

Brunei Darussalam



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1984
Population:	400,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	-0.3% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 37
Official language:	Malay
Time:	GMT plus 8hr
Currency:	Brunei dollar (Br\$)

Geography

Area:	5,765 sq km
Coastline:	161km
Capital:	Bandar Seri Begawan

Brunei Darussalam (*Brunei* – 'Abode of Peace') is a small state in South-East Asia on the north-west coast of the island of Borneo, in the Indonesian Archipelago. Its 161km coastline faces the South China Sea. On the land side, it is enclosed by the Malaysian state of Sarawak, which divides it in two. The districts of Brunei–Muara, Tutong and Belait make up the larger, western part of the country; Temburong district the east.

Main towns: Bandar Seri Begawan (capital, pop. 74,500 in 2009, comprising Kampong Ayer 41,500), Kuala Belait (27,700), Seria (27,600), Tutong (21,000), Muara and Bangar.

Topography: The coastal plain is intersected by rivers descending from the hilly hinterland. To the east are mountains, the highest point being Bukit Pagon at 1,812m. Most towns and villages are beside estuaries.

Climate: Tropical, with high humidity and heavy rainfall. There is no distinct wet season; the wettest months are January and November. Much of the rain falls in sudden thundery showers.

Environment: The most significant environmental issue is seasonal smoke/haze resulting from forest fires in Indonesia.

Vegetation: Mangrove swamps lie along the coast, and forest covers 53% of the land area, a large part of this being primary forest, dense in places and of great genetic diversity. There are 15 forest reserves, covering about 40% of the total land area. The government plans to increase the area of the forest reserves. Around 15% of the land area is cultivated.

Wildlife: Most of the mammals are small and nocturnal, including tree shrews, moon rats and mouse deer. There are numerous bird species, especially hornbills.

Transport: The country has 3,650km of roads, 77% paved. The main deep-water port is at Muara, with a dedicated container terminal. The Brunei, Belait and Tutong rivers provide an important means of transport. Passenger vessels and water-taxis run between the shallow draught port at Bandar Seri Begawan, Temburong district, and the Malaysian port of Limbang. Brunei International Airport is 6km north-east of the capital.

did you know?

Brunei Darussalam is a monarchy.

Scholarships and fellowships are awarded by Brunei Darussalam to citizens of other Commonwealth countries under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan.

Society

KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 69
 Life expectancy: 77 years
 Net primary enrolment: 93%

Population: 400,000 (2009); 75% lives in urban areas, concentrated along the coast; growth 2.3% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 20 per 1,000 people (36 in 1970); life expectancy 77 years (67 in 1970).

Malays comprise some two-thirds of the population, and Chinese (about 11%), Europeans, Indians and other races the balance.

Language: Official language is Malay; English is widely spoken. Other languages include Chinese (various dialects), Tamil, Iban and Dusun.

Religion: Official religion is Islam; minorities of Buddhists, Christians, Confucians and Taoists. The national ideology, *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB, Malay Muslim monarchy) fuses Islamic values and Brunei Malay culture.

Media: *Borneo Bulletin* is an English-language daily newspaper. *Media Permata* is published daily in Malay, and *Brunei Direct* is an online news service.

State-owned Radio Television Brunei provides the only local radio and television services, broadcasting in Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese and Gurkhali. Foreign TV stations are available via a cable network.

There are 89 personal computers (2005) and 788 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

Education: A new education system is being introduced in 2010, referred to as 21st Century National Education System or SPN21, which will be broad-based and provide multiple pathways enabling students with different skills and abilities to survive in a fast-changing world. Under this system, there are six years of primary school, starting at age 6 and leading to Primary School Assessment or Penilaian Sekolah Rendah, and, depending on academic ability, either four or five years of secondary school, leading to the Brunei–Cambridge GCE O level exams. Those aiming for higher education will then study for the Brunei–Cambridge GCE A level exams; others will move into vocational education. Some 98% of pupils complete primary school (2007). The school year starts in January. The primary curriculum puts the emphasis on literacy and numeracy, including information and communication technology skills.

