

# Equatorial Guinea

## *Location and Size*

Equatorial Guinea consists of a land area that is part of mainland Africa and a series of islands off the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. Equatorial Guinea is located in West Africa, bordering the Bight of Biafra, between Cameroon and Gabon. The country lies at 4° 00 N, 10° 00 E. Equatorial Guinea is positioned within the extreme coordinates of 4°00 N and 2°00S and 10° 00E and 8° 00E Equatorial Guinea has a total land area of 28,051 sq km. The mainland territory of the country is called Rio Muni. The island territories of the country are: Bioko (formally, Fernando Po), Annobon, Corisco, Belobi, Mbane, Conga, Cocotiers, Elobey Island (formally known as Mosquito Islands).

### ***Rio Muni (Equatorial Guinea's Continental Territory)***

Rio Muni is a rectangular-shaped territory measuring about 26,000 sqkm (16,150 sq Miles). Rio Muni, which is the mainland territory of Equatorial Guinea lies at 1°01' and 2°21'N. The eastern borderline of Rio Muni lies approximately on longitude 11°20E. This territory is bordered by Gabon on the south and east, Cameroon on the north, and the Atlantic Ocean on the west. The Islands of Corisco (14 sq. km), Belobi, Mbane, Conga, Cocotiers, and Elobey (2 sq. km) are all within the territorial area of Rio Muni.

### ***Bioko***

Bioko, formally Fernando Po, is the largest of the series of islands that constitute part of Equatorial Guinea. Bioko is rectangular in shape and lies at 3° 30' 0 N and 8° 41' 60 E. The island lies 32 km from Mount Cameroon. The Equatoguinean national capital, Malabo, is

located in the north of the island of Bioko. Bioko measures approximately 2017 sq. km, and has a shoreline of 270 km.

### ***Annobon***

Annobon is a small volcanic island measuring about 18 square kilometers (7 sq. mles.). The island is about 6 km. long and 3 km. wide. The Island of Annobon lies at 1° 26 S and 5° 37 E.

## **Geomorphology**

### ***Rio Muni***

The territory of Rio Muni derives its name from the Rio Muni estuary of the Utamboni River. Rio Muni's interior consists of a peneplain with an average height of 650m. It is dominated by inselbergs, consisting mostly of diorite, gneiss and gabbros. The coastal area of the territory consists principally of tertiary marl in the northern sections and secondary slate between Rio Benito Calatrava. The main mountain ranges of Rio Muni originate from Gabon and Cameroon. The highest point in Rio Muni is Mount Mitra (Biyemeyem), which rises up to 1,200m, and stands just south-west of the territory's central region. The territory has a number of rivers which flow from east to west. These include the Rio Campo in the north, the Rio Benito in the central region, and the Utamboni in the south. Rio Muni's vegetation is categorized as low to medium altitude rain forest. The territory has lost a great amount of its forest cover due to logging and agricultural encroachment.

### ***Bioko***

The Island of Bioko is a protuberance from a geological fracture running between West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. The highest point of the Island is the Pico de Basile', which rises up to 3,008m. The Pico de Basile' is a volcanic cone covering a greater part of the northern

section. The capital of Equatorial Guinea, Malabo is situated at the foot of the Pico de Basile. There are other volcanic cones on the southern slope of the peak: San Julian (1496m) and Concepcion (1200m). Further south of Pico de Basile, the land rises to form the Massif peaks. The entire territory lies within a tropical rainforest. Being an extinct volcano, Bioko has extremely fertile soil which encourages the flourishing of trees and lush vines.

### ***Annobon***

Annobon is also a protuberance from the geological fracture stretching from West Africa to the Gulf of Guinea. The Island consists mainly of a basaltic rock outcrop. The outcrop rises steeply from the base of the ocean. The island has four main peaks. The two highest peaks include Pico de Mazofin (830m), and Pico de Fogo (600m). Annobon has very thin topsoil, which does not support arable cropping.

## **Climate**

### ***Rio Muni***

The climate of Rio Muni is equatorial. The territory is warm and humid all year, despite the fact that it experiences two dry seasons. The highest points of the Rio Muni experience relatively cool temperatures compared to the low lying area.

### ***Bioko***

The Island of Bioko experiences equatorial climatic conditions similar to the Cameroonian climate. The island has a single, but long rainy season stretching from February to November. This island used to be covered almost entirely by a rainforest, but logging has significantly altered this feature.

### ***Annobon***

The Island of Annobon experiences tropical humid climatic conditions. The territory has two rainy seasons: April to July and October to November. The Island has a copious vegetal cover.

