

# Asia

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## The continent of Asia

The continent of Asia is the world's largest and most populous continent with over 4 billion people calling Asia home. Asia also contains the world's most populous country, China, and the world's largest country, Russia. Asia borders Africa and Europe to the west and the Pacific Ocean to the east.

The continent of Asia is so large and diverse that it often is divided into sub-regions

- Northern Asia
- Central Asia
- Middle East
- Southern Asia
- Eastern Asia
- Southeastern Asia

Asia is rich in diverse races, cultures, and languages. Many of the world's major religions came out of Asia including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Asia has a major influence on world culture and the world's economy. Countries such as Russia, China, Japan and India produce products and services that are used by every nation in the world. Asia is also abundant in natural resources. Oil in the Middle East is a major supplier of much of the world's energy.

### Major cities:

Tokyo, Japan

Jakarta, Indonesia

Seoul, South Korea  
Delhi, India  
Mumbai, India  
Manila, Philippines  
Shanghai, China  
Osaka, Japan  
Kolkata, India  
Karachi, Pakistan

**Bordering Bodies of Water:** Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean, Arctic Ocean, Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, South China Sea, Yellow Sea, Bering Sea

**Major Rivers and Lakes:** Caspian Sea, Lake Baikal, Aral Sea, Qinghai Lake, Yangtze River, Yellow River, Ganges River, Indus River

**Major Geographical Features:** Himalayas, Ural Mountains, Kunlun Mountains, Arabian Desert, Gobi Desert, Takla Makan Desert, Thar Desert, Island of Japan, Mount Everest, Siberia

**Facts about Asia:**

Asia contains around 30% of the world's land area and 60% of the world's population.

The highest point on earth, Mt. Everest, is in Asia. The lowest point on land, the Dead Sea, is also in Asia.

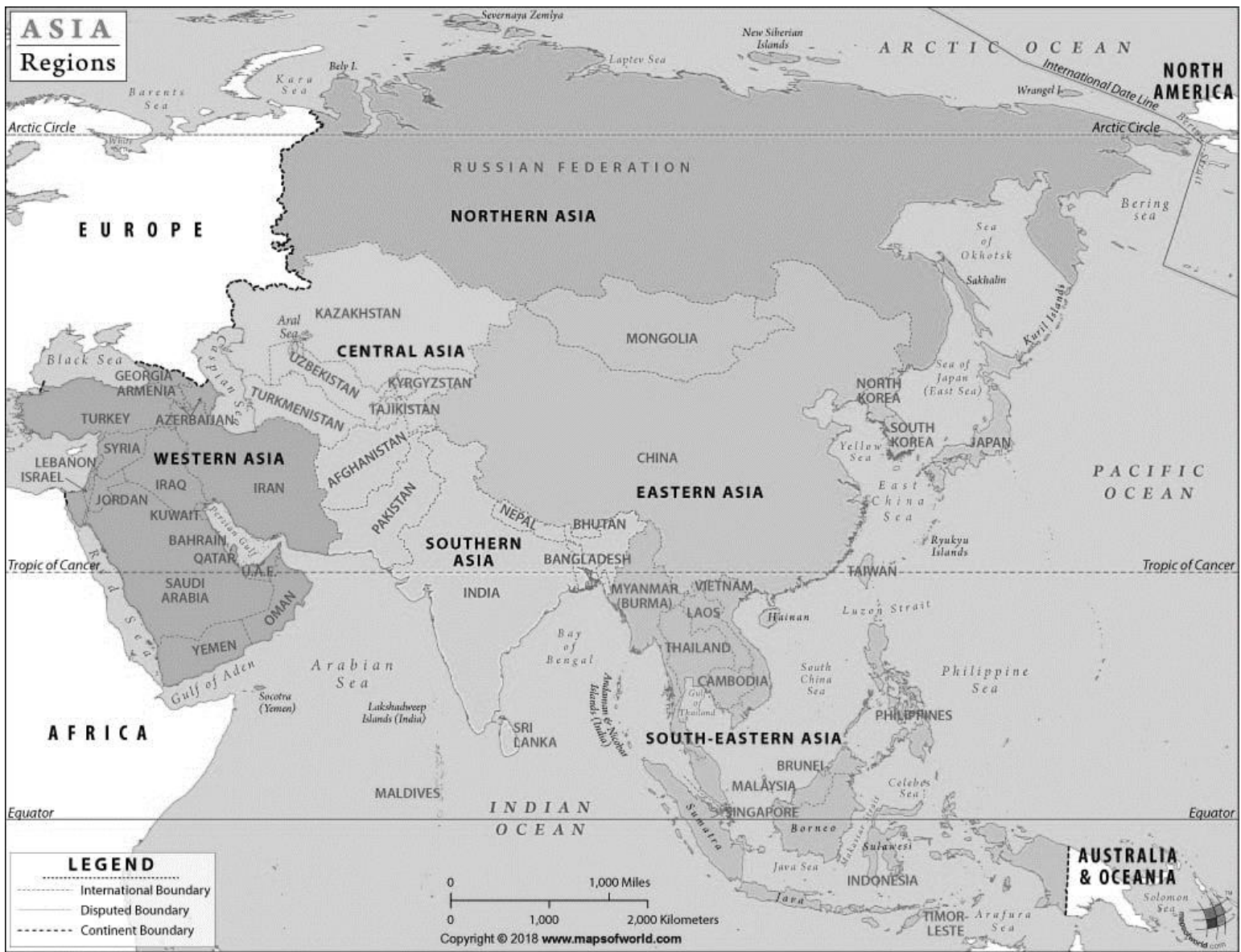
Asia is the only continent that shares borders with two other continents; Africa and Europe. It sometimes joins with a third continent, North America, in the winter by ice forming in the Bering Sea.

Asia is home to two of the three largest economies in the world: China (2nd largest) and Japan (3rd largest). Russia and India are also top 10 world economies.

Asia is home to many interesting animals including the giant panda, Asian elephant, tiger, Bactrian camel, Komodo dragon, and the king cobra.

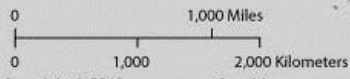
China and India are the two largest countries in the world by population. China is number one with over 1.3 billion people. India is number two with over 1.2 billion. The third largest country in the world, the United States, only has just over 300 million people.

# ASIA Regions



**LEGEND**

- International Boundary
- - - Disputed Boundary
- - - - - Continent Boundary



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# Countries of Asia

## Region: Northern Asia

### Russia

**Capital:** Moscow

**Population:** 145,872,256

#### History of Russia

The Soviet Union (full name: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or USSR) was a socialist (communist) state that was created by Vladimir Lenin in 1922. During its existence, the USSR was the largest country in the world. The USSR collapsed in 1991 and left in its place 15 independent states. Some countries, such as Estonia, Belarus and Ukraine, were once part of USSR but are now independent and part of Europe.

After the dissolution of the USSR on December 25, 1991, Russia underwent a major economic crisis leading to high death rates, low birth rates, and the collapse of social services. Meanwhile, millions of Russians were affected by poverty that increased from 1.5% to about 39 to 49%. Violent crime, extreme corruption, criminal gangs, and lawlessness characterized the 1990's in Russia.

