
Indonesia

The Republic of Indonesia is a country in Southeast Asia. Comprising 17,508 islands, it is the world's largest archipelagic state. With a population of 234 million people in 2007, it is the world's fourth most populous country and the most populous Muslim-majority nation. The nation's capital city is Jakarta. The country shares land borders with Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Malaysia. Other neighboring countries include Singapore, the Philippines, Australia, and the Indian territory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Indonesian archipelago has been an important trade region since at least the 7th century, when the Srivijaya Kingdom traded with China and India. Local rulers gradually adopted Indian cultural, religious and political models from the early centuries CE, and the Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms flourished. Indonesian history has been influenced by foreign powers drawn to its natural resources. Muslim traders brought Islam and European powers fought one another to monopolize trade in the Spice Islands of Maluku during the Age of Discovery.

Indonesia has around 300 ethnic groups, each with cultural differences developed over centuries, and influenced by Indian, Arabic, Malay and European sources. Traditional Javanese and Balinese dances, for example, contain aspects of Hindu culture and mythology as do wayang kulit (shadow puppet) performances. Textiles such as batik, ikat and songket are created across Indonesia in styles that vary by region. Indonesian cuisine varies by region and is based on Chinese, European, Middle Eastern and Indian precedents. Rice is the main staple food and is served with side dishes of meat and vegetables. Spices (notably chilli), coconut milk, fish and chicken are fundamental ingredients.
