

The Vatican City

Location

The Vatican City, also called the State of the Vatican City or Vatican City State, is the smallest independent state in the world. Its territory consists of a small land enclosed area within the city of Rome, Italy. The coordinates for the state are 41°54'North and 21°27'East. It is located on Vatican Hill, which is in the northwest part of Rome. Its boundaries are mostly an imaginary border that extends along the outer edge of St. Peter's Square where it touches Piazza Pio XII and Via Paolo VI.

Geography

The Vatican City is the smallest sovereign state in the world with 0.44 square kilometers, which is also 108.7 acres (about 0.55 times the size of New York State's fairgrounds). The border is 3.2 kilometers long and the only surrounding country is Italy. It is a Mediterranean climate with mild, rainy winters from September to May and hot, dry summers from May to August. The elevation extremes are 19 m at its lowest point and 75 m at its highest point. The area is 100 percent urban, with absolutely no farmland, pastures, or woodland areas. The Vatican City is located on a hill, which today is known as Vatican Hill (Mons Vaticanus) named many years ago before the emergence of Christianity.

History

That part of Rome was originally supposed to remain uninhabited because the area was considered sacred. However, in 326 the first church, Constantine's Basilica, was built over the tomb of St. Peter. It was after that when the area became more populated, but every building that was built was connected to St. Peter. Gradually, Popes gained control of the surrounding regions through Papal States. Their control over the area lasted more than a thousand years

until the mid 19th century when the Kingdom of Italy seized the Papal States. At this point in time, the Vatican was not the normal residence for the Popes, but the residence from 1309 to 1377 it was in Avignon in France. Between 1870 and 1929 the Pope's control over the land weakened to the point that the Italian state did not recognize an official status of the area. While the Italian government had no official status on the Vatican, other countries did recognize it as a sovereign state. It was not until February 11, 1929 under the control of Mussolini by the three Lateran treaties that the Vatican City was officially recognized as an independent state. In 1984, Catholicism became the state religion of Italy.

Government

The prime figures of the government for the Vatican City are the Secretary of State, the President of the Pontifical Commission, and the Governor for the Vatican City State. All of these positions are appointed by the Pope and may be dismissed at any point in time at his discretion. During a papal vacancy, the Chamberlain of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, former Secretary of State, and former President of Pontifical Commission form a committee that performs the Pope's duties, while the College of Cardinals approves each decision. The Governor of the Vatican City has responsibilities very much like a mayor or city executive. He mainly deals with questions on the state's territory, local security, and any other issues that may arise within the city. While the Vatican City maintains a modern security corps, the Swiss Guards are a voluntary military force. Although many think they are the army of the Vatican City, the Swiss Guards act as more of a police force or bodyguard to the Pope than a military. The legislative branch of the city is the Pontifical Commission, led by the Governor. The Pope appoints each member for a term of five years. The judicial branch has three tribunals: the Apostolic Signatura, the Sacra Rota Romana, and the Apostolic Penitentiary. The Vatican's entire legal system is based on canon, or ecclesiastical law. Along with its government the Vatican City also has its own post office, bank, railway station, electricity generating plant, and publishing house, as well as its own radio station.

Demographics

The Vatican City residents are primarily made up of clergy, who includes high dignitaries, priests, nuns, and the Swiss Guards. It has a total of 921 citizens, along with 3,000 lay workers who live outside of the state. The official language is Latin, the same language that is still often used in the Roman Catholic Church. Italian and German are other languages that are frequently used in the city. A resident of the Vatican can receive citizenship, which also enables them to obtain a Vatican passport. A passport from the Vatican does have its perks because it gives diplomatic status in any country that is accredited. In 2003, 552 people held Vatican citizenship, 61 were cardinals, 346 were other clergy, 101 were members of the Swiss Guard, and 44 were other lay persons. Once a Vatican citizenship is obtained, it is very common for that person to have dual citizenship with their native country.

Culture

Botticelli, Bernini, and Michelangelo are just a few artists to have their masterpieces displayed in the Vatican. Vatican City holds great cultural significance with buildings such as St. Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel. Along with the artwork, the Vatican Library and Museum also are of highest historical and cultural magnitude. The permanent population of the Vatican is primarily male, however, there are two orders of nuns that live there as well. Vatican City has a strict dress code, clothes that show leg above the knee are absolutely forbidden. Tourism is a very important part of the Vatican's economy. The Pope also leads a weekly mass, along with masses on holy days.

Crime

One would assume that because the Vatican City has such a small population and strong religious affiliation the area would have a rather low crime rate, however this is not the case. It is a result of the small population that the Vatican City has the highest crime rate per capita of any nation in the world. It is twenty times higher than Italy's alone. Because the city is such a draw for tourists, many pickpockets and other perpetrators come to the area as well.

The statistics show that 87.2% are civil offenses and 133.6% are penal offenses, and because most of the criminals are visitors 90% of the crimes remain unsolved. The Italian government handles the civil offenses that do make it to court.

Economy

On average the Vatican City brings in \$252 million dollars in revenues and \$264 million dollars in expenditures. The main industries of this small sovereign state are printing, mosaics, staff uniforms, and worldwide banking. This unusual economy is also supported by contributions made by Catholics around the world, also through the sale of postage stamps, tourist items, and admission fees. The income and standard of living for the lay workers of the Vatican are slightly better than those in Rome. The Vatican City switched to the Euro as its official currency as of January 1, 2002.

Alicia Ferrell