

Easter Island

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

1680 Work on the *moai* (the large stone statues for which Easter Island is famous) ceased due to tribal wars induced by overpopulation and famine.

1722 The Dutch navigator, Jacob Roggeveen, came to the island on Easter Sunday, hence its name.

1770 Spaniards came from Peru and named the island San Carlos.

1774 Captain Cook visited the island.

1862–63 More than 1,000 islanders were kidnapped and despatched to Peru to work on the guano islands and plantations. Only 15 survived to be repatriated, but some were carrying infectious diseases that quickly decimated the population.

1866 Catholic missionaries converted the remaining population to Christianity.

1871 Conflict between the missionaries and a French settler, who had established a sheep farm, forced the missionaries to leave with around 100 followers. Around 110 natives remained on the island.

1888 The island was annexed by Chile.

1966 The international airport opened and Chile declared the island a province.

1986 The airport runway was extended for use as an emergency landing strip for the US Nasa space shuttle.

1996 Easter Island was declared a World Heritage Site by Unesco.

2002 The first outbreak of dengue fever in Chile occurred on Easter Island.

2003 Unesco awarded a German company a contract for US\$11.5 million to restore the stone *moai*. Work was completed in 2005.

2006 Melania Carolina Hotu Hey was appointed as *Intendenta* (provincial governor).

2008 A Finnish visitor was arrested for damaging an ancient monument when he chipped off a piece of a *moai*, while wishing to find how hard the stone was. He was later forced to make a public apology, pay a fine of US\$17,000 and was banned from the island until 2011.

2009 In a referendum, residents voted by up to 90 per cent in favour of legislation to curb the number of migrants from Chile allowed to live and work on the island. As tourism developed, hundreds of Chileans from the mainland migrated to work in bars, hotels and as taxi drivers. Luz Zasso Paoa became mayor. In August the Rapa

Nui blocked the airport for two days, demanding the length of time tourists can stay be restricted.

2010 Pedro Edmunds Paoa (a pro-independence politician) was appointed provincial governor of Easter Island. Around 70 people, who had been squatting on public land in Hanga Roa were evicted; the squatters claimed the land was ancestral and therefore theirs. Pedro Edmunds resigned and Carmen Cardinali was appointed to the post of *Intendenta*. Clashes between native islanders of the Rapa Nui group and Chilean police occurred, after the group refused to leave buildings occupied earlier in 2010; they claimed the buildings had been 'illegally taken' from their ancestors. Security forces used pellet guns and rubber bullets, injuring around 19 demonstrators, one of whom was air-lifted to Chile for emergency medical treatment; arrests were made and reinforcements travelled to the island.

2011 Police evicted a group of native Rapa Nui from a luxury hotel in February. The indigenous Hitorangi clan had occupied the Hangaroa Village and Spa since 2010, protesting that their ancestors had been cheated out of ownership of the hotel land. They were also protesting at plans to develop Easter Island.

2012 A census was undertaken on 31 August; the preliminary result was 5,806 people recorded.

2013 The Rapa Nui continued to remonstrate with the government in Santiago to restrict the number of tourists allowed to visit the island, and for tighter controls on the number of mainland Chileans taking the few jobs available on the island. They have requested more money for healthcare and education and threatened to lodge a complaint against the government at the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

Political structure

Easter Island is administered as a province of Chile (part of the Valparaíso region), with a governor and locally elected council.

Elections are held every four years for six councillors, who then elect the mayor.

A Council of Elders was formed in 1983 to represent the interests of the native *Rapa Nuis* (Easter Islanders).

Form of state

Province of Chile

KEY FACTS

Official name: Isla de Pascua (Easter Island) (Rapa Nui)

Head of State: President of Chile: Sebastián Piñera Echenique (from 11 Mar 2010); represented by *Intendenta* (provincial governor) Carmen Cardinali Paoa (from 13 Aug 2010)

Head of government: Mayor Luz Zasso Paoa (since 2009)

Area: 180 square km

Population: 5,806 (2012, census)

Capital: Hanga Roa (only inhabited township)

Official language: Spanish

Currency: Chilean peso (CH\$) = 100 centavos

Exchange rate: CH\$515.10 per US\$ (Jul 2013)

Visitor numbers: 40,000 (annually)*

* estimated figure

Political parties

Island politicians belong to a number of national political parties including Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC) (Christian Democratic Party), Partido Humanista (PH) (Humanist Party), Unión Demócrata Independiente (UDI) (Independent Democratic Union) and the Partido por la Democracia (PLD) (Democratic Party)

Political situation

The pro-independent movement in Isla de Pascua (Easter Island) (Rapa Nui) was given tacit support by the former governor Pedro Edmunds Proa when, in 2010 he allowed islanders to squat on government land close to the centre of Hanga Roa. Despite claims that it was ancestral land and denials that they were trespassing the central government in Chile moved quickly to diffuse the situation by replacing Governor Pedro Edmunds Proa with another islander politician Carmen Cardinali, on 13 August. Governor Cardinali authorised the eviction of the protestors and demolition of their temporary structures.

The Rapa Nui continued to remonstrate with the government in Santiago to restrict the number of tourists allowed to visit the island, and for tighter controls on the number of mainland Chileans who the Rapa Nui say are taking over their jobs, their land and, ultimately, control of the economy. They have requested more money for healthcare and education and in 2013 threatened to lodge a complaint against the government at the International Court of Justice in the Hague. Rapa Nui Assembly leader, Leviante Araki, reportedly said that the island could ask to become part of Polynesia, which is closer than Chile.

Population

5,806 (2012, census)

There is a high level of migration and emigration.

Population density: 35 persons per square km.

Last census: 5,806 (31 August 2012)

Annual growth rate: 0.0 per cent (2003)

Religions

Christianity

Main cities

Hanga Roa is the only inhabited township.

