



From the MixCache.com library

SAMPLE COPY

Visiting Palau

MixCache.com

SAMPLE COPY

Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** The Geography and Islands of Palau
- **Chapter 2** A Brief History of Palau
- **Chapter 3** Understanding Palauan Culture
- **Chapter 4** The Language of the Land
- **Chapter 5** Currency and Commerce in Palau
- **Chapter 6** Navigating the Palau Time Zone
- **Chapter 7** Flying to Palau: What You Need to Know
- **Chapter 8** Ensuring Smooth Airport Transfers
- **Chapter 9** Entry Requirements and Visas
- **Chapter 10** Seasons and Best Times to Travel
- **Chapter 11** Where to Stay: Accommodation Guide
- **Chapter 12** Getting Around: Transportation Options
- **Chapter 13** Exploring Top Attractions
- **Chapter 14** Diving and Snorkeling Adventures
- **Chapter 15** Kayaking and Paddleboarding in the Rock Islands
- **Chapter 16** Land-Based Activities: From Beaches to Waterfalls
- **Chapter 17** Sampling Palauan Cuisine and Dining
- **Chapter 18** Practical Safety Tips for Tourists
- **Chapter 19** Health Precautions and Medical Facilities
- **Chapter 20** Navigating Palau's Financial System
- **Chapter 21** Communicating in Palau
- **Chapter 22** Packing Essentials for Your Trip
- **Chapter 23** Respecting Local Customs and Environment
- **Chapter 24** Suggested Itineraries for Different Lengths of Stay
- **Chapter 25** Ensuring a Respectful and Memorable Visit

Introduction

Welcome to Palau, a remarkable destination that offers travelers an unforgettable experience infused with natural beauty, rich history, and diverse cultural tapestry. Nestled in the western Pacific Ocean, and forming part of the larger region of Micronesia, Palau is a captivating archipelago that promises adventure and serenity in equal measure. This guide aims to provide you with in-depth insights tailored specifically for those planning to explore the exquisite islands of Palau, setting it apart from your typical travel guide.

Palau consists of approximately 340 islands, each offering its unique charm and attraction. The landscape is a stunning blend of lush volcanic highlands and idyllic coral islands, with the famous Rock Islands presenting themselves as a geological marvel. These limestone formations, with their mushroom-like shapes, are not only visually striking but also home to some of the world's best diving and snorkeling sites, filled with vibrant marine life.

The human story of Palau is equally compelling. With a history spanning over 4,000 years, this nation has seen the influence of many cultural currents, from early settlers from Southeast Asia to European colonizers and beyond. Today, Palau has established itself as an independent republic and one of the world's youngest nations since gaining independence in 1994. This rich historical tapestry enriches the cultural experience for visitors, offering them a glimpse into traditions that have stood the test of time.

Visiting Palau offers more than beautiful scenery; it offers a chance to immerse yourself in a unique cultural heritage. The people here are proud of their traditions, which blend Micronesian, Melanesian, Asian, and Western influences. An understanding of these customs enriches your visit and ensures you engage respectfully with the local communities. The dual official languages, Palauan and English, facilitate communication without diluting the authentic cultural essence of your interactions.

Every aspect of your journey here—from arrival through regional food or accommodation to the myriad natural wonders awaiting exploration—deserves detailed preparation to ensure a smooth, enjoyable experience. This guide endeavors to answer your questions and offer practical advice tailored to Palau's distinct features. We will explore everything from the nuances of local cuisine that highlight Palau's cultural fusion to practical travel tips ensuring you navigate your adventures safely and respectfully.

As we embark on this journey through Palau's wonders, remember that this is more than just a holiday destination. It's an opportunity to engage with a country that has committed to preserving its unique environment and cultural identity, with visitors playing a vital role in this mission. By following the guidelines and practices outlined in this guide, you'll ensure your visit to this pristine paradise is impactful and unforgettable.