The University of Brunei provides courses taught in Malay and English. On the establishment of the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD) in Bandar Seri Begawan in 1985, local pursuit of degree courses became possible. The government, nevertheless, continued to award scholarships to qualified Brunei citizens to undertake courses of study not yet available at UBD and many Bruneians continue their studies in other Commonwealth countries or other countries such as the USA. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 199:100 (2008). There is virtually no illiteracy among people aged 15–24.

Health: There are ten hospitals, health clinics, travelling clinics and a flying doctor service. Infant mortality was 5 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (63 in 1960). Malaria has been completely eradicated.

Communications: Country code 673; internet domain '.bn'. Coin- and card-operated public telephones are available throughout the country. There is good mobile phone coverage in and around the main towns, particularly in the north-west.

There are 202 main telephone lines and 1,067 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, Chinese New Year, National Day (23 February), Royal Brunei Armed Forces Day (31 May), Sultan's Birthday (15 July) and Christmas Day.

Religious festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Prophet's Birthday, Isra Mikraj (Ascension of the Prophet), First Day of Ramadan, Nuzul al-Quraan (Anniversary of the Revelation of the Quran), Hari Raya Aidil Fitri (Eid al-Fitr/end of Ramadan), Hari Raya Aidil Adha (Eid al-Adha/Feast of the Sacrifice) and Hijriah (Islamic New Year).

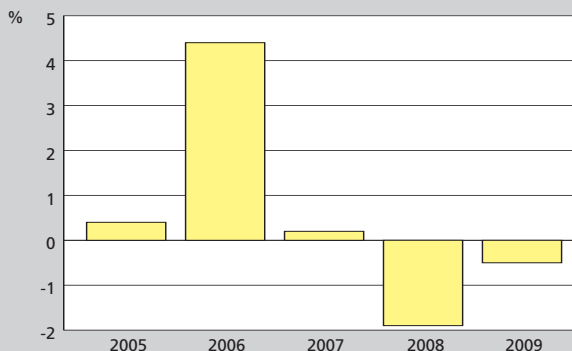
Economy

KEY FACTS 2009

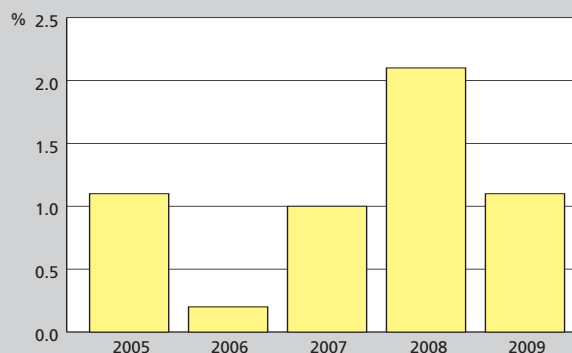
GDP: US\$10.7bn
 GDP p.c.: US\$26,750
 GDP growth: 1.5% p.a. 2004–07
 Inflation: 1.0% p.a. 2004–08

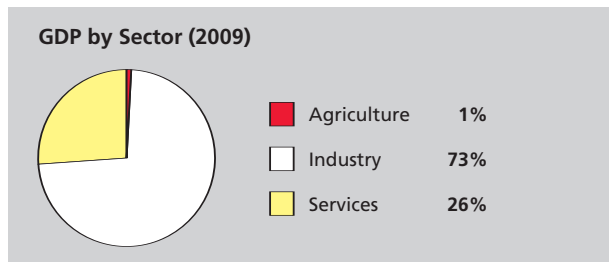
Overview: Due to its extensive resources of oil and gas and small population, Brunei is among the world's richer countries. The oil and gas sector dominates the economy and generates more than 90% of export earnings and government revenues (2008). Brunei is

Real Growth in GDP



Inflation





vulnerable to fluctuations in world prices: the slump in oil prices was largely responsible for negative growth in the 1980s.