#### The Geography of Russia

Russia can be divided into a European and an Asian part. The dividing line is generally considered to be the Ural Mountains. The European part is drained into the Arctic Ocean, Baltic Sea, Black Sea, and Caspian Sea. The Asian part is drained into the Arctic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.

**Borders:** Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, China, Mongolia, North Korea, Lithuania and Poland from the enclave Kaliningrad Oblast, maritime borders with Japan and the United States

**Rivers:** Notable rivers of Russia in Europe are Volga (which is the longest river in Europe), Pechora, Don, Kama, Oka and the Northern Dvina.

In Asia, important rivers are the Ob, the Irtysh, the Yenisei, the Angara, the Lena, the Amur, the Yana, the Indigirka, and the Kolyma.

**Total Size:** 17,075,200 square km

**General Terrain:** broad plain with low hills west of Urals; vast coniferous forest and tundra in Siberia; uplands and mountains along southern border regions

**Climate:** ranges from steppes in the south through humid continental in much of European Russia; subarctic in Siberia to tundra climate in the polar north; winters vary from cool along

Black Sea coast to frigid in Siberia; summers vary from warm in the steppes to cool along Arctic coast

**Major Cities:** MOSCOW (capital) 10.523 million; Saint Petersburg 4.575 million; Novosibirsk 1.397 million; Yekaterinburg 1.344 million; Nizhniy Novgorod 1.267 million

**Major Landforms:** Russia is the largest country in the world by size. Major landforms include the Caucasus Mountains, Altai Mountains, Ural Mountains, Mount Elbrus, Kamchatka Peninsula, Siberian Plain, Siberian Plateau, and the Stanovoy Mountains.

**Major Bodies of Water:** Volga River, Ob River, Yenisey River, Lake Baikal, Ladoga Lake, Onega Lake, Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Sea of Azov, Caspian Sea, Arctic Ocean, Pacific Ocean

## **Economy of Russia**

**Major Industries:** complete range of mining and extractive industries producing coal, oil, gas, chemicals, and metals; all forms of machine building from rolling mills to high-performance aircraft and space vehicles; defense industries including radar, missile production, and advanced electronic components, shipbuilding; road and rail transportation equipment; communications equipment; agricultural machinery, tractors, and construction equipment; electric power generating and transmitting equipment; medical and scientific instruments; consumer durables, textiles, foodstuffs, handicrafts

**Agricultural Products:** grain, sugar beets, sunflower seed, vegetables, fruits; beef, milk

**Natural Resources:** wide natural resource base including major deposits of oil, natural gas, coal, and many strategic minerals, timber

**Major Exports:** petroleum and petroleum products, natural gas, wood and wood products, metals, chemicals, and a wide variety of civilian and military products

**Major Imports:** machinery and equipment, consumer goods, medicines, meat, sugar, semifinished metal products

**Currency:** Russian ruble (RUR)

## **Government of Russia**

**Type of Government:** federation

**Independence:** 24 August 1991 (from Soviet Union)

**Divisions:** The country of Russia is divided up into a complex system of 83 regions called "federal subjects."

## **The People of Russia**

**Languages Spoken:** Russian, many minority languages

**Religions:** Russian Orthodox 15-20%, Muslim 10-15%, other Christian 2% (2006 est.)

Before 1991, Christianity was forbidden, except for a few Russian Orthodox churches which were tightly controlled by the Communist state. Anyone caught practicing Christianity outside of the state church was imprisoned, making evangelism and Bible distribution extremely difficult. The Christian church endured terrible persecution between 1920 and 1990 when up to 200,000 Christian leaders died as martyrs. After the collapse of Communism in 1991, Christianity could be practiced freely.

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) survived Communism, and it remains the one major symbol of Russian identity. Pray for the renewal movements within the Russian Orthodox church, and for fresh outreach to the Russian people. Russian Orthodoxy is culturally strong, but spiritually weak in the lives of most of its followers, who are mostly nominal Christians.

## Region: Southern Asia

### India

**Borders:** China, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indian Ocean

**Size:** 3,287,590 square km

**General Terrain:** upland plain (Deccan Plateau) in south, flat to rolling plain along the Ganges, deserts in west, Himalayas in north

**Climate:** varies from tropical monsoon in south to temperate in north.

**Major Cities:** NEW DELHI (capital) 21.72 million; Mumbai 19.695 million; Kolkata 15.294 million; Chennai 7.416 million; Bangalore 7.079 million (2009)

**Major Landforms:** Himalayan Mountain Range, Punjab Plain, Thar Desert, Chin Hills, Khasi Hills, Deccan Plateau, Mount Kangchenjunga, Coastal Plains

**Major Bodies of Water:** Ganges River, Brahmaputra River, Godavari River, Wular Lake, Chilika Lake, Loktak Lake, Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, Laccadive Sea, Indian Ocean

**Famous Places:** Taj Majal, India Gate, Lotus Temple, Jama Masjid, Qutub Minar, Mysore Palace, Ajanta Caves, The Red Fort, Ganges River, Lake Palace, Virupaksha Temple, Goa beaches, Kanha National Park, Golden Temple in Amritsar

#### Economy of India

Major Industries: textiles, chemicals, food processing, steel, transportation equipment, cement, mining, petroleum, machinery, software

Agricultural Products: rice, wheat, oilseed, cotton, jute, tea, sugarcane, potatoes; cattle, water buffalo, sheep, goats, poultry; fish

Natural Resources: coal (fourth-largest reserves in the world), iron ore, manganese, mica, bauxite, titanium ore, chromite, natural gas, diamonds, petroleum, limestone, arable land

Major Exports: textile goods, gems and jewelry, engineering goods, chemicals, leather manufactures

Major Imports: crude oil, machinery, gems, fertilizer, chemicals

**Currency:** Indian rupee (INR)

## **Government of India**

Type of Government: federal republic

Independence: 15 August 1947 (from UK)

**Divisions:** India is divided up into 29 states and 7 union territories. The largest of the Indian states by population are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Bihar. As of 2011 Uttar Pradesh had a population of around 200 million. The largest states by area are Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. The capital city of Delhi is considered a union territory.

**The Indian flag**, called the Tricolour, was adopted on July 22, 1947. It consists of three horizontal stripes of saffron (top), white (middle), and green (bottom). At the center is a navy blue wheel with 24 spokes. The color saffron represents courage and sacrifice, the color white stands for truth and purity, and the color green represents prosperity.

## **The People of India**

Languages Spoken: English enjoys associate status but is the most important language for national, political, and commercial communication; Hindi is the national language and primary tongue of 30% of the people; there are 14 other official languages: Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Oriya, Punjabi, Assamese, Kashmiri, Sindhi, and Sanskrit; Hindustani is a popular variant of Hindi/Urdu spoken widely throughout northern India but is not an official language

**Religions:** Hindu 80.5%, Muslim 13.4%, Christian 2.3%, Sikh 1.9%, other 1.8%, unspecified 0.1% (2001 census)

**Origin of the name India:** The name "India" comes from the Persian word "Indus" for Hindus. The people of India generally refer to their country as Bharat or Hindustan. Bharat is an official name called out in the Indian Constitution.

## **Additional Information**

India is the largest country by number of people and seventh largest country by land area. India is a peninsula, bounded by the Indian Ocean on the south, the Arabian Sea on the southwest, and the Bay of Bengal on the southeast. It has six neighbors: Pakistan in the north-west, China, Nepal, and Bhutan in the north, and Bangladesh and Myanmar in the east. Sri Lanka is nearby to the south.

