

Ambassador Sharon Day



Sharon Day was sworn in as U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica on September 25. She serves as Ambassador after having worked for more than 20 years for the Republican Party at the local, state, and national level, and most recently in leadership roles as Co-Chair of the Republican National Committee (RNC) and RNC Secretary. Earlier in her career, she built several businesses in the insurance and marketing industries, creating jobs for hundreds of individuals and families.

Drawing from her private-sector experience, Ambassador Day worked in the political arena to promote and strengthen small businesses and the free market system. She also championed women's rights as a Commissioner on the Florida Commission on the Status of Women.

Ambassador Day was born and raised in Texas and has called Ft. Lauderdale, Florida home for the last 25 years. She has two sons and five grandchildren who are a great source of pride.

Chargé d' Affaires Eric Khant



Eric Khant assumed duties as Chargé d' Affaires to U.S. Embassy Kingston, upon Ambassador Luis G. Moreno's departure on June 30, 2017. He served as Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy since August 2, 2016. Prior to Kingston, Eric Khant served as Management Counselor at the U.S. Embassies in Madrid, Spain; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Santiago, Chile and as Supervisory Regional Human Resources Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand.

His other overseas assignments include Morocco, Russia, Cambodia, and France. Eric Khant also served in Washington as an Assignments Officer for the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. Eric Khant is a resident of Florida

and married to Halima Khant. He holds a bachelor's degree in Management and a Master's Degree in National Security Strategy.

Chargé d'Affaires – John S. Creamer



A career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class of Minister-Counselor, John Creamer assumed duties as Chargé d'Affaires at U.S. Embassy Mexico City on July 16, 2018. Previously, he served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Cuba, Mexico, Central America, and Western Hemisphere Regional Economic Policy and Summit issues. Mr. Creamer is a career Foreign Service Officer with over 30 years of experience. His overseas tours include service in Nicaragua, South Africa, Haiti, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, and Bolivia. Mr. Creamer has also served in Washington, DC, as Senior Desk Officer for Brazil, South Africa, and Colombia, Deputy Director of the Office of Andean Affairs, and Executive Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Western

Hemisphere Affairs. Mr. Creamer served as Civilian Deputy to the Commander and Foreign Policy Advisor, U.S. Southern Command, Miami, FL.

Mr. Creamer has been awarded the State Department's Superior Honor Award four times as well as numerous Group awards.

Before joining the Department of State in 1986, Mr. Creamer received a Bachelor's degree in Government from Georgetown University, as well as a Juris Doctor from Georgetown University Law Center. He also holds a Masters in National Security Strategy from the National Defense University. In 1985, Mr. Creamer received a Fulbright Scholarship to Malaysia. He speaks Spanish and Portuguese.

Chargé d'Affaires a.i. Roxanne Cabral



Roxanne Cabral assumed duties as Chargé d'Affaires a.i. at U.S. Embassy Panama in March, 2018, and she arrived in Panama as Deputy Chief of Mission in August 2017. She has over twenty years of experience as a U.S. Diplomat with several high impact assignments in Washington and abroad. Her most recent assignment was as the Director of the Office of Policy, Planning and Resources for the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs from 2015-2017, where she led the development of public diplomacy policy and management of global PD resources to advance key national security objectives. She held the 2013-14 Department of State Senior Fellowship at the Washington, D.C.-based think-tank The Atlantic Council, during which she co-authored a white paper entitled "Diplomacy for a Diffuse World." Her last overseas assignment was as the Public Affairs Section Chief at the U.S. Consulate General in Guangzhou, China from 2010-2013. Previous overseas assignments include Taiwan, Albania, Mexico City, and Ukraine. She also served as the public diplomacy advisor in the Department of State's Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs focusing on Balkans issues from 2006-2008. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Vanderbilt University and a Master of Public Health degree from Johns Hopkins University. She is married to fellow diplomat, David Schroeder, and has three boys, Quinn, Roman, and Evan.



United States Department of State

U.S.-COSTA RICA RELATIONS

The United States established diplomatic relations with Costa Rica in 1851, following its independence from Spain and the later dissolution of a federation of Central American states. The United States and Costa Rica have a history of close and friendly relations based on mutual respect for democratic freedoms, free trade, and other shared values. Costa Rica's own history and record on the environment, human rights, and advocacy for the peaceful settlement of disputes give it a weight in world affairs far beyond its size, and Costa Rica and the United States often share similar positions (votes) in international fora. The United States and Costa Rica enjoy robust bilateral law enforcement and security cooperation, and have signed a maritime cooperation agreement that facilitates narcotics seizures, illegal migrant rescues, illegal fishing seizures, and search-and-rescue missions.

The United States and Costa Rica share a strong commitment to working to promote climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as preserving Costa Rica's important and rich biological diversity. The U.S. and Costa Rican governments, the Central Bank of Costa Rica, and The Nature Conservancy have concluded agreements that provide funding for the conservation, restoration, and protection of tropical forests.

It is estimated that approximately 120,000 private American citizens, including many retirees, reside in the country and more than a million American citizens visit Costa Rica annually.

U.S. Assistance to Costa Rica

The **U.S. Strategy for Central America** (Strategy) guides U.S. diplomatic efforts and foreign assistance in the region. The Strategy is a bipartisan, multi-year U.S. government plan covering all seven Central American countries (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama). The Strategy aims to secure U.S. borders and protect American citizens by addressing the security, governance, and economic drivers of illegal immigration and transnational crime, while increasing opportunities for U.S. and other businesses. The Strategy focuses on three overarching lines of action: 1) promoting prosperity, 2) enhancing security, and 3) improving governance. The United States is working hand-in-hand with a wide range of Costa Rican government agencies and non-governmental organizations to secure Costa Rica's borders, professionalize its police, strengthen its judicial sector, improve its corrections system, and empower at-risk youth. Peace Corps volunteers work in economic development, education, and youth empowerment programs, and U. S. Embassy programs promote entrepreneurship, economic inclusion, renewable energy, and energy efficiency.

Bilateral Economic Relations

The United States and Costa Rica are parties to the U.S.-Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR), which aims to facilitate trade and investment and further regional integration by eliminating tariffs, opening markets, reducing barriers to services, and promoting transparency. CAFTA-DR contains a chapter on investment similar to a bilateral investment treaty with the United States.

The United States is Costa Rica's largest trading partner, accounting for about 40 percent of Costa Rica's exports, imports, tourism, and foreign direct investment. U.S. exports to Costa Rica include automotive parts and supplies, renewable energy, franchises, hotel and restaurant equipment, healthcare products, and construction equipment. U.S. imports from Costa Rica include medical devices, pineapples, bananas, and coffee.

Costa Rica's Membership in International Organizations

Costa Rica and the United States belong to a number of the same international organizations, including the United Nations, Organization of American States, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization.

Bilateral Representation

Principal U.S. embassy officials are listed in the Department's Key Officers List.

Costa Rica maintains an **embassy** in the United States at 2114 S Street NW, Washington, DC 20008 (tel. 202-480-2200).



United States Department of State

U.S.-JAMAICA RELATIONS

The United States established diplomatic relations with Jamaica in 1962 following its independence from the United Kingdom. The United States and Jamaica maintain strong and productive relations, based on trust and mutual interest. This close friendship is built on a foundation of people-to-people ties and a vibrant Jamaican-American community. The United States and Jamaica foster prosperity and stability for both countries within the **Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI)**.

Bilateral Economic Relations

The United States is Jamaica's most important trading partner. An important destination for U.S. investment, Jamaica has generally been a supportive partner in efforts – bilaterally, regionally, and globally – to liberalize trade. Under the Caribbean Basin Trade Partner Act and other trade measures, over 80% of Jamaican exports enter the U.S. market duty free. The United States provides over \$100 million in support through the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) for expanding and diversifying energy sources available on the island. The two countries have an investment treaty and a double taxation agreement. More than 80 U.S. firms have offices in the country and hundreds of other U.S. firms sell their products through local distributors. Over a million American tourists visit Jamaica each year, and hundreds of thousands of Jamaicans visit the United States. The large Jamaican-American community sends billions of dollars in remittances to Jamaica annually.

U.S. Assistance to Jamaica

The United States provides key assistance to Jamaica to help counter violent crime and transnational criminal activity. The partnership focuses on reducing corruption; increasing

transparency and good governance; fostering Jamaican participation in regional security efforts; strengthening basic education; and increasing adaptation to climate change.

Regional HIV/AIDS and security programs complement U.S. assistance.

Jamaica's Membership in International Organizations

Jamaica and the United States belong to a number of the same international organizations, including the United Nations (UN), Organization of American States (OAS), Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), and World Trade Organization (WTO).

Bilateral Representation

Principal U.S. embassy officials are listed in the Department's Key Officers List.

Jamaica maintains an **embassy** in the United States at 1520 New Hampshire Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036 (tel. 202-452-0660).



United States Department of State

U.S.-MEXICO RELATIONS

U.S. relations with Mexico are strong and vital. The two countries share a 2,000-mile border with 55 active ports of entry, and bilateral relations between the two have a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of millions of Americans, whether the issue is trade and economic reform, education exchange, citizen security, drug control, migration, entrepreneurship and innovation, or energy cooperation. The scope of U.S.-Mexican relations is broad and goes beyond diplomatic and official relations. It encompasses extensive commercial, cultural, and educational ties, with some 1.7 billion dollars of two-way trade and hundreds of thousands of legal border crossings each day. In addition, 1.5 million U.S. citizens live in Mexico, and Mexico is the top foreign destination for U.S. travelers.

Bilateral Economic Issues

Mexico is the United States' second-largest export market (after Canada) and third-largest trading partner (after Canada and China). In 2018, two-way trade in goods and services totaled \$678 billion. Mexico's exports rely heavily on supplying the U.S. market, but the country has also sought to diversify its export destinations. About 80 percent of Mexico's exports in 2018 went to the United States. In 2018, Mexico was the third-largest supplier of foreign crude oil to the United States, as well as the largest export market for U.S. refined petroleum products and U.S. natural gas. Top U.S. exports to Mexico include machinery, electrical machinery, vehicles, mineral fuels, and plastics. The stock of foreign direct investment by U.S. companies in Mexico stands at \$109.7 billion, while reciprocal Mexican investment in the United States is \$18 billion.

The United States, Canada, and Mexico cooperate on hemispheric and global challenges, such as managing trans-border infectious diseases and seeking greater cooperation to respond to challenges of transnational organized crime. In 2018, all three countries signed the United States.-Mexico-Canada Agreement to address the needs of the twenty-first century economy.

Mexico is a strong promoter of free trade, maintaining free trade agreements with the most countries of any nation in the world, including pacts with Japan, the EU, and many Latin American partners. In 2012, Mexico joined Chile, Colombia, and Peru to launch an ambitious regional economic integration effort, the Pacific Alliance, focused on liberalizing trade and investment, as well as facilitating the movement of citizens. Eleven Pacific Rim countries, including Mexico, signed the renamed Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership March 8, 2018.

Protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR) is essential to foster economic growth and innovation. Mexico has seen continued challenges on the IPR front, particularly on enforcement. The 2018 U.S. Trade Representative Special 301 Report, a yearly evaluation of IPR and market access conditions with U.S. trading partners, designated Mexico as a “Watch List” country. Long-awaited updates to Mexico’s copyright and enforcement laws, as well as ineffective IP enforcement, particularly with respect to counterfeit goods and online piracy, remain significant challenges. The United States continues to support and urge Mexico to take the necessary steps to improve the IPR protection and enforcement environment in Mexico.

U.S.-Mexico Border

The border region represents a combined population of approximately 15 million people. Cooperation between the United States and Mexico along our border includes coordinating with state and local officials on cross-border infrastructure, transportation planning, and security, as well as collaboration with institutions that address migration, natural resource, environment, and health issues. In 2010, the United States and Mexico created a high-level Executive Steering Committee for 21st Century Border Management to spur advancements

in promoting a modern, secure, and efficient border. The multi-agency U.S.-Mexico Binational Bridges and Border Crossings Group meets three times a year to further joint initiatives that improve the efficiency of existing crossings and coordinate planning for new ones. The ten U.S. and Mexican border states are active participants in these meetings. We have many mechanisms involving the border region, including Border Master Plans to coordinate infrastructure and development and close collaboration on transportation and customs issues.

The United States and Mexico have a long history of cooperation on environmental and natural resource issues, particularly in the border area, where there are challenges caused by rapid population growth, urbanization, and industrialization. Cooperative activities between the United States and Mexico take place under a number of arrangements, such as the Border 2020 Program; the North American Development Bank; the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation; the Border Health Commission; and a variety of other agreements that address health of border residents, wildlife and migratory birds, national parks, and similar issues. The International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), created by a treaty between the United States and Mexico, is an international organization responsible for managing a wide variety of water resource and boundary preservation issues.

The two countries also have cooperated on telecommunications services in the border area for more than 50 years. Agreements cover mobile broadband services, including smartphones and similar devices. We continue to hold regular consultations on telecommunications to promote growth in this dynamic sector and to help facilitate compatible telecommunications services in border areas.

Educational and Cultural Exchanges

The United States has a robust series of exchange programs with Mexico. These programs work with young leaders, students, civil society, and entrepreneurs. They assist in English language learning, and advance STEM education, especially for girls. They include music and sports diplomacy, the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation, leadership

programs like Jóvenes en Acción (Youth in Action), the Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLA), the Study of the U.S. Institutes (SUSI), which target indigenous and Afro-Mexican populations, and English language programs such as the Access program, and English Language Fellows.

The U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Forum on Higher Education, Innovation, and Research expands opportunities for educational exchanges, scientific research partnerships, and cross-border innovation. The Bilateral Forum complements the U.S. 100,000 Strong in the Americas initiative, which seeks to increase student mobility between the United States and the countries of the Western Hemisphere, including Mexico,

The Fulbright program, initiated in Mexico in 1948, is one of the largest in the world. Since the establishment of the binational Fulbright Commission in 1990 with joint U.S. and Mexican funding, more than 3,500 students on both sides of the border have received Fulbright-Garcia Robles scholarships. Fulbright alumni have risen to prominent positions in Mexican business, academics, culture, and politics.

U.S. Security Cooperation with Mexico

Through the Merida Initiative, the United States and Mexico have forged a partnership to combat transnational organized crime and drug trafficking, while strengthening human rights and the rule of law. Merida fosters greater cooperation between U.S. and Mexican law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and judges as they share best practices and expand capacity to track criminals, drugs, arms, and money to disrupt the business model of transnational crime. From 2008-2018, the United States has appropriated \$2.8 billion in equipment, training and capacity building support under the Merida Initiative. Because of our collaboration, our shared border is more secure, information sharing more fluid, and Mexico now has more professionally trained officials and state-of-the-art equipment to confront transnational crime. Our cooperation with Mexico has never been more vital in the fight to combat the deadly threat of illicit fentanyl, heroin, and synthetic drugs. Merida funding has provided training, equipment, and technical assistance to complement Mexico's much larger investment in building the capacity of Mexican institutions to counter

organized crime, uphold the rule of law, and protect our shared border from the movement of illicit drugs, money, and goods.

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programs under the Merida Initiative support Mexican efforts to address key challenges to improving citizen security. USAID programs help communities resist the effects of crime and violence and support Mexico's implementation of criminal justice constitutional reforms that protect citizens' rights.

Mexico's Membership in International Organizations

Mexico is a strong supporter of the United Nations (UN) and Organization of American States (OAS). Mexico and the United States belong to a number of the same international organizations, including the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); International Energy Agency (IEA); International Monetary Fund (IMF); World Bank (WB); World Trade Organization (WTO); International Maritime Organization (IMO); and the Wassenaar Arrangement on conventional arms.

Bilateral Representation

The Department's Key Officers List includes principal U.S. embassy and consulate officials in Mexico.

Mexico maintains an [embassy](#) in the United States at 1911 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20006 (tel. 202-728-1600).



United States Department of State

U.S.-PANAMA RELATIONS

The United States established diplomatic relations with Panama in 1903 following its declaration of independence from Colombia. That year, through the Hay/Bunau-Varilla Treaty, Panama granted the United States rights to a zone spanning the country to build, administer, fortify and defend an inter-oceanic canal. The Panama Canal opened in 1914. In 1977, the United States and Panama signed the Carter-Torrijos Treaties to set basic governing standards for the Canal through 1999 and guarantee its permanent neutrality. These treaties went into effect in 1979, and on December 31, 1999, Panama assumed full jurisdiction and operational control over the Canal.

Changes in Panama's government and tensions over the Canal led to the interruption of diplomatic relations several times during the 20th century. From 1987-1989, relations deteriorated sharply under the rule of Manuel Noriega. During Operation Just Cause in 1989, U.S. troops entered Panama and captured Noriega, who would not cede power following elections. Since the restoration of democracy, Panamanians have elected five presidents from three political parties in free and fair elections.

Panama's location and role in global trade make its success vital to U.S. prosperity and national security. Panama's key location along major land and sea transit routes makes it a critical partner in the interdiction of illegal drugs destined for the United States. While Panama's economic growth rate is among the highest in the hemisphere, the country faces the challenge of making this growth more inclusive. It also faces added pressure for more fiscal transparency as it enforces recent anti-money laundering legislation. Increasing pressure from drug trafficking and organized criminal activity – including migrant smugglers – contributes to security problems that threaten to undermine Panamanian security,

democratic institutions, and economic prosperity. Because of our shared history, cultural ties between both countries are strong.

U.S. Assistance to Panama

U.S. assistance to Panama aims to ensure Panama remains a secure, prosperous, and democratic country that continues to work with the United States as its principal partner in the region. The United States and Panama work together to advance common interests in improving citizen safety and strengthening the rule of law. They cooperate in many ways, including combating illegal drug trafficking and other criminal activity, as well as promoting economic, democratic, and social development through U.S. and international agencies.

The [U.S. Strategy for Central America](#) (Strategy) guides U.S. diplomatic efforts and foreign assistance in the region. The Strategy is a bipartisan, multiyear U.S. government plan covering all seven Central American countries (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama). The Strategy aims to secure U.S. borders and protect American citizens by addressing the security, governance, and economic drivers of illegal immigration and transnational crime, while increasing opportunities for U.S. and other businesses. The Strategy focuses on three overarching lines of action:

1) promoting prosperity, 2) enhancing security, and 3) improving governance.

Bilateral Economic Relations

The United States and Panama have signed a bilateral investment treaty and a Trade Promotion Agreement. The trade agreement eliminates tariffs and other barriers to U.S. exports, promotes economic growth, sets high standards for the treatment of investments, provides a framework for resolution of investment or trade disputes, and expands trade between the two countries. In 2016, Panama inaugurated the expansion of the Panama Canal, which has provided substantial benefits to Panama and many U.S. East Coast ports. U.S. exports to Panama include oil, machinery, aircraft, agricultural products, and low-value shipments. The United States is the number-one user of the Canal, with 68 percent of transits heading to or from U.S. ports. U.S. imports from Panama include fish and seafood, gold, cane sugar, bananas, and pineapples. The finance/insurance and wholesale trade sectors lead U.S. direct investment in Panama, while the manufacturing and real estate sectors lead Panamanian direct investment in the United States.

Panama's Membership in International Organizations

Panama and the United States belong to a number of the same international organizations, including the United Nations, Organization of American States, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, International Maritime Organization, and World Trade Organization.

Bilateral Representation

Principal U.S. embassy officials are listed in the Department's [Key Officers List](#).

Panama maintains an embassy in the United States at 2862 McGill Terrace, NW, Washington, DC 20008 (tel: 202-483-1407).



CENTRAL AMERICA :: COSTA RICA

Introduction :: COSTA RICA

Background:

Although explored by the Spanish early in the 16th century, initial attempts at colonizing Costa Rica proved unsuccessful due to a combination of factors, including disease from mosquito-infested swamps, brutal heat, resistance by natives, and pirate raids. It was not until 1563 that a permanent settlement of Cartago was established in the cooler, fertile central highlands. The area remained a colony for some two and a half centuries. In 1821, Costa Rica became one of several Central American provinces that jointly declared their independence from Spain. Two years later it joined the United Provinces of Central America, but this federation disintegrated in 1838, at which time Costa Rica proclaimed its sovereignty and independence. Since the late 19th century, only two brief periods of violence have marred the country's democratic development. On 1 December 1948, Costa Rica dissolved its armed forces. Although it still maintains a large agricultural sector, Costa Rica has expanded its economy to include strong technology and tourism industries. The standard of living is relatively high. Land ownership is widespread.

Geography :: COSTA RICA

Location:

Central America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Nicaragua and Panama

Geographic coordinates:

10 00 N, 84 00 W

Map references:

Central America and the Caribbean

Area:

total: 51,100 sq km

land: 51,060 sq km

water: 40 sq km

note: includes Isla del Coco

country comparison to the world: 130

Area - comparative:

slightly smaller than West Virginia

Area comparison map:



Land boundaries:

total: 661 km

border countries (2): Nicaragua 313 km, Panama 348 km

Coastline:

1,290 km

Maritime claims:

territorial sea: 12 nm

exclusive economic zone: 200 nm

continental shelf: 200 nm

Climate:

tropical and subtropical; dry season (December to April); rainy season (May to November); cooler in highlands

Terrain:

coastal plains separated by rugged mountains including over 100 volcanic cones, of which several are major active volcanoes

Elevation:

mean elevation: 746 m

lowest point: Pacific Ocean 0 m

highest point: Cerro Chirripo 3,819 m

Natural resources:

hydropower

Land use:

agricultural land: 37.1% (2011 est.)

arable land: 4.9% (2011 est.) / permanent crops: 6.7% (2011 est.) / permanent pasture: 25.5% (2011 est.)

forest: 51.5% (2011 est.)

other: 11.4% (2011 est.)

Irrigated land:

1,015 sq km (2012)

Population distribution:

roughly half of the nation's population resides in urban areas; the capital of San Jose is the largest city and home to approximately one-fifth of the population

Natural hazards:

occasional earthquakes, hurricanes along Atlantic coast; frequent flooding of lowlands at onset of rainy season and landslides; active volcanoes

volcanism: Arenal (1,670 m), which erupted in 2010, is the most active volcano in Costa Rica; a 1968 eruption destroyed the town of Tabacon; Irazu (3,432 m), situated just east of San Jose, has the potential to spew ash over the capital city as it did between 1963 and 1965; other historically active volcanoes include Miravalles, Poas, Rincon de la Vieja, and Turrialba

Environment - current issues:

deforestation and land use change, largely a result of the clearing of land for cattle ranching and agriculture; soil erosion; coastal marine pollution; fisheries protection; solid waste management; air pollution

Environment - international agreements:

party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Ozone Layer Protection, Wetlands, Whaling

signed, but not ratified: Marine Life Conservation

Geography - note:

four volcanoes, two of them active, rise near the capital of San Jose in the center of the country; one of the volcanoes, Irazu, erupted destructively in 1963-65

People and Society :: COSTA RICA

Population:

4,987,142 (July 2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 123

Nationality:

noun: Costa Rican(s)

adjective: Costa Rican

Ethnic groups:

white or mestizo 83.6%, mulatto 6.7%, indigenous 2.4%, black of African descent 1.1%, other 1.1%, none 2.9%, unspecified 2.2% (2011 est.)

Languages:

Spanish (official), English

Religions:

Roman Catholic 71.8%, Evangelical and Pentecostal 12.3%, other Protestant 2.6%, Jehovah's Witness 0.5%, other 2.4%, none 10.4% (2016 est.)

Demographic profile:

Costa Rica's political stability, high standard of living, and well-developed social benefits system set it apart from its Central American neighbors. Through the government's sustained social spending - almost 20% of GDP annually - Costa Rica has made tremendous progress toward achieving its goal of providing universal access to education, healthcare, clean water, sanitation, and electricity. Since the 1970s, expansion of these services has led to a rapid decline in infant mortality, an increase in life expectancy at birth, and a sharp decrease in the birth rate. The average number of children born per women has fallen from about 7 in the 1960s to 3.5 in the early 1980s to below replacement level today. Costa Rica's poverty rate is lower than in most Latin American countries, but it has stalled at around 20% for almost two decades.

Costa Rica is a popular regional immigration destination because of its job opportunities and social programs. Almost 9% of the population is foreign-born, with Nicaraguans comprising nearly three-quarters of the foreign population. Many Nicaraguans who perform unskilled seasonal labor enter Costa Rica illegally or overstay their visas, which continues to be a source of tension. Less than 3% of Costa Rica's population lives abroad. The overwhelming majority of expatriates have settled in the United States after completing a university degree or in order to work in a highly skilled field.

Age structure:

0-14 years: 22.43% (male 572,172 /female 546,464)

15-24 years: 15.94% (male 405,515 /female 389,433)

25-54 years: 44.04% (male 1,105,944 /female 1,090,434)

55-64 years: 9.48% (male 229,928 /female 242,696)

65 years and over: 8.11% (male 186,531 /female 218,025) (2018 est.)

population pyramid:



Dependency ratios:

total dependency ratio: 45.4 (2015 est.)

youth dependency ratio: 32.4 (2015 est.)

elderly dependency ratio: 12.9 (2015 est.)

potential support ratio: 7.7 (2015 est.)

Median age:

total: 31.7 years

male: 31.2 years

female: 32.2 years (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 109

Population growth rate:

1.13% (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 95

Birth rate:

15.3 births/1,000 population (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 121

Death rate:

4.8 deaths/1,000 population (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 200

Net migration rate:

0.8 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 65

Population distribution:

roughly half of the nation's population resides in urban areas; the capital of San Jose is the largest city and home to approximately one-fifth of the population

Urbanization:

urban population: 79.3% of total population (2018)

rate of urbanization: 1.5% annual rate of change (2015-20 est.)

Major urban areas - population:

1.358 million SAN JOSE (capital) (2018)

Sex ratio:

at birth: 1.05 male(s)/female

0-14 years: 1.05 male(s)/female

15-24 years: 1.04 male(s)/female

25-54 years: 1.01 male(s)/female

55-64 years: 0.95 male(s)/female

65 years and over: 0.86 male(s)/female

total population: 1.01 male(s)/female (2018 est.)

Maternal mortality rate:

25 deaths/100,000 live births (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 122

Infant mortality rate:

total: 7.8 deaths/1,000 live births

male: 8.6 deaths/1,000 live births

female: 7.1 deaths/1,000 live births (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 153

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 78.9 years

male: 76.2 years

female: 81.7 years (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 55

Total fertility rate:

1.89 children born/woman (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 135

Contraceptive prevalence rate:

77.8% (2015)

Health expenditures:

9.3% of GDP (2014)

country comparison to the world: 33

Physicians density:

1.15 physicians/1,000 population (2013)

Hospital bed density:

1.1 beds/1,000 population (2014)

Drinking water source:

improved:

urban: 99.6% of population

rural: 91.9% of population

total: 97.8% of population

unimproved:

urban: 0.4% of population

rural: 8.1% of population

total: 2.2% of population (2015 est.)

Sanitation facility access:

improved:

urban: 95.2% of population (2015 est.)

rural: 92.3% of population (2015 est.)

total: 94.5% of population (2015 est.)

unimproved:

urban: 4.8% of population (2015 est.)

rural: 7.7% of population (2015 est.)

total: 5.5% of population (2015 est.)

HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate:

0.4% (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 70

HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS:

13,000 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 93

HIV/AIDS - deaths:

<200 (2017 est.)

Major infectious diseases:

degree of risk: intermediate (2016)

food or waterborne diseases: bacterial diarrhea (2016)

vectorborne diseases: dengue fever (2016)

note: active local transmission of Zika virus by Aedes species mosquitoes has been identified in this country (as of August 2016); it poses an important risk (a large number of cases possible) among US citizens if bitten by an infective mosquito; other less common ways to get Zika are through sex, via blood transfusion, or during pregnancy, in which the pregnant woman passes Zika virus to her fetus

Obesity - adult prevalence rate:

25.7% (2016)

country comparison to the world: 48

Children under the age of 5 years underweight:

Education expenditures:

7.4% of GDP (2017)

country comparison to the world: 11

Literacy:

definition: age 15 and over can read and write (2015 est.)

total population: 97.8%

male: 97.7%

female: 97.8% (2015 est.)

School life expectancy (primary to tertiary education):

total: 15 years

male: 15 years

female: 16 years (2016)

Unemployment, youth ages 15-24:

total: 20.6%

male: 17.6%

female: 25.9% (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 65

Government :: COSTA RICA

Country name:

conventional long form: Republic of Costa Rica

conventional short form: Costa Rica

local long form: Republica de Costa Rica

local short form: Costa Rica

etymology: the name means "rich coast" in Spanish and was first applied in the early colonial period of the 16th century

Government type:

presidential republic

Capital:

name: San Jose

geographic coordinates: 9 56 N, 84 05 W

time difference: UTC-6 (1 hour behind Washington, DC, during Standard Time)

etymology: named in honor of Saint Joseph

Administrative divisions:

7 provinces (provincias, singular - provincia); Alajuela, Cartago, Guanacaste, Heredia, Limon, Puntarenas, San Jose

Independence:

15 September 1821 (from Spain)

National holiday:

Independence Day, 15 September (1821)

Constitution:

history: many previous; latest effective 8 November 1949

amendments: proposals require the signatures of at least 10 Legislative Assembly members or by petition of at least 5% of qualified voters; consideration of proposals requires two-thirds majority approval in each of 3 readings by the Assembly, followed by preparation of the proposal as a legislative bill and its approval by simple majority of the Assembly; passage requires at least two-thirds majority vote of the Assembly membership; a referendum is required only if approved by at least two-thirds of the Assembly; amended many times, last in 2015 (2018)

Legal system:

civil law system based on Spanish civil code; judicial review of legislative acts in the Supreme Court

International law organization participation:

accepts compulsory ICJ jurisdiction; accepts ICCT jurisdiction

Citizenship:

citizenship by birth: yes

citizenship by descent only: yes

dual citizenship recognized: yes

residency requirement for naturalization: 7 years

Suffrage:

18 years of age; universal and compulsory

Executive branch:

chief of state: President Carlos ALVARADO Quesada (since 8 May 2018); First Vice President Epsy CAMPBELL Barr (since 8 May 2018); Second Vice President Marvin RODRIGUEZ Cordero (since 8 May 2018); note - the president is both chief of state and head of government

head of government: President Carlos ALVARADO Quesada (since 8 May 2018); First Vice President Epsy CAMPBELL Barr (since 8 May 2018); Second Vice President Marvin RODRIGUEZ Cordero (since 8 May 2018)

cabinet: Cabinet selected by the president

elections/appointments: president and vice presidents directly elected on the same ballot by modified majority popular vote (40% threshold) for a 4-year term (eligible for non-consecutive terms); election last held on 4 February 2018 with a runoff on 1 April 2018 (next to be held in February 2022)

election results: Carlos ALVARADO Quesada elected president in second round; percent of vote in first round - Fabricio ALVARADO Munoz (PRN) 25%; Carlos ALVARADO Quesada (PAC) 21.6%; Antonio ALVAREZ (PLN) 18.6%; Rodolfo PIZA (PUSC) 16%; Juan Diego CASTRO (PIN) 9.5%; Rodolfo HERNANDEZ (PRS) 4.9%, other 4.4%; percent of vote in second round - Carlos ALVARADO Quesada (PAC) 60.7%; Fabricio ALVARADO Munoz (PRN) 39.3%

Legislative branch:

description: unicameral Legislative Assembly or Asamblea Legislativa (57 seats; members directly elected in multi-seat constituencies - corresponding to the country's 7 provinces - by closed list proportional representation vote; members serve 4-year terms)

elections: last held on 4 February 2018 (next to be held in February 2022)

election results: percent of vote by party - PLN 19.5%, PRN 18.2%, PAC 16.3%, PUSC 14.6%, PIN 7.7%, PRS 4.2%, PFA 4%, ADC 2.5%, ML 2.3%, PASE 2.3%, PNG 2.2%, other 6.2%; seats by party - PLN 17, PRN 14, PAC 10, PUSC 9, PIN 4, PRS 2, PFA 1; composition - men 31, women 26, percent of women 45.6%

Judicial branch:

highest courts: Supreme Court of Justice (consists of 22 judges organized into 3 cassation chambers each with 5 judges and the Constitutional Chamber with 7 judges)

judge selection and term of office: Supreme Court of Justice judges elected by the National Assembly for 8-year terms with renewal decided by the National Assembly

subordinate courts: appellate courts; trial courts; first instance and justice of the peace courts; Superior Electoral Tribunal

Political parties and leaders:

Accessibility Without Exclusion or PASE [Oscar Andres LOPEZ Arias]
Broad Front (Frente Amplio) or PFA [Ana Patricia MORA Castellanos]
Christian Democratic Alliance or ADC [Mario REDONDO Poveda]
Citizen Action Party or PAC [Marta Eugenia SOLANO Arias]
Costa Rican Renewal Party or PRC [Justo OROZCO Alvarez]
Libertarian Movement Party or ML [Victor Danilo CUBERO Corrales]
National Integration Party or PIN [Walter MUNOZ Cespedes]
National Liberation Party or PLN [Jorge Julio PATTONI Saenz]
National Restoration Party or PRN [Carlos Luis AVENDANO Calvo]
New Generation or PNG [Sergio MENA]
Patriotic Alliance [Jorge ARAYA Westover]
Social Christian Republican Party or PRS [Dragos DOLANESCU Valenciano]
Social Christian Unity Party or PUSC [Pedro MUNOZ Fonseca]

International organization participation:

BCIE, CACM, CD, CELAC, FAO, G-77, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICC (national committees), ICt, ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRC, ILO, IMF, IMO, IMSO, Interpol, IOC, IOM, IPU, ISO, ITSO, ITU, ITUC (NGOs), LAES, LAIA (observer), MIGA, NAM (observer), OAS, OIF (observer), OPANAL, OPCW, Pacific Alliance (observer), PCA, SICA, UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNIDO, Union Latina, UNWTO, UPU, WCO, WFTU (NGOs), WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO

Diplomatic representation in the US:

chief of mission: Ambassador Fernando LLORCA Castro (since 17 September 2018)

chancery: 2114 S Street NW, Washington, DC 20008

telephone: [1] (202) 480-2200

FAX: [1] (202) 265-4795

consulate(s) general: Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Washington DC

consulate(s): Saint Paul (MN), San Juan (Puerto Rico), Tucson (AZ)

Diplomatic representation from the US:

chief of mission: Ambassador Sharon DAY (since 5 October 2017)

embassy: Calle 98 Via 104, Pavas, San Jose

mailing address: APO AA 34020

telephone: [506] 2519-2000

FAX: [506] 2519-2305

Flag description:

five horizontal bands of blue (top), white, red (double width), white, and blue, with the coat of arms in a white elliptical disk placed toward the hoist side of the red band; Costa Rica retained the earlier blue-white-blue flag of Central America until 1848 when, in response to revolutionary activity in Europe, it was decided to incorporate the French colors into the national flag and a central red stripe was added; today the blue color is said to stand for the sky, opportunity, and perseverance, white denotes peace, happiness, and wisdom, while red represents the blood shed for freedom, as well as the generosity and vibrancy of the people

note: somewhat resembles the flag of North Korea; similar to the flag of Thailand but with the blue and red colors reversed

National symbol(s):

yiguirro (clay-colored robin); national colors: blue, white, red

National anthem:

name: "Himno Nacional de Costa Rica" (National Anthem of Costa Rica)

lyrics/music: Jose Maria ZELEDON Brenes/Manuel Maria GUTIERREZ

note: adopted 1949; the anthem's music was originally written for an 1853 welcome ceremony for diplomatic missions from the US and UK; the lyrics were added in 1903

0:00 / 1:50

Economy :: COSTA RICA

Economy - overview:

Since 2010, Costa Rica has enjoyed strong and stable economic growth - 3.8% in 2017. Exports of bananas, coffee, sugar, and beef are the backbone of its commodity exports. Various industrial and processed agricultural products have broadened exports in recent years, as have high value-added goods, including medical devices. Costa Rica's impressive biodiversity also makes it a key destination for ecotourism.

Foreign investors remain attracted by the country's political stability and relatively high education levels, as well as the incentives offered in the free-trade zones; Costa Rica has attracted one of the highest levels of foreign direct investment per capita in Latin America. The US-Central American-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR), which became effective for Costa Rica in 2009, helped increase foreign direct investment in key sectors of the economy, including insurance and telecommunication. However, poor infrastructure, high energy costs, a complex bureaucracy, weak investor protection, and uncertainty of contract enforcement impede greater investment.

Costa Rica's economy also faces challenges due to a rising fiscal deficit, rising public debt, and relatively low levels of domestic revenue. Poverty has remained around 20-25% for nearly 20 years, and the government's strong social safety net has eroded due to increased constraints on its expenditures. Costa Rica's credit rating was downgraded from stable to negative in 2015 and again in 2017, upping pressure on lending rates - which could hurt small business, on the budget deficit - which could hurt infrastructure development, and on the rate of return on investment - which could soften foreign direct investment (FDI). Unlike the rest of Central America, Costa Rica is not highly dependent on remittances - which represented just 1 % of GDP in 2016, but instead relies on FDI - which accounted for 5.1% of GDP.

GDP (purchasing power parity):

\$83.94 billion (2017 est.)

\$81.27 billion (2016 est.)

\$77.96 billion (2015 est.)

note: data are in 2017 dollars

country comparison to the world: 93

GDP (official exchange rate):

\$58.27 billion (2017 est.)

GDP - real growth rate:

3.3% (2017 est.)

4.2% (2016 est.)

3.6% (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 104

GDP - per capita (PPP):

\$16,900 (2017 est.)

\$16,600 (2016 est.)

\$16,100 (2015 est.)

note: data are in 2017 dollars

country comparison to the world: 104

Gross national saving:

15.1% of GDP (2017 est.)

