

YEMEN

Yemen officially the **Republic of Yemen**, is a country located on the Arabian Peninsula in Southwest Asia. Yemen has an estimated population of more than 23 million people and is bordered by Saudi Arabia to the North, the Red Sea to the West, the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden to the South, and Oman to the east. Yemen is the only republic on the Arabian Peninsula. Its capital is Sana'a.

History

The history of Yemen dates back to the Minaean (1200–650 B.C.) and Sabaeen (750–115 B.C.) kingdoms. Ancient Yemen (centered around the port of Aden) engaged in the lucrative myrrh and frankincense trade. It was invaded by the Romans (1st century A.D.) as well as the Ethiopians and Persians (6th century A.D.). In A.D. 628 it converted to Islam and in the 10th century came under the control of the Rassite dynasty of the Zaidi sect, which remained involved in North Yemeni politics until 1962. The Ottoman Turks nominally occupied the area from 1538 to the decline of their empire in 1918. The northern portion of Yemen was ruled by imams until a pro-Egyptian military coup took place in 1962. The Republic of Yemen was established on May 22, 1990, when pro-Western Yemen and the Marxist Yemen Arab Republic merged after 300 years of separation to form the new nation.

Geography

Formerly divided into two nations, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the Yemen Arab Republic, the Republic of Yemen occupies the southwest tip of the Arabian Peninsula on the Red Sea opposite Ethiopia and extends along the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula on the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Saudi Arabia is to the north and Oman is to the east. The country is about the size of France. A 700-mile (1,130-km) narrow coastal plain in the south gives way to a mountainous region and then a plateau area.

Population

Unlike other people of the Arabian Peninsula who have historically been nomads or semi-nomads, Yemenis are almost entirely sedentary and live in small villages and towns scattered throughout the highlands and coastal regions.

Yemenis are divided into two principal Islamic religious groups: the Shia Zaidi sect, found in the north and northwest, and the Shafa'i school of Sunni Muslims, found in the south and southeast. Yemenis are mainly of Semitic origin, although African strains are present among inhabitants of the coastal region. Arabic is the official language, although English is increasingly understood in major cities. In the Mahra area (the extreme east), several non-Arabic languages are spoken. When the former states of north and south Yemen were established, most resident minority groups departed.

Climate

Climatically, Yemen can be divided into three main zones: the Tihama (the Red Sea coastal strip); the central highlands (including San'a); and the desert areas of the east and the far north.

The best time to visit the Tihama is between November and February (summertime can be suffocating hot). The twice-yearly monsoons bring some rain to the region between mid-March and mid-April, and particularly July to September. Temperatures range from around 21°C in December and January to as high as 40°C in June. Humidity is also high.

The central highlands (which range from 1500m to 3500m) enjoy a temperate climate for most of the year, though it can get hot at noon and chilly at night (particularly between October and February). The monsoons are light in San'a, but heavy (up to 500mm rainfall) in the southwest and can continue into May. San'a ranges in temperature from a minimum of 5°C (from November to January) to a maximum of 25°C (in July).

Currency: Yemeni Riyal (YR)

Living as an Expat

Housing in Yemen

Finding a house in Sana'a is fairly easy and usually there is a wide variety of houses available. Most houses are quite big and well maintained. Foreigners usually know to appreciate the beautiful camerias (the colored glassworks above the windows) and the nice stucco decorations. Especially the diwan (special room for qat chewing) is considered the showroom of the house. Generally the landlord will ask an advance payment for 6 months or one year. Before finalizing the contract it is wise to go through the house with the landlord and to note down all the fixed assets and the condition of other things that might be available in the house. Sign the list together with the landlord so as to avoid problems when leaving the house. The weak spot of most Yemeni houses is the sanitary equipment. Most toilets keep running and bathrooms often have dripping taps and show other malfunctioning. Check on these things before renting the house and agree with the landlord on who will pay for the inevitable repairs.

Getting there and around

Most international traffic arrives and departs from Sana'a airport. A few airlines, particularly from Middle Eastern countries, also use Aden. Work is currently under way on a new airport for Sana'a, which is scheduled to be completed by 2009. Immigration is an uncomplicated procedure, but slow. If arriving by land, you'll be required to do all paperwork at the border crossing. Proceedings can take hours, particularly if you're with your own vehicle. Buses travel to almost all the larger towns (sometimes several a day), and services are pretty punctual and safe. Most car-hire companies are based in Sana'a. Drivers must be over 21.

More information

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