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Southeast Asia



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Introduction



Southeast Asia is located between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Some of the other major bodies of water in this region include the Bay of Bengal, the South China Sea, and the Strait of Malacca. This region consists of two main areas: Mainland Southeast Asia and Maritime Southeast Asia.

There are eleven countries located in Southeast Asia. These countries are Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and the Philippines.

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Myanmar (Burma)



Myanmar is located on the coast of Mainland Southeast Asia, near the Bay of Bengal. This country is also known as Burma. The name was changed in 1989 by a military government. Some nations do not recognize the new name since there was no vote.

Myanmar gained independence from the British Empire in 1948. Since gaining independence, the country has suffered from political instability and prolonged civil war. Most of the fighting stems from religious and ethnic divisions among the population. Tensions continue, but there has been some progress in recent years. The government has made major reforms and has become increasingly democratic.

Buddhists make up around 85% of the population. Christians and Muslims are both large minorities. The country is ethnically diverse, with over 100 different ethnic groups. The largest ethnic group is the Bamar, who make up roughly two-thirds of the population. Burmese is the official language, but many minority groups speak their own languages.

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Thailand



Thailand is centrally located in Mainland Southeast Asia. The country partially encloses the Gulf of Thailand, which is part of the South China Sea. Bangkok is the capital and most populous city of Thailand. The city is located at a harbor site on the Gulf of Thailand. Most of the population is concentrated in and around Bangkok. There are a few smaller urban areas, but the rest of the country is mostly rural.

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that was never colonized. The Thai government is a constitutional monarchy with a parliament. However, the government has been under military control since 2014. Despite some political instability, Thailand has a relatively high level of development. The country is heavily involved in international trade. Traditionally, agricultural goods like rice and fish have been major exports. Although these industries are still important, Thailand's main exports are manufactured goods like electronics, machinery, and automobiles. The country also has a large tourism industry.

Thailand's population is mostly homogenous. Ethnic Thais make up around 95% of the population. Similarly, around 95% of the population identifies as Buddhist.

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Cambodia



Cambodia is located in Mainland Southeast Asia, on the coast of the Gulf of Thailand. The country was once part of French Indochina. In 1953, Cambodia gained independence from France. In the 1975, a communist regime called the Khmer Rouge seized control of the Cambodian government. The Khmer Rouge was led by a man named Pol Pot. Pol Pot instituted brutal policies and killed anyone considered an enemy of the new government. An estimated two million people died during this time.

Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge were ousted from power in 1979, after Vietnam invaded the country. The fighting continued until 1991, when peace agreements were signed. Free elections were held under the supervision of the United Nations. Elections were held again in 1998, after a coup. Today, the Cambodian government is technically a constitutional monarchy; however, the government functions more like a dictatorship.

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Vietnam



Vietnam is located on the eastern coast of Mainland Southeast Asia, near the South China Sea. This country was once part of French Indochina. In 1954, communist forces overthrew the French. As part of a peace agreement, Vietnam was divided into two countries: North Vietnam and South Vietnam. North Vietnam was communist and South Vietnam was anti-communist. This set the stage for the Vietnam War.

The U.S. supported South Vietnam by sending funding and military supplies. Over time, the U.S. became more involved, and eventually began sending American troops. After years of fighting, the United States withdrew from South Vietnam in 1973. In 1975, Vietnam was reunited under communist rule.

Today, Vietnam is still ruled by a communist government. It is a one-party state, and many political freedoms are restricted. Since the 1980s, the country has undergone economic reforms. It has moved away from a command economy and has started to adopt a market based economy. As a result, Vietnam has experienced strong economic growth.

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Singapore



Singapore is an independent city-state in Southeast Asia. It is located on a small island in the southern part of the Malay Peninsula, near the Strait of Malacca. Modern Singapore was established as a British trading colony in 1819. Singapore was briefly part of Malaysia, before becoming fully independent in 1965.

Since Singapore became an independent nation, it has flourished economically. The country's economy has grown rapidly, and currently has one of the highest per capita GDP rates in the world. Singapore is heavily involved in international trade, and maintains one of the world's busiest ports. The population enjoys a high standard of living and a high quality of life.

Ethnic Chinese make up the majority of Singapore's population. The country has four official languages: English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil. The population of Singapore is religiously diverse. People identify as Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Taoist, and Hindu. Eighteen percent of the population identifies as having no religion.

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Indonesia



Indonesia is a part of Maritime Southeast Asia. The country spans over 17,000 islands along the equator. Some of the major islands are Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Sulawesi, and New Guinea. Sumatra forms the Strait of Malacca, which connects the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. The capital, Jakarta, is located on the northwestern coast of Java.

Indonesia was colonized by the Dutch in the seventeenth century. It remained a Dutch colony for centuries, until Japan occupied the islands during World War II. Indonesia declared its independence near the end of the war. In 1949, the Netherlands officially recognized the country's independence.

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world, after the United States. About half of the population lives on the island of Java. The population is incredibly diverse. The country is home to more than 300 ethnic groups and more than 700 languages. Indonesia is also the most populous Islamic country in the world. 87% of the population identifies as Muslim.

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Philippines



The Philippines are a part of Maritime Southeast Asia. This nation spans an archipelago that includes more than 7,600 islands. The archipelago separates the South China Sea from the Pacific Ocean. Manila is the capital of the Philippines. This city is located at a natural harbor site on the western coast of the island chain. Manila is a densely populated modern city. It was rebuilt after being heavily damaged in World War II.

The Philippines were colonized by the Spanish Empire during the sixteenth century. The islands were named for King Phillip II of Spain. The United States took control of the Philippines in 1898, after the Spanish American War. The U.S. maintained control of the islands for decades. During World War II, the Japanese occupied the Philippines. Filipinos and Americans fought together to reclaim the islands. After the war, in 1946, the Philippines gained independence.

The Philippines are predominantly Christian. Around 80% of Filipinos identify as Roman Catholic. The population is ethnically diverse. There are many regional languages and dialects spoken throughout the country. One of these languages, Tagalog, was standardized and adopted as an official Filipino language. English is also an official language, but it is typically learned as a secondary language.