***India***

India is one of the most versatile countries in the South East Asian region. It covers an area of more than 3.5 million square kilometers. The population of this country is around 1.2 billion people. Formerly a British colony it achieved its freedom on the 15th of august 1947.

***Culture***

India is a country of many religious and cultural varieties. The majority of the people in India are Hindus. This religion was brought in the region by the Aryan people of central Asia who were attracted to this place because of its temperate climate and lush grazing. The Aryans drove out the original people of this region called Dravidians. The Aryans not only brought the religion to this area but also their values and customs. The Aryans introduced the caste system into the Indian society. This system divides the Indian society into different castes such as the Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders and farmers) and Sudras (the untouchables). Although India is an advanced and educated country, the caste system is still prevalent in the rural areas. The Muslims are the second largest community in India. This religion came into the subcontinent with the Muslim traders of Arabia and then the conqueror Muhammad bin Qasim. Muslims represent around 20% of the Indian population and their culture is a major part of the Indian life style. Sikhs and Buddhists are also living in quite a large number in India. The people of India put a lot of emphasis on family values and religious and cultural festivals. Holi, Dasehra and Eid are celebrated with religious and social fervor.

***Architecture***

The architecture of India is inspired by the Hindu and Muslim culture. The Hindu temples are dated back to almost 5 thousand years. They are decorated with floral patterns and beautiful statues of gods and goddesses. The Muslim influence was felt after the 10th century when muslims came into power. The mosques and the muslim shrines were dominated by the traditional arch and dome design. These buildings were adorned with Quranic passages and the sayings of the Holy prophet. Modern indian architecture is predominately western and is quite modern in style.

***Trade and economy***

The Indian subcontinent was known as the golden sparrow. The region was rich in spices, cotton and precious stones. These goods were exported to the European countries since the middle ages. Explorers like Christopher Columbus tried to discover an alternative route to the Indian subcontinent. Modern India is one of the rising economies of the world and it trades in many commodities. Automobiles gems and computer hardware are just some of the things that India exports to the rest of the world. As of 2013 the indian economy is worth 1.3 trillion us dollars.

**Pakistan**

When the British split up the Indian subcontinent in 1947 they created the sovereign state of Pakistan. Nowadays Pakistan encompasses the north western region of the Indian subcontinent.

***Culture***

Pakistan is a predominately Muslim country. It has a Muslim majority of around 97%. The country is primarily patriarchal where every family is headed by a male member who makes most of the decisions of the family. Most of the aspects of the society are dominated by the religion. In rural areas the mosque is still the center of the community and many disputes are settled by the mullah in the mosque. Religious festivals are celebrated with a lot of vigor and warmth. Eid-ul-fitr and eid-ul-azha are the main Muslim festivals. The holy month of Ramadan is also very important and is celebrated with a lot of religious warmth.

***Architecture***

The Muslim architecture is the most important architectural factor in this area. The mosques, forts and other buildings of the Mughal era are the best example of this kind of style. The modern buildings of the cities of Pakistan have been influenced by western design but still carry the mark of the Muslim heritage.

***Trade and economy***

Pakistan is not a rich country. The economy of the country rests primarily on the textile industry. Pakistan is a major exporter of cotton, denim and finished textile products.

**Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is a fairly new country in the subcontinent. This new country came into being on the 16th of December 1971. Previously a part of Pakistan Bangladesh declared independence and gained its freedom.

***Culture***

Bangladesh is also a primarily Muslim country. 80% of the population is Muslim while the rest are Hindus. The Bengali culture is influenced by both these religions. Bangladesh has a rich intellectual heritage and has spawned many famous poets, philosophers and thinkers. It was the Bengalis who first thought of and started the all India Muslim league.

***Architecture***

Like India and Pakistan Bangladesh also has a mix of modern and cultural buildings. The old temples and mosques of the area are examples of Hindu and Muslim cultures while the new and modern buildings represent a growing and expanding western influence.

***Trade and economy***

Bangladesh is also an upcoming industrial country in the region. It is one of the leading exporters of textile and jute products to the rest of the world. Ship building and fishing are also expanding businesses in the region. Bangladesh is the world leader and the first country to introduce microfinance. The creator of the microfinance revolution Muhammad Yunus is also a Bengali national.

**Afghanistan**

Afghanistan is perhaps the oldest sovereign country in this region. First the British and then much later the Russians tried to conquer it but it was to no avail. The harsh topography and the valiant and proud people made it impossible for the country to be conquered.

***Culture***

The country is a Muslim state and strict Islamic laws are enforced. Under the Taliban regime all sorts of music and festivities were banned but now they are slowly coming back. The community is controlled by a Jirga or a collection of the elders of the community.

***Architecture***

The country was the home of some of the most famous conquerors in history who looted the coffers of India and made their capitals the most beautiful in the world. Mahmud made Ghazni one of the most beautiful cities in his time. Sadly all this beautiful architecture has been neglected and there is a real need to revive and restore these amazing buildings.

***Trade and economy***

The country is rich in minerals but sadly the conflicts that have plagued the region have made it almost impossible to utilize this mineral wealth. The region relies heavily on foreign aid in order to survive. Oil, gas, gold and lithium are just a few of the hidden treasure of the region