

Cameroon



KEY FACTS

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| Joined Commonwealth: | 1995 |
| Population: | 19,522,000 (2009) |
| GDP p.c. growth: | 0.7% p.a. 1990–2009 |
| UN HDI 2010: | world ranking 131 |
| Official languages: | French, English |
| Time: | GMT plus 1hr |
| Currency: | CFA franc (CFAfr) |

Geography

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| Area: | 475,442 sq km |
| Coastline: | 402km |
| Capital: | Yaoundé (constitutional); Douala (economic) |

Cameroon is called Cameroun in French, Kamerun in German, Camarões in Portuguese, and Cameroon in English. The country's name derives from *camarões*, meaning 'shrimps', so called by the 15th-century Portuguese explorer Fernando Po who named the River Wouri *Rio dos Camarões* ('shrimp river'), after the many shrimps. Cameroon in central Africa is bounded clockwise (from the west) by the Gulf of Guinea, Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. The country comprises 10 provinces.

Main towns: Yaoundé (capital, pop. 1.74m in 2009), Douala (principal port, 2.05m), Garoua (546,100), Bamenda (515,600), Maroua (415,300), Bafoussam (365,000), Ngaoundéré (298,000), Bertoua (281,100), Loum (234,500), Kumbo (207,400), Edéa (197,900), Mbouda (176,000), Kumba (173,400), Foumban (164,300), Dschang (140,900), Nkongsamba (129,200), Kousséri (contiguous with Ndjamena in Chad, 93,100) and Buéa (58,300).

Topography: The physical geography is varied, with forests, mountains, large waterfalls and deserts, falling into four regions. At the border of the northern Sahel region lies Lake Chad and the Chad basin; further south the land forms a sloping plain, rising to the Mandara Mountains. The central region extends from the Benue (Bénoué) river to the Sanaga river, with a plateau in the north. This region includes the Adamaoua plateau which separates the agricultural south from the pastoral north. In the west, the land is mountainous, with a double chain of volcanic peaks, rising to a height of 4,095m at Mt Cameroon. This is the highest and wettest peak in western Africa. The fourth region, to the south, extends from the Sanaga river to the southern border, comprising a coastal plain and forested plateau. There is a complicated system of drainage. Several rivers flow westwards: the Benue river which rises in the Mandara Mountains and later joins the River Niger, and the Sanaga and Nyong rivers which flow into the Gulf of Guinea. The

did you know?

Celebrated writers originating from Cameroon include: Ferdinand Oyono, who was born in Ebolowa, South Province, in 1929; and Mongo Beti, born in Akométan, Central Province, in 1932 and died in 2001.

Four Cameroon nationals have excelled in international football: Roger Milla was African Footballer of the Year in 1976 and 1990; Samuel Eto'o, in 2003, 2004 and 2005; Patrick Mboma, in 2000; and Lauren Mayer, came 2nd in 2000.

Dja and Sangha drain into the Congo Basin. The Logone and Chari rivers flow north into Lake Chad.

Climate: In the northern Sahel region, there is a long dry season from October to April, with temperatures varying from cool to very hot. Further south, on the Adamaoua plateau, there are sharp drops in temperature at night. In the south the climate is hot and humid, with two rainy seasons, in September/October and from March to June.

Environment: The most significant issues are overgrazing, desertification, deforestation, poaching, and overfishing.

Vegetation: There is tropical rainforest (including ebony and mahogany) in the hot humid south, with mangroves along the coast and river mouths. The southern coastal plain and south-east plateau also contain the cocoa and banana farms and the rubber and oil palm plantations. The central region has mixed deciduous and evergreen forest. Above the forest zone are drier woodlands, with taller grasses and mountain bamboos. High in the interior and

on Mt Cameroon the grasses are shorter. Further north there is savannah bushland, with trees becoming sparse towards the Chad basin. Forest covers 44% of the land area, having declined at 1.0% p.a. 2000–07. Arable land comprises 13% and permanent cropland 2.6% of the total land area.

Wildlife: The Waza National Park in the north, originally created for the protection of giraffe and antelope, also abounds in monkeys — screaming red and green monkeys and mandrills — and lions and leopards. There are gorillas in the great tracts of hardwood rainforest in the south and east.

Transport: There are 51,350km of roads, 8% paved. The rail network runs 977km north–south from Ngaoundéré to Yaoundé, with connections between Douala and Yaoundé, and from Douala to Nkongsamba and Kumba.

Douala is the principal port, Kribi handles mainly wood exports, Garoua on the Benue river is navigable only during the wet season and Limbo-Tiko is a minor port, severely silted up.

