

# Arunachal Pradesh

Source: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Arunachal-Pradesh>

Arunachal Pradesh, state of [India](#). It [constitutes](#) a mountainous area in the extreme northeastern part of the country and is bordered by the kingdom of [Bhutan](#) to the west, the [Tibet Autonomous Region](#) of [China](#) to the north, [Myanmar](#) (Burma) and the Indian state of [Nagaland](#) to the south and southeast, and the Indian state of [Assam](#) to the south and southwest. The capital is [Itanagar](#).

Arunachal Pradesh, meaning “Land of the Rising Sun,” long has been a recognized region of the [Indian subcontinent](#), receiving mention in such ancient Hindu literature as the *Kalika-purana* and the epic poems [Mahabharata](#) and [Ramayana](#). Formerly known as the North East Frontier Agency (from the British colonial era), the area was part of Assam until it was made the Indian [union territory](#) of Arunachal Pradesh in 1972, and in 1987 it became an Indian state. The region, however, has been the subject of an ongoing [sovereignty](#) dispute between India and [China](#). Area 32,333 square miles (83,743 square km). Pop. (2011) 1,382,611.

## Land

### Relief

[Tawang Monastery](#) Tawang Monastery, nestled in the mountains of northwestern Arunachal Pradesh, India.

Most of Arunachal Pradesh’s terrain consists of deep valleys flanked by highland plateaus and ridges that rise to the peaks of the [Great Himalayas](#). The state [encompasses](#) three broad physiographic regions. Farthest south is a series of foothills, similar in type to the [Siwalik Range](#) (a narrow sub-Himalayan belt stretching across much of northern India), that ascend from the [Assam](#) plains to elevations of 1,000 to 3,300 feet (300 to 1,000 metres). Those hills rise rapidly northward to the [Lesser Himalayas](#), where some ridges and spurs reach 10,000 feet (3,000 metres). Farther north, along the Tibetan border, lie the main ranges of the Great Himalayas, where [Kangto](#), the highest peak in the state, dominates the landscape, reaching about 23,260 feet (7,090 metres).

## Drainage and soils

[Kameng River](#) Kameng River, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

The major rivers of the state are the [Brahmaputra](#) and its tributaries—the Dibang [Sikang], Lohit, Subansiri, Kameng, and Tirap. The Brahmaputra (known as the Tsangpo in the Tibet [Autonomous](#) Region of China and as the Dihang [Siang] in Arunachal Pradesh) flows eastward from Mansarovar Lake in Tibet before dipping south through the [Himalayas](#) into north-central Arunachal Pradesh. The river then winds its way southward across the length of the state, cutting a narrow, steep-sided gorge into the mountainous terrain. The Brahmaputra finally emerges onto the northern edge of the Assam plains—a finger of which extends into southeastern Arunachal Pradesh—near the town of Pasighat. It is joined by the Dibang and the Lohit rivers a short distance beyond Pasighat, just south of the border between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. West of the Brahmaputra, the Subansiri is the only tributary to cross the main Himalayan ranges. The Kameng and other rivers in the area rise on the southern flanks of the mountains. The Tirap River drains the southeastern part of the state. Soils vary considerably with terrain. Generally, however, they are acidic and, in mountainous areas, subject to erosion. The major soil types are [inceptisols](#), [entisols](#), and [ultisols](#). River valleys are characterized by rich alluvial soils that are highly suited for agriculture.

[Explore India Quiz](#)

## Climate

The climate of Arunachal Pradesh varies with [topography](#) and elevation. The foothill zone is subtropical and has a hot and humid climate; in the lower valleys, summer temperatures in June, July, and August typically rise into the mid-90s F (mid-30s C), while winter high temperatures in December, January, and February usually reach the mid-50s F (about 13 °C). Average temperatures decrease as elevations increase in the mountains.

Precipitation in the state generally follows the wet-dry [monsoon](#) pattern. Annual totals average about 130 inches (3,300 mm), falling mostly between April and September during the wet southwest monsoon. In the centre of the state, however, the precipitation figure approaches 160 inches (4,100 mm) or higher per year.

## Plant and animal life

Arunachal Pradesh's [diverse](#) terrain, climate, and soils are reflected in its fauna and flora. About two-thirds of the state is forested, with a wide belt of swampy [rainforest](#) lying along the foothills. Forests of tropical evergreens and subtropical pines (as well as subtropical mixed broad-leaved and [pine](#) forests) are found in lower elevations. As elevation increases, the woodlands give way to mixed and coniferous temperate forests. Subalpine and alpine vegetation, with rhododendrons predominating, appears on the higher slopes. A great variety of medicinal plants, including [ginseng](#) and [yew](#), also grow in Arunachal Pradesh, and they are used by much of the population for the [treatment](#) and cure of various ailments.

