

Geography

Cambodia has an area of 181,035 square kilometers (69,898 sq mi) and lies entirely within the tropics, between latitudes 10° and 15°N, and longitudes 102° and 108°E. It borders Thailand to the north and west, Laos to the northeast, and Vietnam to the east and southeast. It has a 443-kilometer (275 mi) coastline along the Gulf of Thailand.

The most distinctive geographical feature is the lacustrine plain, formed by the inundations of the Tonle Sap (Great Lake), measuring about 2,590 square kilometers (1,000 sq mi) during the dry season and expanding to about 24,605 square kilometers (9,500 sq mi) during the rainy season. This densely populated plain, which is devoted to wet rice cultivation, is the heartland of Cambodia. Much of this area has been designated as a biosphere reserve.

Most (about 75%) of the country lies at elevations of less than 100 metres (330 ft) above sea level, the exceptions being the Cardamom Mountains (highest elevation 1,813 m / 5,948 ft) and their southeast extension the Dâmrei Mountains ("Elephant Mountains") (elevation range 500–1,000 m or 1,640–3,280 ft), as well the steep escarpment of the Dângrêk Mountains (average elevation 500 m / 1,640 ft) along the border with Thailand's Isan region. The highest elevation of Cambodia is Phnom Aoral, near Pursat in the center of the country, at 1,813 meters (5,948 ft).

Climate

Cambodia's climate, like that of the rest of Southeast Asia, is dominated by monsoons, which are known as tropical wet and dry because of the distinctly marked seasonal differences.

Cambodia has a temperature range from 21 to 35 °C (69.8 to 95 °F) and experiences tropical monsoons. Southwest monsoons blow inland bringing moisture-laden winds from the Gulf of Thailand and Indian Ocean from May to October. The northeast monsoon ushers in the dry season, which lasts from November to March. The country experiences the heaviest precipitation from September to October with the driest period occurring from January to February.

Cambodia has two distinct seasons. The rainy season, which runs from May to October, can see temperatures drop to 22 °C (71.6 °F) and is generally accompanied with high humidity. The dry season lasts from November to April when temperatures can rise up to 40 °C (104 °F) around April. Disastrous flooding, due to extremely heavy rainfall, occurred in 2001 and again in 2002. Yet almost every year there is flooding to some degree.

Wildlife

Cambodia has a wide variety of plants and animals. There are 212 mammal species, 536 bird species, 240 reptile species, 850 freshwater fish species (Tonle Sap Lake area), and 435 marine fish species. Much of this biodiversity is contained around the Tonle Sap Lake and the surrounding biosphere. The Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve is a unique ecological phenomenon surrounding the Tonle Sap. It encompasses the lake and nine provinces: Kampong Thom, Siem Reap, Battambang, Pursat, Kampong Chhnang, Banteay Meanchey, Krong Pailin, Otdar Meanchey and Preah Vihear. In 1997, it was successfully nominated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Other key habitats include the dry forest of Mondolkiri and Ratanakiri provinces and the Cardamom Mountains ecosystem, including Bokor National Park, Botum-Sakor National Park, and the Phnom Aural and Phnom Samkos wildlife sanctuaries.

The rate of deforestation in Cambodia is one of the highest in the world. Cambodia's primary rainforest cover fell from over 70% in 1969 to just 31% in 2007. In total, Cambodia lost 25,000 square kilometres (9,700 sq mi) of forest between 1990 and 2005—3,340 km² (1,290 sq mi) of which was primary forest. Since 2007, less than 3,220 km²(1,243 sq mi) of primary forest remain with the result that the future sustainability of the forest reserves of Cambodia is under severe threat, with illegal loggers looking to generate revenue.