

# Northern Mariana Islands, Commonwealth of the

Northern Mariana Islands, Commonwealth of the, island group, commonwealth of the United States, in the Pacific Ocean, east of the Philippines and south of Japan. The approximately 16 coral and volcanic islands, including all of the Mariana Islands except Guam, comprise an area of 457 sq km (176 sq mi). The principal islands are Saipan (122 sq km/47 sq mi), Tinian (102 sq km/39 sq mi), and Rota (83 sq km/32 sq mi). The economy is based on agriculture, some light manufacturing and tourism. Major exports include vegetables, beef, and pork. The island of Saipan contains the seat of government, a busy seaport, and an international airport.

The Marianas were sighted in 1521 by Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese explorer sailing for Spain. The islands, known as the Ladrones Islands (Thieves Islands), were not colonized until 1668, when Spanish Jesuit settlers arrived and claimed them for Spain. They renamed the islands for Mariana of Austria, then regent of Spain. In 1898, Guam was ceded by Spain to the United States, and the following year Germany purchased the rest of the island group. In 1914, during World War I, Japan took possession of the German-held islands known as German Micronesia, including the Northern Marianas. After the war, a League of Nations mandate placed the islands under Japanese control. The islands were captured by the U.S. during World War II, and in 1947 were made part of the U.S.-administered United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. In 1975 the inhabitants of the northern Marianas voted to become a U.S. commonwealth, and in 1978 the islands became internally self-governing. In 1986 U.S. President Ronald Reagan proclaimed the Northern Marianas a United States commonwealth and its residents U.S. citizens. The UN Security Council formally ended the trusteeship in 1990. Population (2001) 74,612.

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The **Northern Mariana Islands** officially the **Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands** (CNMI), is a commonwealth in political union with the United States, occupying a strategic region of the western Pacific Ocean. It consists of 15 islands about three-quarters of the way from Hawaii to the Philippines, at

15°12′N 145°4′E﻿ / ﻿15.01722, 145.06806

The United States Census Bureau reports the total land area of all islands as 179.01 square miles (463.63 km<sup>2</sup>).

The Northern Mariana Islands has a population of 80,362 (2005 estimate). The official 2000 census count was 69,221.<sup>[2]</sup> The Northern Mariana Islands have the lowest male to female sex ratio in the world: an average of 76 men to every 100 women. That is due to the overwhelming female majority of foreign workers, especially in the garment industry

## Geology

The Northern Mariana Islands, together with Guam to the south, compose the Mariana Islands.

The southern islands are limestone with level terraces and fringing coral reefs; the northern islands are volcanic, with active volcanoes on Anatahan, Pagan and Agrihan. The volcano on Agrihan has the highest elevation in the islands at 3,166 feet (965 m). About one-fifth of the land is arable, another tenth is pasture. The primary natural resource is fish, some of which are endangered species, which leads to conflict. Also, development has created landfills which have contaminated groundwater on Saipan, which might contribute to disease.

Anatahan Volcano is a small volcanic island 80 miles (130 km) north of Saipan and is about 6 miles (9 km) long and 2 miles (3 km) wide. Anatahan began erupting suddenly from its east crater on May 10, 2003, at about 6 p.m. (0800 UTC). Since then it has continued to alternate between eruptive and calm periods. On April 6, 2005, approximately 50,000 cubic meters of ash and rock were ejected, causing a large, black cloud to drift south over Saipan and Tinian.

## Climate

The islands have a tropical marine climate moderated by seasonal northeast trade winds. There is little seasonal temperature variation; the dry season runs from December to June, and the rainy season from July to November and can include typhoons. The Guinness Book of World Records has cited Saipan as having the most equable temperature in the world

## Economy

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands benefits from substantial subsidies and development assistance from the federal government of the United States. The economy also relies heavily on tourism, especially from Japan, and the rapidly dwindling garment manufacturing sector. The tourism industry has also been dwindling since late 2005. Since late 2006, tourist arrivals fell 15.23 percent (73,000 potential visitors) from the eleven months prior.