16.1% of GDP (2016 est.)

15% of GDP (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 135

GDP - composition, by end use:

household consumption: 64.2% (2017 est.)

government consumption: 17.3% (2017 est.)

investment in fixed capital: 17.1% (2017 est.)

investment in inventories: 1% (2017 est.)

exports of goods and services: 33.3% (2017 est.)

imports of goods and services: -32.9% (2017 est.)

GDP - composition, by sector of origin:

agriculture: 5.5% (2017 est.)

industry: 20.6% (2017 est.)

services: 73.9% (2017 est.)

Agriculture - products:

bananas, pineapples, coffee, melons, ornamental plants, sugar, corn, rice, beans, potatoes; beef, poultry, dairy; timber

Industries:

medical equipment, food processing, textiles and clothing, construction materials, fertilizer, plastic products

Industrial production growth rate:

1.3% (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 147

Labor force:

2.229 million (2017 est.)

note: official estimate; excludes Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica

country comparison to the world: 121

Labor force - by occupation:

agriculture: 14%

industry: 22%

services: 64% (2006 est.)

Unemployment rate:

8.1% (2017 est.)

9.5% (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 117

Population below poverty line:

21.7% (2014 est.)

Household income or consumption by percentage share:

lowest 10%: 1.5%

highest 10%: 36.9% (2014 est.)

Distribution of family income - Gini index:

48.5 (2014)

49.2 (2013)

country comparison to the world: 22

Budget:

revenues: 8.357 billion (2017 est.)

expenditures: 11.92 billion (2017 est.)

Taxes and other revenues:

14.3% (of GDP) (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 200

Budget surplus (+) or deficit (-):

-6.1% (of GDP) (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 185

Public debt:

48.9% of GDP (2017 est.)

44.9% of GDP (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 105

Fiscal year:

calendar year

Inflation rate (consumer prices):

1.6% (2017 est.)

0% (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 89

Central bank discount rate:

3.5% (31 December 2016 est.)

21.5% (31 December 2010)

country comparison to the world: 102

Commercial bank prime lending rate:

11.37% (31 December 2017 est.)

11.64% (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 71

Stock of narrow money:

\$5.356 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$5.63 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 100

Stock of broad money:

\$5.356 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$5.63 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 103

Stock of domestic credit:

\$41.04 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$38.21 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 69

Market value of publicly traded shares:

\$2.015 billion (31 December 2012 est.)

\$1.443 billion (31 December 2011 est.)

\$1.445 billion (31 December 2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 99

Current account balance:

-\$1.692 billion (2017 est.)

-\$1.326 billion (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 160

Exports:

\$10.81 billion (2017 est.)

\$10.15 billion (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 91

Exports - partners:

US 40.9%, Belgium 6.3%, Panama 5.6%, Netherlands 5.6%, Nicaragua 5.1%, Guatemala 5% (2017)

Exports - commodities:

bananas, pineapples, coffee, melons, ornamental plants, sugar; beef; seafood; electronic components, medical equipment

Imports:

\$15.15 billion (2017 est.)

\$14.53 billion (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 90

Imports - commodities:

raw materials, consumer goods, capital equipment, petroleum, construction materials

Imports - partners:

US 38.1%, China 13.1%, Mexico 7.3% (2017)

Reserves of foreign exchange and gold:

\$7.15 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$7.574 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 86

Debt - external:

\$26.83 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$24.3 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 86

Stock of direct foreign investment - at home:

\$33.92 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$31.84 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 68

Stock of direct foreign investment - abroad:

\$4.007 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$3.781 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 78

Exchange rates:

Costa Rican colones (CRC) per US dollar -

573.5 (2017 est.)

544.74 (2016 est.)

544.74 (2015 est.)

534.57 (2014 est.)

538.32 (2013 est.)

Energy :: COSTA RICA**Electricity access:**

population without electricity: 24,362 (2013)

electrification - total population: 99.5% (2013)

electrification - urban areas: 99.9% (2013)

electrification - rural areas: 98.3% (2013)

Electricity - production:

10.79 billion kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 100

Electricity - consumption:

9.812 billion kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 98

Electricity - exports:

643 million kWh (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 64

Electricity - imports:

807 million kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 72

Electricity - installed generating capacity:

3.584 million kW (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 94

Electricity - from fossil fuels:

18% of total installed capacity (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 196

Electricity - from nuclear fuels:

0% of total installed capacity (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 72

Electricity - from hydroelectric plants:

64% of total installed capacity (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 25

Electricity - from other renewable sources:

18% of total installed capacity (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 48

Crude oil - production:

0 bbl/day (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 123

Crude oil - exports:

0 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 109

Crude oil - imports:

0 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 115

Crude oil - proved reserves:

0 bbl (1 January 2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 120

Refined petroleum products - production:

0 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 134

Refined petroleum products - consumption:

53,000 bbl/day (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 100

Refined petroleum products - exports:

0 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 147

Refined petroleum products - imports:

51,320 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 80

Natural gas - production:

0 cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 120

Natural gas - consumption:

0 cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 136

Natural gas - exports:

0 cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 88

Natural gas - imports:

0 cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 111

Natural gas - proved reserves:

0 cu m (1 January 2014 est.)

country comparison to the world: 125

Carbon dioxide emissions from consumption of energy:

7.653 million Mt (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 120

Communications :: COSTA RICA

Telephones - fixed lines:

total subscriptions: 843,148 (2017 est.)

subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 17 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 79

Telephones - mobile cellular:

total subscriptions: 8,840,342 (2017 est.)

subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 179 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 88

Telephone system:

general assessment: good domestic telephone service in terms of breadth of coverage; in recent years growth has been achieved from liberalisation of the telecom sector and has seen substantial expansion in all sectors; Costa Rica's broadband market is the most advanced in Central America, with the highest broadband penetration for this sub-region; broadband penetration does lag behind many South American countries; with the implementation of number portability there is greater opportunity for increased competition in the future

domestic: point-to-point and point-to-multi-point microwave, fiber-optic, and coaxial cable link rural areas; Internet service is available; 17 per 100 fixed-line, 179 per 100 mobile-cellular

international: country code - 506; landing points for the Americas Region Caribbean Ring System (ARCOS-1), MAYA-1, and the Pan American Crossing submarine cables that provide links to South and Central America, parts of the Caribbean, and the US; connected to Central American Microwave System; satellite earth stations - 2 Intelsat (Atlantic Ocean)

Broadcast media:

multiple privately owned TV stations and 1 publicly owned TV station; cable network services are widely available; more than 100 privately owned radio stations and a public radio network (2017)

Internet country code:

.cr

Internet users:

total: 3,217,277 (July 2016 est.)

percent of population: 66% (July 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 94

Broadband - fixed subscriptions:

total: 744,059 (2017 est.)

subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 15 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 74

Transportation :: COSTA RICA

National air transport system:

number of registered air carriers: 1 (2015)

inventory of registered aircraft operated by air carriers: 39 (2015)

annual passenger traffic on registered air carriers: 1,617,075 (2015)

annual freight traffic on registered air carriers: 9,284,160 mt-km (2015)

Civil aircraft registration country code prefix:

TI (2016)

Airports:

161 (2013)

country comparison to the world: 35

Airports - with paved runways:

total: 47 (2017)

2,438 to 3,047 m: 2 (2017)

1,524 to 2,437 m: 2 (2017)

914 to 1,523 m: 27 (2017)

under 914 m: 16 (2017)

Airports - with unpaved runways:

total: 114 (2013)

914 to 1,523 m: 18 (2013)

under 914 m: 96 (2013)

Pipelines:

662 km refined products (2013)

Railways:

total: 278 km (2014)

narrow gauge: 278 km 1.067-m gauge (2014)

note: the entire rail network fell into disrepair and out of use at the end of the 20th century; since 2005, certain sections of rail have been rehabilitated

country comparison to the world: 123

Roadways:

Waterways:

730 km (seasonally navigable by small craft) (2011)

country comparison to the world: 74

Merchant marine:

total: 11

by type: general cargo 2, other 9 (2018)

country comparison to the world: 148

Ports and terminals:

major seaport(s): Atlantic Ocean (Caribbean) - Puerto Limon

Pacific Ocean - Caldera

Military and Security :: COSTA RICA

Military branches:

no regular military forces; Ministry of Public Security, Government, and Police (2011)

Transnational Issues :: COSTA RICA

Disputes - international:

Costa Rica and Nicaragua regularly file border dispute cases over the delimitations of the San Juan River and the northern tip of Calero Island to the International Court of Justice (ICJ); in 2009, the ICJ ruled that Costa Rican vessels carrying out police activities could not use the river, but official Costa Rican vessels providing essential services to riverside inhabitants and Costa Rican tourists could travel freely on the river; in 2011, the ICJ provisionally ruled that both countries must remove personnel from the disputed area; in 2013, the ICJ rejected Nicaragua's 2012 suit to halt Costa Rica's construction of a highway paralleling the river on the grounds of irreparable environmental damage; in 2013, the ICJ, regarding the disputed territory, ordered that Nicaragua should refrain from dredging or canal construction and refill and repair damage caused by trenches connecting the river to the Caribbean and upheld its 2010 ruling that Nicaragua must remove all personnel; in early 2014, Costa Rica brought Nicaragua to the ICJ over offshore oil concessions in the disputed region

Refugees and internally displaced persons:

refugees (country of origin): 10,041 (Venezuela) (economic and political crisis; includes Venezuelans who have claimed asylum or have received alternative legal stay) (2018)

stateless persons: 71 (2017)

Trafficking in persons:

current situation: Costa Rica is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor; Costa Rican women and children, as well as those from Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and other Latin American countries, are sex trafficked in Costa Rica; child sex tourism is a particular problem with offenders coming from the US and Europe; men and children from Central America, including indigenous Panamanians, and Asia are exploited in agriculture, construction, fishing, and commerce; Nicaraguans transit Costa Rica to reach Panama, where some are subjected to forced labor or sex trafficking

tier rating: Tier 2 Watch List – Costa Rica does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so; anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts declined in 2014, with fewer prosecutions and no convictions and no actions taken against complicit government personnel; some officials conflated trafficking with smuggling, and authorities reported the diversion of funds to combat smuggling hindered anti-trafficking efforts; the government identified more victims than the previous year but did not make progress in ensuring that victims received adequate protective services; specialized services were limited and mostly provided by NGOs without government support, even from a dedicated fund for anti-trafficking efforts; victims services were virtually non-existent outside of the capital (2015)

Illicit drugs:

transshipment country for cocaine and heroin from South America; illicit production of cannabis in remote areas; domestic cocaine consumption, particularly crack cocaine, is rising; significant consumption of amphetamines; seizures of smuggled cash in Costa Rica and at the main border crossing to enter Costa Rica from Nicaragua have risen in recent years



CENTRAL AMERICA :: JAMAICA

Introduction :: JAMAICA

Background:

The island - discovered by Christopher COLUMBUS in 1494 - was settled by the Spanish early in the 16th century. The native Taino, who had inhabited Jamaica for centuries, were gradually exterminated and replaced by African slaves. England seized the island in 1655 and established a plantation economy based on sugar, cocoa, and coffee. The abolition of slavery in 1834 freed a quarter million slaves, many of whom became small farmers. Jamaica gradually increased its independence from Britain. In 1958 it joined other British Caribbean colonies in forming the Federation of the West Indies. Jamaica withdrew from the Federation in 1961 and gained full independence in 1962. Deteriorating economic conditions during the 1970s led to recurrent violence as rival gangs affiliated with the major political parties evolved into powerful organized crime networks involved in international drug smuggling and money laundering. Violent crime, drug trafficking, and poverty pose significant challenges to the government today. Nonetheless, many rural and resort areas remain relatively safe and contribute substantially to the economy.

Women's World Cup One-Pager:

Geography :: JAMAICA

Location:

Caribbean, island in the Caribbean Sea, south of Cuba

Geographic coordinates:

18 15 N, 77 30 W

Map references:

Central America and the Caribbean

Area:

total: 10,991 sq km

land: 10,831 sq km

water: 160 sq km

country comparison to the world: 167

Area - comparative:

about half the size of New Jersey; slightly smaller than Connecticut

Area comparison map:

Land boundaries:

0 km

Coastline:

1,022 km

Maritime claims:

territorial sea: 12 nm

exclusive economic zone: 200 nm

contiguous zone: 24 nm

continental shelf: 200 nm or to edge of the continental margin

measured from claimed archipelagic straight baselines

Climate:

tropical; hot, humid; temperate interior

Terrain:

mostly mountains, with narrow, discontinuous coastal plain

Elevation:

mean elevation: 18 m

lowest point: Caribbean Sea 0 m

highest point: Blue Mountain Peak 2,256 m

Natural resources:

bauxite, alumina, gypsum, limestone

Land use:

agricultural land: 41.4% (2011 est.)

arable land: 11.1% (2011 est.) / permanent crops: 9.2% (2011 est.) / permanent pasture: 21.1% (2011 est.)

forest: 31.1% (2011 est.)

other: 27.5% (2011 est.)

Irrigated land:

250 sq km (2012)

Population distribution:

population density is high throughout, but increases in and around Kingston, Montego Bay, and Port Esquivel

Natural hazards:

hurricanes (especially July to November)

Environment - current issues:

heavy rates of deforestation; coastal waters polluted by industrial waste, sewage, and oil spills; damage to coral reefs; air pollution in Kingston from vehicle emissions; land erosion

Environment - international agreements:

party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Marine Life Conservation, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands

signed, but not ratified: none of the selected agreements

Geography - note:

third largest island in the Caribbean (after Cuba and Hispaniola); strategic location between Cayman Trench and Jamaica Channel, the main sea lanes for the Panama Canal

People and Society :: JAMAICA

Population:

2,812,090 (July 2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 139

Nationality:

noun: Jamaican(s)

adjective: Jamaican

Ethnic groups:

black 92.1%, mixed 6.1%, East Indian 0.8%, other 0.4%, unspecified 0.7% (2011 est.)

Languages:

English, English patois

Religions:

Protestant 64.8% (includes Seventh Day Adventist 12.0%, Pentecostal 11.0%, Other Church of God 9.2%, New Testament Church of God 7.2%, Baptist 6.7%, Church of God in Jamaica 4.8%, Church of God of Prophecy 4.5%, Anglican 2.8%, United Church 2.1%, Methodist 1.6%, Revived 1.4%, Brethren 0.9%, and Moravian 0.7%), Roman Catholic 2.2%, Jehovah's Witness 1.9%, Rastafarian 1.1%, other 6.5%, none 21.3%, unspecified 2.3% (2011 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 26.01% (male 372,158 /female 359,388)

15-24 years: 18.36% (male 261,012 /female 255,223)

25-54 years: 38.03% (male 518,984 /female 550,412)

55-64 years: 8.89% (male 123,769 /female 126,350)

65 years and over: 8.71% (male 115,573 /female 129,221) (2018 est.)

population pyramid:

**Dependency ratios:**

total dependency ratio: 48.7 (2015 est.)

youth dependency ratio: 34.9 (2015 est.)

elderly dependency ratio: 13.8 (2015 est.)

potential support ratio: 7.2 (2015 est.)

Median age:

total: 28.6 years

male: 27.8 years

female: 29.3 years (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 133

Population growth rate:

-0.05% (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 201

Birth rate:

16.5 births/1,000 population (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 110

Death rate:

7.6 deaths/1,000 population (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 104

Net migration rate:

-9.4 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 216

Population distribution:

population density is high throughout, but increases in and around Kingston, Montego Bay, and Port Esquivel

Urbanization:

urban population: 55.7% of total population (2018)

rate of urbanization: 0.82% annual rate of change (2015-20 est.)

Major urban areas - population:

589,000 KINGSTON (capital) (2018)

Sex ratio:

at birth: 1.05 male(s)/female

0-14 years: 1.04 male(s)/female

15-24 years: 1.02 male(s)/female

25-54 years: 0.94 male(s)/female

55-64 years: 0.98 male(s)/female

65 years and over: 0.89 male(s)/female

total population: 0.98 male(s)/female (2018 est.)

Mother's mean age at first birth:

21.2 years (2008 est.)

note: median age at first birth among women 25-29

Maternal mortality rate:

89 deaths/100,000 live births (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 77

Infant mortality rate:

total: 12.4 deaths/1,000 live births

male: 13.9 deaths/1,000 live births

female: 10.8 deaths/1,000 live births (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 108

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 74.5 years

male: 72.7 years

female: 76.5 years (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 123

Total fertility rate:

2.09 children born/woman (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 102

Contraceptive prevalence rate:

72.5% (2008/09)

Health expenditures:

5.4% of GDP (2014)

country comparison to the world: 130

Physicians density:

1.32 physicians/1,000 population (2017)

Hospital bed density:

1.7 beds/1,000 population (2013)

Drinking water source:**improved:**

urban: 97.5% of population

rural: 89.4% of population

total: 93.8% of population

unimproved:

urban: 2.5% of population

rural: 10.6% of population

total: 6.2% of population (2015 est.)

Sanitation facility access:**improved:**

urban: 79.9% of population (2015 est.)

rural: 84.1% of population (2015 est.)

total: 81.8% of population (2015 est.)

unimproved:

urban: 20.1% of population (2015 est.)

rural: 15.9% of population (2015 est.)

total: 18.2% of population (2015 est.)

HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate:

1.8% (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 28

HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS:

34,000 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 70

HIV/AIDS - deaths:

1,500 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 58

Major infectious diseases:

note: active local transmission of Zika virus by Aedes species mosquitoes has been identified in this country (as of August 2016); it poses an important risk (a large number of cases possible) among US citizens if bitten by an infective mosquito; other less common ways to get Zika are through sex, via blood transfusion, or during pregnancy, in which the pregnant woman passes Zika virus to her fetus

Obesity - adult prevalence rate:

24.7% (2016)

country comparison to the world: 55

Children under the age of 5 years underweight:

2.2% (2014)

country comparison to the world: 110

Education expenditures:

5.3% of GDP (2017)

country comparison to the world: 50

Literacy:

definition: age 15 and over has ever attended school (2015 est.)

total population: 88.7%

male: 84%

female: 93.1% (2015 est.)

Unemployment, youth ages 15-24:

total: 24.1%

male: 20.1%

female: 29.2% (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 53

Government :: JAMAICA

Country name:

conventional long form: none

conventional short form: Jamaica

etymology: from the native Taino word "haymaca" meaning "Land of Wood and Water" or possibly "Land of Springs"

Government type:

parliamentary democracy (Parliament) under a constitutional monarchy; a Commonwealth realm

Capital:

name: Kingston

geographic coordinates: 18 00 N, 76 48 W

time difference: UTC-5 (same time as Washington, DC, during Standard Time)

Administrative divisions:

14 parishes; Clarendon, Hanover, Kingston, Manchester, Portland, Saint Andrew, Saint Ann, Saint Catherine, Saint Elizabeth, Saint James, Saint Mary, Saint Thomas, Trelawny, Westmoreland

note: for local government purposes, Kingston and Saint Andrew were amalgamated in 1923 into the present single corporate body known as the Kingston and Saint Andrew Corporation

Independence:

6 August 1962 (from the UK)

National holiday:

Independence Day, 6 August (1962)

Constitution:

history: several previous (preindependence); latest drafted 1961-62, submitted to British Parliament 24 July 1962, entered into force 6 August 1962 (at independence)

amendments: proposed by Parliament; passage of amendments to "non-entrenched" constitutional sections such as lowering the voting age, requires majority vote by the Parliament membership; passage of amendments to "entrenched" sections such as fundamental rights and freedoms requires two-thirds majority vote of Parliament; passage of amendments to "specially entrenched" sections such as the dissolution of Parliament or the executive authority of the monarch requires two-thirds approval by Parliament and approval in a referendum; amended many times, last in 2017 (2018)

Legal system:

common law system based on the English model

International law organization participation:

has not submitted an ICJ jurisdiction declaration; non-party state to the ICtC

Citizenship:

citizenship by birth: yes

citizenship by descent only: yes

dual citizenship recognized: yes

residency requirement for naturalization: 4 out of the previous 5 years

Suffrage:

18 years of age; universal

Executive branch:

chief of state: Queen ELIZABETH II (since 6 February 1952); represented by Governor General Sir Patrick L. ALLEN (since 26 February 2009)

head of government: Prime Minister Andrew HOLNESS (since 3 March 2016)

cabinet: Cabinet appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister

elections/appointments: the monarchy is hereditary; governor general appointed by the monarch on the recommendation of the prime minister; following legislative elections, the leader of the majority party or majority coalition in the House of Representatives is appointed prime minister by the governor general

Legislative branch:

description: bicameral Parliament consists of:

Senate (21 seats; members appointed by the governor general on the recommendation of the prime minister and the opposition leader, 13 seats allocated to the ruling party, and 8 seats allocated to the opposition party; members serve 5-year terms or until Parliament is dissolved)

House of Representatives (63 seats; members directly elected in single-seat constituencies by simple majority vote to serve 5-year terms or until Parliament is dissolved)

elections: Senate - last full slate of appointments on 10 March 2016 (next no later than February 2021)

House of Representatives - last held on 25 February 2016; by-election for 5 seats held on 30 October 2017 (3 seats), 5 March 2018, and 4 April 2019 (next to be held no later than February 2021)

election results: Senate - percent by party - NA; seats by party - NA; composition - men 16, women 5, percent of women 23.8%

House of Representatives - percent of vote by party - JLP 50.1%, PNP 49.7%, other 0.2%; seats by party - JLP 32, PNP 31; note - as of June 2019, by-elections have changed House seats to JLP 34, PNP 29; composition - men 51, women 12, percent of women 19%; note - total Parliament percent of women 20%

Judicial branch:

highest courts: Court of Appeal (consists of president of the court and a minimum of 4 judges); Supreme Court (40 judges organized in specialized divisions); note - appeals beyond Jamaica's highest courts are referred to the Judicial

Committee of the Privy Council (in London) rather than to the Caribbean Court of Justice (the appellate court for member states of the Caribbean Community)

judge selection and term of office: chief justice of the Supreme Court and president of the Court of Appeal appointed by the governor-general on the advice of the prime minister; other judges of both courts appointed by the governor-general on the advice of the Judicial Service Commission; judges of both courts serve till age 70

subordinate courts: resident magistrate courts, district courts, and petty sessions courts

Political parties and leaders:

Jamaica Labor Party or JLP [Andrew Michael HOLNESS]
People's National Party or PNP [Dr. Peter David PHILLIPS]
National Democratic Movement or NDM [Peter TOWNSEND]

International organization participation:

ACP, AOSIS, C, Caricom, CDB, CELAC, FAO, G-15, G-77, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICC (NGOs), ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, IHO, ILO, IMF, IMO, Interpol, IOC, IOM, ISO, ITSO, ITU, LAES, MIGA, NAM, OAS, OPANAL, OPCW, Petrocaribe, UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UNITAR, UNWTO, UPU, WCO, WFTU (NGOs), WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO

Diplomatic representation in the US:

chief of mission: Ambassador Audrey Patrice MARKS (since 18 January 2017) (2017)

chancery: 1520 New Hampshire Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036

telephone: [1] (202) 452-0660

FAX: [1] (202) 452-0036

consulate(s) general: Miami, New York

consulate(s): Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Concord (MA), Houston, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Richmond (VA), San Francisco, Seattle (2017)

Diplomatic representation from the US:

chief of mission: Ambassador (vacant); Charge d'Affaires Eric KHANT (since 30 June 2017)

embassy: 142 Old Hope Road, Kingston 6

mailing address: P.O. Box 541, Kingston 5

telephone: [1] (876) 702-6000 (2018)

FAX: [1] (876) 702-6001 (2018)

Flag description:

diagonal yellow cross divides the flag into four triangles - green (top and bottom) and black (hoist side and fly side); green represents hope, vegetation, and agriculture, black reflects hardships overcome and to be faced, and yellow recalls golden sunshine and the island's natural resources

National symbol(s):

green-and-black streamertail (bird), Guaiacum officinale (Guaiacwood); national colors: green, yellow, black

National anthem:

name: Jamaica, Land We Love

lyrics/music: Hugh Braham SHERLOCK/Robert Charles LIGHTBOURNE

note: adopted 1962

0:00 / 1:24

Economy :: JAMAICA

Economy - overview:

The Jamaican economy is heavily dependent on services, which accounts for more than 70% of GDP. The country derives most of its foreign exchange from tourism, remittances, and bauxite/alumina. Earnings from remittances and tourism each account for 14% and 20% of GDP, while bauxite/alumina exports have declined to less than 5% of GDP.

Jamaica's economy has grown on average less than 1% a year for the last three decades and many impediments remain to growth: a bloated public sector which crowds out spending on important projects; high crime and corruption; red-tape; and a high debt-to-GDP ratio. Jamaica, however, has made steady progress in reducing its debt-to-GDP ratio from a high of almost 150% in 2012 to less than 110% in 2017, in close collaboration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The current IMF Stand-By Agreement requires Jamaica to produce an annual primary surplus of 7%, in an attempt to reduce its debt burden below 60% by 2025.

Economic growth reached 1.6% in 2016, but declined to 0.9% in 2017 after intense rainfall, demonstrating the vulnerability of the economy to weather-related events. The HOLNESS administration therefore faces the difficult prospect of maintaining fiscal discipline to reduce the debt load while simultaneously implementing growth inducing policies and attacking a serious crime problem. High unemployment exacerbates the crime problem, including gang violence fueled by advanced fee fraud (lottery scamming) and the drug trade.

GDP (purchasing power parity):

\$26.06 billion (2017 est.)

\$25.89 billion (2016 est.)

\$25.51 billion (2015 est.)

note: data are in 2017 dollars

country comparison to the world: 140

GDP (official exchange rate):

\$14.77 billion (2017 est.)

GDP - real growth rate:

0.7% (2017 est.)

1.5% (2016 est.)

0.9% (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 189

GDP - per capita (PPP):

\$9,200 (2017 est.)

\$9,200 (2016 est.)

\$9,100 (2015 est.)

note: data are in 2017 dollars

country comparison to the world: 143

Gross national saving:

18.3% of GDP (2017 est.)

20.6% of GDP (2016 est.)

18% of GDP (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 109

GDP - composition, by end use:

household consumption: 81.9% (2017 est.)

government consumption: 13.7% (2017 est.)

investment in fixed capital: 21.3% (2017 est.)

investment in inventories: 0.1% (2017 est.)

exports of goods and services: 30.1% (2017 est.)

imports of goods and services: -47.1% (2017 est.)

GDP - composition, by sector of origin:

agriculture: 7% (2017 est.)

industry: 21.1% (2017 est.)

services: 71.9% (2017 est.)

Agriculture - products:

sugar cane, bananas, coffee, citrus, yams, ackees, vegetables; poultry, goats, milk; shellfish

Industries:

agriculture, mining, manufacture, construction, financial and insurance services, tourism, telecommunications

Industrial production growth rate:

0.9% (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 162

Labor force:

1.348 million (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 135

Labor force - by occupation:

agriculture: 16.1%

industry: 16%

services: 67.9% (2017)

Unemployment rate:

12.2% (2017 est.)

12.8% (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 162

Population below poverty line:

17.1% (2016 est.)

Household income or consumption by percentage share:

lowest 10%: 2.6%

highest 10%: 29.3% (2015)

Distribution of family income - Gini index:

35 (2016)

38 (2015)

country comparison to the world: 97

Budget:

revenues: 4.382 billion (2017 est.)

expenditures: 4.314 billion (2017 est.)

Taxes and other revenues:

29.7% (of GDP) (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 81

Budget surplus (+) or deficit (-):

0.5% (of GDP) (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 37

Public debt:

101% of GDP (2017 est.)

113.6% of GDP (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 16

Fiscal year:

1 April - 31 March

Inflation rate (consumer prices):

4.4% (2017 est.)

2.3% (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 166

Central bank discount rate:

3.25% (31 December 2017)

3% (31 December 2016)

country comparison to the world: 105

Commercial bank prime lending rate:

14.91% (31 December 2017 est.)

16.49% (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 41

Stock of narrow money:

\$3.55 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$3.427 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 115

Stock of broad money:

\$3.55 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$3.427 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 121

Stock of domestic credit:

\$7.326 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$7.382 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 118

Market value of publicly traded shares:

\$8.393 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$5.715 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

\$5.38 billion (31 December 2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 76

Current account balance:

-\$679 million (2017 est.)

-\$381 million (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 126

Exports:

\$1.296 billion (2017 est.)

\$1.195 billion (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 151

Exports - partners:

US 39.1%, Netherlands 12.3%, Canada 8.4% (2017)

Exports - commodities:

alumina, bauxite, chemicals, coffee, mineral fuels, waste and scrap metals, sugar, yams

Imports:

\$5.151 billion (2017 est.)

\$4.169 billion (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 126

Imports - commodities:

food and other consumer goods, industrial supplies, fuel, parts and accessories of capital goods, machinery and transport equipment, construction materials

Imports - partners:

US 40.6%, Colombia 6.8%, Japan 5.8%, China 5.8%, Trinidad and Tobago 4.7% (2017)

Reserves of foreign exchange and gold:

\$3.781 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$2.719 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 100

Debt - external:

\$14.94 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$10.24 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 103

Stock of direct foreign investment - at home:

\$15.03 billion (2016)

\$10.86 billion (2010)

country comparison to the world: 90

Stock of direct foreign investment - abroad:

\$604 million (2016)

\$176 million (2010)

country comparison to the world: 96

Exchange rates:

Jamaican dollars (JMD) per US dollar -

128.36 (2017 est.)

125.14 (2016 est.)

125.126 (2015 est.)

116.898 (2014 est.)

110.935 (2013 est.)

Energy :: JAMAICA**Electricity access:**

population without electricity: 200,000 (2013)

electrification - total population: 93% (2013)

electrification - urban areas: 98% (2013)

electrification - rural areas: 87% (2013)

Electricity - production:

4.007 billion kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 128

Electricity - consumption:

2.847 billion kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 137

Electricity - exports:

0 kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 151

Electricity - imports:

0 kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 162

Electricity - installed generating capacity:

1.078 million kW (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 126

Electricity - from fossil fuels:

83% of total installed capacity (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 76

Electricity - from nuclear fuels:

0% of total installed capacity (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 115

Electricity - from hydroelectric plants:

3% of total installed capacity (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 134

Electricity - from other renewable sources:

15% of total installed capacity (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 59

Crude oil - production:

0 bbl/day (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 152

Crude oil - exports:

0 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 142

Crude oil - imports:

24,360 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 61

Crude oil - proved reserves:

0 bbl (1 January 2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 149

Refined petroleum products - production:

24,250 bbl/day (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 87

Refined petroleum products - consumption:

55,000 bbl/day (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 99

Refined petroleum products - exports:

823 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 109

Refined petroleum products - imports:

30,580 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 100

Natural gas - production:

0 cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 149

Natural gas - consumption:

198.2 million cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 104

Natural gas - exports:

0 cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 127

Natural gas - imports:

198.2 million cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 71

Natural gas - proved reserves:

0 cu m (1 January 2014 est.)

country comparison to the world: 150

Carbon dioxide emissions from consumption of energy:

8.9 million Mt (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 112

Communications :: JAMAICA

Telephones - fixed lines:

total subscriptions: 297,027 (2017 est.)

subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 10 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 113

Telephones - mobile cellular:

total subscriptions: 3,091,222 (2017 est.)

subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 103 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 140

Telephone system:

general assessment: fully automatic domestic telephone network; LTE networks providing coverage to 90% of the island population

domestic: the 1999 agreement to open the market for telecommunications services resulted in rapid growth in mobile-cellular telephone usage 103 per 100 subscriptions, while the number of fixed-lines 10 per 100 subscriptions has declined

international: country code - 1-876 and 1-658; the Fibralink submarine cable network provides enhanced delivery of business and broadband traffic and is linked to the Americas Region Caribbean Ring System (ARCOS-1) submarine cable in the Dominican Republic; the link to ARCOS-1 provides seamless connectivity to US, parts of the Caribbean, Central America, and South America; the ALBA-1 fiber-optic submarine cable links Jamaica, Cuba, and Venezuela; satellite earth stations - 2 Intelsat (Atlantic Ocean)

Broadcast media:

3 free-to-air TV stations, subscription cable services, and roughly 30 radio stations

Internet country code:

.jm

Internet users:

total: 1,336,653 (July 2016 est.)

percent of population: 45% (July 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 124

Broadband - fixed subscriptions:

total: 239,120 (2017 est.)

subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 8 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 103

Transportation :: JAMAICA

National air transport system:

number of registered air carriers: 2 (2015)

inventory of registered aircraft operated by air carriers: 5 (2015)

annual passenger traffic on registered air carriers: 92,836 (2015)

annual freight traffic on registered air carriers: 0 mt-km (2015)

Civil aircraft registration country code prefix:

6Y (2016)

Airports:

28 (2013)

country comparison to the world: 122

Airports - with paved runways:

total: 11 (2017)

2,438 to 3,047 m: 2 (2017)

914 to 1,523 m: 4 (2017)

under 914 m: 5 (2017)

Airports - with unpaved runways:

total: 17 (2013)

914 to 1,523 m: 1 (2013)

under 914 m: 16 (2013)

Roadways:

total: 22,121 km (includes 44 km of expressways) (2011)

paved: 16,148 km (2011)

unpaved: 5,973 km (2011)

country comparison to the world: 89

Merchant marine:

total: 43

by type: bulk carrier 1, container ship 8, general cargo 10, oil tanker 1, other 23 (2018)

country comparison to the world: 118

Ports and terminals:

major seaport(s): Discovery Bay (Port Rhoades), Kingston, Montego Bay, Port Antonio, Port Esquivel, Port Kaiser, Rocky Point

container port(s) (TEUs): Kingston (1,681,706) (2017)

Military and Security :: JAMAICA

Military expenditures:

0.9% of GDP (2017)

0.96% of GDP (2016)

0.87% of GDP (2015)

0.87% of GDP (2014)

0.9% of GDP (2013)

country comparison to the world: 122

Military branches:

Jamaica Defense Force: Ground Forces, Coast Guard, Air Wing (2018)

Military service age and obligation:

17 1/2 is the legal minimum age for voluntary military service; no conscription (2012)

Transnational Issues :: JAMAICA

Disputes - international:

none

Trafficking in persons:

current situation: Jamaica is a source and destination country for children and adults subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor; sex trafficking of children and adults occurs on the street, in night clubs, bars, massage parlors, and private homes; child sex tourism is a problem in resort areas; Jamaicans have been subjected to sexual exploitation or forced labor in the Caribbean, Canada, the US, and the UK, while foreigners have endured conditions of forced labor in Jamaica or aboard foreign-flagged fishing vessels operating in Jamaican waters; a high number of Jamaican children are reported missing

tier rating: Tier 2 Watch List – Jamaica does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so; in 2014, the government made significant efforts to raise public awareness of human trafficking, and named a national trafficking-in-persons rapporteur – the first in the region; authorities initiated more new trafficking investigations than in 2013 and concluded a trafficking case in the Supreme Court, but chronic delays impeded prosecutions and no offenders were convicted for the sixth consecutive year; more adult trafficking victims were identified than in previous years, but only one child victim was identified, which was exceptionally low relative to the number of vulnerable children (2015)

Illicit drugs:

transshipment point for cocaine from South America to North America and Europe; illicit cultivation and consumption of cannabis; government has an active manual cannabis eradication program; corruption is a major concern; substantial money-laundering activity; Colombian narcotics traffickers favor Jamaica for illicit financial transactions



NORTH AMERICA :: MEXICO

Introduction :: MEXICO

Background:

The site of several advanced Amerindian civilizations - including the Olmec, Toltec, Teotihuacan, Zapotec, Maya, and Aztec - Mexico was conquered and colonized by Spain in the early 16th century. Administered as the Viceroyalty of New Spain for three centuries, it achieved independence early in the 19th century. Elections held in 2000 marked the first time since the 1910 Mexican Revolution that an opposition candidate - Vicente FOX of the National Action Party (PAN) - defeated the party in government, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). He was succeeded in 2006 by another PAN candidate Felipe CALDERON, but Enrique PENA NIETO regained the presidency for the PRI in 2012. Left-leaning antiestablishment politician and former mayor of Mexico City (2000-05) Andres Manuel LOPEZ OBRADOR, from the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA), became president in December 2018.

The global financial crisis in late 2008 caused a massive economic downturn in Mexico the following year, although growth returned quickly in 2010. Ongoing economic and social concerns include low real wages, high underemployment, inequitable income distribution, and few advancement opportunities for the largely indigenous population in the impoverished southern states. Since 2007, Mexico's powerful drug-trafficking organizations have engaged in bloody feuding, resulting in tens of thousands of drug-related homicides.

Geography :: MEXICO

Location:

North America, bordering the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico, between Belize and the United States and bordering the North Pacific Ocean, between Guatemala and the United States

Geographic coordinates:

23 00 N, 102 00 W

Map references:

North America

Area:

total: 1,964,375 sq km

land: 1,943,945 sq km

water: 20,430 sq km

country comparison to the world: 15

Area - comparative:

slightly less than three times the size of Texas

Area comparison map:



Land boundaries:

total: 4,389 km

border countries (3): Belize 276 km, Guatemala 958 km, US 3155 km

Coastline:

9,330 km

Maritime claims:

territorial sea: 12 nm

exclusive economic zone: 200 nm

contiguous zone: 24 nm

continental shelf: 200 nm or to the edge of the continental margin

Climate:

varies from tropical to desert

Terrain:

high, rugged mountains; low coastal plains; high plateaus; desert

Elevation:

mean elevation: 1,111 m

lowest point: Laguna Salada -10 m

highest point: Volcan Pico de Orizaba 5,636 m

Natural resources:

petroleum, silver, antimony, copper, gold, lead, zinc, natural gas, timber

Land use:

agricultural land: 54.9% (2011 est.)

arable land: 11.8% (2011 est.) / permanent crops: 1.4% (2011 est.) / permanent pasture: 41.7% (2011 est.)

forest: 33.3% (2011 est.)

other: 11.8% (2011 est.)

