GUINEA-BISSAU

Location

The Republic of Guinea-Bissau is a country in western Africa, and one of the smallest nations in continental Africa. It is bordered by Senegal to the north and Guinea to the south and east, with the Atlantic Ocean to its west. Its size is nearly 13,945 sq mi. with an estimated population of almost 1,600,000. Formerly the Portuguese colony of Portuguese Guinea, upon independence, the name of its capital, Bissau, was added to the country's name to prevent confusion with the Republic of Guinea.

Geography

A neighbor of Senegal and Guinea in West Africa, on the Atlantic coast, Guinea-Bissau is about half the size of South Carolina. At 13,945 sq mi. Guinea-Bissau is nearly identical in size to Taiwan, and somewhat larger than the US state of Maryland. The country is a low-lying coastal region of swamps, interior is savanna, rain forests, and mangrove-covered wetlands, with about 25 islands off the coast. The Bijagos archipelago extends 30 mi (48 km) out to sea. This small, tropical country lies at a low altitude, its highest point is 984 feet (300 m). Its monsoon-like rainy season alternates with periods of hot, dry marmattan winds blowing from the Sahara.

Climate

Guinea-Bissau is warm all year around and there is little temperature fluctuation, it averages 79.3°F. The average rainfall for Bissau is 2024 mm although this is almost entirely accounted for during monsoonal-type the rainy season which falls between June and September/October. From December through April, the country experiences drought.

It is consider a tropical country, generally hot and humid, with southwesterly winds with northeasterly harmattan winds.

History

The rivers of Guinea and the islands of Cape Verde were among the first areas in Africa explored by the Portuguese in the 15th century. Portugal claimed Portuguese Guinea in 1446, but few trading posts were established before 1600. In 1630, a "captaincy-general" of Portuguese Guinea was established to administer the territory. With the cooperation of some local tribes, the Portuguese entered the slave trade and exported large
numbers of Africans to the Western Hemisphere via the Cape Verde Islands. Cacheu became one of the major slave centers, and a small fort still stands in the town. The slave trade declined in the 19th century, and Bissau, originally founded as a military and slave-trading center in 1765, grew to become the major commercial center.

Before World War I, Portuguese forces, with some assistance from the Muslim population, subdued animist tribes and eventually established the territory's borders. The interior of Portuguese Guinea was brought under control after more than 30 years of fighting; final subjugation of the Bijagos Islands did not occur until 1936. The administrative capital was moved from Bolama to Bissau in 1941, and in 1952, by constitutional amendment, the colony of Portuguese Guinea became an overseas province of Portugal.

In 1956, Amilcar Cabral and Raphael Barbosa organized the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) clandestinely. The PAIGC moved its headquarters to Conakry, Guinea, in 1960 and started an armed rebellion against the Portuguese in 1961. Despite the presence of Portuguese troops, which grew to more than 35,000, the PAIGC steadily expanded its influence until, by 1968, it controlled most of the country.

It established civilian rule in the territory under its control and held elections for a National Assembly. Portuguese forces and civilians increasingly were confined to their garrisons and larger towns. The Portuguese Governor and Commander in Chief from 1968 to 1973, Gen. Antonio de Spinola, returned to Portugal and led the movement that brought democracy to Portugal and independence for its colonies.

The African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (another Portuguese colony) was founded in 1956, and guerrilla warfare by nationalists grew increasingly effective. By 1974 the rebels controlled most of the countryside, where they formed a government that was soon recognized by scores of countries. The military coup in Portugal in April 1974 brightened the prospects for freedom, and in August the Lisbon government signed an agreement granting independence to the province. The new republic took the name Guinea-Bissau.

**Politics**

In Nov. 1980, João Bernardo Vieira headed a military coup that deposed Luis Cabral, president since 1974. In his 19 years of rule, Vieira was criticized for crony capitalism and corruption and for failing to alleviate the poverty of Guinea-Bissau, one of the world’s poorest countries. Vieira also brought in troops from Senegal and the Republic of Guinea to help fight against an insurgency movement, a highly unpopular act. In May 1999 rebels deposed Vieira.

Following a period of military rule, Kumba Yalá, a former teacher and popular leader of Guinea-Bissau's independence movement, was elected president in 2000. In Sept. 2003 he was deposed in a military
coup. Yalá's increasingly repressive measures and refusal to hold elections were cited as causes. In 2005, former president Vieira returned from six years of exile in Portugal and won the presidency in the July 2005 elections.

Prime Minister Aristides Gomes resigned in April 2007, after Parliament voted to censure his government. Martinho Ndafa Kabi was appointed as his successor. President Vieira dissolved Parliament in August 2008, precipitating the fall of the government of Prime Minister Kabi. Former prime minister Carlos Gomes Júnior succeeded Kabi.

President Vieira was shot to death by army troops in March 2009. The assassination was said to be in retaliation for an earlier bomb attack that killed the army chief of staff, Gen. Batista Tagme Na Wai, which troops blamed on the President. The military denied a coup attempt.

Important Dates

New Year’s Day on January 1, Heroes’ Day on January 20, Women’s Day on March 8, Labour Day on May 1, Pidjiguito Day on August 3, National Day on September 24, Korite on October 13, Readjustment Movement Day on November 14, Tabaski on December 20 and Christmas Day on December 25.