Animal life includes tigers, clouded and snow leopards, elephants, wild buffalo, serow and goral goats, many species of deer, and primates such as hoolock gibbons, slow lorises, macaques, and capped langurs. Animals found at higher elevations include bharals (wild sheep), black bears, and red pandas. The rare [musk deer](#) and takin (*Budorcas taxicolor*) also are found in the state. Moreover, Arunachal Pradesh has an abundance of fish, many varieties of snakes, and hundreds of species of birds.

## People of Arunachal Pradesh

[Apa Tani women](#) Apa Tani women in Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

Arunachal Pradesh is home to dozens of distinct ethnic groups, most of which are in some ways related to the peoples of [Tibet](#) and the hill region of western [Myanmar](#). More than two-thirds of the state's people are designated officially as Scheduled Tribes, a term that generally applies to [indigenous](#) peoples who fall outside of the prevailing Indian social structure. In western Arunachal Pradesh the Nissi (Nishi or Dafla), Sherdukpen, Aka, Monpa, [Apa Tani](#), and Hill Miri are among the main tribes. The [Adi](#), who [constitute](#) the largest tribal group in the state, live in the central region. The [Mishmi](#) inhabit the northeastern hills, and the Wancho, Nocte, and Tangsa are concentrated in the southeastern district of Tirap. Throughout the state, the tribal peoples generally share similar rural lifestyles and occupations; many are subsistence farmers who supplement their diet by hunting, fishing, and gathering forest products. Dispersed villages and isolated farmsteads are typical features of the landscape. Aside from the Scheduled Tribes, much of the remainder of the population of Arunachal Pradesh consists of immigrants from [Bangladesh](#), as well as from [Assam](#), [Nagaland](#), and other states of [India](#).

The tribal groups speak about 50 languages and [dialects](#), most belonging to the [Tibeto-Burman](#) branch of the [Sino-Tibetan language](#) family. They are often mutually unintelligible; thus, [Assamese](#) and [Hindi](#), both of which are [Indo-Aryan languages](#), as well as [English](#) are used as [lingua francas](#) in the region. Each of the tribes follows its

own social, cultural, and religious practices, and most are endogamous (marrying within the group). Many of the groups practice local religions that involve interaction with various spirits and deities of nature. Ritual sacrifice is common, and a domesticated [gaur](#) (wild ox), locally known as a mithun, is especially valued as a sacrificial animal. Some residents of Arunachal Pradesh practice [Hinduism](#), especially those near the lowlands approaching the border with Assam. [Tibetan Buddhism](#) is found among groups near the Tibetan border, and some tribes along the Myanmar border practice [Theravada Buddhism](#), which is predominant in [Southeast Asia](#). Arunachal Pradesh has the lowest population density of any state in India. Most of the populace is concentrated in the low-lying valleys, with the hill peoples living in scattered upland [communities](#). There are no cities and fewer than two dozen towns. [Itanagar](#), in the southwest of Arunachal Pradesh, is the state's largest town.

## Economy

### Agriculture and forestry

[Arunachal Pradesh, India](#) Hillsides cleared for shifting cultivation (*jhum*) near Along, central Arunachal Pradesh, India.

More than half of the population of Arunachal Pradesh is engaged in agriculture, but only a tiny portion of the land is under cultivation. Although settled agriculture, including wet-rice farming, has expanded considerably since the late 20th century, many of the hill peoples continue to practice [shifting agriculture](#) (*jhum*), whereby land is cleared by burning the vegetation, is [cultivated](#) for several years, and then is abandoned in favour of another site when the productivity of the soil declines. Rice, corn (maize), millet, and buckwheat are among the chief crops grown by that method. Major commercial crops include oilseeds, potatoes, ginger, sugarcane, and vegetables. Mithuns are widely kept, and yaks are important in the higher elevations. The Monpa herd sheep. Some groups also raise fish through aquaculture.

Arunachal Pradesh, with its abundance of forest cover, once [derived](#) a significant portion of its gross state product from logging and forestry. Production has dropped dramatically since the 1970s, however, largely in response to environmental legislation. In the early 21st century, forestry supported just a few local industries of small or moderate size.

### Resources and power

Arunachal Pradesh has significant, though largely unutilized, resource potential. Among its resources for generating energy are rivers, coal, and petroleum; most of the state's

power is provided by hydroelectric plants. In addition to hydrocarbons, other mineral resources of Arunachal Pradesh include dolomite, quartzite, limestone, and marble. Efforts have been made in the early 21st century to expand hydroelectric and solar power generation.

