

## Rotuma

### Overview:

Rotuma is a Fijian Dependency, consisting of the island of Rotuma and the nearby islets of Hatana, Haf Liua, Solkope, Solnoho and Uea. Rotuma is divided into seven "districts" further divided into approximately 15 main villages around the Rotuman coast.

### Territory:

Rotuma, a volcanic island, is part of Oceania, an island group in the South Pacific Ocean, about two-thirds of the way from Hawaii to New Zealand. Rotuma is of volcanic origin, mountainous, and covered with palm trees and other vegetation. Rainfall here is considerable. Ahau is the capital, and Motusa is the chief town and port.

### Location:

Rotuma is approximately 465 kilometres north of Fiji, and is 13 km long and 4 km wide. It lies in fair isolation at the crossroad of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia. The volcanic islands reach 256 metres (840 feet) above sea level.

### Latitude and Longitude:

Lat: 12.50° S Long : 177.13° E

### Time Zone:

GMT +12

### Total Land Area:

44

### EEZ:

### Climate:

wet tropical 24-32°C, 3350 mm

### Natural Resources:

Some pockets of second growth lowland rain forest; rocky shore and beaches, sandy-mud bays with seagrasses, some mangroves; fringing and barrier reefs, forest. Coconut plantations, subsistence agriculture.

### ECONOMY:

<b>Total GDP:</b>
-------------------

<b>Per Capita GDP:</b>	
1980	1,953.00 USD

<b>% of GDP per Sector:</b>		
<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Tertiary</b>

<b>% of Population Employed by Sector</b>		
<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Tertiary</b>

### External Aid/Remittances:

Despite evidence of increasing consumer affluence on the island, no major resource-based industries other than copra have been developed. Sources of income originating outside Rotuma are obviously enhancing the standard of living on the island. While money is appreciated, remittances in the form of goods are often preferred. Of the various sources of income for households on the island, the most common is money remitted by Rotuman migrants. In 1989, 48 percent (201) of 415 households surveyed indicated that they received cash remittances. Of these, 64 households (15 percent of all households surveyed) reported both wages and remittances. Direct overseas aid has not played a large part in Rotuma's economy; rather, aid is funneled through the Fiji government. After Hurricane Bebe in 1972, for instance, monetary aid from other countries allowed the Fiji government to provide the Rotuma Island Council a loan of F\$100,000 for rebuilding homes, most of which had been damaged or destroyed (One Fiji dollar is worth approximately US\$ 67). The Fiji government regularly provides infrastructure and supports personnel on Rotuma for health services, education, public works, communications, and so on, perpetuating the priority given to public welfare by the colonial powers. The Rotuma Island Council, comprised of district chiefs and elected representatives and charged with overseeing local affairs, receives a government subvention that has increased substantially in recent years, from F\$52,000 in 1984 to nearly F\$135,000 in 1992. In addition, the Fiji government contributed to the construction of district meeting halls and continues to support other self-help projects on Rotuma through annual grants; from 1989 to 1992 self-help grants amounted to F\$10,000 each year. Assistance for economic development has been comparatively minor. Rotumans have sought foreign aid for development schemes, though on a small scale, such as F\$6000 for fishing equipment for the women's groups, and grants of F\$1500 to F\$7000 for the Raho Cooperative's copra dryers or fuel dispensing facilities. Success depends largely on personal connections with people who know how to access funding sources.

### Growth:

<b>Labour Force:</b>	
1989	174

<b>Unemployment</b>	
<b>Year:</b>	<b>Unemployment Rate (% of pop.)</b>

**Industry:**

The principal product is copra. A few entrepreneurs attempt to export crops such as yams, taro, cocoa, vanilla, or fish, lobster and other seafoods. Such enterprises are plagued with problems of storage, shipping, marketing and management, and most have met with only small scale, short-term success.

