



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. It has more than one hundred active volcanoes. 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 and slightly larger than the country of Sudan. 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 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 deforestation. Slightly less than two-thirds of Indonesia is covered by rain forests, many of which are in danger of being cut down to make way for residential, agricultural, and industrial expansion.

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.

History

Early Empires

Great Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms based in Indonesia once ruled the South Seas. One such kingdom, Sriwijaya, 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.

Colonization

In 1512, Portuguese traders arrived on the islands and attempted to monopolize the country's valuable spice resources. Throughout the 17th century, the islands' spices became a source of conflict between various European nations. In 1602, the Dutch parliament granted the Dutch East India Company approval of trade activities. The Dutch were successful in taking control of the spice trade and established a strong colonial hold over the country. Indonesia was a Dutch colony from 1816 until 1942, when Japan occupied the islands during World War II.

Independence

Although Japan intended to announce Indonesia's independence in mid-1945, Japan's surrender to the Allies days prior to the announcement led to a unilateral

proclamation of independence by Sukarno, who later became Indonesia's first president. 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. 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.

The New Order

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. Suharto gained support during his promotion of the New Order, as many Indonesians were hopeful he could solve many of the country's problems dating back to its independence. 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 after his predecessor's resignation. 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.

Elections

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.

Natural Disasters

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 West Sumatra, killing hundreds and leaving many more homeless.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Indonesia's population of 248.6 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. Despite the variety of cultures across many different islands, Indonesia's motto is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). The largest groups are the Javanese (41 percent), Sundanese (15), Madurese (3), and Minangkabau (3). Smaller groups include Chinese, Betawi, Bugis, Banten, and Banjar.

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. Most people speak Indonesian and their native tongue; there are more than seven hundred languages or dialects. More than 100 million people speak Javanese, but relatively few can read its Hindi script or have mastered its complex grammar. 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 Islam to their culture—Hinduism, Buddhism, and animism have all 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 Indonesian 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 in Bali are mostly Hindu and belong to traditional kinship groups. Many Chinese are Buddhists.

General Attitudes

Indonesians value loyalty to family and friends. They are friendly and quick to smile, even at strangers. Instead of saying *Tidak* (No), Indonesians indicate their refusal by saying *Terima kasih* (Thank you) while shaking the head and placing a hand in front of the chest with the palm facing the other speaker. Laughter is used to diffuse tense situations. Punctuality, while considered important, is not emphasized at the expense of personal relations. Different cultures in Indonesia tend to have distinctive mannerisms. For example, Javanese speech tends to be characterized by a quiet voice and a slow pace, while Batakese tend to speak loudly, which can be misunderstood by Westerners as anger or aggression. In all cultures, embarrassing someone is a terrible insult. Indonesians often feel Westerners are too quick to anger, take themselves too seriously, and are 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 parents want their children to marry someone of the same social status, religion, and ethnicity.

Personal Appearance

Cleanliness and modest dress are hallmarks of an Indonesian's appearance. 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. 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* (a long cloth wrapped around the waist) 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. Village men wear a shirt with shorts or a *sarong*. Village women wear a *batik daster* (a long, loose-fitting dress that is often used as pajamas).

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Indonesians usually shake hands when they greet. Muslim men may follow a handshake with other men by touching the tips of their right fingers to their heart in a show of friendship. Women often brush cheeks with other women. When men and women shake hands, they generally clasp their own hands together and with fingers interlocked, touch the tips of the other person's clasped hands. When meeting someone for the first time, a person may shake hands and state his or her name. For Muslims, the most common verbal greeting is

Al-salamu alaykum (Peace be upon you); the reply is *Wa alaykum al-salaam* (And peace be upon you). *Bagaimana kabarnya?* (How is your news?) is an Indonesian greeting. The question that nearly always follows is *Dari mana asalnya?* ("Where do you come from?" Meaning "Of what descent are you?").

