefs in

Koror and Melekeok, respectively (see p. 1-2 of *History and Myth*). Palauan friends and relatives usually address one another by first name.

Gestures

Palauans often use gestures to augment and sometimes replace spoken words. To gesture, Palauans typically either use their whole hand or a simple eye motion because they consider pointing at someone using the index finger as rude. Holding the right hand out and twisting the palm upward means "where are you going?" Foreign nationals should avoid showing the soles of feet or shoes, which may be offensive to some Palauans.

Conversational Topics

After initial greetings, Palauans typically engage in polite conversation about family and work. Other common topics of conversation are facts about other countries and sports (see p. 2-3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Making positive observations about Palau, its food, and conservation efforts can help establish rapport. Foreign nationals should avoid negative commentary about chewing betel nut (see p. 6 of *Sustenance and Health*) and talking about Palauans' family histories during WWII, as many families faced starvation and other hardships (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*).

Language and Training Sources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Palauan
Hello	Alii
How are you?	Ke ua ngerang?
I am well	Ak mesisiich
Yes	Choi
No	Ng diak
Please	Adang
Thank you	Kek mal mesaul
Thanks	Sulang
I'm sorry	Komeng
I don't understand	Ng dial kudengei
Can you repeat yourself please?	Ke mluut?
What is your name?	Ng techa ngklem?
My name is ___	A ngklek a ____
Where are you from?	Ke chad er ker el beluu?
I am from the US	Ak chad er a Merikel
Goodbye	Mechikung
What does ___ mean in Palauan?	Ngara belkul a __ el toekoi er a Belau?
What is this?	Tilechang ngarang?
I would like a ___	Ng soak a ___
How do you say ___?	Ng mekera omdu el kmo ___ el Tekoi er
…in English?	…a Merikel?
…in Palauan?	…a Belau?
What do you want?	Ng ngara soam?
I need help	Ak ousbech a ngeso.
Who?	Techa?
When?	Oingara?
Where?	Ker?
Why?	E ng ngarang?

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 96.6%
- Male: 96.8%
- Female: 96.3% (2015 estimate)

Early Education

Before the arrival of European colonists in the late 18th century (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*), most regional inhabitants informally transmitted values, skills, beliefs, historical knowledge, and a sense of community to younger generations. Palauans educated their children at home or during community gatherings through legends, stories, and moral lessons, while emphasizing the importance of humility and the traditional matrilineal family hierarchy (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). The maternal uncle and grandmother typically served as mentors, training boys for apprenticeships and girls for household work, respectively.

Traditional education was based on the idea of ***ngelekel a buai*** (belonging to the public), and outside the nuclear family, education occurred through hierarchical social organizations. Once they reached adolescence, unmarried men and women attended separate ***kekerei el cheldebechel*** (small clubs), where the men learned hunting, fishing, and building canoes or houses, and women gardening, handicrafts, childrearing, and household management. After marriage, many Palauans joined the ***ongereung el klou el cheldebechel*** (second club), and later, the ***klou el cheldebechel*** (large club), where they learned to oversee village and clan affairs.

Education in Colonial Palau

During Spanish rule from 1885-99 (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), colonial education was limited and primarily included attempts to

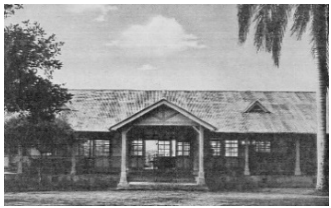
convert Palauans to Christianity through the study and practice of Catholic rites and texts (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). In 1892, Spanish Capuchin missionaries founded the islands' first Catholic school in Koror. A year later, they opened the St. Joseph mission school in Babeldaob. Many Palauan parents did not allow their children to attend the schools because the Capuchins prohibited local cultural practices like divorce and traditional sorcery (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Under German colonial rule (1899-1914) (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), Capuchin missionaries began to expand the educational system. In 1902, the Germans opened the first government-run vocational school for police officers, which offered a curriculum consisting of German, math, reading, and geography. German and Palauan children attended the school, which required all students to be baptized. The Germans also published a Palauan dictionary and translated Christian books to Palauan in an attempt to further spread their religion.

Japanese Education: The Japanese introduced mandatory primary public education to Palau during their colonial administration (1914-44) (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*), and the Japanese public-school system was two track. While Japanese students attended ***shogakko*** (primary schools) for 5 years, some Palauans went to the 3-year ***kogakko*** or ***tomin gakko*** (schools for indigenous children). Among the Palauan students, boys attended school at a rate three times higher than girls. All the teachers were Japanese, and Japanese was the sole language of instruction. Corporal punishment was common, and some teachers penalized their students if they spoke Palauan at school.

Japanese education emphasized morality, obedience, pride of Japan, and respect for the Emperor, while suppressing Palauan spiritual practices and traditions, notably Modekngei (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Nevertheless, the Japanese initially allowed European Christians to continue converting Palauans

and to manage their missionary schools, which flourished during the 1920s (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). However, by the 1930s, the Japanese banned the Christian missionary schools. Meanwhile, after completing primary school, Japanese students and up to 20 Palauans could enroll in the prestigious Mokko Totei Yoseijo trade school, which primarily taught carpentry and construction. By 1936, extensive Japanese immigration to Palau (see p. 5-6 of *History and Myth*) led the *shogakko* to enroll twice as many students as the *kogakko*.