Irrigated land:

65,000 sq km (2012)

Population distribution:

most of the population is found in the middle of the country between the states of Jalisco and Veracruz; approximately a quarter of the population lives in and around Mexico City

Natural hazards:

tsunamis along the Pacific coast, volcanoes and destructive earthquakes in the center and south, and hurricanes on the Pacific, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean coasts

volcanism: volcanic activity in the central-southern part of the country; the volcanoes in Baja California are mostly dormant; Colima (3,850 m), which erupted in 2010, is Mexico's most active volcano and is responsible for causing periodic evacuations of nearby villagers; it has been deemed a Decade Volcano by the International Association of Volcanology and Chemistry of the Earth's Interior, worthy of study due to its explosive history and close proximity to human populations; Popocatepetl (5,426 m) poses a threat to Mexico City; other historically active volcanoes include Barcena, Ceboruco, El Chichon, Michoacan-Guanajuato, Pico de Orizaba, San Martin, Socorro, and Tacana; see note 2 under "Geography - note"

Environment - current issues:

scarcity of hazardous waste disposal facilities; rural to urban migration; natural freshwater resources scarce and polluted in north, inaccessible and poor quality in center and extreme southeast; raw sewage and industrial effluents polluting

rivers in urban areas; deforestation; widespread erosion; desertification; deteriorating agricultural lands; serious air and water pollution in the national capital and urban centers along US-Mexico border; land subsidence in Valley of Mexico caused by groundwater depletion

note: the government considers the lack of clean water and deforestation national security issues

Environment - international agreements:

party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Marine Life Conservation, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands, Whaling

signed, but not ratified: none of the selected agreements

Geography - note:

note 1: strategic location on southern border of US; corn (maize), one of the world's major grain crops, almost certainly originated in Mexico

note 2: Mexico is one of the countries along the Ring of Fire, a belt of active volcanoes and earthquake epicenters bordering the Pacific Ocean; up to 90% of the world's earthquakes and some 75% of the world's volcanoes occur within the Ring of Fire

note 3: the Sac Actun cave system at 348 km (216 mi) is the longest underwater cave in the world and the second longest cave worldwide, after Mammoth Cave in the United States (see "Geography - note" under United States)

note 4: the prominent Yucatan Peninsula that divides the Gulf of Mexico from the Caribbean Sea is shared by Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize; just on the northern coast of Yucatan, near the town of Chicxulub (pronounce cheek-sha-loob), lie the remnants of a massive crater (some 150 km in diameter and extending well out into the Gulf of Mexico); formed by an asteroid or comet when it struck the earth 66 million years ago, the impact is now widely accepted as initiating a worldwide climate disruption that caused a mass extinction of 75% of all the earth's plant and animal species - including the non-avian dinosaurs

People and Society :: MEXICO

Population:

125,959,205 (July 2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 11

Nationality:

noun: Mexican(s)

adjective: Mexican

Ethnic groups:

mestizo (Amerindian-Spanish) 62%, predominantly Amerindian 21%, Amerindian 7%, other 10% (mostly European) (2012 est.)

note: Mexico does not collect census data on ethnicity

Languages:

Spanish only 92.7%, Spanish and indigenous languages 5.7%, indigenous only 0.8%, unspecified 0.8% (2005)

note: indigenous languages include various Mayan, Nahuatl, and other regional languages

Religions:

Roman Catholic 82.7%, Pentecostal 1.6%, Jehovah's Witness 1.4%, other Evangelical Churches 5%, other 1.9%, none 4.7%, unspecified 2.7% (2010 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 26.61% (male 17,143,124 /female 16,378,309)

15-24 years: 17.35% (male 11,072,817 /female 10,779,029)

25-54 years: 40.91% (male 24,916,204 /female 26,612,272)

55-64 years: 7.87% (male 4,538,167 /female 5,375,867)

65 years and over: 7.26% (male 4,079,513 /female 5,063,903) (2018 est.)

population pyramid:



Dependency ratios:

total dependency ratio: 51.4 (2015 est.)

youth dependency ratio: 41.6 (2015 est.)

elderly dependency ratio: 9.8 (2015 est.)

potential support ratio: 10.2 (2015 est.)

Median age:

total: 28.6 years

male: 27.5 years

female: 29.7 years (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 135

Population growth rate:

1.09% (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 101

Birth rate:

18.1 births/1,000 population (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 93

Death rate:

5.4 deaths/1,000 population (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 180

Net migration rate:

-1.8 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 158

Population distribution:

most of the population is found in the middle of the country between the states of Jalisco and Veracruz; approximately a quarter of the population lives in and around Mexico City

Urbanization:

urban population: 80.2% of total population (2018)

rate of urbanization: 1.59% annual rate of change (2015-20 est.)

Major urban areas - population:

21.581 million MEXICO CITY (capital), 5.023 million Guadalajara, 4.712 million Monterrey, 3.097 million Puebla, 2.354 million Toluca de Lerdo, 2.058 million Tijuana (2018)

Sex ratio:

at birth: 1.05 male(s)/female

0-14 years: 1.05 male(s)/female

15-24 years: 1.03 male(s)/female

25-54 years: 0.94 male(s)/female

55-64 years: 0.84 male(s)/female

65 years and over: 0.81 male(s)/female

total population: 0.96 male(s)/female (2018 est.)

Mother's mean age at first birth:

21.3 years (2008 est.)

Maternal mortality rate:

38 deaths/100,000 live births (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 107

Infant mortality rate:

total: 11.3 deaths/1,000 live births

male: 12.6 deaths/1,000 live births

female: 9.8 deaths/1,000 live births (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 125

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 76.3 years

male: 73.5 years

female: 79.2 years (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 89

Total fertility rate:

2.22 children born/woman (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 94

Contraceptive prevalence rate:

66.9% (2015)

Health expenditures:

6.3% of GDP (2014)

country comparison to the world: 101

Physicians density:

2.25 physicians/1,000 population (2016)

Hospital bed density:

1.5 beds/1,000 population (2015)

Drinking water source:

improved:

urban: 97.2% of population

rural: 92.1% of population

total: 96.1% of population

unimproved:

urban: 2.8% of population

rural: 7.9% of population

total: 3.9% of population (2015 est.)

Sanitation facility access:

improved:

urban: 88% of population (2015 est.)

rural: 74.5% of population (2015 est.)

total: 85.2% of population (2015 est.)

unimproved:

urban: 12% of population (2015 est.)

rural: 25.5% of population (2015 est.)

total: 14.8% of population (2015 est.)

HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate:

0.3% (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 85

HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS:

230,000 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 25

HIV/AIDS - deaths:

4,000 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 35

Major infectious diseases:

degree of risk: intermediate (2016)

food or waterborne diseases: bacterial diarrhea and hepatitis A (2016)

vectorborne diseases: dengue fever (2016)

note: active local transmission of Zika virus by Aedes species mosquitoes has been identified in this country (as of August 2016); it poses an important risk (a large number of cases possible) among US citizens if bitten by an infective mosquito; other less common ways to get Zika are through sex, via blood transfusion, or during pregnancy, in which the pregnant woman passes Zika virus to her fetus

Obesity - adult prevalence rate:

28.9% (2016)

country comparison to the world: 29

Children under the age of 5 years underweight:

4.2% (2016)

country comparison to the world: 87

Education expenditures:

5.2% of GDP (2015)

country comparison to the world: 59

Literacy:

definition: age 15 and over can read and write (2016 est.)

total population: 94.9%

male: 95.8%

female: 94% (2016 est.)

School life expectancy (primary to tertiary education):

total: 14 years

male: 14 years

female: 14 years (2016)

Unemployment, youth ages 15-24:

total: 6.9%

male: 6.5%

female: 7.6% (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 157

Government :: MEXICO

Country name:

conventional long form: United Mexican States

conventional short form: Mexico

local long form: Estados Unidos Mexicanos

local short form: Mexico

etymology: named after the Mexica, the largest and most powerful branch of the Aztecs; the meaning of the name is uncertain

Government type:

federal presidential republic

Capital:

name: Mexico City (Ciudad de Mexico)

geographic coordinates: 19 26 N, 99 08 W

time difference: UTC-6 (1 hour behind Washington, DC, during Standard Time)

daylight saving time: +1hr, begins first Sunday in April; ends last Sunday in October

note: Mexico has four time zones

Administrative divisions:

32 states (estados, singular - estado); Aguascalientes, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Campeche, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Colima, Ciudad de Mexico, Durango, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Mexico, Michoacan, Morelos, Nayarit, Nuevo Leon, Oaxaca, Puebla, Queretaro, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosi, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, Yucatan, Zacatecas

Independence:

16 September 1810 (declared independence from Spain); 27 September 1821 (recognized by Spain)

National holiday:

Independence Day, 16 September (1810)

Constitution:

history: several previous; latest approved 5 February 1917

amendments: proposed by the Congress of the Union; passage requires approval by at least two-thirds of the members present and approval by a majority of the state legislatures; amended many times, last in 2019 (2019)

Legal system:

civil law system with US constitutional law influence; judicial review of legislative acts

International law organization participation:

accepts compulsory ICJ jurisdiction with reservations; accepts ICtJ jurisdiction

Citizenship:

citizenship by birth: yes

citizenship by descent only: yes

dual citizenship recognized: not specified

residency requirement for naturalization: 5 years

Suffrage:

18 years of age; universal and compulsory

Executive branch:

chief of state: President Andres Manuel LOPEZ OBRADOR (since 1 December 2018); note - the president is both chief of state and head of government

head of government: President Andres Manuel LOPEZ OBRADOR (since 1 December 2018)

cabinet: Cabinet appointed by the president; note - appointment of attorney general, the head of the Bank of Mexico, and senior treasury officials require consent of the Senate

elections/appointments: president directly elected by simple majority popular vote for a single 6-year term; election last held on 1 July 2018 (next to be held in July 2024)

election results: Andres Manuel LOPEZ OBRADOR elected president; percent of vote - Andres Manuel LOPEZ OBRADOR (MORENA) 53.2%, Ricardo ANAYA (PAN) 22.3%, Jose Antonio MEADE Kuribrena (PRI) 16.4%, Jaime RODRIGUEZ Calderon 5.2% (independent), other 2.9%

Legislative branch:

description: bicameral National Congress or Congreso de la Union consists of:

Senate or Camara de Senadores (128 seats; 96 members directly elected in multi-seat constituencies by simple majority vote and 32 directly elected in a single, nationwide constituency by proportional representation vote; members serve 6-year terms)

Chamber of Deputies or Camara de Diputados (500 seats; 300 members directly elected in single-seat constituencies by simple majority vote and 200 directly elected in a single, nationwide constituency by proportional representation vote; members serve 3-year terms)

elections:

Senate - last held on 1 July 2018 (next to be held on 1 July 2024)

Chamber of Deputies - last held on 1 July 2018 (next to be held on 1 July 2021)

election results:

Senate - percent of vote by party - percent of vote by party - NA; seats by party - MORENA 58, PAN 22, PRI 14, PRD 9, MC 7, PT 7, PES 5, PVEM 5, PNA/PANAL 1; composition - men 65, women 63, percent of women 49.3%

Chamber of Deputies - percent of vote by party - NA; seats by party - MORENA 193, PAN 79, PT 61, PES 58, PRI 42, MC 26, PRD 23, PVEM 17, PNA/PANAL 1; composition - men 259, women 241, percent of women 48.2%; note - total National Congress percent of women 48.4%

note: for the 2018 election, senators will be eligible for a second term and deputies up to 4 consecutive terms

Judicial branch:

highest courts: Supreme Court of Justice or Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nacion (consists of the chief justice and 11 justices and organized into civil, criminal, administrative, and labor panels) and the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (organized into the superior court, with 7 judges including the court president, and 5 regional courts, each with 3 judges)

judge selection and term of office: Supreme Court justices nominated by the president of the republic and approved by two-thirds vote of the members present in the Senate; justices serve 15-year terms; Electoral Tribunal superior and regional court judges nominated by the Supreme Court and elected by two-thirds vote of members present in the Senate;

superior court president elected from among its members to hold office for a 4-year term; other judges of the superior and regional courts serve staggered, 9-year terms

subordinate courts: federal level includes circuit, collegiate, and unitary courts; state and district level courts

Political parties and leaders:

Citizen's Movement (Movimiento Ciudadano) or MC [Clemente CASTANEDA]

Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) or PRI [Claudia RUIZ Massieu]

Labor Party (Partido del Trabajo) or PT [Alberto ANAYA Gutierrez]

Mexican Green Ecological Party (Partido Verde Ecologista de Mexico) or PVEM [Carlos Alberto PUENTE Salas]

Movement for National Regeneration (Movimiento Regeneracion Nacional) or MORENA [Andres Manuel LOPEZ Obrador]

National Action Party (Partido Accion Nacional) or PAN [Damian ZEPEDA Vidales]

Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolucion Democratica) or PRD [Manuel GRANADOS]

International organization participation:

APEC, Australia Group, BCIE, BIS, CAN (observer), Caricom (observer), CD, CDB, CE (observer), CELAC, CSN (observer), EBRD, FAO, FATF, G-3, G-15, G-20, G-24, G-5, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICC (national committees), ICCT, ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCs, IHO, ILO, IMF, IMO, IMSO, Interpol, IOC, IOM, IPU, ISO, ITSO, ITU, ITUC (NGOs), LAES, LAIA, MIGA, NAFTA, NAM (observer), NEA, NSG, OAS, OECD, OPANAL, OPCW, Pacific Alliance, Paris Club (associate), PCA, SICA (observer), UN, UNASUR (observer), UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNIDO, Union Latina (observer), UNWTO, UPU, WCO, WFTU (NGOs), WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO

Diplomatic representation in the US:

chief of mission: Ambassador Martha BARCENA Coqui (since 11 January 2019)

chancery: 1911 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20006

telephone: [1] (202) 728-1600

FAX: [1] (202) 728-1698

consulate(s) general: Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, El Paso (TX), Houston, Laredo (TX), Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Nogales (AZ), Phoenix, Sacramento (CA), San Antonio (TX), San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose (CA), San Juan (Puerto Rico), Saint Paul (MN)

consulate(s): Albuquerque (NM), Anchorage (AK), Boise (ID), Brownsville (TX), Calexico (CA), Del Rio (TX), Detroit, Douglas (AZ), Eagle Pass (TX), Fresno (CA), Indianapolis (IN), Kansas City (MO), Las Vegas, Little Rock (AR), McAllen (TX), Minneapolis (MN), New Orleans, Omaha (NE), Orlando (FL), Oxnard (CA), Philadelphia, Portland (OR), Presidio (TX), Raleigh (NC), Salt Lake City, San Bernardino (CA), Santa Ana (CA), Seattle, Tucson (AZ), Yuma (AZ); note - Washington DC Consular Section is located in a separate building from the Mexican Embassy and has jurisdiction over DC, parts of Virginia, Maryland, and West Virginia

note: Martha BARCENA Coqui is Mexico's first-ever female ambassador to the United States

Diplomatic representation from the US:

chief of mission: Ambassador (vacant); Charge d'Affaires John S. CREAMER (since 16 July 2018)

embassy: Paseo de la Reforma 305, Colonia Cuauhtemoc, 06500 Mexico, Distrito Federal

mailing address: P. O. Box 9000, Brownsville, TX 78520-9000

telephone: (011) 52-55-5080-2000

FAX: (011) 52-55-5080-2005

consulate(s) general: Ciudad Juarez, Guadalajara, Hermosillo, Matamoros, Merida, Monterrey, Nogales, Nuevo Laredo, Tijuana

Flag description:

three equal vertical bands of green (hoist side), white, and red; Mexico's coat of arms (an eagle with a snake in its beak perched on a cactus) is centered in the white band; green signifies hope, joy, and love; white represents peace and honesty; red stands for hardiness, bravery, strength, and valor; the coat of arms is derived from a legend that the wandering Aztec people were to settle at a location where they would see an eagle on a cactus eating a snake; the city they founded, Tenochtitlan, is now Mexico City

note: similar to the flag of Italy, which is shorter, uses lighter shades of green and red, and does not display anything in its white band

National symbol(s):

golden eagle; national colors: green, white, red

National anthem:

name: "Himno Nacional Mexicano" (National Anthem of Mexico)

lyrics/music: Francisco Gonzalez BOCANEGRA/Jaime Nuno ROCA

note: adopted 1943, in use since 1854; also known as "Mexicanos, al grito de Guerra" (Mexicans, to the War Cry); according to tradition, Francisco Gonzalez BOCANEGRA, an accomplished poet, was uninterested in submitting lyrics to a national anthem contest; his fiancée locked him in a room and refused to release him until the lyrics were completed

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Economy :: MEXICO

Economy - overview:

Mexico's \$2.4 trillion economy – 11th largest in the world - has become increasingly oriented toward manufacturing since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) entered into force in 1994. Per capita income is roughly one-third that of the US; income distribution remains highly unequal.

Mexico has become the US' second-largest export market and third-largest source of imports. In 2017, two-way trade in goods and services exceeded \$623 billion. Mexico has free trade agreements with 46 countries, putting more than 90% of its trade under free trade agreements. In 2012, Mexico formed the Pacific Alliance with Peru, Colombia, and Chile.

Mexico's current government, led by President Enrique PENA NIETO, has emphasized economic reforms, passing and implementing sweeping energy, financial, fiscal, and telecommunications reform legislation, among others, with the long-term aim to improve competitiveness and economic growth across the Mexican economy. Since 2015, Mexico has held public auctions of oil and gas exploration and development rights and for long-term electric power generation contracts. Mexico has also issued permits for private sector import, distribution, and retail sales of refined petroleum products in an effort to attract private investment into the energy sector and boost production.

Since 2013, Mexico's economic growth has averaged 2% annually, falling short of private-sector expectations that President PENA NIETO's sweeping reforms would bolster economic prospects. Growth is predicted to remain below potential given falling oil production, weak oil prices, structural issues such as low productivity, high inequality, a large informal sector employing over half of the workforce, weak rule of law, and corruption. Mexico's economy remains vulnerable to uncertainty surrounding the future of NAFTA . because the United States is its top trading partner and the two countries share integrated supply chains — and to potential shifts in domestic policies following the inauguration of a new president in December 2018.

GDP (purchasing power parity):

\$2.463 trillion (2017 est.)

\$2.413 trillion (2016 est.)

\$2.346 trillion (2015 est.)

note: data are in 2017 dollars

country comparison to the world: 11

GDP (official exchange rate):

\$1.151 trillion (2017 est.)

GDP - real growth rate:

2% (2017 est.)

2.9% (2016 est.)

3.3% (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 152

GDP - per capita (PPP):

\$19,900 (2017 est.)

\$19,700 (2016 est.)

\$19,400 (2015 est.)

note: data are in 2017 dollars

country comparison to the world: 90

Gross national saving:

21.4% of GDP (2017 est.)

21.6% of GDP (2016 est.)

20.7% of GDP (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 85

GDP - composition, by end use:

household consumption: 67% (2017 est.)

government consumption: 11.8% (2017 est.)

investment in fixed capital: 22.3% (2017 est.)

investment in inventories: 0.8% (2017 est.)

exports of goods and services: 37.8% (2017 est.)

imports of goods and services: -39.7% (2017 est.)

GDP - composition, by sector of origin:

agriculture: 3.6% (2017 est.)

industry: 31.9% (2017 est.)

services: 64.5% (2017 est.)

Agriculture - products:

corn, wheat, soybeans, rice, beans, cotton, coffee, fruit, tomatoes; beef, poultry, dairy products; wood products

Industries:

food and beverages, tobacco, chemicals, iron and steel, petroleum, mining, textiles, clothing, motor vehicles, consumer durables, tourism

Industrial production growth rate:

-0.6% (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 174

Labor force:

54.51 million (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 12

Labor force - by occupation:

agriculture: 13.4%

industry: 24.1%

services: 61.9% (2011)

Unemployment rate:

3.4% (2017 est.)

3.9% (2016 est.)

note: underemployment may be as high as 25%

country comparison to the world: 42

Population below poverty line:

46.2% (2014 est.)

note: from a food-based definition of poverty; asset-based poverty amounted to more than 47%

Household income or consumption by percentage share:

lowest 10%: 2%

highest 10%: 40% (2014)

Distribution of family income - Gini index:

48.2 (2014)

48.3 (2008)

country comparison to the world: 24

Budget:

revenues: 261.4 billion (2017 est.)

expenditures: 273.8 billion (2017 est.)

Taxes and other revenues:

22.7% (of GDP) (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 131

Budget surplus (+) or deficit (-):

-1.1% (of GDP) (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 83

Public debt:

54.3% of GDP (2017 est.)

56.8% of GDP (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 82

Fiscal year:

calendar year

Inflation rate (consumer prices):

6% (2017 est.)

2.8% (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 186

Central bank discount rate:

7.25% (31 December 2017)

5.75% (31 December 2016)

country comparison to the world: 44

Commercial bank prime lending rate:

7.34% (31 December 2017 est.)

4.72% (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 113

Stock of narrow money:

\$215.5 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$186.6 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 24

Stock of broad money:

\$215.5 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$186.6 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 24

Stock of domestic credit:

\$431.6 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$393.8 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 28

Market value of publicly traded shares:

\$402.3 billion (31 December 2015 est.)

\$480.2 billion (31 December 2014 est.)

\$526 billion (31 December 2013 est.)

country comparison to the world: 25

Current account balance:

-\$19.35 billion (2017 est.)

-\$23.32 billion (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 198

Exports:

\$409.8 billion (2017 est.)

\$374.3 billion (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 12

Exports - partners:

US 79.9% (2017)

Exports - commodities:

manufactured goods, electronics, vehicles and auto parts, oil and oil products, silver, plastics, fruits, vegetables, coffee, cotton; Mexico is the world's leading producer of silver

Imports:

\$420.8 billion (2017 est.)

\$387.4 billion (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 14

Imports - commodities:

metalworking machines, steel mill products, agricultural machinery, electrical equipment, automobile parts for assembly and repair, aircraft, aircraft parts, plastics, natural gas and oil products

Imports - partners:

US 46.4%, China 17.7%, Japan 4.3% (2017)

Reserves of foreign exchange and gold:

\$175.3 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$178.4 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

note: Mexico also maintains access to an \$88 million Flexible Credit Line with the IMF

country comparison to the world: 14

Debt - external:

\$445.8 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$450.2 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 28

Stock of direct foreign investment - at home:

\$554.3 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$473.5 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 16

Stock of direct foreign investment - abroad:

\$243.8 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$148.6 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 25

Exchange rates:

Mexican pesos (MXN) per US dollar -

18.26 (2017 est.)

18.664 (2016 est.)

18.664 (2015 est.)

15.848 (2014 est.)

13.292 (2013 est.)

Energy :: MEXICO**Electricity access:**

population without electricity: 1,231,667 (2012)

electrification - total population: 99% (2012)

electrification - urban areas: 100% (2012)

electrification - rural areas: 97% (2012)

Electricity - production:

302.7 billion kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 13

Electricity - consumption:

258.7 billion kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 14

Electricity - exports:

7.308 billion kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 27

Electricity - imports:

3.532 billion kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 47

Electricity - installed generating capacity:

72.56 million kW (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 17

Electricity - from fossil fuels:

71% of total installed capacity (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 106

Electricity - from nuclear fuels:

2% of total installed capacity (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 27

Electricity - from hydroelectric plants:

17% of total installed capacity (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 96

Electricity - from other renewable sources:

9% of total installed capacity (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 82

Crude oil - production:

1.981 million bbl/day (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 12

Crude oil - exports:

1.214 million bbl/day (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 11

Crude oil - imports:

0 bbl/day (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 166

Crude oil - proved reserves:

6.63 billion bbl (1 January 2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 19

Refined petroleum products - production:

844,600 bbl/day (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 23

Refined petroleum products - consumption:

1.984 million bbl/day (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 11

Refined petroleum products - exports:

155,800 bbl/day (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 35

Refined petroleum products - imports:

867,500 bbl/day (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 10

Natural gas - production:

31.57 billion cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 24

Natural gas - consumption:

81.61 billion cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 9

Natural gas - exports:

36.81 million cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 51

Natural gas - imports:

50.12 billion cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 8

Natural gas - proved reserves:

279.8 billion cu m (1 January 2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 38

Carbon dioxide emissions from consumption of energy:

454.1 million Mt (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 14

Communications :: MEXICO**Telephones - fixed lines:**

total subscriptions: 20,602,668 (2017 est.)

subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 17 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 13

Telephones - mobile cellular:

total subscriptions: 114,326,842 (2017 est.)

subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 92 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 14

Telephone system:

general assessment: adequate telephone service for business and government; improving quality and increasing mobile cellular availability, with mobile subscribers far outnumbering fixed-line subscribers; domestic satellite system with 120 earth stations; extensive microwave radio relay network; considerable use of fiber-optic cable and coaxial cable; two main MNOs despite efforts for competition; preparation for 5G and LTE-M services; Mexico's first local Internet Exchange Point opens in Mexico City (2017)

domestic: competition has spurred the mobile-cellular market; fixed-line teledensity exceeds 17 per 100 persons; mobile-cellular teledensity is about 92 per 100 persons (2017)

international: country code - 52; Columbus-2 fiber-optic submarine cable with access to the US, Virgin Islands, Canary Islands, Spain, and Italy; the Americas Region Caribbean Ring System (ARCOS-1) and the MAYA-1 submarine cable system together provide access to Central America, parts of South America and the Caribbean, and the US; satellite earth stations - 120 (32 Intelsat, 2 Solidaridad (giving Mexico improved access to South America, Central America, and much of the US as well as enhancing domestic communications), 1 Panamsat, numerous Inmarsat mobile earth stations); linked to Central American Microwave System of trunk connections (2016)

Broadcast media:

telecom reform in 2013 enabled the creation of new broadcast television channels after decades of a quasi-monopoly; Mexico has 821 TV stations and 1,745 radio stations and most are privately owned; the Televisa group once had a virtual monopoly in TV broadcasting, but new broadcasting groups and foreign satellite and cable operators are now available; in 2016, Mexico became the first country in Latin America to complete the transition from analog to digital transmissions, allowing for better image and audio quality and a wider selection of programming from networks (2016)

Internet country code:

.mx

Internet users:

total: 73,334,032 (July 2016 est.)

percent of population: 59.5% (July 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 7

Broadband - fixed subscriptions:

total: 17,131,820 (2017 est.)

subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 14 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 11

Transportation :: MEXICO

National air transport system:

number of registered air carriers: 21 (2015)

inventory of registered aircraft operated by air carriers: 357 (2015)

annual passenger traffic on registered air carriers: 45,560,063 (2015)

annual freight traffic on registered air carriers: 713,985,467 mt-km (2015)

Civil aircraft registration country code prefix:

XA (2016)

Airports:

1,714 (2013)

country comparison to the world: 3

Airports - with paved runways:

total: 243 (2017)

over 3,047 m: 12 (2017)

2,438 to 3,047 m: 32 (2017)

1,524 to 2,437 m: 80 (2017)

914 to 1,523 m: 86 (2017)

under 914 m: 33 (2017)

Airports - with unpaved runways:

total: 1,471 (2013)

over 3,047 m: 1 (2013)

2,438 to 3,047 m: 1 (2013)

1,524 to 2,437 m: 42 (2013)

914 to 1,523 m: 281 (2013)

under 914 m: 1,146 (2013)

Heliports:

1 (2013)

Pipelines:

15,986 km natural gas (2019), 10,365 km oil (2017), 8,946 km refined products (2016)

Railways:

total: 20,825 km (2017)

standard gauge: 20,825 km 1.435-m gauge (27 km electrified) (2017)

country comparison to the world: 14

Roadways:

total: 398,148 km (2017)

paved: 174,911 km (includes 10,362 km of expressways) (2017)

unpaved: 223,327 km (2017)

country comparison to the world: 16

Waterways:

2,900 km (navigable rivers and coastal canals mostly connected with ports on the country's east coast) (2012)

country comparison to the world: 33

Merchant marine:

total: 617

by type: bulk carrier 6, general cargo 11, oil tanker 35, other 565 (2018)

country comparison to the world: 34

Ports and terminals:

major seaport(s): Altamira, Coatzacoalcos, Lazaro Cardenas, Manzanillo, Veracruz

oil terminal(s): Cayo Arcas terminal, Dos Bocas terminal

cruise port(s): Cancun, Cozumel, Ensenada

container port(s) (TEUs): Manzanillo (2,830,370), Lazaro Cardenas (1,149,079) (2017)

LNG terminal(s) (import): Altamira, Ensenada

Military and Security :: MEXICO

Military expenditures:

0.47% of GDP (2017)

0.58% of GDP (2016)

0.67% of GDP (2015)

0.67% of GDP (2014)

0.62% of GDP (2013)

country comparison to the world: 146

Military branches:

Secretariat of National Defense (Secretaria de Defensa Nacional, Sedena): Army (Ejercito), Mexican Air Force (Fuerza Aerea Mexicana, FAM); Secretariat of the Navy (Secretaria de Marina, Semar): Mexican Navy (Armada de Mexico (ARM); includes Naval Air Force (FAN), Mexican Naval Infantry Corps (Cuerpo de Infanteria de Marina, Mexmar or CIM)) (2013)

Military service age and obligation:

18 years of age for compulsory military service, conscript service obligation is 12 months; 16 years of age with consent for voluntary enlistment; conscripts serve only in the Army; Navy and Air Force service is all voluntary; women are eligible for voluntary military service; cadets enrolled in military schools from the age of 15 are considered members of the armed forces (2012)

Transnational Issues :: MEXICO

Disputes - international:

abundant rainfall in recent years along much of the Mexico-US border region has ameliorated periodically strained water-sharing arrangements; the US has intensified security measures to monitor and control legal and illegal personnel, transport, and commodities across its border with Mexico; Mexico must deal with thousands of impoverished Guatemalans and other Central Americans who cross the porous border looking for work in Mexico and the US; Belize and Mexico are working to solve minor border demarcation discrepancies arising from inaccuracies in the 1898 border treaty

Refugees and internally displaced persons:

refugees (country of origin): 55,000 (Venezuela) (economic and political crisis; includes Venezuelans who have claimed asylum or have received alternative legal stay) (2018)

IDPs: 338,000 (government's quashing of Zapatista uprising in 1994 in eastern Chiapas Region; drug cartel violence and government's military response since 2007; violence between and within indigenous groups) (2018)

stateless persons: 13 (2017)

Illicit drugs:

major drug-producing and transit nation; Mexico is estimated to be the world's third largest producer of opium with poppy cultivation in 2015 estimated to be 28,000 hectares yielding a potential production of 475 metric tons of raw opium; government conducts the largest independent illicit-crop eradication program in the world; continues as the primary transshipment country for US-bound cocaine from South America, with an estimated 95% of annual cocaine movements toward the US stopping in Mexico; major drug syndicates control the majority of drug trafficking throughout the country; producer and distributor of ecstasy; significant money-laundering center; major supplier of heroin and largest foreign supplier of marijuana and methamphetamine to the US market



CENTRAL AMERICA :: PANAMA

Introduction :: PANAMA

Background:

Explored and settled by the Spanish in the 16th century, Panama broke with Spain in 1821 and joined a union of Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela - named the Republic of Gran Colombia. When the latter dissolved in 1830, Panama remained part of Colombia. With US backing, Panama seceded from Colombia in 1903 and promptly signed a treaty with the US allowing for the construction of a canal and US sovereignty over a strip of land on either side of the structure (the Panama Canal Zone). The Panama Canal was built by the US Army Corps of Engineers between 1904 and 1914. In 1977, an agreement was signed for the complete transfer of the Canal from the US to Panama by the end of the century. Certain portions of the Zone and increasing responsibility over the Canal were turned over in the subsequent decades. With US help, dictator Manuel NORIEGA was deposed in 1989. The entire Panama Canal, the area supporting the Canal, and remaining US military bases were transferred to Panama by the end of 1999. An ambitious expansion project to more than double the Canal's capacity - by allowing for more Canal transits and larger ships - was carried out between 2007 and 2016.

Geography :: PANAMA

Location:

Central America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Colombia and Costa Rica

Geographic coordinates:

9 00 N, 80 00 W

Map references:

Central America and the Caribbean

Area:

total: 75,420 sq km

land: 74,340 sq km

water: 1,080 sq km

country comparison to the world: 119

Area - comparative:

slightly smaller than South Carolina

Area comparison map:



Land boundaries:

total: 687 km

border countries (2): Colombia 339 km, Costa Rica 348 km

Coastline:

2,490 km

Maritime claims:

territorial sea: 12 nm

exclusive economic zone: 200 nm or edge of continental margin

contiguous zone: 24 nm

Climate:

tropical maritime; hot, humid, cloudy; prolonged rainy season (May to January), short dry season (January to May)

Terrain:

interior mostly steep, rugged mountains with dissected, upland plains; coastal plains with rolling hills

Elevation:

mean elevation: 360 m

lowest point: Pacific Ocean 0 m

highest point: Volcan Baru 3,475 m

Natural resources:

copper, mahogany forests, shrimp, hydropower

Land use:

agricultural land: 30.5% (2011 est.)

arable land: 7.3% (2011 est.) / permanent crops: 2.5% (2011 est.) / permanent pasture: 20.7% (2011 est.)

forest: 43.6% (2011 est.)

other: 25.9% (2011 est.)

Irrigated land:

321 sq km (2012)

Population distribution:

population is concentrated towards the center of the country, particularly around the Canal, but a sizeable segment of the populace also lives in the far west around David; the eastern third of the country is sparsely inhabited

Natural hazards:

occasional severe storms and forest fires in the Darien area

Environment - current issues:

water pollution from agricultural runoff threatens fishery resources; deforestation of tropical rain forest; land degradation and soil erosion threatens siltation of Panama Canal; air pollution in urban areas; mining threatens natural resources

Environment - international agreements:

party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Tropical Timber 83, Tropical Timber 94, Wetlands, Whaling

signed, but not ratified: Marine Life Conservation

Geography - note:

strategic location on eastern end of isthmus forming land bridge connecting North and South America; controls Panama Canal that links North Atlantic Ocean via Caribbean Sea with North Pacific Ocean

People and Society :: PANAMA

Population:

3,800,644 (July 2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 131

Nationality:

noun: Panamanian(s)

adjective: Panamanian

Ethnic groups:

mestizo (mixed Amerindian and white) 65%, Native American 12.3% (Ngabe 7.6%, Kuna 2.4%, Embera 0.9%, Bugle 0.8%, other 0.4%, unspecified 0.2%), black or African descent 9.2%, mulatto 6.8%, white 6.7% (2010 est.)

Languages:

Spanish (official), indigenous languages (including Ngabere (or Guaymi), Buglere, Kuna, Embera, Wounaan, Naso (or Teribe), and Bri Bri), Panamanian English Creole (similar to Jamaican English Creole; a mixture of English and Spanish with elements of Ngabere; also known as Guari Guari and Colon Creole), English, Chinese (Yue and Hakka), Arabic, French Creole, other (Yiddish, Hebrew, Korean, Japanese)

note: many Panamanians are bilingual

Religions:

Roman Catholic 85%, Protestant 15%

Demographic profile:

Panama is a country of demographic and economic contrasts. It is in the midst of a demographic transition, characterized by steadily declining rates of fertility, mortality, and population growth, but disparities persist based on wealth, geography, and ethnicity. Panama has one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America and dedicates substantial funding to social programs, yet poverty and inequality remain prevalent. The indigenous population accounts for a growing share of Panama's poor and extreme poor, while the non-indigenous rural poor have been more successful at rising out of poverty through rural-to-urban labor migration. The government's large expenditures on untargeted, indirect subsidies for water, electricity, and fuel have been ineffective, but its conditional cash transfer program has shown some promise in helping to decrease extreme poverty among the indigenous population.

Panama has expanded access to education and clean water, but the availability of sanitation and, to a lesser extent, electricity remains poor. The increase in secondary schooling - led by female enrollment - is spreading to rural and indigenous areas, which probably will help to alleviate poverty if educational quality and the availability of skilled jobs improve. Inadequate access to sanitation contributes to a high incidence of diarrhea in Panama's children, which is one of the main causes of Panama's elevated chronic malnutrition rate, especially among indigenous communities.

Age structure:

0-14 years: 26.13% (male 506,953 /female 486,129)

15-24 years: 16.84% (male 326,207 /female 313,894)

25-54 years: 40.35% (male 776,395 /female 757,008)

55-64 years: 8.11% (male 152,894 /female 155,353)

65 years and over: 8.57% (male 149,415 /female 176,396) (2018 est.)

population pyramid:**Dependency ratios:**

total dependency ratio: 54.8 (2015 est.)

youth dependency ratio: 43.1 (2015 est.)

elderly dependency ratio: 11.7 (2015 est.)

potential support ratio: 8.5 (2015 est.)

Median age:

total: 29.5 years

male: 29 years

female: 29.9 years (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 123

Population growth rate:

1.24% (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 89

Birth rate:

17.6 births/1,000 population (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 97

Death rate:

5 deaths/1,000 population (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 195

Net migration rate:

-0.2 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 111

Population distribution:

population is concentrated towards the center of the country, particularly around the Canal, but a sizeable segment of the populace also lives in the far west around David; the eastern third of the country is sparsely inhabited

Urbanization:

urban population: 67.7% of total population (2018)

rate of urbanization: 2.06% annual rate of change (2015-20 est.)