## Manufacturing

The state's manufacturing sector consists primarily of medium- and small-scale industries. Basketry, [weaving](#), and carpets are the main handicraft manufactures. Smaller-scale industries include rice and vegetable-oil milling, [fruit processing](#), the manufacture of forest-based products, and steel fabrication. Sericulture (raw silk production) also is important, and the state produces many varieties of silk yarns. Industrial expansion has been encouraged by the state's economic development policies, and industrial estates have been established at Itanagar and neighbouring Naharlagun (formerly Old Itanagar), as well as at Pasighat and Deomali.

## Transportation and telecommunications

The state's rugged terrain makes transport and communications extremely difficult. With few paved roads and, for a long time, no railways in Arunachal Pradesh, links with the rest of India are limited. However, there long has been an active trade network within the region, with footpaths connecting villages at different elevations. Most of the major [transportation](#) centres serving Arunachal Pradesh are in the neighbouring state of [Assam](#); among those are the nearest airport, near Lilabari, and the nearest railhead is in Harmoti (or Harmuty). However, in 2014 a rail line was opened between Harmoti and Naharlagun. State-owned and private companies operate regular bus service from Itanagar to various towns of Assam, including [Guwahati](#), [Tezpur](#), [Dibrugarh](#), [Tinsukia](#), and [Jorhat](#). Service also is available to [Shillong](#) in [Meghalaya](#). Telecommunications were long largely undeveloped in the state, with landline telephone service limited mainly to the larger towns. Although basic telephone access has improved since 2000, greater progress has been made in expanding [mobile telephone](#) service into remote mountain areas. Internet access, although still fairly limited, has also increased in the early 21st century, including the installation of fibre-optic cables.

## Government and society

### Constitutional framework

Arunachal Pradesh is a [constituent](#) unit of the [Republic of India](#), and, as such, the structure of its government, like that of most Indian states, is defined by the national

constitution of 1950. The governor, appointed by India's president, is head of state and is aided by an elected chief minister, a Council of Ministers, and a unicameral [Legislative Assembly](#) (Vidhan Sabha).

At the local level, the state [comprises](#) more than one dozen districts. In general, those districts are parceled into a number of subdivisions, which [encompass](#) several blocks, towns, circles, and villages. Villages are the smallest administrative units.

Arunachal Pradesh does not have its own high court. Rather, the state falls under the jurisdiction of the high court in [Guwahati](#), [Assam](#). To handle cases from Arunachal Pradesh more effectively, however, a permanent bench of the Guwahati High Court has been established at Itanagar, with a chief [justice](#) appointed by the chief justice in Assam. Any case from Arunachal Pradesh may be referred to Guwahati, should the chief justice in Itanagar deem it necessary.

## Health and welfare

In addition to the few general hospitals spread among the larger towns of Arunachal Pradesh, nearly every district has its own hospital. In more remote areas, health services are provided by [community](#) health centres and subcentres. Separate facilities specialize in homeopathic medicine. Although the rural character of Arunachal Pradesh has remained an obstacle to the growth of the state's hospital and health care network, the expansion of public water works and the extension of electricity to the villages have helped to improve rural health. By the early 21st century, roughly four-fifths of the villages had a drinking [water supply](#) and about two-fifths were electrified.

Malaria, [dengue fever](#), and tuberculosis are among the major health threats to the population of Arunachal Pradesh. The state government has participated in the country's leprosy eradication program, as well as in national programs to control vector-borne diseases (e.g., malaria, dengue fever, and Japanese encephalitis). Tuberculosis has remained a major concern in the state, with hospital facilities specifically designated as tuberculosis treatment centres

## Education

Despite the presence of numerous primary, middle, and secondary schools, the literacy rate in Arunachal Pradesh continued to rank among the lowest in India in the early 21st century. There are a number of postsecondary institutions, including Arunachal University at Itanagar, which was founded in 1984. The state also has specialized colleges focusing on such fields as education, engineering, industry, and forestry and agriculture.

## Cultural life

[Mishmi dancers in traditional dress](#) Mishmi dancers in traditional dress, Arunachal Pradesh state, India.

Tribal peoples in Arunachal Pradesh wear distinctive garments and headdress. The art of [weaving](#) is especially important, and textile designs are unique to each group. Dances are an [integral](#) part of community life. Losar, Mopin, and Solung are major tribal festivals. At such festivals, villagers often drink millet or rice beer, as well as tea.

## Cultural institutions

Arunachal Pradesh has an array of notable cultural institutions, which together underscore the state's religious and cultural [diversity](#). The state museum, which houses an ethnographic collection consisting of local archaeological finds, musical instruments, weavings, carvings, and other examples of [material culture](#), is located in the capital, [Itanagar](#). Also in Itanagar are the governor's residence and a picturesque [Buddhist](#) temple, each crowning one of the city's two prominent peaks. A [Christian](#) revival church and temples dedicated to the [Hindu](#) deities of [Kali](#) and [Shiva](#) are located in nearby Naharlagun. Bomdila, in the snow-clad [Himalayan](#) ranges of the state's western segment, has many Buddhist monasteries and hermitages, while [Tawang](#), in the far-northwestern extremity of Arunachal Pradesh, is famous for its 17th-century [Mahayana](#) Buddhist monastery with gold-lettered Buddhist scriptures. Parasuramkund, on the Lohit River in the state's eastern region, is a place of Hindu pilgrimage where sins can be washed away in the local waters. Malinithan, in central Arunachal Pradesh, is an archaeological site and also a place of great sanctity.

