

# Melanesia

Smart Card



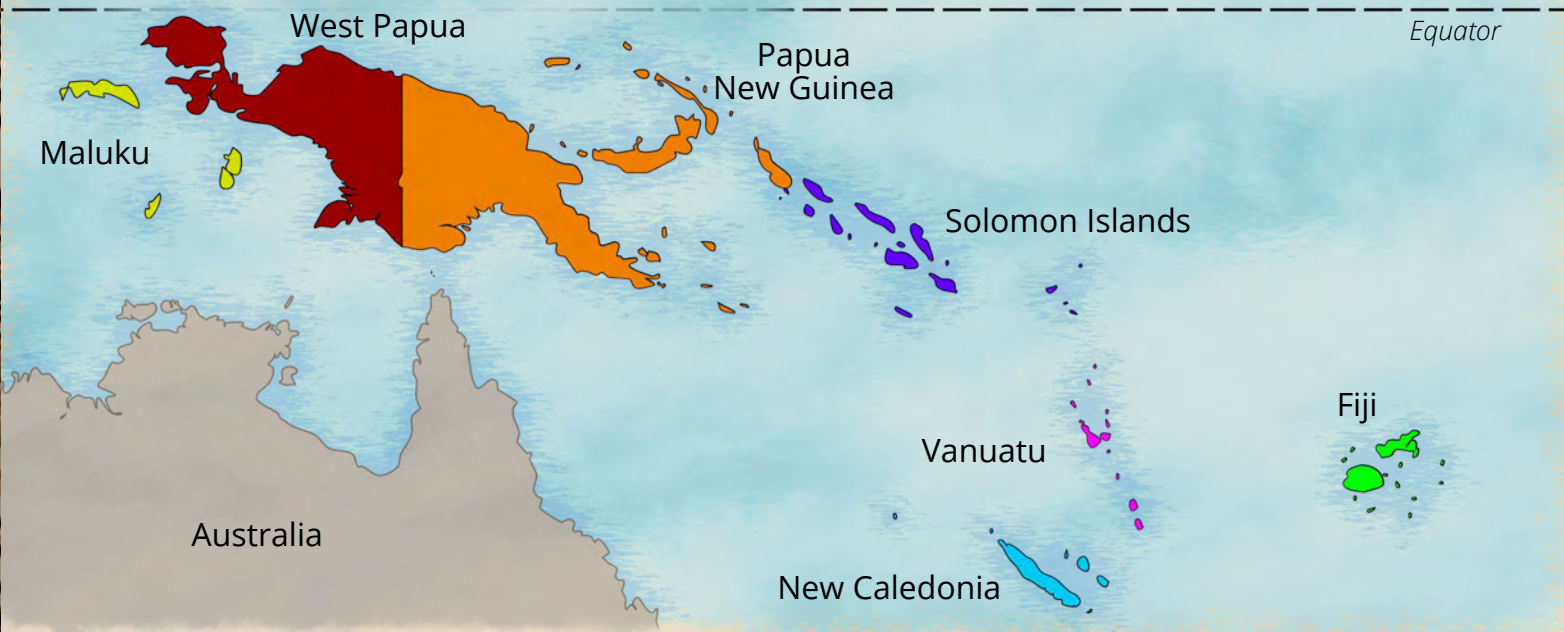
Produced by the  
**TRADOC Culture Center**  
550 Cibique Street, Suite 111  
Fort Huachuca, Arizona 85613  
Comm: (520) 538-5502  
<http://atn.army.mil>  
Search: Cultural Competency  
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APRIL 2017

## GEOGRAPHY

Melanesia consists of four sovereign nations—Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea. It also has three separate areas: New Caledonia, a special collectivity of France; West Papua, which features two provinces of Indonesia (Papua and West Papua); and Maluku Islands, the easternmost part of the Indonesian archipelago.

