Cameroon

Location

Cameroon is located in the southwest corner of the second largest continent in the world, also known as Africa. If you envision the size of California, you can imagine a picture Cameroon. This small country covers 184,000 sq. mi., which is centered around Nigeria, Chad, Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo. Cameroon is bound by two natural sources of water. Lake Chad is in the North and to the west by Bight by Biafra, which is part of the Atlantic Ocean.

Geography

Cameroon is made up of rainforests, mountains and plains. Mt. Cameroon is the highest peak in West Africa and sixth in the country. Mt. Cameroon clears 13,353 ft. easily. The lowest point of elevation is the Atlantic Ocean at 0 m and the highest point is Mount Cameroon. Africa not only has historic mountains, but exotic rainforests as well. Africa’s oldest rainforest can be found in Cameroon which contains exotic animals native to this region. These unusual species include Africa Forrest Elephant, Black Colobus Monkey, Pygmy Hippopotamus, and African Grey Parrot, just to name a few. Cameroon consists of 6,000 sq km of water and 469,440 sq km of land. This country's terrain is diverse, depending on your location. In the southwest the land is made up of mostly coastal plains, dissected plateaus in the center, and mountains to the west, and plains make up the north.

Climate

Cameroon’s climate varies depending on the area you are in. The northern plains, the Sahel region is mostly dry, with very little rainfall and rapidly warm temperatures. The central and western areas of the country near the capital city, is less dry with cooler temperatures. Finally, the southern and coastal areas are surrounded by the forests and the climate has more rainfall and humid air.

History

In 500BC an explorer from North Africa first saw Mount Cameroon. It was not until years later when the Republic of Cameroon, or simply Cameroon, was established in 1962. The British and French came together and united their lands to form this forgotten country. Cameroon’s government is similar to the United States, with slight differences. It is strictly Republic controlled by a president whose term consists of seven years. The head of the government is the prime minister, who is in charge of the National Assembly. In 1984 President Paul Biya was elected president as the only candidate running and is still the president today.
Internationally Cameroon is engaged in a long dispute with its neighbor Nigeria over rights in the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula. There are occasional armed encounters on the ground as the issue is considered by the International Court of Justice.

**Important Dates**

Cameroon was officially established in 1962; however it was not colonized until May 20, 1972. Therefore Cameroon celebrates on May 20th National Day. It was on this date, in 1972, the constitution of the United Republic of Cameroon was adopted by the Union Nationale Camerounaise. January 1st is the national holiday for Independence Day. Independence Day, is celebrated for this is the anniversary of when the French Cameroun separated from France on January 1, 1960. Assumption Day is celebrated on August 15th. This is to remember that Mary was transported into Heaven and her body and soul were united. October 1st is Unification Day. This is the anniversary of independence from the United Kingdom and unification with French Cameroun in 1961. Christmas Day and New Years Day are celebrated on the same dates, the Americans celebrate.

**Population**

Before Cameroon was officially established as a country, its earliest inhabitants were the Bakas or the Pygmies as some call them. They still inhabit the forest of Cameroon, but make up a very small portion if it’s population. Cameroon is said to have 250 ethnic groups which form five large groups. Those groups consist of western highlanders or grass fielders, costal tropical people, southern tropical forest people, kirdi, and central highlanders. Around 20,000 non-Africans including more then 6,000 French and 2,400 American citizens inhabit Cameroon. Although this country was established not long ago it is larger in population then one might think. Cameroon’s population as of 2008 was 18,467,692.

**Currency**

The currency in Cameroon is in West African Francs. 1 U.S. dollar is equivalent to about 519 Cameroon Francs. Traveler’s checks are also accepted at almost any bank. Credit card use is sparse. Used only at hotels and some restaurants.

**Education**

There are several issues that arise in this small country and education is one of them. As of 2001, 64 % of children who started primary school were likely to reach grade 5 and only grade 5. With that being said, Cameroon has one of the highest literacy rates in Africa. 67 % of the people in Cameroon are illiterit. Issues that arise in the educational system include lack of primary teachers, lack of education for children with disabilities, high drop out rate, and high rate of teen pregnancy, just to mention a few examples. A growing trend is is occuring with teenagers leaving the country to study and take up roots abroad.
Language
With 250 ethnic groups, it is surprising that 286 languages are spoken in this one country. 279 of the languages are living languages, including English. The people in the northwest and southwest regions mainly speak English as well as their native language “pidgin.” In the northern regions French is the main language spoken, although some other local languages are spoken as well.

Religion
The people of Cameroon make up three categories of religion. 40% are indigenous beliefs, 40% are Christian, and 20% are Muslim. The people of Cameroon are more conservative than most. Avoid wearing shorts and shirts that bare shoulders to respect their religions and customs.

Agricultural
From 1962 to 1978, agricultural was the main source of economic growth. Agricultural was the principle of foreign exchange and occupation for over half of Cameroon’s population. Cameroon is blessed in natural resources such as mangos, cotton, coffee grains, cocoa, peanuts, and forestry. Cameroon is one of the world’s largest cocoa producers, contributing 150,000 tons in one year. After 1978 the oil industry started to boom, and so did the demand for Cameroon’s oil supply.

Trade
Cameroon is blessed in natural resources such as oil, agricultural, cotton, coffee grains, and forestry. Its largest city Douala is the main city for importing and exporting these goods. These commodities help stabilize the country, from the troublesome countries that outline Cameroon.

Food
Corn, hot peppers, tomatoes, and cassava where the first foods brought over by the Portuguese in 1472, before it was even considered a country. Currently the foods vary by location and climate. The main food is bland and starchy usually covered in hot sauces. Meats, fish, and peppery soups are often found as side dishes. Fresh fruits are a commodity in Cameroon. Some include Mangos, papayas, bananas, pineapples, coconuts, grapefruits, and limes.

Landmarks
Landmarks are found everywhere you look in Cameroon. Yaounde, the capital city, is built on seven large hills and known for its more rural nature. If you would like to go on an excursion, then Mont Febe is the place to travel to while in the country. It is full of nature and considered
to be a vacation getaway. If you are looking for historic artifacts then traveling to the Musée d'Art Cameroonaïs, which holds the grounds of the Benedictine monastery and lots of excellent art. However for the young kid in all of us, traveling 25 miles to Luna Park amusement park with excite you.

If you are near the city of Douala, then Mount Cameroon is your must see. You must receive a permit from the tourism office to hike the mountain. Once you have received your permit, make your experience a two day trip. Hiking one day up the mountain and staying overnight at a cabin on the mountain, and hiking down the mountain on the second day.

If you like adventures and happen to be in the Northlands, then you must stop by one of the safari spots. These safaris are full of wildlife, from monkeys, giraffes, elephants, and lions. After you have visited the safari, do some traveling to the near by villages for some local souvenirs.

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