

Missionary Atlas Project

West Africa

Sao Tome and Principe

Snapshots Section

Country Name: Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe
Republica Democratica de Sao Tome e Principe

Country Founded in: July 12, 1975

Population: 199,579

Government Type: republic

Geography/location in the world: Sao Tome and Principe are two islands located off the West African Coast. They are separated by the Gulf of Gabon and lie off the coast of Gabon.

Number of people groups: 5

Picture of flag:



Religion Snapshot

Major Religion and % of population: Roman Catholic 70.3%

All religions and % for each: Catholic 70.3%, Evangelical 3.4%, New Apostolic 2%, Adventist 1.8%, other 3.1%, none 19.4%

Government interaction with religion: The government protects freedom of religion. All religious entities must register with the government.

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

Country Profile

Basic Facts

Country Name:

Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe
Republica Democratica de Sao Tome e Principe

Demographics:

The estimated population of Sao Tome and Principe is 199,579. Children up to fourteen years of age account for 47.3% of the population. There are 47,796 male children between the ages of newborn to fourteen years of age. There are 46,589 female children between these same ages.

Adults between the ages of fifteen and sixty-four years of age account for 49% of the population. There are 47,386 males in this age category and 50,412 females. In the last age category, sixty-five years and above, there are 3,383 males and 4,013 females. This 65 and over group accounts for 3.7% of the population. The median age for males is 15.7 years, and the median age for females is 16.8 years.

The birth rate is 39.72 births for every 1,000 people. There are an estimated 5.53 children born to every woman. The infant mortality rate is 40.54 deaths for every 1,000 live births. The death rate is 6.28 deaths for every 1,000 people. The life expectancy for the total population is 67.64 years. The life expectancy for males is slightly lower at 66.03 years while the life expectancy for females is slightly higher at 69.3 years.

Approximately five ethnic groups reside in Sao Tome and Principe. The *Mestico* population is generally thought to be the progeny of slaves and Europeans. The people whose ancestors were actually given freedom when the Portuguese overlords abolished slavery are sometimes known as *Forros*.

Another group whose ancestors may have been brought to the islands due to the slave trade are the Angolares. The oral history relates how Angolan slaves were shipwrecked on the islands in the 1500's.

Servicais are immigrants from areas like Cape Verde who have come to settle on the island in the hope of providing a more stable environment for their families. Sometimes the children of these immigrants are called *Tongas*. (The use of the word "tonga" could possibly be unacceptable.) Some Europeans still also choose to live on the islands.

The risk of infectious diseases is high. Travelers should be aware that bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, typhoid fever, and malaria are all problematic. HIV/ AIDS may also be prevalent.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5434.htm>

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

Language:

Portuguese is the official language, but most people over 30 use Saotomense or another indigenous language.

Society/Culture:

The culture of Sao Tome and Principe is based on system of eclectic customs that have evolved from the mixing of many different European and African nations. The cultural landscape of the islands is further complicated by the presence of many Cape Verdians and other immigrants who come to the islands in search of temporary work. *Forros* are the most influential people and usually hold the most power. Independent landholders, even if the plot or "*glebas*" is quite small, are seen to be better off than the people who must live and work on the plantations (known in the local language as "*rocas*"). Education is held in high esteem, and people who can afford to send their children overseas to study are considered wealthy.

People tend to live life at a slower pace on the islands. To be in a hurry is uncommon for islanders. Greeting a person correctly is very important. People should not enter the courtyards of a house unless invited. Rather many conversations may occur in the streets. A visitor should be patient with the flow of conversation and not hurry to reach the specific question or topic that needs to be discussed.

Marriage and family life can be complicated on the islands. Some practice traditional monogamous marriage, but cohabitation is more common. Men are expected to provide monetary support to their progeny, whether the progeny is a result of marriage or cohabitation. Often children will stay with their mothers during their formative years and later go to reside with their father or father's family in adolescence. Godparents and other extended family often have influence on a child too. Sometimes women in poor circumstances, especially those still living on the *rocas* will have several different partners. Prostitution is a problem among young women who are poor.

Traditionally people have earned their living through agriculture or through fishing. People who own land will raise crops. Usually the same family has owned these plots of lands for some time. These landowners will use the crops for their own consumption, but will also sell additional food in the marketplace. Typically women own the businesses in the marketplace. Immigrants from the West African coast have typically worked on the *rocas*. With the dispersion of land after independence, many of the *rocas* became areas where people simply claimed land for themselves. In 1992, the government sought to formalize such possession by granting official status to some people's possession of such plots.