Indonesians might call slightly older individuals "sister" or "brother" in local dialects (*mbak* and *mas* in Javanese). Older individuals or people of higher rank in office are addressed respectfully as *ibu* (mother) or *bapak* (father). Alternatively, men are called *pak* and women are called *bu*, followed by their first name. A significant number of people in Indonesia, especially the Javanese, have one-word names without surnames—for example, the first two presidents of Indonesia, Sukarno and Suharto. 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 clap their hands, clear their throat, or simply wait to be noticed, 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; the left hand is reserved for personal hygiene. To point at something, many people use the thumb instead of a finger. When passing by an older person or someone of higher rank, one will walk slightly bowed, right arm at the side with the right thumb pointing down. 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 should 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. It is considered impolite to eat without offering guests to join. Most Indonesians say *Makan?* (Eating?) to visitors as a rhetorical invitation. 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. Indonesians typically eat with the right hand. Depending on the food and family, they may use a spoon alone or use a spoon and fork. Chinese use chopsticks as well. The mother often supervises the meal and feeds the children then eats later. The eldest in the family takes the first portion of food, and then the others can take what they want, beginning with the next oldest and continuing down according to age. People wash their hands in a bowl of water before and after eating finger foods, such as fried chicken.

Indonesians purchase some portion of their daily meals at a *gerobak jualan* (mobile eatery), from vendors called *kaki lima* (literally, "five feet"; meaning two feet of a man and three of a cart). The vendors either travel from house to house or stay in a single location. Housewives might buy chicken, vegetables, or shredded fruit from a *tukang sayur* (mobile grocery seller) in the morning as he passes the house. Restaurants that serve ethnic Padang food are popular in every region of Indonesia and offer customers a wide variety of dishes at once but only charge for the ones eaten.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

Indonesian families were traditionally large, as some Indonesian cultures believe that having more children leads to more blessings. However, in response to overpopulation concerns of the 1970s and 1980s (particularly on the island of Java), the government started an advertising campaign advocating two children per family and also made contraception and abortion acceptable and available means of population control. Families now have an average of just over two children.

A family usually consists of a father, mother, and children. If grandparents live in the home, they offer advice and consider it their duty to remind the parents of their religious and social obligations. In such cases, the grandfather is the head of the household and has ultimate authority. Relationships within the extended family are greatly valued. Keeping in touch with extended family is very important, and extended families make a particular effort to include each other in religious festivities, weddings, and events surrounding births and deaths. Elderly people often move in with a grown child when they can no longer care for themselves.

Parents and Children

While parents will sacrifice much to provide materially for their children, their primary concern is with raising polite, moral, and religious individuals. Children are taught to respect and obey their elders. Misbehaving children are typically scolded or physically punished. It is common to hear mothers scolding their children very loudly. Grounding is rarely used as a punishment. Instead, corporal punishment such as spanking is common. Alternatively, the child may be given an extra chore to complete. Under adult supervision, young children help around the house.

Parents will employ all means necessary to provide for their children's education until graduation from university,

including selling their land or other assets. Parents in rural areas who may not be able to afford to send all of their children to school will prioritize their sons over daughters. Teenagers do not have part-time jobs, but adult sons are expected to contribute to the family's finances until they marry and start their own families. Parents expect to provide for their children until they are married, and it is not uncommon for parents to continue assisting their married children financially, helping them with major purchases like cars and homes.

Gender Roles

The head of family is generally the father, who tends to be responsible for providing for the family financially and managing the money; he has the final say in major family decisions. Mothers usually take care of the children and housekeeping and have authority in some child-raising decisions. Girls learn to cook by preparing meals for their families, and a daughter's cooking skills are often a source of pride for her parents. As they grow up, girls are given increasing amounts of responsibility for housekeeping chores until they reach marrying age, at which point their biggest responsibility is to find a husband. After puberty, Indonesian girls were traditionally kept in *dipingit* (seclusion) until they were married, a practice that still exists in some rural areas.

Compared to their rural counterparts, urban women have greater access to education and employment opportunities. It is common for single urban women to attend university or work abroad; however, most parents do not allow unmarried daughters to live alone. Many women face discrimination in the workforce and do not often hold high positions in business, though women hold many government positions. In recent years, awareness of violence against women has increased, and legislative steps have been taken to criminalize domestic abuse. The Minangkabau society, in Sumatra, is matrilineal (inheritance passes from mother to daughter), though men are responsible for religious and political matters.