India has the second largest military force in the world and is also a nuclear weapon state. India's economy became the world's fastest growing in the G20 developing nations during

2014, replacing the People's Republic of China. India's literacy and wealth are also rising. According to New World Wealth, India is the fifth richest country in the world with a total individual wealth of \$12.6 trillion. However, it still has many social and economic issues like poverty and corruption. India is a founding member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and has signed the Kyoto Protocol.

India has the fifth largest economy by nominal GDP, the third largest by GDP (PPP) and is the fastest growing major economy. India is a nuclear power and has the second largest standing military in the world. India has its own space agency (ISRO) and has done various research throughout the solar system, including sending spacecraft to the Moon, Mars, and Venus. India is also a member of the G20 developing nations, and has been described as a potential superpower due to its rising economy and increase in global influence.

India has the fourth largest number of spoken languages per country in the world, only behind Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, and Nigeria. People of many different religions live there, including the five most popular world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity.

### **The Himalayan Mountains**

The Himalayas stretch over the northern borders of India. These mountain ranges run in a west-east direction. The Himalayas represent the highest and one of the most rugged mountain barriers of the world. They form an arc, which covers a distance of about 2,400 Km.

### **Forests and wildlife**

India is rich in forests and also rich in fauna. It has approximately 90,000 animal species. The country has about 2,000 species of birds. They constitute 13% of the world's total. There are 2,546 species of fish, which account for nearly 12% of the world's stock. It also shares between 5 and 8 per cent of the world's amphibians, reptiles and mammals.

The elephants are the most majestic animals among the mammals. They are found in the hot wet forests of Assam, Karnataka and Kerala. One-horned rhinoceroses are the other animals, which live in swampy and marshy lands of Assam and West Bengal.

Arid areas of the Rann of Kachchh and the Thar Desert are the habitat for wild ass and camels respectively. Indian bison, nilgai (blue bull), chousingha (four-horned antelope), gazelle and different species of deer are some other animals found in India. It also has several species of monkeys.

India is the only country in the world that has both tigers and lions. The natural habitat of the Indian lion is the Gir forest in Gujarat. Tigers are found in the forests of Madhya Pradesh, the Sundarbans of West Bengal and the Himalayan region. Leopards, too, are members of the cat family. They are important among animals of prey.

Bird life in India is colourful. Peacocks, pheasants, ducks, parakeets, cranes and pigeons are some of the birds inhabiting the forests and wetlands of the country.



# Pakistan

**Borders:** India, Afghanistan, Iran, China, maritime (water) border with Oman, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman

**Size:** 803,940 square km

**General Terrain:** flat Indus plain in east; mountains in north and northwest; Balochistan plateau in west

**Climate:** mostly hot, dry desert; temperate in northwest; arctic in north

**Major Cities:** Karachi 13.125 million; Lahore 7.132 million; Faisalabad 2.849 million; Rawalpindi 2.026 million; ISLAMABAD (capital) 832,000 (2009)

**Major Landforms:** Indus River Valley, Hindu Kush Mountains, Karakoram Mountains, Pamir Mountains, K2, Balochistan Plateau, Thar Desert, Cholistan Desert

**Major Bodies of Water:** Indus River, Jhelum River, Ravi River, Kabul River, Manchar Lake, Keenjhar Lake, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea

**Famous Places:** Jinnah Mausoleum, Minaret of Pakistan, Badshahi Mosque, Lahore Fort, Rani Kot Fort, Hingol National Park, Pir Shohawa, Concordia, K2 Mountain, Trango Towers, Port Grand, Tomb of Jahangir, Mohenjo-daro

## Economy of Pakistan

Major Industries: textiles and apparel, food processing, pharmaceuticals, construction materials, paper products, fertilizer, shrimp

Agricultural Products: cotton, wheat, rice, sugarcane, fruits, vegetables; milk, beef, mutton, eggs

Natural Resources: land, extensive natural gas reserves, limited petroleum, poor quality coal, iron ore, copper, salt, limestone

Major Exports: textiles (garments, bed linen, cotton cloth, yarn), rice, leather goods, sports goods, chemicals, manufactures, carpets and rugs

Major Imports: petroleum, petroleum products, machinery, plastics, transportation equipment, edible oils, paper and paperboard, iron and steel, tea

**Currency:** Pakistani rupee (PKR)

## Government of Pakistan

Type of Government: federal republic

Independence: 14 August 1947 (from UK)

**Divisions:** The country of Pakistan is divided up into the four main provinces of Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Other regions include the capital city area of Islamabad, Tribal Areas, and disputed areas (with India) in Kashmir.

**Description of flag:** The flag of Pakistan was adopted on August 11, 1947. It has a dark green background (field) with a white stripe on the left (hoist side). Inside the green field is a white star and a white crescent. The flag is often called the "Flag of the Crescent and Star." The crescent represent progress and the star light. The color green represents the religion of Islam.

### **The People of Pakistan**

Languages Spoken: Punjabi 48%, Sindhi 12%, Siraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10%, Pashtu 8%, Urdu (official) 8%, Balochi 3%, Hindko 2%, Brahui 1%, English (official and lingua franca of Pakistani elite and most government ministries), Burushaski, and other 8%

**Religions:** Muslim 97% (Sunni 77%, Shi'a 20%), Christian, Hindu, and other 3%

**Origin of the name Pakistan:** The name "Pakistan" was originally coined by Choudhry Rahmat Ali. He suggested the name and that the letters each stood for a different region. The name also means "Land of the Pure" in the Persian and Urdu languages.

## **Bangladesh**

**Capital:** Dhaka

**Population:** 163,046,161

### **Brief History of Bangladesh:**

The area that is now Bangladesh has been settled for many thousands of years. There have been a series of ruling dynasties including the Buddhist Pala dynasty and the Hindu Sena dynasty. By the 12th century, Arab merchants had come to Bengal and the religion of Islam had begun to spread. In the 16th century, The Mughal Empire took control of Bengal and the city of Dhaka became an important center of the Mughal administration.

The first Europeans to visit Bangladesh were Portuguese traders. Soon the French, British, and Dutch followed. The British became the dominant presence primarily through the East India Company. In 1859, Britain took over and Bengal became part of the British Empire as a region of India.

In 1947, the region of Bengal was divided along religious lines. The mostly Muslim eastern half was called East Pakistan and became part of Pakistan. The mostly Hindu western part was part of the country of India and was the state West Bengal.

There were many arguments and wars between Pakistan and India. As a result the new country of Bangladesh was created in 1972. It was a parliamentary democracy with a

constitution. The capital was in Dhaka. Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury was the first President and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Mujib) the first Prime Minister.