US Education

Soon after the US victory over Japan in World War II (see p. 6-7 of *History and Myth*), the US Navy began to administer education in Palau. The US constructed schools across the islands and relied on Palauan leaders for advice. Although Palauans ran primary schools, the Navy managed secondary schools and funded teacher training in nearby Micronesia and Guam. In 1947, the United Nations designated Palau as part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands to be administered by the US (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*). This change permitted missionary schools to reopen, and by 1952, some 1,285 Palauan students were in school.

During the 1960s, the US implemented educational reform in the region, increased education spending, and extended mandatory school attendance to grades 1-8. In 1962, the US contracted teachers and Peace Corps volunteers to teach in Palau as part of a new Accelerated Elementary School Program. As a result, English became the primary language of instruction in primary schools. By 1968, some 940 Peace Corps volunteers were teaching in Palau. To further expand the scope of education, the US established Palau High School to provide secondary education for students in grades 9-12. In 1969, the Micronesian Occupational Center (formerly the Mokko Totei Yoseijo trade school) offered higher education for the first time in Palau.

In the 1970s, many parents began encouraging their children to earn a western-style education in Palau and abroad. As a result,

the growth in emphasis on western-style education increasingly displaced traditional education in the *cheldebechel*. When Palau gained independence in 1994 (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*), the educational system came under the sole control of Palau's Ministry of Education (MOE).

Modern Education

Today, the MOE provides free compulsory schooling for children aged 6-17. The MOE operates some 18 public primary and secondary schools and oversees 6 private institutions, all of which serve over 3,000 students. The stated purpose of education is to increase citizen participation in economic and social development and unify Palau through knowledge of the islands, economy, government, and the world. In recent decades, many Palauans have also pursued higher education abroad.

About 75% of Palauans are enrolled in public schools, while 25% attend fee-based private schools. Many Palauans cannot afford private-school tuition. Although families are required to pay for classroom supplies and uniforms, poorer families typically receive financial assistance from the government and friends. While school enrollment is generally high, around 10% of youth aged 15-29 were not in education, employment, or training in 2020-2021. Other shortfalls include a lack of qualified teachers, low-quality facilities, and language barriers. Although instruction is typically in English and Palauan, not all Palauans speak English at home (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*).

In recent years, some leaders have called for increased instruction in Palauan studies. In 2012, the MOE sponsored a law that made Palauan-language classes mandatory in all schools. In addition, the Belau Modekngei School (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*) has a dual program that offers both the national and an alternative vocational curriculum, in which students learn a traditional trade and Palauan culture.

Pre-Primary: Public schools do not offer pre-primary programs. Some Palauan children aged 3-5 attend US-funded Head Start

programs that the Palau Community Action Agency administers and are designed to support children in poorer families. Some private religious schools also offer pre-primary educational programs. In 2020, some 71% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in pre-primary education.

Primary Education: Primary education comprises eight grades starting at age 6. Palau has 15 public and 2 private elementary schools. The curriculum includes English, Palauan studies, math, social studies, and science. In 2020, some 96% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in primary education.

Secondary Education: Secondary education comprises 4 years in either an academic or vocational program. In 2020, about 72% of students of the appropriate age were enrolled in secondary education at one public and four private high schools. The curriculum includes English, Palauan studies, math, social studies, science, and health and career courses. Vocational and technical programs offer classes in subjects like agriculture, construction, and tourism.

Post-Secondary: Palau Community College (PCC, formerly the Mokko Totei Yoseijo trade school and Micronesian Occupational Center) is the only post-secondary school in the country. Students attend PCC for 2 years to earn an Associate degree or vocational certificates. PCC also developed a program, in collaboration with San Diego State University, that offers Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees in education and human services through a combination of distance learning and instruction in Palau. If they can afford the tuition, some students attend 4-year universities in the US, Guam, Australia, or Japan.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Palauans view interpersonal and family connections as key to conducting business. In general, Palauans have a casual approach to time but are often punctual for business meetings.

Time and Work

The work week typically runs Monday-Friday, and work hours vary by establishment type. Many shops and grocery stores open Monday-Friday from 7am-10pm, and some also open in the afternoon on Saturdays. Post office hours are typically Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm. Government offices tend to be open Monday-Friday from 7:30am-4:30pm, though some officials work a condensed schedule, reducing employee availability on Fridays. While some businesses close for a short lunch from 12pm-1pm, others take a longer break in the early afternoon. Many businesses close on Sundays, though a few shops stay open. In rural areas, operating hours tend to be informal, varying according to owners' preferences.

Working Conditions: While the standard workweek is 40 hours, Palau's labor laws stipulate neither a maximum workweek nor overtime pay. The law prioritizes hiring Palauan citizens over foreign nationals (see p. 10 of *Political and Social Relations*). In 2013, the government implemented a standard minimum wage. However, industries that depend on foreign workers, such as domestic care and farming, are exempt from this protection. Lax enforcement of labor standards often results in unsafe working conditions, low wages, and extended workdays. As of 2021, about 50% of the labor force works in the informal sector, in which many workers earn well below the government-mandated minimum wage. Violations like workplace discrimination and deficient safety standards often occur. Most at risk are foreign workers, particularly those from the Philippines and Bangladesh.

Time Zone: Palau adheres to Palau Time (PWT), which is 9 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 14 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Palau does not observe daylight savings time.