Melanesia shares culture with, and is geographically separated by, the Andesite Line from Polynesia to the east and Micronesia to the north. The people of Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, West Papua, the Maluku Islands and Papua New identify more as Melanesian while those of Fiji are more mixed Melanesian/Polynesian.



## HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Melanesians originated after Proto-Australoids first migrated to the region over 40,000 years ago. Populations increased with an expansion to the eastern islands between 4000 and 3000 BCE. European arrivals began in the 1500s but increased in the late 18th century. The Netherlands claimed western New Guinea in 1828. Fiji became a British colony in 1874. In 1884, Britain claimed southeastern New Guinea, and Germany claimed northeastern New Guinea.

During World War I, Australian forces seized German New Guinea, which became League of Nations-mandated territories of Australia in 1920. During World War II, Japan invaded Dutch New Guinea, the Australian territories, and the Solomon Islands. Independence movements were sparked after the end of the war in 1945. Fiji was granted independence in 1970; Papua New Guinea in 1975; the Solomons in 1978; and Vanuatu in 1980. With this long and mixed history, Soldiers should expect to see unique cultural responses that make each island group distinct.



## MELANESIAN CULTURE

**Fate:** Traditional belief systems and culture declined with the arrival of Western influence. Predominantly Christian—except on Fiji which is mixed Hindu and Christian, and West Papua which is a quarter Muslim—churches are an important social focus. Many combine their Christian faith with some pre-Christian traditional indigenous practices. Religious services and activities in Melanesian congregations often last many hours. Most traditional celebrations have been replaced by Christian or Muslim rituals. Major holidays are usually based on the religious calendar.

**Roles:** Family is the center of the social structure; families are usually large and there is an obligation to ensure care of family. Melanesians are collectivist societies, and the welfare of the social group takes precedence. A combination of matrilineal and patrilineal social systems frequently exist. Social status derived from family, clan, and age are principal and determine how individuals, even foreigners, interact with each other. Because of this they understand military hierarchy and defer to authority. Traditional gender roles are still prevalent; men are still expected to make household decisions and support the family, while women are usually expected to run the household.

**Emotion:** Harmonious relations are key to Melanesians and they have negative views of conflict and loss of face. Usually humble and modest, they rarely express themselves loudly or in a way to offend another.

**Space:** Melanesians are modest and maintain moderate personal space although personal privacy is often lacking. Public displays of affection are rare and the sexes are often separated.

**Honor:** Social status and hierarchy usually arises from kinship and clan. Age is also a principal factor in respect, and social status still determines etiquette in Melanesian societies. To preserve face, do not publically criticize a Melanesian.

**Time:** Expect events to start late and schedules to be loosely followed. Melanesians have a more relaxed concept of time and follow a much slower pace of life; tardiness is expected in interactions with each other.

**Communication:** Melanesians are indirect and high context communicators. Oral history and stories are important to them. The desire to preserve face and harmonious relations may result in crafted indirect answers. When communicating, they take hierarchy and social structure into account and often look away as a sign of respect.

## PAPUA NEW GUINEA

**Population:** 6,791,317 (2016)

**Ethnicity:** Melanesian, Papuan, Negrito, Micronesian, Polynesian

**Language:** Tok Pisin (official), English (official), Hiri Motu (official), 836 indigenous languages spoken (over 12% of the world's total)

**Religion:** Protestant 69.4%, Roman Catholic 27%, Baha'i 0.3%, indigenous beliefs 3.3%

**Military:** Papua New Guinea Defense Force (PNGDF); includes navy and air divisions

**Geography:** Capital – Port Moresby. Group of islands between the Coral Sea and the South Pacific Ocean, east of Indonesia. Shares the island of New Guinea, the second largest island in the world, with Indonesia; slightly larger than California. Generally east-west oriented highlands divide New Guinea into diverse regions leading to over 800 sub-cultures and languages. Administered by Australia for most of 20th century until independence in 1975.