## **History**

The first settlers of the country now known as Equatorial Guinea seem to have been the Pygmies, isolated pockets of whom can still be found in only the northern parts of the continental territory (Rio Muni). Migration of people of the Bantu stock between the C13<sup>th</sup> and C19<sup>th</sup> brought the Ndowe (Playeros) and the Fang to the country. It is thought that elements of the Fang may have given rise to the Bubi, who migrated from Cameroon and Rio Muni to Bioko. The Annobon, native to Angola, were brought into Bioko by the Portuguese via Sao Tome.

Bioko (formally, Fernando Po) was discovered in 1471 by a Portuguese explorer, Fernao Po, who was seeking a sea route to India. Fernao Po initially called the island Formosa, which literally means “pretty flower”. However, the island eventually took on the name of its European discoverer, Fernao Po (Fernando Po). The Bioko and Annobon Islands became Portuguese colonies in 1774.

Equatorial Guinea, comprising of the mainland territory of Rio Muni and a series of island, was originally a Portuguese colony. Following the treaty of Pardo, Portugal ceded the control of Equatorial Guinea to Spain in exchange for a territory in South America (Southern Brazil) in 1778. The country then covered a total land area of 800,000 sq km. (309, 000 sq. miles). During the Berlin Conference of 1844, Spain was unable to retain the original land area it got under the Treaty of Pardo, having been significantly weakened by its civil war of 1840-41. Spain thus managed to retain only 180,000 sq.Km of the original 800,000 sq km. After the Paris treaty of 1900 and the determination of the Rio Muni frontiers, the Spanish colony of Equatorial Guinea (Spanish Guinea) was further whittled down to 26, 000 sq.km. In 1959, the Spanish

province in the Gulf of Guinea was created and given a status similar to the provinces in metropolitan Spain. Spanish Equatorial Guinea was ruled by a Governor-General who exercised military and civilian powers. The first Equatoguinean deputies were elected to the Spanish Parliament in 1959.

Following an investigation by the UN Trusteeship Committee on Equatorial Guinea in August 1966, the UN General Assembly voted in favor of the independence of Spanish Guinea. As a result of this recommendation and pressure from Equatoguinean nationalist agitators, Spain called a constitutional conference (1967-68). The constitutional conference prepared the country for independence, with the election of Marcias Nguema as its first president. On October 12, 1968, Equatorial Guinea became a new nation with the proclamation of its independence. Spain thus gave up its only colonial possession in Africa.

Marcias Nguema, the first president, rapidly became one of the brutal dictators on the African continent. In May 1971, the Equatoguinean constitution was amended, making it possible for the President (Marcias Nguema) to assume the legislative, executive and judicial powers as well as the parliamentary privileges associated with the National Assembly (Consejo de la Republica). In 1972, a new constitution was proclaimed, which was to mark the beginning of the rapid increase in the personal power of President Marcias Nguema. President Nguema set out to eliminate all perceived opponents of his personal power through assassination. The dictatorial excesses of Marcias Nguema resulted in about 514 known assassinations between 1968 and 1978. This is a very significant number of murders, given that the country had a population of just over 400,000, including foreign workers.

In August, 1979, a palace coup led by Obiang Nguema, a nephew of President Marcias Nguema, led to the overthrow of the first Nguemaist regime. On August 3, 1979, President Marcias Nguema was stripped of his power by the Supreme Military Council, which dethroned him. Following the coup d'etat, President Marcias was sentenced to death by a court martial.

On August 12, 1979, Obiang Nguema was pronounced President of the Republic, becoming another Nguemaist dictator. Many political and human rights commentators have noted that the second Nguemaist regime has continued to perpetrate serious human rights abuses against its citizens and even foreigners.

## **Important Dates**

Important dates in Equatorial Guinea include: October 12 –Independence Day; January 1 –New Year's Day; May 1 –Labor Day; August 3 –Armed Forces Day; Aug 15 –Constitution Day; May 25 –African Union Day; December 25 –Christmas Day; December 10 –Human Rights Day; Good Friday (variable); June 5 –President's Birthday and Easter (variable). All the foregoing days are observed as public holidays in the country.

## ***Population***

The population of Equatorial Guinea in 2003 was approximately 510,473. The distribution of the population in 2003 is as follows: 0-14year –42.2 percent; 15-64years –54 percent; and 65 and above –3.8 percent. The population density of Equatorial Guinea is about 9 people per square kilometer. The average population growth rate of Equatorial Guinea is 2.44 percent. The fertility rate of Equatorial Guinea is approximately 37 births per 1,000, while the mortality rate is about 13 deaths per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy in the country in 2003 was 52.6 years for males and 56.9 years for females.

