

Tristan da Cunha

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

1506 The island was sighted by the Portuguese admiral, Tristão da Cunha, on his way to the East Indies.

1810 The first settlers arrived but failed to establish a permanent community.

1816 The island was annexed by Britain and a garrison established to provide additional security for Napoleon who was being held in exile on St Helena.

1817 The garrison was withdrawn but Corporal Glass elected to stay on the island with his wife to guard the remaining stores and incidentally founded the community.

The community gradually developed during the nineteenth century and for a time became relatively prosperous with frequent calls by American whalers in the 1850s. The seven families represented four nations – Britain, Holland, US and Italy. With the decline of sail the island became increasingly isolated and impoverished; sometimes several years passed without a ship calling. The only contact with the outside world was provided by an irregular succession of pastors and a very occasional passing ship.

1938 The island became a dependency of St Helena.

1942 A garrison and radio/meteorological station were built.

1949 The island's extreme isolation ended with the establishment of the crawfish industry when the first fish processing factory was opened.

1950s, The British pound was introduced as the official currency.

1961 The volcano erupted and the entire community was evacuated, returning some two years later to re-establish the settlement.

1981 The Nationality Act ended the islanders' British citizenship and right of abode.

1999 The Nationality Act came under review in the UK government's 'Partnership for Prosperity and Progress' White Paper. 2000 Development of the crawfish industry ended Tristan's dependence on the UK and gave the islanders economic confidence.

2001 The island was hit by a hurricane which inflicted considerable damage.

2004 A new, long wheel-based type Land Rover fire engine, provided by the UK

government, was delivered. Michael Clancy became governor.

2006 An oilrig ran aground on a reef on the southeast side of the island during a hurricane while being towed from South Africa to South America. It took several months and two attempts to re-float the rig. By 2006 very home on the island had a telephone line, and a new satellite service allowed for broadband internet access and live television broadcasts.

2007 David Morley became the resident administrator and Andrew Gurr became governor.

2008 Plans to repair and refurbish the harbour were announced, with work to be undertaken by UK Royal Engineers and materials supplied through the European Development Fund and UK government.

2009 The FCO announced a new constitution for Tristan da Cunha, which included a bill of rights and limits to the power of the governor. It also proposed an executive Legislative Council with either a single constituency for the whole island or two or more constituencies.

Tristan da Cunha later voted in favour of the proposed changes. A new, larger and modern fish factory replacing the one that had been burned down in 2008 was opened. Work began, under the auspices of the Tristan Conservation Department, to eradicate the alien plant *Sagina apetala* (Pearlwort) from Gough Island, which was displacing native floral. Funding and management was being provided by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) from the UK's Overseas Territories Environment Programme.

2010 New island councillors were voted into office in March. In November it was announced that Calshot Harbour is to be repaired by the UK Department for International Development (DfID). It was severely damaged by storms earlier in the year and it was feared that unless emergency repairs were made before the 2011 winter storms the islanders would be cut off. Calshot Harbour is essential to the island's economy, which is primarily based on tourism and fishing. Sean Burns became Administrator on 21 September. 2011 On 19 July Tristan da Cunha's rock lobster fishery was awarded Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) accreditation for sustainable and well-managed fisheries. On 23 September, Governor Gurr's term

KEY FACTS

Official name: Tristan da Cunha

Head of State: Head of State: Queen Elizabeth II, represented by Governor Mark Andrew Capes (from 29 Oct 2011) (resides in St Helena)

Head of government: Administrator Alex Mitham (from 5 Oct 2013)

Area: 98 square km

Population: 263 (2010)

Capital: Edinburgh of the Seven Seas

Official language: English

Currency: Pound sterling (£) = 100 pence

Exchange rate: £0.66 per US\$ (Jul 2013)

in office ended and Attorney General Ken Baddon was sworn in as acting governor on 24 September, until Mark Andrew Capes takes up the post in 29 October. 2012 On 3 August, *HMS Dauntless* arrived for the first of its regular visits to the island. It was carrying the doctor who was a replacement for the existing doctor who had become unwell. The *HMS Dauntless*' helicopter flew VHF repeater station equipment to the north-east of the island to close a gap in the communications network. On 15 October the FCO appointed Peter Hayes as director in the Defence and Intelligence Directorate for the UK Overseas Territories. 2013 Governor Mark Capes appointed Mr Alex Mitham as Administrator on 5 October. The 50th Anniversary of the Re-Settlement of Tristan da Cunha is due to be celebrated in Glasgow, Scotland, on 1 November.

Political structure

Tristan is the only inhabited island, although there is a meteorological station on Gough Island, maintained by the South African navy.

Although technically under the jurisdiction of St Helena, the island effectively administers itself independently. Responsibility for it, as a British Overseas Territory, is divided between the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DfID). The post of Minister for Overseas Territories within the FCO was created and an Overseas Territories Consultative Council set up.

In 2002, full British citizenship was granted to the inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha.