The economy and social infrastructure have been developed through a series of national development programmes. During the 1990s, the emphasis was on social services and public utilities. This continued into the 2000s, together with diversification of manufacturing, and encouragement of private investment, including foreign investment. Major projects include a gas pipeline, a power plant, development at the port of Muara, and an industrial park with a methanol plant which began production and exports in mid-2010.

As the regional economic crisis of 1997–98 receded, the government announced plans to encourage fuller private-sector participation in public enterprises, to promote foreign investment – including, for the first time, allowing foreigners to own land in Brunei – and for the country to become a regional trade and services centre.

The economy benefited from high global energy prices in the early 2000s, with little inflation. It then stalled in 2004 and 2005, picking up in 2006 with growth of 4.4%, only to slow again in 2007 (0.2%). In the strongly adverse climate of the world economic downturn, the economy shrank in 2008 (–1.9%) and 2009 (–0.5%).

Trade: Natural gas and crude oil account for the bulk of exports.

Oil and gas: The oil and gas sector contributes about 70% to GDP (2008). The country produced about 150,000 barrels of oil a day in the second quarter of 2009.

Constitution

Status:	National Monarchy
Legislature:	Legislative Council
Independence:	1 January 1984

Under the 1959 constitution, the Sultan is the head of state with full executive authority and is assisted and advised by five councils – the Religious Council, the Privy Council, the Council of Cabinet Ministers, the Legislative Council and the Council of Succession.

The Legislative Council was suspended in 1984, since when the Sultan has ruled through emergency decree. He has sole power to amend the provisions of existing laws. There are no elections; the last election was held in 1962. The national ideology, *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB), invokes Islam and Brunei's history in support of the Sultan's absolute power, as well as the paramountcy of the Malays in Brunei.

In September 2004 a Legislative Council was revived and 21 members appointed, with no immediate timetable for election of the proposed 15 directly elected members. In September 2005 the

Sultan dissolved the existing Legislative Council and appointed 29 new members.

Politics

Next elections:	no elections
Head of state:	Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah
Head of government:	the Sultan

The Parti Kebangsaan Demokratik Brunei (PKDB) or Brunei National Democratic Party, with a membership of about 3,000, mostly Malay businessmen and professionals, was formed in 1985. It called for free elections and an end to emergency rule. The party was de-registered in 1988, after failing to conform to the requirements of the law. The only legal and registered political party at present is the Parti Pembangunan (National Development Party).

The present Sultan, head of state and government and concurrently prime minister, defence minister and finance minister is Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah. Official policy is to encourage economic growth while preserving cultural and religious values.

International relations

Brunei Darussalam is a member of Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Non-Aligned Movement, Organisation of the Islamic Conference, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Traveller information

Local laws and conventions: The legal system in Brunei is partly based on Sharia law and can, occasionally, apply to non-Muslim visitors. Women should ensure that their head, knees and arms are covered at all times.

There are severe penalties for all drug offences in Brunei, including, in some cases, the death penalty.

The sale of alcohol in Brunei is prohibited and during Ramadan restaurants close during the day.

Malays make up the majority of the country's population, though there are also Chinese Bruneians who have their own social and business etiquettes.

A light handshake is the traditional form of greeting among Muslim men.

Food may only be touched with the right hand and is never given or received with the left. It is regarded as discourteous to eat or drink in public places when Muslims are fasting during Ramadan.

Dress is generally informal except for special occasions. Suits are the norm for business meetings and appointments must be made. Business cards are customary among Chinese Bruneians. Although Malay is the official language, English is used in business circles. The best time to visit on business is outside the monsoon season (between November and December). Office hours are Mon–Thur 0800–1700 and Sat 0800–1200. (Business hours may be interrupted during Ramadan or the Chinese New Year.)

Immigration and customs: Visas are required by most nationals and visitors should contact their local consulate to check current visa requirements. Passports must be valid for six months from the date of departure and a return ticket is required. Visitors are advised to carry photocopies of their passport and travel documents, and to keep the originals in a safe place. Non-Muslims over 17 years of age may import duty free goods, but must declare them to Customs on arrival.

