

**MISSIONS ATLAS PROJECT
PACIFIC OCEAN
REPUBLIC OF MARSHALL ISLANDS**

Snapshots Section

Country Name: Republic of the Marshall Islands

Country Founded in: 1986

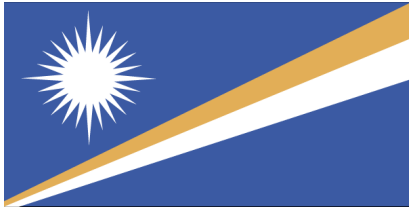
Population: 64,522

Government Type: constitutional government in free association with the US

Geography/location in the world: The geographic coordinates are 9 00 N, 168 00 E. There are about 29 atolls located in the Pacific Ocean between Hawaii and Australia.

Number of people groups: 5

Picture of flag:



Religion Snapshot (All information gleaned from *Operation World*)

Major Religion and % of population: Protestant 78.64%

All religions and % for each:

Protestant	78.64%
Independent	7.94%
Catholic	6.07%
Marginal	6.38%
Unaffiliated	5.51%

(About -6.07% are doubly affiliated)

Non-religious/ Other	2.00%
Baha'i	1.80%
Traditional Ethnic	1.00%

Government interaction with religion: The government supports the freedom of religion.

Country Profile

Basic Facts

Country Name: Republic of the Marshall Islands

Demographics:

The estimated population of the Marshall Islands is 64,522. Children up to fourteen years of age account for 38.6% of the population. Adults between the ages of fifteen and sixty-four years of age account for 58.5% of the population. In the last age category, sixty-five years and above, this group accounts for 2.9% of the population. The median age for males is 21.3 years, and the median age for females is 21.2 years. The population growth rate is 2.08%.

The birth rate is 30.7 births for every 1,000 people. There are an estimated 3.59 children born to every woman. The infant mortality rate is 25.45 deaths for every 1,000 live births. The death rate is 4.49 deaths for every 1,000 people. The life expectancy for the total population is 71.19 years.

There are approximately 5 different people groups. About 92.1% of the population is Marshallese while 5.9% are of mixed Marshallese descent. Another 2% are Filipino, Japanese, Chinese, Pacific Islanders, and Americans.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rm.html>

Language:

English and Marshallese are the two official languages. Most people speak Marshallese but may be familiar with English too.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rm.html>

Society/Culture:

Family connections are highly valued by islanders. Most villages were initially small and every person had to work hard in order to survive. The entire community participates in raising the child. The first birthday of an infant (locally known as *kemem*) is a time of great celebration.

Children are taught to respect elders, but they are also taught the importance of being hospitable and kind to one another. A sense of cooperation is the basic foundation value of islanders because of the need to help each other carve a living out of the limited resources provided by the island's environment.

Each Marshallese belongs to a clan called a *jowi*. They follow the commands of a chief called an *Iroij*. He will decide how the communal land is to be shared and how resources will be distributed. He also serves as the arbitrator when disputes develop between different families.

The chief, however, is supervised by a man known as the *Alap*. The *Alap* watches over the daily lives of the clan members, too.

Fishing and growing food are important daily activities. Breadfruit and pandanus, a local fruit, are cultivated as are coconuts and swamp tares. Ground water and rain water are collected in order to help in the cultivation process.

The Marshallese are expert craftsmen. Women weave mats, baskets, and hats which are used in daily life. Canoes and navigational stick charts are made by men and are highly valued. Some canoes could be 100 feet in length and carry as many as 40 people at one time. The original settlers of the islands came across the ocean in the canoes in order to build homes on the islands.

Tattooing was very traditional among islanders until the advent of missionaries. There would be special ceremonies which would sometimes last for a month at a time in which young people would receive tattoos. The tattoos would represent important cultural values and life events.

