



Australia and the Pacific



An aerial view of Choiseul Island, one of the nine provinces of the Solomon Islands.

To the east of Australia lie our Pacific island neighbours. These countries include thousands of islands with rich and diverse physical and cultural environments. At the same time, they have particular needs as developing nations in a rapidly changing world.

Australia, as the largest and wealthiest nation in the region, has an important role to play. What sort of neighbour are we? How well do we know our neighbours and our neighbourhood?

Our understanding of the Pacific is sometimes based on stereotypes from television - clear water, sun-drenched beaches, grass huts and swaying palm trees. In reality, the beauty of the region is threatened by mining, over-fishing, logging, urbanisation and the effects of climate change. The region is not homogenous. It has a range of landforms, cultures, languages and ethnic groups. Despite these differences, there are some common features. We can group our Pacific neighbours into three distinct regions and ethnic groups: Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia.

Traditionally, Australians have learnt more about countries on the other side of the world than about our Pacific neighbours. This is changing as we realise the many links and relationships we have with our region – through aid, trade, migration, communications, tourism and sport.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Pacific islands consist of high islands (volcanic) and low islands (reefs / atolls). Melanesia is mainly made up of high islands while Micronesia and Polynesia are mainly low islands.

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MELANESIA

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For You To Do!

1. In a small group, brainstorm the qualities that make someone a good neighbour. What are the qualities that would make Australia a good international neighbour?
2. Use the map on p. 4-5 to complete the country names above.