
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Island life: is it paradise?



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Sam

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Sam.

Rob

And I'm Rob.

Sam

What do Britain, Greenland, Australia, Hawaii, and Cuba all have in common, Rob?

Rob

Are you planning your summer holidays, Sam? Or is it that they're all islands?

Sam

Right, Rob, they *are* all islands, but that's about all they have in common. There's as much variety in the world's islands as in the people who live there!

Rob

In tourist holiday magazines, Pacific islands like Fiji, Tonga and Tahiti look like paradise, with tropical rainforests, white, sandy beaches and turquoise blue sea. But in reality, life is far from paradise for these island communities. In 2022, the island of Tonga suffered a **tsunami** – a huge wave caused by an earthquake that flowed inland, killing people and causing largescale damage. The destruction was terrible and added to the continuing crisis of rising sea levels threatening the island's survival.

Sam

In this programme we'll be hearing some Pacific islander voices and, as usual, learning some new vocabulary too. But first I have a question for you, Rob. We already named some islands, large and small, but how much of the world's population, do you think, lives on an island?

- a) 11 percent
- b) 15 percent
- c) 20 percent

Rob

Ooh, that's a tricky question! It can't be that many, so I'll guess a) 11 percent.

Sam

OK, Rob. I'll reveal the correct answer at the end of the programme. The South Pacific is home to thousands of low-lying islands dotted across miles of Pacific Ocean. With rising sea levels, it's predicted that many of these islands will simply disappear in coming years.

Rob

And if that wasn't bad enough, the effects of climate change are making life difficult for these island communities right now. The **tsunami** that hit Tonga left the main island, Tonga Tarpu, in ruins. One of those leading the clean-up was, Ofa Ma'asi Kaisamy, manager of the Pacific Climate Change Centre. She told BBC World Service programme *Business Daily* the extent of the problem.

Ofa Ma'asi Kaisamy

The projected impacts of climate change on agriculture and fisheries will undermine food production systems in the Pacific. Our Pacific people are also dependent on crops, livestock, agriculture, fisheries, **handicrafts** for **food security** and income, and these sectors are also highly **vulnerable** to the impacts of climate change.

Sam

The economy of many islands like Tonga depends on tourism, farming or fishing, and on **handicrafts** – skilfully making traditional objects like jewellery, textiles or pottery by hand. These are usually sold to tourists, but when tsunamis keep the tourists away, local jobs become **vulnerable** – unprotected and open to damage.

Rob

This affects not only handicrafts, but Tonga's ability to produce enough food to feed its population, something known as **food security**.

Sam

As the effects of climate change hit the local economy, young people are leaving Tonga to find work elsewhere. Tonga Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship is a project working with local organisations to help young people start businesses

and find jobs. Here's project director, Lusia Latu-Jones, speaking with BBC World Service's *Business Daily*:

Lusia Latu-Jones

It can be emotional, very emotional and **heartbreaking** to see what's happening in our island... but it's even harder when you see young people coming through... just looking, looking for chance to help their families, for them to **get on their feet** again. So the question we ask ourselves as an organisation is how can we address these challenges to better support our people so that they can **get back on their feet**, feed their families.

Rob

We can hear the emotion in Lusia's voice when she describes the situation facing young Tongans as **heartbreaking** – causing strong feelings of sadness.

Sam

She says her role is to help people **get back on their feet**, an idiom which means be able to function again after having difficulties in life.

Rob

The many problems Tongans face are made worse by perhaps the biggest problem of all - the fact that poverty, hunger and the loss of their traditional culture is being caused by the carbon emissions of larger countries halfway around the world. If we all learned to adapt our lifestyle, just as Pacific islanders have done, it may not yet be too late to change the fate of their island paradise.

Sam

And the fate of the millions living on other islands too, which reminds me of my question, Rob! Eleven percent of us are islanders, which works out as over 730 million people.

Rob

OK, let's recap the vocabulary from this programme starting with **tsunami** – a very large wave that flows inland causing death and destruction.

Sam

Many islanders produce **handicrafts** - handmade traditional objects like jewellery, textiles and pottery.

Rob

Someone who is **vulnerable** is weak or unprotected.

Sam

The phrase **food security** refers to a country's ability to produce enough food to feed its population.

Rob

When something is **heartbreaking**, it makes you feel very sad.

Sam

And finally, to **get back on your feet** means to be okay again after having difficulties in life.

Rob

Once again our six minutes are up! Goodbye for now.

Sam

Bye!

VOCABULARY

tsunami

large wave caused by an earthquake that flows inland causing death and destruction

handicrafts

skilfully handmade traditional objects like jewellery, textiles and pottery

vulnerable

unprotected, weak, open to harm

food security

the ability of a country to produce or obtain enough food to feed its population

heartbreaking

causing a strong feeling of sadness

get back on your feet

be okay again after having problems or difficulties in life