<http://www.rmiembassyus.org/Culture.htm#people>

<http://www.visitmarshallislands.com/culture.htm>

<http://www.everyculture.com/Ma-Ni/Marshall-Islands.html>

Government:

The government is officially a constitutional government in free association with the United States. Suffrage is universal for everyone over the age of 18. There are three branches with the government: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial. The capital is located in Majuro.

The executive branch consists of the office of President and a Presidential Cabinet. The President is elected by the lower house of the legislative branch. The president is the chief of state and the head of the government. Presidents serve for four years. Since November of 2009, Jurelang Zedkaia has served in this capacity. Zedkaia gained office after former President Litokwa Tomeing lost his position due to a vote of no confidence in October of 2009. The president selects the members of his cabinet from representatives of the lower house of the legislature.

The legislative branch has two houses. The Nitijela is the lower house. It has 33 people who serve as senators. The Council of Iroij is the upper house. Its members are 12 chiefs. They advise the president on matters of customary law and practices.

The judicial branch bases their laws upon Trust Territory laws and acts of the legislature. They are also influenced by common and customary laws. The Constitution was adopted in 1979. The legal system has both a high court and a traditional rights court. The highest court in the land is the Supreme Court.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rm.html>

<http://www.rmiembassyus.org/Government.htm>

Economy:

The U.S. government provides a significant amount of assistance to the island economy. There is an Amended Compact of Free Association under which the U.S. will provide millions of aid dollars through 2023. This aid money is partly in response to the effects of the long term exposure to radiation caused by the nuclear testing performed in the 20th century.

In 2008, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) equaled \$133.5 million. The real growth rate was - 0.3%. Per capita, the GDP was \$2,500. About 31.7% of the GDP came from agriculture while 14.9% came from industry. Another 53.4% came from the services sector. The inflation rate was 12.9%.

In 2000, about 14,680 people were part of the labor force. In 2006, the unemployment rate was 36%. About 21.4% worked in agriculture. Most were subsistence farmers who owned small plots of land. Some grew coconuts and breadfruit to be sold commercially. About 20.9% labored in the industrial sector. The two main industries revolved around the processing of tuna and copra. Some people produced handicrafts for sale. The remaining 57.7% of the people worked in service related endeavors. Tourism is the best hope for future growth.

Import costs greatly exceeded the revenues of exports. In 2008, exports equaled \$19.4 million. Copra cake, coconut oil, and fish were all exported. Imports equaled \$79.4 million. Foodstuffs, fuel, and machinery were common imports.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rm.html>

Literacy:

Traditionally, parents and elders taught their children the essential skills they would need to survive living on the islands. They also taught them social responsibilities. When the missionaries began to arrive, they started a series of church schools. They taught the children to read and to write.

Today, children must attend school between the ages of 6 and 14. At 14, they should have completed the 8th grade. To be able to attend high school, they must successfully pass an entrance exam. In 1999, about 93.7% of the people over the age 15 could read and write.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rm.html>

<http://www.rmiembassyus.org/Education.htm>

Land/Geography:

The geographic coordinates of the Marshall Islands are 9 00 N, 168 00 E. There are about 29 atolls located in the Pacific Ocean between Hawaii and Australia. The entire republic covers about 750,000 square miles of sea and land. The total land area is approximately 70 square miles.

The islands are generally coralline in nature. They are narrow strips of land sometimes surrounding a lagoon. About 33.1% of the land is used for agricultural purposes while 13.5% of it consists of meadows and pastures. Another 22.5% is forested.

The weather is generally warm and humid. Most days the temperature high is around 80°F. Rainfall may vary quite a bit with the southern islands getting around 160 inches in a year and the northern islands only receiving about 20 inches. Usually islanders consider the wet season to be between May and November.

Pollution from the nuclear tests performed in the 1950's and 1960's have caused ecological issues on the islands of Bikini and Enewetak. Residents were evacuated due to the danger involved. Later some returned for a time before leaving again.

