

THE REPUBLIC OF HONDURAS

LOCATION

Honduras is located in Central America, bordering the Caribbean Sea, between Guatemala and Nicaragua and also borders the North Pacific Ocean, between El Salvador and Nicaragua. Honduras is located approximately 1000 miles southwest of Miami. Honduras lies at 15° 00" N and 86° 30" W. This country has an area of 112,090 sqm.

GEOGRAPHY

Honduras' is mostly mountainous with some narrow coastal plains and is the most mountainous country in Central America. It is sometimes referred to as "The Tibet of Central America." The highest point in the country is Cerro Las Minas which is 2,870 meters above sea level and the lowest point is the Caribbean Sea, which is at sea level (0 meters). Other peaks include Santa Bárbara (2744meters) Sierra de Agalta (2590 meters), and Cerro El Homo(2470 meters).

Honduras is rich in water resources. The most important river in Honduras is the Ulúa, which flows 400 kilometers to the Caribbean through the economically important Valle de Sula. Other rivers, such as Coco, Alúa, Chamelecón, Aguán, Río Sico, Patuca, and Goascorán, drain the interior highlands and empty north into the Caribbean. These other rivers are important, not only as transportation routes, but for their role of bringing fertility to the valleys during floods.

There is only one lake in Honduras, Lago de Yojoa, which is located in the west-central part of the country; its widest point measures fourteen kilometers.

CLIMATE

Climate in Honduras is subtropical in the lowland regions and temperate at the higher elevation. The coastal zones are generally warm and humid, while the central mountain region is cooler and drier. There are two well-defined seasons, the rainy season, from May through October, and the cooler and dry season from November to April. Temperatures during the rainy season oscillate from 59⁰F in western Honduras to 86⁰ F in the central part of the country. During the dry season, temperatures average 75⁰F in the highlands, 73⁰ F in the west and 86⁰F in the South.

HISTORY

Prior to its colonization, Honduras was inhabited by a complex mixture of indigenous people representing a great variety of cultural backgrounds and linguistic groups; the most advanced and famous were related to the Maya of the Yucatán and Guatemala. Mayan civilization expanded through Western Honduras in the fifth century A.D., almost certainly spreading from lowland Mayan centers in Guatemala's Petén region. Honduras lies at what was the southern angle of the Mayan civilization that spread southwards from the Yucatán Peninsula through modern Guatemala to the city of Copán, now in north-west Honduras. The Mayan civilization collapsed several years before the arrival of Christopher Columbus, who visited Trujillo in north-east Honduras in 1502 on his third expedition to the new world. The country was colonized by Spain after some resistance by the Lenca peoples of the central highlands. Their chief,

Lempira, who was assassinated by the Spaniards, became a national symbol after independence. Honduras got its independence in 1821 and joined the Central American Federation. The Honduran General, Francisco Morazán, became its first president.

Honduras is very salient in history, by being a very important banana trader. In 1899, the first banana dispensation was granted to the Vacarro brothers; their company would later become Standard Fruit. In 1907 Sam Zemurray set up the Cuyamel Fruit Company; later bought by United Fruit. The unusual relationship that would exist between the companies and the Honduran state for the first half of the 20th century gave rise to the description "banana republic."

Between 1932 and 1948 Honduras was ruled by a dictator, Tiburcio Carias Andino. After the fall of Carias, Honduras started an uneven process of political and economic modernization. The first half of the 1980s was dominated by the Contra war in Nicaragua. This was a period of internal repression by the armed forces under the command of General Gustavo Alvarez Martínez, during which approximately 170 left-wing activists "disappeared." In the late 1980s, during the government of the Liberal President José Simón Azcona, as the Contra war waned, the US government pressed with increasing insistence for economic policy reforms along the lines of structural adjustment packages advocated by the World Bank.

POLITICAL AND LEGAL SYSTEM

Honduras has a democratic constitutional government. The president is elected for a single term as the head of state and the head of government. He selects the governors of the eighteen departments of Honduras. There are three vice-presidents, who bear the title “*Designado Presidencial*”. The legislature is the National Assembly, with one member and a substitute elected for every 35,000 voters. There is a single national election on the basis of universal adult suffrage for the president and the legislature. Seats in the legislature are allocated to each party according to its vote in each region. This tends to make for domination of the political system by the president, which enforces party loyalty. Two parties, the *Partido Liberal* (PL) and the *Partido Nacional* (PN), have dominated electoral politics throughout the 20th century.

The legal system in Honduras is rooted in Roman and Spanish civil law with increasing influence of English common law; recent judicial reforms include abandoning Napoleonic legal codes in favor of the oral adversarial system. The International Court Justice jurisdiction is accepted with reservations. Other literature describes Honduras’ legal system as similar to the US; with a Supreme Court at its apex.

POPULATION

Honduran people are an ethnic mix of native Indian, Spanish and other nationalities. Statistics showed that the main ethnic groups are Mestizo, 90%; Amerindian, 7%; black, 2%, and white, 1%.

According to the statistics of 2001, Honduras population is 6,406,052 with a population growth rate of 2.43%. Some other demographic characteristics of Honduras for 2001 are as follows; death rate in Honduras is 5.52 deaths/1,000 live births in the population. On the other hand, the birth rate for the country, is 31.94 births/1,000 population. The age structure of the country is as follows: 0-14 years representing 42.22%, male; 81,823 and females 1,322,684; 15-64 years, 54.21% comprising male 1,719,593 and female 1,753,003; and 65 years and over, 3.57%, males 108,271, and female, 120,678.

CURRENCY

The Honduran currency is the lempira. However, the economy is quasi dollarized. Partial dollarization, which is widespread in Latin America, refers to the process where individuals substitute domestic money with foreign money in order to conduct transactions and protect the purchasing power of their income.

