**Libya**

**Location**

The nation of Libya is located in North Africa and covers approximately one million seven hundred fifty square kilometers, which is slightly larger than the United State’s Alaska. It is one of the largest countries in Africa. Libya lies in the geographic coordinates 25°N and 17°E. It is bordered in the north by the Mediterranean Sea and by Niger and Chad in the south. Libya’s western border connects to Algeria and Tunisia, and connects to Egypt and Sudan in the east.

**Geography**

The highest point in Libya is the Bikku Bitti, also known as Bette Peak, which stands at seven thousand four hundred and thirty eight feet at its highest point. It is located in the Tibesti Mountains in southern Libya near the Chadian border.

The Sahara, an immense North African desert, covers most of Libya. Much of the country’s land consists of barren, rock-strewn plains and sand sea, with flat to underlying plains, plateaus, and depressions. Two small areas of hills ascend in the northwest and northeast, and the Tibesti mountains rise near the southern border. There are no permanent rivers or streams in Libya. The coastline is sunken near the center by the Gulf of Sidra, where barren desert reaches the Mediterranean Sea.

Libya is divided into three natural regions. The first and largest, to the east of the Gulf of Sidra, is Cyrenaica, which occupies the plateau of Jabal al Akhdar. The majority of the area of Cyrenaica is covered with sand dunes, especially along the border with Egypt. Several oases are found along the western edge of the Libyan Desert. To the west of the Gulf of Sidra lies the second agricultural region of
Tripolitania. The Jefara plain stretches along the Mediterranean coast of Tripolitania, west of the Gulf of Sidra. The capital city of Tripoli is located here. Most of Libya’s population lives in the Jefara, a semiarid, sandy coastal plain. Several well-irrigated areas in the region serve as important agricultural resources. Hundreds of miles to the south, in southwestern Libya, is the third natural region, the basin of Fezzan. The Fezzan basin is a sandy area with strewn oases, where life depends upon water provided by wells and springs. To the southeast, the land again rises to a desert plateau and along the southern border of Libya are the Tibesti Mountains.

Climate

Because Libya is ninety percent desert or semi desert, the climate there does not vary much across the country. Most of Libya has an arid, desert climate year-round. Along the coast, however, there are areas with a Mediterranean climate illustrated with hot, dry summers and mild, wetter winters. The plateau and mountainous areas are faintly more humid. Temperatures are much hotter south of the northern highlands where rainfall is at a minimum. In the capital city of Libya, average daily temperatures range from 8° to 16°C (47° to 61°F) in January and from 22° to 29°C (71° to 85°F) in July. The highest temperature ever recorded on Earth occurred at Al ‘Aziziyah, where the temperature peaked at 58°C (136°F) in 1922.

History

The Berber tribes were the first to occupy Libya. In the 7th century B.C., Phoenicians colonized Cyrenaica, the eastern part of Libya, and Greeks colonized Tripolitania, the western part. Beginning in the 16th century, both Tripolitania and Cyrenaica technically became part of the Ottoman Empire. Tripolitania was one of the outposts for the Barbary pirates who attacked Mediterranean merchant ships or required them to pay tribute. In 1801, the pasha of Tripoli raised the price of tribute, which led to the Tripolitan war with the United States. Then a peace treaty was signed, and U.S. ships no longer
had to pay tribute to Tripoli. Following the eruption of conflict between Italy and Turkey in 1911, Italian troops occupied Tripoli. Libyans kept fighting the Italians for three years, by which time Italy controlled most of the land. Italy officially united Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in 1934 as the colony of Libya. Libya was the scene of much desert fighting during World War II. In 1949, the UN voted that Libya should become independent, and in 1951 it became the United Kingdom of Libya. Oil was discovered seven years later.

In 1969, Col. Muammar al-Qaddafi overthrew the king and revolutionized the country, making it a pro-Arabic, anti-Western, Islamic republic with socialist teachings and his own political system called the Third Universal Theory. In 1988, a plane exploded over Scotland, and two Libyan intelligence agents were indicted. At first Qaddafi refused to turn the men over, which lead to the UN approving trade and traffic embargos. Then Qaddafi turned over the men, who were then tried for murder, but the UN did not remove its sanctions for four years until Libya finally admitted to the Scotland bombing, and to two other terrorist attacks. After months of secret talks with the U.S. and Britain, Qaddafi decided in 2003 to announce that he would give up the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and submit to full UN weapons inspections. Three years later, the U.S. announced it would restore full diplomatic relations with Libya after twenty five years.

Important Dates

Important dates on Libya’s calendar are March 2 – People’s Power Declaration, March 28 – British Evacuation Day, April 22 – Earth Day, June 11 – Evacuation Day, September 1 – National Day, October 26 – Deportation Day. Other important events that change in date depending on the year are
Ashura, Prophet’s Anniversary, Ascension of Mohammed, Eid-ul-Adha Feast of the Sacrifice, and El am Hejir New Year.

