

Cameroon

Country name	Cameroon
State title	Republic of Cameroon
Name of citizen	Cameroonian
Official languages	French (<i>fra</i>) and English (<i>eng</i>) ¹
Country name in official languages	Cameroun (<i>fra</i>)/Cameroon (<i>eng</i>)
State title in official languages	République du Cameroun (<i>fra</i>) Republic of Cameroon (<i>eng</i>)
Script	Roman script
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	CM/CMR
Capital city	Yaoundé
Population / area	29.1 million (UN data) / 475,442 km ²

Introduction

Cameroon lies in west-central Africa, sharing land boundaries with Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Nigeria. It is geographically highly diverse, with desert plains in the north, mountains in the centre, and tropical rainforests in the south.

Following World War I, the territory was divided under a League of Nations mandate between France and the United Kingdom. The French-administered territory, Cameroun, became independent in 1960. The southern part of the British Cameroons merged with it in 1961 to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon (the northern part becoming part of Nigeria). The independent state was renamed the United Republic of Cameroon in 1972 and subsequently the Republic of Cameroon in 1984.

Since 2017, Cameroon's mainly English-speaking North-West and South-West Regions (the area of former Southern Cameroons) have been in a state of civil war. This conflict, commonly referred to as the *Anglophone Crisis*, has been characterised by violence between government forces and Anglophone separatists, who seek the independence of the region as 'Ambazonia'.

¹ ISO 639-3 codes, where they exist, are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

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Geographical names policy

The geographical names of Cameroon reflect the complex geopolitical history of the region. Both French and English have official status throughout Cameroon, though (see more in *Introduction* and *Language*) the territorial division before independence maintains its linguistic significance².

It is PCGN policy to use primarily French forms for place names in Cameroon, except in the South-West and North-West Regions where English names should be shown alone or first³. Names can either appear alone, or, if available, if significantly different and if desirable for a particular product, both forms may be used. In such cases, the French form should be shown first, except within the South-West and North-West Regions.

Sources for geographical names

Though few official Cameroonian sources have been seen to monitor the local practice, in a review of commercially available maps of Cameroon, there was some evidence of the BGN/PCGN policy described above (i.e. the predominant use of French throughout the country except in the South-West and North-West Regions). The French *Institut national de l'information géographique et forestière* (IGN) *Carte Touristique* (1994, 1:1,500,000), although not showing administrative divisions, uses solely English generic terms in the anglophone area (e.g. Cameroon Mountain⁴, Rumpi Hills, Lake Benakuma), though, as would be expected, French generic terms are used elsewhere.

The official mapmaking body in Cameroon is the *Institut national de cartographie*, [INC Cameroons - L'Institut National de Cartographie \(INC\) \(inc-cameroon.cm\)](http://INC Cameroons - L'Institut National de Cartographie (INC) (inc-cameroon.cm)), which maintains a national base map at 1:200,000-scale, and has produced a series of region-specific atlases. These are not available online, however.

Though not official, France's IGN products are also useful. The US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) Geographic Names Server can also be used as a source for names in Cameroon.

Language

The official status of both French (*fra*) and English (*eng*) across the country has been the case since independence and is recognised in Cameroon's Constitution⁵. However, the *de facto* linguistic situation in Cameroon is both interesting and complex: the great majority of the population speaks

² Though they may be characterised as 'French' or 'English', most place names derive etymologically from the many other national languages of Cameroon.

³ It may be noted that this policy predates the ongoing 'Anglophone crisis' and was adopted by PCGN and the US Board on Geographic Names to reflect the linguistic reality of the country, rather than showing any linguistic or political affiliation.

⁴ See in *Other significant locations*, the usual recommendation for this feature is Mount Cameroon.

⁵ Law No. 96-06, most recently amended 2008. Part One, article one, 3: *The official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The State shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. It shall endeavour to protect and promote national languages.*

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neither English nor French as a mother tongue: though reports and interpretations differ, there are considered to be some 250 “national” languages⁶.

As well as ‘standard’ French and English there exist two widely spoken hybrids or creoles: Cameroonian Pidgin English (also termed ‘Kamtok’) (wes) is widely spoken in the anglophone area and there is significant use of Camfranglais, a hybrid language used particularly by young people in urban centres, for inter-anglo-francophone communication.