**Niche Industry:****Tourism:**

Tourism is neither encouraged or catered for on Rotuma, in a bid to preserve the traditional Rotuman culture and the pristine natural environment. Consequently, access to the island is restricted to a weekly 25-seater flight out of Nausori, and a monthly boat visit by the vessel Kaunitoni. The flight takes about two hours, while the boat journey takes between one-and-a-half to two days. In late December 2007, however, it was announced that the airstrip, roads, and jetty would be upgraded to allow for increased domestic flights and international cruise stops to the island. The absence of hotels or such facilities makes it obligatory for a potential visitor to the island to know a Rotuman family, whose hospitality he or she will rely on during the stay. Money has moderate meaning on the island, hence one should be both considerate and sensitive as to the manner of repayment for the spontaneous hospitality offered.

Imports and Exports:	
<b>Tot. Value of Imports</b>	0.00 ()
<b>From Eu:</b>	
<b>Import Partners (EU:)</b>	
<b>Partners Outside EU:</b>	
<b>Import Partners:</b>	
<b>Tot. Value of Exports</b>	()
<b>To Eu:</b>	
<b>Export Partners:</b>	
<b>Partners Outside EU::</b>	
<b>Export Partners:</b>	
<b>Main Imports:</b>	
<b>Main Exports:</b>	Copra is main export; others include: yams, taro, cocoa, vanilla, or fish, lobster and other seafoods.

**TRANSPORTATION/ACCESS****External:**

**Number of Airports:** 1

**Number of Main Ports:**

December 2007 - The Government is considering establishing an international port of entry on Rotuma.

**Internal:**

**Air**

**Road:**

**Sea:**

**Other Forms of Transportation:**

**Economic Zones:**

**Energy Policy:**

Year	Total Energy Production (Mwh)	Type			Total Energy Consumption (Mwh)	Sector				
		Thermic (Mwh)	Geothermic (Mwh)	Other (Mwh)		Domestic (Mwh)	Commercial (Mwh)	Public Service (Mwh)	Industry (Mwh)	Public Lighting (Mwh)

**Official Currency:**

**Banking and Insurance:**

Number of Banks and Credit Unions:

Number of Agricultural Credit Unions:

Number of Insurance Companies:

A branch of the National Bank of Fiji opened on Rotuma in 1987.

## Financial Services:

## Communications/E-Commerce:

1991 - Commerce on the island is now handled by a few small, family-owned enterprises who hire limited personnel on a part-time basis.

## Public Ownership:

## Land Use:

The basic concept behind Rotuman kinship is the word *kainaga*, which in its broadest sense means kind, sort, variety, species, class, in other words, 'members of the same category.' Since kinship on Rotuma is traced bilineally (through both mother and father), a person's *kainaga* consists of all their "blood" relatives. Theoretically succession goes from elder brother to younger brother, to eldest son of eldest brother, to youngest son of eldest brother, to youngest son of younger brother, and so on. Women succeed to pureship only if there are no eligible males. This traditional model of kinship and land tenure has been undergoing change as a result of several interrelated factors, most importantly extensive migration, housing changes, and increased commercialisation. Outmigration has resulted in whole families moving to Fiji or abroad, with the prospect of leaving land rights in the hands of distant relatives who may be reluctant to relinquish the land should migrants return. As a result, some families designate one member to stay on Rotuma to occupy their land. Siblings may take turns over a period of years assuming this responsibility. In other instances, migrants may simply allow their *kainaga* rights to go dormant. With so many relatives away, succession is now more an informal process with minimal consultation.

## Agriculture/Forestry:

The vast majority of households in Rotuma maintain gardens which supply their staples (taro, yams, tapioca, breadfruit and bananas). Pineapples, papaya, mangoes, watermelon and oranges are also grown in abundance to supplement the diet. The island is exceptionally fertile and food is generally plentiful. The main implements in gardening are the bush knife, for clearing land, and the dibble stick, which is used to make holes in the earth for planting root crops. Rotation of crops is the common pattern; typically yams are planted the first season, followed by taro and then by tapioca and banana trees. Chicken, canned corned beef and canned mackerel supplement the daily diet, while cattle, goats and pigs are consumed on special occasions such as weddings, funerals, and welcoming ceremonies.