Form of state

As a British Overseas Territory, Tristan da Cunha is a dependency of St Helena.

The executive

Executive authority is exercised by an administrator appointed by the FCO, who acts as chairman of the Island Council (three nominated members, eight elected, two ex-officio members; one member must be a woman), which meets six times a year. A chief islander is also elected, for three years.

National legislature

The Island Council has 15 members: 12 non-partisan members elected by popular vote for a four-year term and three ex-officio members.

Last elections

June 2005

Population

263 (2010)

There are about 80 families living on the island, with eight names between them. Tristan is the most isolated inhabited island in the world. The settlement of

Edinburgh of the Seven Seas in the north-west and is the only inhabited area.

Last census: December 1988: 296

Population density: 3.0 inhabitants per sq km.

Ethnic make-up

English, Scottish, Irish, Dutch and Italian.

Main cities

Edinburgh of the Seven Seas (capital, estimated population 231 in 2012).

Languages spoken

Official language/s

English

Media

Press

News is published by the online newspaper *Tristan Times* (www.tristantimes.com) and the South Atlantic Remote Territories Media Association (www.sartma.com).

Broadcasting

The Tristan Broadcasting Service provides local and BBC World Service programmes on 93.5FM.

Radio: Atlantic FM was re-launched on 13 January 2008 providing a limited service with local news and information.

Economy

Tristan's commercial economy is based on crawfish (Tristan Rock Lobster), sheep farming, philatelic sales and to a much lesser extent through tourism by the provision of guides and accommodation to visitors. Hand-knitted garments and other woollen handicrafts and souvenirs are sold, some of which are also sold by mail order.

Since the opening of the first crawfish canery and freezing plant in 1949, the economy has been transformed from subsistence, sometimes near starvation level, to self-sufficiency. The annual crawfish catch is limited to 340 tonnes, of which 145 tonnes comes from the main island and the balance from the fisheries around Gough, Nightingale and Inaccessible Islands. An agreement has also been signed with a New Zealand company for catching Patagonian toothfish. Revenue from the industry more than adequately covers the island's running costs and has allowed reserves to be built up. These provided a buffer against the decline in Far Eastern demand. A fire in 2008 burned down the island's only fish processing factory. It was rebuilt to EU standards as a bigger, modern facility able to export lobsters to the EU. The island's oldest inhabitant, Alice Glass (93 years old), opened the new factory in 2009.

Other economic activities are hampered by poor access with only about 60 days per year suitable for landing. A new harbour has improved conditions and allows for more regular visits, particularly by small yachts. Tristan's fresh water is

considered to have special properties and there were plans to develop a mineral water export business, but which by early 2012 had not progressed beyond the feasibility planning stage.

External trade

As a UK Overseas Territory, Tristan da Cunha is a member of the European Union's Association of Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT Association), and some EU regulations apply. Foreign earnings are generated by commercial fishing licences, with postage stamps, coins and handicrafts supplied by mail order.

Agriculture

The cultivated area is estimated at no more than 15 hectares. Potatoes are the main crop. Cattle, sheep and poultry are kept. Each married couple is allowed to graze seven sheep and two cows on settlement land, or any number on the plateau.

Each family grows potatoes on about an acre of ground. Potatoes were first introduced to the island in 1816 when the first settlers arrived and have been grown on the same land each year without rotation; they are easily grown in volcanic soil.

Tristan da Cunha's fisheries zone is rich in unique species – rock lobsters, wreckfish, Tristan red scorpion fish, Tristan wrasse and Atlantic amberjack.

The economy is based on crawfish (rock lobster). Fish provide a major source of protein.

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Tourism

Tourist visits to this remote island are largely dependent on cruise ship itineraries and personal sailings. When visitors arrive their welcome is personal as the population of the island is too small to be unappreciative of any newcomer. A display of the history and cultural is exhibited in the local post office and tourism centre and there are walks to the top of the volcano, led by island guides. Beach fishing and golf are activities on offer to visitors.

Hydrocarbons

There are no known hydrocarbon reserves and all petroleum needs are met by imports.

Time

GMT

Geography

The Tristan da Cunha archipelago comprises the main island as well as Inaccessible and Nightingale Islands. Gough Island, to the south-east, also comes

under Tristan administration, combined their surface area is 201 square kilometres.

The main island of Tristan da Cunha is a single, almost circular, volcanic island that lies 2,400km west of Cape Town in the South Atlantic Ocean. It has only one relatively flat area, where the capital is located. Queen Mary's Peak (2,010 metres) is the highest mountain, at the centre of the island.

Inaccessible Island lies 32km west of Tristan; the three Nightingale Islands 35km south; and Gough Island (Diego Alvarez) 350km south, which has a manned weather station with seven personnel.

Hemisphere

Southern

Climate

Tristan da Cunha has a mild, temperate climate. Temperatures range from 3–25 degrees Celsius. The average annual rainfall is 1,700mm.