The Northern Mariana Islands had successfully used its position as a free trade area with the U.S., while at the same time not being subject to the same labor laws. For example, the \$3.05 per hour minimum wage in the Commonwealth, which lasted from 1997 to 2007, was lower than in the U.S. and some other worker protections are weaker, leading to lower production costs. That allowed garments to be labeled "Made in USA" without having to comply with all U.S. labor laws. However, the U.S. minimum wage law signed by President Bush on May 25, 2007, will result in stepped increases in the Northern Marianas' minimum wage to reach U.S. level by 2015. The first step (to \$3.55) became effective July 25, 2007, and a yearly increase of \$0.50 will take effect every May thereafter until the CNMI minimum wage equals the nationwide minimum wage.


In the extreme, the island's exemption from U.S. labor laws had led to many alleged exploitations including recent claims of sweatshops, and child labor.












A separate immigration system outside of federal U.S. control has resulted in a large number of Chinese migrant workers (about 15,000 during the peak years) employed in the islands' garment trade. However, the lifting of World Trade Organization restrictions on Chinese imports to the US in 2005 had put the Commonwealth-based trade under severe pressure, leading to a number of recent factory closures. Adding to the U.S.-imposed scheduled wage increases, the garment industry is expected to become extinct by 2009.




Agricultural production, primarily of tapioca, cattle, coconuts, breadfruit, tomatoes, and melons exists, but is relatively unimportant in the economy.

## Islands, island groups and municipalities

The islands total 179.01 square miles (463.63 km<sup>2</sup>). The table gives an overview, with the individual islands from north to south:

No.	Island	Area		Population	Height	Highest peak	Location
		sq mi	km <sup>2</sup>	(2000 census)	feet		
<b>Northern Islands (Northern Islands Municipality)</b>							
1	Farallon de Pajaros (Uracas)	0.985	2.55	-	1,047	319	 20°33'N 144°54'E / 20.55, 144.9

2	Maug Islands	0.822	2.13	1) <sup>1)</sup> 745 227	(North Island)	 20°02'N 145°19'E / 20.033, 145.317
3	Asuncion	2.822	7.31	- 2,923 891		 19°43'N 145°41'E / 19.717, 145.683
4	Agrihan (Agrigan)	16.80	43.51	9) <sup>2)</sup> 3,166 965	Mount Agrihan	 18°46'N 145°40'E / 18.767, 145.667
5	Pagan	18.24	47.24	3) <sup>3)</sup> 1,900 579	Mount Pagan	 18°08'36"N 145°47'39"E / 18.14333, 145.79417
6	Alamagan	4.29	11.11	6 2,441 744	Alamagan	 17°35'N 145°50'E / 17.583, 145.833
7	Guguan	1.494	3.87	- 988 301		 17°20'N 145°51'E / 17.333, 145.85
8	Zealandia Bank	>0.0	>0.0	- >0 >0		 16°45'N 145°42'E / 16.75, 145.7
9	Sarigan	1.92	4.97	4) <sup>4)</sup> 1,801 549		 16°43'N 145°47'E / 16.717, 145.783
10	Anatahan	12.05	31.21	2) <sup>2)</sup> 2,582 787		 16°22'N 145°40'E / 16.367, 145.667
11	Farallon de Medinilla	0.328	0.85	- 266 81		 16°01'N 146°04'E / 16.017, 146.067
<b>Southern Islands (3 municipalities)</b>						
12	Saipan	44.55	115.38	62,392 1,555 474	Mount Tagpochau	 15°11'06"N 145°44'28"E / 15.185, 145.74111

13	Tinian	39.00	101.01	3,540	558 170	Kastiyu (Lasso Hill)	 14°57'12"N 145°38'54"E / 14.95333, 145.64833
14	Aguijan (Agiguan) <sup>5)</sup>	2.74	7.10	-	515 157	Alutom	 14°42'N 145°18'E / 14.7, 145.3
15	Rota	32.97	85.39	3 283	1,611 491	Mt. Manira	 14°08'37"N 145°11'08"E / 14.14361, 145.18556