## Marine Activity:

### Fishing:

Although only a few men engage in deep-sea fishing, the fringing reef that surrounds the island is widely exploited for a variety of fish, octopus, crustaceans and edible seaweed.

### Marine Life:

The clear oceanic waters around Rotuma offer an abundance of seafood, and Rotumans make use of practically anything they can fish in the sea or on the reefs. Common foods include Octopus, shells, lobsters, fish of all sorts, and seaweeds (*Codium*, *Meristotheca*, *Caulerpa*). The highly saline waters give a rich taste to seafoods.

## Critical Issues:

## JURISDICTIONAL RESOURCES

### Capital:

Ahau

### Political System:

Administratively, Rotuma is fully incorporated into Fiji, but with local government so tailored as to give the island a measure of autonomy greater than that enjoyed by other political subdivisions of Fiji. Rotuma has the status of a Dependency, and its administrative capital is Ahau, where the "tariagsau" (traditionally the name of the sau's palace) meeting house for the Council of Rotuma is based. At the national level, Fijian citizens of Rotuman descent elect one representative to the Fijian House of Representatives, and the Council of Rotuma nominates one representative to the Fijian Senate. Rotuma is also represented in the influential Great Council of Chiefs by three representatives chosen by the Council of Rotuma. For electoral purposes, Rotumans were formerly classified as Fijians, but when the Constitution was revised in 1997-1998, they were granted separate representation at their own request. (The majority of seats in Fiji's House of Representatives are allocated on a communal basis to Fiji's various ethnic groups) In addition, Rotuma forms part (along with Taveuni and the Lau Islands) of the Lau Taveuni Rotuma Open Constituency, one of 25 constituencies whose representatives are chosen by universal suffrage.

### Political Parties:

Lio 'On Famāŋŋr Rotuma or LFR (meaning "Voice of the Rotuman People" in Rotuman) is a political party in Fiji, which seeks to represent the interests of the Rotuman people in their main representative constituency, that is, the Rotuman Communal Constituency, which elects a Member of Parliament in the House of Representatives for all people of Rotuman descent across the nation of Fiji. Although yet to win a seat in Parliament, the Party tightly contested the parliamentary elections of 1999 and 2001. The party has faced some controversy over its short history, primarily related to the mismanagement of funds and donations, and having lost some face did not offer a candidate in the 2006 election.

### Important Legislation:

Rotuma Act - outlines everything from the Constitution of the Rotuma Council, the establishment of the Development Fund, Burial regulations, and emigrations regulations. It also includes topics such as: destruction of trees, gambling, housebuilding rules, infectious diseases, coconut plantation, and primary schools.

### Principal Taxes:

### Associated Power:

### Citizenship:

Fijian

### Paradiplomacy:

## HUMAN RESOURCES

The Fiji government continues to be the largest source of jobs on the island. According to 1992 government figures, there were 37 school teachers and 69 other government employees. Other than working for the government, wage-earning opportunities on Rotuma are therefore scarce. A small number of Rotumans work for the various religious denominations on the island or for Sunflower Air, which serves the island with bi-weekly flights. In addition, a number of retired government workers have pension income.

Island	Area (km sq.)	Population	% of Total Population
--------	---------------	------------	-----------------------

<b>Population:</b>					
<b>Year</b>	<b>Resident Population</b>				
<b>Age of Population:</b>	<b>0-14</b>	<b>15-24</b>	<b>25-49</b>	<b>50-64</b>	<b>65 and up</b>
2007	1030	644	1,055	244	89

**Migration:**  
 There are more people of Rotuman descent outside Rotuma than on the island. Immigration (Emmigration) 1998 - 231 (152) 1999 - 132 (161) 2000 - 151 (97) 2001 - 206 (236) 2002 - 248 (165) 2003 - 290 (175) 2004 - 273 (242)

