INTRODUCTION

Indonesia lies along the equator between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It is made up of some 17,000 islands. Indonesia is the largest country, both in area and population, in Southeast Asia. It is also the 4th most populous nation in the world. The capital is Jakarta.

GEOGRAPHY

Despite the large number of islands, 5 of them account for more than 90% of the land area. These are

1. Sumatra,
2. Java,
3. Sulawesi,
4. the southern three-quarters of Borneo, known as Kalimantan,
5. and the western portion of New Guinea, known as Papua.

Most of the country’s people live on these islands. More than half of the islands are uninhabited (no one lives on them).

Most of the islands are mountainous. Indonesia has many active volcanoes, including the famous Krakatoa. That volcano erupted in
1883, causing massive damage. The area is also known for **earthquakes**. In late 2004 one of the largest earthquakes ever recorded struck off the north-western coast of Sumatra. It caused a giant wave, called a **tsunami**, in the Indian Ocean that struck 12 countries and killed more than 100,000 people.

Indonesia’s tropical climate is generally **hot and humid**. Average temperatures are highest along the coasts. Most of the country receives heavy rain throughout the year.

**PLANTS AND ANIMALS**

Much of Indonesia is covered with **tropical rainforests**. Mangrove tree **swamps** are common along coastal lowlands. Among the animals found in Indonesia are the rhinoceros, orangutan, tapir, tiger and elephant. The country’s bird life includes the cockatoo, the
bowerbird and the bird of paradise. Some animals and birds live only on certain islands. Peacocks, are found only on the island of Java.

People

Indonesia has more than 300 different ethnic groups speaking 250 languages. Most of the people, however, are of Malay ancestry. The largest ethnic group is the Javanese. The Chinese form the most numerous non-Malay community.

Most of the population practises Islam. Other religions include Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. The national language of the country is called Bahasa Indonesia.
The majority of Indonesians live in rural areas (in the countryside), but the cities are growing. More than half the population lives on the island of Java. On this island are the country’s three largest cities – Jakarta, Surabaya and Bandung.

Indonesia is known for its rich cultural traditions. The country is famous for its many dance styles, especially on Java and Bali.
Music, dance and drama are combined in shadow puppet shows known as **wayang**. Decorative arts include **batik**, a traditional technique for dyeing fabric.

---

**Economy**

**Agriculture** employs more than 40 per cent of the work force in Indonesia. The staple crop is rice. Indonesia is a major supplier of natural rubber. Other cash crops include coffee, sugar cane, tea, tobacco, spices and palm oil. Goats, cattle and sheep are raised. The waters surrounding Indonesia allow for a **fishing** industry.

Indonesia produces large quantities of **petroleum and natural gas**. It is also rich in copper and gold. Wood products are major export items.