Date Notation: Like the US, Palau uses the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Unlike Americans, Palauans write the day first, followed by the month and year.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- January: National Day of Prayer *
- March 15: Youth Day
- May 5: Senior Citizens' Day
- June 1: President's Day
- July 9: Constitution Day
- September: Labor Day (date varies)
- October 1: Independence Day
- October 24: United Nations Day
- November: Thanksgiving Day (date varies)
- November: Family Day (always the Friday after Thanksgiving)
- December 25: Christmas Day

Holidays that fall on the weekend may be observed on the preceding Friday or following Monday.

* Under the law, the President may designate any day in January as a National Day of Prayer.

Time and Business

Generally, Palauans tend to have a relaxed approach to time, considering schedules and deadlines less important than social obligations and relationships. However, business meetings often begin on time, and workplaces are usually hierarchical. Subordinates' inability to commit to an agreement without management's approval tends to prolong negotiations and

decision-making. The maintenance of interpersonal relationships, both professional and familial, are typically an integral part of business. As a result, rapport-building activities and social gatherings are common, and business dealings may unfold at an unhurried pace.

Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in Palau depends on the nature of the relationship. Friends and family generally observe less personal space than acquaintances or strangers.

Touch: In business settings, greetings usually include minimal touching beyond the initial handshake. Palauans usually reserve physical affection for family and friends. Close friends of any sex sometimes hug or grab each other's forearms when greeting.

Eye Contact: Many Palauans avoid sustained eye contact, which they consider an attempt to intimidate or assert superiority (see p. 3 of *Language and Communication*). However, some Palauans maintain eye contact during conversation, considering it evidence of interest and confidence.

Photographs

Some churches, museums, landmarks, and other private areas prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should acquire a Palauan's consent before taking his photo. Clear permission is particularly important when photographing children.

Driving

Lax enforcement of traffic laws and poor road conditions in some places make driving hazardous, particularly at night and in rural areas. Some drivers disregard traffic signs, signals, and laws. As of early 2023, Palau does not have national standards prohibiting children from sitting in the front seat of cars or requirements for the mandatory use of seatbelts, increasing the risk of traffic-related injury. Further, drunk driving is a prevalent road-safety issue in Palau. Nevertheless, in 2013, Palau's rate of traffic-related deaths was 5 per 100,000 people, less than the US rate (13).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Palau's art forms reflect its Micronesian traditions, history of European and Japanese colonization, US influence, and recent transition to democracy.

Dress and Appearance

Palauans tend to dress in casual warm-weather clothing throughout the year, with many urban residents following the latest US or European fashion trends. Older Palauans tend to dress more conservatively than younger residents. In business settings, men typically wear button-down shirts with slacks, and women blouses with pants or dresses. Except for some government positions, men's suits and other formalwear are uncommon in Palau.

Traditional: Palauans typically only wear traditional dress for cultural performances and rites of passage (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*). Men traditionally wear a ***thu*** (loincloth) around their waist with coconut sprouts tied around their head, elbows, and knees. Women's dress usually includes a ***cheriut*** (colorful grass skirt) fastened with a woven belt and woven grass bra. Historically, Palauans made *cheirut* from dried coconut fronds, banana leaves, or bark, colored with different natural dyes to signify the woman's rank and clan. Belts were often made from sea turtle or coconut shells, dugong (aquatic mammal) skin, or human hair. Today, Palauans often construct traditional clothing from synthetic fabrics or plastics.

Recreation and Leisure

Palauans tend to spend their free time with family and friends attending ceremonies, hosting barbeques, watching movies, and taking day trips to Rock Islands (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*). Water activities like swimming, boating, and canoeing are also popular.

Holidays and Festivals: Many Palauan holidays and festivals reflect the country's recent history, cultural celebrations, and US influence (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*). Independence Day, October 1, 1994, is Palau's most important holiday and commemorated by the signing of the declaration of independence (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*). Palauans hold festivals across the country, celebrating Palauan identity and heritage. On the main islands of Koror and Babeldaob, the government holds parades, boat races, fireworks, and cultural performances that feature traditional music and dances. Similarly, on Constitution Day, Palauans commemorate the July 9, 1980 ratification of the constitution (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*) with large festivals on the main islands.

On United Nations (UN) Day, Palau hosts a Parade of Nations and flies every country's flag in honor of the UN. The Olechotel Belau Fair also occurs on UN Day and features traditional Palauan sports, art, and crafts. Due to Palau's close historical ties and compact with the US (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), Palauans also celebrate Thanksgiving.

As in the US, Thanksgiving celebrations generally include a large meal with family or friends, and they often consist of traditional Palauan food such as crab, fish, taro, and coconuts (see p. 2 of *Sustenance and Health*). Since most Palauans are Christians (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*), Christmas is a national holiday. Many Palauans celebrate Christmas with charitable donations, gift giving, and feasting with family and friends.

Sports and Games

Palauans participate in a wide variety of sports, including track and field, swimming, volleyball, softball, baseball, tennis, basketball, soccer, and weightlifting. Some traditional sports and activities, such as throwing spears, climbing coconut trees, and husking coconuts, remain popular today. Palau also holds

competitions in fishing and boating. Though Palau first participated in the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, the country has not medaled. Many Palauans also play games such as pool, checkers, chess, and cards.

Baseball: Introduced by Japanese colonists in the 1920s (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*), baseball is Palau's most popular sport. Many children and adults play recreationally. Palau's national team has had some success, winning gold in the 2007 Pacific Games and at several Micronesian Games.