<b>Crude Birth Rate:</b>
--------------------------

**Life Expedctancy:**

<b>Crude Death Rate:</b>
--------------------------

**Ethnicity:**  
 Although the island has been politically part of Fiji since 1881, Rotuman culture more closely resembles that of the Polynesian islands to the east, most noticeably Tonga, Samoa, Futuna and Uvea. Because of their Polynesian appearance and distinctive language, Rotumans now constitute a recognizable minority group within the Republic of Fiji. The great majority of Rotumans (10,000) now live elsewhere in Fiji, with a little under 3000 remaining on Rotuma. Rotumans are culturally conservative and maintain their customs in the face of changes brought about by increased contact with the outside world. As recently as 1985, some 85 percent of Rotumans voted against opening the island up to tourism.

**Class Division:**  
 Rotuma is divided into seven autonomous districts, each with its own headman or chief (Gagaj 'es Itu'u). The districts are divided into subgroupings of households (ho'aga) that function as work groups under the leadership of a subchief (gagaj 'es ho'aga). All district headmen and the majority of ho'aga headmen are titled. In addition, some men hold titles without headship (as tÅŕŕg), although they are expected to exercise leadership roles in support of the district headman. Titles, which are held for life, belong to specified house sites (fuag ri). All the descendents of previous occupants of a fuag ri have a right to participate in the selection of successors to titles. On formal occasions titled men and dignitaries such as ministers and priests, government officials, and distinguished visitors occupy a place of honor. They are ceremonially served food from special baskets and kava. In the daily routine of Village life, however, they are not especially privileged. As yet no significant class distinctions based on wealth or control of resources have emerged, but investments in elaborate housing and motor vehicles by a few families have led to visible differences in standard of living.

**Languages:**  
 The Rotuman language has proved a puzzle for linguists since it has some distinctive characteristics that make it difficult to assign to a subgroup within Oceania. There are several reasons for this according to Andrew Pawley, a linguist at Australian National University. In part it is because Rotuman is an isolate, having no very close relatives that can shed light on its development. Complicating the issue is evidence of at least two layers of Polynesian loanwords, mainly from Samoan and Tongan, accounting for some 40 percent of the total vocabulary. In recent years Rotuman has also borrowed heavily from Fijian and English, especially in areas associated with modern culture. Another source of confusion is the fact that the language uses metathesis (the inversion of word-final vowels with immediately preceding consonants) which produces a vowel system that includes umlauting, vowel shortening, and diphthongisation. The result is that an original system of five vowels has increased to ten. Metathesis has increased the rate of change in Rotuman, adding to the problem of its classification. Nevertheless, when Polynesian loan words are stripped away, Pawley finds convincing evidence linking Rotuman to western Fijian (Pawley, 1979).

**Religion:**  
 Rotuma was converted to Christianity in the 1860s by English Wesleyans and French Catholics. The Catholics, who compose approximately one-third of the population, are concentrated on the south side of the island. In recent years a Seventh-Day Adventist church has been built and serves a number of families, and a small group of Jehovah's Witnesses meet together regularly. The churches play a vital role in the lives of most people and are centers for many communal activities.

**Literacy:**

**Education System:**  
 The standard of education is relatively high, with most children attending one of the four primary schools or the High School in Malhaha. The latter caters up to form six, and has a number of Peace Corps volunteers among its staff. Transport to and from school is provided by two buses, for a minimal fee.