Housing

Urban

Many urban Indonesians rent their homes, but the cost of rent is high. In Jakarta and other areas, rent has to be paid one or two years in advance. In business or tourist centers, like Jakarta and Bali, homes can be extremely expensive. Nevertheless, mortgages are available, and most Indonesians consider home-ownership a high priority and symbol of status.

In major cities, many people live in apartments or houses built from brick and cement. A typical apartment will include a bedroom, a bathroom, and a joint space for a living room and kitchen. Houses usually have two bedrooms and a bathroom, which is typically located in the back of the home. A portable tub is commonly used to wash clothes; a washing machine might be found in wealthier homes. A portion of the population lives in slums. Housing in slums is generally located near rivers and is made of scrap materials. Shacks generally feature a single room, with no access to toilets or running water.

Rural

Houses in rural and remote areas are made with whatever

materials are readily accessible. Most are made of wood and bamboo and insulated with long grasses and leaves. Roofs may be made of thatch and exterior walls strengthened with brick and cement. These houses are sturdy and cool and provide good protection against most weather conditions. Rural houses feature larger front porches than urban homes. The porch is used as a living room, where guests are entertained and where families spend their afternoons. The typical porch is furnished with a set of chairs, some plants, and a small table. Having a yard outside is important, and home owners typically invest the time to create a garden with flowers, vegetables, herbs, and medicinal plants.

Houses in remote areas tend to be built on stilts to protect the house from floods or wild animals. The space under these houses is often used to raise livestock. Among the Padang tribe of West Sumatra, traditional rural homes (called *rumah gadang*, meaning "big house," or *rumah bagonjong*, meaning "house with the horn-like roof") include roofs with multiple gables and upswept ridges, which symbolize reaching out to heaven. Today, houses with these distinctive roofs are still common in Sumatra, and restaurants all over the nation that serve ethnic Padang food use the same design.

Exteriors and Interiors

Indonesian homes generally reflect a strong European influence, partly as a result of the country's former status as a Dutch colony. Western-style houses in big cities often have Dutch architecture and are furnished with ceramics, marble tables, and European-style sofas. Older Indonesians may decorate with porcelain ornaments, vases, and chandeliers. Chinese influence is seen in Indonesian architecture, which often incorporates *feng shui* (a Chinese system of aesthetics) into the layout. For example, good air circulation is said to invite luck, and houses located on a corner are said to bring better fortune to the owner.

Indonesians also decorate their homes with local crafts. For example, homes in Java may feature statues, wood carvings, ceramics, decorative chess sets, *kris* knives (daggers with a wavy blade), and *batik* (dyed cloth) wall hangings. Muslim homes have a dedicated prayer area, which is usually decorated with a large rug and a cupboard to store additional prayer rugs, prayer beads, and a copy of the *Qur'an*. Houses in Sumatra tend to be colorful, and traditional *songket* textiles (handwoven fabrics of silk or cotton with intricate patterns of silver or gold threads) are usually hung on the walls.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

In urban areas, young people usually date in groups, which do not necessitate parental approval. Parents are informed when a more exclusive relationship is established. Such relationships commonly begin when a man asks a woman to be his girlfriend, sometimes through elaborate measures similar to some Western wedding proposals. This type of 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 date. Dates then usually consist of the couple spending time at the woman's house every weekend, often conversing for an evening on her front porch. In big cities, the man regularly visits the woman's

house, but eating out or going to movies are common dates as well.

For Muslims, courtship is expected to result in marriage, and many young Muslim couples get engaged shortly after becoming acquainted. In conservative Muslim communities, when men or women find someone attractive, they talk to their parents, who will then arrange a formal meeting between the two. If the attraction is mutual, an engagement may immediately be arranged. Engagement enables a couple to spend more time together, though not alone.

For couples in both in urban and rural areas, the possibility of marriage is usually discussed after a year of dating. Because family approval is paramount, couples usually discuss marriage prospects with their families. An engagement ceremony is held if both families approve of the match. Ceremonies vary according to region but typically involve the man and his family coming to the woman's house with elaborate gifts, food, and traditional clothes.

