TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Pacific Islands

The term ***Pacific Islands*** refers to the island countries and territories of the tropical Pacific Ocean, commonly grouped into the three major cultural regions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. These regional groupings are not defined consistently across all sources. The groupings used in this Factfile follow common UN and FCDO usage. Some states and territories may be associated with more than one region; for example, Kiribati is often described as being in both Micronesia and Polynesia.

This factfile is split into three parts, one for each of the sub-regions with the following states and territories: **Melanesia** (Fiji, New Caledonia, Norfolk Island, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, West Papua/Papua Provinces), **Micronesia** (Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Marshall Islands, Wake Island, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Naoero) and **Polynesia** (Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, French Polynesia, Hawaii, Kiribati, New Zealand, Wallis and Futuna, American Samoa, Pitcairn Islands, Rotuma, Easter Island, Nihoa-Midway-Johnston).

Within the Pacific region there are around 25,000 islands - more than half of the world's total. The Pacific stretches approximately 16,000 kilometres along the equator, and about 15,000 kilometres from north to south. The region includes independent states, self-governing territories in free association with larger states, and several non-self-governing territories administered by France, the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. The Pacific Islands Forum comprises 18 members: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Naoero, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

Languages

Roughly 20 percent of the world's six to seven thousand languages are found in the Pacific Islands, which contain less than 1 percent of the world's land mass and population. The 1,300 or so distinct languages spoken by the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands belong to over 20 unrelated families.

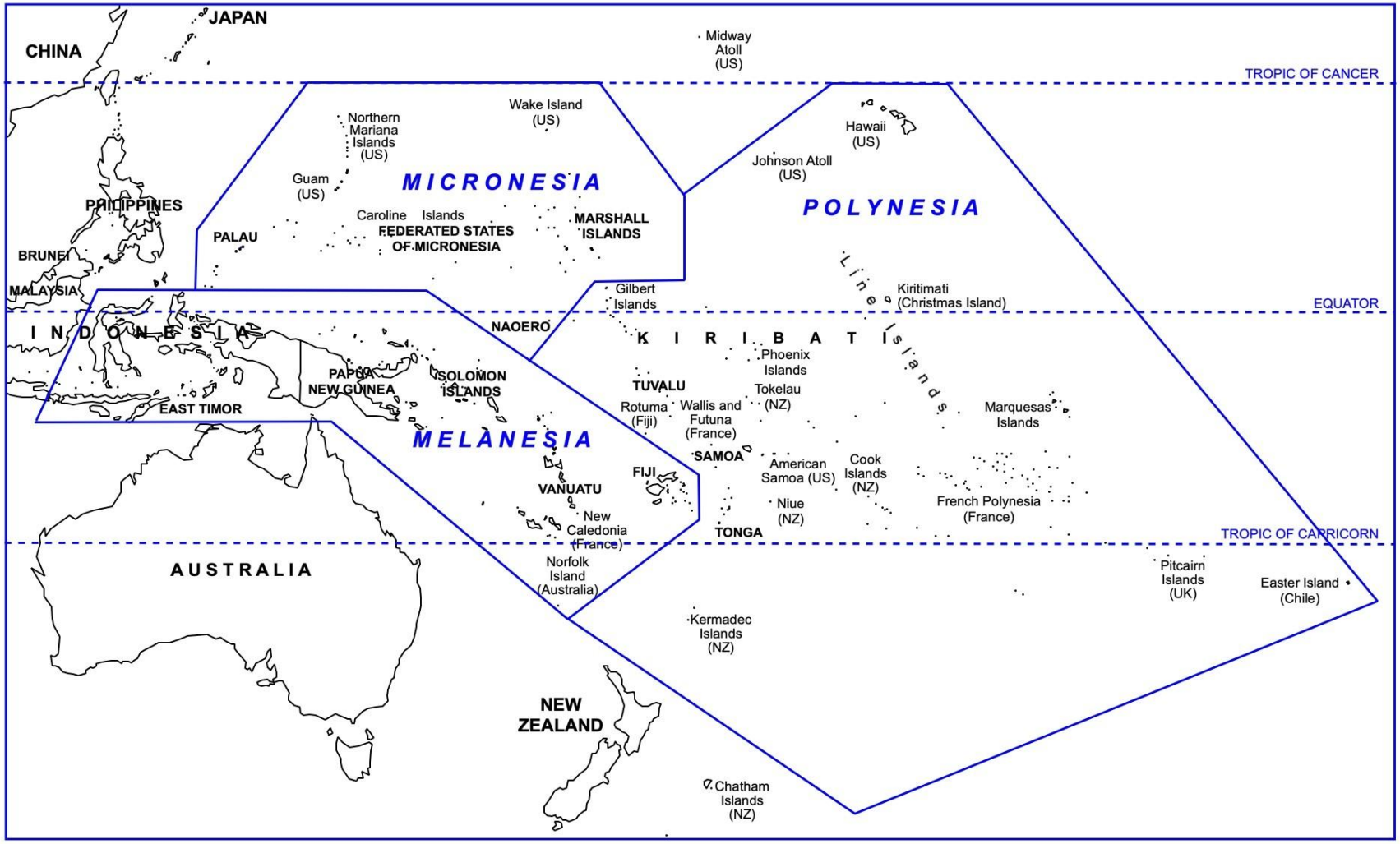
Most island languages use the Roman script, and many incorporate macrons or apostrophes (typically denoting vowel length and glottal stops') as part of their standard orthography. English and French are the most widespread official languages, though indigenous languages are co-official in several countries (e.g. Bislama in Vanuatu, Samoan in Samoa, Tahitian in French Polynesia). PCGN generally recommends using the official locally-approved forms of names, including diacritics where these appear in government sources, while recognising long-established English conventional names where still in international use.