SAMPLE COPY

CHAPTER ONE: The Geography and Islands of Palau

Palau emerges from the vast expanse of the western Pacific Ocean like a scattering of emeralds on a boundless blue canvas. Situated within the Micronesia region, it forms the westernmost archipelago of the Caroline Islands chain, a remote and captivating destination far removed from the world's major landmasses. Its nearest significant neighbour is the Philippines, lying some 500 miles to the west, while Guam sits roughly 800 miles to the northeast. This relative isolation has been instrumental in shaping Palau's unique natural environment and the pristine condition of many of its ecosystems, particularly its world-renowned underwater landscapes. The nation comprises an estimated 340 islands, although the exact count can vary depending on how one defines an 'island' versus a rock or islet, especially among the complex Rock Islands.

Despite the impressive number of islands, Palau's total land area is surprisingly modest, typically cited as being between 177 and 188 square miles (459-488 square kilometres). This makes it one of the smaller nations globally in terms of landmass. However, what Palau lacks in land, it more than compensates for with its vast marine territory. Its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the area of ocean over which it has special rights regarding exploration and use of marine resources, spans a staggering 230,000 square miles (nearly 600,000 square kilometres). This immense oceanic realm underscores the nation's profound connection to the sea, which dominates its geography, economy, and culture. Life in Palau is inextricably linked to the surrounding waters.

The geological foundations of Palau tell a story of volcanic activity and patient coral growth along the edge of the Philippine Sea Plate. The islands are part of a submarine ridge extending from Japan southward. Tectonic movements near the deep Palau Trench, reaching depths of over 8,000 meters just east of the archipelago, have played a role in uplifting parts of this ridge. Over millions of years, volcanic eruptions built up the foundations, while coral reefs grew in the warm, shallow waters surrounding these volcanic peaks. Subsequent changes in sea level and tectonic uplift, particularly in the southern part of the archipelago, created the unique blend of island types we see today, setting Palau apart from many other Pacific island nations.

This geological history has resulted in a fascinating dichotomy in island types across the archipelago. Broadly, Palau's islands fall into three main categories. First are the high volcanic islands, characterized by dark, fertile soil, rugged interiors, and significant elevation compared to their neighbours. Second are the low coral islands and atolls, formed by the gradual accumulation of coral debris on submerged reef structures, often encircling lagoons. Third, and perhaps most famously, are the

uplifted limestone islands, ancient coral reefs pushed above sea level and sculpted by time and weather into dramatic, vegetation-covered forms. This diversity in island structure contributes significantly to Palau's varied landscapes and habitats.

Dominating the northern part of the main archipelago is Babeldaob, the largest island in Palau and the second largest in all of Micronesia, surpassed only by Guam. Covering over 150 square miles (around 390 square kilometres), Babeldaob accounts for more than three-quarters of Palau's total land area. It is a classic high volcanic island, featuring a rugged interior landscape marked by rolling hills, steep ridges, and dense tropical rainforest. Several rivers carve through the island, creating valleys and feeding mangrove forests along parts of the coast. Mount Ngerchelchuus, Palau's highest point at about 794 feet (242 meters), is located here. Babeldaob's size and terrain offer a stark contrast to the small, low islands elsewhere in the nation.

Babeldaob is not a single entity but is administratively divided into ten separate states, each with its own distinct character and traditional boundaries. These states include Aimeliik, Airai (home to the international airport), Melekeok (where the national capital, Ngerulmud, is located), Ngaraard, Ngarchelong, Ngardmau, Ngatpang, Ngchesar, Ngiwal, and Ngaremlengui. The island's coastline varies from sandy beaches in some areas to extensive mangrove forests in others, particularly on the eastern side. A modern paved road, known as the Compact Road, encircles much of Babeldaob, providing crucial infrastructure that connects the various states and facilitates exploration of this large and relatively undeveloped landmass. Driving this road offers glimpses into the island's diverse interior landscapes and coastal fringes.

Just south of Babeldaob, connected by the impressive Japan-Palau Friendship Bridge (often still referred to by the name of its predecessor, the K-B Bridge), lies Koror Island. While much smaller than Babeldaob, Koror has historically been the heart of Palau. It served as the capital until 2006 and remains the nation's undisputed commercial and population center, home to the majority of Palauans and most of the country's businesses, hotels, and restaurants. Koror itself is primarily volcanic in origin but generally has lower elevations and less rugged terrain than Babeldaob. The state of Koror also includes several smaller nearby islands and, crucially, encompasses the vast majority of the famous Rock Islands to its south.