Furthermore, although both English and French enjoy equal official status, there is a significant disparity between them in practice. Prior to the Anglophone Crisis there was considerable activity, both academic and governmental, to encourage French-English bilingualism throughout the country. However, there are approximately four times more French speakers than English speakers, and this produced a greater need and therefore tendency amongst the anglophone community to learn French than vice versa. As noted above, the Anglophone Crisis has created a further rift between the two communities, and education in anglophone areas has been a particular target of protest, with many schools closed.

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings⁷):

French contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

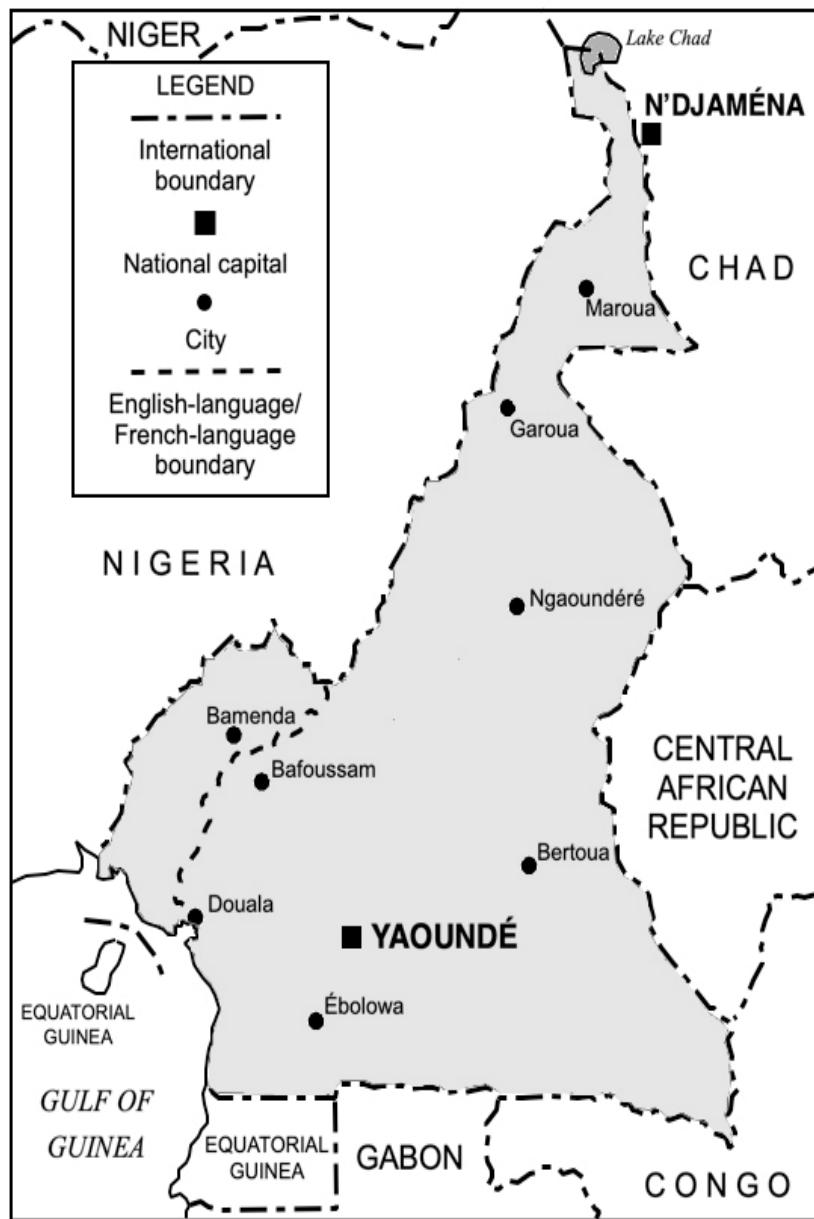
Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
À	00C0	à	00E0
Â	00C2	â	00E2
Ç	00C7	ç	00E7
È	00C8	è	00E8
É	00C9	é	00E9
Ê	00CA	ê	00EA
Ë	00CB	ë	00EB
Î	00CE	î	00EE
Ï	00CF	ï	00EF
Ô	00D4	ô	00F4
Œ	0152	œ	0153
Ù	00D9	ù	00F9
Û	00DB	û	00FB
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC
Ÿ ⁸	0178	ÿ	00FF

⁶ Of these, according to Ethnologue: <https://www.ethnologue.com/> sources, 17 have over 100,000 speakers: Fula (or Fulfulde) (ful) (having some 12 million speakers), Ewondo (ewo) (over half a million speakers); Bulu (bum) (over 800,000 speakers); plus Chadian Arabic (shu); Bafut (bfd); Balundu-bima (bdu); Bamum (bax); Bassa (bas); Fang (fan); Fe'fe' (fmp); Ghomala (bbj); Kom (bkm); Mafa (-); Medumba (byv); Ngiemboon (nnh); Nso' (ns); Tupuri (tui); Yemba (ybb).