© Crown Copyright 2026

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Map of Pacific Islands



Note that this map is for illustrative purposes. It is not to be taken as necessarily representing the view of the UK Government on boundaries or political status.

© Crown Copyright 2026

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Melanesia

The term Melanesia derives from the Greek *melas* (“black”) and *nesos* meaning “islands”. It is predominantly in the southwest Pacific, from the island of New Guinea in the west, to Fiji in the east. It has some of the larger islands of the Pacific, is linguistically diverse, and most are independent states.

Common Name	***Formal Title***	***Official languages***	***Country to which affiliated***	***Status***	***ISO 3166 “country” code***	***Capital***	***Islands***
Fiji	Republic of Fiji	English, Fijian, Fiji Hindi	-	Independent state	FJ/FJI	Suva (on Viti Levu)	Archipelago of more than 330 islands. The two major islands are Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.
New Caledonia	-	French	France	Overseas collectivity with special status	NC/NCL Also included in ISO 3166-2 as subdivision of France: FR-NC	Nouméa (on Grande Terre)	Main island Grand Terre, other islands include Loyalty Islands and Chesterfield Islands.
Norfolk Island	Territory of Norfolk Island	English, Norf’k (Norfolk creole)	Australia	External territory of Australia	NF/NFK	Kingston (on Norfolk Island)	Norfolk Island, Phillip Island, Nepean Island.
Papua New Guinea	Independent State of Papua New Guinea	English, Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu	-	Independent state (Commonwealth realm)	PG/PNG	Port Moresby	Island country comprising the eastern half of the island of

© Crown Copyright 2026

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Common Name	*Formal Title*	*Official languages*	*Country to which affiliated*	*Status*	*ISO 3166 "country" code*	*Capital*	*Islands*
							New Guinea and some offshore islands.
Solomon Islands	-	English	-	Independent state	SB/SLB	Honiara (on Guadalcanal)	Archipelago of over 1000 islands. The largest island is Guadalcanal.
Vanuatu	Republic of Vanuatu	English, French, Bislama	-	Independent state	VU/VUT	Port Vila (on Efate)	Archipelago of 83 islands. The largest are Espiritu Santo, Malakula and Efate.
West Papua / Papua Provinces	-	Indonesian	Indonesia	Indonesian-administered	ID/IDN	-	Indonesian provinces on the western half of the island of New Guinea.