Marriage

Marriage is one of the most deeply rooted institutions in Indonesia. Cohabitation is not legal in Indonesia and is a punishable offense. In urban areas, women often marry in their early twenties, while men may wait until they secure a job that will enable them to support a family. In rural areas, Indonesians generally marry between the ages of 15 and 20, and arranged marriages are common. Such marriages have given way to marriages of choice in urban Indonesia. Indonesian law acknowledges marriage only between men and women of the same religion. Religious affiliation is stated on one's national identity card. Engaged individuals often change their religion in order to be able to legally marry their partners. In Islam, polygamy, although controversial, is legal, with a limit of four wives. Polygamy is uncommon but is found in both urban and rural areas across all socioeconomic classes; however, a husband must be able to care for his wives equally.

Weddings in Indonesia consist of a religious ceremony and a reception. Muslim weddings bind together not only the bride and groom but also their families. The ceremony is officiated by a *penghulu*, an authorized Islamic clergyman. The ceremony is generally attended by family and witnesses—one of whom is normally the father of the bride. In the ceremony, the groom signs a marriage contract promising to provide for his wife and listing how much *mahr* (wedding gold or money) he gives her as a symbol of his ability to provide for her. The groom also provides his bride with *mukena* (white clothing used for prayer), a *sajadah* (prayer rug), *tasbeih* (prayer beads), and a *Qur'an*. A feast or grand reception follows the wedding.

No matter the religion, receptions are often big events with hundreds of guests. The couple usually wears traditional dress and participates in rituals specific to their culture. Javanese couples, for example, wash with a concoction of flowers and water and step on eggs, among other rites, to represent the start of a new life. In Chinese culture, couples present tea to their parents as a sign of respect. In every culture, the reception includes a reception line, where guests congratulate the couple and their parents. Guests commonly give money in red envelopes (*ang pow*), instead of gifts, to help the couple

start their new life. It is common for young married couples to live with either set of parents while saving up to buy their own house.

Divorce

Divorce is regulated with different laws according to religion. A Muslim man, for example, can initiate divorce with his wife by simply saying *Talak* (Divorce). After he has said this word, the woman should not wear makeup or see other men for three months. The husband may choose to reconcile with his wife during this three-month period. This sequence of events can happen up to three times, but after the third utterance of *Talak*, the divorce is final. However, divorce is rare and carries a social stigma, particularly in rural areas. In rural areas, single-parent families are rare because divorce and premarital sexual relationships are highly discouraged. Widows and widowers with young children expect to remarry as soon as possible, though depending on their age, widows may find it difficult to remarry.

Life Cycle

Birth

Ceremonies during pregnancy relate more to tradition than religion. One such ceremony involves the mother being showered with a concoction of water and seven kinds of flowers. This is meant to cleanse the mother and the baby and to ward off bad luck and evil spirits. In Java, the father may drop an egg in a ceremony meant to predict the gender of the baby. If the egg breaks, the baby is predicted to be female. 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.

After the baby is born, ceremonies are centered on wishing for the child's prosperity. Forty days after a child's birth, most parents hold a 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. A child's name is chosen by the parents and usually comes from traditional names within the father's tribe. Most children do not bear their parents' last name; instead, parents create new last names for their children. Common surnames for children include *Putri* (princess) and *Putra* (prince). Indonesians might also have a one-word name with no surname. At age one or two, a ritual is held that is thought to indicate a child's future career path. It involves placing several objects (such as a pen and money) around a room (in Java, in a chicken coop); the object the child chooses represents a future occupation, such as writing (a pen) or business (money).

Milestones

Puberty is a milestone for youth, but few ceremonies mark the transition to adulthood. Hindus in Bali hold a special ceremony in July or August, where teenagers (typically 16-year-olds) enter adulthood by having their teeth lightly filed with an iron file. Doing so is thought to cleanse the body of bad spirits. Indonesian citizens are eligible to vote at age 17.

