

how to start a country



contains 60,000 miles of blood vessels • Smallest town in the US by area:

From houses and backyards to entire planets, from one person to hundreds of people, the idea of a country is taking on a whole new meaning. With names like Molossia, Sealand, Aerica, Bumbunga, Talossa, Atlantium, and Lovely, new countries are being started all the time. You won't find them in the United Nations, but they're there just the same. To some they seem strange and unrealistic; their leaders see them as opportunities. These people devote a lot of time to their "countries"; sometimes they work alone, sometimes with people from all over the world. They're just like anyone else; all that makes them different is that they've decided they're going to start a nation.

These countries have become known as micronations. Today, a micronation is defined as an entity that resembles an independent state (country) but isn't recognized by any other countries (that are recognized by other countries) or major organizations. This is what makes them different from secession movements and disputed countries, like Taiwan. They're typically small as far as territory goes— some of them don't even claim any real land. Although they aren't expected to last long (this makes sense, as often the people that are most interested in them are their creators), many have been around for thirty years or more. Micronationalism as a hobby is fairly recent, having been made much easier with the Internet.

The earliest obvious micronations got started in the 18th century. Some were very successful and lasted many years, like the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Sarawak. The oldest one still around is the Kingdom of Redonda, which started in the Caribbean as a failed attempt to establish a country in 1865. Redonda survives as a micronation, but there are currently at least four people competing for the throne.

The first of several fairly recent territorial (claiming to own land) micronations was Sealand (see page 10). Around the same time that Sealand got started, Leicester Hemingway, the brother of writer Ernest, was president of a small timber platform in the Caribbean Sea near Jamaica named New Atlantis. When that platform was damaged by storms, he moved on to a larger one off the Bahamas. It's not very common for a micronation to get attention from any "real" governments, but the Republic of Minerva, an artificial island set up by an American



His Excellency President Kevin Baugh of Molossia, aboard the Molossian Navy's *M.S. Wombat*. Photo courtesy The Republic of Molossia.



THE STORY OF SEALAND

Probably the most famous micronation (and the most controversial) is Sealand. Sealand was started when Roy Bates claimed Roughs Tower, an abandoned World War II gun platform, on September 2, 1967. The territory claimed is almost 6,000 square feet, or about a tenth of an acre, located six miles off the coast of Great Britain. According to the Montevideo Convention, Sealand meets all of the requirements for being an independent country, and one website even goes so far as to call it “the most successful of all new country projects attempted thus far.” After all, it usually has a permanent population (one until the country caught on fire in the summer of 2006), defined territory, a government started by His Royal Highness Prince Roy, and the capacity to relate to other states (OK, so visitors aren’t allowed, but Sealand does have a website).



In fact, Sealand claims that several countries have recognized its existence. The Belgian postal service mailed some letters with Sealand stamps, it has a constitution, three government bureaus, a postal service, and a currency (the Sealand Dollar). On the other hand, no “real” country in the world has “officially” recognized Sealand. Ever since the beginning of the “nation,” the UK has said that it owns both the tower and the water beneath it.** However, Prince Roy says that he occupied Roughs Tower while it was still in international waters, that is, before the UK made the area part of its maritime territory.

In late 2005, *The Times* printed that the British government admitted that Sealand “is outside British national territory ... and not part of the United Kingdom.” Before that, it seemed that Prince Roy and co. were left alone simply because the UK had no use for the tower, but that, if necessary, it could have easily have taken control by force. In fact, documents show that the UK thought about doing that, but decided not to because of the potential for loss of lives and bad publicity.

As of 2000, Sealand can now say that it has an economy. The data hosting company HavenCo operates from Sealand. It claims to provide “the world’s most secure managed servers in the world’s only true free market environment, the Principality of Sealand.” This means that it can operate free from restrictions on copyright and registration requirements. HavenCo claims that so far it hasn’t experienced much trouble with any government or organization.

In June 2006, Sealand caught on fire. The fire was started by an electrical problem and damaged about a quarter of the top platform.

