

Timeline: Palau

A chronology of key events

circa 2500 BC - Palau's first inhabitants - thought to have come from present-day eastern Indonesia - settle in the islands. The early Palauans develop complex social systems, practice fishing and farming.

1783 - English captain Henry Wilson is shipwrecked on a reef and becomes the first Westerner to visit. Wilson and his crew stay for three months and rebuild their vessel with local help. European contacts grow and Britain becomes Palau's main trading partner.

1885 - Spain asserts its claim to the islands.

1899 - Spain sells Palau to Germany, which begins to exploit the islands' resources using native labour. Phosphate is mined and coconut plantations are developed.

1914 - After Germany's defeat in World War I, Japan seizes Palau. The main town, Koror, is developed and becomes the administrative centre for Japan's regional possessions. The Japanese civilian population in Palau peaks at 26,000.

1940-45 - Japan's military fortifications and naval facilities in Palau are targeted in allied attacks during World War II. Some Palauan islands witness fierce fighting between US and Japanese forces.

1947 - Palau becomes a United Nations Trust Territory under US administration.

1979 - Palau - and the Marshall Islands - opt not to become part of a single, federal Micronesian state.

1981 - Republic of Palau comes into being, following the territory's adoption of a constitution in July 1980. President Haruo Remeliik takes office.

1983-90 - Successive referendums on a proposed Compact of Free Association with the US fail to approve the arrangement, under which Palau would manage its own affairs and the US would retain responsibility for defence.

1985 - President Haruo Remeliik is assassinated in June. Lazarus Salii is elected president in September 1985.

1988 - President Salii dies in an apparent suicide. He is succeeded by President Ngiratkel Etpison.

1992 - President Kuniwo Nakamura is elected, and re-elected in 1996.

1993 - After investigations by US authorities a Palau minister of state and his wife are found guilty of the 1985 murder of President Remeliik.

1993 - Proposed Compact of Free Association with the US gets the green light in a referendum. Requirements for the mandate were changed in a 1992 vote; only a simple majority vote was needed to approve the compact.

1994 - Palau becomes independent under the Contract of Free Association with the US. Palau receives financial and other aid from Washington, and the US retains responsibility for defence and the right to operate military bases. Palau joins the UN.

2000 November - Former vice president Tommy Remengesau wins presidential elections.

2003 August - Palau signs the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

2004 November - Incumbent President Tommy Remengesau is re-elected.