

Drowning in money

Level 2 | Intermediate

1 Key vocabulary

Match these words with their definitions:

tiny

flood

crucial

cyclone

resident

obesity

rubbish dump

immigrant

1. A place where waste is kept.
2. A tropical storm with a whirlwind at its centre.
3. A person who arrives to live in another country.
4. Very, very important.
5. The opposite of 'enormous'.
6. Another word for inhabitant.
7. The state of being very, very overweight.
8. A situation in which the land is covered by water.

2 Find the information

Find the answers to these questions as quickly as possible:

1. Where is Tuvalu?
2. How many people live there?
3. How much money did the Tuvalans receive for their domain name?
4. How high is Tuvalu?
5. What was the average income in Tuvalu in 1999?
6. How much money did the Tuvalans spend on new roads?
7. How many cars were there in Tuvalu before 1999?
8. What is the total length of Tuvalu's roads?

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Daphna Baram

If you suddenly received a lot of money, how would you spend it? And if you knew that your world was about to disappear, what would you do with the time you had got left? For the people of Tuvalu, a tiny state comprising nine islands in the South Pacific, these are crucial questions.

In 1999 Tuvalu, with its population of 11,000, was the third poorest state in the world. But suddenly something unusual happened. Tuvalu received a domain name on the internet - the letters ".tv". A communication company from California quickly offered to buy the domain name for \$40m. For the Tuvalans, with an average annual income of about \$1,000, this was a huge amount of money. The islanders became very rich, or at least reacted as if they had become very rich.

At the same time the islanders received some very bad news. Due to global warming, and because the islands are only 3m above sea level, Tuvalu will probably become the first state in the world to disappear under the sea. According to scientific estimates, the islands will suffer severe floods within the next 15-20 years, and by the end of the century,

the islands will have disappeared from sight altogether.

You can already see signs of the rising sea on Tuvalu. Pools of seawater appear here and there, some beaches are swallowed by the waves, and the roots of trees are rotting by the ocean. Cyclones used to be very rare but they now appear a few times every season, and the rains that come with the cyclones cause temporary floods.

But despite these problems, the Tuvalans had their new money. They could use it to buy themselves a future. Or at least they could use it to borrow more time. Paul Lindsay, a documentary film-maker, took these questions with him all the way to Tuvalu, and came back with an incredible story. As the water rises, the Tuvalans are using the money to develop the land that is soon to disappear. They are building new houses, planning nightclubs, restaurants and hotels and new cars are driving around on new roads. The residents do not think it is strange: "Just because we are sinking, it doesn't mean we don't want to raise our standards of living," Lindsay was told by Sam Teo, Tuvalu's minister for natural resources.

Of the \$40m Tuvalu received through the internet deal, \$10m was used to

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asphalt the islands' 19km of roads. Before 1999 there were four cars on the islands. The Tuvalans used to walk or cycle everywhere. The minister for natural resources, who was in charge of paving the roads, owns one of the two petrol stations on the main island.

Along with the motor revolution there was a flood of imported foods and goods and soon these had unexpected consequences. Many Tuvalans now suffer from obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. Others discovered that it was too expensive for them to keep their cars, and that anyway cars are not really necessary in a state that is just 26 sq km. There is now a huge rubbish dump in the middle of this tropical paradise, covered with abandoned cars and other waste.

For a while the Tuvalans spent large amounts of money to raise international awareness of Tuvalu's situation. Tuvalu joined the UN, at a cost of \$1.5m a year. The delegate to the UN is the prime minister's brother, and the Tuvalan delegation was especially active in promoting

the Kyoto protocol to fight global warming. But while the political system argues about the best way to stop the rising waters, the sea keeps going up, and the Tuvalans keep spending their dollars.

All Tuvalans know that they will probably not die of old age on their islands. The solution to the problem is not so simple, however. They cannot move to the nearby island of Kioa, because it has said it will not take any more immigrants. Australia doesn't want to let the Tuvalans in, and New Zealand will only take a small number each year. When the islands are finally flooded, the Tuvalan nation will probably be split up.

After the eight months he spent among the Tuvalans, Lindsay is not sentimental about white sands and turquoise waters. "There are no more paradises. Tuvalu is trying to keep its sense of social solidarity in the face of progress. Nowadays even paradise has a price".

The Guardian Weekly 25-03-2005, page 18

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3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer:

1. What is the difficult situation that the Tuvalans find themselves in?
 - a. They don't have enough roads for all their cars.
 - b. They have a lot of money but their country will soon disappear.
 - c. They live in paradise but they have no money.
2. What was the effect of the motor revolution and the flood of imported food?
 - a. 19km of roads were paved.
 - b. It contributed to global warming.
 - c. Many Tuvalans are now overweight.
3. How are the Tuvalans using their new wealth?
 - a. They are building houses and other buildings.
 - b. They are planning to emigrate.
 - c. They are building more petrol stations.
4. What will happen to Tuvalu by the end of the century?
 - a. There will be more cyclones.
 - b. The sea will completely cover it.
 - c. It will become a huge rubbish dump.

4 Vocabulary - opposites

Find the opposites of these words in the text.

- | | | | |
|--------------|-------|-----------------|-------|
| 1. permanent | _____ | 5. lower (verb) | _____ |
| 2. tiny | _____ | 6. cheap | _____ |
| 3. common | _____ | 7. unnecessary | _____ |
| 4. lend | _____ | 8. distant | _____ |

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5 Vocabulary - chunks

Rearrange these words to make phrases. Then check your answers in the text.

1. income annual average
2. bad some very news
3. world third in the state poorest the
4. scientific to according estimates
5. the the by end century of
6. of standard living

6 Grammar focus - predictions

Look in the text and underline examples of things that will happen and will not happen to Tuvalu and the Tuvalans in the next hundred years. Find at least 6 examples. Find an example of the future perfect tense.

7 Discussion

What would you do if you were in the situation of the Tuvalans? Make a list of possible solutions to their problem.