



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.



BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Indonesia is a huge archipelago of volcanic islands stretching some 3,200 miles (4,800 kilometers) along the equator south, east, and west of Malaysia. The Indonesian government places the official number of islands at more than 17,000. Combined, these islands have an area of 735,358 square miles (1,904,569 square kilometers), about one-fifth the size of the United States. Six thousand islands are inhabited. Indonesia shares the island of New Guinea with the nation of Papua New Guinea. Indonesia's Kalimantan provinces share the island of Borneo with Malaysia and Brunei. The largest of Indonesia's unshared islands are Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Java. Indonesians consider the waters that separate the islands to be integral to their territory, calling their country Tanah Air Kita ("Our Land of Air and Water").

The nation is home to tigers, elephants, monkeys, tropical birds, small deer, Komodo dragons, abundant marine life, and a variety of tropical plants and flowers. Some species are threatened by logging and other industries. Slightly less than two-thirds of Indonesia is covered by rain forests, many of which are in danger of development.

Indonesia has a tropical climate. From November to March, heavy monsoon rains fall. Coastal areas are hot and humid all year. Mountains on the larger islands are cooler, and there are some arid regions. Indonesia's position on the equator gives it a fairly even climate throughout the country. Temperatures average 72 to 84°F (22–29°C) year-round, though the north coastal plains may reach 94°F (34°C) during

the dry season. Indonesia has more than one hundred active volcanoes.

History

Great Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms based in Indonesia once ruled the South Seas. One such kingdom, Srivijaya, prospered in the eighth century. Inland empires warred with coastal shipping kingdoms until the 11th century, when King Airlangga split his empire in East Java between his two sons. Their two grand empires, Majapahit and Singasari, began a golden era of trade, scholarship, and art. Weakened by internal conflicts, the empires fell to a new Islamic state (Demak) in the 15th century. Portuguese traders arrived in the 16th century and the islands' spices became a source of conflict between various European nations during the 17th century. Indonesia was a Dutch colony from 1816 until 1942, when Japan occupied the islands during World War II.

Upon Japan's defeat in 1945, Indonesia proclaimed independence. The Netherlands tried to reestablish its authority, but faced with an armed resistance struggle, it acknowledged Indonesia's sovereignty in 1949. A fledgling multiparty democracy was then established. The republic's first president, Sukarno, replaced this system in 1960 with a policy of "guided democracy" to balance tensions between factions, including the military, Communists, Muslims, and ethnic groups.

Sukarno survived a failed coup attempt in 1965 but was deposed by General Suharto, who had put down the coup, in 1966. Suharto conducted a bloody anti-Communist purge and was elected president in 1968. Emphasizing the need to sacrifice political freedom for economic stability and

development, he tightly controlled the political system and its three legal parties for the next three decades. Discontent with Suharto surfaced in the 1990s as a rising middle class sought greater press and political freedoms to go with economic prosperity. Escalating corruption, economic crisis, and attempted suppression of opposition party leaders nearly caused the economy to collapse in 1998. Large student demonstrations culminated in a devastating riot, and Suharto resigned in disgrace.

Suharto's vice president, B. J. Habibie, took office. He lifted bans on labor unions and political parties, released political prisoners, and scheduled elections for June 1999. Under international pressure, he also agreed to a UN-sponsored referendum on the future of East Timor, a former Portuguese colony Indonesia had invaded in 1975. When East Timorese voters clearly chose independence in the August 1999 referendum, pro-Indonesian militias rioted, burned villages, and killed residents. Indonesia's government accepted the vote, and international peacekeepers restored a measure of calm. In 2002, East Timor completed the transition to full independence.

None of the 48 parties that took part in the 1999 parliamentary elections gained a majority, but Megawati Sukarnoputri (Sukarno's daughter) and her Indonesia Democratic Party for Struggle received the most votes (34 percent). The People's Consultative Assembly (consisting of parliament and provincial representatives) elected Muslim cleric Abdurrahman Wahid as president and Megawati as vice president. Wahid was forced to resign amid corruption charges in 2001. Megawati took over as president until September 2004, when former army general Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono defeated her in direct presidential elections.