History

Archaeological evidence suggests that the region may have been the first homeland of the Bantu peoples, who developed methods of working iron and an advanced agriculture. After around 200 BC, the Bantu peoples spread east and south, to become the dominant ethnic group of sub-Saharan Africa.

European exploration began in the 15th century with the Portuguese who established sugar plantations and gained control of the slave trade around the coast in the following century. Dutch slave traders subsequently gained the ascendancy. Slavery ravaged West African societies until the middle of the 19th century, when Britain's abolition of the slave trade (in 1807) and the activities of the anti-slavers became effective. In northern Cameroon, during the 19th century, nomadic Fulani arrived and settled.

Germany (a late entrant into the European scramble for colonial possessions in Africa) claimed Cameroon as a German Protectorate in 1884; it remained so until 1916, when Britain, France and Belgium took it by military force in a combined operation. The German administration built the railways between Douala and Eséka and between Douala and Nkongsamba in the west; and German farmers settled in the areas that are now North-West and South-West provinces.

After the First World War, the country was divided into two zones. The western zone (comprising two separate areas, later known as the Northern and Southern Cameroons) was administered by Britain under a League of Nations mandate. The rest of the country (comprising four-fifths of the total) was administered by France, directly from Paris. During the French administration, the port at Douala was built, the coffee and cocoa industries increased and extensive road-building was undertaken. In the British area, there was local participation in government, and both Northern and Southern Cameroons were joined to parts of Nigeria for administrative purposes. After 1945, the UK and France continued to administer the country as UN Trust Territories.

During this period, political parties emerged, the largest being the Union of the Populations of Cameroon (UPC) led by Ruben Um Nyobe. The UPC, which demanded that French and British Cameroons should be united into one independent country, was banned in the mid-1950s, leading to a rebellion in which thousands of people were killed, including Um Nyobe in 1958. Nonetheless, the country proceeded to partial self-government in 1957 and full independence on 1 January 1960.

After a UN plebiscite in 1961, Northern Cameroons chose union with Nigeria, as part of the Northern Region. Southern Cameroons joined the Republic in October 1961. The country became a federal republic in the same year, with both components retaining their local parliaments. In 1972 the federation was dissolved and the country became a unitary republic (the United Republic of Cameroon), the name changing once again to the Republic of Cameroon in 1984.

Following independence, the country was ruled first by President Ahmadou Ahidjo (from 1960 to 1982) and then by President Paul Biya, who took office as president in 1982. A one-party regime was established in 1966 through the merger of the two governing parties and several opposition groups. In 1968 the ruling party was reconstituted as the Union nationale camerounaise (UNC) and was renamed once again the Rassemblement démocratique du peuple camerounais (Cameroon People's Democratic Movement – RDPC or CPDM) in 1985.

Cameroon has never had a successful military coup. A plot by military officers was uncovered in 1979. A further planned coup was discovered in 1983 and in February 1984 the former President Ahmadou Ahidjo (then in exile where he subsequently died) was tried *in absentia* and found guilty, along with two of his military advisers. Two months later, the Republican Guard attempted a coup. This was foiled by the army, but 500–1,000 people were killed in the fighting; the Republican Guard was then disbanded.

In 1995, with the approval of all other member countries, Cameroon joined the Commonwealth.

International airports are at Douala (10km south-east of the city), Yaoundé (25km from city) and Garoua.

Society

KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 41
Life expectancy: 51 years
Net primary enrolment: 88%

Population: 19,522,000 (2009); 58% in urban areas and 19% in urban agglomerations of more than 1 million people; growth 2.6% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 36 per 1,000 people (45 in 1970); life expectancy 51 years (44 in 1970).

The population is ethnically diverse. In the north, the people are mostly Hausa, Fulbé (Fulani), Sudanese and Choa Arab. In the west, the Bamiléké are the biggest ethnic group, followed by Tiker and Bamoun. South of the River Sanaga, there are Bantu groups: Fang, Ewondo, Boulou, Eton, Bassa, Bakoko, Douala. Some pygmies (including Baka) live in the south-eastern forested country.

Language: French and English are both official languages; French is spoken by about 80% of the population, English by about 20%. There are about 240 indigenous languages including 24 major language groups.

Religion: Christians about 50%, Muslims 20% and a substantial minority holding traditional beliefs.

Media: *Cameroon Tribune* (daily in French and English editions) is the official newspaper. *Le Messenger* is the leading independent daily in French, published in Douala since 1979. Other independent papers include *Mutations* (published daily in French), *The Herald* (three times weekly, in English) and *The Post* (twice weekly, in English).