© Crown Copyright 2026

Micronesia

Micronesia derives from the Greek *mikros* ("small") and *nesos* ("islands"). It is in the northwest Pacific and contains around 2,000 small islands and atolls, several in free association with larger states. It has four main archipelagos: the Caroline Islands, the Gilbert Islands, the Mariana Islands and the Marshall Islands. There are long distances between the island groups, and there is considerable linguistic and cultural diversity, so although the term Micronesia is well-established, the region is more of a disparate grouping.

Common Name	***Formal Title***	***Official languages***	***Country to which affiliated***	***Status***	***ISO 3166 "country" code***	***Capital***	***Islands***
Federated States of Micronesia[1]	Federated States of Micronesia	English	United States	Independent state in free association with United States	FM/FSM	Palikir (on Pohnpei Island)	Comprises majority of the Caroline Islands, plus Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, Yap.
Guam	Territory of Guam	English, Chamorro	United States	Unincorporated organised United States territory	GU/GUM Also included in ISO 3166-2 as subdivision of United States: US-GU	Hagåtña	
Marshall Islands	Republic of the Marshall Islands	Marshallese, English	-	Independent state in free association with United States	MH/MHL	Majuro[2]	Two island chains of atolls and small islands.
Naoero[3]	Republic of Naoere	Nauruan, English	-	Sovereign state	NR/NRU	Yaren (de facto)	

Commonly referred to as Micronesia in English-language usage. Not to be confused with the geographical region of Micronesia.
[2] The atoll of Majuro is officially the capital of the Marshall Islands.
[3] Formerly Nauru.

© Crown Copyright 2026

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Common Name	*Formal Title*	*Official languages*	*Country to which affiliated*	*Status*	*ISO 3166 "country" code*	*Capital*	*Islands*
Northern Mariana Islands	Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands	English, Chamorro, Carolinian	United States	Unincorporated, commonwealth, United States territory	MP/MNP	Saipan	14 of the Mariana Islands (except Guam)
Palau	Republic of Palau	Palauan, English	United States	Free association with United States	PW/PLW	Ngerulmud	340 islands in the western part of the Caroline Islands
Wake Island	-	-	United States	Unincorporated, unorganised United States territory (no permanent population)	WK/WAK Also included as subdivision of United States as part of the United States Minor Outlying Islands code UM/UMI	-	Wake Atoll, consisting of Wake, Wilkes and Peale Islands

© Crown Copyright 2026

Polynesia

Polynesia derives from Greek *poly* (“many” and *nesos* (“islands”). It is made up of over 1,000 islands over the central and southern Pacific, commonly defined by the triangle between Hawaii, New Zealand and Easter Island. It is geographically the largest of the areas, with distances between the island groups by far the greatest. Despite this, it is a culturally cohesive region with widespread dual naming and language revival.

Common Name	***Formal Title***	***Official languages***	***Country to which affiliated***	***Status***	***ISO 3166 “country” code***	***Capital***	***Islands***
American Samoa	Territory of American Samoa	English, Samoan (smo)	United States	Unincorporated unorganised United States territory	AS/ASM Also included in ISO 3166-2 as subdivision of United States: US-AS	Pago Pago (on Tutuila)	6 islands, Tutuila is the largest and most populous island.
Cook Islands	-	English, Cook Islands Māori (rar)	New Zealand	Self-governing in free association with New Zealand	CK/COK	Avarua (on Rarotonga)	15 islands in two main groups: Northern Cook Islands and Southern Cook Islands. Main island Rarotonga is in the Southern Cook Islands.