In December 2004, a devastating tsunami killed 220,000 people nationwide. Aceh, in northern Sumatra, was the worst-hit region, sparking negotiations to end a 30-year conflict between the government and the separatist Free Aceh Movement. In August 2005, the two sides signed a peace agreement that called for the disarmament of the separatists and the withdrawal of government forces. In return for a form of local autonomy, the rebels put aside demands for full independence. In 2009, a powerful earthquake struck, killing hundreds and leaving many more homeless.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Indonesia's population of nearly 243 million is the fourth largest in the world. The annual population growth rate is 1.1 percent. Some 54 percent of Indonesians live in urban areas. The largest cities are Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung. Java is the most densely populated island, with more than half of the nation's people.

Indonesia is home to 350 distinct ethnic groups; many have their own language and most have their own customs and heritage. Yet Indonesia's motto is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Diverse yet unified). The largest groups are the Javanese (41 percent), Sundanese (15), Madurese (3), and Minangkabau (3). Smaller groups include Chinese, Betawi, Bugis, Banten,

and Banjar. Chinese live mostly in urban areas and control much of Indonesia's private economy.

Language

The official national language is *bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian). It uses the Roman alphabet and has a simple grammatical structure. Related to Malay but continually developing, Indonesian incorporates words from Javanese, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, Hindi, Sanskrit, English, and other languages. More than 100 million people speak Javanese, but relatively few can read its Hindi script or have mastered its complex multilevel grammar. Most people speak Indonesian and their native tongue; there are more than three hundred languages or dialects. English is the leading international language and is taught as a third language in school (after Indonesian and the main ethnic language of the area).

Religion

Most Indonesians (86 percent) are Muslim. Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population; the majority consider themselves only moderately religious. Indonesians have largely adapted the religion to their culture—Hinduism, Buddhism, and animism have influenced beliefs and practices. Muslims believe the *Qur'an* contains the word of *Allah* (God) as revealed to the prophet Muhammad. Devout Muslims express their faith through the Five Pillars of Islam: professing the name of *Allah* and Muhammad as his prophet; praying five times daily; fasting during the holy month of *Ramadan*; donating to the poor; and making a pilgrimage to Makkah, Saudi Arabia, if they can afford it.

The Javanese are predominantly Muslim. Nine percent of the population is Christian (mostly Protestant) and 2 percent is Hindu. Some northern areas are predominantly Christian. The tribes in the Kalimantan provinces and Papuans on New Guinea practice animistic religions or Christianity, maintain tight kinship bonds, and have a clan-oriented economic and social life. The people on Bali are mostly Hindu and belong to traditional kin groups. Many Chinese are Buddhists.

General Attitudes

Indonesians value loyalty to family and friends. They are friendly and quick to smile, even at strangers. They rarely disagree in public and prefer to say *belum* (not yet) instead of *tidak* (no). Laughter is used to diffuse tense situations. Punctuality, while considered important, is not emphasized at the expense of personal relations. A quiet voice, an unassuming attitude, patience, and discretion are appreciated. To embarrass someone is a terrible insult. Indonesians often view Westerners as too quick to anger, too serious about themselves, and too committed to the idea that "time is money."

Urban lifestyles and goals are very different from those in rural areas. Urban parents strive to provide their children with as much education as possible; rural parents, however, consider education beyond elementary school to be a luxury since they often rely on their children for farm labor. The urban consumer class prefers the pursuit of material possessions to traditional rural values. Most adults want their

children to marry someone of the same social status and religion.

Personal Appearance

Cleanliness and modest dress are hallmarks of an Indonesian's appearance. Indonesians bathe at least twice daily. During *sore* (just before evening), when temperatures cool and the day's work is done, people bathe and dress in traditional attire to relax or visit.

