Micronesia

Location

Micronesia is a chain of 607 islands nestled in the Pacific Ocean. More specifically these islands lie north of the equator in the Western Pacific. It is more generally called The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the principle islands that form the core of the federation are –Kosrea, Pohnpei (Ponape), Chuuk (Truk), and Yap. To put it in the American perspective, these islands are located more than 4,000 km (2,500 mi) southwest of Honolulu, Hawaii and they lie at 6 55 N, and 158 15 E.

Geography

The country's total land area is only 270.8 square miles but the area is spaced over more than one million square miles of the Pacific Ocean. The State of Chuuk has a total land area of 49.2 square miles and is comprised of seven major island groups. Pohnpei State, the largest of the FSM states, accounts for 133.4 square miles of land area. Yap State is made up of 4 large islands, 7 small islands and 134 atolls, with a total land area of 45.6 square miles. Kosrae is a single island of 42.3 square miles.

Climate

Being close to the equator FSM enjoys a tropical climate and temperatures are even and warm almost throughout the year. Being in the tropics these islands are generally blessed with good rainfall characteristic as most tropical countries, and Pohnpei reputedly is one of the wettest places on Earth, with approximately 330 inches of rain per year. Drought, too, is not too uncommon especially when the El Niño condition moves into the Western Pacific. One more major hazard is the tropical typhoons that are a major threat to the low-lying atolls.
History

The Portuguese navigators in 1592 came to Yap and Ulithi while on their quest to reach Indonesia. The Spanish later claimed the Caroline Islands in 1899. Spain withdrew from the Pacific later on and sold its interests in the area to Germany. Guam became an insular region of the US. The formidable Japanese Navy in 1914 took over the Marshall, Caroline and Northern Mariana Islands from the Germans. Under Japanese rule, these islands prospered with its rich resources in mining, fishing and tropical agriculture but with the outbreak of World War II, things changed and these islands were exploited by the Japanese army. After the war ended The United States of America was given the trustee ship of these island chains by the United Nations. The Compact of Free Association was signed on October 1, 1982, and entered into force on November 3, 1986. FSM became a UN member in September 17, 1991.

Population

The population of FSM is 108,155 according to the CIA’S estimate (2004) with 37% of the population being in the age group of 0-14 years and has a reproductive population of 59%. The male to female ratio is nearly one. According to the FSM census in 2000 the population stands at 107,000 which is an increase of about 24,000 since the 1980 census. The State of Chuuk accounts for roughly half the total, at about 53,500. Pohnpei is next at about 34,500. The State of Yap has about 11,200 people, and Kosrae has a population of about 7,700. The Island of Chuuk has the maximum population density.

Religion

The country has an almost even split between Catholics and Protestants.
**Education**

The US placed a lot of emphasis on education when it was the trustee of the islands. The literacy rate is very high with 89% of the population being literate. All Children, by law, are required to attend school at least until the 8th grade. Higher education is still not very established and most of the students go to the United States for higher education.

**Language**

English is the most widely spoken language in the island chains but other languages are used but by a negligible number of individuals.

**Agriculture**

Almost half the population is involved in agriculture. Pohnpei Island is being fashioned for pepper production and the produce is expected to roll out in half a decade. Dried coconut or copra remains the main cash crop of the island chains. Banana, betel nut, and other fruits are produced and exported by the Island of Yap. Kosrae is known for its tangerines and citrus fruits which it exports. Cattle rearing is not popular and though the government is making efforts to encourage the rearing of goats and poultry, but there are currently no substantial numbers.

**Trade and Economy**

The United States funding is the major funding that this country receives. The United States provided the FSM with about $1.39 billion between 1986 and 2001. With additional grants from the United States, the FSM’s total income from U.S. funds averages about $100 million a year. There are also minor donations. The only cash crop is copra but this does not amount to much. FSM has, in recent years, earned $18-24 million annually in licensing
fees paid by foreign vessels for tuna fishing in FSM’s exclusive economic zone. Direct exports of sashimi-grade fresh tuna by air to Japan account for increasing traffic at the airports. Farming of giant clams and other marine products has been instituted. Various plans to establish canneries have been discussed, and are being encouraged. The outlook for this industry overall is strong. Tourism is also significant and Pohnpei, Yap and Kosrae have good hotels.

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