People use the yields from locally grown crops as well as imported food to sustain their families. Usually plaintains, bananas, and citrus fruits are part of the islanders' typical diet along with different types of indigenous greens. Fish is also a main staple, but those who are wealthy may have some other type of roasted meat at special celebrations. Usually palm oil is used as a base in vegetable stews and in wine.

Evening meals are important family times. People will gather and share food around the fire. While other meals simply may be reheated, the food for the evening meal is usually prepared fresh. People also place great importance on the meals served at important familial events such as funerals and baptisms. Even if a family is poor, they will attempt to give sumptuous dinners at such important rites.

People always wish to make sure that funerals are properly remembered and performed. The belief in the influence of the supernatural world is quite popular among most islanders. Any time misfortune occurs people are likely to believe that a supernatural spirit is angry. Local healers and diviners hold preeminence among communities because of the islanders' beliefs in their ability to contact the spirit world. The Djambí celebration offers a time for people to celebrate their belief in these supernatural forces.

The Sao Tome and Principe government recognizes several different holidays. Christmas is celebrated on December 25, and New Year's Day is celebrated January 1. Martyr's Day is celebrated on February 3 while May 1 is Labor Day. Sao Tomeans celebrate their independence from Portugal on July 12 while December 21 is officially called Sao Tome Day. In September, the armed forces are honored on the sixth while Agricultural Reform Day is celebrated on the 30th.

Saints' holidays and festivals of the Catholic Church are also very important. The people who live in Ribeira Afonso celebrate the festival of Santo Isidoro on January 10th. The festival of Santo Amaro is held on January 15th. The people that live in Santo Amaro also venerate Santa Terezinha in October. The city of Sao Tome holds a festival during the last part of January in honor of Sao Pedro and another one in late December in honor of Santo Tome. They also have the festival of Bom Despacho on the 9th and 10th of December. The citizens of Trindade celebrate Deus Pai on May 1st and 2nd and also Nazare on September 1st. The people of Santana celebrate the festival of Santa Ana on July 30th while the citizens of Neves venerate Nossa Senhora das Neves on August 9th and 10th. In Batepa, Santa Pelegrina is honored on August 15th, and in Praia Melao, Santo Jordao is honored on the 28th and 29th of October. Finally, the citizens of Madredeus celebrate on September 8th.

<http://www.everyculture.com/Sa-Th/S-o-Tom-e-Pr-ncipe.html>
<http://www.navetur-equatour.st/Culture.htm>

Government:

The current government follows the laws constituted in 1990 although some changes were made in 2003. This constitution provides for a multi-party democratic system with a duly elected president and prime minister. The current president, Fradique de Menezes, was re-elected to a second term by sixty percent of the population in 2006. Under the current constitution, Menezes can only serve two consecutive terms and thus should be ineligible to run again in the next elections which are scheduled to be held in 2011. Anyone who is eighteen years or older may choose to vote in national elections. Normally presidential candidates are chosen by a national political party to represent that party's interests in the national election; however, independent candidates with the necessary financial means may also choose to run in elections. To become

president, a candidate must secure the majority of the votes. If a preliminary round of voting leads to a tie between candidates, a second round of voting may be instituted and the winner of the second election will then become the new president. The president serves the country as the chief of state.

The prime minister serves as the head of the government. The president appointed the current Prime Minister, Tome Soares da Vera Cruz, after being selected by the National Assembly. Vera Cruz has served since 2006. The prime minister gives the president recommendations as to who the members of the presidential cabinet should be.

There are several prominent political parties in Sao Tome and Principe. The Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe-Social Democratic Party (MLSTP) was created in 1960 and was the only political party for most of the last part of the 20th century. With the new constitution of 1990, their status as the only party changed. The Force for Change Democratic Movement (MDFM-PCD) was started in 2001 and supports the current president. Supporters of the first president of the multiparty system, Miguel Trovoada, originally created the Independent Democratic Action (ADI).

The National Assembly provides legislative representation. Members of the National Assembly are elected for four years. The last election was held in 2006 and the next one is scheduled for 2010. There are fifty-five representatives serving in the National Assembly. Currently, Dr. Dionísio Tomé Dias serves as the head of this legislative body. In the last election, the MDFM-PCD won 23 seats while the MLSTP gained 19. The ADI has 12 representatives in the National Assembly while the NR only has 1.