The Rock Islands, or Chelbacheb as they are known in Palauan, are arguably Palau's most iconic geographical feature. This breathtaking collection of between 250 and 300 islands lies scattered within a large lagoon south of Koror. These are not volcanic islands nor true coral atolls but rather ancient coral reefs that were tectonically uplifted and then heavily eroded over millennia. Composed primarily of limestone, they are characterized by their distinctive mushroom shape – the result of seawater and marine organisms undercutting their bases at the tidal zone, leaving dense, jungle-clad tops perched on narrower stems. Most are uninhabited, preserving unique terrestrial ecosystems isolated from the larger islands.

The landscape of the Rock Islands is almost otherworldly. Steep, often vertical limestone cliffs plunge into the turquoise waters of the lagoon. The islands are densely covered in tropical vegetation, clinging tenaciously to the porous rock. Hidden among them are numerous marine lakes, secluded coves, white-sand beaches accessible only by boat, and intricate cave systems, both above and below the waterline. The entire Rock Islands Southern Lagoon complex, covering about 39 square miles (100 square kilometres), is so unique and ecologically significant that it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2012, recognized for both its natural beauty and cultural importance.

Beyond the high volcanic islands and the unique uplifted limestone formations, Palau also features classic coral atolls and low-lying coral islands. The most prominent example is Kayangel Atoll, situated about 15 miles (24 kilometres) north of Babeldaob. Kayangel is Palau's only true coral atoll in the classic sense – a ring-shaped coral reef enclosing a shallow central lagoon, with several small, flat, sandy islets (motus) perched on the reef rim. These islets are low-lying, typically only a few meters above sea level, and covered with coconut palms and other hardy vegetation. Kayangel offers a picture of idyllic tropical simplicity, remote and accessible primarily by boat.

Other low coral islands exist within the Palauan archipelago, often forming parts of the extensive barrier reef system or existing as isolated sandy cays. These islands are typically small, composed of sand and coral rubble, and vulnerable to storms and sea-level rise. They provide important nesting sites for seabirds and turtles but generally lack the freshwater resources and fertile soil found on the volcanic islands, limiting human habitation. Their geography is fundamentally shaped by marine processes – coral growth, wave action, and sediment deposition.

Stretching far to the southwest of the main Palau archipelago lies a distinct group of six small, isolated islands collectively known as the Southwest Islands. These include Sonsorol, Fanna, Pulo Anna, Merir, Tobi (Hatohobei), and the largely submerged Helen Reef. These islands are geographically and culturally distinct from the main group, lying several hundred miles away. Most are low-lying coral islands or reef platforms. Sonsorol and Hatohobei states have their own languages, reflecting their unique history and long separation from the islands around Koror and Babeldaob. Reaching these remote outposts requires significant sea travel or chartered flights.

Helen Reef (Hotsarihie), the southernmost feature of Palau, deserves special mention. It is a large, primarily submerged atoll, roughly 15 miles long and 6 miles wide, enclosing a deep lagoon. Only one tiny sandy islet, Helen Island, barely rises above sea level at the northern end of the reef. Despite its minuscule land area, Helen Reef is a critical biodiversity hotspot, serving as an important breeding and feeding ground for sea turtles, seabirds, and a vast array of marine life. Its remoteness helps protect it, but it also makes monitoring and management challenging. It represents the

southernmost extent of Palauan territory.

South of Koror and the main cluster of Rock Islands, but north of the distant Southwest Islands, lie Peleliu and Angaur. These two islands have distinct geographical characteristics and significant historical importance, particularly from World War II. Peleliu is predominantly a raised coral limestone island, similar in origin to the Rock Islands but larger and flatter in many areas, though it also possesses ridges and cave systems. Its landscape includes mangrove swamps, forests, and some scrubland. It lies within its own fringing reef system, separated from the main barrier reef lagoon further north.

Angaur, situated a few miles southwest of Peleliu, is also a raised platform island composed of coral limestone. Its geography has been significantly altered by decades of phosphate mining, which occurred from the German era through the Japanese administration and into the post-war period. This extensive mining activity left behind altered terrain, including pits and exposed limestone pinnacles in some areas. Like Peleliu, Angaur sits outside the main barrier reef system and has its own distinct coastal environment. Both Peleliu and Angaur are accessible by regular state ferries or small plane services from Koror.