Major urban areas - population:

1.783 million PANAMA CITY (capital) (2018)

Sex ratio:

at birth: 1.04 male(s)/female

0-14 years: 1.04 male(s)/female

15-24 years: 1.04 male(s)/female

25-54 years: 1.03 male(s)/female

55-64 years: 0.98 male(s)/female

65 years and over: 0.85 male(s)/female

total population: 1.01 male(s)/female (2018 est.)

Maternal mortality rate:

94 deaths/100,000 live births (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 74

Infant mortality rate:

total: 9.6 deaths/1,000 live births

male: 10.3 deaths/1,000 live births

female: 8.9 deaths/1,000 live births (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 137

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 78.9 years

male: 76.1 years

female: 81.9 years (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 58

Total fertility rate:

2.28 children born/woman (2018 est.)

country comparison to the world: 89

Contraceptive prevalence rate:

62.8% (2013)

Health expenditures:

8% of GDP (2014)

country comparison to the world: 57

Physicians density:

1.57 physicians/1,000 population (2016)

Hospital bed density:

2.3 beds/1,000 population (2013)

Drinking water source:

improved:

urban: 97.7% of population

rural: 86.6% of population

total: 94.7% of population

unimproved:

urban: 2.3% of population

rural: 11.4% of population

total: 5.3% of population (2015 est.)

Sanitation facility access:

improved:

urban: 83.5% of population (2015 est.)

rural: 58% of population (2015 est.)

total: 75% of population (2015 est.)

unimproved:

urban: 16.5% of population (2015 est.)

rural: 42% of population (2015 est.)

total: 25% of population (2015 est.)

HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate:

1% (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 45

HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS:

25,000 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 77

HIV/AIDS - deaths:

<1000 (2017 est.)

Major infectious diseases:

degree of risk: intermediate (2016)

food or waterborne diseases: bacterial diarrhea (2016)

vectorborne diseases: dengue fever (2016)

note: active local transmission of Zika virus by Aedes species mosquitoes has been identified in this country (as of August 2016); it poses an important risk (a large number of cases possible) among US citizens if bitten by an infective mosquito; other less common ways to get Zika are through sex, via blood transfusion, or during pregnancy, in which the pregnant woman passes Zika virus to her fetus

Obesity - adult prevalence rate:

22.7% (2016)

country comparison to the world: 73

Children under the age of 5 years underweight:

Education expenditures:

3.2% of GDP (2011)

country comparison to the world: 133

Literacy:

definition: age 15 and over can read and write (2015 est.)

total population: 95%

male: 95.7%

female: 94.4% (2015 est.)

School life expectancy (primary to tertiary education):

total: 13 years

male: 12 years

female: 13 years (2015)

Unemployment, youth ages 15-24:

total: 10.8%

male: 8.3%

female: 14.9% (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 121

Government :: PANAMA

Country name:

conventional long form: Republic of Panama

conventional short form: Panama

local long form: Republica de Panama

local short form: Panama

etymology: according to tradition, the name derives from a former indigenous fishing village and its nearby beach that were called "Panama" meaning "an abundance of fish"

Government type:

presidential republic

Capital:

name: Panama City

geographic coordinates: 8 58 N, 79 32 W

time difference: UTC-5 (same time as Washington, DC, during Standard Time)

Administrative divisions:

10 provinces (provincias, singular - provincia) and 3 indigenous regions* (comarcas); Bocas del Toro, Chiriqui, Cocle, Colon, Darien, Embera-Wounaan*, Herrera, Guna Yala*, Los Santos, Ngobe-Bugle*, Panama, Panama Oeste, Veraguas

Independence:

3 November 1903 (from Colombia; became independent from Spain on 28 November 1821)

National holiday:

Independence Day (Separation Day), 3 November (1903)

Constitution:

history: several previous; latest effective 11 October 1972

amendments: proposed by the National Assembly, by the Cabinet, or by the Supreme Court of Justice; passage requires approval by one of two procedures: 1) absolute majority vote of the Assembly membership in each of three readings and by absolute majority vote of the next elected Assembly in a single reading without text modifications; 2) absolute majority vote of the Assembly membership in each of three readings, followed by absolute majority vote of the next elected Assembly in each of three readings with text modifications, and approval in a referendum; amended several times, last in 2004; note - in May 2018, President VARELA began the process to amend the constitution (2018)

Legal system:

civil law system; judicial review of legislative acts in the Supreme Court of Justice

International law organization participation:

accepts compulsory ICJ jurisdiction with reservations; accepts ICCt jurisdiction

Citizenship:

citizenship by birth: yes

citizenship by descent only: yes

dual citizenship recognized: no

residency requirement for naturalization: 5 years

Suffrage:

18 years of age; universal

Executive branch:

chief of state: President Juan Carlos VARELA (since 1 July 2014); Vice President Isabel de SAINT MALO de Alvarado (since 1 July 2014); note - the president is both chief of state and head of government

head of government: President Juan Carlos VARELA (since 1 July 2014); Vice President Isabel de SAINT MALO de Alvarado (since 1 July 2014)

cabinet: Cabinet appointed by the president

elections/appointments: president and vice president directly elected on the same ballot by simple majority popular vote for a 5-year term; president eligible for a single non-consecutive term); election last held on 5 May 2019 (next to be

held in 2024)

election results: Nito CORTIZO elected president; percent of vote - Nito CORTIZO (PRD) 33.3%, Romulo ROUX (CD) 31%, Ricardo LOMBANA (independent) 18.8%, Jose BLANDON (Panamenista Party) 10.8%, Ana Matilde GOMEZ Ruiloba (independent) 4.8%, other 1.3%; note - Nito CORTIZO will take office 1 July 2019

Legislative branch:

description: unicameral National Assembly or Asamblea Nacional (71 seats; 45 members directly elected in multi-seat constituencies - populous towns and cities - by proportional representation vote and 26 directly elected in single-seat constituencies - outlying rural districts - by plurality vote; members serve 5-year terms)

elections: last held on 4 May 2014 (next to be held in May 2019)

election results: percent of vote by party - CD 33.7%, PRD 31.5%, Panamenista Party 20%, MOLIRENA 7.2%, PP 3.3%, other 1%, independent 3%; seats by party - PRD 30, CD 25, Panamenista 12, MOLIRENA 2, PP 1, independent 1; composition - men 58, women 13, percent of women 18.3%

note: an alliance between the Panamenista Party and Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) fractured after the 2014 election, but a loose coalition composed of Panamenista and moderate PRD and CD legislators generally work together to support the president's agenda

Judicial branch:

highest courts: Supreme Court of Justice or Corte Suprema de Justicia (consists of 9 magistrates and 9 alternates and divided into civil, criminal, administrative, and general business chambers)

judge selection and term of office: magistrates appointed by the president for staggered 10-year terms

subordinate courts: appellate courts or Tribunal Superior; Labor Supreme Courts; Court of Audit; circuit courts or Tribunal Circuital (2 each in 9 of the 10 provinces); municipal courts; electoral, family, maritime, and adolescent courts

Political parties and leaders:

Democratic Change or CD [Romulo ROUX]

Democratic Revolutionary Party or PRD [Benicio ROBINSON]

Nationalist Republican Liberal Movement or MOLIRENA [Francisco "Pancho" ALEMAN]

Panamenista Party [Jose Luis "Popi" VARELA Rodriguez] (formerly the Arnulfista Party)

Popular Party or PP [Juan Carlos ARANGO Reese] (formerly Christian Democratic Party or PDC)

International organization participation:

BCIE, CAN (observer), CD, CELAC, FAO, G-77, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICC (national committees), ICCt, ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, ILO, IMF, IMO, IMSO, Interpol, IOC, IOM, IPU, ISO, ITSO, ITU, ITUC (NGOs), LAES, LAIA, MIGA, NAM, OAS, OPANAL, OPCW, Pacific Alliance (observer), PCA, SICA, UN, UNASUR (observer), UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, Union Latina, UNWTO, UPU, WCO, WFTU (NGOs), WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO

Diplomatic representation in the US:

chief of mission: Ambassador Emanuel Arturo GONZALEZ-REVILLA Lince (since 18 September 2014)

chancery: 2862 McGill Terrace NW, Washington, DC 20007

telephone: [1] (202) 483-1407

FAX: [1] (202) 483-8413

consulate(s) general: Houston, Miami, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Tampa, Washington DC

Diplomatic representation from the US:

chief of mission: Ambassador (vacant), Charge d'Affairs Roxanne CABRAL (since 9 March 2018)

embassy: Edificio 783, Avenida Demetrio Basilio Lakas Avenue, Clayton, Panama

mailing address: American Embassy Panama, Unit 0945, APO AA 34002; American Embassy Panama, 9100 Panama City PL, Washington, DC 20521-9100

telephone: [507] 317-5000

FAX: [507] 317-5445 (2018)

Flag description:

divided into four, equal rectangles; the top quadrants are white (hoist side) with a blue five-pointed star in the center and plain red; the bottom quadrants are plain blue (hoist side) and white with a red five-pointed star in the center; the blue and red colors are those of the main political parties (Conservatives and Liberals respectively) and the white denotes peace between them; the blue star stands for the civic virtues of purity and honesty, the red star signifies authority and law

National symbol(s):

harpy eagle; national colors: blue, white, red

National anthem:

name: "Himno Istmeno" (Isthmus Hymn)

lyrics/music: Jeronimo DE LA OSSA/Santos A. JORGE

note: adopted 1925

0:00 / 1:49

Economy :: PANAMA**Economy - overview:**

Panama's dollar-based economy rests primarily on a well-developed services sector that accounts for more than three-quarters of GDP. Services include operating the Panama Canal, logistics, banking, the Colon Free Trade Zone, insurance, container ports, flagship registry, and tourism and Panama is a center for offshore banking. Panama's transportation and logistics services sectors, along with infrastructure development projects, have boosted economic growth; however, public debt surpassed \$37 billion in 2016 because of excessive government spending and public works projects. The US-Panama Trade Promotion Agreement was approved by Congress and signed into law in October 2011, and entered into force in October 2012.

Future growth will be bolstered by the Panama Canal expansion project that began in 2007 and was completed in 2016 at a cost of \$5.3 billion - about 10-15% of current GDP. The expansion project more than doubled the Canal's capacity, enabling it to accommodate high-capacity vessels such as tankers and neopanamax vessels that are too large to traverse the existing canal. The US and China are the top users of the Canal.

Strong economic performance has not translated into broadly shared prosperity, as Panama has the second worst income distribution in Latin America. About one-fourth of the population lives in poverty; however, from 2006 to 2012 poverty was reduced by 10 percentage points.

GDP (purchasing power parity):

\$104.1 billion (2017 est.)

\$98.82 billion (2016 est.)

\$94.12 billion (2015 est.)

note: data are in 2017 dollars

country comparison to the world: 83

GDP (official exchange rate):

\$61.84 billion (2017 est.)

GDP - real growth rate:

5.4% (2017 est.)

5% (2016 est.)

5.8% (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 42

GDP - per capita (PPP):

\$25,400 (2017 est.)

\$24,500 (2016 est.)

\$23,700 (2015 est.)

note: data are in 2017 dollars

country comparison to the world: 80

Gross national saving:

38.9% of GDP (2017 est.)

39.2% of GDP (2016 est.)

36.8% of GDP (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 10

GDP - composition, by end use:

household consumption: 45.6% (2017 est.)

government consumption: 10.7% (2017 est.)

investment in fixed capital: 42.9% (2017 est.)

investment in inventories: 3% (2017 est.)

exports of goods and services: 41.9% (2017 est.)

imports of goods and services: -44.2% (2017 est.)

GDP - composition, by sector of origin:

agriculture: 2.4% (2017 est.)

industry: 15.7% (2017 est.)

services: 82% (2017 est.)

Agriculture - products:

bananas, rice, corn, coffee, sugarcane, vegetables; livestock; shrimp

Industries:

construction, brewing, cement and other construction materials, sugar milling

Industrial production growth rate:

6.3% (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 38

Labor force:

1.633 million (2017 est.)

note: shortage of skilled labor, but an oversupply of unskilled labor

country comparison to the world: 129

Labor force - by occupation:

agriculture: 17%

industry: 18.6%

services: 64.4% (2009 est.)

Unemployment rate:

6% (2017 est.)

5.5% (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 91

Population below poverty line:

23% (2015 est.)

Household income or consumption by percentage share:

lowest 10%: 1.1%

highest 10%: 38.9% (2014 est.)

Distribution of family income - Gini index:

50.7 (2014 est.)

56.1 (2003)

country comparison to the world: 14

Budget:

revenues: 12.43 billion (2017 est.)

expenditures: 13.44 billion (2017 est.)

Taxes and other revenues:

20.1% (of GDP) (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 152

Budget surplus (+) or deficit (-):

-1.6% (of GDP) (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 94

Public debt:

37.8% of GDP (2017 est.)

37.4% of GDP (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 138

Fiscal year:

calendar year

Inflation rate (consumer prices):

0.9% (2017 est.)

0.7% (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 47

Commercial bank prime lending rate:

7.52% (31 December 2017 est.)

7.53% (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 112

Stock of narrow money:

\$8.347 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$8.249 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 87

Stock of broad money:

\$8.347 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$8.249 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 89

Stock of domestic credit:

\$51.05 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$46.41 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 66

Market value of publicly traded shares:

\$12.54 billion (31 December 2012 est.)

\$10.68 billion (31 December 2011 est.)

\$8.348 billion (31 December 2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 71

Current account balance:

-\$3.036 billion (2017 est.)

-\$3.16 billion (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 176

Exports:

\$15.5 billion (2017 est.)

\$14.7 billion (2016 est.)

note: includes the Colon Free Zone

country comparison to the world: 75

Exports - partners:

US 18.9%, Netherlands 16.6%, China 6.5%, Costa Rica 5.4%, India 5.1%, Vietnam 5% (2017)

Exports - commodities:

fruit and nuts, fish, iron and steel waste, wood

Imports:

\$21.91 billion (2017 est.)

\$20.51 billion (2016 est.)

note: includes the Colon Free Zone

country comparison to the world: 73

Imports - commodities:

fuels, machinery, vehicles, iron and steel rods, pharmaceuticals

Imports - partners:

US 24.4%, China 9.8%, Mexico 4.9% (2017)

Reserves of foreign exchange and gold:

\$2.703 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$3.878 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 114

Debt - external:

\$91.53 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$83.81 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 52

Stock of direct foreign investment - at home:

\$56.7 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$50.62 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 57

Stock of direct foreign investment - abroad:

\$11.38 billion (31 December 2017 est.)

\$10.71 billion (31 December 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 62

Exchange rates:

balboas (PAB) per US dollar -

1 (2017 est.)

1 (2016 est.)

1 (2015 est.)

1 (2014 est.)

1 (2013 est.)

Energy :: PANAMA**Electricity access:**

population without electricity: 300,000 (2013)

electrification - total population: 91% (2013)

electrification - urban areas: 94% (2013)

electrification - rural areas: 80% (2013)

Electricity - production:

10.6 billion kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 101

Electricity - consumption:

8.708 billion kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 103

Electricity - exports:

139 million kWh (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 80

Electricity - imports:

30 million kWh (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 110

Electricity - installed generating capacity:

3.4 million kW (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 97

Electricity - from fossil fuels:

36% of total installed capacity (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 175

Electricity - from nuclear fuels:

0% of total installed capacity (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 161

Electricity - from hydroelectric plants:

51% of total installed capacity (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 36

Electricity - from other renewable sources:

13% of total installed capacity (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 69

Crude oil - production:

0 bbl/day (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 184

Crude oil - exports:

0 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 178

Crude oil - imports:

0 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 180

Crude oil - proved reserves:

0 bbl (1 January 2018)

country comparison to the world: 180

Refined petroleum products - production:

0 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 188

Refined petroleum products - consumption:

146,000 bbl/day (2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 67

Refined petroleum products - exports:

66 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 121

Refined petroleum products - imports:

129,200 bbl/day (2015 est.)

country comparison to the world: 45

Natural gas - production:

0 cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 182

Natural gas - consumption:

0 cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 186

Natural gas - exports:

0 cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 166

Natural gas - imports:

0 cu m (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 171

Natural gas - proved reserves:

0 cu m (1 January 2014 est.)

country comparison to the world: 180

Carbon dioxide emissions from consumption of energy:

26.08 million Mt (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 79

Communications :: PANAMA

Telephones - fixed lines:

total subscriptions: 603,638 (2017 est.)

subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 16 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 91

Telephones - mobile cellular:

total subscriptions: 5,977,641 (2017 est.)

subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 159 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 114

Telephone system:

general assessment: domestic and international facilities well-developed; investmentn from international operators; competition among operators helps reduce price of services; launches LTE services;

domestic: fixed-line 16 per 100 and mobile-cellular telephone 159 per 100 and subscribership has increased rapidly

international: country code - 507; landing point for the Americas Region Caribbean Ring System (ARCOS-1), the MAYA-1, and PAN-AM submarine cable systems that together provide links to the US and parts of the Caribbean, Central America, and South America; satellite earth stations - 2 Intelsat (Atlantic Ocean); connected to the Central American Microwave System; extention of Deep Blue cable pan-Caribbean regional to Panama

Broadcast media:

multiple privately owned TV networks and a government-owned educational TV station; multi-channel cable and satellite TV subscription services are available; more than 100 commercial radio stations

Internet country code:

.pa

Internet users:

total: 2,000,833 (July 2016 est.)

percent of population: 54% (July 2016 est.)

country comparison to the world: 112

Broadband - fixed subscriptions:

total: 446,076 (2017 est.)

subscriptions per 100 inhabitants: 12 (2017 est.)

country comparison to the world: 83

Transportation :: **PANAMA**

National air transport system:

number of registered air carriers: 4 (2015)

inventory of registered aircraft operated by air carriers: 103 (2015)

annual passenger traffic on registered air carriers: 12,018,103 (2015)

annual freight traffic on registered air carriers: 121,567,075 mt-km (2015)

Civil aircraft registration country code prefix:

HP (2016)

Airports:

117 (2013)

country comparison to the world: 50

Airports - with paved runways:

total: 57 (2017)

over 3,047 m: 1 (2017)

2,438 to 3,047 m: 3 (2017)

1,524 to 2,437 m: 3 (2017)

914 to 1,523 m: 20 (2017)

under 914 m: 30 (2017)

Airports - with unpaved runways:

total: 60 (2013)

1,524 to 2,437 m: 1 (2013)

914 to 1,523 m: 8 (2013)

under 914 m: 51 (2013)

Heliports:

3 (2013)

Pipelines:

128 km oil (2013)

Railways:

total: 77 km (2014)

standard gauge: 77 km 1.435-m gauge (2014)

country comparison to the world: 128

Roadways:

Waterways:

800 km (includes the 82-km Panama Canal that is being widened) (2011)

country comparison to the world: 71

Merchant marine:

total: 7,914

by type: bulk carrier 2585, container ship 590, general cargo 1327, oil tanker 808, other 2604 (2018)

country comparison to the world: 2

Ports and terminals:

major seaport(s): Balboa, Colon, Cristobal

container port(s) (TEUs): Balboa (2,905,049), Colon (3,891,209) (2017)

Military and Security :: PANAMA

Military branches:

no regular military forces; Panamanian Public Security Forces (subordinate to the Ministry of Public Security), comprising the National Police (PNP), National Air-Naval Service (SENAN), National Border Service (SENAFRONT) (2013)

Military - note:

on 10 February 1990, the government of then President Guillermo ENDARA abolished Panama's military and reformed the security apparatus by creating the Panamanian Public Forces; in October 1994, Panama's National Assembly approved a constitutional amendment prohibiting the creation of a standing military force but allowing the temporary establishment of special police units to counter acts of "external aggression"

Transnational Issues :: PANAMA

Disputes - international:

organized illegal narcotics operations in Colombia operate within the remote border region with Panama

Refugees and internally displaced persons:

refugees (country of origin): 15,614 (Colombia) (2016), 71,364 (Venezuela) (economic and political crisis; includes Venezuelans who have claimed asylum or have received alternative legal stay) (2018)

Illicit drugs:

major cocaine transshipment point and primary money-laundering center for narcotics revenue; money-laundering activity is especially heavy in the Colon Free Zone; offshore financial center; negligible signs of coca cultivation; monitoring of financial transactions is improving; official corruption remains a major problem

Costa Rica country profile



Bordered by Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south, the tiny republic of Costa Rica has coastlines on the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea.

One of the most prosperous and politically stable countries in the region, Costa Rica is the only Central American state without a permanent standing army, after it was abolished in 1948.

It also enjoys one of the highest standards of living in the region, although a significant percentage of Costa Ricans - or Ticos - continue to live below the poverty line.

Known for its beaches, mountain ranges, volcanoes and varied wildlife, Costa Rica's rich biodiversity makes it a popular destination for eco-tourists. Traditionally a producer of agricultural goods such as coffee and bananas, its economy has diversified and tourism now ranks as the country's number one earner.

- Read more **country profiles** - Profiles by **BBC Monitoring**

FACTS

Republic of Costa Rica

Capital: San Jose

- **Population** 4.8 million
- **Area** 51,100 sq km (19,730 sq miles)
- **Major languages** Spanish (official), English
- **Major religion** Christianity
- **Life expectancy** 77 years (men), 82 years (women)
- **Currency** Costa Rican colon
UN, World Bank

Getty Images

LEADER

President: Carlos Alvarado



The centre-left candidate Carlos Alvarado won the March 2018 presidential election by a surprisingly wide margin over his evangelical pastor rival, Fabricio Alvarado.

Carlos Alvarado, who served as minister of labour and social security minister in the outgoing administration of President Guillermo Solís, called on other parties to join him in a government of national unity.

MEDIA



Costa Rica has a lively press and broadcasting scene. It also has the best record of respecting freedom of expression in Latin America, says Reporters Without Borders.

There were more than 4 million internet users, comprising around 86% of the population, by 2017.

- [Read full media profile](#)

TIMELINE

Key dates in Costa Rica's history:



Costa Rica has several active volcanoes

1502 - Christopher Columbus sights Costa Rica. Spanish colonization begins in 1522. By 1563, Spain has established the colonial capital of Cartago.

1821 - Costa Rica declares independence from Spain and joins the Mexican empire.

1823 - Costa Rica becomes a province of the Central American Federation along with El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

1838 - Costa Rica becomes a fully independent country after the disintegration of the United Provinces of Central America.

1849-59 - Juan Rafael Mora leads the fight against William Walker, an American who with an army of mercenaries, tries but fails to take control of the region.

1948 - Former president Rafael Angel Calderon loses the election by a slim margin and refuses to accept newly-elected president Otilio Ulate. A bloody 44-day civil war ensues and a temporary government led by socialist landowner Jose Figueres emerges.

1948-49 - A new constitution is adopted, which includes the dissolution of Costa Rica's armed forces.

1955 - Border skirmishes with Nicaragua are resolved through mediation by the Organization of American States (OAS).

1987 - President Oscar Arias Sanchez wins the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in ending civil wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua. He wins a second term in 2006.

2010 - Laura Chinchilla becomes Costa Rica's first female president.

- **Read full timeline**



Eco-tourism is important for Costa Rica's economy

Jamaica country profile



Known for its strong sense of self identity expressed through its music, food and rich cultural mix, Jamaica's influence extends far beyond its shores.

With luminaries such as the black nationalist Marcus Garvey and musician Bob Marley, Jamaicans are proud of their cultural and religious heritage.

Jamaicans have migrated in significant numbers to the United States, Canada and Britain and their music stars are known around the globe.

The island is the birthplace of Rastafarianism, a religious movement which has been adopted by groups around the world who venerate the former Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie. Once regarded as a revolutionary threat, Rastafarianism became a cultural force, reflected in art and music.

Since independence from Britain in 1962, power in Jamaica has alternated between the social-democratic People's National Party and the conservative Jamaica Labour Party.

Political stability, however, has not turned into social and economic harmony.

- Read **more country profiles** - Profiles by **BBC Monitoring**

FACTS

Jamaica

Capital: Kingston

- **Population** 2.9 million
- **Area** 10,991 sq km (4,243 sq miles)
- **Major languages** English (official), English patois

- **Major religion** Christianity
- **Life expectancy** 73 years (men), 78 years (women)
- **Currency** Jamaican dollar
UN, World Bank

Getty Images

LEADERS

Head of state: Queen Elizabeth II
Prime minister: Andrew Holness



Andrew Holness, a former education minister and leader of the Jamaican Labour Party, became prime minister in March 2016.

He governs with a slim one-seat majority after his then-opposition party beat the party of Portia Simpson Miller, Jamaica's first female head of government, in elections.

Among the challenges the government faces is a high rate of youth unemployment and dealing with the country's heavy debt.

MEDIA



Jamaica has a free press. Broadcast media are mainly commercial and carry diverse comment.

The country ranks highly in the World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders.

- [Read full media profile](#)

TIMELINE

Some key dates in Jamaica's history:



Jamaica became a leading sugar exporter with the help of slave labour, abolished in the 1830s

1494 - Christopher Columbus sights Jamaica.

1509 - Jamaica occupied by the Spaniards. Much of the indigenous Arawak community dies off from exposure to European diseases; African slaves brought in to work on the sugar plantations.

1655 - Jamaica is captured by the British.

1865 - The British ruthlessly put down the Morant Bay rebellion, staged by freed slaves in response to acute hardship, and force the local legislature to surrender its powers; Jamaica becomes a crown colony.

1962 - Jamaica becomes independent within the British Commonwealth

2010 - Dozens are killed in operation to arrest drug lord Christopher "Dudus" Coke. He is extradited to the US, sentenced and jailed.

2012 - Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller says that 50 years after Jamaica gained its independence from Britain, it is time for the country to break with the British monarchy and become a republic.

Mexico country profile



Mexico is a nation where affluence, poverty, natural splendour and urban blight rub shoulders.

It has the second-largest economy in Latin America, and is a major oil exporter.

But prosperity remains a dream for many Mexicans, and the socio-economic gap remains wide. Rural areas are often neglected, and huge shanty towns ring the cities.

Many poor Mexicans have sought to cross the 3,000-km border with the US in search of a job, but in recent years more Mexicans immigrants have returned to Mexico than migrated to the US.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed in drugs-related gang violence in the past decade. Powerful cartels control the trafficking of drugs from South America to the US. Security forces ordered to crack down on them have been accused of abusing their power and acting with impunity.

- Read more **country profiles** - Profiles by **BBC Monitoring**

FACTS

United Mexican States

Capital: Mexico City

- **Population** 116 million
- **Area** 1.96 million sq km (758,449 sq miles)
- **Major language** Spanish
- **Major religion** Christianity
- **Life expectancy** 75 years (men), 80 years (women)
- **Currency** peso

UN, World Bank

Getty Images

LEADERS

President Andres Manuel López Obrador



The left-winger Andres Manuel López Obrador won an overwhelming victory in the July 2018 presidential election.

He says his priorities are to tackle corruption and reverse decades of free-market economic policy - which he blames for social inequality, endemic violence, and the desire of so many young people to leave the country in search of a better life.

Mr López Obrador, popularly known by his initials Amlo, is a former mayor of Mexico City, and stood for the presidency on two earlier occasions - losing to Enrique Peña Nieto of the centre-left Institutional Revolutionary Party in 2012.

He has pledged to set an example of personal probity by serving only one term, surrendering part of his salary, selling off his official plane, and not living in the presidential palace, while also proposing a law to allow the recall of any elected official by referendum.

MEDIA



Reporters Without Borders describes Mexico as "one of the hemisphere's most dangerous countries" for the media.

Drug cartels and corrupt officials are implicated in most of the crimes of violence against journalists, which almost always go unpunished.

Two big players, Televisa and TV Azteca, dominate the TV sector.

Mexico is one of Latin America's biggest internet markets.

- [Read full media profile](#)

TIMELINE

Some key dates in Mexico's history:



Mexico went through major changes as a result of the revolution led by Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata

1519 - Spanish army led by Hernan Cortes lands at Veracruz, marking the start of Spain's conquest of Mexico.

1521-1820 - Mexico forms part of the Viceroyalty of New Spain.

1810-21 - War of Independence ends with the creation of the short-lived Mexican Empire, which includes Central America to the southern border of modern-day Costa Rica, as well as what is now the south-western US.

1824 - Mexico becomes a federal republic. Central American provinces secede.

1846-8 - Mexican-American War ends with Mexico being forced to sell its northern provinces (including modern-day California, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah) to the US.

1910-1920 - Mexican Revolution leads to establishment of a constitutional republic.

1929 - Formation of the National Revolutionary Party, which later becomes the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, which dominates politics until 2000.

1968 - Student demonstration in Mexico City during the Olympic Games is fired upon by Mexican security forces. Hundreds of protesters are killed or wounded.

1976 - Huge offshore oil reserves discovered.

1994 - Zapatista rebels, led by the charismatic Subcommander Marcos, rise up demanding improved rights for some 10 million Indians in Mexico, four million of whom live in Chiapas.

2000 - Vicente Fox breaks ruling PRI party's seven-decade dominance by winning presidential election.

2006 - President Felipe Calderon launches crackdown on drug gangs, with violence escalating into a national security crisis.

2018 - Left-wing former mayor of Mexico City, Andres Manuel López Obrador, wins an overwhelming victory in presidential elections.

Panama country profile



Lying at the crossroads of the North and South American continents and the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, Panama is of immense strategic importance.

This has made Panama the frequent object of US attention. The United States supported its secession from Colombia in 1903, and secured a sovereign zone in which to build the Panama Canal - which remained under US control from 1914 until 1999.

The US invaded Panama in 1989 to depose a former ally, military ruler Manuel Noriega, over his repressive rule and use of the country as a centre for drug trafficking.

Panama has the largest rainforest in the Western Hemisphere outside the Amazon Basin.

However, it is for a feat of engineering, the canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, that Panama is famous. Every year more than 15,000 vessels make the eight-hour journey through the waterway, which makes a substantial contribution to the country's economy.

- Read **more country profiles** - Profiles by **BBC Monitoring**

FACTS

Republic of Panama

Capital: Panama City

- **Population** 3.6 million
- **Area** 75,517 sq km (29,157 sq miles)
- **Major languages** Spanish, English
- **Major religion** Christianity
- **Life expectancy** 74 years (men), 79 years (women)

- **Currency** balboa
UN, World Bank

Getty Images

LEADERS

President: Juan Carlos Varela



Juan Carlos Varela came from behind to win the presidential election in May 2014.

Panama's vice-president and a former ally of outgoing president Ricardo Martinelli, Mr Varela won a clear majority and easily defeated the president's hand-picked successor, Jose Domingo Arias.

Mr Varela leads the conservative Panamenista Party and helped Mr Martinelli get elected in 2009. But the two had a bitter falling out in 2011, when Mr Varela was fired from his job as foreign minister. He subsequently became one of Mr Martinelli's fiercest critics, accusing his government of corruption.

Mr Varela, aged 50 at the time of his election, is the scion of one of Panama's richest families and studied engineering in the United States.

MEDIA



Press freedom is protected by the constitution and journalists work in relatively safe conditions.

Most media outlets are privately owned. There are no restrictions on internet access.

- **Read full media profile**

TIMELINE

Some key dates in the history of Panama:



The US invaded and removed strongman Manuel Noriega before jailing him for drug trafficking

1502 - Spanish explorer Rodrigo de Bastidas visits Panama, which was home to Cuna, Choco, Guaymi and other indigenous peoples.

1519 - Panama becomes Spanish Vice-royalty of New Andalusia (later New Granada).

1821 - Panama becomes independent of Spain, but joins the confederacy of Gran Colombia, which also comprises Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.

1830 - Panama becomes part of Colombia following the collapse of Gran Colombia.

1880s - France attempts to build a canal linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, but fails due to financial difficulties and the death of more than 20,000 workers from tropical diseases.

1903 - Panama splits from Colombia and becomes fully independent. US buys rights to build Panama Canal and is given control of the Canal Zone in perpetuity. The canal is completed in 1914.

1968-1989 - Period of military rule.

1989 - US invades and ousts Gen Manuel Noriega who became de facto ruler of Panama as head of defence forces in 1983.

1991 - Parliament approves constitutional reforms, including abolition of standing army.

1999 - Panama takes full control of the Panama Canal, ending nearly a century of American jurisdiction over one of the world's most strategic waterways.

2016 - "Panama Papers" lift lid on how the rich and powerful use tax havens to hide their wealth, and reveal Panama itself as one of most popular tax havens.

- **Read full timeline**



Global artery: The Panama Canal allows trade to pass easily between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans



Costa Rica profile - Timeline

A chronology of key events:

1502 - Christopher Columbus visits the area, naming it Costa Rica, (Rich Coast), but disease and resistance by the local population delay the establishment of a permanent settlement for nearly 60 years.

1540 onwards - Costa Rica is part of the vice-royalty of New Spain.

1561 - Spain's Juan de Cavallon leads the first successful colonisers into Costa Rica.

1808 - Coffee is introduced into Costa Rica from Cuba and becomes the principal crop.

1821 - Central America gains independence from Spain. A dispute ensues over whether Costa Rica should join an independent Mexico or a confederation of Central American states.

1823 - Costa Rica joins the United Provinces of Central America, which also embraces El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

1824-25 - Province of Guanacaste secedes from Nicaragua and becomes part of Costa Rica.

Independence

1838 - Costa Rica becomes fully independent.

1849-59 - Under the leadership of Juan Rafael Mora, Costa Rica takes the lead in organising Central American resistance against William Walker, the US adventurer who took over Nicaragua in 1855.

1859 - Mora ousted in a bloodless coup.

1870-82 - Under the leadership of Tomas Guardia Costa Rica encourages intensive foreign investment in railways.

1874 - US businessman Minor Cooper Keith introduces banana cultivation and starts the United Fruit Company.

1917 - Frederico Tinoco ousts the elected president, Alfredo Gonzalez, but is himself deposed two years later.

Socialism and civil war

1940-44 - President Rafael Angel Calderon Guradia, founder of the United Christian Socialist Party (PUSC), introduces liberal reforms, including recognition of workers' rights and minimum wages.

1948 - Six-week civil war over a disputed presidential election result.

1949 - New constitution gives women and people of African descent the right to vote; armed forces abolished and replaced by civil guard; Jose Figueres Ferrer, co-founder of National Liberation Party (PLN), elected president and begins ambitious socialist programme, including introducing a social security system and nationalising banks.

1958-73 - Costa Rica governed by mainly conservative administrations.

1963-64 - Irazu volcano erupts, causing serious damage to agriculture.

1968 - Arenal volcano erupts, causing many casualties.

1974 - Daniel Oduber (PLN) elected president and pursues socialist policies.

Conservatism and economic deterioration

1978 - Rodrigo Carazo, a conservative, elected president amid a sharp deterioration in the economy.

1982 - Luis Alberto Monge (PLN) elected president and introduces harsh austerity programme. Meanwhile, Costa Rica comes under pressure from the US to weigh in against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

1985 - US-trained anti-guerrilla force begins operating following clashes with Sandinista troops.

1986 - Oscar Arias Sanchez (PLN) elected president on a neutral platform.

1987 - Leaders of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras sign peace plan devised by Oscar Arias Sanchez, who in turn wins the Nobel Peace Prize for the plan.

1990 - Rafael Calderon, of the centrist PUSC, elected president.

1994 - Jose Maria Figueres Olsen (PLN) elected president.

1998 - Miguel Angel Rodriguez (PUSC) elected president.

2000 - President Rodriguez and his Nicaraguan counterpart resolve long-standing dispute over navigation along San Juan river, which serves as their border.

2002 April - Abel Pacheco of the ruling Social Christian Unity Party wins a comfortable 58% of the vote in the second round of presidential elections.

2003 May - Energy and telecommunications workers strike over President Pacheco's privatisation plans; teachers strike over problems in paying their salaries. Strikes prompt three ministers to resign.

2004 July - Three Chilean diplomats are killed by a security guard at their embassy in San Jose.

Corruption

2004 October - Mounting concern over corruption as three former presidents - Jose Maria Figueres, Miguel Angel Rodriguez and Rafael Angel Calderon - are investigated over contractor payments.

2005 January - National emergency declared as days of heavy rain lead to serious flooding along the Caribbean coast.

2006 February-March - Presidential election ends in a neck-and-neck race between Oscar Arias and Otton Solis. Mr Solis concedes defeat after a manual count and legal challenges.

2006 October - Two-day public workers strike is held in protest at proposed free trade deal with the US.

2007 May - Government says Costa Rica on course to become first voluntarily "carbon neutral" country.

2007 June - Costa Rica switches diplomatic allegiance from Taiwan to China in a bid to attract Chinese investment.

2007 October - National referendum narrowly decides in favour of ratifying the Central American Free Trade Agreement (Cafta).

2008 November - Chinese President Hu Jintao makes highest-level visit by a Chinese official since Costa Rica ended diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 2007.

2009 March - President Arias says Costa Rica to re-establish ties with Cuba, 48 years after they broken off in 1961.

2009 October - Former president Rafael Angel Calderon is sentenced to five years in jail after being convicted of corruption.

First woman president

2010 February - Costa Rica elects first woman president, Laura Chinchilla, who takes office in May.

2011 March - UN International Court of Justice orders Nicaragua and Costa Rica to keep troops back from a disputed river border.

2012 September - A powerful earthquake kills two people in the Nicoya peninsula west of San Jose, coinciding with the eruption of the San Cristobal volcano in neighbouring Nicaragua.

2013 May - Costa Rica-based Liberty Reserve, considered to be the world's biggest online currency exchange, is shut down after its founder is arrested on suspicion of money-laundering.