<b>Total Pre-schools:()</b>	4
<b>Total Primary Schools</b>	
<b>First Level:</b>	
<b>Second Level:</b>	
<b>Third Level:</b>	
<b>Total Secondary Schools:</b>	1
<b>Total Professional Schools</b>	
<b>Universities:</b>	

Number of Schools per Island:											
		Pre-school		Elementary			High-school		Prof.	University	
		Pub	Priv	1	2	3	Pub	Priv		Pub	Priv

Students Enrolled:					
Year:	Pre-School	Elementary	High-school	Prof.	University

Teachers							
Year	Pre-School	Elementary			High-School	Prof.	University
		1	2	3			
1992	37	0	0	0	0	0	0

#### Medical Services:

Health services on the island are available, although they may leave quite a bit to be desired. There is only one ageing doctor on Rotuma at present (1999), and there also exists a chronic shortage of antibiotics, painkillers and dressing supplies. Filariasis and scabies are quite common. Most severe cases are normally flown to Fiji, as major operations are not feasible considering the limited facilities available. Dental services are rudimentary, the most common remedy to toothaches being extraction. Children seldom if ever brush their teeth, and this is reflected in precociously toothless grins in many an adolescent. Hence, there is an urgent need for improved medical services on Rotuma. A severe fly and mosquito problem also exists, both of which could be easily remedied by health education of the population and biological control methods. The only impediment here is lack of funding and concern by the Fijian authorities, further accentuated by the isolation of the island.

#### HISTORY AND CULTURE

##### History:

The first known European sighting of Rotuma was in 1791, when Captain Edward Edwards landed in search of sailors who had disappeared following the Mutiny on the Bounty. A favorite of whaling ships in need of reprovisioning, in the mid-nineteenth century Rotuma became a haven for runaway sailors, some of whom were escaped convicts. Some of these deserters married local women and contributed their genes to an already heterogeneous pool. Wesleyan missionaries from Tonga arrived on Rotuma in 1842, followed by Marist Catholics in 1847. Conflicts between the two groups, fueled by previous political rivalries among the chiefs of Rotuma's seven districts, resulted in hostilities that led the local chiefs in 1879 to ask Britain to annex the island group. On May 13, 1881, an anniversary now celebrated as Rotuma Day, a public holiday, Rotuma was officially ceded to the United Kingdom, seven years after Fiji became a colony.

##### Referenda:

##### Recent Significant Events:

December 2007 - A government task force will decide whether Rotuma should be declared a port of entry. The task force is travelling to Rotuma to look at its jetty, airport and roads. Task force members will see how the infrastructure can be improved to help the island achieve port-of-entry status. If Cabinet approves port of entry status, cruise ships will be able to call at Rotuma without first having to clear Customs in Suva. That is expected to boost income for the island's 3000 residents. Also, the Rotuma Council will look at possible trade links (such as supplying root crops) with Tuvalu if their island is declared a port of entry. While travel between Rotuma and Fiji takes 36 hours. Ships can travel from Rotuma to Tuvalu in 12 hours. The task force will assess work plans and submit proposals for upgrading works that may be required.

##### Music, Dance, Handicraft and Patrimony:

Rotuman culture is a variation of Western Polynesian cultures, showing heavy influences from Tonga, Samoa, Futuna, Uvea, and more recently, from Fiji. Social life on Rotuma is based in kinship relationships and a strong emphasis on communal sharing, although this value has come under threat by an increasingly money-based economy. No major gathering takes place on Rotuma without singing or dancing. Depending on the size of a festival (kato'aga), performances range from an hour of informal singing around a few guitars or ukuleles, to all-day sessions in which several well-rehearsed groups formally sing and dance. At domestic ceremonies, such as weddings or gravestone-raising, songs honor specific persons.

##### Sources:

<http://www.rotuma.net/os/News.html>

<http://islands.unep.ch/ILQ.htm>

[http://www.paclii.org/fj/legis/consol\\_act/ra103/](http://www.paclii.org/fj/legis/consol_act/ra103/)

<http://islands.unep.ch/ILQ.htm#1434>

<http://www.linguistlist.org/issues/13/13-1879.html>

#### Useful Links:

[IslandStudies.ca](http://IslandStudies.ca)

[www.upei.ca](http://www.upei.ca)

[www.google.ca](http://www.google.ca)

Please address queries to:

Institute of Island Studies

University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI)

550 University Ave

Charlottetown, PE, Canada, C1A 4P3

Copyright 2007. Institute of Island Studies, UPEI. Educational and Non-Commercial Use Only

