Western Sahara

- **Location**

  Western Sahara is an area in Saharan Africa which is located in northwestern Africa, surrounded by Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Atlantic Ocean. Western Sahara is the only country in Africa which still does not have a government and has not gained full independence. Western Sahara was a Spanish colony but now is a region contested by Morocco and the Polisario Front.

- **Geography**

  Western Sahara is typically a low, flat desert with large areas of rocky and sandy surfaces containing large to small mountains in the south and northeast portion of the country. Western Sahara can be divided into three different areas: the rocky desert of the Atlas Mountains, the Zemmour hills, the region between Oued Draa and the Jat River, and the Rio de Oro which is full of flat low lying plains and sand dunes in the southeast. Geographic coordinates in Western Sahara is 24°30′N and 13°00′W, with a total area is 266,000sq km, and a coastline of 1,110km. Since Western Sahara is mainly deserted and the weather is hot and dry, it has a lack of arable land and water is sparse.

- **Climate**

  According to “Western Sahara” by Fr.Bill Turnbull, Western Sahara is a dry desert, the Climate is extremely hot during the summer time and extremely cold in winter. There is sometimes rainfall in Jat and Draa areas.. The temperature is between 120 to 140°F (50 to 60°C) in the summer and below freezing in the winter.

- **History**

  According to “Western Sahara Online”, the earliest record about the Western Sahara history
was around 1000 BC. During 1000 BC, Sanhaja Berber first migrated into Western Sahara, and then in 700-900 BC Zenata berbers controlled the northwestern part of the Sahara and also brought Islam and the Arabic language into Sahara. In 19th century, the Spanish controlled the southern coastal district which was called Rio de Oro, and later they also inhabited the northern internal region, Saguia el Hamra. Later the Spanish united the Rio de Oro and Saguia el Hamra areas, and it became a very well-known as Spanish Sahara in 1958. In December, 1965, the U.N. General Assembly stated that the Saharawis have the absolute right of self-determination and requested Spain to end its colonial rule. After that, both Morocco and Mauritania wanted to control and divide Western Sahara. At the same time, the native Saharawis began to fight for their own independence. Now Western Sahara is controlled by Morocco and the Polisario Front (Popular Front for the Liberation of the Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro), which in February 1976 officially stated a government-in-exile of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR).

- **Population**

  Saharawis, a mixture of indigenous Arabs and Berbers people, is the native population of Western Sahara. It is very difficult to estimate their exact numbers since many of them have moved to other place such as mainland Morocco and Algeria. The population in 2007 was approximately 382,617 people, 45.4% was from age 0-14, 52.2% was from age 15-64 and 2.3% was over 65 years old. The largest city in Western Sahara is EI Aaiun, also the capital, there was about 198,200 people. Sahrawis has an average life expectancy of about 53.5 years, the population density is 4 persons per square mile, the growth rate was 2.9, the birth rate was 40.4, and the infant mortality rate was 72.6.

- **Currency**

  The official currency of Western Sahara is Moroccan dirham (MAD). One Moroccan
dirham (MAD) is equal to 100 centimes and the Current (2008) exchange rate in 2004 was 1 Euro = 11 MAD.

- **Education**

  Because of the incomes and standards of living are substantially below the Moroccan level. People are mostly focused on industry and agriculture. Low education level, people are expected to speak rather than write.

- **Language**

  In Western Sahara, the Sahrawis speak Spanish, the Hassaniya speak Arabic and the Moroccan speak Arabic. Yet, some old signs are still written in Spanish. The education level is likely lower than Morocco, therefore many people speak rather than write. About 90% of Sahrawi live in the refugee camps located in Algeria are educated and some of the older Sahrawi generation still speak Spanish.

- **Religion**

  According to “the CIA World Factbook”, Muslims make up nearly 100% of the population of the Western Sahara.

- **Agriculture**

  Because of the limited unable land, it is hard for Sahrawis to produce large amount of crops. They can only grow fruits and vegetables in a few oases, and they also raise camels, sheep and goats, and fishing occurs in the coastal areas.

- **Trade**

  Western Sahara is poor in natural resources and lacking sufficient rainfall and the Moroccan Government controls all trade and economic activities. According to the “CIA-The World Factbook”, natural resources in Western Sahara are phosphates and iron ore, about 62% of
phosphates is exported at Boukra (near Laayoune). Because of limited transportation network, seaports are very important in Western Sahara, the main seaports are located in Dakhla and Laayoune. Moreover, fuel for the fishing fleet and foodstuffs such as meat and milk are imported from other countries.

- **Food**

Since Western Sahara is mainly desert with limited resource, it has to import foodstuff from other countries. Some foodstuffs such as sugar are subsidized by the Moroccan government to support the Moroccan migration.

- **Landmarks**

There are little wildlife or natural areas in Western Sahara. There are only flat desert with large area of sandy and dunes. There is only one international airport in El Auin, the capital. Flights are all from the Canary Islands, Morocco, and Spain.