Tristan da Cunha

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1817 The garrison was withdrawn but Corporal Glass elected to stay on the island with his wife to guard the remaining stores and incidentally found the community.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

1949 The island's extreme isolation ended with the establishment of the crawfish industry.

1950s An official currency, the British sterling, was introduced.

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

1981 The 1981 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. 2003 A report in April said that Tristan's fishing industry had considerable potential for development, providing the necessary infrastructure was put in place by the government.

2004 In January, Tristan da Cunha received a new fire engine paid for by the British government.

**Political structure**

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. Tristan is the only inhabited island although there is a meteorological station on Gough Island, maintained by the South African navy. Although technically under St Helena, the island effectively administers itself independently. In May 2002, full British citizenship was granted for the inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha.

The creation of a new Minister for Overseas Territories within the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the establishment of an Overseas Territories Consultative Council, proposed in the White Paper, were both implemented. The Council had its first annual meeting in 1999 under the chair of Baroness Scotland, Minister of State at the FCO, but responsibility for the British Overseas Territories (BOTs) remains divided between the FCO and the Department for International Development (DfID). There are no plans for reciprocal right of abode for UK citizens in the BOTs.

**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 by the local population to act on a three-yearly basis.

**Last elections**

November 2003

**Next elections**

November 2006

**Population**

300 (2003)

**Ethnic make-up**

English, Scottish, Irish, Dutch and Italian.

**Main cities**

Edinburgh of the Seven Seas (capital, estimated population 270 in 2003).

**Languages spoken**

**Official language/s**

English

**Media**

Press

The St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha Philatelic Society publishes the
periodical South Atlantic Chronicle (formerly St Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha Philatelic Society Newsletter) with news of the latest stamp printing that depicts detailed descriptions of the region’s political and economic developments. News from Tristan can be obtained from the news website Sartma (www.sartma.com). Sartma has obtained permission to publish various items from the Tristan Times. The Tristan da Cunha Association in the UK publishes a newsletter.

Economy
Tristan’s economy is based on crawfish (rock lobster) supported by philatelic sales and also by handicrafts which are increasingly imported ready-made. From the opening of the first crawfish canning factory 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 was 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. This provided a buffer against the decline in Far Eastern demand. Other economic activities are hampered by poor access with only about 60 days per year suitable for landing. A new harbour will improve conditions and permit more regular visits particularly by small yachts. Tristan’s freshwater is considered to have special properties and there are plans to develop a mineral water export business. The 2001 hurricane devastated the only settlement on the island and severely damaged its prosperity. The British government allocated US$106,000 to help the island recover from the disaster. Plans for a new jetty are going ahead; this is urgently required for the future development of the tourism and fishing industries.

Agriculture
Farming
The cultivated area is estimated at no more than 1.5 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. Fishing
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) and fish provide a major source of protein.

Time
Geography
The island of Tristan da Cunha is in the South Atlantic Ocean, 2,400km (1,500 miles) west of Cape Town, South Africa. It comes under the jurisdiction of St Helena 2,100km (1,300 miles) to the north-east. Also in the group are Inaccessible Island 32km (20 miles) west of Tristan; the three Nightingale Islands 3km (2 miles) south; and Gough Island (Diego Alvarez) 350km (220 miles) south.

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

Telecommunications
Telephone/fax
The Administrator’s office and the factory in Tristan have satellite communications. The Administrator’s office and the factory in Tristan have satellite communications. There is a radio telephone link via Cape Town Radio which connects to the international telephone service and in 1998, a public satellite telephone was installed.

Postal services
Post departs approximately every two months.

Getting there
Surface
Water: The harbour is too small for ships to berth. Passengers are normally ferried to land in small boats and landing is not guaranteed. Improvements to the harbour are vital to the economy. 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 Kelsa 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

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 de 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 N4XU, UK (tel: +44 (0)207-575-6480; fax: +44 (0)207-575-6200; e-mail: reservations@aws.co.uk; internet site: http://www.aws.co.uk).

Premier Fishing, PO Box 181, Cape Town 8000, South Africa. (tel: +27-21-4190124).

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; e-mail: sthelenaline@mweb.co.za).

Miss Kerry Yon, Salomon and Co plc, Jamestown, St Helena, South Atlantic (tel: +290-2525; fax: +290-2423; e-mail: 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: (0)207-270-2695).

Internet sites
SARTMA Falkland Islands News Network (contains Tristan Times): http://www.sartma.com