Cameroon

**KEY FACTS**

**Joined Commonwealth:** 1995  
**Population:** 22,254,000 (2013)  
**GDP p.c. growth:** 0.0% p.a. 1990–2013  
**UN HDI 2014:** World ranking 152  
**Official languages:** French, English  
**Time:** GMT plus 1 hr  
**Currency:** CFA franc (CFAfr)

**Geography**

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

Cameroon is called Cameroun in French, Kamerun in German, Camarões in Portuguese, and Cameroonian in English. The country's name derives from camarões, Portuguese, and Cameroon in English. The Kam erun in German, meaning 'shrimps', so called by the 15th-century Portuguese explorer Fernando Po who named the River Wouri Rio dos Camaroes ('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 ten regions: Adamawa, Centre, Coastal, East, Far North, North, North-West, South, South-West and West.

**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 Adamawa 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 4,095 metres at Mount 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 Dja and Sangha drain into the Congo Basin. The Logone and Chad rivers flow north into Lake Chad.

**Climate:** In the northern Sahel region, there is a long dry season from October–April, with temperatures varying from cool to very hot. Further south, on the Adamawa 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–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 Mount Cameroon the grasses are shorter. Further north there is savannah bushland, with trees becoming sparse towards the Chad basin. Forest covers 41 per cent of the land area, having declined at 1.0 per cent p.a. 1990–2010. Arable land comprises 13 per cent and permanent cropland three per cent of the total land area.

**Wildlife:** The Waza National Park in the north, originally created for the protection of giraffes and antelopes, 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. Some 38 mammal species and 21 bird species are thought to be endangered (2014).

**Main towns:** Yaoundé (capital, in Centre Region, pop. 1.81m in 2010), Douala (principal port, in Coastal Region, 2.13m), Garoua (North Region, 573,700), Bamenda (North-West, 546,400), Maroua (Far North, 436,700), Bafoussam (West, 383,200), Ngaoundéré (Adamawa, 314,100), Bertoua (East, 297,200), Lourm (Coastal, 249,100), Kumbo (North-West, 222,600), Édéa (Coastal, 209,600), Mbouda (West, 188,200), Kumba (South-West, 180,000), Foumban (West, 171,600), Dschang (West, 149,300), Nkongsamba (Coastal, 131,100), Ebolowa (South, 129,600), Kossiéri (contiguous with Ndjamen in Chad, Far North, 95,100) and Buea (South-West, 9,700).

**Transport:** There is a significant road network of 51,350 km, eight per cent paved. The rail network runs 977 km 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.

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

**Society**

**KEY FACTS 2013**

**Population per sq km:** 47  
**Life expectancy:** 55 years  
**Net primary enrolment:** 92%

**Population:** 22,254,000 (2013); 53 per cent of people live in urban areas and 20 per cent in urban agglomerations of more than one million people; growth 2.7 per cent p.a. 1990–2013; birth rate 37 per 1,000 people (45 in 1970); life expectancy 55 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 Barnoun. 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. There are about 240 indigenous languages including 24 major language groups.

**Religion:** Christians about 69 per cent, Muslims 21 per cent and six per cent Animists, while other religious groups including Jews and Baha’is make up less than five per cent of the population (2005).-

**Health:** Public spending on health was two per cent of GDP in 2012. There are three referral hospitals, 70 general hospitals, 50 private hospitals, plus a wide network of public and private health centres – some of which are for the treatment of leprosy. Some 74 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 45 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2012). Infant mortality was 61 per 1,000 live births in 2013 (151 in 1960). In 2013, 4.3 per cent of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

**Education:** Public spending on education was 3.1 per cent of GDP in 2012. There are six years of compulsory education starting at the age of six. Primary school comprises six years and secondary seven, with a first cycle of four years. School attendance is lower in the Far North Region, where the population is partly nomadic. Some 57 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2010). The school year starts in September. Many secondary schools are bilingual, with instruction in both French and English. Faith schools play an important role in the education system and are partly subsidised by the government.

The public universities are the University of Yaoundé (founded in 1962); University of Douala (1963, Coastal Region); University of Ngaoundéré (1982, Adamawa Region); University of Buea (1992, South-West Region, English medium); University of Dschang (1993, West Region); and the University of Maroua (2008, Far North Region). The most prominent is the University of Yaoundé, which now comprises two separate universities on several campuses (University of Yaoundé I and University of Yaoundé II). The École Normale Supérieure of University of Yaoundé I is the leading school for teacher education. The many private institutions offering tertiary education include the Catholic University of Central Africa (1989, Yaoundé), Bamenda University of Science and Technology (1995, North-West Region); and Université des Montagnes (2000, Bangangté, West Region). The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 0.70:1 (2011). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 83 per cent (2007).

**Media:** Cameroon Tribune (daily in French and English editions) is the official newspaper. Le Messager is the leading independent daily in French, published in Douala since 1979. Other independent papers include The Herald, Mutations, La Nouvelle Expression and The Post.

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 31 per cent of households have TV sets (2007). There are 11 personal computers per 1,000 people (2005).

**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. For every 1,000 people there are 36 landlines, 704 mobile phone subscriptions and 64 internet users (2013).

**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 2013**

- **GNI:** US$28.7bn
- **GNI p.c.:** US$1,270
- **GDP growth:** 3.9% p.a. 2009–13
- **Inflation:** 2.4% p.a. 2009–13

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 per cent 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), CAMSU CO (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).

