

Honduras



Official name: República de Honduras

Form of government:

Multiparty republic with one legislative house (National Congress - 128)

Head of state and government:

President Juan Orlando Hernández

Capital: Tegucigalpa

Official language: Spanish

Official religion: none

Monetary: unit lempira (L)

Population: 8,724,000

Total area (sq mi): 43,433

Urban-rural population:

Urban: 54.1%

Rural: 45.9%

Life expectancy:

Male: 69.3 years

Female: 72.7 years

Literacy:

Male: 84.8%

Female: 84.7%

GNI per capita: (U.S.\$) 2,270

Introduction

Christopher Columbus made his first continental landfall on its shores in 1502, and named it Honduras, meaning “depths,” because of the deep waters off its coast.



Since then, the Republic of Honduras has occupied a prominent pivotal position in the seven-country Central America land bridge that connects North and South America. Stretching 175 miles (282 kilometers), Honduras is the second largest country (in terms of area) in Central America after neighboring Nicaragua.

Land and Climate

Throughout western and central Honduras rugged mountains of moderate height, reaching 9,000 feet (2,750 meters) above sea level in a few places, are interspersed with many upland valleys.

Temperatures in Honduras are not as high as might be expected from its tropical location only 15 to 16 degrees north of the Equator. Near the lowland coastal plains the onshore winds are a moderating influence, and the increased elevation of the mountainous interior brings cooler temperatures.

Between January and May the verano, or dry period, occurs, and invierno, the wet season, extends from June to December. In the Pacific coast lowland departamentos, or departments, of Choluteca and Valle, droughts are occasionally severe.

The strongest winds, those coming with the Caribbean hurricanes, are not a yearly threat, but on occasion a disastrous tropical storm strikes the offshore islands and adjacent mainland lowlands. One of the worst natural disasters to strike Honduras in modern times was Hurricane Mitch, a 1998 storm that left more than 5,600 people dead, tens of thousands missing, injured, or homeless, and caused multibillion-dollar economic losses.

People and Culture

Honduras can be partitioned into three grand regions according to physical geography, population composition, and local attitude. The largest of these subdivisions is the western and central



highlands, where Spanish-speaking people of Indian-Spanish heritage are the majority. A second large zone in the east is Costa de Mosquitos, or Mosquito Coast, which is a region of pine savannas and coastal lowlands. The small population is primarily Indian and they are speakers of creole English. A third region is La Costa Norte, the north coast, including the Islas de la Bahía (Bay Islands) just offshore.

Minority cultures make up a considerable proportion of the population. They include the Garífuna (Black Caribs), the English-speaking Bay Islanders, whose ancestors once occupied the Cayman Islands, and the black English creoles, who have worked the coastal banana plantations.

More than four fifths of Hondurans are mestizos—Spanish-speaking persons of Indian-Spanish heritage. Roughly 5 percent are American Indians. While many remnants of indigenous cultures still exist, very few Honduran Indians retain their original languages.

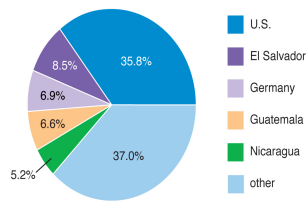
Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion of Honduras, though not the official religion. Honduras' wildlife includes crocodiles, snakes, peccaries (piglike mammals), pumas, and toucans.

Economy

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in Central America, but the annual per capita income of roughly 34,000 lempiras (1,800 \$USD) does not reflect the value of the large amount of foodstuffs produced for immediate consumption by farmers and their families.

Honduras was once considered the most typical of the so-called “banana republics” where large foreign fruit companies often attempted to direct

Major export destinations (2013)*



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*Includes gold exports.

the internal affairs of the country. During the first half of the 20th century, bananas by far dominated the export economy. Today agricultural production is more diversified. Foreign fruit companies no longer own and operate the plantations or manage the docks and railways.

Honduras still produces a large amount of bananas, but coffee, cattle, sugarcane, lumber, tobacco, and seafoods are significant contributors to regional economies.

Tourism has great potential for producing much-desired foreign capital. The clear, warm Caribbean waters are ideal for sport diving, and the coral-sand beaches and climate contribute to a setting favorable for international tourism. The famous Mayan ruins at Copán, which date from the Classic period of ad 300 to 900, and the well-preserved colonial fort at Omoa attract many visitors.

History and Government

For thousands of years indigenous peoples lived in Honduras. The greatest of them were the Mayans who build Copan, which one of the most important sites of the Mayan civilization. The ruined citadel and imposing public squares reveal the three main stages of development before the city was abandoned in the early 10th century.

The first European to reach Honduras was Christopher Columbus on 30 July 1502. The Spanish conquest of Honduras began in 1523. The native people resisted bitterly but by 1539 the Spanish were in control. The native people were forced to work for the Spanish but their numbers fell drastically partly due to European diseases to which they had no resistance such as smallpox.

Honduras became independent from Spain in 1821, but in 1822 it was joined with Mexico and four other nations, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. However the five central American nations broke away from Mexico in 1823. Honduras finally became completely independent in 1839.

In the early 20th century exports of bananas came to dominate the economy of Honduras. In 1932 General Tiburcio Carías Andino was elected president of Honduras. He made himself a virtual dictator and he held onto power till 1949. General Oswaldo López seized power in Honduras in 1963.

Then in 1969 El Salvador invaded Honduras after Honduran landowners deported several thousand Salvadorans. Five thousand people ultimately died in what is called “the football war” because it broke out during a soccer game between the two countries. In 1974 Lopez resigned, but civilian rule was not restored until 1981.

In the 1980s, Honduras also felt the impact of the civil war in neighboring Nicaragua with rebel leaders hiding out there and the U.S. military occupying some areas. Unfortunately Honduras suffered badly when Hurricane Mitch struck in 1998.

Carlos Roberto Reina of the Liberal party became president in 1994. During his tenure and that of his successor, Carlos Flores of the Liberal party, the police and military were placed under civilian control.

In 2006 Manuel Zelaya took over the presidency, and focused on fighting crime and the ongoing drug trade in the country. But on June 28, 2009, President Zelaya was ousted in a military coup for having forged ahead with a national referendum that, if passed, would have allowed him to revise the constitution and serve a second presidential term. The international community condemned the coup, but the Honduran government resisted pressure to restore Zelaya to power.

FUN FACT: The Bay Islands sit on the second largest coral reef in the world.

FUN FACT: Trujillo is believed to be the place where the first Catholic Mass was celebrated in the Americas.

FUN FACT: The Honduran currency is the lempira, and is named after an Indian chief that fought to death against the Spanish conquerors. But it is not his face on the bill, but instead is the image of an American Red Indian.

FUN FACT: There are no active volcanoes in Honduras, and there is only one natural lake: Lake Yojoa.