Western designer fashions are popular among urban youth. Businessmen wear a shirt and tie; factory workers, teachers, and store employees wear uniforms. Village men wear a shirt with shorts or a *sarong* (a long cloth wrapped around the waist). Village women wear a blouse with a *sarong*. Urban women wear Western dresses for daily activities, reserving traditional attire for special occasions such as weddings and religious celebrations. For men and women, traditional clothing includes a *sarong* made of *batik* (fabric printed by coating with wax the areas not to be dyed). Authentic *batik* is made by hand. Cheaper, mass-produced *batik* is more common.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Indonesians usually shake hands when they greet. Muslim men may follow a handshake by touching their right palm to their heart in a show of friendship. Women often brush cheeks. When meeting someone for the first time, a person may shake hands and state his or her name. Otherwise, the most common verbal greeting among Indonesians is *Assalamu alaikum* (Peace be upon you); the reply is *Wa'alaikum salaam* (And peace be upon you). Some people say *Bagaimana kabarnya?* (How is your news?). The question that nearly always follows is *Dari mana?* (Where are you coming from?).

Older individuals are addressed respectfully as *ibu* (mother) or *bapak* (father) alone or followed by their first name. Most Indonesians, especially the Javanese, are addressed by their first names, even in formal situations. Professional or religious titles follow the name if appropriate.

Gestures

It is polite to beckon (waving all fingers with the palm facing down) only to children, close friends, or pedicab drivers. To otherwise get someone's attention, people wait to be noticed, clear their throat, or clap their hands—depending on their status or the situation. Indonesians never touch the head of someone who is older or of higher status. They do not use the left hand to touch others, point, eat, or give or receive objects. To point at something, many people use the thumb instead of a finger. Standing with one's hands in the pockets or on the hips is a sign of defiance or arrogance. Crossing the legs usually is inappropriate, but if crossed, one knee should be over the other (not an ankle on the knee). The bottom of one's foot may not point toward another person.

Visiting

Indonesians believe visits bring honor to the host, and they warmly welcome all guests. Unannounced visits between friends and relatives can occur at any time. Reciprocal visits are very important. It is polite for guests to remove their footwear when entering a home or a carpeted room.

Visitors sit when invited to, and they rise when the host or hostess enters the room. Hosts often serve tea or coffee and crackers or cookies. Guests wait to eat until urged several times or until the hosts eat. Gifts are not expected of guests, although people often take food to their hosts. More Westernized Indonesians also appreciate flowers. Hosts accept gifts graciously because it is impolite to refuse them, but they do not open wrapped gifts in the giver's presence.

Eating

Indonesians eat three meals and several snacks throughout the day. Breakfast is usually rice or noodles, while the midday meal features rice, vegetables, and meat. The family tries to eat together for the midday meal. Leftovers are eaten for dinner. Depending on the food and family, Indonesians may eat with the right hand, use a spoon alone, or use a spoon and fork. Chinese use chopsticks also. The mother often supervises the meal and feeds the children; she eats later. The father takes the first portion of food, and then all others can take what they want, beginning with the oldest. People wash their hands in a bowl of water before and after eating such finger foods as fried chicken. Conversation is minimal.

Indonesians purchase some portion of their daily meals at a *gerobak jualan* (mobile eatery), from vendors called *kaki lima* ("five feet," meaning two of a man and three of a cart). Housewives might send a child or family servant (even a middle class family might hire a young girl as a domestic servant) to a *gerobak jualan* to buy chicken, vegetables, or shredded fruit.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Indonesian families are traditionally large, but a "two (children) is enough" campaign has influenced young families. The father is head of the family, but the mother has considerable authority in the household. If grandparents live in the home, they offer advice and consider it their duty to remind the parents of their religious and social obligations. If it is the parents who have moved in with the grandparents, the grandfather is head of the family and has ultimate authority. Children are taught to respect and obey their elders. Parents will sacrifice much to provide materially for their children, but they are mostly intent on raising moral, polite, and religious individuals. A child is considered an adult when he or she marries. Adult children are expected to visit their parents often and support them if necessary. Urban women often are educated and have jobs outside the home; many hold government positions.