Death

Death is handled according to the customs of one's religion. Muslim ceremonies for the dead involve cleansing the dead

and warding off bad spirits in preparation for the deceased's journey to the afterlife. Burial traditions do not allow for caskets; Muslims bring the body to the family home, where it is bathed and wrapped in a clean white cloth. After a collective prayer at a mosque, the body is then taken immediately for burial. Crying out loud, at the burial and elsewhere, is generally avoided. Prayers are said through the night after the burial and sometimes for up to three days after that. At 7 days, 40 days, 100 days, and 1,000 days after a death, the family gathers to offer prayers.

Christians and Buddhists usually have an open casket reception, where the family receives guests. Christians commonly bury their dead, while Buddhists cremate them. Among Hindus in Bali, a cremation ceremony is held. Friends and relatives march down streets playing music and parading the funeral bier, which is then burned. Over the next few days, ceremonies are held at the home of the deceased. The ceremonies 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 and is cooked in numerous ways in dishes that include *nasi goreng* (fried rice), *nasi uduk* (coconut rice), *nasi kuning* (turmeric rice), *nasi merah* (red rice), *lontong* (rice cake, usually eaten with *satay*, marinated skewered meat cooked on a grill), and *ketupat* (square rice cake). Beef and chicken are popular meats. Devout Muslims do not eat pork or drink alcohol. Coconut milk is used to cook many dishes. Common vegetables include watercress, spinach, carrots, green beans, potatoes, and cabbage.

Each region in Indonesia has its own traditional dishes. For example, in Padang, famous dishes include *rendang Padang* (meat cooked with garlic, shallots, ginger, chilies, lemongrass, and coconut milk) and *satay Padang* (beef skewers with coconut milk sauce). West Java is famous for its *ayam goreng dan lalapan sambal* (fried chicken with turmeric, raw vegetables, and chilies), *gado-gado* (vegetables and tofu topped with peanut sauce), and *sambal* (chilies with shrimp paste or mango). Central Java offers *nasi campur* (white rice with fried noodles, vegetables, and chicken) and *nasi gudeg* (rice with young jackfruit, cooked with sweet soy sauce, chicken in coconut milk, and cow's skin cooked with chilies). North Sumatra is famous for *saksang* (pork cooked with chilies) and dog meat. Indonesians also enjoy various soy product such as *as tempe* (soybean cake), tofu, and *kecap manis* (a sweet dark soy sauce). Dessert often consists of fresh fruit or food sweetened with brown palm sugar and coconut shavings.

Recreation

Sports

Indonesian men and women participate in and watch sports of all types. Soccer is the country's most popular sport; soccer fields are plentiful in both rural and urban areas. Soccer stadiums are also common and are usually packed during regional games. Soccer fans are very passionate and form clubs supporting their favorite teams. Watching soccer on TV

(either in a home or a public venue) is also a national pastime, particularly during the World Cup. A recent trend in bigger cities is to play *futsal* (a compact, indoor version of soccer). *Futsal* arenas can be found in office buildings and malls, and the game is a common after-work leisure activity.

Indonesians are among the best in the world at badminton. In recent years, badminton's popularity as a leisure sport has waned, though it remains a major spectator sport. Basketball is gaining popularity, and volleyball, tennis, cycling, and martial arts are widely enjoyed. *Sepak takraw* (a sport like volleyball but played without using the hands) is a popular sport as well. *Pencak silat*, the traditional form of Indonesian martial arts, is primarily based on deflecting attacks and using quick movements to mislead the opponent. Children and young people usually practice it as a performance art, and it is a common feature in traditional events. Young boys spend their afternoons playing soccer or practicing martial arts. Rural Indonesians, who tend to have less free time, generally engage in fewer sporting events than urban people.

Leisure

Watching television is a common leisure activity, and many mothers who stay home spend their free time watching Indonesian soap operas. Families often enroll their children, especially young women, in traditional dance courses. Many people play chess, and it is common for fathers to spend time after dinner socializing, playing chess, smoking, or watching soccer with friends. Many people enjoy making and flying kites.

