



Australian Government

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

Christmas Island National Park

INFORMATION BOOKLET

Some information about living and working on
Christmas Island

2010



The Place

For centuries Christmas Island's isolation, rugged coasts and poor anchorage protected it from settlement. First included on navigators' charts in the early 17th century Captain William Mynors named the island for the day as he passed by in 1643. Settlement began in 1897 when John Clunies-Ross and John Murray formed the Christmas Island Phosphate Company. At this time 200 Chinese labourers were brought to work the phosphate mine on the island. Mining continued until World War II when the Japanese occupied the island. After the war it came under the jurisdiction of the new colony of Singapore, when mining was taken over by the Australian and New Zealand Governments. They expanded the operation with the recruitment of several hundred Cocos Malays.

In 1957 the Australian Government acquired Christmas Island from the Singapore government and it was a crown colony until its transfer to Australia on 1 October 1958. A decade later the Christmas Island community benefited from being brought into line with mainland Australian conditions with the same range of social welfare and the right to vote in federal elections (as part of the Northern Territory). At this time full mainland taxes were introduced.

The island is in the Indian Ocean, 360 km west of Java and 2600 km north-west of Perth. It is approximately 135 square kilometers in area and was formed 60 million years ago by a series of volcanic events that lifted the top of the island 360 meters above sea level. Within 5 km of the island the ocean floor falls to a depth of 2000 meters.

The climate is tropical but cooler than the mainland at the same latitude due to the moderating effect of the sea. There is little seasonal variation in temperature throughout the year, with a monthly average of about 28^o C. The average annual rainfall of 2000 mm falls mainly between November and May, though there can be rain in any month of the year. August to October are the driest months. Humidity is normally high.

The high humidity, rainfall and warm temperatures are ideal for plant growth and although the shoreline vegetation is limited to scrub because of the wind and salt spray, inland a lush rainforest canopy rises to a height of 30-40 meters. The rainforest trees are used by nesting seabirds such as the endemic Christmas Island Frigate bird and the world's rarest booby bird, Abbott's Booby. The rainforest floor is alive with a wide variety of land crabs like the red crab, blue crab, and robber crabs. A national park was declared in 1980 to protect this unique environment. The park now covers 63% of the island.

The People

The population varies with the island's economic situation but is currently about 1400 (2006) plus 2,000 asylum seekers and immigration detention centre staff. There are three main ethnic groups: Chinese (65%), Malay (15%) and Caucasian and other Eurasian people (20%). English is the official language of the island although 80% of the population has a first language other than English, (Chinese dialects, Malay or Tamil Indian). The Chinese community's religious beliefs include Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucian. There are temples and shrines in various places on the island. The Malay people follow Islam and have a mosque in Flying Fish Cove. There is also a Christian church used by various Christian denominations.

The District High School puts a major emphasis on teaching English as a second language for the many students from an Asian background. The school caters for pre-primary up to and including Year 12. There is also a kindergarten located at Settlement and a training centre operated by Indian Ocean Group Training which provides various training courses both internally and externally.

The school is at Drumsite, one of the main residential areas at the top of the hill above Flying Fish Cove. Poon Saan, where most of the Chinese people live, is just below Drumsite and below Poon Saan is Silver City, the newest residential area. Settlement is the old residential area at sea level, adjoining the Malay Kampong at Flying Fish Cove.

Generally speaking life on CI is similar to any small town community on mainland Australia. There is a large **recreational centre** with a gym and wide range of sports facilities, including swimming, soccer, badminton, volleyball, basketball, cricket, tennis, golf, snorkeling. There are two **scuba-diving** businesses that offer **dive training** at reasonable rates. The island is renowned world-wide for its exceptional diving and snorkeling opportunities. Deep-sea fishing is also popular, as is Hash House Harriers. There are a number of good restaurants and taverns. Radio and television are available and an outdoor cinema screens a movie every Saturday. "The Islander", a fortnightly community newsletter published by the Shire Council, will keep you up to date with all the current events.

A **supermarket** at Settlement and shops at Poon Saan, Drumsite and the Kampong are well stocked with food and household goods. A good variety of foodstuffs is imported from mainland Australia as well as Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. Most grocery items arrive by sea but highly perishable items are air freighted. The cost of living is comparable to that of the Australian Northern Territory rather than southern cities.

A number of little **shops** in the Barracks near the Police Station, and opposite at Temple Court, include a pharmacy, a swim and fishing shop and the duty free shop. A couple of gift and clothes shops in the same area sell T-shirts, cotton dresses, shorts, shirts, skirts, underwear and school uniforms. The pharmacy doubles as a news agency and although they do not sell newspapers they have a good range of magazines and stationery. There is a well-stocked hardware store at Poon Saan.

The CI Op Shop at Poon Saan is also a reliable source of good quality used clothes, due to the high turnover of short term residents on CI.

