

Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailedanalysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



Palau

Population: 0.02 millions (#225 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 459 square km. Comprising six island groups of over 300 individual islands in the Philippine Sea and North Pacific Ocean, Palau is the westernmost archipelago of the Caroline chain and located to the southeast of the Philippines. Island geography varies from low-laying coral terrain to mountainous terrain. Tropical climate prevails year round, which is modified by a wet season from May to November. Typhoons are a natural hazard. Environmental issues include proper disposal of solid waste, sand and coral dredging, and overfishing. Palau is divided into sixteen administrative states.

Peoples

Palauan: 73.0%

Carolinian: 2.0%

Asian: 21.7%

Caucasian: 1.2%

Other: 2.1%

Palauans are related to Micronesians, Melanesians, Polynesians, and Malayans. Approximately 30% of the population are migrant workers or immigrants from East Asia and Micronesia. Most Asians are Filipinos.

Population: 21,516 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.40% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.7 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 70.4 male, 77.0 female (2018)

Languages: Palauan (65.2%), English (19.1%), Filipino (9.9%), Chinese (1.2%), other Micronesian languages (1.8%), other languages (2.8%). Palauan is the official language of all islands except on Sonsoral, Tobi, and Angaur where Sonsoralese, Tobi, and Anguar and Japanese are the official languages, respectively.

Literacy: 96.6% (2015)

History

Seafarers from Indonesia or Oceania are believed to had settled Palau as early as the second millennium BC. The British began visiting the islands in the eighteenth century followed by the Spanish in the nineteenth century. Spain took territorial possession of Palau and sold it to Germany in 1899 following Spain's defeat in the Spanish-American War. Japan gained control of Palau in 1914 followed by the United States in 1947 under the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Several major battles in World War II were fought in Palau, such as at Beliliou. A new constitution was approved in 1981, and Palau signed a Compact of Free Association with the United States the following year. Palau declared independence in 1994.[1]

Culture

Palauan society has diversified over the past century as a result of foreign occupation and the influx of migrant works. Christianity and subsistence farming are the predominant societal influences. Traditional cuisine consists of fish, cassava, coconut, yam, taro, and pork. Western and Asian foods are commonly eaten. Alcohol consumption rates are higher than the world average.

Economy

GDP per capita: $14,700 (2017) [24.6% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.798 (2017)

Corruption Index: N/A

Tourism, subsistence agriculture, and fishing drive the economy. The government is a major employer. The United States provided up to $700 million in aid for the first fifteen years following independence to maintain U.S. military installations. The expansion of the tourist industry and foreign investment has developed greater self-sufficiency. Forest, gold, minerals, and marine products are natural resources. Services generate 78% of the GDP, whereas agriculture and industry generate 3% and 19% of the GDP, respectively. Major industries include tourism, fishing, and subsistence agriculture. Coconuts, copra, cassava, sweet potatoes, and fish are common agricultural products. The level of perceived corruption is low.[2] Petty corruption and misuse of funds are the primary types of corruption that occur in Palau.

Faiths

Christian: 86.7%

Muslim: 3.0%

Other: 10.3%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Roman Catholic – 9,682

Evangelical Church – 5,594

Modeknei – 1,291

Seventh Day Adventists – 1,259 – 6

Latter-day Saints 430 1

Assembly of God – 215

Baptists – 215

Jehovah's Witnesses – 80 – 2

Religion

Roman Catholics comprise the largest religious group (45%). Other prominent religious groups include evangelicals, Modekngei, Seventh-Day Adventists, Muslims, Latter-day Saints, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Modekngei is a syncretic Christian denomination that incorporates indigenous beliefs. Most foreigners are Roman Catholic.[3]

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. Religious groups must obtain charters as nonprofit organizations to receive tax-exempt status. The government has not refused registration to any religious groups in recent years. Foreign missionaries may serve in Palau and must request a missionary permit from the Office of Immigration. Religious instruction is not permitted in public schools. There have been no reported societal abuses of religious freedom in recent years.[4]

Largest Cities

Urban: 79.9% (2018)

Koror, **Airai**, **Meyungs**, **Kgetkib, Kloulklubed, Bkulangriiil.**

Cities listed in **bold** have no congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

One of the six largest towns has a Church congregation. Eighty-three (83%) of the national population resides in the six most populous towns. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the national population resides in Koror State.