Entry requirements

Visa

None required, but visitors must have permission of the Island Council and Administrator to land; this is normally granted. All visitors must have onward/return passage, full medical insurance including emergency evacuation and sufficient funds for a visit. A small landing fee is charged.

Hotels

There is no hotel accommodation on the island.

Working hours

Government

Mon—Fri: 0830—1230, 1300—1630.

Telecommunications

Telephone/fax

The Administrator's office and the factory in Tristan have satellite communications by telephone and fax. Faxes are only available to the government.

A public satellite telephone provides an international service through a radio telephone link via Cape Town Radio.

Postal services

The international postal code for Tristan da Cunha is TDCU 1ZZ.

Getting there

Surface

Shipping is the sole means of regular access to the island.

Water: Calshot Harbour, completed in 1967 and named after the Hampshire village where many islanders lived after the volcanic explosion of 1961, is too small for ocean going boats to berth.

Passengers are normally ferried to land in small boats and landing is not guaranteed. Cargo is loaded onto barges and off loaded by crane. Improvements and repairs to the harbour, which is vital to the economy, were agreed in 2006 for completion by 2008. The improvements included deepening the harbour. Finance for the work was to come from the British government and from the EU. However, in 2010 the work still had to be agreed and commissioned.

In February 2008 a team of 40 Royal Engineers plus a detachment from the Royal Logistic Corps and a medical support team from the Royal Navy, were transported along with their materials by the RFA *Lyme Bay*, to carry out urgent repairs to the main harbour. Operation Zest was a joint government response involving the foreign and commonwealth office, the department for international development (DfID) (who funded the work) and the ministry of defence. Within months of the successful completion of Operation Zest, the main crane collapsed in April, leaving the islanders with the problem of not only how to bring ashore a new crane, but also the materials to rebuild the fish factory.

The new crane was finally commissioned in January 2009 and further improvements and repairs were finished by April. The Austral storms of 2010 again damaged the harbour walls and it was feared that unless emergency repairs were made before the winter storms of 2011 the islanders would be cut off. In November island administrator, Sean Burns, announced that DfID had agreed to fund the £6 million (US\$3.77 million) needed to fund the fifty 10-tonne concrete 'dolosse' blocks specially designed to protect the most vulnerable part of the harbour from future storms.

Calshot Harbour is essential to the island's economy, which is based on tourism and fishing, as well as enabling supplies to be delivered.

The RMS *St Helena* makes an annual visit. The ship is operated under contract by Andrew Weir Shipping Ltd on behalf of the owners, St Helena Line Ltd.

Premier Fishing operates two fishing boats, the *Kelso* and the *Edinburgh*, which make irregular connections between Tristan and Cape Town.

The South African Navy operates the *Agulhas* to approximate sailing dates, mainly for official personnel.

Yachts call frequently and offer an alternative means of reaching the island, as does the occasional cruise ship.

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 Tristan da Cunha is +874 (satellite) followed by subscriber's number.

Travel information

Travel information (for air travel and bookings on the RMS *St Helena*):

Passenger Services Department, Andrew Weir Shipping Ltd, Dexter House, 2 Royal Mint Court, London EC N4XX, UK (tel: (+44-207) 575-6480; fax: (+44-207) 575-6200; email: reservations@aws.co.uk; internet site: www.aws.co.uk).

Premier Fishing, PO Box 181, Cape Town 8000, South Africa. (tel: (+27-21) 419-0124).

St Helena Line, Andrew Weir Shipping (SA) Pty Ltd, 3rd Floor, BP Centre, Thibault Square, Cape Town, South Africa (tel: (+27-21) 425-1165; fax: (+27-21) 421-7485; email: [sthenalines@mweb.co.za](mailto:sthenalines@sthenalines.co.za)).

Miss Kerry Yon, Solomon and Co plc, Jamestown, St Helena, South Atlantic (tel: (+290) 2523; fax: (+290) 2423; email: solco.shipping@helanta.sh).

Ministries

Administrator's Office, Edinburgh of the Seven Seas (e-mail: hmg@cunha.demon.co.uk).

Other useful addresses

The Tristan Resource Centre, Michael Swales, Denstone College, Uttoxeter, Staffs, UK (tel: (+44)-(0)1538) 703-322).

St Helena Desk Officer, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Room, King Charles Street, London SW1A 2AH, UK (tel: (+44-(0)207) 270-2695).

Miles Apart (books, maps, videos on South Atlantic Islands), 5 Harraton House, Exning, Newmarket, Suffolk CB8 7HF, UK (tel: (+44-(0)1638) 577-627; fax: (+44-(0)1638) 577-874); 5929 Avon Drive, Bethesda, Maryland 20814, US (tel/fax: (+1-301) 571-8942; email: familycarter@msn.com).

Internet sites

Sartma (South Atlantic Remote Territories Media Association): www.sartma.com
Tristan Times: www.tristantimes.com