⁷ See www.unicode.org

⁸ rarely encountered

Map of Cameroon



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

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Administrative structure

Cameroon is divided into 10 régions/regions. These are semi-autonomous and are subdivided into 58 départements/departments (sometimes seen as divisions).

As described above, French and English are both official across the country, but to reflect the practical situation, the French form can be used for all regions except South-West and North-West Regions, for which the English form can be used. Both forms are shown in the table below with the recommended form shown in bold. Both forms, if required for a particular product, may be used, following the policy described above to determine which name should appear first. Long forms (including the generic term région/region) are shown in the table below. For short forms simply remove this term and any article (e.g. Adamaua, Centre etc.)

Region name English	Region name French	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative centre	Centre location
Adamaoua Region	Région de l'Adamaoua	CM-AD	Ngaoundéré	07°19'00"N 13°35'00"E
Centre Region	Région du Centre	CM-CE	Yaoundé	03°52'00"N 11°51'00"E
East Region	Région de l'Est	CM-ES	Bertoua	04°35'00"N 13°41'00"E
Far North Region	Région de l'Extrême-Nord	CM-EN	Maroua	10°35'27"N 14°18'57"E
Littoral Region	Région du Littoral	CM-LT	Douala	04°02'49"N 09°42'30"E
North Region	Région du Nord	CM-NO	Garoua	09°18'05"N 13°23'52"E
North-West Region	Région du Nord-Ouest	CM-NW	Bamenda	05°57'35"N 10°08'46"E
South Region	Région du Sud	CM-SU	Ebolowa	02°54'00"N 11°09'00"E
South-West Region	Région du Sud-Ouest	CM-SW	Buea	04°09'10"N 09°14'28"E
West Region	Région de l'Ouest	CM-OU	Bafoussam	05°28'40"N 10°25'03"E

Other significant locations

PCGN Approved name ⁹	Other names	Feature Type	Location
Bakassi Peninsula		Peninsula (see <i>Disputed areas</i> below)	04°33'59"N 08°35'41"E
Benue River	Bénoué (if labelled within Cameroon)	River (Cameroon; Nigeria) (the major tributary of the Niger River)	07°45'12"N 06°45'24"E

⁹ PCGN recommends use of conventional names for international features where they exist. If there is no conventional name, then the relevant name can be shown on the appropriate side of the international boundary on cartographic products.

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PCGN Approved name ⁹	Other names	Feature Type	Location
Cameroonian Highlands	Western High Plateau; Western Highlands; Bamenda Grassfields	Mountain range (includes Cameroon Highlands forests ecoregion)	06°30'N 10° 30'E
Lake Chad	بحيرة تشاد (Buḥayrat Tshād) (<i>ara</i>); Lac Tchad (<i>fra</i>)	Lake (Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger)	13°20'N 14° 00'E
Mount Cameroon	Mont Cameroun (<i>fra</i>)	Cameroon's highest mountain (4040m)	04°12'59"N 09°12'50"E
Nyong		River	03°16'02"N 09°56'11"E
Sanaga		River	03°35'40"N 09°44'00"E

Disputed areas

After decades of dispute, the resource-rich Bakassi Peninsula between Cameroon and Nigeria was ceded to Cameroon in 2008 following an International Court of Justice ruling.

The boundary between Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon is not fully determined or agreed, provoking, particularly in the area around Kyé-Ossi (Région du Sud), sporadic tensions and violence.

Useful references

- BBC country profile (no longer updated): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13146029>
- Cameroon *Institut national de cartographie*: [INC Cameroun – L'Institut National de Cartographie \(INC\) \(inc-cameroun.cm\)](http://INC Cameroun – L'Institut National de Cartographie (INC) (inc-cameroun.cm))
- Cameroon national report to the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names, May 2023
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cameroon/>
- Ethnologue: <https://www.ethnologue.com/>
- FCDO Geographical Names & Information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/geographical-names-and-information>
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui>
- PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
- Unicode: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names Geographic Names Server: [GNS Search & Download WebApp \(nga.mil\)](https://gns.nga.mil/)

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