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. From the mid-1990s, growth was sustained at four to five per cent 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 Cameroon economy grew more slowly, growth averaging 3.3 per cent p.a. 2003–07. It slowed again in response to the global economic downturn in 2008–09, before recovering from 2010; it then continued to grow at four to six per cent p.a. during 2011–15.

**GDP by sector (2013)**

- Agriculture 22.7%
- Industry 29.7%
- Services 47.6%
Oil and gas

Oil production began in 1978 but fell steadily from its peak of 186,000 barrels a day in 1985 to about 63,000 barrels a day in 2013, 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 45 per cent of export earnings in 2011.

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 the Nigerian border, natural gas at Rio del Rey basin, close to the Bakassi peninsula would be ceded to Cameroon.

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After World War I, the country was divided into two zones. The western zone (comprising two separate areas, later known as the Northern and Southern Cameroon) 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 Camerooners 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 Peoples of Cameroon (UPC) led by Ruben Um Nyobe. The UPC, which demanded that French and British Cameroonians 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 Camerooners chose union with Nigeria, as part of the Northern Region. Southern Camerooners 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 national 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.

Political protest against the one-party system was widespread up to 1992, through a campaign of civil disobedience known as viles 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 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.

At presidential elections in October 1992 Paul Biya was re-elected with 40 per cent of the votes (in 1988 he had stood unopposed, winning 98 per cent of the vote). Of the eight candidates, his nearest rival was John Fru Ndi of the SDF, who gained 36 per cent. In 1995, with the approval of all other member countries, Cameroon joined the Commonwealth.

Before the May 1997 general election there was an outbreak of violence in the North-West Region, which was attributed to the Anglophone separatist movement. A curfew was enforced and public meetings banned. In the election, with Commonwealth observers present, CPDM took 109 of the 180 Assembly seats, the SDF 43, the National Union for Democracy and Progress 13, and the Union for Democracy and Change five.

In the run-up to the presidential election, the leading opposition parties, the SDF, the National Union for Democracy, and Progress and the Union for Democracy and Change, 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, defeating the six other candidates in a landslide victory, receiving more than 92 per cent of the votes cast.

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 B CE, 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 Africa, during 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 Regions.

Cameroon on the international stage

Celebrated writers originating from Cameroon include Ferdinand Oyono, who was born in Ebolowa, South Region, in 1929 and died in 2010; and Mongo Beti, born in Akométan, Centre Region, in 1932 and died in 2001.


Jazz bass player Richard Bona was born in Mointa in 1967. He has played with Chaka Khan, Bobby McFerrin and Harry Belafonte.
Relations with Nigeria

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.

Constitution

Status: Republic with executive President
Legislature: National Assembly of Cameroon
Independence: 1 January 1960

Under the constitution adopted in 1996 Cameroon is a unitary republic with an executive President – elected every seven years – 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. The constitution also provides for an upper house, the Senate, with 100 members, 70 per cent of whom are elected every five years by electoral colleges comprising local government councillors and 30 per cent nominated by the President. Each region is thus represented in the Senate by ten senators, seven of whom are indirectly elected and three appointed by the President. Elections to the Senate were held for the first time on 14 April 2013.

Politics

Last elections: 9 October 2011 (presidential), 14 April 2013 (Senate), 30 September 2013 (parliamentary and local)
Next elections: 2018 (presidential), 2018 (senatorial), 2018 (parliamentary and local)
Head of state: President Paul Biya
Head of government: The President
Ruling party: Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement
Women MPs: 31%

In the June 2002 general election, the third since the introduction of multi-party politics in 1990, the ruling Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) gained 133 seats, substantially extending its parliamentary majority, while the Social Democratic Front (SDF) took 21 (mainly in the English-speaking North-West), the Union for Democracy and Change (UDC) five and Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UCP) three. Elections in nine constituencies with 17 National Assembly seats were annulled by the Supreme Court and re-run in September 2002, when 16 were won by the CPDM and one by the SDF. Incumbent President Paul Biya won a landslide victory in the October 2004 presidential election receiving 75 per cent of the votes. 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 Supreme Court for 17 of the 180 seats in September 2007 resulted in reducing the CPDM’s holding to 153 seats; while SDF took 16, the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP) six, UDC four and Progressive Movement one. At the re-run in September 2007, the CPDM took 13 of the 17 contested seats, the SDF two and the UNDP two.

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 about 78 per cent. His main rival in a field of more than 20 candidates was John Fru Ndi (SDF) who secured about 10.7 per cent of the vote. The election was observed by a Commonwealth expert team.

In the first Senate elections, held on 14 April 2013, the ruling CPDM won 56 of the 70 elective seats and the SDF 14.

International relations

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

Traveller information

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of departure. Visas are required by all Commonwealth nationals. A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from all Commonwealth nationals. A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from all travellers aged over 12 months.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the right.

Scheduled flights connect the main towns, and are daily between Douala and Yaoundé. Train services are run by CAMRAIL. Coach services operate between Yaoundé and Douala. Taxis are widely available in the main towns.

Travel health: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include cholera, dengue fever, diphtheria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, malaria, meningococcal meningitis, rabies, typhoid and yellow fever.

There were 817,000 tourist arrivals in 2012.