

INTERESTING INDONESIA

Fast Facts

Official language: Bahasa Indonesian

President: Megawati Sukarnoputri

Population Density: 119 people per km²

Currency: Rupiah

Total Area: 1,919,440 sq km

Independence Declared from the Netherlands:
Aug. 17, 1945,

Capitol: Jakarta

Population: ranked 4th in the world
228,437,870

Land: 1,826,440 sq km

Water: 93,000 sq km

Recognized Dec. 27, 1949

The Republic of Indonesia is a large archipelago located between the South East Asian peninsula and Australia, between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Indonesia borders Malaysia on the island of Borneo, Papua New Guinea on the island of New Guinea and East Timor on the island of Timor.

Geography

Indonesia's 17,000 islands (ca. 6,000 are inhabited) are scattered around the equator, giving the country a tropical climate. The largest islands are Java, where about half of the population lives, Sumatra, Borneo (partially Malaysian), Irian Jaya (western half of New Guinea) and Sulawesi. Its location on the edges of tectonic plates means Indonesia is frequently hit by earthquakes and the resulting tsunamis. Indonesia is also rich in volcanoes, the most famous being the now disappeared Krakatoa.

History of Indonesia

Under influence of Buddhism, several kingdoms formed on the islands of Sumatra and Java from the 7th to 14th century. The arrival of Arab traders later brought Islam, which became the dominant religion. When the Europeans came in the early 16th century, they found a multitude of small states. These were vulnerable to the Europeans, who were in pursuit of dominating the spice trade. In the 17th century, the Dutch emerged as the most powerful of the Europeans, ousting the British and Portuguese (except for Timor). After the Dutch East India Company was liquidated, its possessions in Indonesia were taken over by the Dutch government. After Japanese occupation ended in 1945, the Indonesians declared independence, led by Sukarno. The Dutch finally accepted in 1949, and Sukarno became the country's first president. After Sukarno's autocratic rule was almost overthrown, army leader Suharto became president in 1968. Suharto enriched himself, but the nation grew poorer and he was forced to step down after massive demonstrations in 1998. The country currently suffers from internal religious struggles and several regions including Aceh and Irian Jaya are striving for independence.

Economy

Indonesia suffered of major economic problems in the late 1990s, but economy has recently stabilised. The country has extensive natural resources like oil and natural gas, tin, copper and gold. Agriculture mainly produces rice, tea, coffee, spices and rubber. Indonesia's major trading partners are Japan, the United States and nearby nations.

Culture of Indonesia

Art forms in Indonesia have been influenced by several cultures. The famous Javanese and Balinese dances, for example, contain aspects of Hindu culture and mythology. Also well-known are the Javanese wayang kulit shadow theatre shows, displaying several mythological events.

Indonesian Demographics

Islam is Indonesia's main religion, to which almost 87% of the people adhere. The remainder of the population is Christian (9%), Buddhist (2%), and Hindu (1%), the latter mainly on the island of Bali. Religious conflicts have been numerous in recent years, especially in the Moluccas. The official language, Bahasa Indonesia - a dialect of Malay - is spoken by almost everyone, although local dialects are usually the primary language.