



Natural Vegetation of Southeast Asia



Vegetation of Southeast Asia

Almost all of the vegetation in Southeast Asia consists of tropical forest. There are several different types of tropical forests. Rain forests are usually found in hot and humid climatic zones located near the Equator. Rain forests are found where heavy rains fall throughout the year, averaging between 80 and 200 inches of rain per year. They have a dense canopy of tall trees, slightly smaller trees that can grow in the shade, and a dark forest floor with a thick carpet of decaying vegetation. Undergrowth is limited except in those places where the sun can shine through, such as along a river or lake. Tropical deciduous forests generally have shorter trees, the top canopy has more gaps, and there is plenty of undergrowth (what one often refers to as a jungle). The difference in vegetation stems from less total precipitation or seasonal spurts of precipitation. Unlike rain forests, tropical deciduous forests shed their leaves, allowing sunlight to reach the ground. Except for northern Myanmar and southern Indonesia, the rest of Southeast Asia lies between the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer. The climate throughout the region is generally hot and humid. The islands and archipelagos of Southeast Asia, as well as the western coast of Indochina, receive significant rainfall all year long. Thus the vegetation is that of a rain forest. Central and eastern Indochina receive heavy summer rains, but precipitation levels for the rest of the year tend to be more modest. Here one finds tropical deciduous forests.

MAP: Question 1

What is the predominant kind of vegetation found in Southeast Asia? Explain the reasons for this.

Question 2

According to the map, what other kinds of vegetation can be found in Southeast Asia? What are the defining characteristics?

Question 3

How has the climate and vegetation affected agricultural development in the region?