

# Papua New Guinea - Main Details

## Biodiversity Facts

Papua New Guinea occupies the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and many outlying islands to the north and east, with a land area of about 462,243 km<sup>2</sup>, a coastline of 20,197 km and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 3,120,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The country possesses more than 5,000 lakes, extensive river systems and wetlands. The species-rich mainland coastline includes more than 8,000 km of mangrove swamps, lagoons, wetlands, coral reefs and atolls, plus island archipelagos and hundreds of offshore islands.

The country is remarkably diverse in terms of species, landscapes and ecosystems. The forests of the island of New Guinea constitute the third largest expanse of tropical rainforest on the planet, after the forests of the Amazon and the Congo Basin. Rainforests cover 28.2 million hectares of Papua New Guinea and comprise 80% of the forest estate, with the rest of the forest estate comprised of dry evergreen forest, swamp forest and mangroves. The total forest estate covers approximately 71% of the land area. Approximately 2.9 million hectares of rainforest (about 15% of the total) are currently degraded, with a similar amount having been lost since 1972 when forests were first accurately mapped. This forest is currently being lost at the rate of 1.4% per year. The other major types of forest (dry evergreen forest, swamp forest, mangroves) have remained relatively stable in extent since 1972. The remaining non-forest area includes extensive areas of lowland to mid-montane grassland, sub-alpine and alpine shrubland and grassland, human settlements and water bodies.

Regarding agro-biodiversity, the sweet potato is a central component of the Papua New Guinean diet, with an estimated 5,000 cultivars of this staple found within the country. Numerous other plant species have traditionally been cultivated, including more than 30 root crops, 21 legume species, 40 leafy green vegetables, 60 other vegetables and roots, 43 varieties of nuts, 102 fruits, and 89 other plants used for food or seasonings. Wildlife plays an important part in traditional diets, supplying the primary intake of proteins and fats in many highland areas and other isolated areas of the country. In coastal areas, a wide variety of seafood, including fish, mollusks, and turtles, dominates local diets.

Papua New Guinea's waters exist in a part of the Coral Triangle which is considered the area with highest known level of marine biological diversity in the world. Its coral reefs and associated marine habitat are home to about 2,800 species of fishes, constituting about 10% of the world's total. Almost all reef types found in Papua New Guinea's waters are within fringing and/or barrier reefs, with an estimated area of 40,000 km<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the country has some of the largest unpolluted tropical freshwater systems in the Asia-Pacific region. Mangrove swamps occupy 51.6 million hectares (about 2% of the forest estate). A recent study demonstrated that the extent of mangroves in the Gulf of Papua has remained relatively stable for nearly 40 years, with expansion in some areas balanced by regression in other areas. There are 33 species of mangrove trees known, representing the highest mangrove diversity in the world.