Lone parents coming into the country will need documentary evidence to show parental responsibility for accompanying children.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate will be required by all those arriving from infected countries.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left, and car hire is available at the airport and from major hotels for those with an international driving permit. The best roads are found in the Brunei-Muara district.

There is a good national bus service linking the main towns, and local buses are well maintained and efficient.

Taxis are widely available in Bandar Seri Begawan and can be found near the major hotels. Fares are usually metered, but travellers should ensure they agree a price if no meter is visible.

There is a water taxi service to Kampong Ayer, where boats are the most common means of getting around Brunei's 'water village'. Fares are negotiated before travel.

Travel health: Brunei's health care facilities are good. Should complications arise, medical evacuation to Singapore may be necessary and visitors should ensure they have comprehensive health insurance that covers this.

Air quality periodically reaches hazardous levels because of smoke haze and this may affect some travellers.

Dengue fever is endemic to Brunei, and visitors will need insect repellent and suitable clothing to discourage mosquito bites. All current vaccination requirements must be checked well before travel.

Water for drinking, brushing teeth and making ice should first have been boiled or sterilised. Milk is unpasteurised.

Money: Credit cards are accepted at most major establishments. Travellers cheques can be cashed at banks or major hotels. Singapore dollars may also be used in Brunei and are of the same value as the Brunei dollar. Most other major currencies are convertible at banks, hotels or official moneychangers.

There were 226,000 tourist arrivals in 2008.



History

The pre-Islamic history of Brunei is unclear, but archaeological evidence shows the country to have been trading with the Asian mainland as early as AD 518. Islam became predominant during the 14th century and the Brunei Sultanate rose to prominence in the 15th and 16th centuries, when it controlled coastal areas of North-West Borneo, parts of Kalimantan and the Philippines. The Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish began arriving after the 16th century. Brunei lost outlying possessions to the Spanish and the Dutch and its power gradually declined as the British and Dutch colonial empires expanded.

In the 19th century the Sultan of Brunei sought British support in defending the coast against Dayak pirates, and ennobled James Brooke, a British adventurer, as Rajah of Sarawak in 1839. The British proceeded to annex the island of Labuan in 1846. North Borneo became a British protected state in 1888 and Brunei voluntarily accepted the status of a British protected state under the Sultan, with Britain having charge of its foreign relations. The loss of Limbang district to Sarawak in 1890 split Brunei into two and remains an obstacle to good relations with Malaysia to this day.

In 1906 a treaty was signed between Britain and Brunei making Brunei a full protectorate. The treaty assured the succession of the ruling dynasty, with the arrangement that a British resident would advise the Sultan on all matters except those concerning local customs and religion.

In 1929 large resources of oil were discovered in Seria; these and subsequent discoveries made Brunei a wealthy country. In 1959 a written constitution was introduced, giving Brunei internal self-rule and allowing for a legislative council. The residency agreement of 1906 was revoked, transferring the resident's power to the Sultan and appointed officials below him.

During 1962 there were sporadic and unsuccessful attempts at rebellion, instigated by the North Borneo Liberation Army. These were put down with the help of British Gurkha units flown in from Singapore and the Sultan declared a state of emergency. This has been renewed every two years since.

In the 1960s, Brunei considered merging with the Federation of Malaysia, which at the time included the provinces of the Malaysian peninsula, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore. The idea was opposed by the Brunei People's Party, which at that time held 16 seats in the 33-member legislative council, and which proposed instead the creation of a state comprising Northern Borneo, Sarawak and Sabah. The Sultan finally decided against joining the Federation.

In 1971, under an agreement with the UK, Brunei ceased to be a British protected state. The constitution was amended to give the Sultan full control over all internal matters, the UK retaining responsibility for defence and foreign affairs. Brunei became a fully independent sovereign state on 1 January 1984.

Further information

Prime Minister's Office of Brunei Darussalam:
www.pmo.gov.bn

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

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