Population

There is a 1,503,182 habitants in Guinea-Bissau. The population of Guinea-Bissau is ethnically diverse with distinct languages, customs, and social structures. Most people are farmers, with traditional religious beliefs. The religions are Indigenous beliefs 50%, Muslim 40%, Christian 10%. There are ethnic groups like Fula 20% and Mandinka 13% speakers concentrated in the north and northeast. Other important groups are the Balanta 30% and Papel 7%, living in the southern coastal regions, and the Manjaca 14% and Mancanha 16%, occupying the central and northern coastal areas. Population growth rate (2008) is 2.035%.

Languages

Portuguese is the official language, Creole, French; many indigenous languages—Balanta-Kentohe 26%, Pulaar 18%, Mandjak 12%, Mandinka 11%, Pepel 9%, Biafada 3%, Mancanha 3%, Bidyogo 2%, Ejamah 2%, Mansoanka 1%, Bainoukgunyuno 1%, Nalu 1%, Soninke 1%, Badjara 1%, Bayote 0.5%, Kobiana 0.04%, Cassanga 0.04%, Basary 0.03%.

Currency
The official currency is the West African CFA franc. They have coins in aluminum of 5, 10, 25, 50, 100, 200, 500 francs and banknotes of 1000, 2000, 5000, 10,000 francs. Besides Guinea-Bissau, there are another uses of this currency like Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo.

**Education**

Education is compulsory between the ages of 7 and 13, but as of 1999 only about 54% of primary-school-age children (grades one through four) actually attended school, and only 26% of students at the complementary education level (grades five and six). Only 32% of girls attended school, compared with 58% of boys, and only 58% of girls finished the fourth grade. In 1995 there were 100,369 primary pupils. The pupil-teacher ratio at the primary level was 44 to 1 in 1999. Projected literacy rates for the year 2000 stand at 63.2% (males, 47.0%; females, 78.6%).

The 1998–99 civil war severely disrupted education, closing schools and keeping most of the country's children out of school for at least half a year. In 2000, UNICEF requested $5.22 million to rebuild and refurnish damaged primary schools, buy teaching materials and school supplies, train teachers, and provide other types of aid.

**Religion**

Islam is the predominant religion, practiced by approximately 50 percent of the country’s population. In addition to this, 40 percent hold indigenous beliefs and 10 percent of the country's population belong to the Christian community.

**Agriculture**

More than two-thirds of Guinea-Bissau's population lives below the poverty line. The economy depends mainly on agriculture; fishing, cashew nuts and ground nuts are its major exports. A long period of political instability has resulted in depressed economic activity, deteriorating social conditions, and increased macroeconomic imbalances. Guinea-Bissau has started to show some economic advances in the last 2 years, after a pact of stability was signed by the main political parties of the country, leading to a structural reform program. The key challenges for the country in the period ahead will be to restore fiscal discipline, rebuild public administration, improve the economic climate for private investment, and promote economic diversification.
The GDP/PPP 2007 was $808 million, per capita $500. The real growth rate was 2.5%, with an inflation of 3.8%. The most important thing is Agriculture (rice, corn, beans, cassava (tapioca), cashew nuts, peanuts, palm kernels, cotton; timber; fish). Labor force: 480,000 (1999); agriculture 82%, industry and services 18% (2000 est.). There is a lot of natural resources like fish, timber, phosphates, bauxite, clay, granite, limestone, unexploited deposits of petroleum.

**Trade**

Exportation is $133 million f.o.b. (2006) with cashew nuts, shrimp, peanuts, palm kernels, sawn lumber. The Importation is $200 million f.o.b. (2006) with foodstuffs, machinery and transport equipment, petroleum products. The major trading partners are Pakistan, Nigeria, Italy, Senegal and Portugal.

**Food**

Culture of Guinea Bissau is rich and colorful and Cuisines of Guinea Bissau is a unique feature of it. Bordered by Senegal to the north and Guinea to the south and east and with the Atlantic Ocean to its west, the Republic of Guinea-Bissau is a country in western Africa. Cuisines of Guinea Bissau has fully maintained the health and life of the people.

Being located on the west coast of Africa, the most common Food in Guinea Bissau is fresh fish but also abundant fruits and vegetables are available here. The Cuisine of Guinea Bissau uses a perfect combination of locally available fruits, grains, and vegetables, milk and meat products. The traditional Guinea Bissau diet has a prevalence of milk, curd, and whey. You can find rice all over the country. Exotic Guinea Bissau Cuisine is influenced by Arab, European and Asian cuisine.

Another characteristic of Guinness Cuisine is the use of hot spices, including peppers and chilies. Seeds of Guinea pepper, Aframomum melegueta, also called grains of paradise are a native West African plant and it is used to prepare traditional sauces. Guinea Bissau Cuisine also includes Pork meat and fish.

**Landmark**

There are many websites to visit that provide you a tour in Guinea-Bissau. The capital and the biggest city is Bissau which is the most famous and beautiful. Game shooting, a major attraction for many travelers in Africa, is popular in Guinea-Bissau. Game is abundant in the open country, as well as in the more hazardous forest and jungle areas. The traditional practices of various ethnic groups also interest and attract tourists. The
island of Bubaque and the town of Bolama are cited for their charm and beauty. All visitors need a valid passport and a visa secured in advance.

In 1999, the UN estimated the cost of staying in Bissau at $76–134, depending upon the choice of hotel. Daily expenses are an estimated $44 in Bubaque and $68 in Bafata. The best place to visit is Bissau are The Young Artists Center, The National Museum and The Center Market. But before you go there, everybody must take a vaccine against yellow fever.

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