## ***Currency***

The official currency of Equatorial Guinea is the CFA Franc. CFA Franc notes are in the denominations of 10000, 5000, 2000, 1000 and 500. CFA Franc coins are in the denominations of 250, 100, 50, 25, 10, 5 and 1. One CFA Franc is equal to 100 centimes. The CFA Franc

used to be tied to the French Franc, but following France's adoption of the Euro as its currency, the CFA is now tied to the Euro.

## ***Education***

Education in the country by law is obligatory for all children between the ages of six (6) and fourteen (14) years. However, only about half the children of school going age are enrolled in schools. Primary education in Equatorial Guinea lasts for six (6) years. Secondary education also lasts for six (6) years in the country. Opportunity and facilities for higher education are provided in Bata and Malabo through Spanish assistance. The main university of Equatorial Guinea is the Universidad Nacional de Guinea Ecuatorial (UNGE).

## ***Language***

The principal official language of Equatorial Guinea is Spanish, apparently because the country was a Spanish colony. Equatorial Guinea is the only Spanish-speaking country in the continent of Africa. French is also an official language in the country. A number of local languages are also spoken in the country. These include: Batanga, Benga, Bubi, Fad'ambu, Fang, Gyele, Molengue, Ngumba, Ngumbi, Seki, and Yasa. Creole is also spoken in the country.

## ***Religion***

The principal religion in Equatorial Guinea is Christianity, predominantly Roman Catholicism. Though about 85 percent of the population consider themselves as Christians, Christianity remains nominal in the country. Many of the Christians still engage in 'pagan' practices. Other religions, including the African Traditional religion, account for the remaining 15 percent of the religious faith of the Equatoguinean population.

## *Agriculture*

Agriculture used to be the main source of foreign exchange for Equatorial Guinea until the discovery of economic reserves of petroleum in the country in the 1990s. The country has about 230 thousand hectares of both permanent and arable cropland. The country's main agricultural produce include coffee, cocoa, rice, yams, cassava, banana, palm nuts, livestock and timber. Cocoa and timber are the country's principal agricultural export commodities. Agriculture accounts for approximately 20 percent of the country's GDP.

## *Trade*

Equatorial Guinea's main trading partners include the United States of America, Spain, China, Canada, France, Norway, the Netherlands, and Italy. The import bill of the country in 2002 was 562 million US\$ (f.o.b.). The distribution of Equatorial Guinea's imports in 2002 by country of origin include: US –29.1 percent; Spain –15.9 percent; France –10.4 percent; Norway –7.2 percent; Netherlands –4.8 percent; and Italy –4.7 percent. The country's main imports include petroleum sector equipment and other equipment. The export earning of Equatorial Guinea in 2002 was about 2.5 billion US\$ (f.o.b.). The distribution of the country's exports for 2002 is as follows: US – 28.3 percent; Spain –25.3 percent; China –17.4 percent; Canada –10.6 percent; France –4.9 percent. The main export commodities of Equatorial Guinea include petroleum, methanol, cocoa, and timber.

## *Food*

Local dishes are made from produce such as cassava, cocoyam and leafy vegetables. Depending on the location of a family, cassava is served with either fish or bush meat. The leafy vegetables used in dishes include *Amaranthus hispidus*, *Portulaca grandiflora* (water leaf) and *Xanthoxylem spp* (supple leaves of edible cocoyam). Nigerian and Ghanaian immigrants in the country have also introduced fufu into Equatorial Guinea. Fufu is a dish made of pounded



cassava, yam or cocoyam, and served with a light soup. Like most African dishes, these dishes are spicy. European styled cuisines are served in major restaurants and hotels in the major cities (Malabo, Bata, etc) of the country.

## **Landmarks**

An important landmark of Equatorial Guinea is the Malabo Gothic Cathedral. The cathedral is characterized by glass rose windows, high ceilings, and an ornate sermon pulpit. Malabo is a picturesque city resplendent with Spanish architecture. The Island of Bioko, which houses Malabo, is an extinct volcano. As a result of its fertile volcanic soils, the Island is characterized by lush tropical rainforest, which is a suitable home for a variety of primates and other wild animals. The Gran Caldera de Luba is a place one can have the opportunity of seeing primates and sea turtle nests along the beach. Equatorial Guinea; therefore, has a lot to offer to eco-tourists. Bioko has beautiful volcanic cones (peaks), including the Pico de Basile, Pico de San Julian, and Pico de Concepcion. The Volcanic peaks of Annobon include Pico de Mazofin, and Pico de Fogo. These are all landmarks that may be of interest to tourists. The mainland territory, Rio Muni, has good beaches that can be a delight for tourists. It has cultural centers where some of the finest locally carved masks are housed. These masks are among the finest sculptures in Africa.

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