

Iraq

Facts and Statistics

Location: Middle East, bordering the Persian Gulf, between Iran and Kuwait

Capital: Accra

Climate: mostly desert; mild to cool winters with dry, hot, cloudless summers; northern mountainous regions along Iranian and Turkish borders experience cold winters with occasionally heavy snows that melt in early spring, sometimes causing extensive flooding in central and southern Iraq

Population: 28,221,180 (July 2008 est.)

Ethnic Make-up: Arab 75%-80%, Kurdish 15%-20%, Turkoman, Assyrian, or other 5%

Religions: Muslim 97%, Christian or other 3% br/> **Government:** parliamentary democracy

Language in Iraq

The official language of Iraq is Arabic. Many other languages are spoken by a variety of ethnic groups, most notably Kurdish. "Iraqi Arabic" (also known as Mesopotamian Arabic [Mesopotamian Qeltu Arabic, Mesopotamian Gelet Arabic, Baghdadi Arabic, Furati, 'Arabi, Arabi, North Syrian Arabic) is a variety of Arabic spoken in the Mesopotamian basin of Iraq south of Baghdad as well as in neighboring Iran and eastern Syria.

Iraqi Society and Culture

The People

The Iraqi population includes a number of ethnic groups, about 77% of whom are Arabs, 19% Kurds, and the rest a variety of different groups, including Turkomans, Assyrians, and Armenians. There is also a distinct sub-group of Iraqi Arabs, called the Ma'dan or Marsh Arabs, who inhabit miles of marshy area just above the point at which the Tigris and Euphrates join together.

Religion

The majority of Iraqis are Muslims regardless of ethnicity. Its position in Iraq went through a transition during Saddam Hussein's regime as the state moved from a secular one to one needing Islam to prop up their actions. At this stage the words "Allahu Akbar" (Allah is the Greatest) was added to the flag. During Saddam's regime only Sunnis held real power.

With the overthrow of Saddam's regime the Shia majority now hold more power and influence than in the past. As well as the power shift people have also been able to express their religious identities a lot more freely.

The Shia and Sunnis are similar in over 95% of ways. The differences are not as acute as one would think. Essentially the split occurred to the political question of who should succeed the Prophet Muhammad as the leader of the community. Major differences between the two occur in jurisprudence (i.e. how to pray, how to marry, inheritance) and minor elements of faith.

Regardless of orientation Islam prescribes a way of life and it governs political, legal, and social behavior. It organizes one's daily life and provides moral guidance for both society and the individual. The rules of Islam come from the Quran and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (known as "hadith").

Hospitality

Hospitality is an Arab and Muslim tradition deeply engrained in the culture. Visitors are treated as kings and must always be fed and looked after. A tradition within Islam actually stipulates someone is allowed to stay in your home for 3 days before you can question why they are staying and when they will leave, Invitations to a home must be seen as a great honour and never turned down.

Family and Honor

Iraqis consider family and honor to be of paramount importance. The extended family or tribe is both a political and social force. Families hold their members responsible for their conduct, since any wrongdoing brings shame to the entire family. Loyalty to the family comes before other social relationships, even business.

Nepotism is not viewed negatively; in such a culture it naturally makes more sense to offer jobs to family as they are trusted.

It is common for large extended families to live in the same house, compound, or village. In urban areas, families do not necessarily live in the same house, although they generally live in the same street or suburb at least.