2014 April - Luis Guillermo Solis wins presidential election.

2014 August - The government says it will investigate undercover US programmes to destabilise Cuba allegedly operated from Costa Rica and using its citizens.

2015 March - The last of nearly 8,000 Cuban migrants stranded for nearly four months in Costa Rica, after Nicaragua refused them passage through its territory to reach the United States, leave for El Salvador as part of a pilot programme agreed by Central American countries to allow them safe passage to the US.

2015 December - Costa Rica wins a long-standing territorial row with Nicaragua after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) rules it has sovereignty over a small patch of wetlands known as Isla Portillo on the San Juan river.

2018 May - Carlos Alvarado becomes president after winning election.

Jamaica country profile



Known for its strong sense of self identity expressed through its music, food and rich cultural mix, Jamaica's influence extends far beyond its shores.

With luminaries such as the black nationalist Marcus Garvey and musician Bob Marley, Jamaicans are proud of their cultural and religious heritage.

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FACTS

Jamaica

Capital: Kingston

- **Population** 2.9 million
- **Area** 10,991 sq km (4,243 sq miles)
- **Major languages** English (official), English patois

- **Major religion** Christianity
- **Life expectancy** 73 years (men), 78 years (women)
- **Currency** Jamaican dollar
UN, World Bank

Getty Images

LEADERS

Head of state: Queen Elizabeth II
Prime minister: Andrew Holness



Andrew Holness, a former education minister and leader of the Jamaican Labour Party, became prime minister in March 2016.

He governs with a slim one-seat majority after his then-opposition party beat the party of Portia Simpson Miller, Jamaica's first female head of government, in elections.

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- [Read full media profile](#)

TIMELINE

Some key dates in Jamaica's history:



Jamaica became a leading sugar exporter with the help of slave labour, abolished in the 1830s

1494 - Christopher Columbus sights Jamaica.

1509 - Jamaica occupied by the Spaniards. Much of the indigenous Arawak community dies off from exposure to European diseases; African slaves brought in to work on the sugar plantations.

1655 - Jamaica is captured by the British.

1865 - The British ruthlessly put down the Morant Bay rebellion, staged by freed slaves in response to acute hardship, and force the local legislature to surrender its powers; Jamaica becomes a crown colony.

1962 - Jamaica becomes independent within the British Commonwealth

2010 - Dozens are killed in operation to arrest drug lord Christopher "Dudus" Coke. He is extradited to the US, sentenced and jailed.

2012 - Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller says that 50 years after Jamaica gained its independence from Britain, it is time for the country to break with the British monarchy and become a republic.

- **Read full timeline**



Jamaica is the birthplace of reggae music and Bob Marley was one of its greatest exponents

Mexico profile - Timeline

A chronology of key events:



The city of Teotihuacan was a major pre-Colombian cultural centre

c. **AD 250-900** Classical Maya city states flourish in the far south of modern-day Mexico, as well as in neighbouring Guatemala and Belize, before suffering a mysterious collapse.

c. **AD 0-500** - Major cultural and religious centre of Teotihuacán flourishes. Thought to have been one of the world's largest cities at the time, but little is known about its ethnic and political nature.

Aztecs



Aztec traditions are still being kept alive

Aztec-era traditions are still being kept alive

Mexico City to teach Aztec tongue

Festival highlights indigenous pride

6th-7th century - Influx of new peoples into central Mexico from the north, including speakers of Nahuatl.
800-1000 - High point of the Toltec culture, centred on the city of Tula, in modern-day Hidalgo province.
10th-16th centuries - Revitalised Maya civilisation blossoms in the northern Yucatan peninsula, creating major cities such as Chichen Itza and Uxmal.
1428-1521 - The latest of a long line of indigenous civilisations, the Aztec Empire - an alliance of Nahuatl-speaking city states led by Tenochtitlan - establishes hegemony over much of central Mexico.

Spanish conquest

1519 - Small Spanish army led by Hernan Cortes lands at Veracruz, marking the start of Spain's conquest of Mexico.

1521 - Allied with local anti-Aztec forces, Cortes' men capture the capital Tenochtitlan (modern-day Mexico City).

Conquest



The Spanish conquest took decades to complete

The Spanish conquest took decades to complete

BBC History: Story of the Conquistadors

1521-1820 - Mexico forms part of the Viceroyalty of New Spain.

Independence

1810-21 - War of Independence ends with the creation of the short-living Mexican Empire, which includes Central America to the southern border of modern-day Costa Rica, as well as what is now the southwestern US.

1824 - Mexico becomes a federal republic. Central American provinces secede, becoming Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

The new Mexican state is marked by tension between the conservative Spanish-origin landowning elite and the largely indigenous landless minority, resulting in instability and frequent armed conflict.

1836 - Former province of Texas, by now increasingly populated by English-speaking Americans, secedes after a war, going on to join the United States nine years later.

1846-8 - Mexican-American War ends with Mexico being forced to sell its northern provinces (including modern-day California, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah) to the US.

1855-72 - "La Reforma" period, characterised by liberal reforms limiting the power and landholdings of the Catholic Church.



Pancho Villa was one of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution. His exploits have been recreated in a variety of books and movies

1864-7 - Archduke Maximilian of Austria is installed as emperor by France and conservative landowners, but is toppled and executed by Republican rebels.

1876-1911 - Porfirio Diaz's 35-year-long dictatorship brings stability, modernisation and economic growth, but at the price of political repression.

Revolution

1910-1920 - Mexican Revolution ends the Porfirio Diaz dictatorship and establishes constitutional government.

1913-14 - The liberal Francisco Madero introduces land reform and labour legislation before being assassinated. Victoriano Huerta seizes power. Political unrest continues with Emiliano Zapata leading a peasant revolt in the south.

Trotsky assassination



Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky (1) arrives in Mexico, where he was tracked down and killed by a Soviet agent

The ice pick assassination

1916-17 - Inconclusive US incursion against guerrilla leader Francisco "Pancho" Villa.

1920 - President Venustiano Carranza is murdered, followed by a decade of instability.

Institutional Revolutionary Party rule

1929 - Former president Plutarco Elias Calles forms what later becomes the Institutional Revolutionary Party(PRI), which dominates government for 71 years.

1934 - President Lazaro Cardenas begins programme of oil nationalisation, land reform and industrial expansion.



Up to 30,000 people were killed in the quake which struck Mexico City in 1985

1960s - Unrest amongst peasants and labourers over unequal wealth distribution is suppressed.

1968 - Student demonstration in Mexico City during the Olympic Games is fired on by security forces. Hundreds of protesters are killed or wounded. The extent of the violence shocks the country.

Oil discovery

1976 - Huge offshore oil reserves discovered; the Cantarell field becomes the mainstay of Mexico's oil production.

1985 - Earthquake in Mexico City kills thousands and makes many more homeless.

1993 - Parliament ratifies the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) with the US and Canada.

Chiapas rebellion



Mexico hosted the football World Cup in 1986

1994 - A guerrilla rebellion in Chiapas by the Zapatista National Liberation Army is brutally suppressed by government troops. The government and Zapatistas agree on greater autonomy for the indigenous Mayans of Chiapas the following year.

1996 - The insurgency in the south escalates as the leftist Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) attacks government troops.

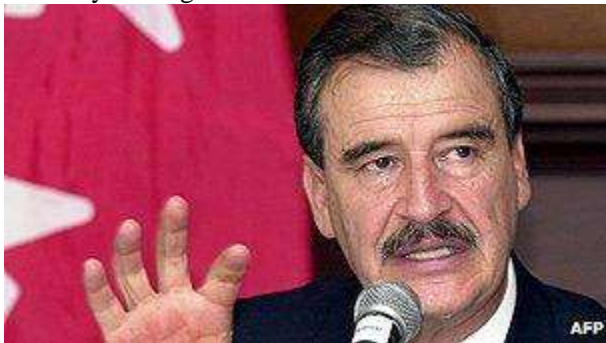


Mexico City in 1995: Thousands gathered in support of Zapatistas pressing for indigenous rights

1997 - The PRI suffers heavy losses in elections and loses its overall majority in the lower house of parliament for the first time since 1929.

Fox election victory

2000 July - Vicente Fox of the conservative Alliance for Change wins presidential elections, the first opposition candidate ever to do so. Parliamentary elections see the Alliance emerge as the strongest party, narrowly beating the PRI



Vincente Fox broke the ruling party's 71-year dominance with his election victory in 2000

2002 June - Millions of secret security files are released, shedding light on the repression of hundreds of political activists in the 1960s and 1970s.

2006 July - Conservative candidate Felipe Calderon is declared the winner of presidential elections with a razor-thin majority over his leftist rival, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

War on drugs

2006 December - A new federal police force is created to tackle drugs cartels; thousands of troops are deployed in the western state of Michoacan as part of a major anti-drug trafficking drive.

'Dirty War' - questions remain



Hundreds died or disappeared when Luis Echeverria was interior minister or president

New warrant for ex-leader

Mexicans dig for 'disappeared'

2007 October - Heavy rains flood nearly the entire southern state of Tabasco. Some 500,000 are made homeless in one of the country's worst natural disasters.

2009 March - Army troops enter Ciudad Juarez, on the border with the US, as open warfare erupts between rival drug gangs.

Drug wars



In 2006, President Calderon launched a crackdown on Mexico's brutal drugs gangs

- Over 50,000 people thought to have died from drug-related violence between 2006-12.
- Drugs traffic into US worth an estimated \$13bn
- Regions along Mexico's border with US worst-hit, but violence has spread to other areas.
- More than 50,000 troops and federal police involved in combating the gangs

Q&A: Mexico's drug-related violence

Mexico's gruesome killings

2012 July - The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate Enrique Pena Nieto wins presidential election.

2013 July - Miguel Angel Trevino Morales, head of the brutal Zetas drugs cartel, is arrested in the highest-profile arrest since President Pena Nieto adopted a policy of targeting local bosses rather than big names.

2014 August - Mexico's Congress approves sweeping reforms to the country's energy sector that will open the market to foreign oil firms and strip state-owned energy group Pemex of the monopoly it has held since nationalisation in 1938.



Drug kingpin Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman's dramatic 2015 prison escape once again highlighted the weakness of state institutions

2018 October - The US, Canada and Mexico reach a new trade deal - the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) - to replace the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta).

2018 - Left-wing former mayor of Mexico City, Andres Manuel López Obrador, is inaugurated president after winning an overwhelming victory in the July presidential election.

Panama profile - Timeline

A chronology of key events:

1502 - Spanish explorer Rodrigo de Bastidas visits Panama, which was home to Cuna, Choco, Guaymi and other indigenous peoples.

Panama City



Panama City boomed as a result of the construction of the Panama Canal

- Old city founded in 1519
 - Population (metropolitan area): 1.2 million (2010)
- 1519** - Panama becomes Spanish Vice-royalty of New Andalucia (later New Granada).
1821 - Panama becomes independent of Spain, but joins the confederacy of Gran Colombia, which also comprises Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.
1830 - Panama becomes part of Colombia following the collapse of Gran Colombia.
1846 - Panama signs treaty with US allowing it to build a railway across the isthmus.
1880s - France attempts to build a canal linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, but fails due to financial difficulties and the death of more than 20,000 workers from tropical diseases.

Independence, building the canal

1903 - Panama splits from Colombia and becomes fully independent. US buys rights to build Panama Canal and is given control of the Canal Zone in perpetuity.

Gen Noriega



- Became de facto ruler of Panama as head of defence forces in 1983
- Originally a close US ally, he was later accused by the US of drug-trafficking and election-rigging
- Surrendered to invading US troops in 1990

General Manuel Noriega's fall from grace

Noriega jailed on Panama return

1914 - Panama Canal completed.

1939 - Panama ceases to be a US protectorate.

1968-81 - General Omar Torrijos Herrera, the National Guard chief, overthrows the elected president and imposes a dictatorship.

1977 - US agrees to transfer the canal to Panama as from 31 December 1999.

1981 - Torrijos dies in plane crash.

1983 - Former intelligence chief and one-time US Central Intelligence Agency informant Manuel Noriega becomes head of the National Guard, builds up the size of the force, which he renames the Panama Defence Forces, and greatly increases its power over Panama's political and economic life.

1988 - US charges Noriega with drug smuggling; Noriega declares state of emergency in the wake of a failed coup.

US invades

1989 - Opposition wins parliamentary elections, but Noriega declares results invalid. Noriega declares "state of war" in the face of increased threats by Washington. US invades Panama, ousts Noriega and replaces him with Guillermo Endara.

1991 - Parliament approves constitutional reforms, including abolition of standing army; privatisation begins.

1992 - US court finds Noriega guilty of drug offences and sentences him to 40 years imprisonment, to be served in a US prison.

1999 - Mireya Moscoso becomes Panama's first woman president.

Panama Canal



The US controlled the Panama Canal for almost a century

- Length: 65km (40 miles)
- Officially opened on 15 August 1915
- Control passed to Panama by treaty on 1 January 2000
- Plan to double capacity approved in 2006

Eyewitness: Panama celebrates new era

Panama Canal : America's strategic artery

1999 December - Panama takes full control of the Panama Canal, ending nearly a century of American jurisdiction over one of the world's most strategic waterways.

2000 - Moscoso announces creation of a panel to investigate crimes committed while military governments were in power between 1968 and 1989.

2002 January - President Moscoso sets up a commission to investigate corruption. The move follows large street protests against alleged graft in government circles.

2002 April - Panama removed from international list of uncooperative tax havens after promising to make its tax system more transparent.

2003 September - National strike over management of social security fund paralyzes public services. More than 40 hurt in clashes.

2004 May - Martin Torrijos, son of former dictator Omar Torrijos, wins presidential elections.

2004 August-September - President Moscoso pardons four Cuban exiles Havana accuses of plotting to kill Cuban President Castro. Cuba severs ties. Newly-inaugurated President Martin Torrijos pledges to repair relations; both countries agree in November to restore ties.

2004 November - Panama Canal earns record revenues of \$1 billion for the financial year.

2005 May-June - Plans to increase pension contributions and raise the retirement age spark weeks of protests and strikes. President Torrijos had promised to reform the cash-strapped social security system.



The Centennial Bridge over the Panama Canal was completed in 2004

2006 - At least 50 people die after taking cough medicine tainted with an industrial solvent imported from China.

Canal upgrade

2006 October - Voters in a referendum back a \$5.2bn plan to upgrade the Panama Canal. The scheme aims to double the capacity of the waterway.

2006 December - Panama and the US agree on a free trade deal. The accord cannot come into force until it has been approved by the US Congress.

2007 September - Work to widen Panama Canal begins.

2008 February - Fatal shooting of union leader triggers violent clashes between police and construction workers in Panama City.

2008 December - A Russian warship sails through the Panama Canal for the first time since World War II. The canal was shut to the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

2009 May - Ricardo Martinelli wins presidential election.



Planned changes to mining laws sparked protests from indigenous groups

2010 July - Former military ruler Manuel Noriega is sentenced to seven years in prison by a French court for money laundering. He was extradited from the US in 2008 after serving a 17-year sentence for drug trafficking.

2010 October - Chinese freighter becomes the millionth vessel to cross the Panama Canal three years before its 100th anniversary.

2010 December - President Martinelli denies information from a US diplomatic cable released by Wikileaks suggesting he asked the US to help wiretap rivals, but acknowledges asking for help against criminals.

2011 March - Mining code reforms reversed following protests from indigenous groups and environmentalists.

2011 October - US Congress finally approves long-stalled free trade agreement with Panama. President Martinelli hails the agreement as a "tool for the economic development" of the country.

2011 December - Former military ruler Manuel Noriega is repatriated and taken straight to prison.

2012 January - Workers end a strike on a project to expand the Panama Canal after the consortium in charge agrees to increase the minimum wage. The \$5.25bn (£3.4bn) project to widen the Panama Canal and double its capacity is due to be completed in 2014.

2012 October - The government scraps plans to approve the sale of land in the duty-free zone of Colon after hundreds of protesters clash with police. The protesters feared the legislation would have cost jobs and cut incomes in the lucrative free trade port area at the Caribbean end of the Panama Canal.

2013 May - The government orders power rationing as a severe drought hits hydroelectric power supplies.

2013 July - Panama charges the crew of a North Korean ship detained in Panama after it was found to be carrying weapons.

2014 March - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro breaks diplomatic relations and freezes economic ties with Panama, accusing it of being a "lackey" of the US and working against his country.

The Panama Canal Authority (ACP) approves a deal to end a dispute over \$1.6bn (£1bn) cost overruns that had delayed work to widen the waterway. The Spanish-led construction consortium and the ACP say each will invest an extra \$100m in the project.

Varela presidency

2014 May - Vice-president Juan Carlos Varela, a former ally turned critic of President Martinelli, scores a surprise victory in presidential elections.

2014 July - President Varela offers a month-long amnesty to criminal gangs operating in the country if they disarm and sever links with organised crime.

2014 December - Investigators in Panama arrest 59 members of a drug trafficking ring linked to Colombian FARC rebels and the Mexican Sinaloa drugs cartel.

2015 January - Supreme Court votes to open a corruption investigation against former president Ricardo Martinelli.

2015 February - Government announces ban on building on environmentally-significant wetlands around Panama City, reversing policy of previous administration.

2015 June - Panama tops an annual ranking of well-being for the second year in a row. The Gallup-Healthways Global Well-Being Index includes a person's sense of purpose, financial well-being and health in its measure.

2016 April - The "Panama Papers" - files leaked from one of the world's most secretive companies, the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca - lift the lid on how the rich and powerful use tax havens to hide their wealth. The leaked documents reveal Panama itself to be the second most popular tax haven with Mossack Fonseca's clients, after the British Virgin Islands.

President Varela announces creation of international panel of experts to help Panama improve transparency of its offshore financial industry.

2016 June - A giant Chinese container ship becomes the first vessel to use the newly-enlarged Panama Canal.

2017 June - Panama cuts long-standing ties with Taiwan and recognises China, in a major diplomatic coup for Beijing. China is a major user of the Panama Canal.



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Costa Rica is about half the size of Iceland, or just smaller than the U.S. state of West Virginia. This small nation has a diverse landscape of tropical rain forests, tropical dry forests, mountain cloud forests, volcanoes, rivers, waterfalls, coastal lowlands, and over 700 miles (1,127 kilometers) of beaches. About half of Costa Rica is covered by different types of forests. The land is subject to frequent earthquakes and occasional volcanic eruptions. More than 25 percent of the total territory is reserved as protected areas, and the nation has banned hunting for sport. The national bird of Costa Rica is the *yigüirro*, a clay-colored thrush or gray thrush.

Although Costa Rica lies entirely in the tropical climate zone, elevation changes allow for cooler temperatures in the central highlands. The coastal lowlands are hot and humid; temperatures there average 81°F (27°C) year-round. Most people live at elevations where the climate is generally mild. In San José and other parts of the Central Valley highlands, temperatures average 67°F (19°C) year-round. Rainfall varies between the wet season (May–November) and the dry season (December–April).

History

Native Peoples and Colonization

A variety of native peoples lived in what is now Costa Rica before Columbus arrived in 1502 on his fourth and final voyage to the Americas. In the north, the indigenous cultures were influenced by Maya civilization. Southern groups were

more closely related to the indigenous peoples of South America. Spain eventually colonized the Costa Rican area along with most of Central America. Because minerals were scarce, the area was ignored by the Spanish crown and remained isolated.

Independence and Political Transitions

In 1821, Costa Rica joined other Central American nations in declaring independence from Spain. In 1823, it became a state of the Federal Republic of Central America. Shortly before the republic collapsed, Costa Rica became a sovereign nation (1838). José Joaquín Rodríguez was elected president in 1889 in what was considered the first free and fair election in Central America.

Costa Rica has one of the strongest democratic traditions in Central America. Interruptions in this tradition have been few. In 1917, General Federico Tinoco led a coup that brought him to power until he resigned two years later. The next non-democratic transfer of power happened in 1948, following a disputed election between President Rafael Ángel Calderón and Otilio Ulate. José Figueres staged a rebellion against Calderón, setting off a six-week civil war that resulted in the deaths of roughly two thousand Costa Ricans. Figueres then led an interim government and passed a new constitution that abolished the army before turning power over to Ulate in 1949. Costa Rica has enjoyed peace and democracy ever since. Figueres was considered a national hero and went on to win the presidency in 1953 and 1970.

Modern Politics

The 1970s and '80s were times of economic struggle for Costa Rica due to the high cost of oil, rising foreign debt levels, excessive government spending, and conflicts in

neighboring countries that discouraged tourism in the region. President Óscar Arias played a major role in finding a diplomatic solution to the many military conflicts raging in Central America and received a Nobel Peace Prize in 1987 for his work on the Esquipulas Peace Agreement, which helped bring peace to the region. Costa Ricans take great pride in Arias's award, which is seen as a reflection of the peaceful orientation of the nation.

In the 1990s, Costa Rican presidents worked to reduce the country's deficit by cutting spending and increasing taxes. Weary of rising prices and falling incomes, voters elected businessman Miguel Ángel Rodríguez as president in February 1998. Promising to revitalize the economy, Rodríguez took office in May 1998, replacing José María Figueres. Government plans to privatize some state-owned industries led to the country's worst strikes, demonstrations, and unrest in many years. A court ruled the proposals unconstitutional in April 2000, and the government began pursuing other avenues to modernize the country's industries.

Investigations into corruption allegations against three former presidents—José María Figueres, Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, and Rafael Ángel Calderón—began in 2004. In the face of this widespread political scandal, voter turnout was low in 2006 elections, with former president Arias narrowly winning the presidency once again. Elections in 2010 installed Laura Chinchilla as Costa Rica's first female president. In 2014, opposition candidate Luis Guillermo Solís was elected president, becoming the country's first third-party candidate in 44 years to serve in the office. For many voters, his election represented a move away from the corruption associated with professional politicians. Although Costa Rica is known as one of the most stable, developed nations in Latin America, political corruption has been a widespread problem in recent years.

Recent Events and Trends

- **Elections:** In April 2018, Carlos Alvarado Quesada was elected president, defeating his opponent, Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz, by a decisive two-to-one margin in a runoff election. Alvarado Quesada's victory marked a second consecutive win for the center-left Citizens' Action Party, which also won the presidency in 2014. The legalization of same-sex marriage was a defining campaign issue: Alvarado Quesada supported legalization while Alvarado Muñoz, a member of the right-wing National Restoration Party, opposed it. In Costa Rica, presidents are elected by popular vote and serve four-year terms.
- **Nicaraguan migrants:** In July 2018, Costa Rica opened two shelters to accommodate an influx of migrants fleeing a violent political crisis in neighboring Nicaragua. Costa Rica, which is one of the most stable and developed nations in the region, has long been a refuge for Nicaraguans, who make up the largest share of immigrants living in the country.
- **Same-sex marriage:** In August 2018, Costa Rica's same-sex marriage ban was ruled unconstitutional by the nation's Supreme Court. The ruling, which ordered that same-sex marriage be legalized within 18 months, followed an earlier judgment by the Inter-American Human Rights Court that its member countries, including Costa Rica, should recognize same-sex marriage. Although the legalization of

same-sex marriage has been a contentious political issue, Costa Rica's LGBT community has seen increasing support in recent years.

THE PEOPLE

Population

The majority of people (90 percent) have European or mixed heritage. About 2 percent of Costa Ricans are indigenous peoples. One percent of the population is black and lives mostly on the Atlantic Coast. These people are descendants of laborers brought from the Caribbean to build a railroad. They later worked on banana plantations and developed a distinct culture in the region around Puerto Limón.

About 9 percent of Costa Rica's population was born outside of the country, and roughly three-fourths of the foreign-born population is Nicaraguan, with many of them having entered Costa Rica illegally. The general population is relatively young, with about 22 percent younger than age 15. Most people live in the Central Valley highlands.

Language

Spanish is the official language of Costa Rica. English is widely understood in tourist-oriented areas but not by the general population. Patua (creole English) is spoken by the black population. A few indigenous languages are still spoken by indigenous groups.

Costa Ricans refer to themselves as *ticos* (the female form is *ticas*) and are known by that name throughout Central America. The nickname comes from the Costa Rican custom of ending words with the suffix *-tico* (instead of the more common Spanish diminutive *-tito*). So instead of saying *chiquitito* (very small), Costa Ricans say *chiquitico*.

In contrast to most other Spanish speakers, Costa Ricans use the formal form of the word "you" (*usted*) even when addressing close friends. The familiar pronoun *tú* is rarely used, though Spanish's less common familiar pronoun *vos* is heard in most urban areas. This linguistic characteristic should not be interpreted as a sign of formality in relationships, however.

Religion

Roughly 92 percent of the population is Christian. About 76 percent of all Costa Ricans claim membership in the Roman Catholic Church. According to the constitution, Roman Catholicism is the state religion, but the constitution also protects freedom of religion. The Catholic Church continues to be very influential, and religion as a whole plays an important role in society.

Evangelical groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other Protestants are also common, and a growing number of former Catholics are joining other Christian churches. At the same time, secularization in Costa Rica is leading some people away from organized religion.

General Attitudes

In general, courtesy, hospitality, and gentleness are highly valued in Costa Rica. Aggressiveness, brusqueness, and

violence are shunned by most. Most *ticos* (Costa Ricans) dislike militarism. Costa Ricans say they are lovers of peace and conciliation. Confrontation is avoided when possible; people may even say they will do something when they do not intend to do it, just so they will not have to disagree.

People tend to value privacy and quiet behavior but will vigorously defend personal honor. Honesty, humility, and formality are generally respected. A strong work ethic is prevalent among most segments of society, and people in rural areas, in particular, accept hard labor as a necessary part of life. Individuality is considered an important characteristic, expressed in Costa Rica's relations with other nations and, to a lesser extent, on a personal level. The attitude is due partly to Costa Rican isolation during the colonial period; because *ticos* had little contact with colonial rulers, they developed greater independence. Still, group conformity in values, interests, and thought is generally important in society.

All people are expected to be given respect, regardless of their social class. There tends to be little resentment among the classes because of the traditional respect for all people and a belief that some things are determined by God. The belief that Deity controls some aspects of life, such as one's health or success, is common among many *ticos* and is evident in daily speech. People often attribute their achievements to and place hope in God; similarly, *ticos* often consider negative life events to be part of God's plan. This tradition, which is most prevalent in rural areas, is changing with greater education and people's desire for material progress.

Personal Appearance

Western dress is common throughout the country. Professionals typically wear suits or dress suits to work, while others may wear uniforms. For casual wear, jeans are very popular among both men and women in urban areas. Women in rural areas are more likely to wear skirts. In urban areas, women may wear tight and revealing clothes and try to dress fashionably, though styles are open to personal taste. Older adults tend to dress more conservatively. Young adults may be seen wearing a variety of styles, including sportswear and U.S. American fashions. Shorts (including surfing-inspired fashions like board shorts) are generally only worn in hotter coastal cities or in beach areas. Flip-flops are commonly worn inside the house, around local neighborhoods, and in towns and cities near the coast but not elsewhere.

Costa Ricans, particularly older adults, tend to carefully consider their appearances when doing errands or other business in public. Clothing is generally clean and neatly ironed, and shoes are polished. Being well groomed is considered essential. This includes expectations of neatly cut (and, for men, short) hair and a fresh smell. Those who do not meet these expectations may be discriminated against in minor ways, while those who are very well dressed and groomed are given more respect and are assumed to be financially well-off.

For rodeos and horse parades, men and women throughout the country often dress up as *vaqueros* (cowboys), wearing jeans, plaid shirts, belts with large buckles, boots, and hats. During Independence Day, many children dress as *campesinos*, or old-fashioned farmers.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Polite and respectful greetings are a social norm. Female friends or relatives typically greet each other with a light kiss on the cheek. If women are not yet acquainted, they may pat each other on the arm. Men typically shake hands and may kiss the cheeks of female friends and relatives. It is considered an insult not to shake every man's hand in a small group.

Common greetings include *Buenos días* (Good day), *Buenas tardes* (Good afternoon), and *Buenas noches* (Good evening). A simple *Buenas* may be used by itself any time of the day. *Ticos* (Costa Ricans) often respond to the greeting *¿Cómo está?* (How are you?) with the expression *Pura vida* (Pure life), which is understood to mean that the person is doing well. *Pura vida* has many uses, as it is also a way to say "Okay" or "No worries." *Hola* (Hi) is a casual greeting popular among youth; older people consider it disrespectful if used to greet them.

In rural areas, people tend to greet each other when passing on the street, even if they are not acquainted. One might simply say *Adiós* or *Buenas*, or more formally *Adiós, señora* or *Buenos días*. This tradition is less common in urban areas. People in rural areas often bow their heads slightly and touch their hats in greeting. Greetings between strangers or acquaintances are generally brief, but people who know each other usually take a few minutes to talk about family, work, or health. When passing by quickly, such as on a bike, people in rural areas may also greet each other by saying *¡Whoop!* or *¡Eso!* (That's it!).

One addresses others by professional title either with or without a surname, depending on the situation. *Señor* (Mr.) and *Señora* (Mrs.) are also used, especially for people with whom one is not well acquainted. *Ticos* address friends, children, coworkers, and subordinates by first name. They use the title *Don* with the first name of an older man, or *Doña* for a woman, to show special respect for and familiarity with the person. For example, a child might call the mother of his best friend *Doña María*.

Gestures

Hand gestures are common and important to everyday conversation. In fact, *ticos* (Costa Ricans) often use their hands to express an idea, either with or without verbal communication. To indicate "no," one vigorously waves the index finger (palm out, finger up). When expressing shock or when faced with a serious situation, *ticos* will shake the hand vigorously enough to snap (slap) the fingers together three or four times. There are many different hand greetings in addition to the handshake or wave. For instance, young people slap hands together in a greeting similar to a "high five" or bump fists. Eye contact is generally important, especially when one is discussing a serious issue or talking to a superior. It traditionally is understood that a lack of eye contact means one cannot be trusted, while a weak handshake is thought to signal disrespect and a lack of interest. Chewing

gum while speaking is considered impolite.

Visiting

Overall, Costa Ricans enjoy socializing. Costa Ricans in urban areas generally prefer that visits be arranged in advance. Only close friends or relatives may drop by unannounced in these areas, and then mostly in the afternoon after household chores have been done; otherwise, uninvited visitors may not be asked into the home. In rural areas, people tend to visit unannounced more often and rarely are turned away. Hosts usually offer visitors something to drink (like coffee) and refreshments (pastries, bread, or crackers). It is considered impolite to refuse such an offer. Invited guests generally are expected to arrive a few minutes late (later in rural areas). Punctuality is typically not customary, but being very late is also not appreciated.

Friends and neighbors often share food, such as freshly caught fish, homegrown produce, or baked goods. Dinner guests usually bring a small gift to their hosts, such as flowers, wine or a bottle of local liquor, a plant, or something to share or to mark the occasion. Hosts usually serve dinner guests refreshments and drinks while they socialize for an hour or so before the meal is served. After dinner, coffee and dessert typically accompany more conversation. Guests generally leave shortly thereafter.

If a Costa Rican invites someone to dinner or to spend a few days at his or her home, the potential guest must determine whether the invitation is sincere or whether the host is just trying to be polite. Polite invitations often are extended as a gesture of goodwill rather than as an expectation that guests will actually come.

Eating

Most people eat three meals a day, with midmorning and afternoon coffee breaks or snacks. Breakfast and dinner are the most important meals, as lunch is becoming more rushed and is more often eaten away from home. Business professionals may make lunch dates, but dinner is typically the meal for entertaining guests. Mealtime is to be enjoyed and is extended by conversation on a variety of subjects. Table manners vary, but as a general rule, one keeps both hands (though not elbows) above the table rather than in the lap.

It is considered extremely rude for a waiter or waitress to bring a restaurant bill before it is requested by patrons. Bills customarily include a tip of 10 percent. Further tipping is not expected, except in some tourist-oriented areas.

LIFESTYLE

Family Structure

While Costa Ricans tend to value family tradition and heritage, family dynamics are changing as the country modernizes. Family members are generally spending less time at home together and more time working and participating in individual activities. Families have an average of one to two children, though rural families are usually larger. Rural

extended families often either share a dwelling or live as neighbors and are especially close-knit, as a lack of recreational resources means they spend a lot of time together. In contrast, the busy schedules of urban families can make finding time together difficult. No matter what their schedules, though, families typically enjoy gathering together on Sundays.

Parents and Children

Young boys typically start helping their fathers work outside of the home around age six or seven. For example, they may help pick coffee or assist with construction work. At the same age, girls are usually taught to help with housework, beginning with cleaning their own rooms and washing their own dishes after meals. Grandparents, especially grandmothers, often help raise their grandchildren. Children also commonly receive care from their aunts. Most children live with their parents until they graduate from college or get married. Adult children are expected to care for their elderly parents, though state-run facilities are available for those without families.

Gender Roles

While the husband makes most final decisions in the home, he shares many responsibilities with his wife. Traditionally, women worked at home, caring for children, cleaning, cooking, and doing laundry. Today, a growing number are seeking higher education and entering the labor force to help support their families, and many men are doing more around the house. Some women now work as cooks in restaurants, domestic employees, schoolteachers, and sales assistants. Though it is uncommon to see women in high-profile corporate positions, they do hold some high-ranking positions in government. Domestic violence, often fueled by alcoholism, is a serious problem.

Women traditionally retain their maiden names when they marry. Children carry the surnames of both parents. The second-to-last name in a full name is from the father's side and is considered the family surname.

Housing

Urban

A majority of the population lives in the urbanized Central Valley region of the country, including San José and its surrounding cities and neighborhoods. In these and other cities, houses are usually made of cement and have tin roofs. Houses are often painted in bright colors. Metal security bars to protect windows and doors are common.

Houses are typically one storey, with a living room, a kitchen, one or two bathrooms, and two or three bedrooms. Many also have a dining room and a laundry area with its own sink, where clothes can be rinsed prior to washing, since most machines are only semi-automatic. Common wall hangings include photographs of family and friends and religious images. Art is gaining popularity among affluent families. Ceramic knickknacks are common decorations, and televisions are placed in prominent locations in living rooms. Higher-income households often have DVD players and computers. Other electronics and appliances, such as fans, telephones, radios, microwaves, and the like are common as well. Floors tend to be made from tile, wood, or smooth, red

cement (called *piso lujado*).

By traditional standards, a home should be cleaned thoroughly every day. Children may be enlisted to help with this task, though it is also increasingly common for women who work outside the home to employ maids to clean, cook meals, and do the laundry.

Rural

Houses in rural areas tend to be more basic and may be made of a combination of wood and cement. Most houses have tin roofs, which have oftentimes rusted out. Houses are usually one storey and tend to be small, with a living room, a kitchen, one bathroom, and two bedrooms. Most homes have electricity and running water; however, many homes lack hot water tanks, so they may be equipped with a *ducha*, a water heater attached directly to the shower. Though many houses in rural areas are in disrepair, satellite dishes are often seen on rooftops. Whereas most people rent their homes in cities, ownership tends to be the rule in rural areas, as homes are often inherited from parents.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Dating typically starts around age 14, although in more conservative families girls do not date until age 18. Dating can be casual and is not necessarily expected to end in marriage. Most young Costa Ricans meet for the first time while socializing with groups of friends at school, sporting events, church, weekend dances, or other group activities such as volunteering. Young adults commonly meet partners at bars and nightclubs, at work, or through friends. The religiously conservative may meet through church events. Going to dinner or getting ice cream are common dating activities. Other favorite dating activities include movies, dances, picnics, rodeos, bullfights, festivals, and carnivals.

Girls generally are more restricted in dating than boys. They seldom can have visitors past 10 p.m., unless a courtship is close to marriage. A boy sometimes asks a girl's parents for permission to date her, but this custom is disappearing and no longer occurs in urban areas. When a young couple is dating, the boy commonly visits according to a predetermined schedule. During these visits, which usually happen a few evenings a week and last about two hours, the pair often sits on the porch, takes short walks around the neighborhood, goes to the park, or goes out to dinner.

Engagement

Often a man proposes to his girlfriend and then gives her a ring on a special occasion, like her birthday or Christmas. The two families visit each other to show formal agreement on their children's marriage. Engagements typically last six months or less.

Marriage in Society

Couples generally marry in their middle to late twenties. Marriage is a valued institution, and having a partner to share a life with is considered important. Those who remain single into their thirties, especially if they are women, may be pitied. Unmarried adults usually live with their parents, especially in rural areas. The exception is unmarried university students or college graduates, who sometimes live on their own.

Young couples often live together for many years before

marrying, an arrangement that is socially acceptable. After three years of cohabitation, the couple may file to enter into a common-law marriage, which affords them the same rights as a formally married couple.

A majority of Costa Ricans oppose same-sex marriage, though support for it is increasing, especially among young people. Same-sex couples who have been living together for at least three years are allowed a limited number of domestic partnership benefits, such as inheritance and hospital visitation rights. In August 2018, Costa Rica's Supreme Court ruled that the nation's same-sex marriage ban was unconstitutional and ordered the legalization of same-sex marriage within 18 months.

Weddings

Wedding ceremonies are followed by celebrations, during which family and friends drink and share a meal. A typical meal consists of *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken), *picadillo de papaya* (a dish of beef and papaya), refried black beans, and potato chips, followed by an elegant cake. After eating, guests dance.

El baile del billete (the dance of the bill) is a common practice during which guests tuck bills of various denominations into the clothing of the bride or groom for an opportunity to dance with one of them until the next guest pays for a turn. This dance relieves the newlyweds of some of the economic burden associated with the wedding.

Divorce

Divorce is becoming fairly common and does not carry a strong stigma. However, women may find it harder than men to remarry, especially if they have children.