Music

Traditional: ***Chelitakl rechuodel*** (traditional music) relies on the musician's voice and body to create a beat and rhythm through chanting and body percussion, such as clapping and patting the thighs. Music historically served as a means of communication and storytelling, and songs were passed down within clans (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*). Some Palauans believe gods created traditional chants such as ***chesols*** (recitations), ***kesekes*** (lullabies or hymns), ***kelloi*** (mournful hymns typically sung by women), and ***rebetii*** (love songs).

Today, some traditional songs retain their original lyrics, though some lyrics are so old that even performers and fluent Palauan speakers do not understand them fully. Traditional instruments such as the ***tumtum ra lild*** (jaw harp), ***debúsech*** (conch shell), and ***ngaok*** (flute) are used rarely today.

Modern: Many Palauans listen to modern popular music, also known as ***beches chelitakl*** (new songs), which developed in the late 20th century. Contemporary Palauan musicians tend to incorporate US, Japanese, and other international genres in their music. For example, many musicians have developed Palauan variations of reggae and US country music.

Dance

Dance is an important part of Palauan culture and expression and was traditionally used to welcome visitors, as offerings to the gods or for celebrations. Traditionally, men and women perform separate dances, with men's dances often including standing, stomping, and walking. The ***ruk*** is a solemn men's dance that incorporates over 50 dancers, who typically perform during large feasts or community events. The *ruk* is comprised of a sequence of performative dances of various formats that sometimes include props like coconut trees and javelins. While chanting and body percussion are always part of the *ruk*, the specific type and sequence of each dance often vary by clan, location, and event. War dances such as ***oeáng*** and ***ruk ra mekemád*** were part of rituals when rival clans went to war (see p. 1-2 of *History and Myth*). Today, they imitate battles, usually performed in two groups facing each other.

Women typically perform dances in two lines using slow, graceful movements such as swaying and arm gestures. The women's version of the *ruk* is called the ***nglóik*** and is also usually performed during community feasts, particularly on religious occasions. The *nglóik* also includes props such as bamboo sticks, and the women traditionally incorporate the rhythm of their swaying grass skirts into the routine. At some events, *ruk* and *nglóik* dance groups alternate performing.

Today, dancers often perform at cultural events, festivals, and public functions. However, many performances are variations of traditional dances, most of which were forgotten or are no longer performed. Men, women, and children perform a newer dance known as the ***matamatong***, a fast-paced marching dance with aggressive movements and stomping. Observers suggest the dance was influenced by German soldiers, who occupied Palau in the early 20th century (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*).

Literature

As Palauan was historically an oral language and storytelling an oral tradition (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*), Palau does not have a long history of written literature. Much of traditional Palauan literature consists of legends or myths transcribed after the arrival of European colonists. While the introduction of the Roman alphabet to write Palauan sparked a poetry movement in the 20th century, most Palauan literary works are still spoken. Palauan literature tends to center on themes of national identity and life under foreign occupation. One of Palau's most famous poets, Hermana Ramarui, focuses much of her work on Palauan identity and freedom.

The Bai

A cornerstone of Palauan culture is the ***bai***, a traditional meeting house erected at the request of a village or chiefs. While most villages have at least one *bai*, some wealthier villages constructed several. Different types of *bai* are constructed for designated purposes. The ***bai er a klobak*** is the most common, used as a meeting hall for village councils of chiefs. The ***chosobuulngau el bai*** is a meeting hall for the second tier of chiefs, while ***bai el beluu*** and ***tetib bai*** serve as community meeting spaces to host visitors or hold feasts, dances, and town halls.

Bai are single-room structures built in an A-frame style with the entrance facing east to let in sunlight. Many *bai* measure about 60 ft long, 30 ft wide, and 40 ft tall. The process of constructing the *bai* is a sacred rite led by a ***dachelbai*** (master builder), who typically begins with chants and prayers to the gods, who some Palauans believe first showed the villagers how to build the *bai*. Builders traditionally use only one tool, a ***chebakl*** (an axe-like tool for carving. Instead

of using nails, the *dachelbai* employs sculpting and fitting techniques to construct the *bai*.

After construction is complete, the builders typically decorate the inner and outer walls with oil paintings or pictorial carvings depicting various aspects of Palauan life and history. The entrance is usually adorned with a traditional wood carving of the goddess Dilukai (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). The original purpose of the Dilukai is unknown. Some theories suggest it could be a symbol of agricultural fertility, a guardian of crops and protector against evil spirits, a warning against promiscuity, or a symbol that women from other villages were welcome to visit the *bai* to provide sexual services.

Folk Arts and Handicrafts

Palau has a rich collection of arts and crafts that reflect the country's history, culture, and people. Woodworking is Palau's most symbolic art form. Some Palauan men build ***kabekl*** (war canoes), one of Palau's most notable traditions. *Dachelbai* traditionally use a *chebakl* to carve the ***kabekl*** from a tree trunk. Once carved and painted in traditional styles, the men display them to the village. Wood-carved storyboards of events, myths, or stories in Palauan history are another popular craft. While they traditionally adorned the *bai*, Palauans create individual wood plank storyboards to sell to tourists.

To create a storyboard, the artist first draws their depiction onto a large slab of wood before carving the designs. Nearly all storyboards feature depictions of myths, though size and placement of the individual carvings vary between boards. Individual storyboards have become an important part of Palau's culture of art and storytelling (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). Other popular Palauan handicrafts include jewelry; woven baskets, grass skirts, and belts; wood-carved containers and bowls; and pottery.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Palauans typically consider shared meals with friends and family important social events. Palauan culinary traditions exhibit an array of Pacific and global influences, while incorporating fresh, locally grown and brightly seasoned ingredients.

