

Summary: History and Governments

First People

The islands of the Pacific and Indian oceans were settled before the Europeans arrived. People from Southeast Asia migrated to Australia at least 40,000 years ago. Their descendants are called Aborigines. Later, Southeast Asians migrated to parts of Oceania—first Melanesia, then Micronesia, and finally, Polynesia. The Maori were the first settlers in New Zealand. They came from Polynesia 1,000 years ago.

Geography influenced which islands people settled. Fresh water, wildlife, and vegetation were important. People did not inhabit islands that lacked food sources or were too dry or small. Islanders fished or farmed for survival. They also traded with nearby islands. The great distances between islands caused different languages and cultures to develop.

Europeans in Australia and New Zealand

In the 1500s, Europeans explored the Pacific for spices. Missionaries and other settlers soon followed. They brought smallpox and other diseases. Many island people died or were enslaved.

The United States, several European countries, and later Japan had colonies in the Pacific. Although some islands have gained their independence since 1962, others are still colonies. For example, the United States controls Guam today.

The British settled Australia. Many early colonists were prisoners. Others settled there freely. Six British colonies formed the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. When Europeans first moved to Australia, about 750,000 Aborigines already lived there. As more settlers arrived, the Aborigines were crowded into the center of the country. Today, about one percent of the population has Aboriginal roots.

Commonwealth of Nations

Australia, New Zealand, and Oceania have different types of governments. Some are democracies, others are monarchies, and some are ruled by other countries. The group of countries that was once British colonies belongs to the Commonwealth of Nations. This group includes Australia and New Zealand.

The monarch of Great Britain is their head of state.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

Aborigine *noun*, a person descended from Australia's first inhabitants

Commonwealth of Nations *noun*, a group of nations that includes Australia and New Zealand

After You Read

REVIEW Look at the map on page 729. Why do you think Southeast Asians settled the islands in the order they did? Underline the sentences that explain how geography influenced island settlement.

REVIEW Why are Aborigines such a small minority today in Australia? Draw a box around the effects of European settlement on the Aborigines.