### **The Geography of Bangladesh**

**Total Size:** 144,000 square km

**General Terrain:** mostly flat alluvial plain; hilly in southeast

**Climate:** tropical; mild winter (October to March); hot, humid summer (March to June); humid, warm rainy monsoon (June to October)

**Major cities:** DHAKA (capital) 14.251 million; Chittagong 4.816 million; Khulna 1.636 million; Rajshahi 853,000 (2009)

### **The People of Bangladesh**

**Type of Government:** parliamentary democracy

**Languages Spoken:** Bangla (official, also known as Bengali), English

**Independence:** 16 December 1971 (from West Pakistan); note - 26 March 1971 is the date of independence from West Pakistan, 16 December 1971 is known as Victory Day and commemorates the official creation of the state of Bangladesh

**Religions:** Muslim 83%, Hindu 16%, other 1% (1998)

### **Economy of Bangladesh**

**Major Industries:** cotton textiles, jute, garments, tea processing, paper newsprint, cement, chemical fertilizer, light engineering, sugar

**Agricultural Products:** rice, jute, tea, wheat, sugarcane, potatoes, tobacco, pulses, oilseeds, spices, fruit; beef, milk, poultry

**Natural Resources:** natural gas, arable land, timber, coal

**Major Exports:** garments, jute and jute goods, leather, frozen fish and seafood (2001)

**Major Imports:** machinery and equipment, chemicals, iron and steel, textiles, foodstuffs, petroleum products, cement (2000)

**Currency:** taka (BDT)

## **The Partition of India and Pakistan, 1947**

Following the end of the British rule over India, the year 1947 saw the division of British India into two self-governing countries, namely India and Pakistan. Eventually known as the Partition of India, this split was deeply rooted in the religious tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities in the region. As a consequence, India became a predominantly Hindu country, while Pakistan became predominantly Muslim.

### **GREAT DIVIDE**

In 1945, following the end of the Second World War and the election of Great Britain's Labor Party, British and Indian leaders resumed talks on independence.

The leaders of the Indian National Congress, along with Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, campaigned for a non-religious country that aims to guarantee the rights of all Indians, whether Hindus or Muslims, through constitutional protection and democratic practice.

However, the Muslim League, led by its spokesperson Muhammad Ali Jinnah, pushed for a partition and an independent Pakistan. Both nations gained independence from the British Empire on 15 August 1947.

This brought an end to 300 years of British rule, and with the drawing of new borders through parts of India, the new nation of Pakistan was created. While the creation of the two new nations was a cause for celebration for many, violence continued after the Partition of India. More than a million people were killed and some 14 million displaced from their homes.

It should have been the dawn of a proud new nation, but the first days of India's independence were among the darkest in its history. The rush to split the country into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan left millions stranded on the wrong side of the new border and this initiated the largest migration in history. Nearly 14 million refugees fled their homes as entire villages were killed.

To set itself apart from India, Pakistan — the world's largest Muslim nation in 1947 — changed its time zone with a 30-minute difference. Before the separation, India was composed of about 66 per cent Hindu and 24 per cent Muslim.

### **EAST AND WEST PAKISTAN**

During the campaign for India's partition, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League originally desired the entire Bengal province, but later settled for an independent Pakistan, including East Bengal (present-day Bangladesh).

Pakistan was divided into two territories: East and West Pakistan. Separated by more than 1,600 kilometres, the two nations had language differences brought about by diverse ethnicities and traditions, even though they shared common religious roots.

### **RESULTS OF THE PARTITION**

One of the most enduring outcomes of the Indian partition was its record-breaking human migration. About 12 to 15 million Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs needed to cross borders to live among people of the same religious orientation. Other accounts estimated that the partition resulted in 24 million refugees.

Mahatma Gandhi, who rejected the Indian division and campaigned to end the hatred among Hindus and Muslims, was also killed by a Hindu extremist five months after the partition had been declared.

**Read the biography of Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi.**

### Questions

1. What was the root cause of violence before and after the Partition?
2. Who pushed for a partition?
3. Who was against the Partition? What did they want?
4. Why was there so much migration?
5. Imagine having to migrate from India to Pakistan on foot with just the possessions you could carry. What were the consequences for many?
6. The Muslim League originally wanted all of Bengal, (East India), but finally settled for just the Eastern section of Bengal. What is this country called today?
7. What were the main cultural differences between East and West Pakistan?
8. Why is Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi famous? What was his role in trying to solve the problems at the time of the Partition? What action did he take?
9. Draw a map showing India and Pakistan after the Partition.

## Region: Eastern Asia

Countries: North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Mongolia, China, Vietnam, Myanmar (Burma), Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Indonesia

### North Korea

**Capital:** Pyongyang

**Population:** 25,666,161

#### **Brief History of North Korea:**

During the 1st century AD, Korea was divided into three kingdoms. They were the Shilla, the Koguryo, and the Pekche. The area remained this way until 668 AD when Korea was unified under the rule of the Shilla Kingdom. The Shilla kingdom was followed by the Koryo kingdom in 935 and then by the Choson dynasty in 1392. The name Korea comes from the Koryo kingdom.

Korea was invaded and conquered by other larger empires and countries throughout its history. The Mongol Empire ruled over Korea from 1231 until the 14th century and Japan invaded in the 1500s. In the 1900s both the Chinese and the Russians tried to invade Korea. In both cases the Japanese fought them off and took Korea as part of the Japanese Empire.

When Japan lost World War II, Korea was divided into two zones. The Soviet Union took control of the north and the United States the south. They were divided at the 38th parallel. This was meant to be a temporary division, but it is still there today. North Korea is the country that is north of the 38th parallel.

North Korea became an independent country in 1948. It was supported and dominated by the communist Soviet Union. In 1950 North Korea went to war against South Korea. The Korean War was the first major conflict of the Cold War.

Today North Korea is a communist country and keeps itself isolated from the rest of the world. Tensions between North and South Korea can be high.

## **The Geography of North Korea**

**Total Size:** 120,540 square km

**General Terrain:** mostly hills and mountains separated by deep, narrow valleys; coastal plains wide in west, discontinuous in east

**Climate:** temperate with rainfall concentrated in summer

## **The People of Korea, North**

**Type of Government:** Communist state one-man dictatorship

**Languages Spoken:** Korean

**Independence:** 15 August 1945 (from Japan)

**Religions:** traditionally Buddhist and Confucianist, some Christian and syncretic Chondogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way)

Percentage of evangelical Christians: 1%

The government creates a cult around the young “Supreme Leader” (Kim Jong-un) and his dead grandfather (Kim Il-Sung), and does not allow the people to interact with the outside world. More than 3 million people have starved to death since 1994. Foreign charities can bring food, farming technology, training, and start business ventures, but are restricted in their activities and closely watched. Pray that help will reach the desperate, hungry people. Pray that in God’s timing a change would come to completely free and transform this land.

The Korean revival (1907) began in the Church in North Korea! People in those days called Pyongyang the “Jerusalem of the East”. But most Christians fled to the South during the Korean War, or died as martyrs. Now if you even say the name “Jesus” aloud you may die for it. We do not know much about the underground Church, but we know it survived and

even grows. The government holds up to 100,000 Christians in labour camps. Pray for North Korean believers to persevere in probably the most difficult country for Christians.

## **Economy of North Korea**

**Major Industries:** military products; machine building, electric power, chemicals; mining (coal, iron ore, magnesite, graphite, copper, zinc, lead, and precious metals), metallurgy; textiles, food processing; tourism

**Agricultural Products:** rice, corn, potatoes, soybeans, pulses; cattle, pigs, pork, eggs

**Natural Resources:** coal, lead, tungsten, zinc, graphite, magnesite, iron ore, copper, gold, pyrites, salt, fluorspar, hydropower

**Major Exports:** minerals, metallurgical products, manufactures (including armaments), textiles, fishery products

**Major Imports:** petroleum, coking coal, machinery and equipment, textiles, grain

**Currency:** North Korean won (KPW)

## **South Korea**

**Capital:** Seoul

**Population:** 51,225,308

### **Brief History of South Korea:**

South Korea is located on the southern part of the Korean Peninsula.