The tower’s only occupant was taken by helicopter to a hospital to be treated for injuries. Since then, renovations have been begun by Church and East Ltd, with cost estimated at about \$477,000. One person who worked on the renovation describes Sealand this way: “What seems weird about the place is that you know [you’re] in the middle of nowhere yet there are bedrooms all decorated and a kitchen ... which just all seems a bit of out place in the sea.”

www.xtrasi.co.uk/index.asp?show=sealandtrip1, www.churchandeast.co.uk/Sealand.htm, www.sealandgov.org/history.html, www.havenco.com, Background courtesy Ryan Lackey, Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 License.



businessman, was annexed (taken) by Tonga. The British town of Hay-on-Wye is the scene of yet another micronation, where king Richard Booth still confers awards on visitors with his scepter of a toilet plunger.

“What exactly is your idea of a country?”

Micronations are started for very different reasons. The ones we’ve looked at so far all exist for political reasons– their founders wanted something that they weren’t getting from their former governments. Many of them actively try to get sovereignty– recognition by other countries and complete control over the areas they claim. Some of them just want to be left alone. Sometimes that happens, but only when it’s convenient for the macronations (notice the ‘a’; in the micronational community, this describes the 193–194 (exactly where the number falls in that range is beyond the scope of this article) countries that recognize each other). Yet for all of their efforts, micronations are hardly ever even admitted to exist. Why not?



Displaying some of the country’s flags, this building serves as the Palace for Italian town and micronation Seborga. Photo courtesy Wikipedia (GFDL).

The answer to that question lies in another one: What exactly is your idea of a country?. According to the Montevideo Convention of 1933, there are only four things that you need to have a country: 1) a permanent population, 2) defined territory, 3) a government, and 4) the ability to enter into relations with other countries. Many territorial micronations seem to meet these requirements, but there’s a problem: “Real” governments don’t like this set of requirements. They say that in order for a country to exist, it has to be recognized by other countries. So, Prince Roy probably won’t be representing Sealand in the United Nations anytime soon.

Let’s take for example the Principality of Hutt River. In 1970, the Australian state of Western Australia made quotas, or limits on production, on wheat for farms. Leonard Casley, a farmer who felt these limits and the laws about them were unfair, tried unsuccessfully to protest the decision, according to Hutt River’s website. So he decided to declare his farm independent (secede). He then declared war on Australia and was ignored. Leonard could then check off all the items on the Montevideo Convention list (“the declaratory theory of statehood”). The farm had a population, land, and a government, and he would talk to anybody that was interested.



The gates to the micronation Province of Bumbunga. Licensed under the GFDL, courtesy Wikipedia.

While only 20 people actually live in the Principality, over 13,000 are passport holders. The Australian government treats the Principality like a business, and seems to be trying to avoid any legal conflict with it. For example, buildings are constructed without government approval and the Principality has at times failed to pay taxes. H.R.H. Prince Leonard looks at it a little differently: “If anyone asks has our secession succeeded? Then we simply say, ‘We are still here,’” he says on the Principality’s website.

One micronation that has an extensively developed culture is the Republic of Molossia, located near Virginia City, Nevada. The climate on the 6 acres the country claims is dry and temperate. Molossia has a number of unique national symbols and holidays, such as Founder’s Day (May 26th), which celebrates the day that Molossia (then known as Vuldstein) was founded in 1977. The value of Molossia’s currency is based on that of Pillsbury cookie dough. Cookie dough is also important in traditional “Cookie Dough Fests,” held to celebrate national holidays such as Emperor Norton I day. Molossian time is officially 21 minutes behind Mountain Standard Time. There are several attractions for tourists, including the Tower of the Winds, the Railroad, and the Peace Pole.

Today, the most common type of micronation is a “cybernation”, one that conducts most of its business on the Internet. Although often run by one person, they sometimes have many members that contribute to the government. They have diplomatic relations and wars with each other, join groups like the League of Micronations and the Micronational News Network, and run vast empires, sometimes made up, sometimes just very far away, all through bulletin boards, mailing lists, blogs, and wikis.

