**Columbia**

**Location**

Columbia is a country located on the South American continent. It is located on the Northwestern side of the continent and is bordered by Central America on the south side of the Panama Canal. Columbia has coastline on the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Columbia is approximately 1100 miles North to South and lies just North of the Equator, with only a small tip in the southern hemisphere. It is about 800 miles wide extending from approximately 65° to 80° W longitudes. Columbia is bordered by Venezuela and Brazil on the East, Peru and Ecuador to the South, the Pacific Ocean to the west, and the Caribbean Sea to the North.

**Geography**

The Mountains are a very prominent feature of Columbia. The Andes mountain range begins in Columbia. Topography ranges from sea level along the coast to high central mountain ranges of 5,750 m at the peak of Nevado del Huila, to low plains on the eastern side of the country.

Nearly half of Columbia is wooded or forested. Only 4% of the land is arable and only a quarter of that is used for permanent crop production. Thirty-eight percent of the land is used as permanent pasture. Petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron ore, nickel, gold, copper, and emeralds are some of the natural resources found in Columbia.

**Climate**

Since Columbia is located so close to the equator, the climate is mostly tropical. Along the coastlines and in the eastern plains, the climate is very warm. However, since much of Columbia is located so high up in the Andes, the climate in these parts is slightly cooler. Columbia is subject to earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and periodic droughts.
History

Columbia’s history has been fairly violent and militarized. Guerilla forces have been fighting in Columbia for several years. On three separate occasions, the military has seized power of the country. Military coups were used as a means of changing leadership in Columbia.

Prior to the Spanish, Columbia was inhabited by nomadic farmers and primitive hunters. The Spanish established their first permanent settlement at Santa Marta in 1525. On July 20, 1810, the first revolution against Spanish colonial rule took place. July 20\textsuperscript{th} is now celebrated as Columbia’s Independence Day. It wasn’t until 1813 that true independence was achieved.

Finally, in 1819, the Republic of Greater Columbia was formed.
With the formation of the Republic and the first President of Columbia, two distinct parties began to emerge. The Conservative party was formed by the followers of President Simon Bolivar, and the Liberal party was established by the followers of Vice President Francisco de Paula Santander. Until the mid 1900’s, both parties had about equal time in the presidency. In 1957, after several years of violence and military overthrows, the idea of the National Front was issued. The National Front was a form of government where both parties would share control of the country. The Presidency would alternate between Liberal and Conservative candidates every 4 years.

**Population**

About 39 million people live in Columbia. A few different ethnicities make up the population of Columbia. These include mestizo 58%, white 20%, mulatto 14%, black 4%, mixed black-Amerindian 3%, and Amerindian 1%. The majority speaks Spanish and are Roman Catholic. The life expectancy of Columbians is about 66.15 for men and 74.11 for women.

**Currency**

The National currency of Columbia is the peso. In 2003, the exchange rate was 2894.9. Columbian pesos equal one U.S. dollar.
Economy and Trade

Currently, Columbia is suffering from a recession that started in 1996. Columbia ranks very low in Gross Domestic Product. The unemployment rate in Columbia is a little more than 12%. Of the labor force of 16.8 million, 46% work in services, 30% work in agriculture, and 24% work in industry. The countries GDP rate is $231.1 billion U.S. Per Capita GDP is about $6200 U.S. Major industries include textiles, food processing, oil, clothing and footwear, beverages, chemicals, cement, gold, coal, and emeralds. Columbia Imports 13.5 billion dollars worth of industrial equipment, transportation equipment, consumer goods, chemicals, and paper products. Exports include petroleum, coffee, coal, bananas, and fresh cut flowers valued at approximately $11.4 billion. Columbia owes $17 billion in foreign debt.

Conclusion

Columbia has had a somewhat violent past and military rule has not been uncommon. Political leaders have used military coups to seize power and guerilla fighting is fairly common in Columbia. Also, Columbia is a fairly poor country. Much of the country lives under the poverty level.

Cory Luke