© Crown Copyright 2026

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Common Name	*Formal Title*	*Official languages*	*Country to which affiliated*	*Status*	*ISO 3166 "country" code*	*Capital*	*Islands*
Easter Island	Isla de Pascua (spa) / Rapa Nui (rap)	Spanish (spa), Rapa Nui (rap)	Chile	Special territory of Chile	CL/CHL	Hanga Roa	-
French Polynesia	-	French (fra), Tahitian (tah)	France	French overseas collectivity	PF/PYF Also included in ISO 3166-2 as subdivision of France: FR-PF	Papeete (on Tahiti)	Consists of five island groups: Austral Islands; Gambier Islands; Marquesas; Society Islands; Tuamotas.
Hawaii	Hawaiian Islands	English	United States	An island state of the United States	Also included in ISO 3166-2 as subdivision of United States: US-HI	Honolulu (on Oʻahu)	8 islands, the most populated of which are: Hawaiʻi, Maui, Oʻahu, Kauaʻi.
Kermadec	Kermadec Islands		New Zealand	Uninhabited, outlying island group of New Zealand	-		
Kiribati	Republic of Kiribati	Gilbertese, English	-	Independent state	KI/KIR	Tarawa[4]	Comprises Gilbert Islands, part of Line

[4] The atoll of Tarawa is officially the capital of the Republic of Kiribati.

© Crown Copyright 2026

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Common Name	Formal Title	Official languages	Country to which affiliated	Status	ISO 3166 "country" code	Capital	Islands
							Islands, Phoenix Islands
New Zealand	-	English, Māori	-	Independent state	NZ/NZL	Wellington (on North Island)	An island country of 2 main islands: Te Ika-a-Māui / North Island and Te Waipounamu / South Island
Johnston Atoll	-	-	United States	Unincorporated unorganised United States territory (no permanent population)		-	Johnston Island, Sand Island, Akau Island, Hikina Island
Niue	-	Niuean, English	New Zealand	Self-governing in free association with New Zealand	NU/NIU	Alofi	-
Pitcairn Islands	Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands	English, Pitkern (creole)	United Kingdom	British Overseas Territory	PN/PCN	Adamstown	Four volcanic islands consisting of: Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands
Rotuma	-	Rotuman, English, Fijian, Fiji Hindi	Fiji	Self-governing dependency of Fiji	FJ/FJI	Ahau	Rotuma island group

© Crown Copyright 2026

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Common Name	*Formal Title*	*Official languages*	*Country to which affiliated*	*Status*	*ISO 3166 "country" code*	*Capital*	*Islands*
Samoa	Independent State of Samoa	Samoan, English	-	Independent state; formerly Western Samoa	WS/WSM	Apia	Savai'i, Upolu
Tokelau	Tokelau Islands	English, Tokelau	New Zealand	Territory of New Zealand (non-self-governing)	TK/TKL	Nukunonu (administrative)	Three atolls: Atafu, Nukunonu, Fakaofo
Tonga	Kingdom of Tonga	Tongan, English	-	Independent state	TO/TON	Nuku'alofa	Consists of three island groups: Vava'u, Ha'apai & Tongatapu (the largest island)
Tuvalu	-	English, Tuvaluan	-	Independent state	TV/TUV	Funafuti[5]	Volcanic archipelago. The capital is Funafuti atoll. Other islands include Nanumea, Nanumaga, Nukufetau, Nukulaelae, Nui, Vaitupu
Wallis and Futuna		French, Wallisian, Futunan	France	French overseas collectivity		Mata-Utu	

[5] The atoll of Funafuti is officially the capital of Tuvalu.

© Crown Copyright 2026

Useful references

- Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com (for information on languages)
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#home
- Omniglot: www.omniglot.com (for information on languages and scripts)
- Pacific Islands Forum Home page | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
- PCGN Country Names list: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names
- Unicode: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/welcome.html

---

Compiled by PCGN
www.gov.uk/pcgn
November2026

© Crown Copyright 2026