Eritrea

Location
This country has a coastline that touches the Red Sea and its borders touch Ethiopia, Djibouti and Sudan. The country lies in eastern Africa (15 00 N, 39 00 E).

Geography
The country is slightly larger than the state of Pennsylvania. Its coastline runs quite a distance (2,234 km). The country has a variety of landscapes ranging from highlands to deserts to plains. The highest part of the country is Soira at 3,018 m while the lowest point is near Kulul within the Denakil depression at -75 m. Less than 5% of the land can be used for agricultural purposes and irrigation is employed as well.

Climate
The outside borders of the country are quite dry, especially on the coast where the Red Sea touches. The central part is quite wet with rains up to 61 cm during the months of June to September. In the central highlands it could get as hot as 85 F and as cold as 23 F. The hottest month is May. On the coast it could get as high as 75 F and 10 degrees lower when it is cold. On the western side of the country, it could get as hot as 105 F and drop down to about half the temperature when cold.

History
The country once belonged to Ethiopia as a gift but has gained independence through long struggles. Before WW II it was an Italian colony but was lost to the British who took over. The UN in 1952 wanted Ethiopia and Eritrea to join together at the same time giving the country some sort of independence. The idea did not work as riots for independence soon occurred. The Eritrean Liberation Front led the whole ordeal to free the country and fought with Ethiopia. The fighting was so bad that the US had to step in for peace talks. They had to convince the Ethiopians that Eritrea had its right to independence. On April 27, 1993, the country was considered independent after the UN monitored the elections for an independent country.

Important Dates
January 6 is Orthodox Epiphany, February 10 is Fenkil Day, March 8 is Women's Day, May 24 is Independence Day, June 20 is Martyrs' Day, and September 1 is Anniversary of the Start of the Armed Struggles.

Population
As of July 2008, the current population in the country is 5,028,475 with a growth rate of 2.447%. Women usually have about 5 children. The people of this country are called Eriteans. There are also other ethnic groups that reside in this country as well. They include Tigrinya, Tigre and Kunama, Afar, and Saho. Unfortunately, this country is also plagued with AIDS as well and around 6000 people die from the disease.

Currency
The currency that the people use is known as the Nafka (ERN). The conversion rate is 1 US Dollar = 429.920 CFA Franc BEAC and 1 CFA Franc BEAC (XAF) = 0.002326 US Dollar (USD).
Education

Schooling starts at age 6 and is provided by the government. They focused a lot on the education of the next generation because the government believes that they will be the future for the country. The school year is quite similar to the US, with school starting in September and ending in June. Besides school, everybody needs to complete civil service for the government that lasts one year. The whole country only has one university, University of Asmara. As long as a student has a GPA of 2.0 or above, they are eligible for entrance into university. Courses are usually taught in English.

Language

The country does not have any official languages but have a couple languages that are commonly spoken. They include such languages as Arabic and Afar, just to name a few. English is taught in schools.

Religion

Same as languages, there is no official religion other than the fact that Muslims and Christians along with Roman Catholics dominate the country.

Agriculture

Some of the products that are grown in this country include sorghum, cotton, corn, tobacco, lentils and other vegetables. Livestock wise, they have a lot of goats and they fish a lot. Most of the country’s people are farmers but most experience the problem of not growing enough to even feed their own families. With unpredictable rainfall, many of their crops suffer. Even the army helps in the reforms set up by the government to help their agricultural sector.

Trade

The country most often exports their livestock and sorghum to countries such as Italy, Austria, France, US, Ethiopia, Taiwan and China. They import a lot of food, manufactured products, petroleum and machinery from countries such as Italy, China, Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Sudan, and Germany.

Food

A majority of Eritreans like their foods spicy. Their food culture is quite similar to that of their neighbor Ethiopia. Most dishes come with stew that is served with injera which is almost like a sour pancake, where they rip pieces and dip it into the stew that is made of meat and vegetables. Dried chili, known as Berbere, accompanies many dishes as well.

Landmarks

Some places to visit are the nation’s capital of Asmara, which is known to be a very clean city. Keren, which is the 3rd largest city in the country, is the site of many WW II battles and here you could see a lot of the agricultural sector as well.