Indonesia

Location

Indonesia, is in the south east of Asia, is an archipelago (group of islands) nation located in the passage between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Comprised of over 17,500 counted islands, Indonesia covers 5,000,000 square kilometers in total area with 1,919,400 square kilometers of land, the remaining being water. This is the largest archipelago in the world and the 16th largest area of the world’s countries. From North to South, Indonesia spans approximately 1,900 kilometers, and from East to West, it extends across approximately 5,100 kilometers. Longitudinally, Indonesia falls between 92˚ East and 141˚ East and latitudinally, between 7˚20’ North and 14˚ South. Indonesia is bordered by Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei and Philippines to the North, Papua New Guinea to the East, and Australia to the South.

Geography

Indonesia’s major islands are Java, Kalimantan, Irian Jaya, Sulawesi, Sumatra and the Moluccas. The terrain of Indonesia varies where some is relatively low, flat land with the volcanic soil being very fertile for agriculture but mainly Indonesia’s islands are mountainous and make agriculture difficult. They have on the order of 100 active volcanoes and much rainforest, home to much of Indonesia’s mineral stores. The highest point in Indonesia is Puncak Jaya, which is located 5,030 meters above sea level. However, many other mountains exceed 2,500 meters or more, including Mt. Gede on Java and Mt. Leuser on Sumatra. The Jaya Wijaya mountain range on Irian Jaya is home to the Mandala Top which is capped in snow year round.
Indonesia is located at a meeting point of tectonic plates causing it to have frequent earthquakes and tsunamis. It is also located across the equator having locations in both the Northern and Southern hemispheres of the earth. Because Indonesia is so spread out, its ecology is quite diverse. The islands of Java, Madura, Sumatra and nearby islands are similar to Malaysia, Thailand, etc. in terms of the plant and animal life. The Indonesian province of Papua, which shares the land of New Guinea, has biological life more similar to that of Australia.

Because Indonesia is an island nation, it has an immense amount of coastline, totaling nearly 55,000 kilometers. In addition, there are many lakes and rivers running through Indonesia. While none are as significant as the Nile or Yangtze, they provide a dependable source of transportation and are used to produce electricity. Considering the coastline and the number of lakes and rivers, it is easy to see that a great number of people live near water.

**Climate**

The climate of Indonesia is tropical where it is hot (21-33°C) and humid (75-100 %RH) all the time, especially in the coastal regions. Temperatures are slightly lower in areas of higher elevation. Rainfall occurs much of the year, the greatest being in December and January. Annual rainfall averages 1,500 to 3,000 millimeters with some mountain regions receiving 6,100 millimeters per year. Much of Indonesia’s weather is dependent on monsoons having two major seasons. The (relatively) dry season, as a result of the East monsoon, is June through September. The wet season, being November through February, is based on the West monsoon.

**History**

It is believed that the island of Java was the first to be inhabited. Early on, influence was primarily Hindu. Around the 14th century, Islam was brought to Indonesia through Arab spice
Some time later (16th century), the Portuguese attempted to dominate the spice trade in Indonesia. Ultimately, the Dutch overruled the Portuguese and began settling Indonesia during the 17th century and so it remained except for Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945 ending with World War II. The Dutch East Indies became officially known as Dutch colonies by the Treaty of Paris in 1815. During this time, Indonesia was quite profitable to the Dutch.

On August 17, 1945, Indonesia declared its independence and turmoil ensued. The Netherlands did not officially recognize Indonesia as an independent state until December 27, 1949 when the Republic of Indonesia was formed. This democratic society was maintained under the rule of Sukarno, the country’s first president. The country’s second president, Suharto, lead Indonesia in an authoritarian fashion with much corruption until he was forced out of office as a result of the Revolution of 1998 when democracy was restored.

**Important Dates**

One important date in the history of Indonesia is its National Freedom Day, which is celebrated each year on August 17, corresponding to the date that Indonesia declared its independence from the Netherlands in 1945. Another important date is August 18, 1945 when Indonesia adopted its constitution. The cabinet, designed to assist the President, was formed on September 5, 1945. On December 27, 1949, the Netherlands recognized Indonesia as an independent state. Indonesia later became a member of the United Nations on September 28, 1950.

