**MAURITANIA**

**Location**

Mauritania is located in North West Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, Cameroon, Algeria to the northeast, Mali to the southeast, Senegal to the south, and the Western Sahara to the north. Mauritania has a land area of 400,385 square miles (1,037,000 square kilometers), more than three quarters of which is made up of the Sahara desert and the semiarid Sahelian zone. The remaining portion lies along the Senegal River Valley in the extreme south and southeast.

**Geography**

In the southern region, most people engage in agriculture and livestock raising. The people in the south are settled black African farmers, whereas in the north the people have a nomadic lifestyle. The capital, Nouakchott, is on the the Atlantic coast. It was chosen a year before independence in 1960. Because the French wanted to transfer power to their Arab-Berber allies, the idea of having major cities such as Rosso or Kaedi as the capital was ruled out.

**Climate**

Mauritania has four climatic zones, although in general it has a dry tropical climate characterized by sparse and sporadic rainfall. (1.) The Chemama zone which has a rainy season from May to September while tornadoes are also common. The Sahelian zone which has decreasing rainfall northward and an average annual precipitation, in the south, of around 350 mm (14 inches). (3.) The coastal zone which is humid but with a temperate climate, receives less than 25 mm (1 inches) of annual precipitation. (4.) The Saharan zone receives 25 to 127 mm (1 to 5 inches) of
annual precipitation with a rainy season from July to September. The Harmattan, which is a dry and dust laden wind from the Sahara Desert, intensifies the conditions. Average temperature ranges in Nouakchott are from 13 to 28 degrees Celsius (55 to 82 degrees Fahrenheit) in December to 24 to 34 degrees Celsius (75 to 97 degrees Fahrenheit) in September.

**History**

In 1946 Mauritania became an overseas territory in the French Union and in Nov. 1958 it became a self-governing state in the French Community. On Nov. 28, 1960 Mauritania became a fully independent Islamic Republic. Morocco claimed that Mauritania was historically Moroccan territory and did not recognize Mauritania's independence until 1969. May 1961 Mauritania adopted a constitution that established a presidential system of government and Mokhtar Ould Daddah was elected President in Aug. During 1965, a constitutional amendment officially established the country as a single party state. In 1973 Mauritania joined the Arab League. On 1976 Spain gave up control of its overseas province of Spanish Sahara (Western Sahara) while Mauritania and Morocco invaded and occupied it. Complete independence was attained on 28 November 1960.

**Important Dates**

Mauritania's major national holiday is Independence Day (November 28). There are two major Islamic holidays observed in Mauritania. One is Eid al-Fitr, which comes at the end of the month of fasting called Ramadan. It is celebrated for three days. The other major Muslim holiday is Eid al-Adha, which commemorates the willingness of the Prophet Abraham to obey God's command,
even when it meant sacrificing his own son. Traditionally, Islamic holidays are celebrated by wearing new clothes and cooking grilled meat. Girls color their hands with henna (a natural dye).

**Population**

According to the census of 2008, Mauritania population estimated 3,364,940 million. Mauritania Population comprises people from different racial groups and religions. About two-fifths of Mauritania Population is made up people belonging to black African and mixed Moor heritages. Another 30 percent of the population in Mauritania consists exceptionally of the Moors, who are direct descendents of the Berbers and the mixed Arabians, many of whom were nomadic in nature. More than 90 percent of the Mauritanian population lives in the southern area of the country. Also about 30 percent of the Mauritanian people are composed of the black African farmers, settled permanently on the Senegal River valley.

**Currency**: The official currency is the Ouguiya (UM) divided into 5 Khoums.

**Education**

The French colonial administration established a system of public schools in Mauritania. The literacy rate of Mauritania remains poor, right above 51.2%. School is compulsory for all children and free for all. But for many children there exist no service. It is only in the cities that proper schools are found. 83% of the children attend school, while 21% attend secondary school.

**Language**
The official languages of Mauritania are Arabic and French. The Moors of Arab / Berber stock, speaking Hassaniya dialects of Arabic, comprise the majority of the people. Other dialects include Soninke, Pulaar and Wolof. English is rarely spoken.

**Religion**

Islam is the official religion for Mauritania people. Despite ethnic and cultural differences among Mauritanians they are all bound by a common Muslim attachment to the Malekite sect. The key values are belief in God, honor, respect, and service to the community, generosity, hospitality, endurance, and patience; Islamic teaching prepares Muslims to serve Allah and the community of believers by learning the Koran and practicing the five pillars of Islam. The most important qualities in a "good" child are respect and service to the parents and the community, truthfulness, learning, prayer, and politeness. Parents believe that children are what they inherit and learn from their parents. If the mother is of good character, her children will be good.

**Agriculture**

Although it is a large country, most of the Mauritania is deserts. Most farmers are engaged in subsistence agriculture and never buy food outside their households. Farms produce dates, millet, sorghum, and root crops, while herders raise cattle and sheep. Fishing is the second largest foreign revenue source after mining.

**Trade**
Iron ore, copper, and fish are sent to the European Union and Japan, and animals are sold to Senegal. Imports consist of food, machinery, and weapons. There is much informal trade with neighboring African countries. Gum Arabic and salt also are sold abroad.

FOOD

Lunch is the biggest meal of the day in Mauritania. Commonly, villagers eat a spicy fish-and-vegetable stew with rice for lunch. Another popular Mauritanian lunch is spicy rice mixed with tishtar, or small pieces of dried meat. A common dinner meal is couscous. This consists of semolina wheat sprinkled with oil and water and rolled into tiny grains. Couscous can be mixed with a number of sauces. In some parts of Mauritania, couscous is known as lachiri.

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