The top court of Sao Tome and Principe is the Supreme Court. The court system functions freely without interference from the National Assembly although its judges are still appointed by Assembly members. Laws have been built from ideals gleaned from the Portuguese system and also from traditional customs. The current judiciary has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction.

There are six administrative districts on the island of Sao Tome while Principe has had its own separate governmental bodies since 1995. The districts are overseen by councils whose members serve five year terms. The members may be re-elected.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5434.htm>

http://saotome-principe.tripod.com/political_parties.html

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_S%C3%A3o_Tom%C3%A9_and_Pr%C3%ADncipe

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

Economy:

The Sao Tome economy was once solely dependent upon cocoa production, but recent advancements in oil exploration in the Gulf of Guinea seem to promise new possible sources of revenue. The government is also trying to expand the tourism industry as a way of bolstering the local economy. Without the help of international aid, though, the economy would be faltering more than it is.

The total GDP is \$278 million. The GDP growth rate is about 6.5%. The GDP per capita is \$1,200. About 14.8% of the GDP comes from agriculture while industry accounts for 14.2%. The majority of the GDP, 71%, comes from service related jobs. The islands receive about four million from exports. They primarily export to the Netherlands, Belgium, and Portugal. The islands' imports total \$73 million. They import from Portugal, France, Belgium, and the US.

About fifty-four percent of the people live below the poverty line. Most people engage in subsistence agriculture, the fishing industry, or work for a local plantation. Some people will also own small businesses in the marketplace. Agricultural products include: coconuts, palm kernels, copra, cinnamon, pepper, bananas, papayas, and beans. Coffee and cocoa are very popular exports.

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

Literacy:

The literacy rate is 84.9%. About 92.2% of men can read and write while 77.9% of women can. This statistic accounts for people fifteen years or older. This is a high literacy rate for West Africa. Children are required by law to attend school for four years. They may attend secondary school as well. The secondary school is generally organized in two steps. The first step takes five years to complete while the second step takes only two years.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tp.html>
World Mark Encyclopedia for the Nations

Land/Geography:

Sao Tome and Principe are two islands that lie off the West African coast in the Gulf of Guinea. The two islands are mountainous in some areas due to the fact that they are part of a chain of extinct volcano ranges. The presence of these extinct volcanoes causes the soil to be very fertile. The areas that are not mountainous have either been cleared for cultivation or remain forested. About 8.33% of the land is arable while 48.96% is used for growing permanent crops. Another 42.71% is used for various purposes.

The islands can receive as much as 200 inches of rainfall per year in some areas while other areas only receive about forty inches. The climate is mainly tropical and humid, but there is only one main rainy season that lasts from October to May. Temperatures may range from 68 to 80 degrees.

Because of the many centuries of agricultural use and land mismanagement, the islands face issues with deforestation and soil erosion. The government of Sao Tome and Principe has dialogued with other nations about environmental issues such as biodiversity, climate change, desertification, ozone layer protection, and ship pollution.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5434.htm>
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tp.html#Geo>

History

Sao Tome and Principe were under Portuguese control between the late fifteenth century and 1975. Portuguese sailors first discovered the islands and the Portuguese government gave control of the islands to powerful private landlords who imported slaves to the islands to work on sugar plantations. The Portuguese government also sent people to the islands that were considered to be "malcontents" or criminals. Some of these early settlers included Jewish children who were taken away from their parents so that the Roman Catholic Church could raise them.

Those Europeans who were forced to go to the islands usually did not have access to European women, and the colonial government encouraged them to take African women as wives. The African wives were given special status. Later, both these women and their children were given freedom. In the early 1500's, male slaves who had been the property of the first European settlers were also granted freedom, and thus a free African society was initiated.

Between the initial settlement in the latter part of the fifteenth century and the middle of the seventeenth century, absentee landlords or their representatives who used the productivity of the volcanic soil to raise sugar controlled Sao Tome and Principe. The landlords were not generally known for their concern for their slaves. Eventually, Brazil became a more profitable venue for sugar production, and the islands then became merely a port of call for Portuguese ships as they made the Atlantic journey with newly captured slaves.

While the Portuguese government officially abolished slavery in its realm in 1869, the de facto practice of forced labor continued under various guises on the islands well into the twentieth century. Coffee and cocoa replaced sugar as the primary plantation crops, and workers were again subject to the whims of the landlords and their representatives. In 1909, a man named Nevinson published an expose on the harshness of the forced labor regimes, and international condemnation brought some reforms. Yet, in 1953, the Portuguese overlords shot and killed about 1,000 protestors in what has come to be known as the Batepa Massacre. This outbreak of violence would eventually lead to a nationalist movement on the part of the islanders.