Vacation

On weekends and holidays, families visit nearby parks, beaches, or mountains. On longer holidays, families may travel to famous tourist sites like Bali, Komodo Island, Lake Toba, Borobudur Temple, Ancol (a famous beach site in north Jakarta), or *Dunia Fantasi* ("Fantasy World," Indonesia's major theme park). Camping is uncommon for families, though the accessibility of mountains and camping grounds make school camping trips very popular.

The Arts

Favorite Indonesian art forms include music, drama, and dance. 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. *Ketoprak* humor (theater with stories from Hindu epics and impromptu dialogues) is widely enjoyed. If the audience finds a particular scene especially funny, they throw packs of cigarettes onto the stage for the actors. Other stage entertainment includes *sendratari* (musical drama), where actors act out scenes from Hindu epics as a singer sings the story.

Common dances include mask dances (*wayang topeng*), in which dancers act out legends and stories; trance dances; and the *baris gede*, a warrior dance. Each province in Indonesia has unique traditional dances. Aceh, for example, is well-known for the *saman* dance, a welcome dance with intricate hand movements performed only by women. Java is well-known for *ronggeng* (a couples dance) and *jaipongan*, which is a seductive dance featuring rhythmic hip

movements. Balinese dance, such as *legong*, is renowned for its subtle, graceful movements, and *kecak* is a dance performed by Hindu men while chanting prayers.

Other art forms include *batik* printing (the use of wax to paint designs on textiles, which are then dyed a color that holds everywhere except where the wax is painted), 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.), *Lebaran* (or *Eid al-Fitr*), Independence Day (17 Aug.), *Eid al-Adha*, *Waisak* (celebrating the birth, attainment of nirvana, and death of the Buddha), *Nyepi* (Hindu New Year), and *Muharram* (Muslim New Year). Christians celebrate Christmas (25 Dec.), Easter, and Ascension (9 May). A variety of festivals common to certain islands or ethnic groups are held throughout the year. Muslim holidays are observed according to a lunar calendar and do not have fixed dates according to the Western calendar.

Major holidays are usually celebrated throughout the week surrounding the holiday, in some cases extending to two weeks. When *Lebaran*, Christmas, or any other major holiday falls near the weekend (such as on a Thursday or Tuesday), the government extends the holiday so that people can take longer work leaves. Aside from allowing more family time, this also encourages families to travel and visit tourist sites. Festivals or gatherings are usually held in major public places like the town hall or shopping malls. Street parades are also common. Neighborhoods take pride in decorating streets and houses with banners and ornaments.

Independence Day

Independence Day is celebrated with a series of competitions at the neighborhood level. These typically include sack racing, eating contests, and small games for children. Grown men usually take part in a game of climbing a greased tree (sometimes a pole) with gifts tied to it. Though Independence Day is recognized as a holiday, government offices and schools usually ask their students and staff to attend a special flag-raising ceremony in the morning. Schools or offices might penalize those who fail to attend, so these ceremonies are generally well attended.

Nyepi

Nyepi marks the Hindu New Year and is celebrated mostly in Bali. It is a time for self-reflection, and observers sit in silence for an entire day. People remain indoors and generally keep lights off. The following days, Hindus visit family and friends to ask forgiveness for past offenses.

Lebaran

Lebaran (or *Eid al-Fitr*) is one of the biggest holidays of the year. For two days, Muslims celebrate the end of the holy month of *Ramadan*, during which Muslims do not eat or drink from sunrise to sundown (but eat a family meal in the early morning and late evening). On the last night of *Ramadan*, the whole family goes to the mosque together for a prayer service called *shalat tarawih*. The family begins *Lebaran* with a morning prayer, called *shalat eid*, at the mosque. *Lebaran* is the first day when Muslims resume eating normally, so the day is spent feasting. The holiday is also a time for

purification of past sins, and forgiveness is sought for past mistakes from parents, friends, and family. A few days prior to *Lebaran*, urban workers from rural areas return to their hometowns to be with their families in a massive homecoming period known as *mudik*. Train ticket prices and air fare soar at this time, and inter-city traffic is extremely heavy. People might take up to a week off before *Lebaran* to avoid *mudik* at its peak. Most businesses do not return to full operation until a week after *Lebaran*.

