



Easter Island is an island and special territory of Chile in the southeastern Pacific Ocean, at the southeasternmost point of the Polynesian Triangle in Oceania. Easter Island is most famous for its nearly 1,000 extant monumental statues, called moai, created by the early Rapa Nui people. In 1995, UNESCO named Easter Island a World Heritage Site, with much of the island protected within Rapa Nui National Park.

It is believed that Easter Island's Polynesian inhabitants arrived on Easter Island sometime near 1200 AD. They created a thriving and industrious culture, as evidenced by the island's numerous enormous stone moai and other artifacts. However, land clearing for cultivation and the introduction of the Polynesian rat led to gradual deforestation. By the time of European arrival in 1722, the island's population was estimated to be 2,000–3,000. European diseases, Peruvian slave raiding expeditions in the 1860s, and emigration to other islands, e.g. Tahiti, further depleted the population, reducing it to a low of 111 native inhabitants in 1877..

Chile annexed Easter Island in 1888. In 1966, the Rapa Nui were granted Chilean citizenship. In 2007, the island gained the constitutional status of "special territory". The 2017 Chilean census registered 7,750 people on the island, of whom 3,512 (45%) considered themselves Rapa Nui. The increase in population in the last census was partly caused by the arrival of people of European or mixed European and Native American descent from the Chilean mainland. However, most married a Rapa Nui spouse. Around 70% of the population were natives. Estimates of the pre-European population range from 7–17,000.

Easter Island is one of the most remote inhabited islands in the world. The nearest inhabited land (around 50 residents in 2013) is Pitcairn Island, 1,289 miles away; the nearest town with a population over 500 is Rikitea, on the island of Mangareva, 1,619 miles away; the nearest continental point lies in



central Chile, 2,182 miles away.

The large stone statues for which Easter Island is famous were carved in the period 1100–1680 AD. A total of 887 monolithic stone statues have been inventoried on the island and in museum collections. Although often identified as "Easter Island heads", the statues have torsos, most of them ending at the top of the thighs; a small number are complete figures that kneel on bent knees with their hands over their stomachs. Some upright moai have become buried up to their necks by shifting soils.

Almost all moai were carved from compressed, easily worked solidified volcanic ash or tuff, found at a single site on the side of the extinct volcano Rano Raraku. The native islanders who carved them used only stone hand chisels, mainly basalt *toki*, which lie in place all over the quarry. The stone chisels were sharpened by chipping off a new edge when dulled. While sculpting was going on, the volcanic stone was splashed with water to soften it. While many teams worked on different statues at the same time, a single moai took a team of five or six men approximately a year to complete. Each statue represented the deceased head of a lineage.

Only a quarter of the statues were installed. Nearly half remained in the quarry at Rano Raraku, and the rest sat elsewhere, presumably on their way to intended locations. The largest moai raised on a platform is known as "Paro". It weighs 90 short tons and is 32 ft 5 in long. Several other statues of similar weight were transported to ahu on the north and south coasts.

Possible means by which the statues were moved include employment of a Y-shaped sledge with cross pieces, pulled with ropes made from the tough bark of the hau tree and tied around the statue's neck. Anywhere from 180 to 250 men were required for pulling, depending on the size of the moai. Among other researchers on moving and erecting the moai was Vince Lee, who reenacted a moai moving scenario. Some 50 of the statues were re-erected in modern times. One of the first was on Ahu Ature Huke in Anakena beach in 1956. It was raised using traditional methods during a Heyerdahl expedition.

There is debate regarding the effects of the monument creation process on the environment. Some believe that the process of creating the moai caused widespread deforestation and ultimately a civil war over scarce resources. In 2011, a large moai statue was excavated from the ground. During the same excavation program, some larger moai were found to have complex dorsal petroglyphs, revealed by deep excavation of the torso. In 2020, a pickup truck crashed into and destroyed a moai statue due to brake failure. No one was injured in the incident

