

Physical Geography

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Southeast Asia's physical features include peninsulas, islands, rivers, and many seas, straits, and gulfs.
2. The tropical climate of Southeast Asia supports a wide range of plants and animals.
3. Southeast Asia is rich in natural resources such as wood, rubber, and fossil fuels.

The Big Idea

Southeast Asia is a tropical region of peninsulas, islands, and waterways with diverse plants, animals, and resources.

Key Terms and Places

Indochina Peninsula, *p. 618*

Malay Peninsula, *p. 618*

Malay Archipelago, *p. 618*
archipelago, *p. 618*

New Guinea, *p. 619*

Borneo, *p. 619*

Mekong River, *p. 619*

TAKING NOTES

As you read, use a chart like this one to help you take notes on the physical geography of Southeast Asia.

Physical Features	
Climate, Plants, Animals	
Natural Resources	

If YOU lived there...

Your family lives on a houseboat on a branch of the great Mekong River in Cambodia. You catch fish in cages under the boat. Your home is part of a floating village of houseboats and houses built on stilts in the water. Boats loaded with fruits and vegetables travel from house to house. Even your school is on a nearby boat.

How does water shape life in your village?

BUILDING BACKGROUND Waterways, such as rivers, canals, seas, and oceans, are important to life in Southeast Asia. Waterways are both “highways” and sources of food. Where rivers empty into the sea, they form deltas, areas of rich soil good for farming.

Physical Features

Where can you find a flower that grows up to 3 feet across and smells like rotting garbage? How about a lizard that can grow up to 10 feet long and weigh up to 300 pounds? These amazing sights as well as some of the world's most beautiful tropical paradises are all in Southeast Asia.

The region of Southeast Asia is made up of two peninsulas and two large island groups. The **Indochina Peninsula** and the **Malay** (muh-LAY) **Peninsula** extend from the Asian mainland. We call this part of the region Mainland Southeast Asia. The two island groups are the Philippines and the **Malay Archipelago**. An **archipelago** (ahr-kuh-PE-luh-goh) is a large group of islands. We call this part of the region Island Southeast Asia.

Landforms

In Mainland Southeast Asia, rugged mountains fan out across the countries of Myanmar (MYAHN-mahr), Thailand (TY-land), Laos (LOWS), and Vietnam (vee-ET-NAHM). Between these mountains are low plateaus and river floodplains.



Interactive Map

Southeast Asia: Physical



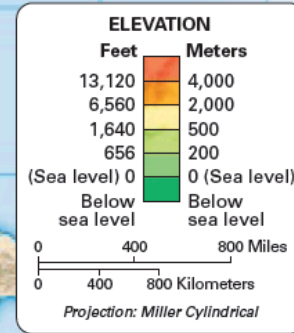
Geography Skills

Regions Southeast Asia is a region of islands and peninsulas surrounded by water.

1. **Identify** What two major peninsulas are located in this region?
2. **Contrast** Almost all the countries in this region have coastlines. How does the country of Laos differ from this pattern?

go.hrw.com

KEYWORD: SK7 CH24



Island Southeast Asia consists of more than 20,000 islands, some of them among the world's largest. **New Guinea** is Earth's second largest island, and **Borneo** its third largest. Many of the area's larger islands have high mountains. A few peaks are high enough to have snow and glaciers.

Island Southeast Asia is a part of the Ring of Fire as well. As a result, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions often rock the area. When such events occur underwater, they can cause tsunamis, or giant series of waves. In 2004 a tsunami in the Indian Ocean killed hundreds of thousands of people, many in Southeast Asia.

Bodies of Water

Water is a central part of Southeast Asia. Look at the map to identify the many seas, straits, and gulfs in this region.



1 Mist hovers over the Mekong River as it flows through the forested mountains of northern Thailand.

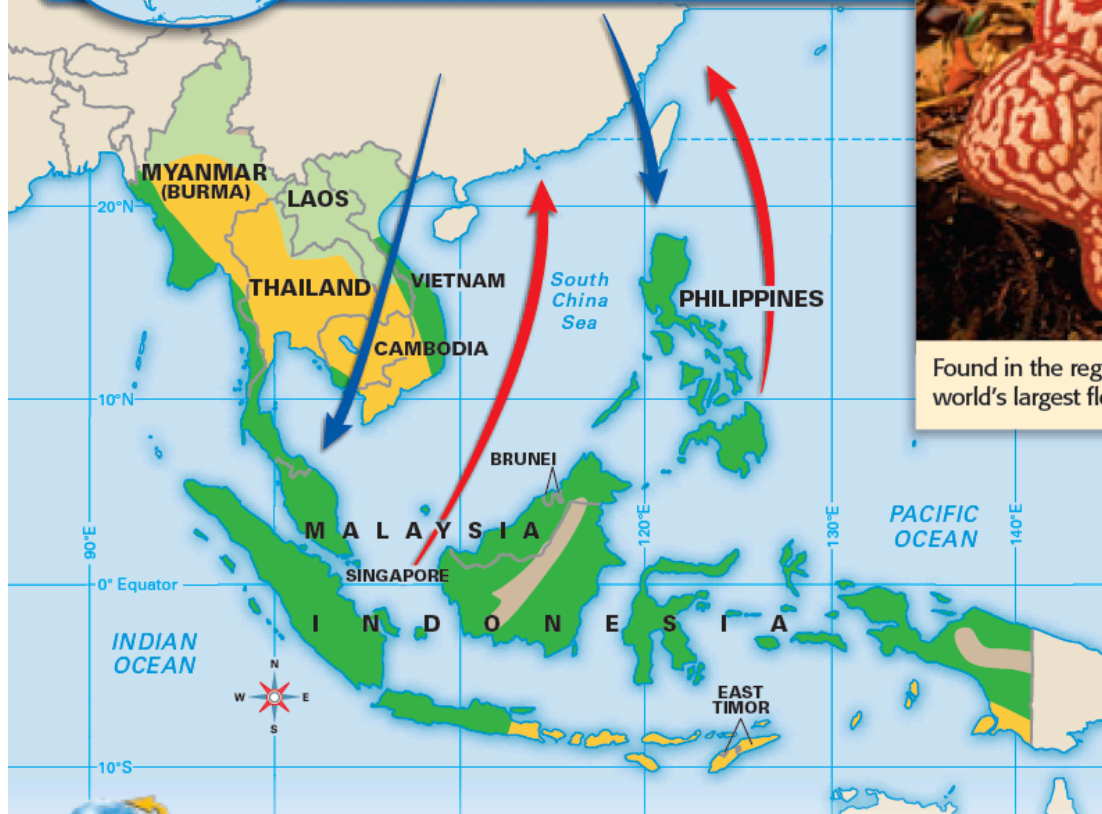
In addition, several major rivers drain the mainland's peninsulas. Of these rivers, the mighty **Mekong (MAY-KAWNG) River** is the most important. The mainland's fertile river valleys and deltas support farming and are home to many people.