**Culture:** Papuans are not an ethnic group, but are a linguistic group who speak Papuan languages. However, many consider themselves ethnically Papuan as well. Forming a national identity has been difficult due to the many diverse, isolated societies.



Many still identify as being a member of their local ethnic group with their own distinct culture. Almost all groups are patrilineal, and even matrilineal clans, remain male-dominated. The clan forms the major unit of social organization.

The population is mostly rural with farming, gathering and hunting the most common occupations. Rural settlement patterns are extremely varied from clustered highland villages to scattered coastal hamlets. Most land is community-owned, so cooperation is very important. Welfare support, comes through the local **wantok** system, where each clan member can expect basic sustenance, further expanding cooperation and obligation.

Social events often take place on weekends with men and women often socializing separately. "Western" forms of entertainment are rare outside of the capital, Port Moresby. The majority are at least nominally Christian, but many also maintain traditional religious beliefs. Crime rates are high and personal security is a concern.





# SOLOMON ISLANDS



**Population:** 635,027 (2016)

**Ethnicity:** Melanesian 95.3%, Polynesian 3.1%, Micronesian 1.2%, other 0.3% (2009 est.)

**Language:** Melanesian pidgin (lingua franca), English (official) but spoken by only 1-2% of the population), 120 indigenous languages

**Religion:** Protestant 73.4%, Roman Catholic 19.6%, other Christian 2.9%, other 5%

**Military:** Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)—consisting of six nations led by Australia—provided security from 2003-2013; currently no regular military forces.

**Geography:** Capital – Honiara. Group of six major and over 990 smaller islands spread over 803,000 km<sup>2</sup> northeast of Australia in the South Pacific Ocean. Located east of Papua New Guinea; slightly smaller than Maryland. Mostly rugged mountains with some low coral atolls. Strategic location on sea routes between the South Pacific Ocean, the Solomon Sea, and the Coral Sea.



**Culture:** Nearly everyone in Solomon Islands is Melanesian, and they are among the oldest settlers of the South Pacific. On a national level many people identify as “Solomons” or “Solomon Islanders.” World War II changed the culture as much of the country's farmland was destroyed. This led to urbanization and introduced new technologies and outlooks as well as some instability and ethnic tension. Tribal and kinship groups, speaking different languages, form the basis of the social structure.

Aside from those who work in towns, there is limited social stratification. A majority of the population is matrilineal. Most live in family groups in villages, often situated on tribal land, and practice fishing or subsistence agriculture. Men make most major decisions; however, women usually have much influence, are the primary caregivers and in charge of the household. For most families, church activities are very important and occupy most Sundays.



# NEW CALEDONIA

Special Collectivity of France



**Population:** 275,355 (2016)

**Ethnicity:** Kanak 40.3%, European 29.2%, Wallisian-Futunian 8.7%, Tahitian 2%, Indonesian 1.6%, Vietnamese 1%, Ni-Vanuatu 0.9%, other 16.2% (2009 est.)

**Language:** French (official), 33 Melanesian-Polynesian dialects

**Religion:** Roman Catholic 60%, Protestant 30%, other 10%

**Military:** French military and gendarmerie permanently stationed in New Caledonia provided by France.

**Geography:** Capital – Noumea. Located east of Australia; consists of the main island of New Caledonia, one of the largest in the Pacific; the Loyalty Islands; and numerous small, sparsely populated islands and atolls spread over 18,575 km<sup>2</sup>.

**Economy:** New Caledonia's economy depends heavily on services, nickel mining, and French subsidies. High GDP per capita for region, but unequal wealth distribution. Melanesian households earn about 1/4 the income of

European households. France has agreed to conduct a referendum by 2018 to decide whether New Caledonia should be granted full sovereignty.