Dining Customs

Palauans typically eat three daily meals and snack throughout the day. Breakfast is often the smallest meal, while the mid-day and evening meals are usually more substantial. While women traditionally prepared the food and cultivated important staples such as the taro root, men provided fresh fish or other animal proteins for the dishes. Today, many Palauans cook and prepare meals following similar dining customs as the US, using cutlery or chopsticks for most meals.

While featuring distinct cuisine, decades of US presence (see p. 6-8 of *History and Myth*) have influenced daily Palauan dining and culinary practices. Accordingly, an increasing number of Palauans, particularly in urban areas such as Koror, have adopted US culinary habits and dietary preferences.

Diet

Although Palauan cuisine varies somewhat by island, it typically combines local Micronesian ingredients with Japanese (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*) and US influences. The cuisine has also recently incorporated dishes from growing Asian immigrant communities (see p. 10 of *Political and Social Relations*). Dishes tend to highlight starches, fresh seafood, and fruits over meat and dairy products. Taro, a starchy root vegetable or tuber common in some Asian-Pacific cuisines, is prominent in many traditional dishes and is served steamed, boiled, or roasted. Rice is also an important component of many Palauan meals, often used as a side dish or mixed with a protein and vegetables.

Other common staples are yams and pumpkin, prized for their versatility, and pandan – a sweet, aromatic leaf used for flavoring.

Seafood is the most common source of protein in traditional Palauan cuisine, with clams, mouse grouper, coral trout, ***meas*** (rabbit fish), ***chum*** (surgeonfish), ***kemeduckl*** (parrot fish), and ***cherangel*** (poll unicorn fish) featuring prominently. Due to conservation efforts in large areas of Palauan waters (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*), much of the country's seafood is caught in local lagoons instead of the open ocean (see p. 6 of *Economics and Resources*), making reef fish more common than open-ocean game like tuna. In the 18th century, European explorers (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*) introduced pork, chicken, and beef, which feature prominently in European, Asian, and US-style dishes.

Popular and widely available fresh fruits include coconut, papaya, banana, dragon fruit, mango, breadfruit, passionfruit, rambutan (a small, spine-covered fruit similar to lychee), and soursop (a large, green fruit with a soft, sweet interior).

Popular Dishes and Meals

Common breakfast foods include breads and cereals accompanied by fresh fruit juice and tea or coffee. Served in the early afternoon, lunch generally features seafood paired with starchy side dishes or vegetables. A popular lunch dish is snapper seasoned with fresh ginger and cilantro and broiled in a banana leaf, served with rice or taro. Another common lunchtime meal is a Japanese-style ***bento*** box, a takeout dish that features rice and meat such as ***karaage*** (Japanese fried

chicken), served with small vegetable side dishes. Stews and soups are also an important part of Palauan cuisine. ***Tinola*** (a green papaya and chicken soup originally from the Philippines) is an especially popular option. Palauans often prepare family-style evening meals, consisting of dishes similar to lunch but typically larger and eaten with the entire family.

Historically a common meal, fruit bat soup is prepared by stewing a large bat with coconut milk, spicy peppers, onions, and soy sauce. Today, traditional Palauan restaurants serve the soup, which is typically reserved for special occasions.

Ulkoy (deep fried fritters made of shrimp and grated summer squash) are also popular, as are ***rösti*** (German-style fried pancakes made from taro). Many popular desserts like ***pichi-pichi*** (a sticky, gelatinous steamed cassava, sugar, and coconut cake) and ***halo-halo*** (plantain, coconut, jackfruit, yams, and condensed milk over crushed ice) originated in the Philippines.

Beverages

Due to Palau's tropical climate, fresh fruit juice, lemonade, and smoothies, which are often milk-based, are available year-round. Soda, tea, and coffee are popular non-alcoholic beverages, particularly iced varieties that originated in nearby East Asian countries. An emergent brewery industry produces a variety of local beers.

Eating Out

Restaurants in Koror range from upscale establishments specializing in international cuisine to inexpensive, casual eateries and fast-food restaurants serving Japanese or Western-style meals. Fish dishes are common in almost all restaurants. While most restaurants are in Koror, other islands have a handful of dining establishments. Some small gas stations and convenience stores serve bento boxes, and cafes serve coffee-based drinks. A 10-20% tip for good service is expected in most restaurants and other eateries.

Health Overview

Palauans' overall health has improved in recent decades. Between 1995-2023, life expectancy has slowly increased from 72 to 75 years, higher than the 2022 average of the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) (73), but lower than the US (81). Between 1985-2023, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased from 29 deaths per 1,000 live births to 11, lower than the PSIDS average (18) but higher than the US rate (5). Healthcare spending as a percentage of GDP was 18% in 2020, higher than the PSIDS average (9%) but lower than the US rate (19%).

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Palauan medicine centers on the use of prayer and herbal remedies to identify illness and treat disease. According to traditional religious beliefs, a ***melecholb*** (healer) performs ceremonies and uses local plants to reverse curses or sorcery perceived to have caused illness (see p. 1-2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). While most Palauans today have access to modern medicine, the use of traditional herbs is common to treat the symptoms of some diseases, notably obesity and diabetes.