<b>Northern Mariana Islands</b>	179.01	463.63	69,221	3,166	965	Mount Agrihan	14°08' to 20°33'N, 144°54' to 146°04'E
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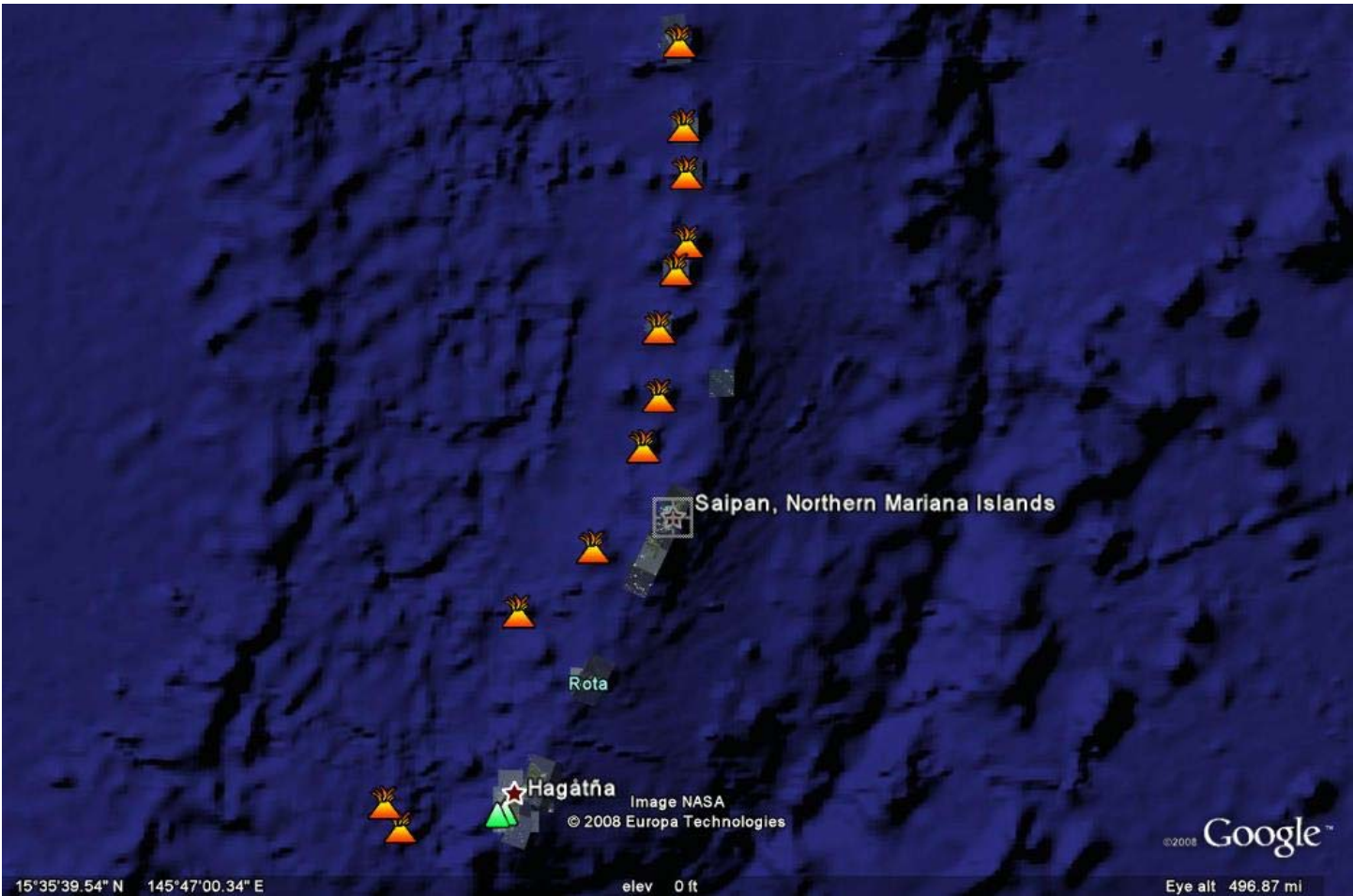
- <sup>1)</sup> Japanese military occupation 1939 to 1944
- <sup>2)</sup> evacuated 1990 due to volcanic eruptions
- <sup>3)</sup> evacuated 1981 due to volcanic eruptions
- <sup>4)</sup> formerly inhabited (population of 21 in 1935, but only 2 in 1968)
- <sup>5)</sup> part of Tinian Municipality

## Politics

The Northern Mariana Islands have a presidential representative democratic system, in which the governor is head of government, with a multi-party system. The Northern Mariana Islands are a commonwealth in political union with the United States. Federal funds to the Commonwealth are administered by the Office of Insular Affairs of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Repeating the separation of powers in other U.S. territories and state governments, executive power is exercised by the Governor of the Northern Mariana Islands. Legislative power is vested in the bicameral Northern Mariana Islands Commonwealth Legislature. Senate President Joseph Mendiola is a founding member of the Outlying Areas Senate Presidents Caucus. The judiciary is independent of the executive and the legislative branches.