Even though these nations are based on the Internet, there’s a lot more to them than their

Eric Lis

Emperor, The American Empire



ADVENTURER: Thanks for taking the time to do this interview... So, what exactly

do you find yourself doing as an emperor?

ERIC: Very little, generally. The Empire takes up relatively little of my time – an hour or two a week, usually. In part this is because I don't have loads of time myself, and in part it's because we're a small, efficient organization and people tend not to have problems that require my attention. I used to be rather busier, when we were more active in intermicronational affairs, but nowadays I mostly just process the citizenship applications and post ineffable (and semi-effable) wisdom on our mailing list.

ADVENTURER: What does the American Empire mean to you?

ERIC: It's my dream given form, at the risk of being melodramatic. The Empire is

my chance to try to change the world, improve the lives of others both by bringing them humour and offering genuine political activities, and, while I'm at it, earn a little worldwide notoriety. I want to make the world a better (and more interesting) place, and

I consider it an added bonus that it also lets me get interviewed by newspapers from far off corners of the world. Last and hardly least, it's also a link to some of the best friends I've ever made, people who I would never have known if not for this and who have changed my life (generally for the better).

ADVENTURER: You've been running the Empire for almost twenty years. What caused you to keep it going?

ERIC: Passion. Also, obstinacy – I've never known when to give up. The Empire is actually fairly self-perpetuating. I'm not the only active member of government and I'm not even the most vocal citizen. We have quiet periods,

but all it takes to keep a micronation alive is the willingness to wake up every morning and say “Yes, this still seems like a job that needs doing.” Also, I have yet to grow bored of the ego boost of opening my e-mail and seeing letters addressed to “emperor.”

ADVENTURER: What are some of the rights and responsibilities that come with being a citizen of the Aerican Empire? How do you recruit new members?

ERIC: There are very few responsibilities. Once every year, they are required to reply to a letter which gets e-mailed out known as the Culling of the Inactive; anyone who fails to reply to it within one month has their citizenship terminated.

In terms of rights, mostly we have a lot of ideals. In an ideal world we would guarantee free education right up through undergraduate and free universal health care. In practice, we have freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom to disagree with and openly mock the government, and other freedoms which don't cost any money to maintain. As with criminal law, rights tend to be set by the places where citizens actually live, and we don't yet have the power to change those very much. Hope springs eternal, however.

Recruitment tends to be very passive. We get most of our traffic through our Wikipedia article and from articles in newspapers. There's some word of mouth, as well. The truth is, I don't know how we've ever managed to recruit members... I've just always had a lot of good luck with it. A good community (and website) is part of it, though, since all the luck in the world might bring someone to your page but won't make them want to join unless you can really offer them something.

ADVENTURER: What sets the Aerican Empire apart from other micronations?

ERIC: That's a good question. The gag answer is “me.” We've survived longer than most states simply because I refuse to get bored and go do something else. The real answer, though, is twofold. First, we offer a culture which links our citizens. Most micronations offer political ideology or ideals, but we try to offer a community of like-minded people. At the heart of any culture, of course, is the people, and I've been blessed with wonderful people. The second thing that separates us is undoubtedly our sense of humour. The first thing people see when they come to our site is the flag with a great big smiley face in the center, and in many ways, that tells the story. I believe in finding things in life to laugh about, and I think that the reason most micronationalists get bored and fade away is that they aren't having enough fun at what they do. For my part, having the Empire in my life means I get to have some fun every day. The world would be a better place if everyone was so lucky.

ADVENTURER: What do you see the future holding for the Empire?

ERIC: I usually try not to think in terms of the future, because the universe continually surprises me with what ends up being in it. I believe we'll continue to grow, slowly but surely. People will join and people will leave, and hopefully more of the former than the latter. In about thirty years, we'll conquer the world and unite the entire planet under my dictatorial fist, or maybe we'll just play Warhammer instead. And tomorrow, I'm going to wake up, process some citizenship applications I've got sitting in my inbox even as I write this, and have fun.

Kevin Baugh

President, Republic of Molossia

ADVENTURER: Molossia seems to have gone through a lot of changes. How did you get involved and how has your involvement changed?