Eid al-Adha

Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice), honoring Abraham for his willingness to sacrifice his son, follows *Lebaran* as the next major Islamic holiday. To celebrate, people sacrifice cows, lambs, and goats. In the weeks before *Eid al-Adha*, cattle merchants can be found along major streets. Muslims purchase the livestock and indicate which mosque should distribute the meat. The actual sacrificing on *Eid al-Adha* usually happens in empty fields or behind mosques. A portion of the resulting meat is immediately distributed to the poor, and the purchaser brings home some of the meat for a family feast.

SOCIETY

Government

Indonesia is a democratic republic headed by a president (currently Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) as head 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. Indonesia is a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). 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 38 percent of the labor force; the services sector employs about 50 percent. 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 corruption, poor rule of law, and the slow pace of privatization. Unemployment and poverty are major concerns.

Nevertheless, Indonesia is widely recognized as an emerging world market. The currency is the Indonesian *rupiah* (IDR).

Transportation and Communications

Middle-class Indonesians have private cars, and many families are able to hire drivers because the cost of labor is low. 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.

Landline phones are more common in cities than in rural areas. Cellular phone use among the middle class in Indonesia is high. Television is the country's main source of media, with the internet as the second largest platform. Television broadcasters include a government station and numerous private stations. Many private radio stations also operate. While a lack in high-speed infrastructure impedes the use of the internet as a media source, there are over 50 million internet users. Social media sites are popular. A number of local dailies and English-language newspapers are in circulation. Strict media censorship was abolished in 1998 to allow for a free press. However, media continues to be regulated, and topics that are critical of the country's authority, nationalism, and cultural and religious beliefs are discouraged.

Education

Structure

The Indonesian education system is comprised of elementary school (ages 6–12), junior high school (ages 12–15), and senior high school (ages 15–18), for a total of 12 years of education. Education is compulsory from elementary through junior high.

Secondary education is divided into two types: university preparation schools and vocational schools. In big cities, private schools and public schools tend to be equally common. Many middle-class families send their children to private schools to help prepare them for university (generally in Australia or the United States). In smaller cities and some rural areas, there are usually only public high schools and vocational schools.

Alternative schools called *madrrasah* (Islamic schools) and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools, in which the youth live in gender-segregated dorms) are available to Muslim youth. Each features a curriculum that includes lessons on Islam and the Arabic language. Religion classes are also offered in public and private schools.

Access

While enrollment may be universal in wealthier areas, in poor rural areas, many children are unable to attend. About 90 percent of children finish primary school. Just over half of students go on to secondary school, which is divided between junior high and senior high school. In extremely remote areas, schools can be very far from a child's home and attendance—even among teachers—can be poor (especially if weather conditions are bad). The government is recruiting

young teachers in an effort to provide more teachers to remote areas. However, regional language diversity is a challenge, as people in these areas may use their local language more than Indonesian, which most teachers speak.

School Life

Teachers tend to use an authoritative method of teaching, and students are not encouraged to ask many questions or challenge either the teacher or the lesson. Because of pressure to get good grades, cheating on tests is common. The curriculum is fixed until the second year of high school. After that, students can apply to a major in science, social science, or linguistics. Students must achieve sufficient scores on exams to be considered for their chosen major.

Higher Education

Parents generally aspire for their children to attend university and will do whatever they can to pay for it. Entrance to public universities is determined by a nationwide standardized entrance test. However, students who graduate from high school with exceptionally high scores may be admitted directly, without having to take the entrance test. Most private universities make and conduct their own entrance tests. Each of Indonesia's provinces has at least one university. Public universities, such as the University of Indonesia or Bandung Institute of Technology, are preferred for their prestige and affordability.

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	248,645,008 (rank=4)
Area, sq. mi.	735,358 (rank=16)
Area, sq. km.	1,904,569

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	124 of 187 countries
Gender inequality rank	100 of 146 countries
Adult literacy rate	94% (male); 87% (female)
Life expectancy	67 (male); 71 (female)

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2012 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

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