However, politics in the Northern Mariana Islands is often "more a function of family relationships and personal loyalties" where the size of one's extended family is more important than a candidate's personal qualifications. Some critics, including the author of Saipan Sucks, charge that this is nepotism carried out within the trappings of democracy.



15°35'39.54" N 145°47'00.34" E

elev 0 ft

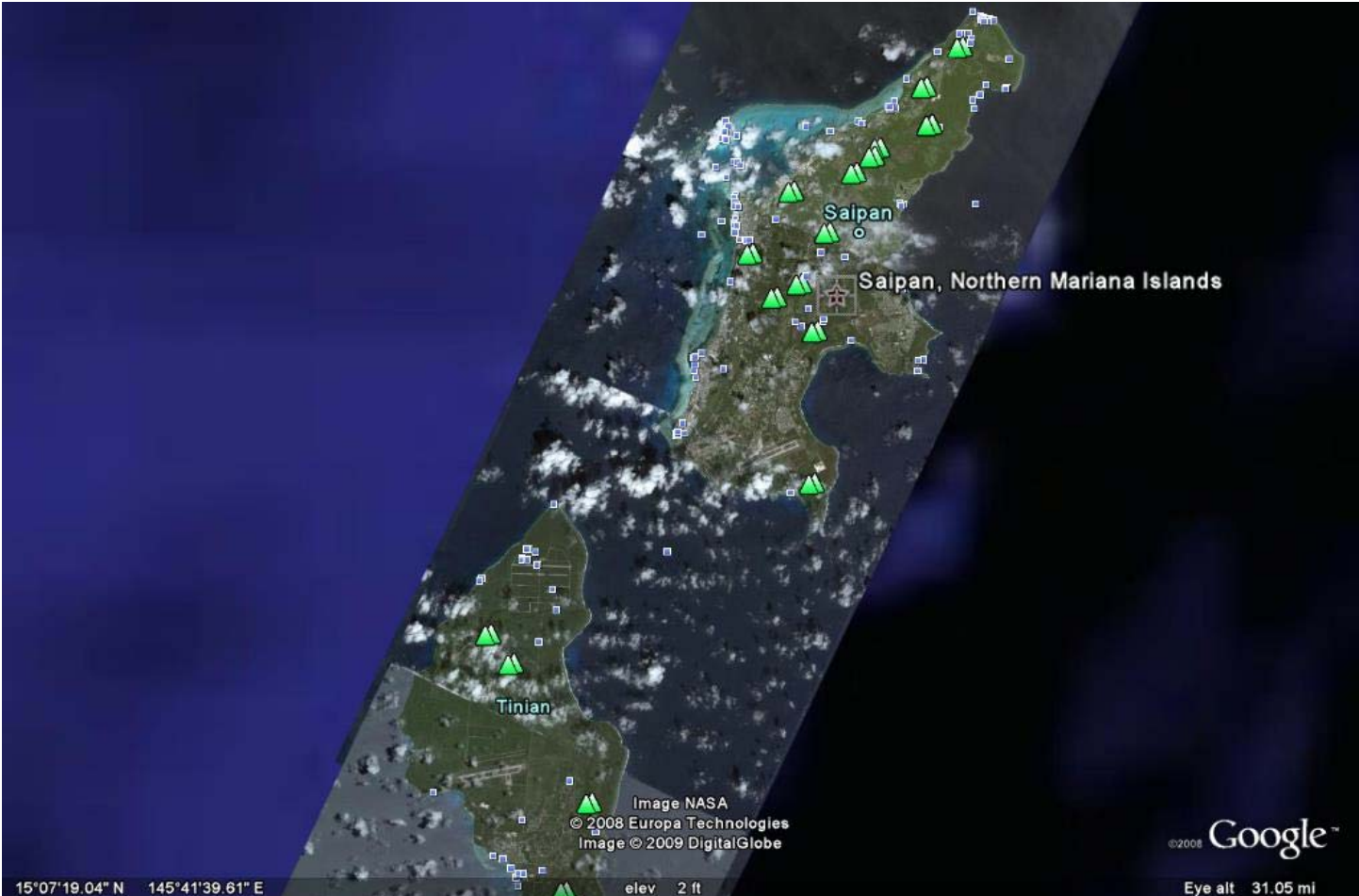
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Hagåtña

