



# Our land for ever

That's the true meaning of the word 'Vanuatu' in the local language, which freed itself from colonialism and became an independent republic in 1980. Discover this exotic South Pacific destination, its origins, culture and native people.

## Southseas Discovery Trip

Vanuatu is an Y-shaped archipelago of 83 islands, stretching over 1,000 km from just south of the Solomon Islands to just north of New Caledonia.

The main islands are Efate (political capital), Santo (the largest), Malekula and Tanna. Other larger islands are Erromango, Ambrym, Pentecost (the home of "land diving" – predecessor of "bungy jumping"), Maewo, Gaua, Aneityum and Ambae.

Vanuatu was formerly known as New Hebrides. It was an Anglo-French Condominium (which became locally known as 'Pandemonium'), from 1906 until independence in 1980, when it became a self-governing republic and a member of the Commonwealth.

Around 200,000 Ni-Vanuatu people (a Melanesian race) live on the islands and speak over 110 local languages, the highest number of languages per head of population in the world. English and French are widely spoken, although Bislama (a "pidgen English") is the lingua franca and national language.

## A bit of history

Vanuatu has been inhabited for around 5,000 years. The first people to settle the 80+ islands, were the Melanesians from South East Asia. The European contact was made by the Portuguese in May 1606. At that time, Pedro Ferdinand de Quiros "discovered" the largest island in Vanuatu group. He thought it was 'Terra Australis' so he christened it, "Terra Australis del Espiritu Santo". The last part of the name is still used today.

In the ensuing years, other European navigators also visited the islands. Captain James Cook from England, during his journey in 1774, up the east coast of Australia and into the Coral Seas, gave the name "New Hebrides" to the Vanuatu island group. European settlement came in the form of Sandalwood Traders in 1825. They established trade with China for the valuable Sandalwood, which lasted for many decades. Later in the 19th century, both English and French settlers began setting up colonies within the islands of Vanuatu. That led to the unique establishment of the Anglo-French Condominium of 1906. Certain islands of Vanuatu played a strategic role in the Allied forces battle against Japanese invaders during World War II. The people of Vanuatu finally regained their independence from European Colonists in 1980 on the 30th of July.

## Culture, Food and Activities

The culture of the people of Vanuatu is one of the few in the South Pacific that has successfully resisted total change from outside influences. The more remote islands have maintained much of their thousands of years customs and culture. This of course makes such islands very



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interesting to visit as part of a discovery holiday. A visit to what is often described as the 'Untouched Paradise' of Vanuatu, has certainly become popular with modern Europeans. For the last few decades the majority of visitors to these islands have come from Australia and New Zealand. In recent years though, an increasing number of Northern Europeans are making the extra discovery trip from Australia to Vanuatu for a short but memorable cultural experience!



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Some of what can be easily experienced on Efate island are Melanesian Feast Nights, Kastom Villages, String Band Music and Kastom Dancers. Efate island is the country's main island. Both Port Vila (the Capital) and Seat of the central government, are located there. Along with the Bauerfield International Airport, Efate has the best infrastructure of all the islands in the Vanuatu group. Espiritu Santo being second most set up with a modern infrastructure. Of course in both cases, the infrastructure is only in and around the main towns. The rest of the villages on Efate and Santo and especially the other islands, are still very traditional or partially modernized.

One thing that is very unique to Vanuatu, is the many different choices of international cuisine. Diners can choose from Australian, American or British styles, traditional Melanesian Ground Oven cooking, French, Italian, Chinese, Vietnamese and Indian cuisine. Restaurants, Bistros and Cafes are dotted all throughout Port Vila and surrounds. Many hotels and resorts also have one or more restaurants or bistros to choose from.

The Port Vila downtown 'Markets' operate now 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The choice of fresh, organically grown fruits and vegetables at very affordable prices fills

the markets daily. Many traditional root crops, such as Taro, Sweet Potato and Yams are found in abundance at the Markets. Also a selection of hand-crafts, such as wood carvings and shell necklaces etc. make ideal gifts or souvenirs.

As for activities, Vanuatu has much to offer. Golfing, swimming in crystal clear waters, scuba-diving, sailing, Deep Sea / Coral Reef fishing, horse-riding, kayaking, day and night cruising, etc. Or visiting the outer islands, such as Tanna with its active volcano Mt Yasur, or Pentecost island in May during the "land diving" season. Or, relaxing and soaking up the sun one of the many secluded, pristine white and volcanic sand beaches, strewn around Efate, Santo and other islands. Or, just come and experience the unique culture of the South Pacific.

### Offshore Financial Centre

Vanuatu also has another aspect besides tourism and various export industries. It was set up as a Financial Centre with Tax Haven status as far back as the early 1970's by the British. This important industry contributes a sizeable percentage of Vanuatu's Gross National Product! Most of the offices of the well established and recognized financial industry

representatives can be found in Port Vila. With no exchange controls, and the long established Financial Centre industry, many companies have been established in Vanuatu to take advantage of its Tax Haven status. Although Vanuatu was blacklisted for a few years by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – the rich countries cartel), it has been now removed from the blacklist by the OECD and continues to enjoy its Offshore Financial Centre status.

Finally, Vanuatu has been popular with Honeymooners and people wishing to get married on a South Pacific island, for many years. Many resorts offer special services for weddings and honeymoon couples, all year round. Likewise, South Pacific cruise ships often visit Vanuatu and stop over at Port Vila for an overnight stay.

So for many reasons, Vanuatu is the destination of choice for an ever growing number of yearly visitors.

*Mi lukim yu!*