Modern Healthcare System

The government offers free universal healthcare to all Palauans through a public hospital in Koror and a series of smaller health centers (locally known as "dispensaries") funded by a national insurance scheme. The insurance system is comprised of two parts: medical savings accounts cover routine medical checkups and outpatient procedures, while a larger universal insurance fund covers inpatient care and referrals for international medical care required for more complex procedures. Both components are funded by mandatory contributions based on earned income, which employers match. All employed Palauans must enroll in

the program and dedicate a minimum of 2.5% of their salary to the fund. Self-employed Palauans must contribute 5% of their salaries.

Palau's only hospital, Belau National Hospital located in Koror, has around 80 beds and a dispensary, a few smaller private clinics, and a dental care center. Other large community health centers are in Melekeok, Ngarchelong, Ngaremlengui, and Airai, all on Babeldaob Island (see p. 1-2 of *Political and Social Relations*). In 2020, Palau had about 18 physicians per 10,000 people, more than the PSIDS average (6), but lower than the US rate (26) and the World Health Organization recommendation (23).

While healthcare is available for all Palauans without payment at the point of service, wealthier residents and those living in Koror and Babeldaob typically receive better care. Palauans living in rural areas and on outer islands may have to travel to receive medical care and must consider the high cost of fuel and long distances from some islands to Koror and Babeldaob. As a result, some residents defer required treatment and care.

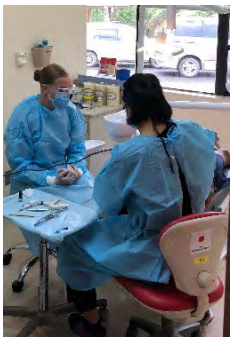
Palau's limited medical services require some residents to seek treatment abroad. Often covered by the national insurance fund as part of the Medical Referral Program (MRP), treatment for complex medical conditions requires travel to Taiwan, India, the Philippines, or the US.

Health Challenges

As in most developed countries, the leading causes of death in Palau are chronic and non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. NCDs accounted for 78% of deaths in 2017. Estimates suggest some 75% of Palauans are overweight or obese, which contribute to heart disease and diabetes.

In addition, many Palauans chew betel nuts. Consisting of an areca nut wrapped in betel pepper leaves and sometimes mixed with tobacco, betel nuts produce a mild euphoria and stain the chewer's mouth reddish-purple. Chewing betel nuts is linked to higher rates of oral cancers, cardiovascular diseases, and other negative health outcomes. Due to the burden of NCDs on the Palauan healthcare system, the government passed a tax in 2016 that dedicates 10% of revenues from tobacco and alcohol sales to prevention and education efforts meant to curb unhealthy lifestyle choices.

Partially due to the country's small population, Palau lacks healthcare employees with adequate training to supervise complex medical care. While the implementation of the MRP offsets some of this risk, the government has not fully assessed the long-term financial viability of the program or the possibility of hiring more staff and opening new hospitals. As Palau uses US funds from the Compact of Free Association (see p. 5-6 of *Political and Social Relations*) to defray healthcare costs, the country is dependent on foreign assistance for the management of its healthcare system.



As of September6, 2023, Palau had 6,227 confirmed cases of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. Palau's initial lack of cases and high vaccination rate prompted the government to establish a "travel bubble" with Taiwan in early 2021, allowing Taiwanese tourists into the country. However, that travel bubble burst in January 2022 as COVID-19 cases increased and restrictions continue to negatively impact the tourism-dependent economy (see p. 5 of *Economics and Resources*).

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

For centuries, most Palauans subsisted by foraging, fishing, and farming. In the late 18th century, they began trading local products for European tobacco, metal, and firearms (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). By the mid-19th century, British traders had established small plantations in Palau, using Chinese laborers to grow and harvest sugar, coffee, cotton, and bananas. The Europeans also fostered a small seafood industry on the islands, drying tropical sea cucumbers (oblong, gelatinous creatures distantly related to starfish and sea urchins) to trade with Asian merchants. However, conflict between the Europeans and Palauans led to the decline of both endeavors.

When Germany took control of Palau in 1899 (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*), the authorities began investing in new industries. In the early 1900s, Germans planted coconut trees in Babeldaob to harvest copra (dried coconut) for export, which subsequently failed due to weather, pests, and Palauans' lack of interest in the endeavor. Nevertheless, the Germans established a successful phosphate industry in Angaur, southern Palau. In 1913, the newly created Phosphate Joint Stock Company employed some 500 Micronesian and 100 Chinese laborers.

Following the Japanese annexation of Palau during World War I (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), the Japanese sought to use the islands for resources to fuel their expanding Asian empire and promote their interests in the region. In 1921, Japan founded the South Seas Development Company to operate fishing and copra industries in Palau. While the Japanese fishing industry spanned a large swathe of the Pacific, about 75% of some 33,000 tons of tuna caught and exported to Japan in 1937 came from Palau and Chuuk in present-day Micronesia.

In addition to the fishing industry, the Japanese developed coconut plantations, pineapple farms, and bauxite mines in Babeldaob. Further, they expanded upon the phosphate mining operations in Angaur, displacing many residents. The Japanese also built houses for Japanese immigrants, who in 1940 outnumbered Palauans by nearly four to one (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). The Japanese enlisted many Palauans to build defenses during World War II, resulting in the ceasation of most commercial fishing operations.

After defeating Japan in World War II, the US Navy governed the region until the United Nations designated Palau and several other nations as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands to be administered by the US in 1947 (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*). Despite some investment in roads and schools in the late 1940s and 1950s (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*), the US paid relatively little attention to Palau's economic development until the 1960s. In 1964, the US Van Camp Seafood Company established a base in Palau, where it operated up to 15 tuna boats and a freezing facility. Meanwhile, Japanese fishing boats began returning to Palauan waters, targeting various species of tuna. While the tuna industry provided Palau some revenue, the government was the main employer on the islands. Meanwhile, an increase in visitors caused Palau's small tourism industry to grow substantially.

