

## TIMELINE: HISTORY OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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- c. 60,000 BC** First Homo sapiens arrive in the Melanesian migration.
- c. 2000 BC** Austronesian mariners arrive in north coastal areas and the Bismarcks. The island becomes populated by nearly a thousand different tribal groups with distinct languages and cultures, engaging in sophisticated agriculture (including the first known domestic cultivation of sugar cane), hunting, gathering, and constant inter-village warfare.
- c. 1400** The Sultanate of Tidore in the Maluku aka Spice Islands begins claiming coastal parts of western New Guinea.
- 1526:** Portuguese explorer Jorge de Meneses sights the western tip of New Guinea and names it "ilhas dos Papuas" -*Papua* was Portuguese slang for dark skin or kinky hair, or both
- 1528:** Spanish navigator Álvaro de Saavedra records sighting New Guinea while returning from Tidore to New Spain.
- 1545:** Spanish explorer Inigo Ortíz de Retes sails along New Guinea's northern coast, naming it "Nueva Guinea" after the west coast of Africa
- 1606:** Spaniard Luís Váez de Torres proves New Guinea is an island (2nd largest on Earth after Greenland) by sailing through the strait separating Australia and New Guinea which now bears his name.
- 1600s-1700s:** European explorers, including Torres, Dutch mariners Jansz, Le Maire, Schouten & Tasman, England's Dampier (who named the island of New Britain and first sailed the Dampier Strait), Cartaret & Cook, France's Bougainville, and others explore and map sections of the New Guinea coast.
- 1793:** The British East India Company attempts to establish a settlement at Geelvink Bay but soon abandons it.
- 1814:** The British formally recognize the Sultan of Tidore's claim to suzerainty over West New Guinea.
- 1828:** The Netherlands formally claims the western half of New Guinea as Netherlands New Guinea.
- 1883:** The Australian colony of Queensland annexes southeastern New Guinea, but the British government quickly repudiates the action.
- 1884:** Germany claims northeastern New Guinea as a protectorate called 'Kaiser Wilhelmland' aka German New Guinea. The newly unified German nation also establishes claims in the Bismarcks and the northern Solomons including Bougainville. Britain formally establishes a protectorate over southeastern New Guinea, later called British New Guinea.
- 1898 & 1902:** The Dutch establish their first government posts in Manokwari, Fak-Fak, and Merauke on western New Guinea
- 1901:** Missionary Harry Dauncey discovers 10,000 skulls in long houses on Goaribari Island, highlighting the history of headhunting and cannibalism in some regions.
- 1905:** Britain transfers administrative responsibility for southeastern New Guinea to Australia, which renames it the 'Territory of Papua.'
- 1914:** Australian forces occupy German New Guinea during World War I.
- 1920:** German New Guinea becomes the 'Territory of New Guinea', administered by Australia under a League of Nations mandate.
- 1930s:** Australian prospectors search for gold, largely unsuccessfully.
- 1942:** The Australian Territories of Papua and New Guinea and Dutch Papua are invaded and partially occupied by Japan during World War II.
- 1942-5:** Australian and American forces fight a long and grueling war against the Japanese throughout New Guinea and the Bismarcks in 'The New Guinea Campaign' to prevent the Japanese from taking Port Moresby as a stepping stone to isolating and possibly invading Australia. Over 200,000 Japanese, 7,000
- (cont.)

## **1942-45 continued**

Americans, and 8,000 Australians die in the harsh jungle environment with rampant tropical diseases and some of the world's roughest terrain. SEE MY SEPARATE 'TIMELINE on THE NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN'.

**1945:** After WWII, the two Australian-administered zones becomes the single Territory of Papua New Guinea and is granted limited self-government.

**1949:** The Netherlands grants independence to the Dutch East Indies, except for its New Guinea colony, which remains under Dutch control. A strong independence movement continues to fight for autonomy.

**1961:** The New Guinea Council is established, and elections are held in the Australian territory. The Dutch introduce a West Papuan national identity, including a flag, anthem, and coat of arms.

**1962:** The Netherlands hands over West New Guinea to the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) following the New York Agreement. The Papua Conflict begins, marked by ongoing tensions and outright violence between Indonesian authorities and the Free Papua Movement.

**1963:** Indonesia re-takes control of West New Guinea and renames it West Irian.

**1964:** Australian Papua New Guinea establishes a House of Assembly with 64 members, starting the final formal path to independence.

**1969:** Indonesia formally annexes the contested West New Guinea territory after a controversial referendum, the "Act of Free Choice." Voter suppression and other irregularities mar the referendum process. The territory is given the name Irian Jaya, with IRIAN being an acronym for an anti-Dutch slogan.

**1973:** Papua New Guinea gains full internal self-government.

**1975: Papua New Guinea achieves full independence** from Australia on September 16th. Bougainville island promptly declares itself an independent nation. The declaration is largely ignored by the central PNG government. Two decades of civil war on Bougainville over both independence and the rapacious practices of the Panguna copper mine ensue, with all-out military activity by rebel forces 1988-1997.

**1997:** A peace agreement is signed, ending the Bougainville secessionist unrest.

**1998:** A major earthquake and tsunami devastate the Aitape region, killing over 2,180 people.

**2000:** Irian Jaya's name is changed to Indonesian Papua.

**2001:** Indonesia passes the Law on Special Autonomy, granting its Papua territory special autonomy status. The Papuan People's Assembly (MRP) is established.

**2002:** A magnitude 7.6 earthquake strikes off the coast of Wewak, causing casualties and damage.

**2003:** Indonesia creates a separate West Papua province.

**2018:** A series of earthquakes strike Hela Province, resulting in landslides and over 200 deaths.

**2019:** Bougainville votes overwhelmingly (97.7% of votes) for independence from Papua New Guinea in a non-binding referendum.

**2021:** A peace agreement is reached between the governments of Papua New Guinea and Bougainville, under which Bougainville is declared an Autonomous Region and would gain independence by 2027 pending ratification by PNG's parliament. As of March 2025, the parliament of Papua New Guinea has not ratified the agreement

**2022:** A severe earthquake hits Papua New Guinea, causing damage and casualties in major cities.

**2024:** Bougainville continues to assert that it will become independent in 2027, and is actively courting benefactors, especially China.

**2025:** Bougainville's President Ishmael Toroama declares: "Nobody will stop our people." He faces significant challenges in that (1) the PNG government has not approved independence as yet, (2) the Panguna mine remains closed and the costs of its environmental clean-up and re-opening will be great, and (3) Bougainville's economy currently only generates 7% of its annual budget.