READING CHECK Finding Main Ideas What are Southeast Asia's major physical features?



Interactive Map

Southeast Asia: Climate



Found in the region's rain forests, the rafflesia is the world's largest flower at up to 3 feet (1 m) in width.

Climate Types

- Humid tropical
- Tropical savanna
- Humid subtropical
- Highland
- Wet monsoon airflow
- Dry monsoon airflow

0 300 600 Miles
0 300 600 Kilometers
Projection: Miller Cylindrical



Geography Skills

Location Southeast Asia's location on and around the equator affects the region's climate.

1. **Identify** What is the main climate found in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines?
2. **Interpret** Based on the map, how do monsoons affect the climate of this region?

go.hrw.com KEYWORD: SK7 CH24

Climate, Plants, and Animals

Southeast Asia lies in the tropics, the area on and around the equator. Temperatures are warm to hot year-round, but become cooler to the north and in the mountains.

Much of the mainland has a tropical savanna climate. Seasonal monsoon winds from the oceans bring heavy rain in summer and drier weather in winter. Severe flooding is common during wet seasons. This climate supports savannas—areas of tall grasses and scattered trees and shrubs.

FOCUS ON READING

What context clues help you figure out the definition of *monsoon*?

The islands and the Malay Peninsula mainly have a humid tropical climate. This climate is hot, muggy, and rainy all year. Showers or storms occur almost daily. In addition, huge storms called typhoons can bring heavy rains and powerful winds.

The humid tropical climate's heat and heavy rainfall support tropical rain forests. These lush forests are home to a huge number of different plants and animals. About 40,000 kinds of flowering plants grow in Indonesia alone. These plants include the rafflesia, the world's largest flower. Measuring up to 3 feet (1 m) across, this flower produces a horrible, rotting stink.

Rain forest animals include elephants, monkeys, tigers, and many types of birds. Some species are found nowhere else. They include orangutans and Komodo dragons, lizards that can grow 10 feet (3 m) long.



Orangutans live in the rain forests of Borneo and Sumatra. Deforestation has seriously reduced their habitat.

Many of these plants and animals are endangered because of loss of habitat. People are clearing the tropical rain forests for farming, wood, and mining. These actions threaten the area's future diversity.

READING CHECK Analyzing How does climate contribute to the region's diversity of life?

Natural Resources

Southeast Asia has a number of valuable natural resources. The region's hot, wet climate and rich soils make farming highly productive. Rice is a major crop, and others include coconuts, coffee, sugarcane, palm oil, and spices. Some countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia (muh-LAY-zhuh), also have large rubber tree plantations.

The region's seas provide fisheries, and its tropical rain forests provide valuable hardwoods and medicines. The region also has many minerals and fossil fuels, including tin, iron ore, natural gas, and oil. For example, the island of Borneo sits atop an oil field.

READING CHECK Summarizing What are the region's major natural resources?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW Southeast Asia is a tropical region of peninsulas, islands, and waterways with diverse life and rich resources. Next, you will read about the region's history and culture.

Section 1 Assessment

go.hrw.com

Online Quiz

KEYWORD: SK7 HP24

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

- a. Define** What is an archipelago?

b. Compare and Contrast How do the physical features of Mainland Southeast Asia compare and contrast to those of Island Southeast Asia?
- a. Recall** What type of forest occurs in the region?

b. Summarize What is the climate like across much of Southeast Asia?

c. Predict What do you think might happen to the region's wildlife if the tropical rain forests continue to be destroyed?
- a. Identify** Which countries in the region are major producers of rubber?

b. Analyze How does the region's climate contribute to its natural resources?

Critical Thinking

- Summarizing** Draw a chart like this one. Use your notes to provide information about the climate, plants, and animals in Southeast Asia. In the left-hand box, also note how climate shapes life in the region.



FOCUS ON SPEAKING

- Writing Questions about the Region's Physical Geography** Note information about the region's physical features, climate, plants, animals, and natural resources. Write two questions and answers for your interview. For example, you might ask a question about the region's tropical rain forests.