CRTV operates the national radio and TV networks. After broadcasting was liberalised in 2000, dozens of private radio stations and several private TV channels were launched.

Some 25% of households have TV sets (2006). There are 11 personal computers (2005) and 38 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

Education: Public spending on education was 3.7% of GDP in 2009. There are six years of compulsory education starting at age six. Primary school comprises six or seven years and secondary seven, with a first cycle of four or five years. School attendance is lower in the Far North province, where the population is partly nomadic. Some 57% of pupils complete primary school (2007). The school year starts in September. Many secondary schools are bilingual, with instruction in both French and English. Missionary schools play an important role in the education system and are partly subsidised by the government.

There are state universities at Yaoundé (two), Dschang, Ngaoundéré, Douala and Buéa. The most prominent is the University of Yaoundé, established in 1962, which has four regional campuses. Professional institutes include the School of Administration and Magistracy, the School of Agriculture (ENSA), the Military Academy (EMIA) and the School of Education (ENS). Many private institutions offer tertiary education. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 79:100 (2008). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 86% (2008).

Health: There are three referral hospitals, some 70 general hospitals, some 50 private hospitals, plus a wide network of public and private health centres – some of which are for the treatment of leprosy. 74% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 47% have adequate sanitation facilities (2009). Infant mortality was 95 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (151 in 1960). In 2009, 5.3% of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

Communications: Country code 237; internet domain '.cm'. There are telephone booths in all towns. Mobile phone coverage is patchy but more extensive in the south.

There are 17 main telephone lines and 379 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, Youth Day (11 February), Labour Day (1 May), National Day (20 May), Sheep Festival (21 May), Assumption (15 August), Unification Day (1 October) and Christmas Day.

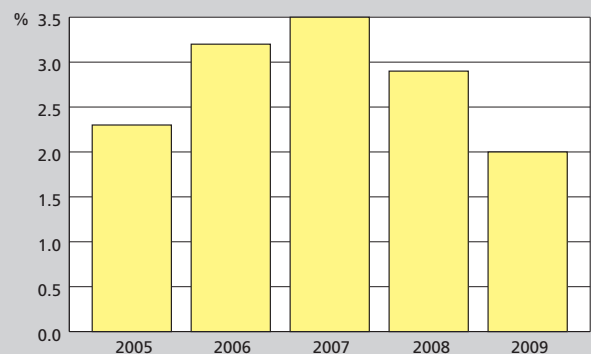
Religious festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Prophet's Birthday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Ascension of the Prophet, Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan), Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice) and Islamic New Year.

Economy

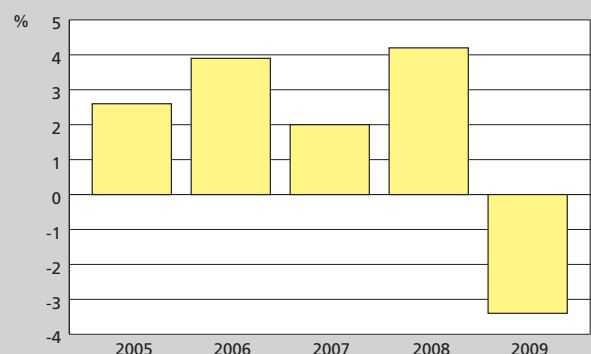
KEY FACTS 2009

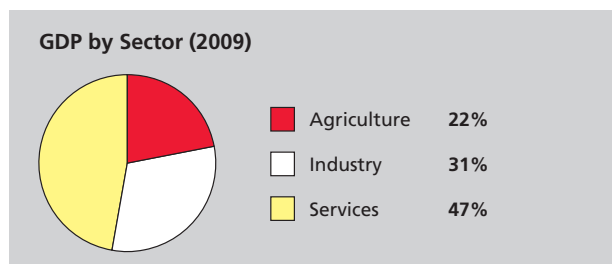
GNI: US\$23.2bn
GNI p.c.: US\$1,190
GDP growth: 2.8% p.a. 2005–09
Inflation: 1.8% p.a. 2005–09

Real Growth in GDP



Inflation





Overview: Cameroon developed rapidly from 1978 thanks to its oil wealth, agricultural diversity and well developed agro-industries. However, after the mid-1980s, the economy declined and debt rose. From the late 1980s, the World Bank and IMF supported a series of economic reform programmes, which included cuts in public expenditure (public-sector wages were reduced by 70% in 1993), structural adjustment, privatisation of the many publicly owned enterprises, and rescheduling external debt.

