

Squiz the World goes to... Papua New Guinea

Each week, we give the world globe a spin, and see where we land. Then we take the kids of Australia on an audio excursion to visit that country and its people.

I'm Christie Kijurina, and today on Squiz the World we're visiting a country that is our closest neighbour, was once an Australian territory, and is totally mad about rugby league. Can you guess where we're going?

Strap yourselves into the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and take a squiz at Papua New Guinea.

JUST THE FACTS

Not too much more than a stone's throw away, Papua New Guinea is Australia's closest neighbour. The closest distance from the Australian mainland to PNG is only 150 kilometres. That would be less than a two-hour drive if there was a motorway connecting us. And our closest islands are only five kilometres apart! Papua New Guinea occupies the eastern part of the island of New Guinea as well as more than 600 smaller islands. We've spoken before about tectonic plates and PNG sits right on the joining of tectonic plates known as 'the ring of fire' and so earthquakes are a frequent occurrence and there are at least 15 active volcanoes.

All that volcanic activity does wonders for the soils of Papua New Guinea. They are super rich in nutrients and the tropical climate means that plants and animals can flourish. More than 80% of the country is covered in rainforest, hosting a jaw-dropping 5% of the world's biodiversity. Talk about nature's treasure chest!

Now, a quick history break - PNG has been under the flag of three different nations since 1883, including a more than 60-year stint under Australia. But in 1975, they broke free, waving their independence flag high and joining the Commonwealth, which means that their head of state is also King Charles.

During WWII, PNG was on the frontline news, bravely aiding the allies against a Japanese invasion. Despite being under-equipped, the spirit and courage of the Papua New Guineans shone through, earning them angelic status among Australian soldiers.

Fast forward to today, PNG is a vibrant mosaic of cultures, languages, and traditions, with people deeply connected to their clan or 'wantok,' meaning 'one talk' - the people who share the same land, family connections, culture and traditions.

LEARN THE LINGO

Believe it or not there are more than 800 different languages spoken in PNG, the most of any country on Earth.

So how do people communicate? Well, there are three official languages, English, Tok Pisin (which is also called pidgin or creole) and Hiri Motu which is spoken in specific regions.

Today, we've got a special guest, Dre, ready to give us a crash course in Pisin. Take it away Dre!

With our new Pisin skills, we're one step closer to making friends in PNG!

Now that we can communicate a little bit, it's....

TIME FOR SCHOOL

School's in, and in PNG, the classrooms have been filling up over the past decade! Over three-quarters of kids aged 6 to 18 now hit the books, especially in the urban areas. Yet in more remote areas getting to school can be a trek and kids might stay at home to help with family chores.

In 1995, the government of Papua New Guinea implemented a bilingual education program meaning that both community languages and English are used and taught in schools and in 2022, schooling became fee-free but this has changed throughout the country's history.

1995 was a game-changer with a bilingual education kick-off, mixing local lingo and English in lessons. Plus, schooling went fee-free in 2022, making pencils and books more accessible. The setup mirrors Australia's, from primary to secondary, and guess what? Rugby league is the recess favourite!

LET'S GET CULTURAL

Sports, especially Rugby League, is huge in PNG. It's not just a game; it's a legacy, easing old clan rivalries with friendly competition. PM Anthony Albanese scored major points in 2023, supporting PNG's dream for an NRL team, just like the New Zealand Warriors.

PNG's cultural tapestry is rich and diverse. While strides are being made toward gender equality, some communities honour matrilineal traditions, meaning that land and possessions are passed down on the females' side of the family and when women are married they can stay with their own cultural group, rather than moving to their husband's, emphasising women's roles in heritage and home. It's a fascinating blend of the past and present, shaping a unique societal fabric.

Enough cultural chat, I'm starving! I think it might be...

DINNER TIME

Feeling peckish? Being the tropical paradise that it is, Papua New Guinea is rich in tropical fruits, and its staple foods are root vegetables like sweet potato, karuka nuts and rice. Although many people eat largely vegetarian meals, meat's also on the menu, but pork takes the spotlight for festivities.

Ever heard of Mumu? It's not just fun to say; it's an ancient cooking style using earth ovens for that slow-cooked perfection. Remember, though, manners matter - hold off on asking for seconds because that can be considered rude.

If you're craving a taste sensation, check the episode notes for a recipe mixing pineapple and hearty sweet potatoes - a tropical twist on dinner and dessert!

THE S'QUIZ

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening.

Question 1. How many kilometres is Papua New Guinea from the Australian mainland? (150km)

Question 2. What percentage of Papua New Guinea is covered by rainforest? Is it a) 50%, b) 65%, or c) 80%? [(c) 80%]

Question 3. Which root vegetable is a staple food in Papua New Guinea? (sweet potatoes)

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for staying curious about the world, and joining me on this incredible trip to Papua New Guinea.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day. Over and out.