In 1975, US businessman Robert Panero sought to build a port in Palau for crude oil storage. However, the ***Ibedul*** (high chief) of Koror led a "Save Palau" campaign to stop the plan. The *Ibedul*'s efforts succeeded and laid the foundation for future policies in support of environmental protection and tourism, which would become a key component of Palau's economy.

In the 1980s, Palau faced economic challenges due to political disorder (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*) and a financial crisis. In 1985, Palau defaulted on a $32 million loan for a power plant contracted from a British firm. The default led to a financial shock

that caused Palau to reduce government employees' hours and salaries (see p. 9-10 of *History and Myth*). While some Palauans demonstrated against the cuts, economic growth was stagnant. In response, Palau sought to limit foreign direct investment in the economy through the 1990 Foreign Investment Act, which created a board to approve foreign business activities in Palau. The law also required a Palauan at least partially own businesses, and foreign nationals could not own land on the islands.

Upon gaining independence, Palau's economic prospects improved. In 1994, Palau and the US signed the Compact of Free Association (COFA – see p. 5-6 of *Political and Social Relations*), which stipulated Palau would receive some $574 million in a trust fund, $25 million for federal services and $267 million in discretionary federal program assistance. Palau also began receiving financial assistance from US agencies like the Postal Service, National Weather Service, and Department of Education, and the COFA allowed Palauan citizens to live and work in the US. Further, Palau settled its debts with the British banks that funded the power plant, improving the country's financial standing.

By the late 1990s, Palau's economic policy had shifted to focus on free-market strategies and trade. In 1997, Palau joined the International Monetary Fund, and in subsequent years, created financial and banking regulatory bodies. In 2001, Palau signed the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement, which created regional integration and liberalized trade across Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Australia, and New Zealand. In the same year, Palau also created the Ngardmau Free Trade Zone to promote investment in light manufacturing in Babeldaob.

Palau did not historically welcome foreign workers due to their often illegal, exploitative labor practices and operation of local shell companies (businesses created to hold funds and manage another entity's financial transactions). However, Palau opened its labor market as part of the liberal economic reforms, and by

2005, foreign workers accounted for some 54% of formal employment. Today, they comprise about 40% of all workers in Palau (see p. 10 of *Political and Social Relations*). Although the government set a minimum wage of $3-per-hour for both public and private sector jobs in 2014, the minimum wage law does not apply to foreign workers, who are often underpaid (see p. 1 of *Time and Space*).

Between 2000-16, Palau's economy doubled in size. In 2007, Palau completed a 53 mi-long road in Babeldaob that has since facilitated mobility and economic opportunity across the states on the island (see p. 1 of *Technology and Material*). In 2009, Palau and the US extended the COFA, preserving US financial assistance to the country until at least 2024. While the economy experienced recession in 2008-09 due to the global financial crisis, it recovered in 2010-12, largely from an increase in tourism.

Today, Palau's economy is heavily dependent on tourists, many traveling to the country to see the fruits of its conservation and environmental protection efforts. For example, in 2020, the government established a marine reserve that encompasses 80% of the country's sea territory (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*). While Palau's environmental activism has drawn increasing numbers of tourists, it has had a mixed impact on the fishing industry. Although the government created the reserve to protect marine ecosystems, following the ban of commercial fishing, some restaurants have turned to serving reef fish due to shortages of more sustainable fish such as tuna. Consequently, the reserve has negatively impacted some Palauan fishermen's livelihoods, as well as coastal reefs.

Palau's small trade-dependent economy is highly exposed to external shocks, causing per-capita GDP growth to fluctuate every few years. In 2020, travel restrictions and the global shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (see p. 6 of *Sustenance and Health*) devastated the economy, which shrunk by some 10.3%.

Due to the persistence of pandemic-related restrictions in 2021, Palau's GDP declined by an additional 13.3% before contracting another 1% in 2022. Nevertheless, Palau is still in a better economic position than many other countries in the region. In 2021, Palau's per-capita GDP was nearly $14,000, much higher than the nearby Marshall Islands ($6,000) and Federated States of Micronesia ($3,300). Further, Palau remains committed to promoting growth through sustainable tourism and agriculture.

Services

Accounting for some 73% of GDP (2021) and 80% of employment (2020), services comprise the economy's largest sector. Key subsectors include tourism and telecommunications.

Tourism: Comprising about 38% of GDP (2020) and 45% of the workforce (2019), tourism is a vital component of the economy, generating some $52.4 million in 2020. Visitor arrivals peaked at 168,770 in 2015 but declined to 41,674 in 2020. Palau's reefs, lagoons, and wildlife serve as key attractions for visitors, many visiting the country specifically for diving and snorkeling, as global rankings place Palau as one of the world's top three diving sites.

Industry

As the second-largest sector of the economy, industry comprises some 12% of GDP (2021) and 15% of the labor force (2020). While construction is a key subsector, manufacturing is limited, as Palau has only one large factory that produces clothing. Two power plants generate electricity for the islands.

Construction: This subsector accounts for about 8% of GDP and is the largest component of the industrial sector. Most of the large construction companies operating in Palau are foreign-owned and concentrate on infrastructure development.

