

Nauru: How a country doesn't have a capital.

A capital city is of great importance to many countries. It is often where parliament, the highest court, or the head of state is based. Capital cities also tend to have significant historical, economic, or cultural importance. Most countries therefore have one clearly defined capital city. However, there are exceptions. South Africa, for example, has three capitals: Pretoria, Cape Town, and Bloemfontein. Other countries have moved their capitals, such as Brazil, which relocated its capital from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília in 1960. Indonesia is also currently working on moving its capital from Jakarta to Nusantara.

Some countries do not even have an official capital. Switzerland is a well-known example: officially, the country has no capital, although Bern serves as the seat of government in practice.

However, there is one country that takes this a step further. This small island nation in Oceania not only has no official capital, but also has no city that is generally considered its unofficial capital. We are talking about Nauru, one of the smallest countries in the world.

But why does Nauru have no capital? How does a country govern itself without a central administrative center? And which place performs the functions that would normally be carried out by a capital city in other countries?

These are the questions we will explore in greater detail in this article.



Flag Nauru. Source: wikipedia.org



Geography Nauru

In most articles about countries, the story often begins with history. In the case of Nauru, however, geography may be even more important than the past. The island's exceptionally small size explains why Nauru does not have a capital city.

Nauru is a tiny island nation in Micronesia, a region of Oceania. With an area of only about 21 km², the country is one of the smallest states in the world. Only Vatican City and Monaco are smaller. To put this into perspective, Nauru is roughly half the size of the Dutch Wadden Island of Schiermonnikoog.

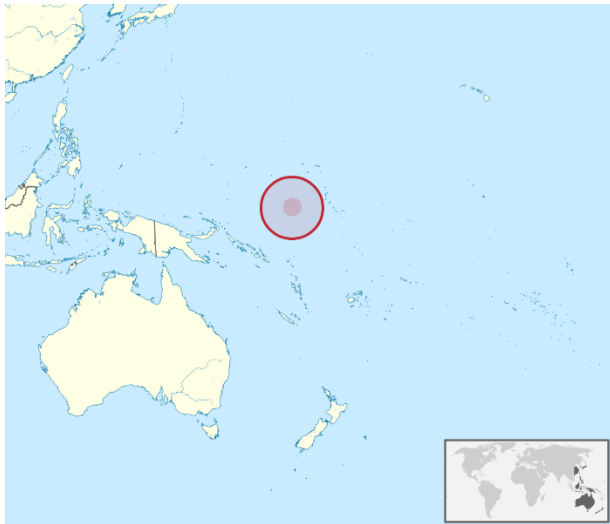
The island has a population of around 11,000 people, who are primarily descended from Micronesian and Polynesian peoples.

Despite its small size, Nauru has a turbulent colonial history. At the end of the nineteenth century, the island was annexed by the German Empire. After Germany's defeat in the First World War, it lost its colonies and Nauru became a League of Nations mandate. Administration of the island was primarily placed in the hands of Australia, together with New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

During the Second World War, Nauru was occupied by Japan. After Japan's defeat, the island once again came under Australian administration, until Nauru eventually gained independence on January 31, 1968.

Because of the island's extremely small size, however, Nauru developed differently from most other independent states. Instead of having one large city with a centralized government, the country consists of several small districts that almost seamlessly blend into one another. This is the main reason why Nauru has never had an official capital city.





Location Nauru on the world map. Source: wikipedia.org

Districts

If you look at Nauru's Wikipedia page, you will often see Yaren listed as its capital. However, this is not entirely accurate. Yaren is indeed home to many important government buildings, as well as the country's international airport, but officially, Yaren is neither a city nor a capital. It is simply one of the fourteen districts that make up Nauru.

Nauru does not have cities or towns in the way we know them. Instead, the island is divided into fourteen districts: Yaren, Aiwo, Anabar, Anetan, Anibare, Baiti, Boe, Buada, Denigomodu, Ewa, Ijuw, Meneng, Nibok, and Uaboe (often spelled Uoe). Each district has only a few hundred inhabitants; no district has more than roughly 800 residents.

This makes Nauru unique among the world's sovereign states: the country has no officially designated cities. This is normally only the case with small city-states such as Monaco, Singapore, and Vatican City. Unlike these countries, however, Nauru does not consist of a single city, but rather of several small districts that almost seamlessly blend into one another.

For this reason, some people consider Nauru to be a kind of city-state, although internationally it is recognized as a fully independent sovereign state.

Although Nauru therefore has no official capital, Yaren is often considered its *de facto* capital. *De facto* literally means "in practice." In other words, a place does not officially have capital status but nevertheless performs the functions of a capital. Because many



government institutions, the parliament, and the international airport are located in Yaren, the district effectively serves as the country's administrative center.

Officially, however, Nauru remains a country without a capital city.



The distribution of the Nauru districts. Source: wikipedia.org

Island or city-state?

Nauru finds itself on unique ground in several respects. Many countries in Oceania consist of multiple islands. Even Australia, which is largely made up of a single continental landmass, has an important additional island in Tasmania. Nauru, on the other hand, consists of just one single island.

This is the result of geological processes. Many islands in Oceania were formed through volcanic activity and tectonic movements, often resulting in island groups or atolls (ring-shaped coral islands). In the case of Nauru, however, only a single isolated island developed, meaning that the country today consists entirely of that one island.

Because of its small size, there is sometimes debate over whether Nauru should be considered a “fully fledged” state. After all, the country is extremely small, has no cities, and consists of only one island. Some people therefore compare Nauru to city-states such as Singapore and Monaco.

However, the comparison is not entirely accurate. Unlike Monaco or Singapore, Nauru does not consist of a single urban area, but rather of several districts spread across the island. Furthermore, Nauru is internationally recognized as a fully sovereign state and is a member of organizations including the United Nations.



Precisely because of its isolated location, Nauru has developed its own unique culture over the centuries. This culture came under pressure during the colonial period due to the influence of foreign powers such as the German Empire, Japan, and later the League of Nations mandate administered by Australia.

The first president of independent Nauru, Hammer DeRoburt, attempted to protect Nauruan identity by pursuing a restrictive immigration policy and limiting outside influence.

Perhaps that is precisely what makes Nauru so fascinating. Despite its small size, its lack of cities, and even the absence of an official capital, the country has developed its own history, culture, and national identity. Nauru may be small, but these extraordinary characteristics make it one of the most unique countries in the world.

Conclusion

You can dive much deeper into Nauru than this. You could discuss the island's phosphate wealth, which meant that very little work was needed on the island and made it, on paper, one of the richest countries in the world. You could also explore how, with support from Russia, Nauru recognized territories such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

However, those things do not necessarily make Nauru unique. What makes it truly fascinating is how the country functions and how this unusual situation came about. There is no other country in the world quite like Nauru. And despite the fact that there is not an enormous amount of information available about the country, I had wanted to write an article about this situation for quite some time: how is it possible that Nauru has no capital, but in a broader sense does not have any cities at all?

Whether you consider it a larger city-state or a sovereign country, the origins and continued existence of the island and its people are remarkable and truly fascinating.



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