

Timor introductory podcast

History

You may or may not have heard of Timor Leste, otherwise known as East Timor. It is located just above Australia. It is part of an island called Timor. Australia has a special connection to Timor Leste. In World War II, the Japanese occupied Timor Leste, with only a small group of Australian commandos to fight back. They would have been wiped out had it not been for the East Timorese, who fed and hid them while helping them fight against the Japanese.

But before that, a country called Portugal ruled over Timor for about 400 years. It had products that the Portuguese wanted.

In 1976, Portugal decided it had had enough of ruling Timor Leste, and moved out. Timor Leste was its own nation – but not for long. Indonesia invaded almost as soon as the Portuguese had moved out, killing 5 Australian journalists in the process. For the next 25 years, a small guerrilla army of Timorese soldiers hid in the mountains and fought the Indonesian army.

In 1999, the Indonesians decided to hold a vote to see how much of Timor Leste wanted to be independent from them. A big majority voted in favour, and then there was a massive amount of violence, some say sparked and supported by the Indonesia military and carried out by militia. Militia are civilians who take up arms but are not officially soldiers. Most important buildings like schools and hospitals were burnt or destroyed, there were massacres of dozens of people and most of the population fled to the hills.

But Timor-Leste recovered enough to have elections and vote in a government of their own. Things haven't been smooth though, and Australia has had soldiers in Timor Leste to try and help keep things stable.

Geography

Now for some of the geography of Timor Leste. It has extremely high mountains through the middle of the island, making it very difficult to get around, even though it's only about 150 km from one end to the other.

Timor Leste is in the tropics, and has a monsoonal weather system. This means that from November to May there is a 'wet season' when a lot of rain falls and it's very hot. From June to October there is a dry season.

Timor Leste has 13 provinces, which are like our states, and the capital city is called Dili. One of these provinces is actually in Indonesia! It is called Oecussi. The reason for this is that, hundreds of years ago when the Dutch and Portuguese were fighting over the island of Timor, they decided to split it down the middle, but gave Oecussi to the Portuguese because that's where the Portuguese first landed when they came to Timor.

Economics

Timor Leste has 2 main exports – that means products that it makes for sale in other countries. The first one is coffee beans, and the second is oil. Most Timorese people, however, work in agriculture, working to produce things that they eat for themselves or sell at local markets.

Because Timor Leste is only a young country, it relies a lot on other countries for donations in order to build itself up after the Indonesians destroyed it. Australia is one of its main supporters, giving military support as well as money to build schools and hospitals.

Conclusion

So that's a few facts about Timor Leste. We'll be learning more about its history, geography and economy over the next 5 weeks.

Some of you might know that we have a sister school in Timor Leste, and we try to support them with school supplies, and by communicating with them. Kirsty Sword-Gusmao came from Eaglehawk Primary School and ended up marrying East Timor's first president. To finish, here she is talking about having a relationship with our sister school in East Timor, and some of the aims of it.