There are many different species of vegetation and animals on the islands. As many as 180 different types of coral can be found around the Amo Atoll while 156 are present around Majuro. Also, 238 different types of algae can be found in the waters surrounding the islands. On land, coconut palms are the most plentiful type of trees. Whales, dolphins, and porpoises like to make their homes near the islands. The only mammal that is indigenous to the islands is the Polynesian rat.

<http://www.rmiembassyus.org/Geography.htm>

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rm.html>

History

Micronesian navigators first explored the islands beginning in 500 B.C. They traveled across vast swaths of oceans in canoes using the stars as navigational charts. They later settled on the islands in small family groups. These early settlers formed small farming and fishing communities on the atolls which were habitable.

The Spanish sailed among the Marshall Islands throughout the 1500's. They basically traded with the islanders without building any colonies. The next Europeans to visit the islands were British sailors. John Marshall, for whom the Islands were later named, visited in 1788. He mapped many of the atolls. For the next 100 years, different European and American sailors would visit the islands periodically, but would not claim the islands as a colony or protectorate.

In 1857 representatives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions built a station on the Ebon Atoll and later did church planting on every inhabited atoll. Ultimately though, the Germans claimed the islands as a protectorate legally. Their claim was based upon the establishment of the first permanent trading post by Adolph Capelle in 1859. The Germans based their colonial headquarters on the Jaluit Atoll. In 1887, the Jaluit Company was formed to officially govern the area for the German government. The Germans would continue to rule the islands until the end of World War I.

With the advent of World War I, the Japanese began to fight Germany. In October of 1914, they seized control of Jaluit and Majuro. In 1922, after the defeat of Germany, the League of Nations officially gave the islands to the Japanese. Even when the Japanese withdrew their membership from the League of Nations in 1933, they still retained ownership of the islands.

The United States fought the Japanese for control of the islands during World War II. The United Nations gave control of the islands to the U.S. in 1951 in a maneuver called a Strategic Trust.

While owning the islands, the U.S. conducted a series of 67 different nuclear tests. The effects of the fall-out from these tests damaged the environment and caused health problems among the islanders. The United States government is now giving aid monies to the government in order to help alleviate the effects of the testing.

In 1978, a Constitutional Convention was held in which the first constitution was written. In 1979 internal autonomy was approved. In 1983, islanders decided to approve the Compact of Free Association with the United States. This compact allows free association with the U.S. in trade and causes the U.S. to provide aid monies to help with re-settlement and health issues caused by the nuclear testing of the 1950's. This Compact was renegotiated in 2003.

<http://www.rmiembassyus.org/History.htm>

<http://www.visitmarshallislands.com/history.htm>

Christian History

Protestant and Catholic missionaries arrived at very different times. Rev. Hiram Bingham, Jr. of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions came to the islands in 1857. He established a station on the Ebon atoll. Catholics did not start missions until 1902. They created the first prefecture in 1993. About 6.07% of the population is currently Catholic.

World Christian Encyclopedia Vol. 1

Religion

All information unless otherwise noted is gleaned from *World Christian Encyclopedia Vol. 1* and *Operation World*.

Non Christian

Baha'i --About 1.80% of the population follow these teachings.

Catholic—Work began around 1902. A prefecture was created in 1993. In 2005 there were 10 congregations and 2,267 people attending mass.

Jehovah's Witness—This group started their efforts around 1968. In 2001 there were 3 groups that met with a total of 167 members.

Non-religious—About 2% of the population profess to have no religious leanings at all.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons)—The church started work around 1960.

Traditional Ethnic—Approximately 1% of the population continues to follow traditional religious beliefs which center on a polytheistic view of the universe.

Christian/Evangelical

Assemblies of God—This denomination began work in 1960. In 2005 there were 72 churches and 4,000 members.

Gospel Fellowship Association—This group began work around 1970. In 2001 there were 2 churches and 50 members.