During the 1st century AD, Korea was divided into three kingdoms. They were Shilla, Koguryo, and Pekche. The area remained this way until 668 AD when Korea was unified by the Shilla Kingdom. The Shilla kingdom was followed by the Koryo kingdom in 935 and then by the Choson dynasty in 1392. The name Korea comes from the Koryo kingdom.

Korea was invaded and conquered by other larger empires and countries throughout its history. The Mongol Empire ruled over Korea from 1231 until the 14th century and Japan invaded in the 1500s. In the 1900s both the Chinese and the Russians tried to invade Korea. In both cases the Japanese fought them off and took Korea as part of the Japanese Empire.

When Japan lost World War II, Korea was divided into two zones. The Soviet Union took control of the north and the United States the south. They were divided at the 38th parallel. This was meant to be a temporary division, but it is still there today. South Korea is the country that is south of the 38th parallel.

In 1950 South Korea was invaded by North Korea and the Korean War began. It was the first major conflict of the Cold War. With the help of United Nations forces, the South Koreans fought back and regained their territory. Today there is a two-mile demilitarized zone between the two countries at the 38th parallel.

South Korea became an independent country in 1948. The first president of South Korea was Syngman Rhee. Today South Korea has a fairly strong economy growing in technology.

## **The Geography of South Korea**

**Total Size:** 98,480 square km

**Climate:** temperate, with rainfall heavier in summer than winter

**Major cities:** SEOUL (capital) 9.778 million; Busan (Pusan) 3.439 million; Incheon (Inch'on) 2.572 million; Daegu (Taegu) 2.458 million; Daejeon (Taejon) 1.497 millio

## **The People of South Korea**

**Type of Government:** republic

**Languages Spoken:** Korean, English widely taught in junior high and high school

**Independence:** 15 August 1945 (from Japan)

**Religions:** no affiliation 46%, Christian 26%, Buddhist 26%, Confucianist 1%, other 1%

Society and culture in South Korea changed rapidly in the last generation. Economic growth was remarkable, but global success also exposed corruption in politics and industry. A wide gap now separates the rich and poor. Korean society was traditionally conservative, but positive modern developments also brought new problems such as more suicides, Internet addiction, the fast-growing sex industry, high use of cosmetic surgery for vanity, and less sensitivity to violence in the media. Pray for wisdom for leaders, and justice for the most vulnerable. South Korea leads the digital revolution. Digital ministry is widespread for both evangelism and discipleship. Pray for the gospel to impact the many spiritual needs of this society.

Praise God for the unique Korean Church! From the 1st Protestant congregation in 1884, South Korea now has as many as 50,000. God blessed the Church with a series of revivals, and refined it through times of persecution. Now its leadership is well-trained, and its strong missions vision is an example to the world. Korea has some of the largest congregations in the world, and Christians impact all levels of society. The South Korean Church commits itself to sacrificial and passionate prayer, with early morning and evening prayer meetings, every day and all night! At the same time, corruption and scandals in church leadership and an inability to connect well with the younger generation means that South Korean Christianity faces rapid decline and decreasing cultural relevance. Pray for fresh expressions of following Jesus that will bring new life – and a new generation – into the churches.

## **Economy of South Korea**

**Major Industries:** electronics, telecommunications, automobile production, chemicals, shipbuilding, steel

**Agricultural Products:** rice, root crops, barley, vegetables, fruit; cattle, pigs, chickens, milk, eggs; fish



**Natural Resources:** coal, tungsten, graphite, molybdenum, lead, hydropower potential

**Major Exports:** semiconductors, wireless telecommunications equipment, motor vehicles, computers, steel, ships, petrochemicals

**Major Imports:** machinery, electronics and electronic equipment, oil, steel, transport equipment, organic chemicals, plastics

**Currency:** South Korean won (KRW)

## Japan

**Capital:** Tokyo

**Population:** 126, 048, 450

**Official Language:** Japanese

**Currency:** Japanese yen

**Area:** 377,835 square kilometres

**Major Mountain Ranges:** Japanese Alps

**Major Rivers:** Biwa, Inawashiro, Kasumigaura

### Economy of Japan

**Major Industries:** among world's largest and technologically advanced producers of motor vehicles, electronic equipment, machine tools, steel and nonferrous metals, ships, chemicals, textiles, processed foods

**Agricultural Products:** rice, sugar beets, vegetables, fruit; pork, poultry, dairy products, eggs; fish

**Natural Resources:** negligible mineral resources, fish

**Major Exports:** transport equipment, motor vehicles, semiconductors, electrical machinery, chemicals

**Major Imports:** machinery and equipment, fuels, foodstuffs, chemicals, textiles, raw materials (2001)

**Currency:** yen (JPY)

**National GDP:** \$4,444,000,000,000

### Government of Japan

**Type of Government:** constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary government

**Independence:** 660 B.C. (traditional founding by Emperor JIMMU)

**Divisions:** Japan is officially divided up into 47 prefectures. The names and location of each are shown in the map to the right. It is also sometimes (unofficially) divided into eight regions shown by the different colors on the map. The largest of the prefectures by population are Tokyo, Kanagawa, and Osaka. The largest by area are Hokkaido, Iwate, and Fukushima.

**Description of flag:** The flag of Japan was first adopted in 1870 (the current design became the national flag in 1999). It has a white background with a red disk in the center. The red disk represents the sun. The flag is sometimes called the sun-disk flag. In Japan it is called Nisshoki or Hinomaru. Hinomaru means "circle of the sun."

## **The People of Japan**

**Languages Spoken:** Japanese

**Religions:** observe both Shinto and Buddhist 84%, other 16% (including Christian 0.7%)

**Origin of the name Japan:** The name "Japan" is an English word that comes from the Chinese pronunciation of the word for Japan. The Japanese name for the country is Nippon or Nihon. The words "nippon" and "nihon" both mean "from the Sun" and are sometimes translated as "Land of the Rising Sun."

## **Japan: geography and landscape**

Japan is an archipelago, or string of islands, on the eastern edge of Asia. There are four main islands – Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu. There are also nearly 4,000 smaller islands, too! Japan's nearest mainland neighbors are the Siberian region of Russia in the north, and Korea and China farther south.

Almost four-fifths of Japan is covered with mountains. The Japanese Alps run down the centre of the largest island, Honshu. The highest peak and Japan's most famous mountain is Mount Fuji, a cone-shaped volcano considered sacred by many Japanese.

Japan can be a dangerous place. Three of the tectonic plates that form the Earth's crust meet nearby and often move against each other, causing earthquakes. More than a thousand earthquakes hit Japan every year. Japan also has about 200 volcanoes, 60 of which are still active.

## **Japan's wildlife and nature**

The Japanese people have a deep affection for the beauty of the landscape. The ancient Shinto religion says natural features like mountains, waterfalls and forests have their own spirit or soul.

Japan is home to some wonderful wildlife! Some of the country's most incredible creatures include the sika deer, red-crowned crane, stellar's sea eagle and one of the coolest critters on the planet...the Japanese macaque monkey!