In the run-up to privatisation, some 70 state-owned enterprises were closed down and others restructured, with a loss of about 20,000 jobs. Then from the late 1990s the state-owned rail company Régifercam (having been streamlined by halving its staff), CAMSUCO (sugar), SOCAPALM (palm oil), BICEC (the last remaining state-owned bank) and SONEL (electricity) were privatised; SNEC (water) was restructured as a public-private partnership; and Cameroon Airlines was liquidated (2006). In 2006, too, the government was proceeding with privatisation of CAMTEL (telecoms).

From the mid-1990s, growth was sustained at 4–5% p.a. in a climate of relatively low inflation, as a result of the prudent monetary policies of the regional central bank. From 2003 the economy grew more slowly, by 3.2% in 2006, 3.5% in 2007 and 2.9% in 2008. By 2009, however, in response to the global economic downturn, the economy slowed again (2.0% annual growth). Cameroon reached the IMF/World Bank Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative completion point in 2006, qualifying for present value debt-relief of US\$1.3 billion.

Trade: Exports of goods and services account for 30% of GDP (2008). The principal exports are crude oil, timber and cork, cocoa, cotton, aluminium and coffee.

Oil and gas: Oil production began in 1978 but fell steadily from its peak of 186,000 barrels a day in 1985 to about 64,000 barrels a day in 2010, although government has made exploitation of marginal oilfields more viable and new small fields have boosted production. Crude oil is, nevertheless, the largest foreign-currency earner and accounted for 50% of export earnings in 2007.

Oil is found in the Rio del Rey basin, close to the Nigerian border, natural gas at Rio del Rey and in the basin extending to the south of Douala. Further oil exploration has been initiated in the north, close to the Chad border, and in the west around Mamfé, close to the Nigerian border. Prospects for large offshore finds of oil and gas were dramatically improved in 2006 when Nigeria agreed that the Bakassi peninsula would be ceded to Cameroon.

Constitution

| | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| Status: | Republic with executive president |
| Legislature: | National Assembly |
| Independence: | 1 January 1960 |

The country has undergone constitutional reform several times since independence. Under the 1996 constitution, it is a unitary republic with an executive president who appoints the prime minister and council of ministers. The president also appoints the provincial governors, the judges and government delegates in main towns. In April 2008, Cameroon's parliament approved a constitutional amendment allowing the president to serve for more than two terms. Presidential elections must then be conducted not less than 20 days or more than 120 days following the vacancy.

The National Assembly has 180 members, directly elected every five years by universal adult suffrage, and has three sessions a year, in March, June and November. There was also provision in the constitution for an upper house, the Senate, with 30% of its members nominated by the president and 70% directly elected every five years, as well as a constitutional council and elected regional assemblies. Regional councils and the Senate, provided for under the constitution, were in 2009 yet to be established.

Politics

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| Last elections: | July 2007 (legislative), October 2011 (presidential) |
| Next elections: | 2012 (legislative), 2018 (presidential) |
| Head of state: | President Paul Biya |
| Head of government: | Prime Minister Philemon Yang |
| Ruling party: | Cameroon People's Democratic Movement |

Political protest against the one-party system was widespread up to 1992, through a campaign of civil disobedience known as *villes mortes* or 'ghost towns', when towns were virtually closed down to prompt reform. Multiple political parties became legal in 1990 and legislative elections were held in March 1992. They were contested by 48 political parties but boycotted by the Social Democratic Front (SDF). The ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) took 88 seats, the opposing parties a total of 92 seats. The CPDM formed a coalition with the Movement for the Defence of the Republic, which had six seats, thus securing a majority of eight.

A presidential election was held in October 1992; Paul Biya was re-elected with 40% of the votes (in 1988 he had stood unopposed, winning 98% of the vote). Of the eight candidates, his nearest rival was John Fru Ndi of the SDF, who gained 36%.

The 1997 general election, postponed from March, took place in May, attended by Commonwealth observers. Before the elections there was an outbreak of violence in the North-West province which was attributed to the Anglophone separatist movement; a curfew was then enforced and public meetings banned. The CPDM took 109 of the 180 seats in the elections. The SDF won 43 seats, the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP) 13 seats, and the Union for Democracy and Change (UDC) five seats.

In the run-up to the presidential election, the leading opposition parties, the SDF, the UNDP and the UDC, were urging reform of the presidential electoral system, and introduction of a two-tier process. The three parties boycotted the election and advised their supporters not to vote. The Commonwealth therefore declined to send an observer mission. In October 1997 President Paul Biya was re-elected for a seven-year term (he had held the presidency since 1982), defeating the six other candidates in a landslide victory, receiving more than 92% of the votes cast.