Life Cycle

Birth

Pregnancy and birth are considered a blessing in Costa Rican culture. When a woman is pregnant, her friends and family throw a *té de canastilla* (baby shower) for her. Traditionally, only females attended these parties, but it is becoming more common for males to be invited as well. The guests often bring gifts and play games. Before they leave, they are given a small *recuerdo* (souvenir), which is usually a plastic knickknack and a ribbon with the family's last name and the date of the party. When a baby is born, neighborhood women, family members, and friends come and visit the new baby and mother, sometimes bringing a gift. Many babies are baptized by the Catholic Church, and another party is held after baptism.

After giving birth, women are given 40 days (*la cuarentena*) to recover. During the first one or two weeks of this period, a woman's mother or mother-in-law comes to help her with household tasks. Formally employed women are entitled to four months of paid maternity leave, but many women work in the informal market and do not receive this benefit.

Milestones

At age 15, many Costa Rican girls celebrate their birthdays with a special party called a *fiesta de quince años*, which can be something quite simple, like a family gathering in the home. For wealthy families, as many as one hundred guests may attend a party at a reception hall and enjoy a sit-down

dinner, a fancy cake, and dancing to music played by a professional disk jockey. Socially, girls are considered adults after this party, as are boys when they turn 16. At these ages, youth are usually accepted into adult conversations and given more freedoms. Legally, they are considered adults at 18, when they have the right to vote, drive, and drink alcohol. Children do not typically leave home until they graduate from college or get married.

Death

Following a death, neighbors and family members come to the *velorio* (wake). Acquaintances will not stay long, but close friends and family members will generally stay the whole night praying. Those close to the family bring coffee and bread to help those praying stay awake. After the wake, everyone in the community walks behind the hearse as it makes its way from the church to the cemetery. For the last part of the distance, the coffin is carried on the shoulders of six close friends or relatives. Few people are buried; instead, according to sanitary regulations, the deceased is usually laid to rest in a cement box above ground. After losing a family member or friend, Costa Ricans hang a black ribbon on their door for nine days.

Diet

Ticos (Costa Ricans) often eat rice and beans in various combinations for nearly every meal. Typical at breakfast is *gallo pinto* (mixture of rice and black beans). A common lunchtime meal is *casado* (rice, beans, salad, meat, plantains, and sometimes eggs). *Olla de carne* (a beef stew with potatoes, onions, and many vegetables) is a national favorite. *Tamales* (meat, vegetables, and cornmeal wrapped in plantain leaves and boiled) are often served for Easter and Christmas. Also common are *lengua en salsa* (beef tongue served in a sauce), *mondongo* (intestine soup), *empanadas* (turnovers), *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken), and *gallos* (tortillas with meat and vegetable fillings). Bread, tortillas, and fruits are also staple items. Bananas, mangos, pineapples, papaya, watermelons, and various citrus fruits are locally grown and popular.

Ticos of all ages typically enjoy coffee. Adults may take two or three coffee breaks each day. Among *ticos* who do not drink coffee, many drink *agua dulce* (sweet water), a drink made from sugarcane that is mixed with water or milk.

Recreation

Sports

Fútbol (soccer) is the most popular spectator and participant sport. It is frequently played during recess at school. Elsewhere, children may be seen playing soccer barefoot, using sticks, small trees, or even their shoes as goal markers. Basketball, baseball, volleyball, surfing, swimming, biking, running, auto racing, and motorcycling are also popular. Skateboarding and karate are popular in urban areas. Fishing is common in many parts of the country. The wealthy may enjoy golf and polo. Rodeos, bull riding, and cockfighting tend to draw large crowds in rural areas, though cockfighting is illegal and becoming increasingly rare.

Leisure

Beaches are typically most crowded between January and

April. Local carnivals, festivals, and bullfights are popular attractions at various times throughout the year. Media broadcasts from the United States are common and have a significant impact on urban trends. People may also enjoy going to bars, clubs, restaurants, movie theaters, and malls on the weekend. Sunday is typically a day to spend with family. Rural inhabitants generally enjoy dancing and drinking with friends at the weekly town dance (*baile*), held on Saturday nights. Children may enjoy playing marbles and *trompos*, which involves a small wooden or plastic top spun by pulling a string wrapped around it.

Ticos (Costa Ricans) tend to be creative and resourceful when they lack money for recreation. For example, they float down rivers in old car tires, fashion rope swings over lakes, make swings from old rice sacks for children, and go fishing with a hook and fishing line wound around an old plastic soda bottle in place of a pole. They also build structures from bamboo and palm behind their homes where they can sit and relax with friends.

Vacation

Families who can get time off from work may take their children on vacation during the mid-year school break, the first two weeks of July. Many Costa Rican families also vacation at the end of the year or during Holy Week. Most people take trips within the country, as foreign travel tends to be prohibitively expensive. Urban dwellers often like to escape the cities and head for the beach or the mountains on vacation.

The Arts

Dancing is a favorite activity among many *ticos* (Costa Ricans) of all ages. Typical Latin dances such as salsa, merengue, and cumbia, as well as the Costa Rican swing, are popular. Folk dances include the national dance (the *Punto Guanacaste*), the *cambute*, and maypole dances. Typical musical instruments include the trumpet, clarinet, guitar, xylophone, accordion, *quijongo* (a stringed instrument), and *güiro* (an open-ended metal or wooden instrument with grooves that produce a rasping sound when scraped). Many people enjoy *soca* (a mixture of soul music from the United States and calypso music), calypso, reggae, and other music popular throughout the Caribbean, Central America, and North America.

Brightly painted Costa Rican *carretas* (oxcarts) are well known throughout the world. Other arts include pottery and *molos* (appliqué for clothing or textiles). The Boruca, an indigenous group, are known for their carved wooden masks. These masks were originally made from cedar trees and depicted *diablos* (devils) to scare off Spanish invaders. Today, these colorful masks also feature themes from nature, often combining a human face with the features of animals such as jaguars, toucans, snakes, and crocodiles, and are more often made from native balsa wood.

Bombas are a popular oral form of poetry hailing from the province of Guanacaste. These quatrains always begin with the speaker yelling ¡*Bomba!*, after which follow four rhyming lines that often depict humorous, witty, or romantic sentiments.

Holidays

Costa Rican holidays include New Year's Day (1 January); Feast of Saint Joseph (19 March); Anniversary of the Battle of Rivas (11 April), during which a Costa Rican army defeated the forces of a U.S. conqueror and in which the national hero, a drummer boy named Juan Santa María, lost his life; *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) and Easter; Labor Day (1 May); Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul (29 June); Annexation of Guanacaste to Costa Rica (25 July); Feast of Our Lady of the Angels (2 August); Central American Independence Day (15 September); *Día de las Culturas* (Day of Cultures), formerly called Columbus Day and then *Día de la Raza*, recognizing the indigenous roots of Latin America (12 October); Feast of the Immaculate Conception (8 December); and Christmas (25 December).

New Year's

New Year's is generally thought of as a time for friends, parties, drinking, and dancing. *Tamales* (meat, vegetables, and cornmeal wrapped in plantain leaves and boiled) and *chicharrones* (fried pork rinds) are foods typical of this holiday. Gifts are exchanged and people often sing and light fireworks as the new year approaches. However, many Costa Ricans will interrupt festivities before midnight on New Year's Eve to go home and eat a small, quiet meal with family before returning to their party after midnight. *Flor de itavo* (the flower of a yucca plant) is a special ingredient sold throughout the country for this holiday. It is used to make various dishes, the most popular of which are egg based.

Semana Santa

After Christmas, *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) is the most widely celebrated holiday in Costa Rica. During the period of Lent, leading up to *Semana Santa*, many observant Catholic families put a cross draped with a purple sash on their front lawns. During Holy Week itself, only a minority of families participate in the religious parades that depict the resurrection of Jesus Christ in city centers. Instead, many Costa Ricans vacation during this holiday. All businesses are closed on the Thursday and Friday prior to Easter Sunday, so many families often spend time at the beach or mountains over the long weekend. *Arroz con leche* (rice pudding), often topped with caramelized coconut, mango, cashew, guava, or papaya, is a common dessert during this holiday season.

Feast of Our Lady of the Angels

On this religious holiday, Costa Ricans from all over the country make a pilgrimage on foot to the city of Cartago to pay homage to the Virgin Mary. Throughout the year, people pray for a miracle from the Virgin in exchange for making a promise to her (to stop a bad habit, for example) or a pledge to walk from their hometown to visit her in Cartago on 2 August if their prayer is answered.

Central American Independence Day

Costa Rica celebrates its independence from Spain on 15 September. In school, students make *faroles*, which are small, portable displays featuring some aspect of Costa Rican culture. A light is attached to each *farol* so that they are visible on the eve of Independence Day, when students and their families gather at the school after dark to show off and enjoy their creations. The next morning begins with a parade that includes floats representing traditional Costa Rican

scenes, high school marching bands, and dancing, as well as *payasos* (huge masked puppets) and *cimarronas* (small bands that play lively music).

Christmas

Christmas is the biggest holiday in Costa Rica and is generally celebrated with family. Families typically decorate evergreen trees—usually fake ones—and display them on their front porches for all to see. Other common decorations include poinsettias and Christmas lights. In preparation for Christmas Eve dinner, the women in a family gather to make hundreds of *tamales*. These are also shared with neighbors. Many families raise a pig all year to butcher just before Christmas so they will have fresh meat for the *tamales*. Families also exchange gifts on Christmas Eve. Children may be told that some of their gifts were brought by *el niñoito dios* (the child god), by the Three Kings, or by Santa Claus. Christmas itself is a quiet day spent at home with immediate family.

SOCIETY

Government

Structure

Costa Rica is a presidential republic. Its head of state and head of government are a popularly elected president and two vice presidents, all of whom serve a single four-year term with the possibility of a second non-consecutive term. The unicameral Legislative Assembly is composed of 57 legislators, who are elected by direct popular vote to four-year terms. In effect since 2014, a gender-based quota that requires 50 percent of legislative candidates to be women has encouraged greater participation of women in political parties. The judicial branch is separate and independent. Costa Rica has seven provinces. The country has no standing military, though it does have an armed National Guard to ensure domestic security; the weaponry the National Guard can legally use is limited.

Political Landscape

Traditionally, most Costa Ricans affiliated with one of two major parties: the center-right Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC) or the center-left National Liberation Party (PLN), which dominated politics in the second half of the 20th century. However, other parties, such as the center-right Libertarian Movement Party (PML) and the center-left Citizens' Action Party (PAC), have played increasingly large roles in government since the 2002 election. The victory of PAC candidate Luis Guillermo Solís in 2014 presidential elections brought an end to the domination by the two major parties. Issues facing the government include further strengthening environmental protections, increasing security, combating drug trafficking, and improving the economy.

Government and the People

In recent years, political corruption has become a growing problem; many former Costa Rican presidents have faced corruption charges. Freedoms of religion, assembly, and association are protected by law and in practice. Overall, freedom of the press is respected.

Costa Ricans engage in public protests fairly frequently on

a variety of topics, including issues related to public sector jobs and various social issues. The government has not given much attention to developing resources for indigenous people, and most of them lack sufficient access to health care and education. Citizens 18 years of age and older are required to vote in national elections, although there is no penalty for not voting; voter turnout generally exceeds 65 percent. Election day is a national holiday.

Economy

Despite a relative lack of minerals and other traditional natural resources, Costa Rica has a fairly prosperous economy, especially for the region. This is due in part to Costa Rica's political stability; its generally egalitarian society; and its successful timber, agricultural, and tourism industries. Costa Rica's rich biodiversity and environmental protections make it an especially popular destination for ecotourism, and tourism facilities are well developed.

Although Costa Rica's economy was briefly hurt by the 2008 global economic crisis, it has been growing again since 2010. Still, the country faces a relatively high level of debt, along with relatively high unemployment levels. Poverty affects about one-fourth of the population, and the country's once adequate social safety net has deteriorated in recent years as the amount of public money available to devote to these programs has dropped and the economy has suffered more generally.

Exports include bananas, pineapples, coffee, melons, ornamental flowers, sugar, and beef. Costa Rica is one of the largest banana producers in the world. Cattle raising is concentrated in the Guanacaste province but is expanding to other areas. Manufacturing and tourism now contribute substantially more to the economy than agriculture. Other industries include medical equipment, food processing, and textiles.

Costa Rica is a leader in renewable energy: hydroelectric power plants supply much of the country's electricity. Costa Rica has been a major recipient of foreign aid, and foreign investment in the country is among the highest per capita in Latin America. The monetary unit is the Costa Rican *colón* (CRC), or plural, *colones*.

Transportation and Communications

Although cars are available, the most common form of transportation within and between cities is the bus. Fares are inexpensive and the system is efficient. Taxis are available; legal taxis are red or, at the airport, orange. Illegal taxis (called *piratas*, or "pirates") are common. Many people ride motorcycles. Roads in and around the major cities are usually paved and generally in good condition; dirt roads are common in rural areas. Trains connect many of the major cities.

Telephones are located throughout the country, although remote areas still lack service. Rural homes usually have phones, and when this is not the case, each town has at least one public phone. Cellular phones are common throughout the country, even in most rural areas. Radio stations transmit throughout the country. There are also a number of television stations in Costa Rica. Several national newspapers have wide circulation. The press generally operates free from

government interference. The postal system is efficient. The majority of the population uses the internet.

Education

Structure

Primary education, which is compulsory, begins at age six and lasts through sixth grade. The majority of pupils advance to secondary school since most jobs require at least a high school education and a diploma is considered very important. Students can choose one of two secondary school tracks: a college preparatory one or a vocational one, which requires completion of an extra grade.

The majority of students attend public schools. Private schools, some of them religious, are generally thought to provide higher quality education and are affordable for middle-class and affluent Costa Ricans. Evening schools educate the older generation as well as young people who cannot attend secondary school during the day.

Access

Costa Rica has one of the best urban public education systems in the Americas. Costa Rica spends a sizeable portion of its gross domestic product (GDP) on education. Education is free, though students are responsible for their own uniforms, books, and supplies. Though the government does offer grants to help needy students with these expenses, the remaining costs can still be prohibitively expensive for poor families. Students who qualify receive free meals (usually breakfast and lunch) at school, which can be an incentive for parents to send them. Many children walk miles to and from rural schools every day.

School Life

Math, Spanish, social studies, science, and a foreign language (usually English or French) are the main subjects taught. Teaching techniques focus on memorization and tests. Although cheating is fairly common, students are punished if they are caught. Classroom overcrowding has necessitated a split in the primary school day, with some students attending a morning session and the remainder going in the afternoon. Most studying is done at school, and homework is minimal. Children in rural areas especially have little time to devote to homework, as they are required to care for younger siblings or work after school to help support their families.

Teachers and students tend to have friendly, caring relationships with each other. Even so, teachers rarely spend time outside of class mentoring or assisting students. More emphasis tends to be placed on students completing grade levels than on the quality of their learning experiences. School activities include Independence Day preparations, occasional day and weekend trips, and end-of-year parties.

Higher Education

After high school, students may attend college or get vocational training. Public universities are subsidized, and scholarships are available. To gain admittance to a public university, students must pass an entrance exam. The two largest schools are the University of Costa Rica and the National University. The country is home to several private universities as well. The National Learning Institute offers a wide range of vocational courses free of charge to all, enabling those Costa Ricans with fewer resources to enter the

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labor force with valuable skills.

Health

A national healthcare system serves all citizens, and medical care is considered very good, though the system suffers from inadequate funding. Wait times for standard appointments can be several hours. Those who can afford it pay for private services to receive quicker care.

Life expectancy has risen in recent years. Infant malnutrition and inadequate prenatal care, which were once problems in rural areas, have become far less common because of the national healthcare system. Mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue fever, chikungunya, and the Zika virus are a threat in some areas, though uncommon overall.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of Costa Rica, 2114 S Street NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 499-2991; web site www.costarica-embassy.org; Costa Rica Tourist Board, phone (866) COSTA RICA, web site www.visitcostarica.com.

Country and Development Data

Capital	San José
Population	4,987,142 (rank-121)
Area (sq. mi.)	19,730 (rank-126)
Area (sq. km.)	51,100
Human Development Index	63 of 188 countries
Gender Inequality Index	63 of 188 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$16,900
Adult Literacy	98% (male); 98% (female)
Infant Mortality	8 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	78 (male); 82 (female)
Currency	Costa Rican colon

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Costa Rica



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BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Jamaica is part of the Greater Antilles, a chain of islands that forms the northern boundary of the Caribbean Sea. Its nearest neighbor is Cuba (about 90 miles, or 145 kilometers, to the north). Only 51 miles (82 kilometers) across at its widest point, Jamaica is just smaller than The Gambia or the U.S. state of Connecticut. Eighty percent of the island is mountainous. Only 11 percent is suitable for cultivation. A natural port on the southern coast is home to Jamaica's capital, Kingston.

Jamaica has a tropical maritime climate, but rainfall varies depending on the region. The rainy seasons occur in May and October. Hurricane season lasts from June through November. The tropical island climate prevents extreme temperature variations; temperatures generally are 80 to 90°F (26–32°C).

History

Early Inhabitants and Colonization

Jamaica's original inhabitants were the Taíno (Arawak), who called the island *Xaymaca*, meaning either “land of wood and water” or “land of springs.” Columbus landed on the island in 1494. The Taíno were decimated within a few decades by European diseases and the harsh life settlers imposed on them.

The Spanish occupied the island until 1655, when it was captured and colonized by the English. By the late 17th century, the English had established sugarcane plantations

and were importing large numbers of slaves from Africa. Some slaves managed to run away and establish settlements in the mountains, some of which remain today; called Maroons, descendants of these runaway slaves enjoy some political autonomy. Slavery was abolished in 1838, though life for the former slaves remained difficult.

In 1865, Paul Bogle led the Morant Bay Rebellion, a protest that demanded fair treatment and justice for all Jamaicans. The protest was pivotal in Jamaica's fight for more autonomy and made Bogle a national hero. In 1866, Jamaica's status was upgraded from colonial possession to British crown colony, affording the island additional autonomy. During the 1930s, people began calling for self-determination. In 1938, serious social unrest was stirred up by long-standing injustices and labor problems. Alexander Bustamante, aided by Norman Manley, championed labor's cause, sparking important social change. The two also formed today's major political parties. A new constitution in 1944 ended rule by the British crown colony government and granted adult suffrage. However, Jamaica remained under nominal British rule until it gained full independence in 1962.

Independence and Political Transitions

Since independence, political power has been dominated by Jamaica's two major political parties: the center-left People's National Party (PNP), founded by Manley, and the center-right Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), founded by Bustamante. In the decade after independence, under the leadership of the JLP, Jamaica experienced rapid economic growth. During the 1970s, the PNP headed a social-democrat government that concentrated on social issues and help for the poor. However, severe economic problems led to a 1980

victory for Edward Seaga and the JLP, which dominated the government throughout the decade.

Most elections in the 1980s and 1990s were marked by fraud and violence, as political parties strove to maintain control over communities known as *garrison constituencies*, in which political parties joined forces with urban gangs to force citizens to vote for certain candidates. National elections in 1989 brought the PNP to power once again. After 14 years as prime minister, PNP leader Percival James Patterson stepped down in 2006 and was replaced by Portia Simpson-Miller, Jamaica's first female prime minister.

In recent elections, political power has continued to alternate between the PNP and the JLP, which returned to power in 2016. Issues driving current politics in Jamaica include a struggling economy, drug trafficking, corruption, and violent crime, with one of the highest murder rates in the world.

Recent Events and Trends

- **State of emergency:** In January 2018, Jamaican prime minister Andrew Holness declared a state of emergency in Saint James, a parish that includes the popular tourist destination of Montego Bay, after a spate of gang-related violence. The emergency declaration is part of a larger campaign to fight crime under the Zones of Special Operations Act, an anti-crime law passed in 2017 that gives police and security forces the power to search and detain Jamaican citizens without a warrant in designated high-crime areas. In recent decades, Jamaica has struggled with a high rate of violent crime.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Most people are of African ancestry (92 percent). Among those with African ancestry, many claim mixed heritage, which reflects the various groups that have come to the island over the centuries, including Europeans, East Indians, Chinese, and Middle Easterners, in addition to the indigenous Taíno (Arawak). This mixed heritage is reflected in Jamaica's national motto: "Out of Many, One People." The rest of the population is made up of whites of European descent, East Indians, Chinese, and other groups.

More than half of the population lives in urban areas. Kingston is the capital and largest city. Because many people leave to seek greater opportunity, nearly as many Jamaicans live outside of Jamaica as on the island, according to some estimates. Most expatriates live in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Language

English is the official language of Jamaica and the primary language of business, government, and the media. Most Jamaicans understand Standard English; however, a Jamaican's ability to speak Standard English may vary depending on the person's level of education. *Patois* (an English-based creole with West African influences) is commonly used in everyday conversation. Jamaican speech, whether in English or *patois*, has a distinctive rhythmic and

melodic quality.

Religion

Most Jamaicans (65 percent) are Protestants, and many major denominations are represented on the island. The largest Protestant group is made up of various denominations of the Church of God (26 percent), followed by Seventh-day Adventists (12 percent), Pentecostals (11 percent), and Baptists (7 percent). Roughly 2 percent of the people are Roman Catholic.

Jamaicans commonly use the term *Christian* to mean baptized and practicing members of a Protestant church. Non-Christians may practice ceremonies and rituals that have roots in India, China, or Africa but that have become uniquely Jamaican. There is also a long-standing Jewish community, whose first members arrived with Columbus as ship hands to escape the Spanish Inquisition.

The political, cultural, and religious Rastafarian movement originated in Jamaica. Only a small percentage of Jamaicans practice Rastafarianism, but it has had a profound impact on Jamaican and Caribbean culture. Adherents generally believe that they should not forget their African identity and should separate themselves from the negative effects of colonialism and white dominance. They regard Africa as their motherland and the promised land. They consider Ethiopia's late ruler Haile Selassie I to be a messenger of God. Many also observe Old Testament laws, including dietary restrictions, and regard marijuana (*ganja*) as a sacred herb that brings divine experiences and enlightenment. However, Rastafarians tend to view their belief system and philosophy as a way of life rather than an organized religion.

Religion plays a central role in society through the spiritual values and social opportunities it provides. Religious education is included in school curricula at all grades in both private and public schools. At the beginning of every school day, Christian hymns are sung and Bible verses are read. At work, it is common to begin and end business meetings with prayer. In everyday conversation, references to God and the devil are common. The vast majority of Jamaican churchgoers are women and children.

General Attitudes

Jamaicans tend to enjoy spending time together and having lively conversations. People are generally outgoing, warm, and hospitable; however, they may be reserved with strangers. Jamaicans tend to live in tight-knit neighborhoods, so it is considered important to be thoughtful, neighborly, and charitable. Selfish or standoffish behavior is looked down upon.

Jamaicans generally appreciate honesty, hard work, education, and professionalism, although one's socioeconomic status also has significant bearing on how Jamaicans view one another. Jamaicans tend to have a strong entrepreneurial spirit and are increasingly building a strong business atmosphere in urban areas. Many Jamaicans strive for financial security and prestige. Homes, properties, and vehicles are valued possessions. Men who provide well for their families are referred to as *boss* by other men; women who do so are similarly treated with respect. Those who willingly leave the

physical needs of their families unmet, especially while taking care of themselves, face strong social disapproval.

Jamaicans typically have a fairly flexible approach to life and tend to be good-natured in dealing with life's challenges, even if there is no solution to the problem at hand. Flexibility is also evident in attitudes toward time and schedules, especially those related to social events. A common phrase is *Soon come*, which can mean anything from five minutes to next week. Events and meetings often begin late, although people tend to be more punctual in urban areas, especially when work-related matters are involved.

Most Jamaicans have a strong sense of individuality, which is manifest in their dress and speech. Creativity and expression are considered important, and strong personalities are common. As a whole, Jamaicans are proud of the contributions their country has made to the world in areas such as sports and music and have a well-developed sense of patriotism.

Personal Appearance

While Jamaicans may dress in a variety of ways, women generally try to keep themselves and their children well dressed, especially at church. Older women usually wear dresses or skirts. Professional women typically wear business suits or skirts. Jeans or linen or tailored pants are the norm among women for social events. Institutions such as banks and insurance companies usually provide employees, particularly women, with uniforms. Children also wear uniforms for school. Men usually wear casual clothing for most occasions. This may include jeans or khakis with a cotton button-up shirt or T-shirt, accompanied with sandals, loafers, or sneakers. Youth fashions are often brightly colored and commonly follow trends from the United States and the music industry.

Clothing and accessories worn throughout the island often feature Rastafarian colors (green, red, and gold). Some Jamaicans may wear their hair in dreadlocks, particularly Rastafarians, who do not cut their hair. Professional men typically cut their hair short, though long hairstyles are slowly starting to gain more acceptance in the professional world. Women's hairstyles vary; many sport relaxed (straightened) hair of varying lengths. Those who leave their hair naturally curly wear it in twists, cornrows, and locks, among other styles. Women also wear a wide range of wigs and weaves to enhance or change their look. Overall, well-groomed hair is considered a source of pride, while unkempt hair is viewed negatively.

Most women wear more muted makeup during the day, applying brighter colors more liberally for social events. Costume jewelry (jewelry made from non-precious stones and metals) is common among women who wear jewelry.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Jamaicans consider it important to recognize and greet others and to be recognized in return. Greetings range from a nod to a slap on the back to a kiss—depending on the people

involved and the occasion. Strangers being introduced usually shake hands and say *Good morning*, *Good afternoon*, *Good evening*, or *Good night*.

It is considered rude not to greet someone properly before beginning a conversation or asking a question. Friends and acquaintances passing on the road often call out greetings. A common phrase is *Whap'am?* (What's happening?) or *Alright, alright* (as if responding to "How are you?"). Common parting phrases include *Later*, *Likkle more* (See you later), *Tomorrow then*, *Next time*, and *God bless*.

When addressing coworkers or acquaintances, Jamaicans use professional or formal titles (*Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Miss*). Children usually refer to adults who are not family members as *Sir*, *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, or *Miss*. They often refer to close adult family friends as *Auntie* or *Uncle* followed by the person's first name (for example, *Auntie Karen*).

In casual situations, people often use nicknames, which are common in Jamaica. Jamaicans (particularly men) might have many nicknames given them by various friends or groups. The nickname often refers to a physical trait or station in life. Examples include *Fatty* (a fat person; it is a compliment because it indicates life is treating that person well) or *Juicy* (a man who sells juice on the street). Some parents may give their children nicknames at a young age. Family members may also call one another by a *pet name* or *yard name*, which often is a shortened or slightly altered version of a person's given name (*Nicky* for Nicholas).

Gestures

Jamaicans can be very animated when speaking and tend to use hand gestures to help make a point. People sometimes greet one another or show approval of shared ideas by touching fists. They emphasize greetings by holding on to an initial handshake or by touching the person's arm or shoulder. To hail a taxi, one keeps the hand down between thigh and shoulder height (rather than holding it above the head) and waves in a fanning motion.

To get someone's attention, one may clap hands or tap on a grill or gate of a home. Some people say "psst" to attract another's attention, but this can be considered rude. Sucking air through the teeth may express exasperation or the idea of "Give me a break," but it also may be considered a rude way to say "You don't impress me."

Traditional Western social courtesies are common. Men offer seats on a bus to older women, women with young children, or pregnant women. Seated passengers commonly offer to hold packages or children for standing passengers. Men open doors for women in urban areas. Kissing extensively is not common in public.

Visiting

Informal visits take place at the house gate. Visitors simply knock, ring a buzzer, or otherwise call attention to themselves. Only close friends or relatives of the home's occupants will approach the door before being greeted and invited past the gate. Conversations held on the street are called *meet-and-greet* activities.

Visitors inside homes usually are offered a drink and sometimes a meal. Guests sometimes bring their hosts a small

gift (fresh produce, garden flowers, a bottle of wine). Families and friends get together often. In rural areas especially, visits commonly are unannounced. Surprise guests nearly always are welcome.

Eating

Rural families tend to eat dinner together each day after 5 p.m., while urban families may eat together only on weekends because of work and school schedules. Many Jamaicans say a prayer of thanks before or after meals. Meals are usually sociable and not overly formal when guests are present. Buffet meals are popular, as is eating outdoors. Jamaicans eat in the continental style; the fork is in the left hand and the knife remains in the right. While family meals may be casual, good table manners in public are considered an important social refinement.

Restaurant bills usually include a service charge, but if not, one leaves a tip of 10 to 15 percent. Caterers, restaurants, and street vendors often sell *take-away* (take-out) meals served in boxes. Roadside stands or carts commonly feature pineapples, melons, and water coconuts sold as quick snacks or thirst quenchers. Because eating while walking is considered inappropriate, people often eat snacks on the spot.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

The family structure varies in Jamaica according to several factors, including one's social standing and location. For example, families in lower socioeconomic groups and in rural areas usually are larger than those in the middle or upper classes and in cities. In addition, some women in lower-income groups have several children by different men, known as *baby fathers*. The fathers refer to these women as *baby mothers* (as opposed to "wives" or "girlfriends") and are generally expected to provide financial support for children they father. Fathers who do not support their children face social disapproval. Although *baby mothers* are common, many women prefer the social approval that comes with being married to their children's father. It is becoming more common for both men and women to have more than one relationship, though it is considered more acceptable for men than it is for women. Having children prior to marriage is common.

In rural areas, extended families often live together, and child rearing tends to be a collective endeavor. Rural homes often lack fathers, who are forced to live away from their families in order to find the work necessary to support them. In these cases, the oldest child (whether male or female) often takes on the role of an authority figure, as do adults in the extended family and in the neighborhood.

Parents and Children

Parents are expected to ensure their children's general well-being and access to education. Children are expected to offer their parents respect and assist in household duties. From a young age, around nine years old, they begin helping with the cleaning and laundry. Girls also help with cooking.

Grown children typically live with their parents until marriage or until they are able to save enough to afford a place on their own, since housing is generally expensive. Adult children strive to ensure the comfort of their aging parents. Many take pride in providing them with material support, even purchasing them a home if they were never able to buy one themselves. As parents become unable to care for themselves, an adult child takes them in, though rest homes accommodate those whose children live abroad.

Gender Roles

Caring for children generally is seen as a serious responsibility and financial commitment. Men are expected to fill the roles of breadwinner and primary disciplinarian. Women assume primary responsibility for housework and child care, but children often live with grandparents, relatives, or godparents when the mother works outside the home.

Women work in a variety of fields, as teachers, doctors, lawyers, bankers, domestic laborers, and more. They may also be found in non-traditional sectors such as construction or engineering. Women are more likely to pursue higher education than are men, and many hold respected leadership positions throughout the economy and government. For example, Portia Simpson-Miller was elected prime minister in both 2006 and 2011. Even so, domestic violence against women is common, especially in rural areas.

Housing

Economic Circumstance

The quality and style of housing vary considerably in Jamaica. Luxurious mansions of the upper classes, complete with separate quarters for domestic employees, swimming pools, and huge parcels of land, contrast with the basic shacks of the poor. These shacks, located in both urban and rural areas, are almost always erected in defiance of stringent building codes put in place to protect against severe weather like hurricanes and natural disasters such as earthquakes. They are made of zinc (usually used for roofs but sometimes walls as well), wood, and concrete and may lack amenities such as running water, electricity, and indoor bathrooms.

The vast majority of Jamaicans live in accommodations that fall somewhere between the extremes. In cities, many middle-class families live in two- to four-room houses or narrow two-storey condominiums made of cinderblock. Some families live in apartments, particularly in Kingston. Apartment buildings are generally two to three storeys tall and gated. Security precautions, including guard dogs and iron bars over windows and doors, are common.

Rural

Rural homes tend to be larger than urban ones, with three to four bedrooms and two bathrooms. Most are constructed from cinderblock, though wood may also be used. Interiors are decorated with abundant plants, figurines, and trinkets. Many of these homes have verandas, which tend to be used for entertaining visitors. Houses with yards are usually fenced in. Many people grow fruit trees in their gardens. Water storage tanks catch rain water for use in the household.

Home Life

Children may share a bedroom, while parents nearly always have their own. Families that have more than one living room

usually reserve the more formal one for special occasions. Bright paint colors are popular, and wooden furniture is common. Mirrors, Caribbean-style paintings, family pictures, and certificates adorn walls. Middle-class homes are often equipped with the latest electronics, including televisions, sound systems, and computers.

Ownership

Home ownership is common, including among members of the working class, and is a nearly universal goal in Jamaica. The National Housing Trust provides low-interest mortgages to those who pay into the program, though it is difficult to secure a mortgage large enough to cover the cost of most houses; therefore, individuals often resort to private lenders for a second mortgage. Families may own several homes over the course of a lifetime, sometimes using an additional home to generate rental income.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Though there is no set age at which dating begins in Jamaica, youth tend to begin forming relationships around age 16. Young people meet at school, work, parties, or on the street. They socialize at dances, movies, sporting events, church functions, and the market. Youth tend to socialize in groups that often include neighbors, cousins, and close friends.

Marriage in Society

Wealthier Jamaicans and observant Christians (who generally abstain from cohabitation and premarital sex) often marry in their twenties, before children are born. Others move in together in their mid- to late twenties. Among those who marry, engagements may last from six months to a year or longer.

Marriage ceremonies often are prohibitively expensive; therefore, lower-income couples may marry only after years together as a couple, usually after children are born. Others never marry, maintaining a common-law relationship instead. A couple automatically enters into a common-law marriage, which offers all the benefits of formal marriage, after cohabitating for five years. Though such relationships are socially acceptable, marriage does carry prestige for women, and most aim to marry eventually if they can.

Although tolerance has increased, homophobia remains widespread in Jamaican society. Members of the LGBT community often fear for their physical safety because many have been victims of violence, though such violence has decreased somewhat in recent years. Homosexual relationships and same-sex marriage are illegal.

Weddings

When couples marry formally, they generally do so in a church ceremony that is followed by a celebration held in a hall or garden. It features music, drinks, and a meal. The food is often catered and may include chicken, fish, goat, pork, and rice and red peas. A multi-tiered cake is common. Newlyweds typically honeymoon at all-inclusive resorts in Jamaica, often on the north shore. Family and neighbors may help pay for the wedding. A formal marriage is sometimes associated with giving up vices and leading a responsible life.

Divorce

Devout Christians, who make up a significant portion of the

population, tend to disapprove of divorce, though even the most conservative of churches sanction it when domestic abuse is involved. Among the rest of the population, divorce is common and divorced individuals are not stigmatized.

Life Cycle

Birth

To a large extent, life-cycle rituals are a function of a family's religious affiliation and socioeconomic standing. Pregnant women are generally thrown a baby shower, where they receive gifts to help care for the baby. Rastafarians tend to give their children creative names (for example, *Profile*). Among Protestants and Catholics, baptism or christening typically occurs soon after birth. A couple's close friends may be named godparents of the child. Women are often cared for by their mothers or sisters after giving birth and tend to refrain from their normal household duties for about six weeks. Employed women are entitled to eight weeks of paid maternity leave.

Milestones

The 16th birthday is considered a significant coming-of-age milestone, especially for girls, and is celebrated with a big party, to which family and friends are invited. Birthday gifts at this age often include cash, giving teenagers the opportunity to make their own purchases. The 18th birthday is also cause for a large celebration and marks the age at which Jamaicans receive the right to vote and consume alcohol. Socially, young people are considered adults when they move out of their parents' house or when they become parents themselves. The age of retirement in Jamaica is 65.

Death

When a person dies, the body is taken to a funeral home. Most Jamaican funerals are highly elaborate affairs. After a memorial service in a church, synagogue, or mosque, the burial or cremation takes place. After that, there is usually a large meal for the mourners that includes traditional dishes such as *mannish water* (a soup made with goat parts), rice and *peas* (any one of a variety of legumes), and chicken. Often, people close to the deceased will deliver lengthy commemorative speeches. Mourners typically wear formal dress. For men this means suits, and for women it means dresses in the traditional mourning colors of black, mauve, lavender, or lilac. Many Jamaicans reserve an outfit that is worn primarily, if not exclusively, at funerals.

In rural areas or poor towns, it is common for a *nine night* or *set-up* (wake, or period of time when people "sit up") to be held the night before the funeral service. A meal is served, and music is played by a *mento* band (a traditional band commonly composed of a banjo, tambourine, acoustic guitar, and handmade instruments) from evening until sunrise. Some families may hold the wake for eight days before the *nine night* celebration as well. In larger cities, candlelight services are often held instead of wakes. They may occur at the place of death rather than in the home of the deceased.

Diet

Jamaican food generally is spicy. Breakfast often includes *ackee and saltfish* (a meal of yellow fruit served with salted, dried cod), which is the national dish. Fish may be eaten two

or more times a week. Stews and curries (such as curried goat or chicken) are popular. *Jerk* (spicy barbecued pork or chicken, roasted in open pits or on makeshift grills) is often served with bland, hard bread or with yams. *Bammy* (cassava bread), a staple food, is still prepared in the style of the native Taíno (Arawak): the cassava is peeled, grated, sifted, and juiced; the juice (which is mildly poisonous) is discarded, and the grated cassava is placed in circular molds and baked to form thick, hard cakes. It is often served with fish or other meats.

Many people enjoy Indian and Chinese dishes. *Box food* (food eaten out of a box when away from home) generally consists of fish, chicken, or goat served over rice and *peas* (any one of a variety of legumes). Boiled green bananas, boiled or fried plantains, yams, avocados (called *pears*), and fried dumplings are popular side dishes. Fruits (mangoes, bananas, papaya, pineapples, grapefruit, oranges, tomatoes, breadfruit) are plentiful, and one or more types of fruit usually are in season. Vegetables also play an important role in the diet. A typical salad includes lettuce and tomatoes or cabbage and carrots.