Most of Japan is covered by countryside – but with more than 100 million people living in such a small place, sadly, wildlife has suffered. Although pollution is now tightly controlled,

over the years, road building and other human activities have harmed natural habitats. Today, about 136 species in Japan are listed as endangered.

Off the coast of this incredible country, the warm Tsushima Current flows from the south into the Sea of Japan, where it meets a colder current from the north. As a result of the mixing of different waters, the seas around Japan are very rich in fish and other sea life. Cool!

### **The history of Japan**

People first came to Japan about 30,000 years ago. At the time, the main islands were connected to Siberia and Korea by bridges of dry land, allowing people to cross on foot. The first society, called the Jomon culture, arose about 12,000 years ago. Around the same time, the Ainu people arrived by boat from Siberia. The Jomon and Ainu survived for thousands of years, hunting, fishing and gathering plants.

In 300 B.C., the Yayoi people came to Honshu Island from Korea and China. The Yayoi were skilled weavers, tool makers and farmers, and they were the first people in Japan to cultivate rice in flooded paddy fields.

In 660 B.C., Japan's first emperor, Jimmu Tenno, came to power. For many years following, Japan was governed by a string of emperors, until the 12th century A.D. when military rulers, called shoguns, took control by force.

Europeans first arrived in Japan in 1543, bringing with them a range of new technologies and cultural practices, including the Christian religion. But in 1635, the ruling shogun closed Japan to foreigners and forbade Japanese to travel abroad, beginning a state of isolation that would last more than 200 years. In 1868, the shoguns were overthrown and emperors returned. This was a time of great change and modernisation for Japan.

During World War I (1914-1917), Japan fought on the side of the Allies (Britain, France, Belgium, Russia and the USA). But in World War II, Japan's military leaders sided with the Axis powers, joining forces with Germany and Italy.

### **Japanese people and culture**

The Japanese are famous for their willingness to work very hard. Children are taught to show respect for others, especially parents and bosses. They learn to do what's best for their family or company and worry less about their own needs.

Japanese cuisine consists of lots of rice, fish and vegetables. With little fat and lots of vitamins and minerals, their food is very healthy. It's believed their nutritious diet is what makes the Japanese, on average, one of the longest living populations in the world!

### **Japan's government and economy**

Japan is the only country in the world with a reigning emperor. Emperors have no real power, but they are still respected as a symbol of the country's traditions and unity.

World War II devastated Japan's economy, but the Japanese people's hard work and clever innovation turned things around. Today, Japan has the third largest economy in the world. The country's high-tech industry makes some of the most popular electronic products and vehicles in the world.

## **World War II: The War in the Pacific**

There were two major places where World War II took place. These places are sometimes called theaters of war. One theater of World War II was in Europe, the other was in the Pacific. The Pacific theater of war included Japan, China, Korea, the Philippines, and many more islands and countries in Southeast Asia.

### **Leading up to the War**

Japan wanted to become a strong country and a world leader. However, because Japan was a small island country, they had to import many natural resources. Some Japanese leaders felt they needed to gain more land by conquering other countries.

In 1937 Japan invaded China. They wanted to dominate all of Southeast Asia. They joined the Axis alliance with Germany and Italy in 1940 by signing the Tripartite Pact. In 1941 a former General of the Army, Hideki Tojo, became Prime Minister of Japan. He had been a strong supporter of Japan joining the Axis Powers. Now that he was Prime Minister, Tojo wanted Japan to attack the United States.

### **Pearl Harbor**

Although the US was trying to avoid getting involved in World War II, Japan was worried that the US would try and stop them from taking over some countries in Southeast Asia. They decided to attack the US Navy hoping they could sink enough ships to keep the US from ever attacking Japan.

On December 7, 1941 Japan attacked the US Navy at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. They surprised the US and sunk many ships. However, this attack did not have the effect the Japanese had hoped. The US joined the Allies in World War II the next day. The attack at Pearl Harbor united the Americans with the goal of defeating the Axis powers, and especially Japan.

### **The War**

The Japanese quickly took over much of Southeast Asia and were well on their way to dominance by 1942. However, the US won a critical battle called the Battle of Midway on June 4, 1942. Badly outnumbered, the US Navy sunk four Japanese aircraft carriers and forced the Japanese to retreat. Winning this battle gave the Americans cause for hope and was a turning point in the war in the Pacific.

After the Battle of Midway the United States began to fight back against the Japanese. They fought to take over strategic islands in the Pacific. One of the first major battles was over the island of Guadalcanal. After fierce fighting the US was able to take the island, but they

learned that fighting the Japanese was not going to be easy. There were many battles over islands in the South Pacific, these included Tarawa, Saipan, and Iwo Jima. Iwo Jima took 36 days of fighting to take the island. Today a statue of marines raising a flag on the island of Iwo Jima serves as the Marine Corps Memorial in Washington DC.

### **The Atomic Bomb**

Finally in 1945 the Japanese army had been pushed back to Japan. However, the Japanese would not surrender. American leaders felt that the only way to get Japan to surrender would be to invade the main island of Japan. However, they feared this would cost the lives of up to 1 million US soldiers.

Instead of invading, President Harry S. Truman decided to use a new weapon called the atomic bomb. The first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan on August 6, 1945. It completely destroyed the city and killed thousands and thousands of people. Japan did not surrender. Another atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan. This time the Japanese decided to surrender.

### **Japan Surrenders**

On August 15, 1945 Japanese Emperor Hirohito announced that Japan would surrender. Later on September 2, 1945 the Japanese signed a surrender treaty with US General Douglas MacArthur aboard the battleship USS Missouri. This day was called V-J Day which means Victory in Japan.

### **Other Facts about World War II in the Pacific**

In order to attack Japan, Air Force Lieutenant Colonel James H. Doolittle demonstrated that large B-25 bomber planes could take off from air craft carriers.

Japanese fighter pilots would purposely crash their planes into US ships in what were called Kamikaze attacks.

The Soviet Union had been at peace with Japan during much of World War II. They agreed to attack Japanese forces in Manchuria on August 8, 1945. This also helped in forcing Japan to surrender.

The Japanese were guilty of many war crimes during World War II. This includes the killing of up to 20 million Chinese people. They had a policy called "Kill All, Burn All, and Loot All". They used biological weapons and tortured prisoners of war. As a result, many Japanese leaders were executed after the war including Prime Minister Hideki Tojo.