Housing

In major cities, many people live in Western-style apartments or houses. Particularly in Jakarta and on the island of Bali,

these homes can be extremely expensive. Many city-based Indonesians rent, but even the costs of renting are very high. In Jakarta and other areas, rent has to be paid one or two years in advance. Inside urban homes, decoration often follows Western styles. Many contain couches, loveseats, and other furniture typically found in Western houses. However, Indonesians usually give local touches to their homes. For example, residents of West Java may decorate their homes with local arts and crafts, such as distinctive *batik* wall hangings, statues, ceramics, and decorative chess sets. In rural areas, houses are generally made of bamboo. These houses are sturdy and cool and provide good protection against most weather. In both urban and rural areas, homes have a dedicated prayer area. It is usually decorated with a large rug, and it tends to be the cleanest part of the house.

Dating and Marriage

In Jakarta and other urban areas, the trend is for young people to go out without parental approval. However, Western-style dating is uncommon in rural areas, where a young man must visit a young woman's home several times to get acquainted with the family before the two can go on a date. If the young woman does not want to go, she may tell the young man to stop coming to the home. Arranged marriages have given way to marriages of individual choice in urban areas, but they are still common in rural areas. Rural women often marry by the time they are 20.

The Muslim wedding binds together not only the bride and groom but also their families. In the ceremony, the groom signs a marriage contract promising to provide well for the woman and listing how much “wedding gold” or money he is giving her as her own. A feast or grand reception follows the wedding. A woman can divorce a man who fails to live up to the specific promises in the wedding contract. However, divorce is rare and carries a social stigma. Although polygamy is legal, few men have more than one wife. Physical relationships outside of marriage are not tolerated in most regions.

Life Cycle

Customs surrounding the birth of a child include a celebration during the seventh month of a woman's first pregnancy. Family members and friends gather together, and a religious leader prays for the mother's safety during labor. Forty days after a child's birth, most parents hold another celebration at which the baby's hair is cut for the first time and prayers are offered for his or her future safety and well-being.

Muslims bury their dead as soon as possible. Crying out loud during the burial is generally avoided. Prayers are said through the night after the burial and sometimes for up to three days after that. Forty days and then a thousand days after a death, the family gathers again to offer prayers. Among Hindus in Bali, a cremation ceremony is held. Friends and relatives march down streets playing music and parading the funeral pyre, which is then burned. Over the next few days, ceremonies are held at the home of the deceased. These ensure the safe passage of the person's soul and give friends and relatives an opportunity to pay their respects to the deceased's family.

Diet

Rice is the main staple of the Indonesian diet. Beef and chicken are popular. Devout Muslims do not eat pork or drink alcohol. Coconut milk is used to cook many dishes. Common vegetables include carrots, green beans, potatoes, and cabbage. *Nasi goreng* (fried rice) is eaten at any meal. Other dishes typical in most areas are *Rendang Padang* (a spicy meat dish cooked in garlic, shallots, ginger, chilies, lemongrass, and coconut milk), *sop bening* (vegetable soup), *gado-gado* (vegetables and tofu topped with peanut sauce), and *sambal* (any foods fried with chilies). Indonesians also enjoy seafood, tofu, *kecap manis* (a sweet dark sauce), and *nasi campur* (a Javanese vegetable dish with white rice, noodles, and chicken). Dessert often consists of fresh fruit.

Recreation

Indonesian men and women participate in or watch sports of all types. Soccer is the country's most popular sport. Basketball is growing in popularity as a participant and spectator sport. Indonesians are among the best in the world at badminton. They also enjoy volleyball, tennis, cycling, and martial arts. Watching television is a common leisure activity. Many people play chess. Rural Indonesians have less leisure time and engage in fewer sporting events, but both rural and urban people enjoy making and flying kites.

The Arts

Favorite Indonesian art forms include music, dance, and drama. Gongs and drums are prominent in folk music. *Gamelan* (traditional music ensembles) include such instruments as the *rebab* (a bowed instrument) and the *saron demung* (similar to a xylophone). Puppet theater, especially with shadow puppets (*wayang kulit*), is popular. Some common dances are mask dances (*wayang topeng*), in which dancers act out legends and stories; trance dances; and the *baris gede*, a warrior dance. Balinese dance is renowned for its subtle, graceful movements. Other art forms include *batik*-printing, carving, painting, and weaving. In many areas, legends and myths are preserved through a rich oral history.