Church History and Background

The first known Latter-day Saints to live on Palau were American military servicemen during World War II. A member of the Hawaii Honolulu Mission presidency visited Palau in 1977 to explore prospects for beginning missionary work. Full-time missionaries were assigned in 1978 and were restricted by the government to work only on the islands of Koror, Arakabesan, Malakal, and Airai. The first Palauan Latter-day Saints joined the Church in late 1978, and the Meyungs Branch was organized shortly thereafter. Palau was reassigned to the Micronesia Guam Mission in 1980. In 1985, an American Latter-day Saint shipped 1,000 school books as part of an Eagle Scout project.[5] There were fifty-nine Latter-day Saints in 1981 and 200 members in 1987. Three additional congregations were organized in the late 1980s (Airai, Koror Topside, Koror Central) and were consolidated shortly thereafter. A Chinese congregation briefly operated in the early 1990s to meet the needs of converts from mainland China but was discontinued after many of the converts returned to China.[6] In 1993, there were 300 members, one district, and two branches. By 1997, there was one branch. Membership totaled 400 in 1997, 384 in 2000, 437 in 2005, 424 in 2009, 491 in 2015, and 515 in 2018. In 2018, one in forty-two was nominally a member on Church records.

In 2010, there were approximately sixty active members in the Koror Topside Branch, or 15% of national Church membership. Church attendance sometimes reaches as high as 100. There were four proselytism areas in mid-2014: Airai, Koror Central, Koror Topside, and Meyungs.[7] By 2017, Church attendance did not appear to noticeably change from seven years earlier. In 2018, only 14% of church-reported members appeared to regularly attend church.

In 2010, there were four elders and a senior missionary couple assigned to Palau. The sole branch meets in a church-built meetinghouse in Koror. Member groups have periodically functioned in Airai and South Koror during the past decade. Palau is assigned to the Cebu City Philippines Temple district. In 2010, the branch president of the Koror Topside Branch was the Ngardmau State delegate for the government. A local member served as branch president in 2019.

The Church has translated approximately thirty Church materials into Palauan despite approximately 18,000 speakers

worldwide. Select passages of the Book of Mormon in Palauan were first published in 1988. The entire Book of Mormon was translated into Palauan in 2017. General conference addresses, missionary materials, and leadership resources are also available in Palauan.

The 1995 Census reported 161 self-affiliated Latter-day Saints nationwide (105 adults), 140 of whom lived on Koror, 9 lived on Airai, 5 lived on Ngeremlengui, 3 lived on Ngarchelong, 2 lived on Peleliu, 1 lived on Ngaraard, and 1 lived on Melekeok.[8] The 2005 Census reported 143 self-affilated Latter-day Saints nationwide (103 adults), of whom 132 lived in Koror, 7 lived in Airai, and 4 lived in Melekeok.[9] The 2015 Census reported 273 self-affiliated Latter-day Saints nationwide, including 133 women and 100 children and adolescents who were under age 20. Among the 192 Latter-day Saints on the 2015 Census who were age 18 or older, there were 139 who were Palauan natives. Of these Palauan native Latter-day Saints, 92 lived in Koror, 9 lived in Airai, 8 lived in Ngardmau, 5 lived in Kayangel, 5 lived in Ngaraard, 4 lived in Ngarchelong, 4 lived in Melekeok, 3 lived in Aimeliik, 3 lived in Ngaremlengui, 3 lived in Peliliu, 2 lived in Ngatpang, and 1 lived in Ngchesar. Two of the sixteen administrative states had no reported adult Latter-day Saints on the 2015 Census: Ngiwal and Angaur.[10]

Opportunities

Religious freedom and a predominantly Christian population generate favorable conditions for missionary activity. Mission leadership has held the vision of opening a second branch in Palau for many years, but that goal requires new active converts and efforts to reactivate less active members. The Koror Branch provides mission outreach to Koror, home to two-thirds of the national population. Full-time missionaries operate regularly on Babelthuap, increasing the percentage of the national population receiving limited mission outreach to 95%. Most nonnatives have materials translated in their native language. Palau receives abundant missionary resources despite its tiny, isolated population. Full-time missionaries report that there were three seminary students in 2010. Expanding seminary and institute programs with assistance from the senior missionary couple may lead to greater doctrinal understanding, higher convert retention rates, and greater numbers of local members serving full-time missions. Members who live on islands without a branch or member group present opportunities to organize an official congregation and establish a Church presence in additional locations.

