



The Dutch East Indies: Facts and Figures 1908

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For a few hundred years what is now Indonesia was under Dutch rule. Dutch control of these Southeast Asian islands began with when the Dutch East India Company began to push their Portuguese competitors out of the region in the 17th century. In 1800 the Dutch government took over the administration of the colony, known as the Dutch East Indies or Netherlands India, from the Company.

This book provides facts and figures describing the geography, population, history, government, climate, economy, exports, army and navy, education, and transportation of the Dutch East Indies around the year 1908.

Dutch rule in the what is now Indonesia was sometimes harsh. The Dutch East Indies Company was primarily concerned with extracting profits from the islands, and sometimes used brutal methods to do so. Slave labour was widely used and rebellions were brutally suppressed. The islands were an important source of spices (including nutmeg), and other agricultural products like rubber and sugar. Like nearby Malaysia, tin was mined in the Dutch East Indies, often by Chinese-owned companies. By the early 1900s the colony's petroleum resources were also being exploited.

In addition to natural and agricultural resources, the Dutch East Indies provided a pool of labour for the Dutch Empire. Slavery was practiced in the islands, and enslaved people from the colony were sent abroad to Cape Colony in South Africa, and other Dutch-owned territories. After slavery was abolished in the Dutch Empire, the Dutch East Indies were a source of contract (indentured) labourers for the Dutch sugar plantation colony of Suriname in South America.

Most of the colony's population belonged to various Malay groups, but there were also significant ethnic Chinese and European minorities. In 1941 the Dutch East Indies were invaded by the Japanese, who wanted the colony's resources for their military-industrial complex. After the war local nationalists won independence from the Netherlands, and the Dutch East Indies became the independent republic of Indonesia.

Before coming under Dutch rule, what is now Indonesia had been inhabited by many different, mostly Malay-speaking groups. There were many different kingdoms in the different islands, including Sumatra, Java, and Bali. The earlier kingdoms were often Hindu and Buddhist, religions that were brought to the region by southern Indian traders. Later on, Islam became the dominant religion in the local kingdoms. The first Europeans to establish commercial relations in the region were the Portuguese. But the Portuguese lost most of their trading posts in the Malay Archipelago and Southeast Asia to the Dutch in the 17th century. They did, however, hold on to East Timor. East Timor was incorporated into Indonesia in 1975, after the Portuguese gave up their control over that territory. There was opposition to Indonesian rule and in 2002 East Timor formally won independence from Indonesia.

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