In the June 2002 general election – postponed by one week when the government failed to provide sufficient ballot papers – the ruling CPDM gained 133 seats, substantially extending its parliamentary majority, while SDF took only 21 (mainly in the English-speaking North-West), UDC five and UPC three. Elections in nine constituencies with 17 Assembly seats were annulled by the Supreme Court and re-run in September 2002, when 16 were won by the CPDM.

Biya won a landslide victory in the October 2004 presidential election receiving 75% of the votes.

The International Court of Justice ruled in 2002 that the long disputed and fought-over border areas of Nigeria should be ceded to Cameroon. These areas include the Bakassi peninsula in the south which is believed to contain very large offshore reserves of oil and gas. In a UN-brokered agreement in June 2006, the two countries agreed on a phased transfer of the peninsula. Nigerian troops withdrew in August 2006 and Nigeria formally ceded the border areas to Cameroon in August 2008.

The elections in July 2007 extended the ruling CPDM's majority in the National Assembly. On announcement of the results, 103 petitions for annulment were filed with the Supreme Court. A re-run ordered by the Court for 17 of the 180 seats in September 2007 resulted in reducing the CPDM's holding to 153 seats; while SDF took 16, UNDP six, UDC four and Progressive Movement (MP) one.

In early 2008 the National Assembly approved a constitutional amendment removing presidential term limits which opened the way for President Biya to seek re-election. Biya won the presidential election in October 2011 increasing his share of the vote to 78%. His main rival in a field of more than 20 candidates was John Fru Ndi (SDF) who secured 10.7% of the vote. Turnout was 66% and the election was observed by a Commonwealth expert team.

International relations

Cameroon is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, African Union, Non-Aligned Movement, Organisation of the Islamic Conference, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Traveller information

Local laws and conventions: Photographing military establishments and official buildings, in particular the airports, is strictly forbidden. If photographing local residents or their property, visitors should exercise discretion and should always ask permission.

Drug use and possession are prohibited. Penalties for all drug offences are severe and usually lead to a prison sentence.

Visitors should carry identification documents on them at all times; failure to produce them may lead to detention.

Islamic traditions must be respected in the north and visitors must never enter a Muslim prayer circle of rocks. In rural areas, tact should be shown for the traditional beliefs.

Clothing varies between cities and rural areas and a conservative style of dress is best adopted. Long sleeves and some form of head cover are advisable when entering religious buildings.

Handshaking is the usual form of greeting in Cameroon. Business is conducted primarily in English and French. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0730–1700.

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for a minimum of six months and visas are required by most nationals. Visas (tourist and business) are valid for up to six months. All visitors must present a return or onward ticket when entering the country.

Pornographic materials may not be brought into the country and licences are required for sporting guns.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate must be presented by all travellers arriving from infected areas.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the right. An international driving permit is required to drive in Cameroon and must be carried at all times. Car hire is available in Douala, Yaoundé and Limbé. Roads are paved between the main cities.

The most efficient and reliable means of travelling between the cities is by taking an internal flight. Unitair has daily flights between Douala and Yaoundé and operates less regular flights to other major towns.

Train services, run by CAMRAIL (Cameroon Railways), are generally good – if relatively slow.

There is a modern coach service between Yaoundé and Douala, and there are local services that serve the more rural areas.

Taxis are a cheap and fast means of travelling around the cities and are widely available. All fares must be agreed on before travel, as taxis are not metered.

Travel health: Travellers are advised to have full medical insurance.

Visitors will need protection against malaria, together with insect repellent and suitable clothing to prevent mosquito bites. Dysentery, dengue fever, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria and Hepatitis A also occur, and visitors should exercise caution and protect themselves at all times. Paddling or swimming in fresh water should be avoided as there is a risk of catching bilharzia. In the northern areas, meningococcal meningitis and cholera are an additional risk during the dry season.

Outside of the main hotels, all water should be boiled or sterilised before use. Only powdered or tinned milk is recommended.

Money: Local currency is the CFA franc. Visitors should note that only currency issued by the Banque des États de l'Afrique Centrale is valid; it is not valid if issued by the Banque des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. Cash in a hard currency is preferred to travellers cheques. ATMs are rare, and debit and credit cards cannot be used in banks to obtain cash. Limited numbers of hotels and airline offices will accept major credit cards. Banking hours are Mon–Fri 0730–1530.

There were 185,000 tourist arrivals in 2007.

Further information

Prime Minister's Office of Cameroon: www.spm.gov.cm

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

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