Looking for Jesus Church—This church formed around 1985 after a schism within the Assemblies of God churches. In 2001 there were 2 churches and 1,000 members.

New Apostolic Church—In 2001 there were two churches and 40 members.

Reformed Congregational Church—This church formed around 1986. In 2001 there were 27 churches and 2,000 members.

Salvation Army—In 2001 there were 5 churches and 200 members.

Seventh Day Adventist—This church began around 1930. In 2001 there were 15 churches and 700 members.

United Church of Christ in the Marshall Islands—This church formed in 1857. In 2001 there were 180 churches and 20,200 members.

United Pentecostal Church—In 2001 there were 10 churches and 1,000 members.

Other Pentecostal Denominations—There were 5 churches and 500 members.

Other Independent Churches—There were 6 churches and 80 members. They are largely independent Baptists.

People Groups

(Information taken from www.peoplegroups.org and www.joshuaproject.net)

00000

Chinese (100)

The Chinese living on the Marshall Islands may have migrated there for business purposes. They speak Mandarin Chinese so have easy access to the complete Bible and to the *Jesus* film. Their primary religion is unknown. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown.

00000

Filipino (500)

The Filipinos living there may have come for business purposes. They primarily speak Tagalog. The complete Bible and the *Jesus* film are accessible. About 98% profess to have some type of religious belief. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown.

00000

Japanese (500)

The Japanese people living on the islands may have migrated there during the years the islands were controlled by the Japanese government in the early part of the 20th century. They primarily speak Japanese and thus have easy access to the complete Bible and the *Jesus* film. The people are predominantly Buddhist. About 5% of the population has some other type of religious affiliation. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown.

9375

Marshallese (52,000)

The Marshalese people are the predominant people group on the islands. They speak Marshallese, but some are familiar with English. About 97% of the people have some time of religious beliefs. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown. The Bible is available in Marshallese and English. The *Jesus* film and other Christian resources are only available in English.

00000

Pacific Islanders (1,400)

The Pacific Islanders living on the islands have migrated there over time. They speak Marshallese, but may also be familiar with English. The Bible is available in Marshallese and English. The *Jesus* film and other Christian resources are only available in English. About 97% of the population has some type of religious beliefs. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown.

9376

USA Black/ White (3,600)

The people from the United States living on the islands may have moved there during the time that the islands were under the trusteeship of the U.S. They speak English and thus have ample access to the complete Bible and the *Jesus* film. About 87% of the people have some type of religious belief system. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown.

Missiological Implications

1. Evangelical Christians and churches should continue to seek ways to evangelize the peoples of the Marshall Islands. While many are believers, the lost remain and should be reached.
2. Evangelical Christians and churches should continue to support efforts to give help to those hurt either physically or other ways by the nuclear testing after WW II. Marsahall Islanders are still dealing with a cultural shift due to long-term effects of the trauma caused by the effects of the radiation of the nuclear testing era. They were uprooted from their homes and many faced health problems. The Marshall government and the U.S.

government are dispersing funds as agreed upon by the Compact. These funds are helping to alleviate some suffering but people need hope in the face of the destruction of much of their native culture.

3. Evangelical Christians and churches should pray for and seek ways to help local congregations combat the serious problems of nominal Christian living and teaching. Evangelicals could help the locals secure training materials for spiritual living.
4. Evangelical Christians and churches should seek to help local believers combat the serious challenges of narcotic and alcoholic excess that trouble the people in the islands. Feelings of pain and hopelessness drive many to these supports.
5. Evangelical Christians and churches should support the training centers for Christian leaders that exist on the islands and the students in the schools.
6. Evangelical Christians and churches should seek ways to aid the local peoples in economic development in ways that would help them better care for themselves.

Pictures



Links

- <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rm.html>
- <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127278.htm>
- <http://www.rmiembassyus.org/index.htm>
- <http://www.visitmarshallislands.com/>
- http://marshall.csu.edu.au/Marshalls/Marshalls_Society.html