

Cambodia (Kampuchea)

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Location and area

Cambodia is a republic in South East Asia, bordered on the northeast by Laos, on the east and southeast by Vietnam, on the southwest by the Gulf of Thailand, and on the west and northwest by Thailand. Cambodia covers a total area of 181,035 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

A large, low-lying alluvial plain dominates most of the central part of Cambodia, where the Mekong River flows from north to south through Cambodia. Tonle Sap (Great Lake) covers an area of about 2,600 km² in the dry season to about 10,400 km² in the rainy season. To the east of the plain lies an undulating plateau region. In the southwest the Kravanh Range (Cardamom Mountains) form a physical barrier along the country's coast. In the north the Dangrek Range is situated. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

Cambodia has a tropical monsoon climate. The average annual temperature is about 27° C, average annual rainfall is about 1,400 mm on the central plains and more than 3,800 mm in the mountainous areas and along the coast. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

About three quarters of Cambodia is forested. The densest forests are found in the mountains and along the southwestern coast. Only a small proportion has been exploited, mainly because of Cambodia's poor transport facilities. Savannas are present in the higher plains and plateaux.

Agriculture is the basis of the Cambodian economy. Some 80 per cent of the cultivated land is planted with rice. Rubber, the other leading crop, is primarily grown on the eastern plateaux (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

According to Geoanalytics (www.geoanalytics.com/bims/cb.htm) freshwater swamps originally covered 12,530 km² against currently 4,239 km², peat swamps originally 15,189 km², mangroves originally 1,007 km² against currently 467 km². Seasonally flooded areas currently cover 6,733 km² and "swamp grasses" 5,806 km². One of the largest swamp concentrations is found around Tonle Sap (www.wcmc.org.uk/wh/reviews/wetlands/t11.htm, www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/im/im0164_full.html, www.gefweb.org/COUNCIL/GEF_C15/GEF_C15_Inf.13/cambodia.pdf).

Peatlands

Katz (1971) mentions the occurrence of peatlands, usually with low thickness of peat, along the Mekong River.

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) no histosols exist in Cambodia and 35,604 km² of gley soils.