Challenges

With one of the lowest member activity rates and one of the slowest growth rates in the Pacific, the Church in Palau has struggled to retain new converts and reactive less active or inactive members. The first congregation was organized three decades ago on Meyungs Island, but in 2010 nearly all of the forty-three LDS households were inactive or less active. Full-time missionaries have worked for years to reintroduce the Church and reestablish church attendance among these members with no noticeable success. Full-time missionaries reported in 2010 that the branch conducted meetings in English despite Palauan members comprising the majority, largely due to the presence of foreign full-time missionaries and a few nonnative members from the Philippines and Mexico. Efforts to use Palauan in church meetings during the 2010s has yielded few observable improvements. Reluctance of local members to speak Palauan at church and to missionaries has heavily contributed to poor member activity rates, as those not proficient in English may stop attending meetings. The Church has yet to translate the Doctrine and Covenant and The Pearl of Great Price into Palauan. Many administrative and ecclesiastical tasks are placed upon full-time missionaries, resulting in reduced member participation in holding and magnifying callings. Overstaffing the branch with missionaries has likely exacerbated poor member-missionary participation. Many local members and leaders have a desire to share the gospel but are unable to plan and coordinate proper activities without reliance on full-time missionaries. Travel to the temple is time consuming and expensive, resulting in limited temple attendance from active members. Nevertheless, the Yigo Guam Temple will reduce travel times for members once it is completed. Some cultural conditions pose difficulties for missionary work and church growth. For example, the Church has openly opposed the consumption of the areca nut, which is frequently chewed as a social pastime.

Prospects

The outlook for future growth of the Church in Palau is poor due to the historical unwillingness of native members to speak Palauan in meetings, decreasing numbers of self-reported members who live in Koror, low member-missionary work participation, and the lack of apparent success in reactivating less active and inactive members. The opening of Palauan-language-only dependent branches or groups in areas with concentrated numbers of less active members may improve prospects retaining and reactivation less active members, although prospects for reactivation appear dim after years of largely fruitless efforts. Most future growth is likely to occur through new converts rather than through reactivation, although improved standards for baptism will be necessary to avoid repeating past difficulties with the lapse of most converts into inactivity.

[1] “Background Note: Palau,” Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 4 October 2010. http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1840.htm

[2] “Palau.” Freedom in the World 2019. Freedom House. Accessed 9 May 2019. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/palau

[3] “Palau.” International Religious Freedom Report for 2017. Accessed 9 May 2019. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=280848#wrapper

[4] “Palau.” International Religious Freedom Report for 2017. Accessed 9 May 2019. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=280848#wrapper

[5] Romney, Richard M. “Books to Palau,” New Era**,** Nov. 1985, 27.

[6] “Palau,” Country Profile, retrieved 4 March 2011. http://newsroom.lds.org/country/palau

[7] Martinich, Matthew. “Stagnant LDS Growth in Palau.” Case Studies on Stagnant or Slow LDS Growth. 30 January 2016. www.cumorah.com. https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=view_case_studies&story_id=469&cat_id=2

[8] “1995 Census of the Republic of Palau.” Accessed 9 May 2019. https://www.palaugov.pw/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/1995-Census-of-Population-Housing-Tables.pdf

[9] “2005 Census of Population and Housing of the Republic of Palau, Volume 1: Basic Tables.” Accessed 9 May 2019. https://www.palaugov.pw/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/2005-Census-of-Population-Housing.pdf

[10] “2015 Census of Population, Housing and Agriculture for the Republic of Palau.” Accessed 9 May 2019. https://www.palaugov.pw/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2015-Census-of-Population-Housing-Agriculture-.pdf