Holidays

Indonesians celebrate International New Year's Day (1 Jan.), Easter, Ascension, *Lebaran* or *Idul-Fitri* (a feast at the end of *Ramadan*), Independence Day (17 Aug.), *Idul-Adha* (Feast of the Sacrifice, honoring Abraham), and *Maharram* (Muslim New Year). During *Ramadan*, Muslims do not eat or drink from sunrise to sundown but eat a family meal in the evening and before sunrise. The nation marks *Waisak* (a Buddhist holiday) and *Nyepi* (Hindu New Year). Christians celebrate Christmas and Easter. A variety of festivals common to certain islands or ethnic groups are held throughout the year.

SOCIETY

Government

Indonesia is a democratic republic headed by a president (currently Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) as chief of state and

head of government. The president and vice president are directly elected to five-year terms. The 560 members of Indonesia's unicameral parliament, the House of Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, or DPR), also serve five-year terms. The House of Regional Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Daerah*, or DPD) provides input to the DPR on regional issues. The People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*, or MPR) includes members from the DPR and DPD and takes part in measures to impeach the president and amend the constitution. The government is often a coalition of several small parties that frequently disagree, but all parties must accept a national philosophy called *pancasila* (five principles): belief in one God, humanism, unity of the state, consensus, and social justice. Indonesians who are married or are age 17 and older are eligible to vote.

Economy

Indonesia is rich in natural resources, but many of them remain undeveloped. Agriculture employs roughly 45 percent of the labor force. Primary crops include rice, rubber, soybeans, copra, tea, cassava, palm oil, coffee, and peanuts. Forestry and fishing are also important. Petroleum, liquid natural gas, and manufactured goods account for the bulk of export earnings. Cottage industries produce consumer items such as clothing and shoes for the global market. The number of employees per enterprise is relatively small. The economy is hindered by the slow pace of privatization and a lack of foreign investment. The currency is the Indonesian *rupiah* (IDR).

Transportation and Communications

Middle-class Indonesians have private cars, but others use public transportation: trains, taxis, buses, minibuses, motorcycle taxis, and pedicabs. Buses are crowded, and roads outside urban areas are not well maintained. Traffic jams and accidents are common. Ferries and airplanes connect islands. Rural people travel by motorcycle, bicycle, or on foot. Traffic moves on the left side of the road. Phones are more common in cities than in rural areas. Television broadcasters include a government station and numerous private stations. Many private radio stations also operate. Strict media censorship was abolished in 1998 to allow for a free press.

Education

Education is compulsory for students between ages six and fifteen, and 95 percent of children begin primary school. While enrollment may be universal in wealthier areas, in rural, poor areas, many children are unable to attend. Still, more than 90 percent of pupils complete elementary school. About 60 percent go on to secondary schools, which are divided between junior and senior levels, each lasting three years. Many middle-class families send their children to private schools to help prepare them for a university (often overseas). Each of Indonesia's provinces has at least one university.

Health

Medical facilities are best in urban areas, but improvements

have been made to rural clinics. Most infants are immunized. Health insurance is neither free nor mandatory. Most people are without insurance, so health care, especially hospital stays, can be very expensive. Traditional medicine is popular as a cheaper alternative. Health concerns include malnutrition, lack of extensive prenatal care, pollution, poor sanitation, unsafe drinking water, and diseases such as cholera, malaria, and dengue fever. Forest fire hazes caused by large logging companies and ash clouds formed by active volcanoes hang over many areas; respiratory ailments are common.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

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POPULATION & AREA

Population	242,968,342 (rank=4)
Area, sq. mi.	735,358 (rank=17)
Area, sq. km.	1,904,569

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	108 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	100 of 155 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$4,000
Adult literacy rate	94% (male); 87% (female)
Infant mortality rate	29 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	69 (male); 74 (female)

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).