**Culture:** Melanesia's two main populations have given rise to two diverse ways of life, known as *kanak* and *caldоче*. The *kanak* identity is based on clan membership, a network of family alliances and defined land rights. The *caldоче* way of life is based on the cash economy. European cultural influence is predominant in Nouméa and most *caldоче* live there. There has been an increase in nationalist sentiment among Melanesians, which revived an interest in traditional cultural practices, especially in relation to clan, family ties



and obligations. Almost all Melanesians return to their villages to take part in traditional ceremonies, which have been modified to include Christian practices. In rural areas, traditional division of labor is prevalent. Women practice light agricultural and domestic tasks and child rearing.

# VANUATU



**Population:** 277,554 (2016)

**Ethnicity:** Ni-Vanuatu 97.6%, part Ni-Vanuatu 1.1%, other 1.3% (2009 est.)

**Language:** Local languages (over 100) 63.2%, Bislama (official; creole) 33.7%, English (official) 2%, French (official) 0.6%, other 0.5%

**Religion:** Protestant 70%, Roman Catholic 12.4%, customary beliefs 3.7% (including Jon Frum cargo cult), other 13.9%

**Military:** No regular military forces

**Geography:** Capital – Port-Vila. A group of over 80 islands, about 65 of which are inhabited, in the South Pacific, about three-quarters of the way from Hawaii to Australia; land area slightly larger than Connecticut. Mostly mountainous islands of volcanic origin; narrow coastal plains. The Vanuatu Islands were among the first settled islands in the South Pacific.

**Culture:** European settlement and culture changed Vanuatu, but most of the population remain rural-oriented and tied to their cultural traditions and lifestyles. Traditions, such as young men jumping from a tower with nothing but a rope or vine tied to their feet as a passage to manhood, remain

strong. Although ethnically similar, Vanuatu is linguistically diverse with over 100 local languages. Social structure is complex with some following matrilineal rules while others follow patrilineal rules. Control on some islands depends on advancement within men's-only societies or one's personal ability, while on others it depends on possession of chiefly titles. Kinship and village ties are paramount while religious affiliation is often second in importance. Land is usually jointly owned by kin groups and many in Vanuatu practice subsistence agriculture.

Free time is filled with socializing with friends and family, and Sundays are usually occupied with church activities. Many identify primarily with their local island, island group, or language group, although there is a push for a national identity, which has been adopted by many in the larger cities.



# Fiji



**Population:** 915,303 (2016)

**Ethnicity:** iTaukei 56.8% (predominantly Melanesian with some Polynesian), Indian 37.5%, Rotuman 1.2%, other 4.5%

**Language:** English (official), Bau Fijian (official), Hindustani. The Fijian language also contains aspects of both Melanesian and Polynesian.

**Religion:** Protestant 45%, Hindu 27.9%, other Christian 10.4%, Roman Catholic 9.1%, Muslim 6.3%, Sikh 0.3%, other 1.1%

**Military:** Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF): Land Forces, Naval Forces. Several military coups have interrupted democratic rule in the last three decades.

**Geography:** Capital – Suva. Fiji is a group of over 330 islands, of which about 100 are inhabited, located northeast of New Zealand spread over an area of 1.29 mln km<sup>2</sup>; most early settlers in Fiji arrived via the Solomon Islands, with whom they share ethnic similarities; they are also closely related to the Polynesians.

**Culture:** Fiji is one of the region's more ethnically diverse countries as almost half the country's population is of Indian descent, Indo-Fijians, and the



other half is primarily ethnic Fijian. The culture in the country is also greatly divided between these two groups, which has caused some political turmoil and ethnic strife, as well as several military coups, due to the perceived dominance of the Indian community. Many ethnic Indians and foreigners live in the cities while most ethnic Fijians live in rural areas and are subsistence farmers or fishermen. Both groups are patrilineal and remain patrifocal, so women are formally subordinate to their husbands in regard to decision making.

For both groups, most free time is spent with family. Religion is also important. Religious gatherings are common with ethnic Indians practicing Hindu, and ethnic Fijians practicing Christianity. Precolonial society was highly stratified, and this social hierarchy still persists today. Many aspects of English colonial culture survive today due to similar roots of the Indian population.