Languages spoken

Rapa Nui, an Eastern Polynesian language, is spoken. English is not used.

Official language/s

Spanish

Media

Press

News publications are pamphlets and internet connections, such as *Te Rapa Nui* (www.rapanui.co.cl). Newspapers from

the mainland have to be flown in and may be days old. The bi-annual (May and October) *Rapa Nui Journal* (www.islandheritage.org) is an academic publication.

Broadcasting

Radio: There are several radio stations, broadcasting in Spanish, including the (Chilean) government-run Radio Cooperativa (www.cooperativa.cl), the private Radio Activa (www.radioactiva.cl) from Santiago, ADN Radio (www.adnradio.cl) and Armada de Chile broadcasts to military personnel. Radio Manukena is a community radio station broadcasting in the local language.

Television: Satellite television is broadcast from Chile (TV Chile: www.tvchile.cl) with reception available on the island.

Economy

Tourism is the principal industry, which offers employment to a significant proportion of the population. There are a number of hotels and guesthouses catering for visitors interested in archaeological and activity pursuits. The Rapa Nui National Park and open museum encompasses almost the entire island and is run by the inhabitants. Flights link the island with Santiago, Chile, and French Polynesia.

Fishing and commerce also provide income.

External trade

As a province of Chile, all international trade agreements are negotiated by the government in Santiago.

Imports

Main imports are food, fuel, construction materials and machinery from Chile.

Exports

Main exports are tuna, avocados and pineapples to Chile.

Traditional subsistence farming is carried out.

Although the island is predominantly grassland, pine, eucalyptus and fruit trees have been planted.

The island's main crops are bananas, pineapples, sweet potatoes, yams, sugar cane, maize, potatoes, tomatoes, castor beans, melons, grapes and avocados. Sheep farming has declined rapidly since the mid-twentieth century due to soil erosion. There are wild horses in addition to those used as draught animals and for riding. Poultry bred on the island includes pigeons, quail and ducks.

Lobster, tuna and king fish are an important local source of protein.

Industry and manufacturing

There is a small manufacturing sector, based on the production of local handicrafts.

Tourism

Easter Island is famous for its giant stone heads, called *moai* (statues), of which nearly a thousand of these ancient sculptures are strewn along the coastline and extinct volcano. Easter Island was awarded Unesco status as a world heritage site in 1995 and in 2005, the *moai* were restored by Unesco. Easter Island is visited by over 65,000 tourists each year not only to see the *moai* but also they are attracted in early February by the Tapati Festival. Many visitors arrive either by airplane or cruise ships, which because the island lacks a deep-water harbour must land passengers and crew by tenders. There are over a dozen hotels and a number of hostels catering for visitors. There are also opportunities for hiking, horse-riding, cycling and swimming. Mass tourism is opposed by the Rapa Nui, considering that it endangers the fragile ecosystem.

There are no known oil reserves; all domestic needs are met by imports from Chile.

Energy

The former state-owned and now limited company, Sociedad Agrícola y Servicios Isla de Pascua (Sasipa) manages the supply of electricity on the island. In 2007 a 15-year contract began to develop and plan the provision of a comprehensive electrical service, including the investment needed to cope with projected growth.

Banking and insurance

Central bank

Banco del Estado de Chile

Time

GMT minus 11 hours

Geography

Easter Island is a small volcanic rock, measuring 166 sq km, in the southern Pacific Ocean. It lies about 3,500km off the coast of Chile, the closest land mass. The nearest inhabited island (Pitcairn) is about 1,600km to the west. The island is roughly triangular in shape, with a rugged coastline and few beaches. Inland are low rolling hills and grasslands. There is no flowing water; volcanic craters round the edge of the island hold standing water.

Hemisphere

Southern

Climate

Subtropical, cooled by constant winds. Average rainfall is 1,250mm falling mainly in June–July; average temperature ranges from 16–27 degrees Celsius.

Entry requirements

Passports

Required by all, with the exception of tourists travelling from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay and Uruguay, for whom

national identity cards are sufficient. Entry will be permitted only with proof of return/onward passage and sufficient funds for stay.

Visa

As a province of Chile, the requirements are the same. Citizens of neighbouring countries or most EU states do not need visas. For further details contact the local embassy. Business visas are not required by those citizens who do not need a tourist visa; all others, including those who do not normally require them but who are visiting on short-term contracts or receive fees from a local company, do need a visa.

On arrival a 'tourist card' is issued and must be returned when leaving. Proof of onward/return passage is necessary.

Health (for visitors)

Mandatory precautions

Vaccination certificates are required for yellow fever if travelling from an infected area.

Advisable precautions

Vaccinations for diphtheria, tuberculosis, hepatitis A and B, polio, tetanus and

typhoid are recommended. There is a risk of rabies.

Telecommunications

Telephone/fax

There is a limited telephone service available. There is no direct international dialling, although satellite links enable calls to be made through the international operator in Chile.

Internet/e-mail

There are internet bars in Hanga Roa.

Getting there

Air

National airline: Lan (part of the Latam Airlines Group)

International airport/s: Mataverí International (IPC), 1.6km south of Hanga Roa.

Surface

Main port/s: Hanga Roa.

Getting about

National transport

There are few surfaced roads. Four-wheel drive vehicles, motor cycles and horses are the main means of transportation. Minibuses are used by tourists.

Car hire

Make local enquiries regarding availability of car hire.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

Telephone area codes

The international direct dialling (IDD) code for Easter Island is +56 (Chile) followed area code 32 and Easter Island number 100 + subscriber's number.

Other useful addresses

Gobernación Provincial, Isla de Pascua (tel: 100-254)

Internet sites

Easter Island Foundation:
www.netaxs.com/~trance/rapanui.html