The political party now known as MLSTP or the Movement for the Liberation of Sao Tome and Principe formed in the early 1960's and resided in Gabon until November of 1974 when the Portuguese government (after internal disputes within Portugal itself) decided to grant the islanders independence. Manuel Pinto da Costa, the leader of MLSTP, became the first president of the islands. Between 1975 and 1985, Pinto da Costa seemed to favor ties with Eastern Bloc countries although usually no formal declarations existed. Different factions arose within MLSTP and important leaders like Dr Carlos da Graça, Leonel d'Alva, and Miguel Trovoada were either removed from their government posts and/ or exiled.

However, around 1985, the Pinto da Costa government began to see that socialist economic policies were not conducive to economic growth and began to form ties with capitalistic Western governments and adopt more capitalist ideology. In 1990, a multiparty democratic system was implemented. Since that time, different power struggles have occurred. Some dissatisfied military members attempted a coup in 2003, but it was eventually quelled with international assistance.

Fradique de Menezes, the current president, was elected in elections that were considered fair and mostly free of corruption. As islanders face economic tensions from lack of financial resources, discontent can sometimes cause a sense of frustration with the government. However, the democratic process is fairly well established.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5434.htm>
<http://saotome-principe.tripod.com/history.html>

Christian History

All information comes from World Christian Encyclopedia Vol. 1 or Operation World.

The first Catholic diocese was established in 1534. Priests began working among the Portuguese sailors and traders as well as the slaves that were brought to the islands. The diocese was under the jurisdiction of different areas and until 2006 a bishop had not been appointed since 1816. The diocese before 2006 had been under the administrative supervision of the bishop at Luanda, Angola. However, Manuel António Mendes dos Santos, who was a priest for about 22 years, formally took leadership in 2007.

The first Protestant church was actually started in the 1930's by a man who had been exiled from Angola to Sao Tome as a servant in the penal system. However, in 1957, a Methodist missionary arrived from Angola to support local Protestant efforts. A representative from the Evangelical Church of Central Angola later aided this missionary. As political situations began to change, the churches were unable to easily maintain support.

Seventh Day Adventist missionaries began work in 1938 while YWAM missionaries came from Brazil in 1990. Deeper Life missionaries and missionaries associated with the Assembly of God Church of Portugal also began missions work in the 1990's.

Religion

All information comes from World Christian Encyclopedia Vol. 1 or Operation World unless otherwise noted.

Christianity is listed as the predominant religion of all of the people groups. However, this statistic is misleading. Most of the people attend Roman Catholic mass, and most have not truly had a salvation experience where they have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. In fact, many only nominally practice Roman Catholicism while not really strictly following its tenets.

For most people the belief in the supernatural world is a constant part of their lives. People will attempt to reach dead relatives in the hope of help. They will also visit the local diviner in order to appease what they consider to be vengeful spirits. While missionaries began arriving in the 1990's to attempt to bring about a deeper commitment level among church attendees, much work is still needed. Teachers and linguists could help with translation and education efforts.

Non-Christian

Bahai—This religion began to become popular sometime after 1970. In 2001, there were approximately 147 adherents.

Igreja Nova Apostolica (New Apostolic Church)—This church was started around 1980. The denominational headquarters are located in Switzerland. In 1995, there were 100 congregations and 8,000 members. There were 11,189 affiliates.

Islam—In 2001, there were approximately 440 adherents. Islam has not had a very strong presence on the islands in the past, but some scholars believe that interest in Islam is growing.

Testemunhas de Jeova (Jehovah's Witnesses)—This denomination started work around 1975. In 2001, there were six churches and 275 members. There were 900 affiliates.

Traditional Religions—Traditional religions have often been interspersed with Christian beliefs. Approximately 2,936 people still retained only traditional beliefs with an unknown number of people practicing syncretism.

Catholic Church—The Catholic Church began work in the early sixteenth century. About 70.3% of the population is Roman Catholic. Manuel António Mendes dos Santos is currently serving as the bishop. In 2004, there were 121,931 mass attendees and a total of nine priests.

<http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dstep.html>

Christian or Evangelical

Assembleias de Deus (Assemblies of God)—This church was founded around 1960. Pastors come from indigenous people groups. In 2001, there were six congregations and approximately 520 members in all. There were also 1,300 affiliates.

