

Squiz the World goes to... Vatican City

Each fortnight, 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 heading to the smallest country in the world... a place with no airport, no schools like you might expect, and where ancient tombs sit beneath one of the most famous buildings on Earth.

Can you guess? ... Strap yourselves into the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and take a squiz at Vatican City

JUST THE FACTS

Vatican City is the smallest country on Earth, so small you could walk around the perimeter in 30 to 45 minutes...It's about the size of a large theme park... you could explore most of it in an afternoon. It sits entirely inside the city of Rome in Italy, an entire country tucked inside another country's capital. Fewer than 1,000 people live there, and many of them are priests, nuns, or people working for the Catholic Church.

"Vatican City is an elective monarchy, which means instead of a king or queen inheriting power, a new leader is chosen. When a pope dies or steps down, cardinals from around the world gather in a secret meeting called a conclave to vote for the next one.

That's exactly what happened last year, when Pope Leo XIV was elected."

"Now, while Vatican City might be tiny on the map... its influence is anything but small. It's the home base of the Catholic Church, one of the largest religious groups in the world, with around 1.3 billion followers globally.

At the centre of it all is something called the Holy See—and this is where it can get a little tricky, so stick with me.

The Holy See isn't a place... it's the governing body of the Catholic Church, led by the Pope. It's the part that makes decisions, sends ambassadors to other countries, and connects Catholics all around the world. Vatican City is the place, and the Holy See is the power behind it."

"The Pope is not just a religious leader, he is also the head of state, meaning he's in charge of making laws, running the country, and overseeing its courts.

Even though it's tiny, Vatican City runs like a full country. It has its own post office, bank, coins, stamps, and even a railway line... though it's mostly used for deliveries."

"There's no official language, but Latin is used for important documents, Italian is spoken day-to-day, and even the guards use Swiss German for commands.

And while Vatican City doesn't have an army, it does have a small, very famous security force that protects the Pope."

Now that we understand what Vatican City looks like today, let's rewind the clock and see how it all began... it's time for some...

TIME TRAVEL

"Back in ancient Roman times, this area wasn't a grand city at all. It was a marshy, flood-prone patch of land on the edge of Rome—damp, unhealthy, and not a place people wanted to live. But over time, things changed.

Roman emperors built gardens and a large stadium here called Nero's Circus, where crowds gathered to watch chariot races and public events."

And this is where the story takes a darker turn. In the early days of Christianity, Christians were persecuted by the Roman Empire—meaning they were punished and sometimes killed for their beliefs. Many were brought to this very area. Tradition tells us that Saint Peter, one of the earliest leaders of the Christian Church, was put to death here.

Now here's the incredible part...Hundreds of years later, in the 300s, a massive church—St Peter's Basilica—was built right on top of that site, over what is believed to be his tomb. So the heart of Vatican City today stands on a place that was once a site of persecution. Talk about a plot twist!

Fast forward to the 1800s, and the Pope used to rule large areas of Italy. But when Italy became one united country, the Pope lost that land and stayed inside the Vatican, refusing to leave. For decades, he was known as a "prisoner in the Vatican"... until everything was sorted out in 1929, when Vatican City officially became its own independent country.

So from marshland to empire to independent country... Vatican City has had quite the journey. But what's it like growing up in a place like this today? Let's find out... it's

TIME FOR SCHOOL

"Now, you might be wondering... where do kids go to school in the smallest country in the world? Well... there aren't many kids living in Vatican City at all.

The few who do live there are usually the children of guards or workers—and instead of going to school inside the Vatican, they head out into Rome to attend Italian schools. So there's no typical playground, classrooms, or school bells inside Vatican City like you'd find in most countries.

But education still plays a big role here."

Just outside the Vatican are some of the world's most famous Pontifical universities, where students from all over the globe come to study things like history, philosophy, languages, and religion. Some classes are even taught in Latin, a language commonly spoken over 2,000 years old.

So while you won't find a bustling primary school... you will find classrooms filled with people studying ancient texts, global history, and ideas that have shaped the world.

So while school life might look a little different here, learning and history are everywhere you look. Now from classrooms to centuries-old masterpieces...

LET'S GET CULTURAL

This tiny country is packed with some of the most famous artworks ever created. Inside the Sistine Chapel, you'll find Michelangelo's incredible painted ceiling—a masterpiece that took years to complete. The Vatican Museums hold thousands upon thousands of artworks, sculptures, and historical objects collected over centuries.

Over time, people's ideas about art have changed. Some of the famous artworks here originally showed the human body just as it is, but later on, body parts were covered up, covered with carved additions called [ahhmm] “fig leaves,” or removed altogether to make them seem more modest.

There are also ancient libraries filled with rare manuscripts, some dating back hundreds, even thousands of years.

Vatican City is full of incredible sights...but wait until you hear some of the quirky and surprising things about this tiny country...

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

Believe it or not... this tiny country is full of surprises. About half the country is actually gardens, filled with fountains, trees, and quiet green spaces. If you need some cash, it has an ATM where the text on the screen is in Latin (that ancient language) it's possibly the only one in the world.

It also has its own football league, with teams made up of guards, museum workers, and staff. And here's a quirky one, because the population is small and unique, statistics can get a bit strange. For example, Vatican City is often said to have very high wine consumption per person, partly because wine is used in religious ceremonies.

After all that exploring, I don't know about you—but I'm getting hungry... it must be

DINNER TIME

Now, Vatican City doesn't really have its own national cuisine. Instead, food here is heavily influenced by Italian cooking, which means plenty of pasta, pizza, fresh bread, and strong espresso coffee.

"Almost everything has to be brought in from Italy, including food, water, and supplies. There are cafés and canteens where workers grab meals, and even a supermarket for residents and staff.

So while it may be the smallest country in the world... when it comes to food, it tastes a lot like Rome."

THE S'QUIZ

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

"Vatican City is completely surrounded by another city. What is that city

A) Paris

B) Madrid

C) Rome

C- Rome"

"True or false. The land that Vatican City was built on was once rich farming land.

False, The Vatican area was once marshy and considered unhealthy."

"A key figure in early Christianity is believed to have been put to death and buried near where St Peter's Basilica now stands. Who was he?

Saint Peter"

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

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