



Robinson Crusoe Island

About 700 km off the coast of Chile, there is a wild, beautiful island with mountains, high cliffs, and stormy waves. It is far away from everything, in fact if you want to go there by ship from Santiago, the journey will take almost twenty-four hours. But over 800 people call this island home and every year visitors arrive and walk on the island's beaches. They want to see the place where the 'real Robinson Crusoe' lived, over three hundred years ago.



This place is called Robinson Crusoe Island. Before 1966 its name was Más a Tierra, and it is part of the Juan Fernández Islands group. In 1704 a Scottish sailor named Alexander Selkirk came here. His ship was stopping for fresh water and food, and Selkirk saw that the sailors needed to repair it. He told his captain that the ship wasn't safe, but the man didn't listen. They had a terrible argument ¹ about this and

1. **argument** : an angry conversation.

the captain left Selkirk on the island alone. (Selkirk was right about the ship: later it went down near Colombia.)

On the island, Selkirk had only his gun, a hatchet, ² a knife, a cooking pot, a Bible and some blankets and clothes. He stayed on the island for four years. This wasn't easy. For food he had only berries, ³ lobsters, ⁴ goat meat and wild turnips. ⁵ Like Robinson Crusoe, he built himself a house and made clothing from goat skins. (He used a nail for a needle.) Every day Selkirk read his Bible, because he needed to comfort himself with the words, and also because he didn't want to forget his own language.



During his time on the island, two ships stopped there, but they were both Spanish and England was at war with Spain. Selkirk had to hide from the men who were walking around 'his' island. Finally an English ship arrived in 1709. The captain was surprised to see Selkirk, and thought that he looked wilder than the goats. Back in England, Selkirk became famous. William Cowper wrote a poem about him, *The Solitude* ⁶ of *Alexander Selkirk*. Daniel Defoe also heard about Selkirk's adventures and used the idea of a man alone on an island in his famous first novel.

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2. **hatchet** : 
 3. **berries** : very small fruit.
 4. **lobsters** : 
 5. **turnips** : 
 6. **solitude** : being alone.



Defoe wasn't writing about Selkirk's real island home – the island in *Robinson Crusoe* is a much warmer place, probably somewhere in the Caribbean. But the people who live on Robinson Crusoe Island are still pleased about their connection to this famous story. Today most of the islanders live in the village of San Juan Bautista and make money from lobster fishing and tourism. Like the island in *Robinson Crusoe*, there is danger from storms and earthquakes. In 2010 a strong earthquake caused a tsunami,⁷ and this destroyed most of the village. The islanders had to work hard for years and rebuild their homes and businesses. Hundreds of tourists visit Robinson Crusoe Island every year. A popular sight is a high hill above the village. People say that this is where Alexander Selkirk sat every day and looked for ships. Today this hill is called 'Selkirk's Look-Out'.

7. **tsunami**: a very large, strong wave.



1 COMPREHENSION CHECK

Answer the questions about Robinson Crusoe Island.

- 1 What country is closest to Robinson Crusoe Island?
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- 2 How many people live on the island?
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- 3 What happened to most of these people's homes in 2010?
.....
- 4 How do the people on Robinson Crusoe Island make money?
.....
- 5 Would you like to visit Robinson Crusoe Island? Why or why not?
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2 COMPREHENSION CHECK

Read the sentences. Write S if the sentence is true about Alexander Selkirk. Write C if the sentence is true about Robinson Crusoe. If the sentence is true about both men, write S and C.

- 0^{S, C}..... He lived alone on an island.
- 1 He came to his island because of an argument.
- 2 He read his Bible often.
- 3 He made clothes from goat skins.
- 4 He lived on a warm island in the Caribbean.
- 5 He stayed on his island for four years.
- 6 He had a parrot for a pet.
- 7 He was from Scotland.

3 INTERNET PROJECT

Part One: Find the poem *The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk* and read the first line. What does it mean in your language?

Part Two: Plan a trip to Robinson Crusoe Island with a friend.

Decide on:

- A where you will stay
- B where you will eat
- C what you will do during the day