Vanuatu

**Introduction**

One known as the New Hebrides, Vanuatu is an archipelago that sits in the crystalline waters of the South Pacific. Many travelers come here expecting a relaxing trip marked by sunbathing trips on perfect beaches and catnaps under the majestic palm trees. While a beach bum paradise can certainly be found at any corner in Vanuatu, a little digging will offer the discerning traveler so much more than the typical island getaway.

Perhaps it’s the islands multitude of active volcanoes that add excitement to this peculiar set of islands. It could also be the spectacular diving through waters as clear as a bottle of the most purified drinking water. Most likely, it’s the history and culture that cradle these islands and shelter them from the boring, everyday tourist trap. The native culture is abundant here, and the locals waste no time in making their guests feel like part of their society. They will tell you fantastic stories about their cannibalistic ancestors and the World War II G.I.’s who made such an impression on them that they were believed to be gods.

Vanuatu is not a place for those seeking a week holed up in a glittering beach resort. Nor was the archipelago meant for visitors lacking a sense of adventure. There is simply so much to do here that a whole afternoon spent sunbathing will feel like a shameful waste of time. Instead, you should strap on your hiking shoes and explore some of the myriads of volcanoes, or don a loincloth and join in a ceremonial dance with the natives. Whatever you choose to do on the islands of Vanuatu, you are certain to have the adventure of a lifetime.

**Climate**

The climate of Vanuatu is typically warm but also varied; while the northern islands are classified as tropical, the southernmost points can be considered subtropical. Port Vila, which is the capital of Vanuatu and one of the archipelago’s more popular destinations, is usually between 80 and 86 degrees Fahrenheit. Most of the islands experience temperature ranges similar to this, but some spots can drop into the 50’s on winter nights.

The best time to travel to Vanuatu is between May and October. This period is the dry season, and it offers visitors warm tropical days and cool breezy nights. The rainy season lasts from November to April; most people choose not to travel to the islands during this time because of the moderate to heavy rain fall. Vanuatu, like other South Pacific regions, often experiences cyclones during the rainy season.

There is no doubt that Vanuatu is a little slice of bliss, but there are certain environmental factors that could be potentially dangerous. It is important to remember that most of the islands in the archipelago are volcanic, and eruptions have occurred in recent years. Also, minor earthquakes have been reported from time to time. While these facts should not deter anyone from visiting the cultural haven of Vanuatu, it is important to be informed and prepared at all times.

**History**

Little is known about the first inhabitants of the islands of Vanuatu. A handful of artifacts, such as the bones of people and livestock and fragments of pottery, have been found on various islands in the archipelago. It is widely believed that the Lapita people, who migrated from the Solomon Islands, were the first to inhabit the area approximately 3200 years ago.

Vanuatu has a long history of colonization following the disappearance of its mysterious first inhabitants. The trend of colonization began with the Polynesians who hailed from the central Pacific. Bringing their families and livestock in large canoes, these people settled on the islands of Vanuatu around the 11th century, with more and more of their neighbors following until the 15th century.

The archipelago was first spotted by Europeans in 1606, when the Portuguese explorer Pedro Fernandez de Quiros noticed one of the islands in passing. Vanuatu did not receive more attention from Europe until 1825, when a trader named Peter Dillon discovered a vast supply of sandalwood on one of the islands. This discovery brought even more traders from Australia, French territories, Samoa, and other nearby areas. It is thought that the population of colonists was even greater than the population of Vanuatu today.

Following the discovery of sandalwood, the new foreign laborers were joined by missionaries and settlers who were looking to grow cotton on the vast expanses of unused land. Although the British made up the majority of these colonists at the beginning of the century, the French greatly outnumbered them by the end of the 19th century. This brought about the question of ownership of the island, and both governments were petitioned to annex the territory to one government or the other. However, in 1906, the French and British governments made the decision to govern Vanuatu jointly. They dubbed this unique government the British-French Condominium.

The British-French Condominium remained unchallenged until World War II. The presence of American soldiers in Vanuatu inspired a sense of nationality and a desire for independence. The citizens of Vanuatu began to push for their independence in 1974, and they were finally successful in 1980.

**Government**

Vanuatu became an independent parliamentary republic on July 30, 1980. Its government is headed by a prime minister, who is elected every four years, and a president, who is elected every five years. The prime minister is aided by his or her appointed Council of Ministers.

The legislative branch of Vanuatu is made up of the country’s Parliament. Vanuatu’s Parliament consists of 52 representatives, who serve four-year terms. Justice is maintained by the nation’s Supreme Court. Vanuatu follows its own constitution, which was instated on its independence day in 1980.

**Economy**

The economy of Vanuatu is primarily based on small-scale agriculture. The archipelago’s lush environment allows for the cultivation of coffee, coconuts, copra, and other cash crops. The local farmers also raise cattle and harvest fish from the Pacific. Agriculture is such a large part of the archipelago’s economy that over 80% of the population works in the industry.

Over the years, Vanuatu has experienced a period of economic growth. It is thought to be the result of an increase in tourism to this beautiful region of the world. The nation’s government is beginning to focus more on the tourism and services industries in order to continue the trend of growth. Real estate, business, and industry also continue to have a growing influence on the economy.

**People**

As of 2010, an estimated 221,552 people live on the various islands of Vanuatu. The indigenous people make up almost 95% of its total population. The vast majority of the citizens of Vanuatu live in rural areas; the rest live in the nation’s capital and Luganville, a large city on Espitiru Santo.

Because of the archipelago’s history of colonization, the cultures of Vanuatu are colorful and varied. There are over one hundred local languages spoken by the indigenous people of these peaceful islands. Bislama, a local pidgin language, is known as national language; however, English and French are also cited as official languages.

The natives of Vanuatu are some of the friendliest people that even the most seasoned traveler ever will have encountered. They are very inviting, and will not hesitate to answer any questions about their cultures and customs. The locals of Vanuatu are genuinely hospitable; unlike the locals of some of the world’s best known islands, these people will not try to hassle you into spending all of your money. They do not have a trace of that fake friendliness which rubs visitors the wrong way. They are real people, and they want you to love their islands as much as they do.

**Safety**

Vanuatu is a safe place to travel, but visitors should be aware that crimes can occur if they are not careful. Violent crime is rare on the islands, and guests are more likely to theft and burglary. Visitors should take care not to travel with large amounts of cash or valuables; instead, they should keep these items in hotel safes. Also, it is important not to travel to isolated areas, especially at night.

Sexual harassment and assault have also been reported in Vanuatu. Women should take extra caution not to travel alone, especially at night and in remote areas.

**Things to Do:**

* View the colonial architecture in Port Vila.
* Enjoy the fabulous French cuisine at restaurants such as The Flaming Bull in Port Vila.
* Tour old World War II complexes, such as the ammunition bunkers in Luganville.
* Hop on one of Vanuatu’s luxury liners for a day cruise of the islands.
* Shop at the markets in Luganville and Port Vila.
* Scuba dive, swim, or fish the pristine waters of the South Pacific.

**Other Information:**

* Telephone country code: 678
* Languages: English, French, local languages.
* Predominant Religion: Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Anglican.
* Passport, proof of funds, and return ticket required for entry.
* Visa is not required for stays of less than 30 days.