KEVIN: Life is all about change, and Molossia is no different. As with any country, events occur and change happens as a result. The end is the nation you see before you today, and we are quite proud of it. I have been involved in Molossia since its first day, May 26th, 1977. I was one of two "founding fathers," along with my friend James. Since that historic day, I have continued to be the leader of the nation, first as Prime Minister, then as Premier, and now as President. The name has changed, but the duties remain the same, head of the Molossian Government.

ADVENTURER: Right now, what do you find yourself doing as President?

KEVIN: Pretty much what I always do, running my country. That means doing everything, from making decisions about foreign policy and planning publicity and cultural events to running the website. Of course it's a labor of love!

ADVENTURER: What does Molossia mean to you?

KEVIN: Just

about everything; in fact it is second only to my family in my heart. And because I founded it, it is like a child of which I am very proud, watching it grow up into something wonderful.

ADVENTURER: Tell us about some recent events in Molossia. For example, we hear you went to war with Mustachistan?

KEVIN: Interesting things happen all the time in Molossia, not the least of which has been the recent publication of the *Lonely Planet Guide to Micronations*, the publicity of which has been an ongoing project with which my government has been involved.

Very exciting stuff. And yes, early last summer we fought a war with Mustachistan, a fellow micronation which claimed the land upon which Molossia is founded. Sadly it turned into [a] fairly major conflict and we were forced to defend ourselves in two battles.

Fortunately, our Naval Infantry acquitted itself very well in these battles and we won the war.

The whole story can be found [at www.molossia.org/war/history.html].

Mustachistan unfortunately remains an ongoing problem to this day, however.

ADVENTURER: What other



micronational leader do you admire most and why?

KEVIN: There a quite a few, among them President Dan of the Moonshine Republic, King James of the Northern Forest Archipelago and the former Grand Duke of Westarctica, Travis. These fine people are all friends of mine, as well. In addition, I admire Prince Leonard of Hutt River and Prince Roy of Sealand, both prominent and long-time micronationalists that have done magnificent things with their nations.

ADVENTURER: What sets Molossia apart from other micronations?

KEVIN: I think our nation's level of activity, creativity and longevity really set us apart.

We have been around for almost 30 years, and each year is better and more interesting than the last. I look forward every day to seeing what comes next!

ADVENTURER: What does Molossia's future look like to you?

KEVIN: I think our future is very, very bright. Molossia as a micronation represents the best and brightest that a small nation can be. We continue to seek and explore new ways to make our nation a better and more enjoyable place to be. I have no doubt that the future is ours and I look forward to being a part of it.

national ice cream flavor, etc. Baugh advises you to not make changes too often, or else you won't seem to be serious.

Diplomatic relations with other micronations can be very helpful, but don't get discouraged if it takes a while to get recognition. Micronations will only have diplomatic relations with other micronations that are at their level of seriousness, and they don't want to damage their reputations by having diplomatic relations with you if they aren't sure how serious you'll turn out to be. When you start yours, "take a close look at the nations you are seeking diplomatic relations with." Look for nations that have concepts and ideals similar to yours, and focus on relations with those nations.

So what do you want to do? Maybe you'd like the experience of running a government (something you're not likely to get elsewhere). Perhaps you have plans to colonize the planet Mercury. Whatever your goals for the future, you already have what it takes to start a micronation. There's a lesson to learn from the presidents, kings, and emperors we've met: They don't get discouraged when acceptance doesn't come easily. They just keep going; making laws, recruiting members, and leaving their mark on the world, sometimes helping to make it a better place. 🌍

For more information

The best place to find out more is on the websites of micronations, and we certainly didn't cover all of them! Here are some sites to get you started:

molossia.org freewebs.com/mustachistan

Also, Wikipedia has an article on almost every micronation at en.wikipedia.org.

For some more general information:

Bite-sized sovereignties offer worlds of fun – iberkshires.com/story.php?story_id=16658

Micronations: An Introduction – sleepybrain.net/micronations-an-introduction