



Northern Mariana Islands



Background Austronesian people settled the Northern Mariana Islands around 1500 B.C. These people became the indigenous Chamorro and were influenced by later migrations, including Micronesians in the first century A.D. and island Southeast Asians around 900. Spanish explorer Ferdinand MAGELLAN sailed through the Mariana Islands in 1521, and Spain claimed them in 1565. Spain formally colonized the Mariana Islands in 1668 and administered the archipelago from Guam. Spain's brutal repression of the Chamorro, along with new diseases and intermittent warfare, reduced the indigenous population by about 90% in the 1700s. With a similar dynamic occurring on Guam, Spain forced the Chamorro from the Northern Mariana Islands to resettle there. By the time they returned, many other Micronesians, including Chuukese and Yapese, had already settled on their islands.

In 1898, Spain ceded Guam to the US after the Spanish-American War but sold the Northern Mariana Islands to Germany under the German-Spanish Treaty of 1899. Germany administered the territory from German New Guinea but took a hands-off approach to day-to-day life. Following World War I, Japan administered the islands under a League of Nations mandate. Japan focused on sugar production and brought in thousands of Japanese laborers, who quickly outnumbered the Chamorro on the islands. During World War II, Japan invaded Guam from the Northern Mariana Islands and used Marianan Chamorro as translators with Guamanian Chamorro, creating friction between the two Chamorro communities that continues to this day. The US captured the Northern Mariana Islands in 1944 after the Battle of Saipan and later administered them as part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI).

On four occasions in the 1950s and 1960s, voters opted for integration with Guam, which Guam rejected in 1969. In 1978, the Northern Mariana Islands was granted self-governance separate from the rest of the TTPI, and in 1986, islanders were granted US citizenship, with the territory coming under US sovereignty as the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In 2009, the CNMI became the final US territory to elect a nonvoting delegate to the US Congress.

Capital	name: Saipan
Government type	a commonwealth in political union with and under the sovereignty of the US; republican form of government with separate executive, legislative, and judicial branches
Area	total : 464 sq km land: 464 sq km water: 0 sq km
Climate	tropical marine; moderated by northeast trade winds, little seasonal temperature variation; dry season December to June, rainy season July to October
Natural resources	arable land, fish
Population	total: 51,118 (2024 est.)
Population growth rate	-0.34% (2024 est.)
Ethnic groups	Asian 50% (includes Filipino 35.3%, Chinese 6.8%, Korean 4.2%, and other Asian 3.7%), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander 34.9% (includes Chamorro 23.9%, Carolinian 4.6%, and other Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander 6.4%), other 2.5%, two or more ethnicities or races 12.7% (2010 est.)
Religions	Christian (Roman Catholic majority, although traditional beliefs and taboos may still be found)

Languages	Philippine languages 32.8%, Chamorro (official) 24.1%, English (official) 17%, other Pacific island languages 10.1% (includes Carolinian (official), Chinese 6.8%, other Asian languages 7.3%, other 1.9% (2010 est.)
Executive branch	chief of state: President Donald J. TRUMP (since 20 January 2025) head of government: Governor David M. APATANG (since 24 July 2025)
Legislative branch	note: the Northern Mariana Islands delegate to the US House of Representatives can vote when serving on a committee and when the House meets as the "Committee of the Whole House," but not when legislation is submitted for a "full floor" House vote
Diplomatic representation from the US	embassy: none (commonwealth in political union with the US)
Economic overview	US Pacific island commonwealth economy; growing Chinese and Korean tourist destination; hit hard by 2018 typhoon; dependent on energy imports; exempt from some US labor and immigration laws; longstanding garment production
Real GDP (purchasing power parity)	\$1.242 billion (2016 est.) \$933 million (2015 est.) \$845 million (2014 est.)
Exports	\$244 million (2022 est.) \$55 million (2021 est.) \$128 million (2020 est.)
Exports - partners	Sweden 21%, Singapore 20%, Hong Kong 12%, UK 8%, India 7% (2023)
Exports - commodities	scrap iron, refined petroleum, scrap copper, hydraulic engines, integrated circuits (2021)
Imports	\$777 million (2022 est.) \$666 million (2021 est.) \$556 million (2020 est.)
Imports - partners	Singapore 63%, Japan 12%, Hong Kong 8%, Taiwan 4%, Philippines 3% (2023)
Imports - commodities	refined petroleum, cars, jewelry, trunks and cases, flavored water (2023)

Population Pyramid

Northern Mariana Islands (2024)

