

IRAQ (جمهورية العراق)



QUICK FACTS

Population: 31 million

Area: Roughly the size of California

Capital: Baghdad

Languages: Arabic 75%-80%, Kurdish 15%-20%,
Turcoman, Assyrian, and other 5%

EDUCATION

Schools in Iraq follow a standard national curriculum. Students enter a six year primary school system at the age of six. In order to advance to the intermediate school they must pass a standardized exam. Students who fail the exam can repeat the grade, but many who fail drop out of school. Intermediate school lasts three years. Secondary school lasts three years and an entrance exam determines which track the students will take. Tracks include academic and art as well as training in trade, agriculture, and industry. Beginning in grade four students are segregated by gender. Great investment was placed into the education system in the 1980s, but decades of internal turmoil has greatly disrupted this system.

Modern Iraq contains much of the ancient territory of Mesopotamia. Located in the "Fertile Crescent," between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the region produced humanity's first known agriculture and written language. Due to its importance in human history it is sometimes referred to as the "cradle of civilization." The area produced the influential Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian civilizations before it came under the control of Muslim Arabs in the seventh century AD. Baghdad was founded at that time to be the capitol of an empire. The Arab Abbasid Empire lasted until the Mongol invasion of 1258. Today Iraq has the world's second largest known reserves of oil. While Arabic is the official language, there are some minority groups including a large Kurdish- speaking population in the North.

RELIGION

The official state religion of Iraq is Islam. 97% of the population is Muslim. The population is split between Shi'i (60-65%) and Sunni (32%-37%) Islam. Shi'i Muslims are found mostly in the Eastern and Southern parts of the country. Sunni Muslims are found in the North and in areas around Baghdad and Basra. Most Kurds are Sunni. There are also small populations of Christians, including Eastern Orthodox and Catholics.

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS

Family connection is very important in Iraq. Traditionally, Iraqis have large families, and extended households can include several generations. Politeness, curiosity, and responsibility are all traits that are encouraged in Iraqi children. Practically all young women and most young men live with their parents until they are married. In the past it was not uncommon for married children to live with or close to their parents. National holidays include: Independence Day (Jan 1), Labor Day (May 1), Republic Day (July 14), and National Day (Oct 3). Islam follows a lunar calendar. Due to this the dates of major holidays change each year. There are many online sources which can list the current dates for these holidays. Some important holidays include: Ramadan (Holy Month of fasting), Eid-al-Fitr (End of Ramadan), Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice), and the Malid al-Nabi (The Prophet Muhammad's birthday). Shi'i Muslims also observe 'Ashura (commemorates the martyrdom of Hussein).



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CONTEMPORARY IRAQ

Between the 12th and early 20th centuries the region of modern Iraq was under the control of the Ottoman Empire. After the defeat of the Ottomans in WWI, control of the region was given to the British by a League of Nations Mandate. In 1932 Iraq was granted independence by the British and a constitutional monarchy was established. The monarchy was under the leadership of the Hashemites, a family from modern-day Saudi Arabia, and popular discontent led to a several uprisings. The monarchy was overthrown by revolutionary forces in 1958. Political instability continued until a coup in 1968 placed the Arab nationalists and socialist Ba'ath party into power. The Ba'ath party enforced one party rule and in 1979 Saddam Hussein became president of Iraq. In 1980 Iraq invaded Iran, beginning an eight-year war which would involve great destruction and loss of life for both sides.

Saddam Hussein had the support of the United States during the Iran-Iraq war. This would end when Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in 1990. The Persian Gulf War, carried out by a U.S.-led military coalition, led to the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait in February of 1992. The United Nations set up economic sanctions meant to force compliance to UN resolutions. In addition, a no-fly zone was enforced in both Northern and Southern Iraq.

An important condition of the cease-fire was the removal of all weapons of mass destruction from Iraq. In 1998 UN inspectors were withdrawn due to lack of co-operation by the Iraqi government. After inspections in 2002 and 2003 the U.S. and Britain charged Saddam Hussein with violating the conditions of the UN resolution. In March 2003 a joint coalition invaded Iraq. The U.S. led forces had control of most of the country within weeks.

Control was given to an interim Iraqi government in June 2004 and a full-term government was elected in 2005. Internal instability continued, and the execution of Saddam Hussein in December 2006 increased sectarian divisions. In 2009 President Obama announced that U.S. troops would complete withdrawal by the end of 2011. Internal instability remains in post-withdrawal Iraq.



ETHNICITY

The majority of Iraqis are Arab. A large group of Kurds live in the North. The Kurds have a strong sense of regional identity and, due to the U.N. enforced no-fly zone, achieved semi-autonomous rule in 1992. There are also small Turcoman, Armenian, and Iranian communities.



The temporary flag of Iraq was adopted in 2008. The colors represent oppression (black), overcome through struggle (red), replaced by a bright future (white).



Lion of Babylon from the Ishtar Gate

LANGUAGE AND NAMES

Arabic is a Semitic language related to Amharic and Hebrew. While there are several regional Iraqi dialects of Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic is used for most formal and mass media communication. Arabic is a highly gendered language; due to this, different forms are used when speaking to men or women (see Arabic word list). Kurdish is the second most common language in Iraq. While Kurdish uses the Arabic alphabet, it is an Indo-European language more closely related to Persian (or English) than Arabic. Most first names in Iraq originate from Islam. Many names derive either from important figures or key words of the faith.

ARABIC WORDS

Hi	Salaam
Bye	Ma'a salama
Good morning	Sabah al khayr
Yes	Na'am
No	Laa
Please.....	Min fadlik
Thank you (very much).....	Shukran (jalilan)
You're welcome.....	Al'afwan
How are you?.....(Boy)	Kaifa halok?
	(Girl) Kaifa haloki?
I do not understand	Anaa la afham
Do you understand?... (Boy)	Hal tafham?
	(Girl) Hal tafhamiin?
What is your name?... (Boy)	Ma Ismouk?
	(Girl) Ma Ismouki?
My name is	Ismee
Where are you from? (Boy)	Min ayna anta?
	(Girl) Min ayna anti?

USEFUL LINKS

[The World Factbook: Iraq](#)

[BBC Iraq Profile](#)

[National Geographic Iraq Guide](#)

[Iraqi News](#)