Coffee, herbal teas, fruit juices, drinks made from boiled roots, and a variety of alcoholic beverages are common. All hot drinks (coffee, cocoa, green tea, etc.) are called *tea*. Popular drinks include *Milo*, a brand of hot cocoa, and *Malta*, a brand of nonalcoholic beer. Beer and white rum are especially popular. Women usually drink less than men and do not generally drink alcohol directly from the bottle.

Recreation

Sports

Cricket and *football* (soccer) are the most popular sports in Jamaica. *Football* is the most accessible sport, as it requires little equipment. Many people also enjoy table tennis, field hockey, and tennis, though lower-income families often lack access to the facilities needed for these sports. *Athletics* (track and field) plays a significant role in Jamaican culture. High schools across the country compete in a yearly *athletics* event called Champs, and some of these champions go on to compete in the Olympics. Jamaican track-and-field athletes are top performers in world competitions such as the Olympic Games. Girls often play netball (a game similar to basketball) in school.

Leisure

Dominoes and *ludie* (called *ludo* elsewhere, a dice-based board game) are favorite games among men and may be played indoors or outdoors. Many people attend discos, community centers, and clubs. Many young people attend dance clubs, street dances, and street parties; *liming* is a general word for partying but also refers to relaxing and visiting with friends. Other leisure activities include going to movies, plays, and other cultural events as well as enjoying spectator sports such as boxing or team competitions. Various festivals, church activities, and community events provide entertainment and recreation. Many Jamaicans also take advantage of the outdoor activities their island offers, such as hiking and swimming. Television shows featuring local music, cuisine, and attractions are popular, as are sporting events and news programs.

Vacation

Vacations are considered important. People of all economic backgrounds usually take them—sometimes saving all year in order to spend time with their families in this way. In the past, that meant traveling overseas; however, today more people are exploring local attractions instead. These include the island's beaches and all-inclusive resorts. The average Jamaican gets two weeks of vacation time off work, which they usually take in July or August.

The Arts

An annual festival commemorates the birthday of the most famous Jamaican musician, Bob Marley, in early February. Reggae is seen as an older, though still popular, form of Jamaican music, while *dancehall* (which incorporates elements of reggae, disco, and rap) is seen as the new Jamaican music. Many Jamaicans are also fond of jazz, calypso, and gospel. Many young people enjoy *soca* (a mixture of soul music from the United States and calypso), which is especially popular during Carnival.

Theatrical comedies performed in *patois* (an English-based creole with West African influences) are popular. Galleries throughout the island display local fine art, and open-air markets sell folk art. These folk arts are produced primarily for tourists and include basketry, pottery, and textiles.

Holidays

Jamaican holidays include New Year's Day (1 January), Ash Wednesday, Easter (Friday–Monday), Labor Day (23 May), Independence Day (6 August), National Heroes Day (the third Monday in October), Christmas (25 December), and Boxing Day (26 December). Boxing Day is a day to visit family and friends. Maroons celebrate 6 January as their independence day. Carnival is a springtime festival involving parades, costumes, and parties.

Easter and Carnival

Christians begin Easter celebrations on Good Friday, which is marked as the day Jesus Christ was crucified. On Easter Sunday, they celebrate Christ's resurrection. The weekend is spent attending church and relaxing with family. An *Easter bun* is the traditional food eaten during this holiday; it consists of a sweet bread prepared with spices and dried fruit and is served with cheddar cheese. Some Jamaicans may celebrate Easter by going to the beach, attending parties, and visiting with family and friends.

Carnival takes place over the Easter holiday as well, but it tends to be a much smaller celebration in Jamaica than in other Caribbean nations. The parties and parade held during this time draw mostly college-aged students.

Labor Day

Another spring holiday, Labor Day, is devoted to community improvement projects, such as road repair, pruning, community center improvement, and the like. Charitable organizations contribute to various causes on this day. The Labor Day holiday was created in 1961 to commemorate the 1938 labor rebellion headed by Alexander Bustamante that led to Jamaican independence; it replaced Empire Day (24 May), which celebrated Queen Victoria's emancipation of slaves in Jamaica.

Independence Day

Late summer brings Independence Day, which marks the end of British rule in Jamaica and is one of the country's major holidays. Numerous cultural activities are held on the days leading up to the holiday, culminating in a parade and celebration at the national stadium that includes music, dancing, poetry, and other cultural highlights.

Christmas

Christmas is another important holiday. Significant effort is devoted to cleaning and redecorating homes at this time. Tree trunks and stones making up walkways and walls are often painted white in a practice that is referred to as *white washing*, which gives exteriors a bright, clean appearance while also suggesting the look of a "white Christmas." Stores and businesses are decorated for the season as well.

Christmas Eve night features the busiest shopping event of the year—Grand Market Night, when stores remain open all night and vendors sell their wares in the street until morning. There is also music, food, and festivities. Youth and children are allowed to stay up all night to shop, eat, listen to music, and enjoy themselves.

The typical Christmas dinner includes rice and *peas* (any one of a variety of legumes), chicken, baked ham, roast beef, curried goat, and salad. A drink made from ginger and the sorrel plant is a favorite during this time. Dessert consists of ice cream and *Christmas cake*, a dark brown cake made of dried fruits and rum or wine.

SOCIETY**Government****Structure**

Jamaica's government is based on the British model of parliamentary democracy. Although Jamaica is independent, it is part of the Commonwealth of Nations and recognizes Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom as its head of state. She is represented in Jamaica by a governor-general. The governor-general appoints the leader of the majority party or coalition as prime minister, who is head of government.

Parliament consists of an upper house (a 21-member Senate) and a lower house (a 63-member House of Representatives). Representatives are elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms. The prime minister appoints 13 members of the Senate and the opposition appoints 8. The cabinet, led by the prime minister, holds executive power. Elections must be held at least every five years.

Political Landscape

While Jamaica has a number of political parties, very few ever gain representation in Parliament. The center-left People's National Party (PNP) and the center-right Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) are the two major political parties. The government's main challenge is reviving the country's economy, which struggles with high inflation and unemployment. Corruption, drug trafficking, and violence are other serious problems affecting the country's development.

Government and the People

Jamaica's constitution protects freedom of association, assembly, and expression. Despite efforts by the government

and many women's groups to discourage violence against women and young girls, the problem persists. Crime and murder rates are high, especially in the slums. In recent elections, voter turnout has hovered around 50 percent of registered voters. In some poorer urban areas, crime gangs control voter turnout in exchange for political favors, affecting the legitimacy of elections. The voting age is 18.

Economy

Tourism is a key element of the economy, as are remittances, which are primarily sent from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Bauxite (an ore processed to make alumina) is a major export. Other important exports include sugar, rum, coffee, and yams. Agriculture employs around 17 percent of the population.

Jamaica's many economic challenges include a high crime rate, large-scale unemployment, corruption, and a massive amount of public debt. However, Jamaica has initiated a series of reforms that in recent years have reduced the country's public debt and modestly improved the economy. Still, poverty remains a challenge, with about 17 percent of the population living below the poverty line.

Jamaica is part of the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), a program designed to improve economic relations between Caribbean nations and the United States. It is also a member of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), a regional economic association. The currency is the Jamaican dollar (JMD).

Transportation and Communications

Cars and buses are the most common form of transportation. Following the British tradition, traffic moves on the left side of the road. The majority of the roads are paved but are often in poor repair. Buses serve all parts of the island and are often crowded; schedules are generally unreliable. *Route taxis* follow set local routes with set fares. Regular taxis, with negotiated fares, are plentiful.

Jamaica's communications system is modern and adequate. Cellular phones are common throughout the country, and many Jamaicans access the internet at home, at internet cafés, or on their smartphones. There are several radio and television stations as well as various daily newspapers. The press is free in Jamaica, and most broadcast media and newspapers are privately owned. They offer a range of news and opinions.

Education**Structure and Access**

Schooling is mandatory from ages 6 to 12, but attendance is not strictly enforced. Some children attend preschool (called *basic school*) from ages 2 or 3 to 6 before beginning primary school, which lasts until age 12. Secondary schools, for youth ages 12 through 17, include high schools as well as technical, comprehensive, and vocational schools.

When and where children attend school may depend on their economic background. The majority of students in Jamaica attend public schools. A lack of money for fees, uniforms, books, supplies, meals, and transportation makes attendance at public schools difficult for some. Though some

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government aid is available, it is not easily accessible. Those who are wealthy enough to afford private schools, called *preparatory schools*, enjoy higher-quality educations, in part because of the smaller class sizes and better access to supplies and extracurricular activities at private institutions.

Most children finish primary school. High school enrollment is lower, and admission is determined by the competitive Grade Six Achievement Test, a comprehensive exam covering the entire primary school curriculum.

School Life

English, Spanish, math, and science are subjects emphasized in school. In 2012, the government instituted a civics program focused on the life of political leader Marcus Garvey. Classroom methods tend to focus on memorization of knowledge taught in lectures and through textbooks and photocopies. Cheating is rare and considered a serious offense. Relationships between students and teachers are formal; teachers are addressed as *Miss* (even if married) or *Sir*. Opportunities for socializing at school include annual banquets and barbecues.

At the end of high school, students take the CSEC (Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate) examination, which is administered by the CXC (Caribbean Examinations Council); they must pass at least five of eight subjects in order to enter institutions of higher education. Passage of five CSEC subjects, including English and math, is also the precondition for many government and private sector jobs. Students may also take the GCE (General Certificate of Education) examination, which is common in the United Kingdom and some British Commonwealth countries. Parents often enroll their children in extra lessons, outside of school, to ensure their success on standardized tests.

Higher Education

Higher education is strongly encouraged in many Jamaican families, though it is more attainable for higher socioeconomic classes because of tuition costs. More young women than young men attend higher education. Higher education is provided at teacher-training colleges; community colleges; vocational schools; a college of agriculture, science, and education; a college of physical education and sports; and schools of music, art, dance, and drama.

Several universities are also present in Jamaica; the major ones include Northern Caribbean University (NCU), University of the West Indies (UWI), University College of the Caribbean (UCC), and the University of Technology (UTECH). Several foreign universities offer satellite campuses on the island as well. The Caribbean Institute of Technology trains Jamaicans in programming and software development. University graduates who fail to find work in Jamaica often seek opportunities in North America or Europe.

Health

The primary health risks in Jamaica are diseases associated with sedentary lifestyles and poor diets. Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, are also significant problems. Most large towns and cities have a hospital. Medical clinics are community-based and available across Jamaica. The public healthcare system covers basic care for all citizens at low cost or for free. Payment might be required in some

Jamaica

cases, especially for more complicated care. Jamaica faces a shortage of healthcare providers, as many move overseas, where they can earn more money. Private healthcare facilities are available. Piped water is safe to drink. Life expectancy has risen in recent years.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of Jamaica, 1520 New Hampshire Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036; phone (202) 452-0660; web site www.embassyofjamaica.org, Jamaica Tourist Board, web site www.visitjamaica.com.

Country and Development Data

Capital	Kingston
Population	2,812,090 (rank=136)
Area (sq. mi.)	4,244 (rank=160)
Area (sq. km.)	10,991
Human Development Index	96 of 188 countries
Gender Inequality Index	93 of 188 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$9,200
Adult Literacy	84% (male); 93% (female)
Infant Mortality	13 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	74 (male); 79 (female)
Currency	Jamaican dollar

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BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Mexico is a little smaller than Saudi Arabia, or about three times the size of the U.S. state of Texas. It shares its northern border with the United States and its southern border with Guatemala and Belize. Deserts separate Mexico from the United States. In central Mexico, there is a large plateau, and jungles are found in the far southeast. Much of the country is covered by mountains, which include the Sierra Madre Oriental and Sierra Madre Occidental mountain ranges. Earthquakes are a common threat in Mexico, which sits atop the boundaries of three tectonic plates: the North American, the Cocos, and the Pacific plates. Mexico is rich in natural resources, including oil, natural gas, gold, silver, and coal.

Temperatures and rainfall vary with elevation and region. The deserts of the north are usually dry and hot. The high central plateau, where Mexico City is located, is cooler and tends to get a lot of rain during the summer. Humidity is higher in the southeast jungles and along coastal areas, where rain falls more often.

History

Indigenous Peoples and Colonization

Mexico's history boasts a long line of advanced indigenous civilizations whose accomplishments rival those of the Egyptians and early Europeans. They built huge empires, were skilled artisans, and created accurate calendars. The Olmecs were among the first inhabitants of the area. By 500 BC, the Maya Empire had built incredible cities in southern

Mexico and Central America, but the empire began to decline in the 10th century AD and eventually fell. Following the fall of the Maya Empire, the Aztecs rose to power and built soaring temples, developed a writing system, and created an accurate calendar.

In the early 1500s, Spanish explorers came to Mexico. Following years of fighting, the Aztecs were conquered by the Spanish in 1521, and Mexico became a colony of Spain. While the Spanish assimilated some aspects of the native cultures, the destruction of these civilizations was widespread. Spaniards brought Christianity to the land and ruled until the 19th century.

Independence

Mexico was one of the first countries to revolt against Spain. Led by a priest named Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, the drive for independence began in September 1810 and was achieved in 1821. A constitution was adopted in 1824 and a republic was established. However, Antonio López de Santa Ana took power in 1833 and ruled as a dictator. During his regime, Mexico diminished in size as it lost territory comprising Texas and much of the current western United States.

Political Transitions and Revolution

Santa Ana resigned in 1855, and after a series of interim presidents, Benito Juárez became president. In 1861, French troops invaded Mexico City and named the Austrian archduke Maximilian the emperor of Mexico. Forces under Juárez overthrew Maximilian in 1867. Dictator Porfirio Díaz came to power in 1877 and was overthrown in 1911, when Mexico entered a period of internal political unrest and violence. That period of social change, which ended in the 1920s and produced a new constitution, became known as the Mexican

Revolution.

The Rise and Fall of the PRI

The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) emerged as the national leader in 1929; it ruled the country as a single party and restricted political dissent for many years. Many changes did take place, but none challenged the PRI's domination. Elected in 1988 amid allegations of fraud, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Canada. After his term, he fled the country because of allegations of corruption.

In the 1990s, charges of corruption against high-level government officials and an economic crisis weakened the PRI's power. In 1997, the PRI lost control of the lower house in Congress for the first time since the party's founding. In July 2000, Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN) was elected president, ending more than 70 years of PRI control of the government.

The Drug War

Felipe Calderón (PAN), who was elected president in 2006, cracked down on the drug trade while attempting to curb rising drug-related violence. He relied on the military, rather than Mexico's underpaid and highly corrupt police force, to increase security and target cartel leaders. During Calderón's six-year term, the military arrested two-thirds of the country's most-wanted drug kingpins. However, these arrests often created power vacuums that bred violence, as those in the cartels' middle ranks vied for leadership positions and organizations splintered into rival groups. In all, more than 60,000 people were killed in drug-related violence between 2006 and 2013 and tens of thousands disappeared.

When PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto became president in 2013, he put a greater emphasis on social programs aimed at preventing young people from joining criminal organizations. The drug trade remains an enormous problem, however. There are several major cartels, the largest of which are the Sinaloa, the Jalisco New Generation, and the Zetas, which employ hundreds of thousands of people and continue to be largely responsible for Mexico's high rate of violence.

Modern Mexico

Despite the violence that plagues its society, Mexico has seen progress in recent years thanks to a growing middle class, an open and increasingly competitive economy, and strengthened democratic institutions. Ensuring that all Mexicans benefit from this progress remains a challenge. Andrés Manuel López Obrador was elected president in 2018 on his third attempt by tapping into voters' frustrations with traditional political parties and by promising to tackle longstanding problems like poverty, economic inequality, corruption, and violence.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Roughly 62 percent of Mexico's population is of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage. Roughly 28 percent belongs to various indigenous groups. Most of these are descendants

of the Maya and Aztecs. About 10 percent is of European ancestry. Most Mexicans tend to identify with their indigenous and Spanish heritage.

Most the population lives in urban areas. Mexico City, the capital, is one of the largest cities in North America; its metropolitan area has a population of about 21 million. Guadalajara and Monterrey are also major population centers. Though many Mexicans continue to immigrate to the United States in search of work and an increased standard of living, hostile attitudes toward immigrants in the United States and improving opportunities in Mexico have slowed migration rates and caused a growing number of Mexicans to return to Mexico.

Language

Spanish is the official language, and Mexico has the largest population of Spanish speakers in the world. The Spanish spoken in Mexico is somewhat unique in pronunciation and idiom uses. One characteristic is the abundant use of diminutives to express small size, endearment, or politeness: *chico* (small) becomes *chiquito*, *abuelo* (grandfather) becomes *abuelito*, etc.

More than two hundred indigenous languages, including Tzotzil and Tzeltal (Mayan dialects), Nahuatl (Aztec), Otomi, Zapotec, and Mixtec, are still spoken in parts of Mexico. Most people who speak an indigenous language also speak some Spanish. Indigenous languages and Spanish are often used jointly in rural schools that serve large indigenous populations, such as those located in the states of Chiapas, Guerrero, and Yucatán. English is taught at public and private schools, but competence in English is rare in most rural areas.

Religion

The majority of Mexicans (83 percent) are Roman Catholic, although many do not attend church services regularly. This is especially true of younger generations. The Catholic Church has greatly influenced the culture, attitudes, and history of Mexicans, and Catholic holidays are celebrated widely. The Virgin of Guadalupe is the patron saint of Mexico and a national symbol. According to legend, she appeared several times to an indigenous man named Juan Diego in December 1531. Other Christian churches are also active in Mexico; some are growing quite rapidly, especially in rural areas.

The Mexican constitution was drafted during the revolution in an attempt to transfer power from the Catholic Church to the people. It guaranteed freedom of worship but banned public displays of worship and forbade churches to own property or exist as legal entities. In 1992, the law was changed, endowing churches with more legal rights. Although many officials ignored the previous restrictions, the law relieves tension between the state and various religions—without forcing the government to endorse a specific church.

General Attitudes

Most Mexicans value friendship, humor, hard work, personal honor, and honesty. Nevertheless, corruption is a fact of life at nearly all levels of society. For many Mexicans, social status is measured by family name, education, and wealth,

which is respected even when that financial success is achieved through illegal means. In general, indigenous Mexicans are more hesitant than other Mexicans to flaunt wealth or accomplishments in public, and they tend to be more appreciative of reserved and humble behavior.

Machismo, the ideal of a strong, forceful man, is still prevalent. The elderly are respected, particularly in indigenous communities. Mexicans traditionally have had a relaxed attitude toward time, although this is changing in urban areas. Generally, they believe individuals are more important than schedules.

Despite Mexico's challenges, Mexicans tend to be patriotic and proud of their country. Though divided on many issues, Mexicans will often put aside their differences and unite for the good of the country during times of crisis. Many Mexicans will also fight publicly for a cause they feel strongly about. In fact, in the tradition of revolutionaries like Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, Mexicans frequently engage in protests, boycotts, and other social movements to bring about improved living, working, and public health conditions. Complaints about government or social institutions are also communicated through political cartoons, graffiti, speeches, pamphlets, and the internet.

Mexicans also tend to be proud of the country's mestizo identity. The mestizo mix of Spanish, indigenous, and African heritage created by colonization has given birth to unique cultural traditions in music, food, dance, dress, language, and social values. However, some Mexicans believe that this concept of mixed racial unity draws attention away from the way race affects social hierarchies, with those of primarily Spanish descent and generally lighter skin often found at the top of the social ladder and those with more indigenous or African backgrounds and generally darker skin at the bottom.

Personal Appearance

Most Mexicans follow the latest fashion trends and wear clothing that is also common in the United States. Brand-name clothes are valued, and counterfeit versions of popular brands are common. Secondhand clothing, much of which comes from the United States, is common among poorer and rural Mexicans. While casual clothing is popular among Mexicans of all ages, older generations tend to dress more formally.

Many indigenous groups wear traditional clothing—either daily or for festivals. In some areas, a man wears a wool poncho (*sarape*) over his shirt and pants when it is cold. He also may wear a wide-brimmed straw hat. Rural men and professional men in the north may wear cowboy hats, boots, and jeans. In the south, men may wear a *guayabera* (a decorative shirt of light fabric that hangs to just below the waist).

Rural women may wear dresses or skirts, often covered by an apron. They may also use a shawl (*rebozo*) to carry a child, cover the head or arms, or help support water buckets carried on the head. Fabric designs and colors can be characteristic of a specific region.

People often dress up for special occasions. Women in particular are careful about their appearances and tend to wear a lot of makeup. Earrings are usually worn daily, while

bracelets, necklaces, and rings may be reserved for important social events. Once widely popular, gold jewelry is now closely associated with drug cartels.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Mexicans usually greet with a handshake or nod of the head, although family and close friends commonly embrace. People may also shake hands while saying good-bye. Women often greet each other with a kiss on the cheek, and men may greet female relatives or close female friends in the same way. Mexicans commonly make eye contact with and smile at strangers passing by.

Common verbal greetings include *Buenos días* (Good morning), *Buenas tardes* (Good afternoon), *Buenas noches* (Good evening/night), and *¿Cómo está?* (How are you?). A casual greeting is *Hola* (Hello). Some Mexican males, especially blue-collar ones, make *piropos* (pick-up lines or sexually suggestive comments) in passing to females, to which the females generally do not respond.

Mexicans commonly have more than one given name and two last names (e.g., *José Luis Martínez Salinas*). The next-to-last name comes from the father and functions as the official surname, while the final name is from the mother. Coworkers address one another by professional title followed by the first surname (e.g., *Doctor Martínez*). Acquaintances or coworkers without a title are addressed as *Señor* (Mr.), *Señora* (Mrs.), or *Señorita* (Miss), followed by the surname. Respected elders often are addressed as *Don* or *Doña*, followed by a given name. Mexicans use *usted*, the formal version of “you,” when greeting a person of higher rank and the more casual *tú* with those of their own age or social position.

Gestures

Mexicans typically stand close to each other while talking. While conversing, eye contact is customary. They often use hand and arm gestures in conversation. Indigenous peoples may be more reserved around foreigners or Mexicans from big cities.

To get someone's attention, Mexicans usually wave and often whistle. A person can indicate “no” by shaking the hand from side to side with the index finger extended and palm outward. The “thumbs up” gesture expresses approval. Pointing an index finger just below one's eye is a warning to be careful, but pointing at others with an index finger is considered rude in most situations. A person may show that something is expensive by making a fist and extending the index finger and thumb to form a C-shaped gesture. To indicate stinginess, a person may bend an elbow and tap or rub it with the hand. Tossing items is considered offensive; one hands items directly to another person.

If someone sneezes, a person may say *Salud* (Health). If passing between conversing individuals is unavoidable, it is polite to say *Con permiso* (Excuse me). It is considered important to say *Gracias* (Thank you) for any favor or commercial service rendered. Men will often open doors,

carry heavy items, and give up their seats on public transportation for women.

Visiting

Mexicans have a reputation for being very hospitable. Unannounced visits are fairly common, but visitors may call ahead to ensure the hosts are home. Visitors usually are welcomed and served refreshments. Refusing refreshments may be considered impolite. Guests will often bring drinks, desserts, or flowers. On special occasions, gifts are important, and in some areas serenading is still popular. Guests are expected to relax and do not offer to help the host unless it is evident some help is needed.

Mexicans tend to enjoy conversing and socializing with relatives or friends. At a dinner party, the meal might not be served until after 8 p.m. because people work late and enjoy socializing before eating. Guests stay for conversation rather than leave directly after the meal. It is considered rude to depart without taking leave of the hosts through handshakes, kisses on the cheek, and (for close relationships) embraces.

Eating

Although schedules vary, Mexicans typically eat three main meals daily: a hearty breakfast, a main meal in the afternoon (between 2 and 4 p.m.), and a light snack called a *cena* or *merienda* in the evening. The main meal may consist of soup or salad, a main dish, and dessert (*postre*) or coffee.

Eating as a family is common. Urban professionals eat many of their meals at restaurants or street-side stands. Families are more likely to eat at restaurants only on the weekends. *Cocinas rapidas* are small restaurants that offer diners a filling meal for an inexpensive price. Food purchased on the street usually is eaten at the stand where the item is bought. It is usually inappropriate for adults to eat while walking on the street. Fast food is a popular option for low-income Mexicans. Tips of 10 to 15 percent are customary in restaurants that have servers.

People are expected to wait until everyone is served before eating. When eating, Mexicans keep both hands above the table. Some foods are eaten with utensils, while others (such as *tacos*, for example) are eaten by hand or by using pieces of tortillas to scoop food. Meals usually are not rushed and may last up to two hours. One should generally ask to be excused when leaving the table.

LIFESTYLE

Family Structure

Whereas several decades ago seven children used to be the average, today most Mexican families—especially those in urban areas—have around two. Rural parents usually have more than three children. A household often includes members of the extended family, though nuclear families are becoming more common among younger people in urban areas. A majority of Mexican children are born out of wedlock.

Immigration of one or more family members to the United

States or elsewhere to work is common and has mixed effects on the family unit. While many families benefit materially from remittances sent to Mexico, long absences from loved ones, unstable work, and sometimes poor living conditions abroad often weaken family relationships.

Parents and Children

Family unity and responsibility are high priorities, with family ties representing lifelong commitments of mutual support. Mexican children generally have few responsibilities outside of studying. Mothers sometimes help their children with homework. Even though most Mexican parents are generally lenient with their children, corporal punishment is not uncommon and is socially accepted. Children generally live with their parents until they marry and sometimes after they marry.

Adult children are expected to take care of their elderly parents, as nursing homes carry a stigma. The eldest male child in particular is expected to care for his parents in old age and support his siblings if parents cannot do so. Specifically, this may mean providing housing for his parents and financing his siblings' educations by paying their university tuition or purchasing their books and uniforms. Because male children—especially the oldest son—are seen as carriers of their families' legacies, they are often favored during childhood.

Gender Roles

In many families, the father is the leader and provides economic support, while the mother and daughters are responsible for the domestic duties of cooking, cleaning, sewing, and childcare. Additionally, female family members often encourage the use of native indigenous languages in the home, keep cultural traditions alive, and participate in religious ceremonies. The father represents masculine sensibilities and often strives, through example, to instill moral character in his children. Girls are often encouraged to display femininity in their dress and disposition, while boys are encouraged to play sports and spend time with male role models. In some ethnic groups, the mother is the leader, and more women from almost all groups are entering the formal workplace: about 45 percent of women now work outside the home. Rural men and women often work together in the fields.

Though women in urban areas of central and northern Mexico have long enjoyed access to education, their rural counterparts—especially those in the south of the country—have only recently been able to do so. Women throughout the country are still struggling to achieve social equality and access to positions of power. Activists and government organizations strive to provide women with the skills necessary to compete with men in political and social arenas. But even though Mexico may appear to be a dominantly male-run society, behind the scenes, women play important roles in facilitating the progression of government, business, science, and technology.

Housing

Exteriors

Most Mexican dwellings, especially in urban areas, are box-like, rectangular buildings with few frills and little

greenery. People try to make up for the lack of lawn outside their homes by hanging lots of flowers and plants on their exterior walls. Some rural dwellings are made from adobe or stone, materials ideally suited to the Mexican climate, but urban-style cement and brick buildings have become more common in rural areas.

Because of earthquakes, people in both urban and rural areas now build houses that do not exceed two storeys and that are constructed of cement blocks and steel bars, which are often left protruding out of the roofs. In urban centers, especially Mexico City, complexes called *vecindades* contain 10 to 12 small one- to two-storey low-income housing units connected by a shared patio. In deeply impoverished areas, houses may be made from cardboard and other found materials.

Interiors

Houses usually have one to three bedrooms, though in poorer urban homes and in many rural ones, the sleeping area may be separated from the rest of the house with only a curtain, if at all. A multipurpose room used for visiting, cooking, and dining is common. Virtually all homes have electricity and most have indoor plumbing.

Standard furnishings include a couch, dining table, refrigerator, television, and music player. Mexicans typically decorate their walls with pictures of ancestors, wedding and graduation photos, and religious art, especially of the Virgin Mary.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Because young people usually spend most of their academic careers in the same group, they tend to form deep relationships—some romantic—with their peers in school. Couples might also meet at community social events, cafés, clubs, and bars. When dating, a young man often meets the young woman at a prearranged place rather than picking her up at her home. However, parental approval of the activity and of the boyfriend is important.

In some rural areas, it is considered a mark of poor character for a young woman to go out alone after dark, so a young man may call on her at home. Elsewhere, couples frequent movies, beaches, bars, and nightclubs. They may also spend time strolling in a central plaza or park. Public displays of affection are the norm when family members are not present.

At the beginning of a romantic relationship, small tokens such as flowers, candles, stuffed animals, or poems are often exchanged to express interest or love. Some men express a deeper commitment to a love interest by hiring a *marachi* band to perform love songs to his girlfriend (and her family and neighbors) outside of her home.

Marriage in Society

Getting married is an important goal for most Mexicans, especially women. On average, men and women usually marry in their mid-twenties, though in rural areas they may be much younger. Most men still follow the tradition of asking the woman's parents for permission to marry. An engagement period allows the bride and her family to prepare for the wedding.

Common-law marriage is recognized, though it is not commonly practiced. Those involved in such a relationship have some parental duties and financial obligations toward each other if the union is dissolved.

Same-sex marriage is explicitly legal in Mexico City and in several states. In June 2015, the Mexican Supreme Court ruled it discriminatory for states to deny same-sex marriages, effectively legalizing the practice throughout the country. Same-sex couples who are denied marriage licenses in their states must seek injunctions from district judges, who are now required to grant them. The federal Mexican government is seeking to officially legalize same-sex marriage nationwide.

The divorce rate is relatively low, partly because of the dominance of the Catholic faith, which does not approve of divorce. Teen pregnancy is common, and unmarried women tend to keep and raise the child with the help of their parents.

Weddings

Many people marry first in a civil ceremony and then in a church, following Catholic traditions. These two events usually occur within days of each other, with the civil ceremony generally attended by immediate family members only and the church ceremony open to both family and invited guests.

Because marriage is a major milestone for Mexicans, many families spend a great deal of money on the wedding reception, which typically includes food, music, dancing, and games. Traditionally, the bride's family pays for the reception and the "post party," an informal celebration that is usually held the day after the wedding. The groom usually pays for the wedding ceremony (such as flowers, church fees, etc.), the rings, the bride's dress, and the honeymoon. Less affluent families may conduct a civil ceremony only and forgo costly festivities.

Life Cycle

Birth

Friends and family members hold parties for expectant mothers a few weeks prior to the woman's due date. Here they provide gifts, food, and entertainment to celebrate the impending arrival of the baby. Some traditional indigenous midwives believe that pregnant women should not be exposed to extremes in temperature, spicy food, or physical activity because doing so will hinder the birthing process. These midwives, often found in southern Mexico, use holistic practices to assist the woman in labor. Women living in urban areas or rural regions where such facilities exist usually give birth in modern hospitals. A nurse will typically pierce a baby girl's ears the day of her birth. Grandparents play a key support role during a baby's early days.

Most Mexican babies are baptized. The performing of this religious ritual is the focus of a major social event attended by the child's *padrinos* (godparents) and numerous family members and friends.

Milestones

Although legally a Mexican girl does not reach adulthood until she turns 18, her *quinceaños* (15th birthday) has traditionally marked that transition. Often an extravagant and costly event, the *fiesta de quince* (15th birthday party) is part religious ceremony, part big party. It begins with a special

Mass, after which family and friends gather to celebrate with food, music, and dance. The birthday girl wears an elaborate gown and what is often her first pair of high-heeled shoes. She is escorted by a group of young men with whom she dances after one waltz with her father.

Death

After the death of a loved one, most Mexicans do the bulk of their mourning in funeral homes or in small chapels, though some rural indigenous Mexicans may mourn in their homes. Typically, the body is buried within two or three days of death. On the way to the cemetery, female mourners dressed in black carry white flowers. In rural communities, a band composed of guitars, trumpets, drums, and harps may accompany mourners to the cemetery. Nine days of community prayer in the home of the deceased follows the burial. When these days are over, a cross is carried to the cemetery and placed on the deceased's grave.

Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead, 1–2 November) is a holiday celebrated each year to honor the spirits of deceased family members. In the home or at the graveside, altars for the dead are adorned with food, beverages, and the relative's favorite objects. These offerings are left out for the spirits to sample from as they pass by on their yearly tour of earth. The holiday is not only a time to pray and reflect but also one to drink, eat, laugh, and share stories about deceased loved ones.

Diet

Staple foods include corn, beans, rice, and chilies. These typically are combined with spices, vegetables, and meats or fish. Some foods and dishes are regional, but others are common throughout the nation. Cornmeal or flour tortillas are eaten everywhere.

Common dishes include *tortas* (hollow rolls stuffed with meat, cheese, or beans), *quesadillas* (tortillas baked or fried with cheese), *mole* (spicy or sweet sauce served with meat), and *tacos* (folded tortillas with meat or other filling). Popular soups include *pozole* (pork-and-hominy soup), *birria* (goat soup), and *menudo* (spicy tripe soup). *Enchiladas* are tortillas filled with meat and covered in a chili sauce. *Tamales* are cornmeal dough stuffed with meat, cheese, fruit, or other filling; they are wrapped in a corn husk or banana leaf and steamed. People often make homemade fruit drinks, but commercially produced soda is everywhere.

Recreation

Sports

Fútbol (soccer) is Mexico's most popular sport; the national team has competed in several World Cups. Bullfighting draws the next highest number of spectators. Professional wrestling (*la lucha libre*) has a large following. Popular participation sports include baseball, basketball, tennis, and volleyball. Other activities vary by region: surfing, diving, and swimming are popular in coastal areas; hiking in mountainous ones; and horseback riding in northern ranch states. Mexicans enjoy their own form of rodeo called *charreada*, which is often accompanied by a fair-like atmosphere.

Leisure

Watching television is a favorite leisure activity, especially in urban areas. *Telenovelas* (soap operas) are popular, and men

often gather on weekends to watch televised soccer games. Women throughout the country enjoy making various crafts. In the southern states, young girls embroider designs on tablecloths, dresses, and quilts, sometimes selling these goods in central markets. Listening to music and dancing is popular among Mexicans of all ages.

On weekends, families and friends enjoy gathering at home or in restaurants. Meeting for a chat in the *zócalo* (town square) in the evening or on Sunday is popular among older rural men. Daylong *fiestas* (parties) and weeklong festivals nearly always feature fireworks, feasts, and bullfights.

Urban youth enjoy spending their free time in shopping malls, where they go to movies or chat with friends. Many young people also like to exercise at the gym. Young children enjoy outdoor activities such as riding bikes, going to nearby parks, and playing hide-and-seek; popular indoor activities for children include playing video games, browsing the internet, and dancing to music.

Vacation

Full-time employees usually receive up to two weeks of paid vacation. When official holidays fall on Thursdays, Fridays, or Mondays, Mexican workers enjoy *puentes* (literally "bridges"), or extended weekends, that are often used to vacation or visit relatives. Middle- and upper-class families often vacation along the beaches of the Pacific and Caribbean. Archeological sites such as Teotihuacán, Monte Albán, Uxmal, and Chichén Itzá attract many vacationers, as do the colonial cities of Morelia and Oaxaca. Oaxaca is home to a popular cultural festival, Guelaguetza. Many Mexicans also visit the International Cervantes Culture Festival, in Guanajuato, and the Morelia International Film Festival.

The Arts

Song and Dance

Song and dance are integral to Mexican society. Originating in Mexico, *mariachi* music has found many international audiences. *Mariachi* bands vary in size but generally consist of a singer, violins, trumpets, and various guitars. *Corridos*, songs that tell stories, and *ranchera* are other forms of traditional music. Mexico has become a major music recording and distribution center for the Americas. Dances, such as the *Jarabe Tapatío* (Mexican Hat Dance), often accompany traditional music and *fiestas* (parties).

In Mexico City, the Palacio de Bellas Artes (Palace of Fine Arts) features the famous Ballet Folklórico de México (Mexican Folklore Ballet), and the National Autonomous University of Mexico hosts a philharmonic orchestra that has been performing classical music since 1936.

Visual Arts

Revolutionary themes dominated all types of art the first half of the century and remain important today. For example, brightly colored murals commissioned by the government in the 1920s and 1930s decorate many public buildings. Diego Rivera and other Mexican artists inspired muralist movements worldwide, and the muralist tradition continues in Mexico today.

Museums feature the art of ancient civilizations as well as fine art. Textiles, pottery, and silverwork are popular and can be seen in many markets.

Film

The period spanning the 1930s to the 1950s was known as the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema. Notable directors such as Emilio Fernández and Luis Buñuel influenced filmmaking during this time.

In the 1990s, Mexican film again flowered. This era, dubbed the New Mexican Cinema, saw directors like Alfonso Arau and Alfonso Cuarón create important films such as *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992) and *Y tu mamá también* (2001). In recent years, Cuarón, Guillermo del Toro, and Alejandro González Iñárritu have directed successful films within the American and British film industries as well; in 2014 Cuarón became the first Latin American director to win an Oscar, awarded for his film *Gravity* (2013).

Holidays

Holidays include New Year's Day (1 January); Constitution Day (5 February); Birthday of Benito Juárez (third Monday in March); Labor Day (1 May); Independence Day (16 September), which is marked by a presidential address and *El Grito* (the cry of freedom) on the evening of 15 September; *Día de la Raza* (Day of the Races), which celebrates indigenous heritage (12 October); Revolution Day (20 November); and Christmas Day (25 December). Many offices close for a half day on Mother's Day (10 May), when schools sponsor special festivities.