# China

**Total Size:** 9,596,960 square km

**General Terrain:** mostly mountains, high plateaus, deserts in west; plains, deltas, and hills in east

**Climate:** extremely diverse; tropical in south to subarctic in north

**Major Cities:** Shanghai 16.575 million; BEIJING (capital) 12.214 million; Chongqing 9.401 million; Shenzhen 9.005 million; Guangzhou 8.884 million (2009)

**Major Landforms:** Himalayan Mountains, Kunlun Mountains, Tianshan Mountains, Qinling Mountains, Mount Everest, Pamirs Plateau, Tibetan Plateau, Gobi Desert, Taklamakan Desert

**Major Bodies of Water:** Yangtze River, Yellow River, Heilongjiang River, Songhua River, Grand Canal, Qinghai Lake (salt lake), Poyang Lake, Dongting Lake, Lake Tai, Yellow Sea, East China Sea, South China Sea

**Famous Places:** Great Wall of China, Forbidden City, Terracotta Army, Pudong Skyline and the Oriental Pearl Tower, Giant Buddha of Leshan, Mount Huang, Li River, Potala Palace, Jiuzhaigou Valley, Mount Everest, Silk Road

## Economy of China

Major Industries: mining and ore processing, iron, steel, aluminum, and other metals, coal; machine building; armaments; textiles and apparel; petroleum; cement; chemicals; fertilizers; consumer products, including footwear, toys, and electronics; food processing; transportation equipment, including automobiles, rail cars and locomotives, ships, and aircraft; telecommunications equipment, commercial space launch vehicles, satellites

Agricultural Products: rice, wheat, potatoes, corn, peanuts, tea, millet, barley, apples, cotton, oilseed; pork; fish

Natural Resources: coal, iron ore, petroleum, natural gas, mercury, tin, tungsten, antimony, manganese, molybdenum, vanadium, magnetite, aluminum, lead, zinc, uranium, hydropower potential (world's largest)

Major Exports: machinery and equipment, plastics, optical and medical equipment, iron and steel

Major Imports: machinery and equipment, oil and mineral fuels, plastics, optical and medical equipment, organic chemicals, iron and steel

**Currency:** yuan (CNY); note - also referred to as the Renminbi (RMB)

## Government of China

Type of Government: Communist state

Independence: 221 BC (unification under the Qin or Ch'in Dynasty); 1 January 1912 (Manchu Dynasty replaced by a Republic); 1 October 1949 (People's Republic established)

**Divisions:** China is divided into 22 provinces. They claim the island of Taiwan as their 23rd province. The largest provinces by population are Guangdong, Shandong, and Henan. See the map below for the locations and name of each province.

**Description of flag:** The flag of China was adopted on September 27, 1949. It has a red background with five yellow stars in the top left. One star is larger and the other four stars form an arc of unity around the larger star. The large star represents the Communist Party of China. The four smaller stars represent the four social classes of the people.

### **The People of China**

**Languages Spoken:** Standard Chinese or Mandarin (Putonghua, based on the Beijing dialect), Yue (Cantonese), Wu (Shanghaiese), Minbei (Fuzhou), Minnan (Hokkien-Taiwanese), Xiang, Gan, Hakka dialects, minority languages (see Ethnic groups entry)

**Religions:** Beginning in the earliest grades, Chinese students are subjected to anti-religious propaganda. They learn that religion is a 'feudal superstition'; a remnant of the past that holds the country back and is responsible for many of its problems. Despite this there are a few who practice ancient Chinese ancestral religion, Buddhism, Christianity (3%-4%) and Islam (1%-2%).

### **How are Christians persecuted in China?**

Tightening restrictions and increasing surveillance are putting Christians in China under intensifying pressure, as the Communist Party seeks to limit all threats to its power.

New restrictions on internet and social media – together with the 2018 regulations on religion, which includes a ban on under 18s attending church – are severely limiting Christian freedom.

Under the draconian measures introduced in March 2022, churches that want to share sermons or Bible studies online require a permit – but this is only available to the five state-approved religious institutions, such as the Three Self Patriotic Movement. The restrictions extend to social media, meaning that mentioning anything connected with Christianity could get people into considerable trouble.

Given the surveillance used by the authorities – which is among the most oppressive and sophisticated in the world – Christians have little room for manoeuvre, both online and offline. *Read the biography of Brother Yun.*

**Origin of the name China:** The English word "China" for the country either comes from the word "Qin" from the Qin dynasty or from the Persian word "Cin." In China, the country is usually referred to as "Zhongguo" which means "central country."

## Additional Information

China, officially the People's Republic of China (PRC), is a country in East Asia. It is the world's most populous country, with a population of around 1.4 billion. The capital city is Beijing and Shanghai is the city with the most people living in it. China covers an area of approximately 9.6 million square kilometers (3.7 million mi<sup>2</sup>), it is the world's third or fourth-largest country. The country is officially divided into 23 provinces, five autonomous regions, four direct-controlled municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing), and two special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau.

China emerged as one of the world's first civilizations, in the fertile basin of the Yellow River in the North China Plain. China was one of the world's foremost economic powers for most of the two millennia from the 1st until the 19th century. For millennia, China's political system was based on absolute hereditary monarchies, or dynasties, beginning with the Xia dynasty in 21st century BCE. Since then, China has expanded, fractured, and re-unified numerous times. In the 3rd century BCE, the Qin reunited core China and established the first Chinese empire. The succeeding Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) saw some of the most advanced technology at that time, including papermaking and the compass, along with agricultural and medical improvements. The invention of gunpowder and movable type in the Tang dynasty (618–907) and Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127) completed the Four Great Inventions.

Tang culture spread widely in Asia, as the new Silk Route brought traders to as far as Mesopotamia and the Horn of Africa. The Qing Empire, China's last dynasty, which formed the territorial basis for modern China suffered heavy losses to foreign imperialism. The Chinese monarchy collapsed in 1912 with the 1911 Revolution, when the Republic of China (ROC) replaced the Qing dynasty. China was invaded by the Empire of Japan during World War II. The Chinese Civil War resulted in a division of territory in 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led by Mao Zedong established the People's Republic of China on mainland China while the Kuomintang-led ROC government retreated to the island of Taiwan. Both the PRC and the ROC currently claim to be the sole legitimate government of China, resulting in an ongoing dispute even after the United Nations recognized the PRC as the government to represent China at all UN conferences in 1971.

China is nominally a unitary one-party socialist republic. The country is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and a founding member of several multilateral and regional cooperation organizations such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Silk Road Fund, the New Development Bank, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and is a member of the BRICS, the G8+5, the G20, the APEC, and the East Asia Summit.

It ranks among the lowest in international measurements of civil liberties, government transparency, freedom of the press, freedom of religion and ethnic minorities. Chinese authorities have been criticized by political dissidents and human rights activists for widespread human rights abuses, including political repression, mass censorship, mass surveillance of their citizens and violent suppression of protests.



After economic reforms in 1978, and its entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001, China's economy became the second-largest country by nominal GDP in 2010 and grew to the largest in the world by PPP in 2014. China is the world's fastest-growing major economy, the second-wealthiest nation in the world, and the world's largest manufacturer and exporter. The nation has the world's largest standing army — the People's Liberation Army — the second-largest defense budget, and is a recognized nuclear-weapons state. China has been characterized as a potential superpower due to its large economy and powerful military.

## Hong Kong

### **Brief History of Hong Kong:**

The area that is today Hong Kong was settled by the Han Chinese dynasty in the 7th century. In 1513 the Portuguese explorer Jorge Alvares arrived in Hong Kong. Trading between Portugal and China started soon after. However, there were also battles between the Chinese and Portuguese and soon the trading stopped. Years later, in 1699, the East India Company from Britain arrived and trade started up with Britain.

At the end of the first Opium war in 1842, Britain gained control of Hong Kong. The city became a major port for trade with southern China. When the communists took over China, many people fled to Hong Kong to keep their freedoms. After more than 150 years of British rule, China again took control of Hong Kong in July of 1997. Although now a part of China, Hong Kong maintains its same internal political, economic, and legal systems that it had before.