Agriculture

Accounting for some 4% of GDP (2021) and 5% of employment (2020), agriculture in Palau mainly consists of fishing.

Fishing: Commercial and artisanal fishing are important for many Palauans' livelihoods, and in 2019, fisheries accounted for some 2% of GDP. In recent years, aquaculture has comprised an increasingly large share of Palau's fishing sector. The Palau Mariculture Demonstration Center, a government-run giant clam farm, is the largest producer of giant clams in the Micronesia region. Milkfish are another significant farm-raised species that provide fresh fish for consumption and bait for tuna fishing. Tuna and giant clams are Palau's top seafood exports.

Farming: As of 2020, less than 1% of Palauan land is arable. Most farms in Palau are on small plots that produce taro, cassava, coconut, sweet potatoes, bananas, papaya, taro, betel nuts, and other crops for local consumption. A small number of larger commercial farms, usually run by Chinese or Filipinos, grow vegetables such as cucumbers, green onions, cabbages, eggplants, and other produce.

Currency

Palau uses the US dollar ($) as its currency.

Foreign Trade

Palau's imports, totaling some $180.38 million in 2021, primarily consisted of refined petroleum, boats, fish, cars, and broadcasting equipment from China (34%), the US (21%), South Korea (12%), Japan (8%), and Taiwan (6%). In the same year, exports totaled $12.07 million and consisted of fish, computers, office machinery, and scrap vessels sold to Japan (34%), China (16%), Turkey (15%), and Italy (12%).

Foreign Aid

In 2021, Palau received some $50.5 million in official development assistance, with the US, Japan, Australia, and the Asian Development Bank serving as top donors. In the same year, the US committed $9 million in bilateral aid to Palau, $2 million of which was part of a COFA infrastructure grant.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Palau has generally well-maintained modern physical infrastructure and telecommunications systems. However, the country's relatively small population and environmental conservation has limited the number of largescale infrastructure projects. Free speech and press are constitutionally protected, and the government rarely restricts those freedoms.

Transportation

Due to Palau's small size, there are few public transportation options on the islands, and only Koror features a limited shuttle service. Instead, the most common forms of transport include private car, boat, and foot. Government-owned ferries make regular trips between islands. Many small privately owned vessels also transport passengers. While Palauans drive on the right side of the road (see p. 3 of *Time and Space*), the driver's seat is often on the right instead of the left side of the vehicle, as many cars are imported from Japan.

Roadways

About 80% of Palau's 78 mi of roads are paved. Towns are connected by roads; however, these are sometimes washed out during the rainy season. The Japan-Palau Friendship Bridge completed in 2002 connects Babledaob and Koror. The main highway is the 53 mi-long Compact Road, which encircles Babeldaob and was completed in 2007. The US military built some small roads in Peleliu and Angaur after World War II (see p. 6-7 of *History and Myth*) that remain in use.

Ports and Waterways

Palau's main port is Malakal, situated on an island of the same name located just north of Koror. Positioned on a lagoon, the port has docks that specialize in managing cargo and fishing

vessels. Around 30 smaller docks on other islands serve more private and less commercial traffic.

Airways

All of Palau's three airports have a paved runway. The country's air transport hub is Roman Tmetuchl International Airport, also known as Palau International Airport, located on the southern end of Babeldaob. With direct flights to Guam, the Philippines, Taiwan, and South Korea, and charter flights to other regional destinations, the airport handles some 200,000 passengers annually. Belau Air operates a single five-passenger aircraft with daily flights to World War II-era airports in Angaur and Peleliu (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*).

Energy

In 2021, Palau generated some 96% of its energy from fossil fuels, with just 4% from solar panels and other renewable energy sources. With no domestic oil industry, Palau must import fossil fuels, leaving it vulnerable to international fluctuations in oil prices. In 2015, Palau adopted a series of policies meant to accelerate the country's transition to renewable resources and reduce overall energy consumption. By 2025, Palau aims to reduce emissions by 22% below its 2005 levels and for 45% of its energy to be renewable.

Media

Palau's 1981 constitution protects the freedoms of speech and press, and the government generally respects those rights. Observers praised a 2012 Senate (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*) decision that tabled a proposal to limit foreign

ownership of the media, claiming it was an attempt to target a Palauan television business partially owned by US citizens. While the government does not restrict press freedoms, the high cost of Internet connectivity and small population size limit the scope of Palauan media coverage.

Print Media: Multiple newspapers are in circulation in Palau. *Tia Belau* and *Island Times* are popular English-language weeklies. In addition, regional newspapers such as the *Pacific Island Times* published in Guam sometimes cover Palauan news.

Radio and TV: Palau is home to a few local radio stations, with private stations such as *Koror Palauan* broadcasting news, talk shows, and music. A short-wave government-owned radio station transmits news and music, and two stations owned by Christian groups broadcast religious content (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Two private cable-news networks transmit US television programming, and a government-owned network broadcasts in Palauan. Many residents gain access to international radio and television channels through satellite and Internet streaming services.

Telecommunications

While Palau has modern telecommunications infrastructure, penetration rates are generally lower on the islands farthest from Koror. In 2021, Palau had some 44 landlines and 130 mobile cellular subscriptions per 100 people. Even in remote villages, many Palauans access the Internet via mobile phones.

Internet: While the Internet penetration rate in Palau was only about 37% in 2021, a higher percentage of Palauans likely access the Internet through their own or family and friends' mobile devices. However, the Internet's high cost does make it inaccessible to many residents. Generally, government authorities neither restrict access nor block or censor content.

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