

HONDURAS OVERVIEW



BASIC STATISTICS

- **Total population:** 6,406,052 (Ranked 97th in the world by the US Census Bureau).
- **National GDP:** US \$14.4 billion.
- **GDP per capita:** US \$2,400.
- **Median Age:** 18.5.
- **Infant Mortality:** 39.79 per 1,000 live births.

GEOGRAPHY

- **Location:** Central America.
- **Borders:** El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.
- **Area:** 43,300 square miles.
- **Topography:** A 500-mile long Caribbean coastline and a 50-mile Pacific coastline surround the lush forestry and fertile valleys of the mountainous interior.
- **Climate:** Subtropical in lowlands, temperate in mountains.
- **Capital and population:** Tegucigalpa, 950,000.
- **18 Departments** (departamentos, singular—departamento): Atlantida, Choluteca, Colon, Comayagua, Copan, Cortes, El Paraiso, Francisco Morazan, Gracias a Dios, Intibuca, Islas de la Bahia, La Paz, Lempira, Ocotepeque, Olancho, Santa Barbara, Valle, Yoro.

DEMOGRAPHY

- **Children 0-14:** 42.2 %—2,704,507.
- **Teenage 10-19:** 24.1%—1,543,722.
- **Youth between 15-24:** 20.9%—1,339,771.
- **Seniors Over 70:** 2.2%—141,655.
- **Male to female ratio:** 89 males per 100 females.
- **Birth rate:** 32.65 per 1,000 people.
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 63.01 for males and 65.74 for females.

- **Infant mortality rate:** 39.79 per 1,000 live births.
- **Official Language:** Spanish.
- **Ethnic Groups:** 90% mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European), 7% Amerindian, 2% black, 1% white.
- **Religious affiliations:** 97% Christian (6,291,766), 1.1% Spiritist (60,000). Less than 1% Nonreligious, Baha'i, Atheist, Muslim, Ethnoreligionist, Buddhist, Chinese folk-religionist, Jew, and other.
- **Education:** Free and compulsory from 7-13.
- **Literacy rate:** 73%.

ECONOMY

- **Currency:** Lempira.
- **GDP per capita:** US \$2,400.
- **National GDP:** US \$14.4 billion.
- **Major Industries:** Textiles and wood products.
- **Chief crops:** Bananas, coffee, citrus.
- **Electricity production:** 2.904 billion kWh (1998).
- **TV sets:** 29 per population.
- **Radios:** 337 per population.
- **Telephones:** 279,200 main lines.
- **Daily newspaper circulation:** 45 per 1,000 population.

POLITICS

- **Government type:** Republic.
- **Head of state:** President Carlos Flores Facusse.
- **International organization memberships:** United Nations (UN) and Organization of American States (OAS).
- **Historical Background:** Prior to the arrival of Columbus in 1502, Honduras was at the southeastern edge of the thriving Mayan civilization. The Copán ruins are a testament to brilliance of this early advanced culture. The indigenous peoples, however, were severely affected by the Spanish conquests and newly introduced European diseases. The Spanish settlers were disproportionately male, thus mestizos (persons of mixed European and American Indian blood) become Honduras's dominant ethnic group. In the 1500s, the region now known as Honduras was embroiled in conflict over the discovery of gold and silver. After taking control, Spain ruled until Honduras independence in 1821. Since independence, Honduras has been plagued by political instability, corruption, military coups and economic change, beginning with a bloody civil war from 1827-1829. 1876 Began a sequence of liberal dictatorships lasting into the early 20th century, heavily influenced by the competition of US mining and fruit companies which played a pivotal role in

Honduras's economic development. In 1957 Ramón Villeda Morales led Honduras to join the the Central American Common market and initiated educational and agrarian reforms, but was ousted by a coup led by Colonel Osvaldo López Arellano in 1963. Under López, Honduras was weakened by the Soccer War with El Salvador. Named because it began after the two countries met in World Cup competition, the term was a expression of a brewing dispute over immigration policies between the countries. Soon it became apparent that government officials were taking bribes from United Brands (one of the US fruit companies) and he was ousted by Juan Alberto Melgar Castro in 1975, who was, in turn, overthrown by General Policarpo Paz García. In 1980 a peace treaty was signed with El Salvador and any lingering disputes were settled in 1992 by the International Court of Justice. Though the military still holds substantial power, an elected civilian government came to power in 1982 and has since held several successful elections. In 1997 El Salvadoran and Honduran business leaders pledged to work together to construct a highway alternative to the Panama Canal. In 1998 Honduras was devastated by hurricane Mitch, which took over 5,600 lives and destroyed over US \$850 million in crops and livestock.

TRENDS AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Understanding the trends and social issues of a particular country should always take into consideration the opinions of persons within the country. We are looking for contributors from each country to add to our appreciation and understanding of Honduran culture, potential, trends and critical issues.

The world press has reported extensively on the devastation in which hurricane Mitch inflicted on the Honduran people, economy and infrastructure. We understand the recovery from this widespread disaster to be of prime importance. Also border disputes between Honduras and Nicaragua have required assistance from other world powers for Honduras to protect its claim. Increasing government stabilization and economic growth also appear to be of importance to Honduras. We need to hear from Hondurans regarding their political concerns and what outside assistance they desire.

SOURCES

TEXT

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WEB

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US Census Bureau, International Database.

US Central Intelligence Agency. *World Factbook*.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How important do you see Honduras's role in Central America and in the world?
2. What most impresses you about the above information?
3. Do you take issue with any of the above? If so, how would you express it differently?
4. What strikes you most about the population of Honduras and the male to female ratio? Why?
5. What do you see as the historical and cultural contributions of Honduras and its Mayan ancestry to the world?
6. How has Honduras begun to rebuild after the devastation of Hurricane Mitch?
7. What can we learn from Honduras and the Honduran people?

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