On December 26, 2004, a massive earthquake occurred in the Indian Ocean causing a devastating tsunami. Indonesia’s Sumatra, located approximately 150 km from the epicenter, was hard hit. In all, the Indonesian death toll was estimated at 165,000 people. The survivors were then left in desolation having all infrastructure completely destroyed.
National days celebrated in Indonesia include New Year’s Day (January 1), National Education Day (May 2), National Awakening Day (May 20), National Children’s Day (July 23), National Freedom Day (August 17), National Sports Day (September 8), Pancasila Sanctity Day (October 1), Armed Forces Day (October 5), Youth Pledge Day (October 28), Hero’s Day (November 10), and Women’s Day (December 22). Several religious holidays are also observed in Indonesia including the religions of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Population

Indonesia’s population is estimated to reach 245,452,739 in 2006. This reflects a population growth of 1.4% per year. This is down from previous decades and much lower than other countries with comparable income levels. Per square kilometer, there is an average of 136 people. However, more than half the population lives on the island of Java. To alleviate some of the crowding problems on this island, the government has offered grants and other incentives to those who move to outer islands. The indigenous people of Indonesia are predominantly Javanese (45%) or Sundanese (14%).

With approximately 65% of Indonesia’s population falling between the ages of 15 and 64, the median age is nearly 27 years old and life expectancy is about 70 years of age with women living approximately 6 years longer than men.
Currency

The Rupiah is the official currency of Indonesia. One United States Dollar (USD) equaled approximately 9,000 Indonesian Rupiahs (IDR) in August 2006. Rupiahs come in paper bills in denominations of 100, 500, 1000, 5000, 10000, 20000 and 50000. More recently a plastic bill worth 100000 rupiahs was minted. Rupiahs also come in the form of coins in denominations of 25, 50, 100, 500 and 1000.

Education

Approximately 90% of Indonesia’s children go to primary school. This is considered to be elementary education which lasts for 6 years. However, there are regional differences in education, i.e., some regions cannot afford school buildings and textbooks, and there is a shortage of teachers. Gender differences were common in the past with more boys attending school than girls. More recently, these numbers have grown more equal. Children are now afforded 3 years of lower secondary school but enrollment is lower, and enrollment is still lower for the optional 3 years of upper secondary school. Indonesia is also home to vocational institutes as well as 50 public universities and over 1,000 private universities.

Language

The official language of Indonesia is Bahasa Indonesia. Indonesians may also speak English, especially in tourist areas, as well as Dutch and local dialects. In all, over 500 local dialects are spoken. Since Indonesia’s independence in 1949, the Bahasa Indonesia language has worked to unify the people and it is now used by most television stations, newspapers and schools.
Religion

Over 80% of Indonesians are Muslim (the largest population in the world) and 5 to 10% are Christians (Protestant and Roman Catholic). A mixture of other religions (including Hinduism and Buddhism) makes up the remaining 10%. Religious freedom is a right enabled by the Indonesian Constitution.

Agriculture

Indonesia has strong agrarian roots, raising such agricultural products as rice, corn, cassava, tapioca, peanuts, cocoa, coffee, poultry, beef, pork, eggs, soybeans, and spices. Over the years, rice has been the staple crop. Approximately 11% of Indonesia’s land is suitable for cultivation. An important sector of Indonesia is forestry and fishing. Shrimp has become a major earner for Indonesia. Rubber and palm oil are also grown on plantations. Agriculture makes up approximately 13% of Indonesia’s GDP and 47% of the work force.

Trade

Indonesia’s natural resources include crude oil, petroleum, tin, natural gas, nickel, timber, bauxite, copper, coal, gold, and silver. Industries related to oil make up approximately half of Indonesia’s export earnings but non-oil exports are necessary to the expansion of Indonesia’s trade. Indonesia is also involved in textiles, production of apparel and footwear, and manufacture of chemical fertilizers and plywood. Japan and the United States are Indonesia’s largest export partners with Japan and China being the largest import partners. Tourism is increasing in importance as a source of revenue.

Food

Rice is largely the staple food of Indonesia. Traditionally, corn, sago, cassava and sweet potatoes were also frequently consumed. Fish and other seafood (lobster, oysters,
shrimp) are popular due to their abundance and availability. Fish is consumed in a variety of ways, including fresh, smoked and dried. Many Indonesian dishes are made with coconut in a variety of forms (milk, oil, etc.).

**Landmarks**

The capital of Indonesia is Jakarta on the island of Java. Besides its Dutch heritage, evident in buildings and monuments, Jakarta offers such landmarks as the Central Museum, Istiqal Mosque, historic Portuguese church, Borobudur Buddhist monument and Prambanan Hindu temple. The National Museum is one of Southeast Asia’s greatest alongside the Textile Museum and the Abri Satriamandala Army Museum. Tamin Mini Indonesia is a theme park in Jakarta that celebrates the diverse cultural background of Indonesia.

Java and other islands are great places to see mountains, volcanoes and hot springs. There are also many sultan palaces and Indonesia offers many monuments to royalty and war heroes. The Bogor Botanical Garden is a beautiful place to visit with more than 15,000 horticultural species. The Bali Hall of Justice is also a popular tour stop where paintings line the ceiling. In adjacent scenes, one will show the crime and the other will show the appropriate punishment.

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