Igreja Adventista do Setimo Dia (Seventh Day Adventists)—This church was started around 1938. In 2001, there were six congregations and 1,312 congregants. There were 2,500 affiliates.

Igreja de Vida Profonda do Biblia (Deeper Life Bible Church)—This church began as a mission of the DLBC of Nigeria. Work began around 1990. The Manna Church from Portugal also sent missions representatives. In 2001, there was one church with 150 members. There were 300 affiliates.

Igreja Evangelica (Evangelical Church)—This denomination was started by an Angolan around 1935. In 2001 there were three congregations and 1,200 congregants. There were 2,400 affiliates.

Igreja Evangelica YWAM—This church was founded in 1990 by YWAM workers. In 1995, there was one congregation with sixty members. There were 150 affiliates.

Igreja Metodista (Methodist Church)—This church began about 1970. In 1995, there was one congregation with 140 congregants. There were 280 affiliates.

Pentecostal Churches—There were four different Pentecostal denominations. There were six congregations and 250 congregants. There were 500 affiliates.

People Groups

All information unless otherwise noted comes from www.peoplegroups.org, www.joshuaproject.net, and www.ethnologue.com

14209

Angolar (5,970)

The Angolar people live in the south on São Tomé. They speak a language called Angolar, but many are also familiar with São Tomense, Forros, or Portuguese. In fact, about fifty percent of the people can read and write in Portuguese. The Angolars are supposedly descendents of shipwrecked slaves whose country of origin was Angola. Most of these people work as fishermen.

They are predominantly Roman Catholic. Approximately three percent of the people are evangelical Christians. There are no ministry tools in the Angolar language, but the people that read and write in Portuguese can access Christian materials.

14212

Fang (16,833)

The Fang people speak a language called Fang and are part of the Bantu people cluster. Some alternate names for this people group include: Ahouin, Kak, Ntum, Ntumu, Ogowe, Okak, Pahouin, or Pangwe.

Roman Catholic missionaries first evangelized the Fang. Today most are nominally Roman Catholic. Only 0.88% are evangelical Christians. The complete Bible had been translated into their language by 1951. The Jesus film and other Christian videos are also accessible. Gospel recordings exist.

The Fang were known as very fierce and courageous fighters who knew how to use their jungle home to their advantage. Today they are farmers and merchants. Polygamy is still an acceptable cultural practice. Many people continue to live in small villages led by a single leader. The single leader is generally descended from the founder of the clan and maintains power by reinforcing the idea that he is the conduit through which communication with dead ancestors can occur.

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/Fang.html>

14213

Portuguese (3,268)

The Portuguese began arriving around 1485. They speak Portuguese, but most are also familiar with local languages.

They are predominantly Christian adherents, but the number of evangelical Christians is unknown. The Bible has been translated into their language, and the Jesus film is available. Other Christian resources also exist.

14214

Principense Mestico (6,810)

The *Principense Mestico* are descendents of slaves that were once brought from the mainland to the islands. They primarily live on Principe. Some alternate names for this people group include Lun'gwiye or Moncó. They are sometimes known as filhos da terra.

They generally speak Portuguese or *Sãotomense*. The elderly may still communicate in Principense. The people are predominantly Catholic. About 3.5% of the people are evangelical Christians. The Bible has not been translated into *Principense* but is available in Portuguese.

14215

Saotomense Mestico (139,345)

The *Saotomense Mesticos* are also descendents of slaves brought by the Portuguese to work in the islands. They speak a language called *Saotomense* but many are also familiar with Portuguese. About fifty percent of the population can read and write in Portuguese. The people are predominantly Catholic.

Missiological Implications

1. Evangelical Christians and churches should consider the peoples on these islands as people who stand in desperate need of the Jesus Christ and his salvation. The attachment to the Roman Catholic Church is a barrier to their evangelization
2. Evangelical Christians and churches should recognize the important place that traditional religions play in the lives of these peoples.
3. Evangelical Christians and churches should develop programs for sharing the Gospel with Roman Catholics and followers of traditional religions and train local believers in the use of these methods.
4. Evangelical Christians and churches should develop plans to aid the Christians and churches in Sao Tome and Principe in training leaders for the Evangelical work. This training should centralize on training lay leaders rather than full-time Christian workers.
5. Evangelical Christians and churches should share the methodologies of house churches and small group evangelism and worship services.
6. Evangelical Christians and churches should address the problems of poverty in these islands and seek ways to stimulate the local economies. Help in the name of Jesus will meet needs and open doors for evangelism and church starting.

Pictures —