EDUCATION

Honduras did not have a national education system until the late 1950s. Before the reforms of 1957, education was the exclusive privilege of those who would have enough money to send their children to private schools. However by 1957, the government of Ramón Villeda Morales introduced reforms that led to the establishment of a national public education system and began a school construction program.

Nowadays, education in Honduras is free and compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 12. The government has pledged to raise the literacy rate, which stands at 83.7%. In 1994, 1.01 million pupils were enrolled in 8,114 primary schools. Only 32% of secondary school-age children were enrolled in school. The National Autonomous University of Honduras (1847), in Tegucigalpa, is the major institution of higher learning in the country.

Accredited bi-lingual schools from kindergarten through high school provide a quality education to children of foreigners or Hondurans that can afford it. Graduates are regularly accepted in US Ivy League colleges.

LANGUAGE

The official language is Spanish; however English is widely used as a second language. Amerindian dialects are also spoken in Honduras.

RELIGION

Honduras is, as is the case for the majority of Latin American and Caribbean countries that were colonized by Spain, Roman Catholic, 97%; and most of the rest are Protestant.

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Some of the Natural resources that can be found in Honduras are timber, gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, iron ore, antimony, coal, fish, and hydropower.

Regarding agriculture, Honduras has 740 sq km of irrigated land. Honduras' land, as was mentioned before, is very mountainous; nevertheless, the Honduran economy has always depended almost exclusively on agriculture. In 1992 agriculture was still the largest sector of the economy, contributing 28 percent to the GDP. Fifteen percent of its land is categorized as arable or well suited for agriculture; 3% of this dedicated to permanent crops; and 14% is used for permanent pastures. Honduras has 54% of its land as forest and woodland areas; and other uses accounted for 14%.

Honduras used to be one of the world's leading exporters of bananas to US and Europe. The Honduran government and two banana companies, Chiquita Brands International and Dole Food Company, owned approximately 60 percent of Honduras's cultivable land in 1993. The banana companies purchased most of their landholdings in the early twentieth century in return for building the railroads used to transport bananas from the interior to the coast. Much of their land remained unused because it lacked irrigation. Approximately 14 percent of the cultivated land was irrigated in 1987. Most

land under cultivation in 1992 was planted in bananas, coffee, and specialized export crops such as melons and winter vegetables.

TRADE

Honduras' imports are mainly machinery and transport equipment, industrial raw materials, chemical products, fuels, and foodstuffs. The majority of these products are imported from US 46.1%; 8.2% from Guatemala; 6.6% from El Salvador; 4.7% Mexico, and 4.6% from Japan.

Honduras' export products are coffee, bananas, shrimp, lobster, meat, zinc, and lumber. In fact during the 1990's Honduras was among the seven leading exporters of banana, accounting for 77% of all internationally traded bananas. Almost half (39.9%) of these products are exported to the U.S. Honduras' other export partners are El Salvador (9.2%), Germany (7.9%), (Belgium 5.8%), and Guatemala (5.4%).

FOOD

The most common food in Honduras is Tortillas, which are made from corn. Tortillas are present in almost every meal, just as bread is in the USA and rice is in China. Also, grains are eaten as well in Honduras. Most of the meals are accompanied with a spice chili sauce. Other foodstuffs are plantains and rice, cooked in various ways, which include fried or boiled. Cheese and eggs are common for breakfast.

Some of the local plates are *tamales*, made of ground corn and filled with meat and sauce and *tortillas con quesillo*, tortillas filled with melted cheese. Other common

dishes include *tapado* which is a stew made from cassava and meat and *baleadas* tortillas folded over and filled with refried beans, crumbled cheese and cream. Street vendors sell crispy *tajaditas*, fried plantain chips, or sliced green mangoes sprinkled with salt and cumin.

IMPORTANT DATES

Honduras important dates include: September 15 (1821), Independence commemoration, observed as a national holiday; and January 11 (1982), the Constitution day.

LANDMARKS

Some of the main landmarks are Honduras' national parks, including Barbareta Marine National Park (Bay Islands). Barbareta Island has a 1,250 acre private parrot preserve. This 5 kilometer long island is protected as the Barbareta Marine National Park. Barbareta is a pristine private island preserve, teeming with wildlife and exotic plants. Sandy beaches and coconut gardens line the coast. It has eight miles of jungle trails, featuring Mayan archaeological sites. This lush tropical island is surrounded by pristine coral reefs, and consists of isolated beaches and virgin rainforest. Another landmark in Honduras is Capiro-Calentura which is a large area of tropical forest. Celaque National Park has the highest cloud forest in the country, four mountain peaks, pine forest and a big complex of hot springs. This park has the highest peak in Honduras and requires a three-day trip to the top. Easiest access is by dirt road (8 kms) from Gracias. Montana de Yoro, Montecristo-Trifinio and Pico Bonito are others.

Copan Ruinas, a colonial-styled city built around the ancient Mayan Indian ruins preserved there, is approximately three hours southwest of San Pedro Sula. The ruins date back to at least 426 A.D. and were home to a dynasty that lasted some 400 years.

Some of the classical architectural landmarks in Honduras are, the Parroquia de San Miguel Arcangel (known simply as la Catedral), the Galeria Nacional de Arte (National Art Gallery) and the exquisite Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Suyapa, (Basilica of Our Lady of Suyapa, patron saint of Honduras and the most revered site of Honduran Catholics).

There are also a number of museums in Honduras including the Museo del Hombre Hondureño (Museum of the Honduran Man) and the Museo Nacional de Honduras (National Museum of Honduras), which offer visitors the opportunity to see the work of contemporary Honduran artists and Honduran history, respectively.

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