**Population**

The population of Libya in 2008 was approximately six million people, including one hundred sixty non-nationals. Today only three percent are of non-Arab decent. The population growth rate is 2.216 percent, with a median age of 23.7 years. The majority of the population is between the ages of fifteen and sixty four years and approximately one third less than fourteen years of age. Less than five percent of the population survive over the age of sixty five, but have a life expectancy of seventy seven years. About ten thousand of the Libyan people are living with HIV/AIDS.

**Currency**

The official currency of Libya is the Libyan dinar. The Libyan dinar is made up of 1000 dirham and is often presented with the symbol LYD. In Libya, the dinar is often called jni or jneh. At first, the coins were in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 dirham which bore the coat of arms of the Federation of Arab Republics. These were followed by a second series of coins, in the same denominations, which bore a design of a horseman in place of the arms. ¼ and ½ dinar coins were issued later. Banknotes are currently in denominations of ¼, ½, 1, 5, 10, 20, with 50 added just recently. The current U.S. exchange rate is 1.00 LYD = 0.76 USD.

**Education**

Primary education in Libya is free and essential. The Qaddafi government has placed emphasis on education, especially since the government has been making a large profit on oil exports. New schools have opened, and more teachers have been trained. About ninety two percent of the male population over fifteen years of age are literate, and about seventy percent of the female adult
population are. The school life expectancy of the population is an average of seventeen years of age for both genders. Libya has a total of five universities, the largest of which was Al-Fateh University in Tripoli.

Language

The official language of Libya is Arabic, although Italian and English are also widely understood in major cities, mainly due to trade. The Berber language Tamazight is spoken in the very few Berber villages and communities. The government discourages the use of foreign languages.

Religion

The official religion of Libya is Islam, but most all Libyans are Sunni Muslim, with over ninetyseven percent of the population participating. Sunni Muslims believe that Muhammad intended that the Muslim community choose a successor by consensus to lead the theocracy he had set up.

Agriculture

Only slightly over one percent of Libyan land is arable, so therefore approximately seventy five percent of Libya’s food has to be imported. Most of the arable land and pasture of Libya is in Tripolitania. Cultivation for crops in the eastern and southern regions is sporadic and dependent on rainfall. Agricultural production has risen as a result of irrigation projects and the use of fertilizer. Some grain products produced in Libya include wheat, barley, olives, dates, watermelons, citrus fruits, tomatoes, peanuts, and soybeans. Principal livestock include sheep, goats, cattle, camels, and poultry.

Trade
The Libyan economy mostly depends on the revenues gained from oil, which contributes to about ninety five percent of export earnings. Libya gains approximately sixty six billion dollars from crude oil, refined petroleum products, natural gas, and chemicals. Libya’s main export partner is Italy, contributing over forty percent. Following close behind are Germany, United States, Spain, and France.

The major imports of Libya are machinery, semi-finished goods, food, transport equipment, and consumer products. These make up a little over twenty billion dollars. Like in exports, Italy is the main import partner as well, but Germany, China, Tunisia, France, Turkey, and the United States import from Libya.

Food

Libyan cuisine is a mixture of Arabic and Mediterranean, with a strong Italian influence. One can tell that Libya was an Italian colony by the popularity of pasta on its menus. One of the most popular meals in the Libyan cuisine is a Batata mubatana filled potato. This dish consists of fried potato pieces filled with spiced minced meat and covered by egg and breadcrumbs.

Libyans prefer to eat at home, except on Fridays, when they enjoy picnics at the beach with their family. Restaurants and cafes are mainly used by foreigners.

All alcoholic drinks are banned in Libya, in accordance with the laws of Islam. Local brews are available, but are strictly illegal and of poor quality. Bottled mineral water is widely consumed due to the lack of good quality well water. Many different sodas are also available for consumption. Libyan tea is a thick beverage served in a small glass, often accompanied by mints or peanuts.

Landmarks

There are numerous sites to visit and tour while in Libya. Leptis Magna has deservedly earned a reputation of having the most complete and impressive Roman ruins in the entire North Africa. Leptis
Magna was originally a Berber settlement. Sabratha is another of Libya’s common tourist sites, a great archeological site of an old city. Ghadames is one of Libya's highlights. As a matter of fact, it is a highlight of the whole of Sahara, often called "the Jewel of Sahara". Old Roman cities are fairly well represented all over North Africa, but it proves difficult to find any better site of Greek ruins than Cyrene. Cyrene lies at the beginning of the beautiful Akhdar Mountains. Tourists also enjoy going to the numerous beaches off of the north coast of Libya. These are just a few of the many attractions a visitor would enjoy while in Libya.

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