**Total Size:** 1,092 square km

**General Terrain:** hilly to mountainous with steep slopes; lowlands in north

**Climate:** subtropical monsoon; cool and humid in winter, hot and rainy from spring through summer, warm and sunny in fall

### **The People of Hong Kong**

**Type of Government:** limited democracy

**Languages Spoken:** Chinese (Cantonese), English; both are official

**Independence:** none (special administrative region of China)

**Religions:** eclectic mixture of local religions 90%, Christian 10%

### **Economy of Hong Kong**

Major Industries: textiles, clothing, tourism, banking, shipping, electronics, plastics, toys, watches, clocks

Agricultural Products: fresh vegetables; poultry, pork; fish

Natural Resources: outstanding deepwater harbor, feldspar

Major Exports: electrical machinery and appliances, textiles, apparel, footwear, watches and clocks, toys, plastics, precious stones, printed material

Major Imports: raw materials and semi-manufactures, consumer goods, capital goods, foodstuffs, fuel (most is re-exported)

**Currency:** Hong Kong dollar (HKD)

## Region: South East Asia

### Countries of South East Asia

Brunei

Burma (Myanmar)

Cambodia

East Timor (Timor-Leste)

Indonesia

Laos

Malaysia

Philippines

Singapore

Thailand

Vietnam

Southeast Asia is located, just like it sounds, in the southeast portion of the continent of Asia. It is south of China and to the east of India. Much of Southeast Asia is islands in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Two major Seas are the South China Sea and the Philippine Sea.

Southeast Asia is rich in wildlife with animals such as orangutans, leopards, elephants, water buffalo and rhinos. There is also significant diversity in culture, language, and religion. Much of Southeast Asia is rainforest and the climate is very wet. The wet weather makes the area prime for rice patty agriculture making rice the main staple in the Southeast Asian diet.

**Population:** 593,415,000 (Source: 2010 United Nations)

**Area:** 1,900,000 square miles. There are around 20,000 islands in Southeast Asia.

**Major terrain:** rainforest

**Wildlife:** Hundreds of animals in Southeast Asia are on the brink of extinction. This includes the Sumatran Tiger and the Sumatran Rhino.

**Bordering Bodies of Water:** Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean, South China Sea, Gulf of Thailand, Gulf of Tonkin, Java Sea, Philippine Sea, Celebes Sea

**Major Rivers and Lakes:** Tonle Sap, Lake Toba, Songkhla Lake, Laguna de Bay, Mekong River, Salween River, Irrawaddy River, Fly River

**Major Geographical Features:** Volcanoes of Indonesia and the Philippine Islands, Malay Peninsula, Philippine Trench, Java Trench, New Guinea Island, Borneo Island, Sumatra Island

Southeast Asia consists of two geographic regions:

Mainland Southeast Asia, also known historically as Indochina, comprising Myanmar, Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Maritime Southeast Asia, or the Malay Archipelago, comprises of Western New Guinea, East Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, the Philippines, East Timor, Christmas Island, and the Cocos Islands.

The region lies near the intersection of geological plates, with both heavy seismic and volcanic activities.

The mountain ranges in Myanmar, Thailand, and peninsular Malaysia are part of the Alpidic belt, while the islands of the Philippines are part of the Pacific Ring of Fire. Both seismic belts meet in Indonesia, causing the region to have relatively high occurrences of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

## **Geography**

Indonesia is the largest country in Southeast Asia and it also the largest archipelago in the world by size. Geologically, the Indonesian archipelago is one of the most volcanically active regions in the world. The highest mountain in Southeast Asia is Hkakabo Razi at 5,967 meters and can be found in northern Burma sharing the same range of its parent peak, Mount Everest.

The South China Sea is the major body of water within Southeast Asia. The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and Singapore, have integral rivers that flow into the South China Sea.

Mayon Volcano, despite being dangerously active, holds the record of the world's most perfect cone which is built from past and continuous eruption.

## **Climate**

The climate in Southeast Asia is mainly tropical—hot and humid all year round with plentiful rainfall. Northern Vietnam and the Myanmar Himalayas are the only regions in Southeast Asia that feature a subtropical climate, which has a cold winter with snow. The majority of Southeast Asia has a wet and dry season caused by seasonal shift in winds or monsoon. The tropical rain belt causes additional rainfall during the monsoon season. The rain forest is the second largest on earth (with the Amazon being the largest).

## **Environment**

The vast majority of Southeast Asia falls within the warm, humid tropics, and its climate generally can be characterised as monsoonal. The animals of Southeast Asia are diverse; on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra, the orangutan, the Asian elephant, the Malayan tapir, the Sumatran rhinoceros and the Bornean clouded leopard can also be found. Six subspecies of the binturong or bearcat exist in the region, though the one endemic to the island of Palawan is now classed as vulnerable.

Tigers of three different subspecies are found on the island of Sumatra (the Sumatran tiger), in peninsular Malaysia (the Malayan tiger), and in Indochina (the Indochinese tiger); all of which are endangered species. The Komodo dragon is the largest living species of lizard and inhabits the islands of Komodo, Rinca, Flores, and Gili Motang in Indonesia.

The Philippine eagle is the national bird of the Philippines. It is considered by scientists as the largest eagle in the world, and is endemic to the Philippines' forests.

The wild Asian water buffalo, and on various islands related dwarf species of Bubalus such as anoa were once widespread in Southeast Asia; nowadays the domestic Asian water buffalo is common across the region, but its remaining relatives are rare and endangered.

The mouse deer, a small tusked deer as large as a toy dog or cat, mostly can be found on Sumatra, Borneo (Indonesia) and in Palawan Islands (Philippines). The gaur, a gigantic wild ox larger than even wild water buffalo, is found mainly in Indochina. There is very little scientific information available regarding Southeast Asian amphibians.

Birds such as the peafowl and drongo live in this subregion as far east as Indonesia. The babirusa, a four-tusked pig, can be found in Indonesia as well. The hornbill was prized for its beak and used in trade with China. The horn of the rhinoceros, not part of its skull, was prized in China as well.

The nations of the region, with only few exceptions, have become aware of the need to maintain forest cover not only to prevent soil erosion but to preserve the diversity of flora and fauna. Indonesia, for example, has created an extensive system of national parks and preserves for this purpose. Even so, such species as the Javan rhinoceros face extinction, with only a handful of the animals remaining in western Java.

The shallow waters of the Southeast Asian coral reefs have the highest levels of biodiversity for the world's marine ecosystems, where coral, fish and molluscs abound. According to Conservation International, marine surveys suggest that the marine life diversity in Indonesia is the highest recorded on Earth. The whale shark, the world's largest species of fish and 6 species of sea turtles can also be found in the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean territories of the Philippines.

The trees and other plants of the region are tropical; in some countries where the mountains are tall enough, temperate-climate vegetation can be found. These rainforest areas are currently being logged-over, especially in Borneo.

While Southeast Asia is rich in flora and fauna, Southeast Asia is facing severe deforestation which causes habitat loss for various endangered species such as orangutan and the

Sumatran tiger. Predictions have been made that more than 40% of the animal and plant species in Southeast Asia could be wiped out in the 21st century. At the same time, haze has been a regular occurrence. The two worst regional hazes were in 1997 and 2006 in which multiple countries were covered with thick haze, mostly caused by "slash and burn" activities in Sumatra and Borneo. In reaction, several countries in Southeast Asia signed the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution to combat haze pollution.