Christmas Island is **duty-free and GST-free**. If you are coming to the island duty free shopping is available once you have your air tickets.

It is a good idea to have a vehicle as although the distance from Settlement to Poon Saan, Silver City and Drumsite is only 2-5 km, depending on where you are going, it is up a steep hill. If you bring your **own car** from the mainland you have 3 months grace before you have to re-register it with CI registration. The same 3 months grace applies to changing your **driving licence** to a CI licence. Second-hand vehicles of varying condition are available at prices comparable to the mainland. There is a service station opposite the supermarket which sells diesel and unleaded petrol (no gas) and several garages offer car repairs and maintenance. There is a school bus service, a car hire service and a taxi service.

There are plenty of **places to visit** at the weekends and some of the locations require a 4-wheel drive. Alternatively one can go as far as possible in a 2-wheel drive and then walk. Little sandy and shingle beaches, caves, lookouts and the forest itself provide endless opportunities for picnics, swimming, walking and photography. The small pamphlet "Christmas Island Visitor Guide" produced by Parks Australia is essential reading for sights to see.

Services

The island is **administered** by the Attorney General's Office and the Shire of Christmas Island provides local government.

There is a well-equipped government **hospital** with a resident doctor and dentist. The hospital has general wards and conducts an outpatient's clinic, infant welfare clinic, and has visiting consultants on a regular basis. Facilities include an air-conditioned operating theatre, laboratory, X-ray unit, dressings room and dispensary. The nurse will attend emergency call outs in the first place. Please note that babies are not delivered on island. Pregnant mothers are sent to Perth at least 4 weeks prior to delivery.

Immunisations for Christmas Island should be advised by your doctor. There are plenty of mosquitoes - but there is **no malaria**. There are no endemic

diseases on the Island, but many travelers choose to immunize against hepatitis, tetanus, polio, flu, etc.

The **Christmas Island Shire Council** provides garbage services, street cleaning and road maintenance as well as a small public library.

There is a **police** station, an **ambulance** service, SES, Volunteer Marine Rescue and a volunteer fire service.

There is a good, chlorinated, potable **water** supply, regularly tested by the WA state health laboratories. **Electricity** is 240 volts, 50 Hz.

The CI **Post Office** is next to the Kampong, opposite the Westpac Bank. It is operated under license from Australia Post and most regular services apply. There is no postman on island and all mail is delivered via a post office box at the post office. Normal internal postal rates apply on mail to and from the mainland. The only airmail service available for packages is via **EXPRESS POST**. All other mail coming to Christmas Island goes by sea and can take up to two months. The Post Office acts an agent for the Commonwealth Bank and allows cash withdrawals.

There is one **bank on island** -Westpac Bank – that will cash traveler's cheques (probably the best way to organize money). Most shops accept credit cards and EFTPOS and allows for additional cash withdrawals. However, they usually only allow up to 50 dollars withdrawal at one time. There are **no automatic teller machines** for cash withdrawals.

Telstra offer a range of **telephone** services, including digital mobiles. Currently we are unsure if the island is covered by Next G. The area code is 08. Optus mobiles do not have coverage on the island.

There is a local **Internet** service provider, Christmas Island Internet Administration (CIIA). Wireless broadband is currently being rolled out on CI as the current dial-up speed is only 26kbps. An Internet café is located at the Visitor's Centre.

Virgin Blue operate **scheduled flights** from Perth to Christmas and Cocos Islands four times a week – check the web site for timetable details. Photographic ID is required for the journey from the Australian mainland. A passport is required if you are not an Australian citizen. Normal Australian quarantine restrictions apply and in addition the **importation of pets is prohibited**. A weekly chartered service from Malaysia, MAS, is operated by Travel Exchange CI on Fridays. You will require a passport if you travel through Malaysia.

There is only one **ship** that services Cocos and Christmas Islands once a month, weather permitting. In bad weather the ship cannot dock and long delays occur. There are no passenger services by sea.

Relocation Assistance and Housing

A Parks house is provided for the CIMFR Manager, with rental contribution in accordance with the DEWHA Enterprise Agreement 2009-11. Relocation assistance will be negotiated with the successful applicant.

Work

Christmas Island National Park is managed by the Director of National Parks, and staffed by employees of the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

The National Park office is located at Drumsite close to the High School. The total number of staff working for the National Park at any one time can vary between 18 and 34. The Christmas Island National Park Management Plan is available from the website, and provides further information about work undertaken in the park.

For more information please visit our website:
www.environment.gov.au/parks/christmas/index.html

or call us at the Christmas Island National Park office on 08 9164 8700.

Further information regarding Christmas Island can be found at the Christmas Island Tourism Association's website: <http://www.christmas.net.au/>

While care is taken to keep this pamphlet accurate Parks Australia accepts no responsibility for the accuracy of its information.