Rota

Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands



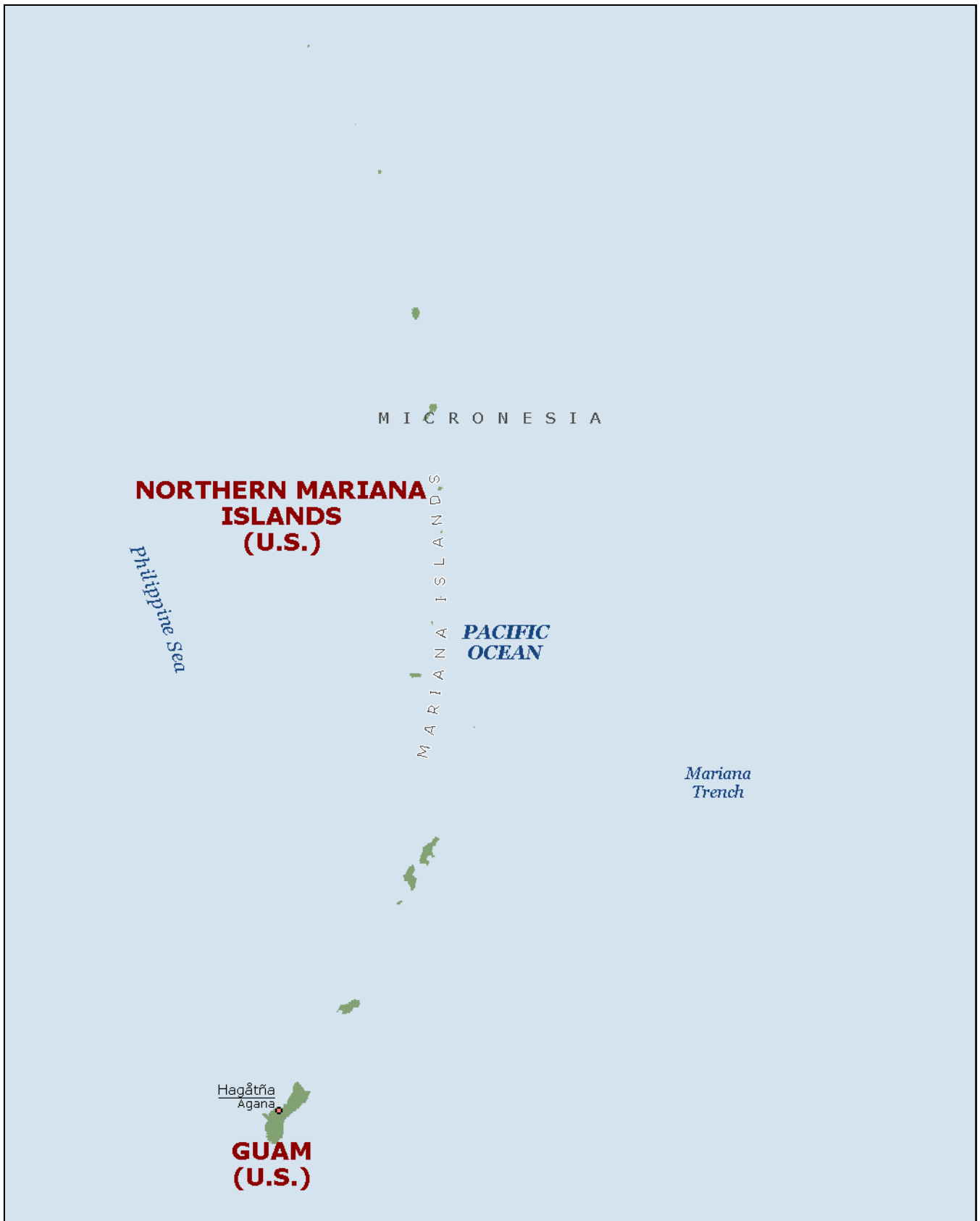
15°07'19.04" N 145°41'39.61" E

elev 2 ft

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Eye alt 31.05 mi



**NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS (U.S.)**

M I C R O N E S I A

*Philippine Sea*

M A R I A N A I S L A N D S

**PACIFIC OCEAN**

*Mariana Trench*

Hagåtña  
Agaña

**GUAM (U.S.)**

0 km 50 100 150 200 250

Mariana Islands  
Pacific Ocean

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Salmoiraghi/The Stock Market

**Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands**

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, located in the western Pacific Ocean, comprises about 16 volcanic and limestone islands. Tourism is an important economic activity.

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## Northern Mariana Islands

Average temperature, rainfall and snowfall information is available for the following climate stations in Northern Mariana Islands

- [ROTA INTL](#)
- [PEIPEINIMARU](#)

Official name: Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

Capital: Saipan

Area: total: 477 sq km  
note: includes 14 islands including Saipan, Rota, and Tinian  
water: 0 sq km  
land: 477 sq km

Climate: tropical marine; moderated by northeast trade winds, little seasonal temperature variation; dry season December to June, rainy season July to October