Crucial to the geography of the main Palauan archipelago (excluding Angaur, Kayangel, and the Southwest Islands) is the extensive barrier reef system. This complex underwater structure runs parallel to the western coasts of Babeldaob and Koror, extending south to enclose the Rock Islands Southern Lagoon. It acts as a natural breakwater, protecting the inner islands and lagoon waters from the full force of the open Pacific Ocean. This protection is fundamental to the calmness and clarity of the waters within the lagoon, creating ideal conditions for coral growth and the rich marine life Palau is famous for.

The barrier reef is not a continuous wall but is punctuated by several deep channels or passes. These passes, such as the famous German Channel (artificially widened during the German era) and Ulong Channel, allow for the exchange of water between the lagoon and the open ocean, driven by tides. These channels are critical for navigation, allowing boats to access the lagoon and outer reef areas, and they also create unique marine environments where currents concentrate nutrients and attract marine life. The outer edge of the barrier reef typically drops off steeply into deep water, forming dramatic walls prized by divers.

Palau's location just north of the equator, between 7 and 8 degrees North latitude, firmly places it in the tropics, dictating its warm, humid climate. The surrounding ocean exerts a strong moderating influence, keeping temperatures relatively stable year-round. Abundant rainfall, characteristic of a tropical rainforest climate, sustains the lush vegetation covering the volcanic islands and the Rock Islands. While Palau experiences distinct wet and dry seasons, rainfall can occur at any time. Importantly,

Palau lies mostly south of the main Pacific typhoon belt. While tropical storms and disturbances can occur, devastating typhoons are less frequent here than in island groups further north, like Guam or the Philippines, a significant geographical advantage.

The sheer dominance of the marine environment is central to understanding Palau's geography. The nation's identity is tied to the sea. Recognizing this, Palau has taken bold steps in marine conservation, most notably designating the vast majority of its EEZ as the Palau National Marine Sanctuary (PNMS) in 2015. This ambitious initiative aims to protect marine biodiversity and ensure sustainable fisheries by restricting most commercial fishing activities within its waters. This designation is a direct reflection of the geographical reality that Palau's most significant resource and defining feature is its surrounding ocean.

The underwater geography is as diverse as the terrestrial landscape. Shallow lagoons studded with coral bommies give way to vertical reef walls plunging into the abyss. Channels slice through the reef, creating corridors for migrating species. Marine lakes within the Rock Islands offer unique, isolated aquatic environments. Far offshore, the deep Palau Trench marks a significant feature of the ocean floor. These varied underwater topographies create a multitude of habitats supporting Palau's extraordinary marine biodiversity, from intricate coral gardens to rendezvous points for large pelagic species like sharks and manta rays.

In terms of natural resources derived directly from the land, Palau is somewhat limited. The volcanic soils of Babeldaob support agriculture, primarily subsistence farming of crops like taro and cassava, but large-scale agriculture is not prevalent. Timber resources exist within the rainforests but are not heavily exploited. The phosphate deposits on Angaur were significant historically but are largely depleted. Today, Palau's most valuable natural resources are its fisheries, particularly tuna within its EEZ (managed sustainably under the PNMS), and the immense value derived from tourism, which is almost entirely dependent on the nation's spectacular natural geography – its islands, reefs, and marine life.

Finally, Palau's administrative geography mirrors its physical island structure. The republic is divided into sixteen states. Ten of these states are located on the main island of Babeldaob, reflecting its size and traditional divisions. Koror State encompasses Koror Island and most of the Rock Islands. Kayangel State corresponds to Kayangel Atoll. Peleliu State and Angaur State cover their respective islands. The remote Southwest Islands are divided into Sonsorol State (covering Sonsorol, Fanna, Pulo Anna, and Merir) and Hatohobei State (covering Tobi Island and Helen Reef). This political structure is deeply rooted in the archipelago's geographical layout and traditional land and sea tenure systems. Understanding this connection between the states and the islands provides insight into the organization of Palauan society and governance.

This is a sample preview. Purchase the book to read the full content.

Visit MixCache.com to purchase the complete book.

SAMPLE COPY