## Recreation

Arunachal Pradesh offers numerous parks, gardens, wildlife sanctuaries, and other natural settings for outdoor recreation. Bhalukpung and Tipi, both in the southwest, and Bomdila all are noted for their abundant flora, especially orchids. Namdapha National Park, near Dibrugarh on the south-central border, has a wildlife sanctuary inhabited by tigers and leopards. In Naharlagun the botanical garden at Polo Park sits atop a ridge overlooking the town. Other places valued for their unique scenery and natural [environment](#) are Ziro, set in a levelled valley of west-central Arunachal Pradesh and covered on all sides by pine-clad, stooping hills, and Ganga Lake just outside of Itanagar.



# History of Arunachal Pradesh

In 1912–13 the British Indian government made agreements with the [indigenous](#) peoples of the [Himalayas](#) of northeastern India to set up the Balipara frontier tract in the west, the Sadiya frontier tract in the east, and the Abor and [Mishmi](#) hills and the Tirap frontier tract in the south. Together those tracts became the North East Frontier Agency, which is now Arunachal Pradesh. The northern boundary of the territory (now of the state) determined at that time became known as the [McMahon Line](#); it is about 550 miles (885 km) long and has been a lasting point of [contention](#) between [India](#) and [China](#).

The boundary takes its name from Sir Henry McMahon, secretary in the Indian foreign department and representative of [Great Britain](#) at the conference held in 1912–13 in Simla (now called [Shimla](#), in the state of [Himachal Pradesh](#)) to settle frontier and other matters relating to [Tibet](#). To the British, the line marked the geographic, ethnic, and administrative boundary between the two regions, and delegates from Great Britain, [China](#), and Tibet agreed that the frontier between Tibet and northeastern India indeed should follow the crest of the high Himalayas. Two days later, however, the Chinese republican government disavowed its [delegate](#) and refused to sign a convention. After the independence of India in 1947, China made claims to practically the whole upland area of what was then [Assam](#) state, arguing that the McMahon Line had never been accepted by China and was the result of British aggression. In letters to the Indian [prime minister](#), [Jawaharlal Nehru](#), the Chinese prime minister, [Zhou Enlai](#), quoted a map in the 1929 edition of [Encyclopædia Britannica](#) showing the disputed territory as Chinese, with the boundary following the alignment of Chinese maps. Some Chinese maps before 1935 showed the North East Frontier Agency (i.e., Arunachal Pradesh) as part of India and since then as part of Tibet. The *Survey of India* (1883) depicted the [disputed](#) tribal areas as [de facto](#) administered by British India. British and Indian maps since 1914 have usually followed the McMahon Line. If the Chinese claims were allowed, the Indian-Chinese border would follow roughly the margin of the [Assam](#) plain, a frontier almost impossible to defend. Following that dispute, Chinese troops crossed the McMahon Line on August 26, 1959, and captured an Indian outpost at Longju, a short distance south of the line. They abandoned that outpost in 1961, but in October 1962 they again crossed the line, part of the month-long [Sino-Indian War](#), this time in force. After first striking toward the Tanglha ridge and Tawang near the border with [Bhutan](#), the Chinese later extended their attack along the whole frontier. Deep inroads were made at a number of points. Later the Chinese agreed to withdraw approximately to the McMahon Line, and in 1963 they returned Indian troops who had been held as prisoners of war.



[Deryck O. Lodrick](#)

Since then, efforts have been made to more fully [integrate](#) the region into India, beginning with its [designation](#) as a [union territory](#) in 1972 and then as a state 15 years later. Economic growth, though slow, has progressed, notably with the development of some of the state's vast hydroelectric potential. Efforts have been made to improve Arunachal's [infrastructure](#), including extending roads into some remote areas, building the state's first rail line, and expanding access to electricity, drinking water, and telecommunications facilities in tribal villages. However, some of those efforts have raised calls for concern among environmentalists and others who wish to preserve the natural landscape.

There have been no instances of outright hostilities between India and China in Arunachal Pradesh since 1962, but tensions have remained high there. Each country has maintained troops along the de facto international border, and there have been periodic reports of incursions by both sides. The territory and then state government has largely been controlled by the [Indian National Congress](#), although there have been brief periods of rule by the central government.