Location: Oceania, islands in the North Pacific Ocean, about three-quarters of the way from Hawaii to the Philippines

Geographic coordinates: 15 12 N, 145 45 E

Comparative Area: 2.5 times the size of Washington, DC

Land boundaries: 0 km

Coastline: 1,482 km

Terrain: southern islands are limestone with level terraces and fringing coral reefs; northern islands are volcanic

Elevation extremes: lowest point: Pacific Ocean 0 m  
highest point: unnamed location on Agrihan 965 m

## Map of Northern Mariana Islands

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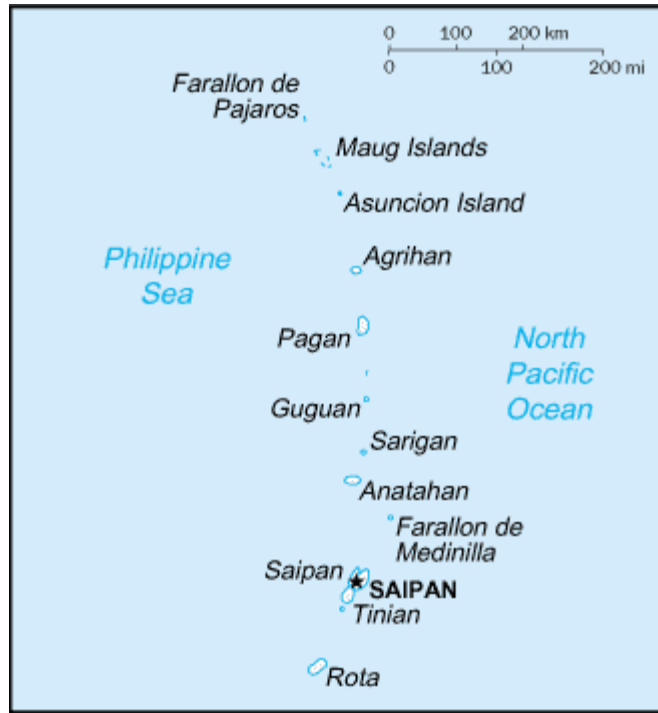
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## General info

**Entity:**  
 Northern Mariana Islands  
**Capital:**  
 Saipan  
**Population (2008-07-01):**  
 86,616 (CIA)  
**Area:**  
 477 sq.km.  
**Country code:**  
 CQ  
**Region:**  
 Micronesia

## Northern Mariana Islands

### Administrative units

<b>municipality</b>	<b>capital</b>	<b>area (sq.km.)</b>	<b>population 1990-04-01 census</b>	<b>population 2000-04-01 census</b>
Northern Islands <i>Municipality</i>			36	6
Rota <i>Municipality</i>			2,295	3,283
Saipan <i>Municipality</i>			38,896	62,392
Tinian <i>Municipality</i>			2,118	3,540
total			43,345	69,221

source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#).