Major religious holidays include Saint Anthony's Day (17 January), when children take their pets to church to be blessed; *Semana Santa* (Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday); Corpus Christi (May or June); and Assumption (15 August). During the period known as *Día de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead (1–2 November), families gather to celebrate life while they honor the dead. Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe (12 December) and *Noche Buena* (Christmas Eve, 24 December) are so popular that most offices and businesses honor them as public holidays. Christmas celebrations begin on 16 December with nightly parties, called *posadas*, and end on Day of the Kings (6 January), when most children in central and southern Mexico get their presents.

Each town also has an annual festival that includes a religious ceremony, meal, and dance. Many people try to return home for these events.

Carnaval

Carnaval, the week of parties and parades that precedes Lent, is a favorite holiday in Mexico. It is a time of indulgence before the solemn religious holiday that follows. The most popular place to celebrate is in the tropical port city of Veracruz, where thousands of dancers, musicians, and other performance artists gather to parade along the city's seaside boardwalk in elaborate masquerade. At the end of a weekend filled with parties, a king and queen of *Carnaval* are crowned.

Semana Santa

Mexicans look forward to time off school and work during *Semana Santa*. Many who live in big cities and the central states flock to the coast. Towns also hold *ferias* (fairs), complete with amusement-park rides, games, and food stands stocked with snacks such as *empanadas* (meat, vegetable, or cheese turnovers) and *quesadillas* (tortillas baked or fried with cheese).

Christmas

The *posadas* held during the Christmas season (16–24 December) are another favorite time of celebration. During these nightly parties, families reenact the night when Mary and Joseph searched for lodging (*posada*). The hosts act as innkeepers while their guests act as lost pilgrims seeking shelter. The tradition holds that guests are initially turned away until a pregnant Mary—a woman dressed as the Virgin or a statue of her—is recognized in the crowd. All are then invited into the home to pray and celebrate with song, dance, and food, as well as piñatas for the children.

SOCIETY

Government

Structure

Mexico's federal presidential republic of 31 states and one federal district operates under a central government led by a president. The president is the head of state and head of government. The president is directly elected by popular vote to serve only one six-year term.

The legislature is composed of a 128-seat Senate and 500-seat Chamber of Deputies. Members of congress are elected directly and through proportional representation to serve terms of either six years (senators) or three years (deputies). Forty percent of party candidates are required to be women.

Though the Supreme Court has become more independent in recent years, as a whole the judicial system lacks transparency and is prone to corruption.

Political Landscape

Mexico has four main political parties: the right-wing National Action Party (PAN), the centrist Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the left-wing Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and the left-wing National Regeneration Movement (MORENA). From 1929 to 2000, Mexico's political landscape was dominated by the authoritarian style of the PRI. However, Mexico has since transitioned into a competitive multiparty system.

Mexico faces some major challenges, including violence, the illicit drug trade, and widespread corruption. Political parties have been accused of voting fraud, decreasing the legitimacy of the country's democratic system. Though many Mexicans blame the government for these problems, they also expect the government to fix them.

Government and the People

While states are autonomous, the central government controls education, security, and national industries, among other sectors. The constitution provides for many freedoms, including speech, association, and assembly, which are generally upheld. However, political and social activists and journalists sometimes face threats and violence from the government and criminal organizations.

Few Mexicans have confidence in their government. Corruption is widespread, and efforts to curb it have been slow. Bribery is considered necessary when interacting with Mexico's underpaid public servants and intricate bureaucracy; the practice costs the economy a significant portion of its

gross domestic product (GDP) yearly. Yet despite these challenges, most Mexicans are politically engaged and regard their political affiliation as an important part of their identity.

Past elections have generally been considered free and fair, though election fraud, including vote-buying and unbalanced media coverage of parties, has been reported. Mexico has no law against giving voters gifts, though the gifts are not allowed to be used to influence one's vote. Violence against electoral candidates by political opponents or gangs, consisting of threats, intimidation, and killings, is common. Voting is considered a duty for adults 18 and older but is not enforced.

Economy

Economic Sectors

Service industries employ the highest proportion of Mexicans and create the largest part of the gross domestic product (GDP), although heavier industries such as mining, manufacturing, and petroleum are also important. Pemex, owned by the Mexican government, is one of the world's largest oil companies, but as production has lagged, the government has opened the oil sector to foreign investment and foreign bidding on exploration rights. Tourism brings in several billion dollars each year. Remittances from Mexican emigrants working in the United States are an important source of income. More than half of the Mexican workforce is part of the informal economy.

Free Trade

Since 1994, when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Canada came into effect, the economy has increasingly relied on a growing manufacturing sector. NAFTA lowered trade barriers and increased the number of *maquiladoras* (border industries), where U.S. investment employs Mexican labor. Economists are divided on how much NAFTA has helped Mexico's economy. Although some sectors have grown, others, such as agriculture, have been harmed by competition from duty-free, heavily subsidized products from the United States. In addition, *maquiladoras* have drawn some criticism for not meeting typical U.S. guidelines for wages, safety, and environmental regulations. In 2018, the leaders of Canada, Mexico, and the United States agreed to a deal, the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), that would revise important areas of NAFTA, including agriculture, auto manufacturing, and labor rights.

Mexico also has entered free-trade agreements with the European Union, much of Central America, Japan, and Israel, making its economy one of the most open and globalized in the world. Mexico was one of four founding members of the Pacific Alliance with Peru, Colombia, and Chile, enabling the free movement of goods, people, services, and capital among member nations and allowing the regional group to compete more successfully with China, Europe, and NAFTA countries.

Personal Economies

Mexico is home to a growing middle class, and most Mexicans have access to at least basic resources. However, economic opportunities are fewer among the indigenous, rural, and southern populations. About 46 percent of Mexicans live in poverty. Income distribution is highly

unequal.

Urban residents buy basic goods in supermarkets and smaller neighborhood stores. Street vendors and open-air markets are common and often open to bargaining. In small towns, weekly market days provide food and other goods. The currency is the Mexican *peso* (MXN).

Transportation and Communications

Some Mexicans own personal cars, especially in urban areas, but the majority of people rely on public transportation. Buses and minibuses are plentiful and relatively inexpensive. Mexico City has a subway system. Taxis are numerous. The highway system has grown steadily in recent years, and Mexico has an extensive system of roads, although many remain unpaved or semi-paved. Most people use the private bus system for intercity travel. There are several domestic airlines and numerous international airports, including those in major cities like Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey as well as those serving tourist hubs like Acapulco, Cancún, and Cozumel. To help reduce traffic congestion and pollution, Mexico City officials have tried to promote biking by instituting a public bike rental program and closing one of the city's major avenues to cars on Sundays.

Communications are generally well developed, and cellular phones have become common. High-speed internet is available in major cities and towns. Rural areas have internet access, but internet service remains prohibitively expensive for many people in these areas. Numerous radio and television stations and daily newspapers serve the public. Although freedom of the press is constitutionally protected, it is not respected in practice. Journalists routinely face harassment, intimidation, and violence from corrupt government officials and members of criminal organizations. Mexico is one of the world's deadliest countries for journalists, a problem that has worsened in recent years.

Education

Structure

Education is compulsory for 12 years. After six years of primary education and three years of basic secondary education, students enter one of two tracks: a technical education program or a pre-university education. Those who choose a pre-university program then specialize further.

Access

Most students attend public schools. Attendance is not enforced, and schools may require that students pay some fees. Students who do attend regularly face class sizes of about 30 students, poorly maintained buildings (which may lack drinkable water and electricity), and low-quality state textbooks. Though resources vary by region, access to technology tends to be limited in primary and secondary grades. Some students, mostly ones from middle- and upper-income families, attend private schools, which usually have better facilities and educational outcomes.

Mexico has enacted educational reforms aimed at improving the quality of teaching and curbing corruption. Nevertheless, Mexico continues to have one of the most corrupt education systems in the world. A huge portion of its education budget is siphoned off by administrators and

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teachers who are not actually working.

School Life

Curriculum used to be dominated by rote learning, but collaborative group projects that involve hands-on learning and community engagement have become the norm. Common courses include English, Spanish, indigenous languages, mathematics, science, history, geography, civics, art, technology, and physical education. Midterm and final exams are used to test student knowledge. Cheating is widespread among Mexican students and usually goes unpunished.

Generally speaking, students and teachers have close relationships. They may attend parties at each other's houses to celebrate special events, play on the same intramural sports team, or go on academic trips outside of the classroom together. Nevertheless, students show respect by using the academic titles *licenciado/a*, *maestro/a*, or *profesor/a* to address teachers with bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degrees.

Amiable relationships are not only expected between students and teachers but also among security guards, cleaning staff, cafeteria workers, and other school employees, as socializing and maintaining a pleasant environment are integral to Mexican academic culture. Students often bring guitars to their campuses, and it is not uncommon to hear singing and laughter fill outdoor courtyards.

Higher Education

Obtaining a university degree takes from three to seven years. The mostly free National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), in Mexico City, is prestigious, though few applicants pass its entrance exams. Other public and private universities are located throughout Mexico. Tuition at public schools is lower than that at private schools. Enrollment has increased rapidly in recent decades, and a growing number of women are entering institutes of higher education.

Health

By law, all citizens have access to medical services free of charge at government-operated facilities. Medical facilities are good in large cities but limited in remote areas. Traditional remedies and the use of herbs are common in rural areas. Sanitation and access to safe water are problems in some regions. Air pollution is a serious problem in big cities.

A large portion of Mexicans are overweight or obese, conditions that have contributed to quickly rising rates of heart disease and type 2 diabetes, which are the leading causes of death in the country. Mexicans drink more carbonated beverages than any other citizens in the world. In 2014, Mexico implemented higher taxes on sugary drinks and junk food to discourage dietary choices that have contributed to these lifestyle diseases.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of Mexico, 1911 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20006; phone (202) 728-1600; web site embamex.sre.gob.mx/eng; Mexico Tourism Board, web site www.visitmexico.com.

Mexico

Country and Development Data	
Capital	Mexico City
Population	125,959,205 (rank=11)
Area (sq. mi.)	758,449 (rank=13)
Area (sq. km.)	1,964,375
Human Development Index	74 of 188 countries
Gender Inequality Index	73 of 188 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$19,900
Adult Literacy	96% (male); 94% (female)
Infant Mortality	12 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	75 (male); 80 (female)
Currency	Mexican peso

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BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Panama is a fairly rugged, mountainous country connecting Central and South America. Panama's total land area is just bigger than Sierra Leone and just smaller than the U.S. state of South Carolina. Volcanic activity has made the soil very fertile in some areas, and over half the country is forested.

The man-made Panama Canal runs from Panama City to Colón through Lago Gatún (Lake Gatún). The Canal Zone (*la zona*) stretches between and includes the two cities. Areas outside *la zona* are collectively referred to as the interior (*el interior*).

The Cordillera Central (Tabasará Mountains) forms a spine down the center of the western interior; there are also mountains in the eastern interior. The tropical climate is hot and humid except at higher elevations. The average annual temperature is 80°F (27°C). In the mountains, the average is about 55°F (13°C).

History

Early Peoples and European Contact

Not much is known about the area's original inhabitants, though several dozen indigenous groups are thought to have lived there beginning at least 10,000 years ago. The Cuevas and Coclé were the major tribes in the area when Spaniards arrived. Many indigenous people were killed by unfamiliar European diseases, while others fled into the forest or to nearby islands.

The history of Panama has been greatly affected by its

strategic location between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Columbus claimed the area for Spain in 1502. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Panama served as the route for shipping Incan treasures to Spain, becoming an important center for Spanish commerce in the Americas. It was also a frequent target for English pirates.

In 1821, Spanish rule was overthrown, and Panama became a province of Colombia. During the 1880s, Colombia awarded a contract to build a canal across the narrow isthmus to a French company. However, planning and financing were poor, and yellow fever claimed more than 20,000 lives.

Independence and the Panama Canal

In November 1903, Panama declared independence from Colombia, and the United States sent troops to support the new government. Canal rights were sold to the United States that same year. Construction of the Panama Canal began in 1907 and was completed in 1914. It quickly became an important passage for ships traveling between the Atlantic and the Pacific. In 1978, the U.S. Senate narrowly ratified a treaty signed by U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Panamanian president Omar Torrijos Herrera that would allow Panama to assume control of canal operations in 1999; the United States would continue to guarantee the canal's neutrality.

Dictators

Omar Torrijos Herrera, commander of Panama's national guard, had seized control of the country in 1968. Although he ruled as a dictator, most Panamanians now revere him as a national hero. He turned daily government powers over to a civilian administration in 1978 and allowed free, multiparty legislative elections in 1980. After Torrijos died in a controversial 1981 plane crash, his defense minister, Manuel

Antonio Noriega, became the leader of the Panama Defense Forces and de facto leader of the nation.

Arturo Delvalle Henríquez became president in 1985 but was ousted in 1988 for trying to fire Noriega, who had effectively suspended the constitution. Noriega ruled under a state of emergency and controlled the National Assembly. Following 1989 elections, he refused to allow the new president (who had opposed Noriega) to take office. Noriega's rule became increasingly repressive in Panama, and relations with the United States worsened.

The Fall of Noriega

When a 1989 coup attempt against Noriega failed, the United States sent troops to Panama in response to growing concerns about corruption, violence, and Noriega's threats against U.S. interests. Troops loyal to Noriega were defeated and he was taken prisoner. When the elected government was installed, Noriega was extradited to the United States to stand trial for various drug-trafficking charges. Convicted in 1992, he was sentenced to 40 years in a U.S. prison. Good behavior brought him early release in 2007. He remained in custody while battling extradition to face money laundering charges in France. The battle ended in 2010, when he was sentenced to seven years prison in France. France later agreed to extradite Noriega to Panama to serve a 20-year sentence based on three convictions there; he returned to Panama in December 2011.

Free Elections

After toppling Noriega, the United States installed President Guillermo Endara in 1989. Although Endara's efforts to rebuild the nation were hindered by social unrest, poverty, and corruption, subsequent presidents have made headway. Since 1994, when Ernesto Pérez Balladares was elected president, free and fair elections have prevailed and transitions of power between political parties have been peaceful. Despite progress, corruption continues to be one of the biggest problems faced by the Panamanian government.

Panama Canal Expansion

The Panama Canal has been a major source of revenue for the country since Panama assumed full control of its operation in 1999. In 2006, a project was proposed to expand the canal in order to meet the growing demands of maritime trade and accommodate enormous ships known as mega freighters. After close to a decade of construction at a cost of more than US\$5 billion, the expanded Panama Canal opened in 2016. The expansion is expected to bolster Panama's future economic growth.

Recent Events and Trends

- **Panama Papers scandal:** In November 2016, an independent commission tasked with reviewing Panama's financial and legal system issued a final report that was criticized for lacking major reform proposals. The commission was created in response to the hacked release of 11.5 million documents, dubbed the Panama Papers, that detailed financial and attorney-client information for some 250,000 offshore companies set up for many of the world's rich, powerful, and famous.

- **Manuel Noriega's death:** On 29 May 2017, former dictator Manuel Noriega died at the age of 83. At the time of his death, Noriega was serving a 20-year sentence in Panama for embezzlement, corruption, and murder of political opponents.

Noriega's reign as Panama's military dictator lasted from 1983 to 1989, when a U.S. military invasion ousted him from power.

- **Panama cuts ties with Taiwan:** In June 2017, Panama cut diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Panama had been one of the largest economies to maintain ties with Taiwan. Instead, Panama established diplomatic relations with China, one of the largest users of the Panama Canal and a major investor in the surrounding area. Taiwan criticized the move, stating Panama made the switch for "economic gain."

THE PEOPLE

Population

Next to Belize, Panama has the smallest population in Central America. About 65 percent of Panama's citizens are mestizos (people with mixed indigenous and European heritage). Sixteen percent of Panamanians are black or mulatto, descendants of laborers from the Caribbean who came to work on the canal in the early 1900s; they have mixed Amerindian and West Indian ancestry. Seven percent of the people are white, having European ancestry. The rest are members of various indigenous groups, who have their own rich cultural heritage and often have chosen not to integrate into Panamanian society. The largest groups are the Ngöbe-Buglé, Guna, and Emberá (or Wounaan).

Most of the country's urban population lives in Panama City, in Colón, or along the canal somewhere between. Most of the rest of the population lives as *campesinos* (farmers) in the rural interior of the country.

Language

Spanish is the official language of Panama. Although some people speak English as a native tongue, many others speak English as a second language. However, English is rarely spoken outside of Panama City. Many black Panamanians speak creole English. Indigenous peoples speak various languages, according to their ethnic background. Most prevalent are Ngäbere, Buglere, Guna, and Emberá. Ethnic minorities usually speak their native tongue and Spanish.

Religion

About 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Most of the rest of the population belongs to various Protestant churches. There also are small numbers of Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and Baha'is in Panama.

Although the Catholic Church has great influence on the lives of the people, Panamanian law maintains freedom of worship and separation of church and state. Many Catholics are critical of local ecclesiastical authorities but remain loyal to the pope. Mothers and grandmothers are often the most religious members of the family and steer younger generations toward church attendance.

General Attitudes

Although society is stratified in traditional social classes and there is some tension between different groups, including discrimination against indigenous peoples, most Panamanians

consider all people to be of worth. As a whole, they believe people should be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their class. This value for the individual is also evident in Panamanians' respect for personal strength and charisma. Tradition, family loyalty, stability, and wealth are all important values in Panamanian society. Men are expected to be polite. However, *machismo*, the defining of a man as forceful, daring, and virile, is a large part of Panamanian culture. The ideal woman is well-bred, understanding, and feminine. People in large urban areas are more cosmopolitan in their approach to these traditions.

Nationalism is strong in Panama, a reflection of the country's strategic position in the world and the service it provides to all nations. Most citizens, including interior *campesinos* (farmers), are well informed on topics relating to national and international politics. Panamanians are also aware of and may resent their country's historically unequal association with the United States; however, today most people have positive attitudes toward the country. Panamanians appreciate their Spanish heritage and, to a lesser extent, their indigenous roots.

Personal Appearance

Most people dress in styles similar to those worn in the United States. Bankers and other executives typically wear dark suits and ties. Many rural men wear collared, button-down shirts with four pockets called *guayaberas*. Many Panamanians, especially women, pay careful attention to public appearance. They admire a polished look and rarely wear sloppy clothing. However, styles may seem informal to U.S. observers, and sandals are common footwear.

Traditional costumes are worn on special occasions. For women, this includes a *pollera* (full-length dress with embroidery). For men, it is the *montuno* (baggy shorts and matching embroidered top), *cutarras* (leather sandals), and palm-fiber hats. Guna women wear *mola* (appliquéd) shirts, Ngöbe-Buglé women wear *naguas* (colorful dresses), and Emberá women wear skirts but no top. Indigenous men usually wear Western-style dress.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

When greeting, many women (and sometimes members of the opposite sex) give an *abrazo* (hug). That is, they clasp hands as in a handshake, lean forward, and press cheeks. Men shake hands with one another, often while patting the other on the shoulder. *Campesinos* (farmers) usually shake hands but do not normally hug when greeting. Verbally, they may also "howl" a *saloma*, a personally styled cry used to express friendship, break the monotony of fieldwork, and show joy at *fiestas* (parties).

The most common verbal greetings include *Buenas* (Good day), *¿Cómo está?* (How are you?), *¿Qué tal?* (What's up?), and *¿Qué hay de bueno?* (What's good?). *Buenos días*, *Buenas tardes*, and *Buenas noches* (Good morning/afternoon/evening) are used more formally or with the elderly. Inquiring about the welfare of one's family

members is polite after an initial greeting. For "good-bye," one says *Hasta luego* (See you later) or *Que le vaya bien* (May things go well for you). In the cities, one says *Chao* (Good-bye). *Adiós* is rarely used because it is considered a fairly permanent farewell.

In formal situations among the educated, it is important to address people by educational title, such as *Maestro/a* (teacher), *Ingeniero/a* (person with a bachelor of science degree), or *Doctor/a* (Dr.). These titles usually are followed by the person's given name, not surname. Other titles include *Señor* (Mr.), *Señora* (Mrs.), and *Señorita* (Miss). *Don* and *Doña* are used for respected or elderly men and women. Informally, people often greet one another by given name or nickname. Nicknames may be a shortened version of a name or based on a physical characteristic, such as *flaco* for a skinny person. Using someone's nickname is not polite unless he or she is a close friend. Panamanians often address one another by terms of relationship: *hermano/a* (brother/sister), *amigola* (friend), *tío/a* (uncle/aunt), and so forth.

Gestures

People in the interior use nonverbal communication more often than those in urban areas. For example, they pucker their lips to point or to indicate "over there" or "time to go." One might ask "What's up?" by shrugging with the palms facing up. "No" can be expressed by wagging the index finger from side to side. Using a finger to draw a circle in the air means one is coming right back. Wrinkling a nose can mean "What's going on?" or "I don't understand." Politeness is important and chivalry common. On public transportation, men offer their seats to women or the elderly. Deference to elders in any situation is important. Personal space generally is limited, and people sit or stand close to each other when they converse. Eye contact is important. It is polite to cover one's mouth when yawning.

Visiting

Many Panamanians enjoy hosting friends in their homes. In rural areas, families are quick to host people they have only just met as well. They tend to be open, generous, and informal with their guests. Hosts customarily do not establish an ending time to a visit, as that might indicate to the guests that they are not as important as the hosts' schedule. It is polite for guests to allow their hosts to take care of them. That is, guests do not help with dishes, they take any offers of the best seat or food, and they graciously accept any good-bye gifts. When invited to dinner, guests usually do not take gifts to their hosts; this would imply the hosts are not expected to be thorough in providing hospitality. Rather than giving a gift, guests generally expect to return the favor of a dinner invitation.

A visit is considered a compliment in Panama, and friends and relatives visit one another often. Unannounced visitors are common and welcome. In the interior, relatives see each other almost daily, depending on their relationship and how far they live from one another. People in cities often enjoy Sunday visits. All visitors are offered refreshments, such as a fruit drink. A full meal is also often offered.

Eating

Urban residents generally eat three meals a day. People from the interior often have a big breakfast early, a main meal at midday, and a small dinner around 5 p.m. *Campesino* (farmer) families usually follow the same schedule, but sometimes eat only breakfast and dinner. They may have snacks before or during work. Breakfast virtually always includes coffee, which is served with some combination of bread, oatmeal, *hojaldras* (fry bread), or *empanadas* (stuffed savory pastries). Lunch foods are soup, rice, meat, *tajadas* (fried yellow plantain), and salad. Families make an effort to gather together for dinner, which is usually composed of sandwiches or salads.

Hands generally are kept above the table during a meal, and diners engage in light conversation. Any guests present are served first, followed by the men, children, and women and/or cooks. The cook or hostess usually prepares a plate for each person. Extra food might be put out for second helpings. Guests compliment the cook verbally and by finishing their food. City dwellers eat out often, but *campesinos* rarely do. Urban diners usually leave servers a tip of 5 to 10 percent.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

The family is the basic unit of Panamanian society. Urban parents typically have two or three children, while rural families tend to be larger, with four or five. Because of the changing tempo of modern life, which includes longer work hours and commutes, families tend to spend less time together and nuclear families are gaining prominence over the extended family. Even so, extended families in urban areas often live together for economic reasons, and rural families continue to build houses near each other on family-owned land. Among the Guna, once a couple marries, they move in with the wife's family, as daughters inherit their parents' land. A large number of births take place out of wedlock, but many of these are within stable common-law marriages.

Parents and Children

In urban areas, where both parents often work outside of the home, grandparents assist with child care and household chores. Rural mothers are less likely to be formally employed, but grandmothers still offer hands-on help and childrearing advice.

In both rural and urban areas, boys have nearly complete freedom. Although rural boys have farm responsibilities, they receive little supervision outside of school and have no domestic duties. Urban boys spend most of their free time playing sports and participating in other activities. Girls do most of the chores, including washing dishes, sweeping the floor, and laundering clothes. They also help care for elderly relatives and younger siblings. In rural areas, girls often help their parents with harvesting as well. Among some indigenous groups, boys also do harvest work.

Adult children typically remain in their parents' home until they marry or move to a larger city to study or work. Family members who have migrated to urban areas often return to

their hometowns or villages on the weekends. Even if adult children no longer live with their aging parents, they still care for them, sending money, visiting, sharing meals, offering transportation, and providing for other basic needs.

Gender Roles

In Panama, the mother generally takes responsibility for the home and child care. She is the primary disciplinarian and educator of the children. This traditional role is still quite admired and respected, though young women in particular are increasingly choosing to work outside of the home in fields like education, hospitality, and medicine. As the primary breadwinner, the father's main responsibilities are usually outside the home, but he is still considered the undisputed leader of the family.

Despite the progress that women have made in the workforce, the culture of *machismo* remains prevalent, with men expected to be dominant. Women are often overlooked by men unless being flirted with. Some indigenous groups, such as the Guna, are characterized by matriarchal structures. Domestic violence is a widespread problem.

Housing

Homes in rural areas are usually made from cement or dirt. In the provinces of Herrera and Los Santos, dirt homes were traditionally erected in one day by family, friends, and neighbors. These homes were made by mixing water and hay or rice stalks, then plastering the mixture to a wooden frame. Today, homes like this are only rarely built. Modern homes, in both urban and rural areas, are usually made from cement blocks and have cement floors. Apartments are becoming more common in Panama City, but even there most people live in houses. Two to three bedrooms is the norm. Interiors are generally decorated with neutral colors.

The Ngöbe-Buglé and the Emberá live in wooden houses built on stilts, which raise the main structure between four and seven feet off the ground. Such homes do not generally have running water, and occupants use rivers for bathing and washing. The Guna, inhabitants of Panama's small islands, typically live in round homes made largely of bamboo. The homes generally consist of one large open room, in which hammocks are lowered at night for sleeping and then raised out of the way during the day.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Compared with girls of other Latin American countries or with girls from the interior, urban Panamanian girls enjoy a great degree of freedom; young women in the interior begin dating much later and are subject to parental restrictions. In cities, casual dating is common and marriage is not necessarily the focus of relationships. In rural areas, girls are encouraged to be romantically attached to a single partner, whom they are eventually expected to marry.

Most young people begin dating around age 14. Group dating tends to be the norm, though couples may begin pairing off in later teenage years. Dating couples may exchange rings to indicate their commitment to each other. Youth often meet at local parks or fast-food establishments. University students tend to meet and spend time together on

campus at places like coffee shops. Couples also enjoy dancing, going for walks, meeting at the mall, and watching movies.

To become engaged, a man proposes to his girlfriend. The couple then usually discusses the engagement with the woman's father and announces it to their families at a large dinner. Engagements typically last a few months.

Marriage in Society

Having a mate, preferably a husband but even a boyfriend, is especially important to women for the security and status being in a relationship offers. Most Panamanians expect to marry, and unmarried women of a certain age are met with social disapproval. Urban men usually marry in their mid-twenties, while urban women usually marry in their early twenties. In the interior, women often marry by age 20, some as early as 14; men tend to marry when a bit older. Common-law marriages are prevalent in the interior and are generally as well accepted and stable as legal marriages performed by the state.

Infidelity has become more common among husbands working away from home in the tourism industry along the Caribbean coast and among the wives they leave behind. Infidelity and abuse carried out by men is often excused as natural and forgiven, though the same is not true for women. Though divorce happens with some regularity in affluent middle-class homes, divorce is rare in the population as a whole and often reflects poorly on the wife, who is judged as incapable of satisfying and keeping her husband. Separation is easier and more prevalent among those in common-law relationships.

Homosexual relationships are taboo in Panamanian society. Same-sex marriage, which a majority of Panamanians oppose, was long illegal; however, Panama has signaled it will comply with the 2018 ruling of an international human-rights court that requires the recognition of same-sex marriage.

Weddings

Couples desiring a church marriage must obtain a license; a registered religious official can then perform the marriage. Church weddings, often lavish ones, are common in urban areas. Brides traditionally wear white dresses, which range from simple to elaborate styles depending on economic class, while grooms usually wear dark suits or tuxedos. According to Panamanian tradition, the priest blesses 13 gold coins and gives them to the groom prior to the ceremony. The groom then gives these coins to his bride during the marriage.

A celebration typically follows a wedding ceremony. It includes traditional dishes such as *guandu* (garbanzo beans) and rice, as well as a multi-tiered wedding cake. Traditional dances may be performed by women dressed in lacy, ruffled white dresses with beaded flowers in their hair and men dressed in white with straw hats on their heads.

Life Cycle

Birth

Baby showers are generally thrown for expectant women, with family, friends, and neighbors attending. Many pregnant women are cautious about revealing how far along they are in their pregnancy or exposing themselves to anyone with a

grudge, as doing so is believed to put them at risk for birth complications or an ugly child.

Most births take place in a hospital. Many urban-dwelling Panamanians hire a *nana* (nurse) to help care for the baby for a few months after they return home; some *nanas* continue on with a family for years. Otherwise, grandmothers or sisters typically help the new mother during this period with cooking, cleaning, and child care. Employed women are legally entitled to 14 weeks of paid maternity leave.

In larger cities, mothers are discouraged from taking the baby out in public for at least a month after birth. In the interior, babies are taken out much earlier, since women have to travel by public bus to the nearest hospital (usually one to three hours away) to give birth and take the baby for checkups. Rural mothers often place a red ribbon on the wrist or ankle of a newborn to keep bad spirits away. Throughout Panama, new babies are often dressed in red, a color that is thought to ward off the "evil eye" (misfortune believed to be brought on by envy or ill wishes.)

The babies of Catholic parents are baptized and christened soon after birth. According to one folk story, mainly heard in the interior, babies should be baptized as soon as possible to escape being visited by the *Tulivieja*, a woman who is always searching for the baby she killed to avoid the shame of being abandoned by her lover. The first boy in a Christian family is commonly named after his father and is given a Biblical middle name. Among the matriarchal Guna, who prize females, baby girls have their noses pierced with a gold ring when they are between two and four months old in a special ceremony.

Milestones

Panamanian girls have a special celebration on their fifteenth birthday, or *quinceaños*. The day is marked by a party, which is sometimes as elaborate as a wedding. Eating, drinking, and dancing often continue all night. Traditionally, the passage from girlhood into young adulthood occurs when a father removes his daughter's sandals and puts high-heeled shoes on her feet. The legal age of adulthood is 18. Indigenous girls often take part in a coming-of-age ceremony that coincides with the onset of puberty.

Death

When someone dies, relatives close to the immediate family clean, dress, and prepare the body for a wake. One tradition, now mostly abandoned, involved tying a rope around the deceased's foot to represent a ladder to heaven. The day after the wake, a mass is said in church. After that, members of the community carry the coffin to the cemetery for burial. Mourners return to the family home to share a meal and recite prayers. Prayers are resumed each night of the week after the death and then on monthly and yearly anniversaries after that. The Guna bury loved ones with their belongings and with things they want the deceased to pass on to others in the afterlife.

Diet

In Panama, it is commonly said that one hasn't eaten if one hasn't had rice. Rice is served with nearly every meal, along with a source of protein (eggs, chicken, sardines, meat, fish, or beans). Corn and plantains are also staples. Fish is often

fried. People usually eat vegetables as part of the main dish or in a salad. Fruit is often eaten as a snack. Common dishes in the interior include *sancocho* (chicken soup), *guacho* (rice soup), *bollo* (corn mush that has been boiled in the husk), corn tortillas, and *carne guisado* (stewed meat with tomatoes and spices). *Patacones* is a typical side dish of fried plantain slices. *Arroz con pollo* (rice and chicken) is eaten on special occasions. *Chicha*, a popular drink, is made from fresh fruit, water, and sugar. Coffee is served often throughout the day. A wider variety of international foods are eaten in urban areas, along with traditional foods.

Recreation

Sports

In towns, many participate in team sports. *Fútbol* (soccer) and baseball are the national favorites. Basketball is also popular. In school, children play these as well as volleyball. Soccer balls are ubiquitous, though basketball courts are found only in urban areas and some smaller towns. Sometimes boys may be seen using an orange or grapefruit in place of a baseball.

Leisure

Many Panamanians enjoy attending horse races, boxing matches, cockfights, fairs, and movies. Hiking and shopping are also common activities. The twice-weekly national lottery is extremely popular. Socializing on the porch or visiting family and friends is an important leisure activity. Time is often spent by listening to music and playing cards and dominos. Tops and marbles are favorites among young boys.

Leisure time for rural women often revolves around domestic events. Work is usually an opportunity for socializing and is done at a leisurely pace. Women may get together to make crafts or to socialize and make *bolos* (corn mush that has been boiled in the husk) when the new corn comes in. They may also talk while peeling *guandu* (garbanzo beans) or making *chichas* (drinks made of fresh fruit, water, and sugar). Dancing at night clubs—often till dawn—is popular among city dwellers. In smaller towns, bars called *jardines* (gardens) with large open concrete floors are used for socializing and dancing on weekends.

Vacation

Middle- and upper-class Panamanians often vacation on the coasts, where they lounge on the beach, go shopping, and enjoy the nightlife scenes. They may also take trips to the United States or Spain. Germany and Italy are other favored destinations. Panamanians of nearly all economic backgrounds occasionally travel to Panama City to shop.

The Arts

Indigenous Panamanians create many handicrafts, including textiles, jewelry, baskets, and ceramics. Guna women's *mola* shirts are known for their ornate designs. Poetry incorporates indigenous mythology, and poetry readings are well attended. Dancing is popular, especially the *tamborito*, the country's national dance. The area's traditional music, called *típico*, is played by a band consisting of a singer and players with an accordion, a guitar, and some percussion. *Típico* is more common in rural areas and is joined in cities by reggae, salsa, merengue, and jazz. On the Caribbean coast, drumming and singing to African beats are popular.

Holidays

Official holidays include New Year's Day (1 January), Day of the Martyrs (9 January), Easter (Friday–Sunday), Labor Day (1 May), Independence from Colombia Day (3 November), Uprising of Los Santos (11 November), Independence from Spain Day (28 November), Mother's Day (8 December), and Christmas (25 December). Each village or city holds celebrations to honor the local patron saint. *Carnaval* celebrations are always held the Saturday to Tuesday before Ash Wednesday (usually in February or March). Most businesses shut down during the holidays, as friends and family gather for parties, drinking, and socializing.

Easter

The majority of Panamanians vacation during the Easter holiday, often staying at one of the country's resorts. Even so, during *Semana Santa* (Holy Week), the week leading up to Easter, thousands of people travel to Chiriquí Province to take part in a pilgrimage from the Iglesia del Carmen to the Iglesia Apóstol de Alanje, where a religious icon is kept. As they walk along the street, they pray fervently to the Virgin Mary or to Jesus to forgive them of their sins. Many believe that they or their family members may be healed if their faith is strong enough. On Easter Sunday, Christians attend a church service in the morning and later gather for a meal of chicken or fish, as beef is traditionally prohibited during the holiday.

Christmas

Most Panamanians decorate elaborately for Christmas. Nativity scenes, large wreaths on doors, and colorful decorations in front of houses are common. Many school activities revolve around Christmas during this season, and shops are full of customers looking for Christmas gifts. On Christmas Eve, families gather for a feast that usually includes *guandu* (garbanzo beans) and rice and attend a midnight Christmas mass. Santa Claus, who is less commonly referred to as Papá Noel, delivers presents under a decorated tree, and families exchange gifts at midnight. Christmas Day itself is spent relaxing with family and eating.

New Year's Eve

On New Year's Eve, people gather to eat traditional foods like *guandu* and rice, pork, turkey, and plantains. At midnight, they ignite life-sized dolls (which are usually made to look unattractive) stuffed with straw, grass, and firecrackers to say good-bye to all the bad things of the previous year. Kids light firecrackers, and parties may last until dawn.

SOCIETY

Government

Structure

Panama is a presidential republic. Its president is head of state and head of government. Presidents serve a five-year term and must wait two terms before running for reelection. Members of the 71-seat National Assembly are elected by popular vote to five-year terms. The judicial branch is organized under a nine-member Supreme Court and includes all tribunals and municipal courts. It suffers from politicization and corruption.

Panama is divided into ten provinces and three indigenous regions; the president appoints governors for each province. At the local level, communities elect a *junta local* (town council) to coordinate events for the town. Each indigenous group also has its own form of government, and the Guna have autonomy in their province.

Political Landscape

Several parties are active in Panama, including the center-right Panameñista Party (PP, formerly the Arnulfista Party); the center-left Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), originally formed by Omar Torrijos; and the right-leaning Democratic Change (CD) party. No party is popular enough to govern alone, so larger parties must form coalitions with smaller ones. Challenges that the government faces include an overcrowded prison system and human trafficking.

Government and the People

Freedom of religion and assembly are protected in law and practice. Journalists—especially those who criticize the government—face a hostile environment. Corruption is widespread, and dissatisfaction with the government is a routine topic among friends and neighbors. Even so, Panamanians generally see the current government as an improvement over the authoritarian and U.S.-backed regimes of the past. Many see the steady stream of state-funded infrastructure projects and incentives to attract foreigners to visit and spend money in Panama as positive developments.

Indigenous groups, however, have a long history of protesting in an effort to protect their land from government construction and illegal settlement and logging. Other Panamanians also turn to protests to block unpopular government proposals, such as a bid to change mining laws in 2011 or reform electoral rules in 2012.

All citizens are required by law to vote beginning at age 18. Turnout rates for elections generally fall above 70 percent. The last elections in Panama, held in 2014, were considered free and fair.

Economy

Panama's economy is primarily based on services such as banking, insurance, tourism, and the operation of the Panama Canal. The canal, a major international trade route, provides vital foreign-exchange earnings. Income earned from the Panama Canal has contributed substantially to the economy and will likely grow now that the expansion project aimed at doubling the canal's cargo capacity was completed in 2016. Key exports include fruit and nuts, fish, iron and steel waste, and wood. About 17 percent of the labor force is employed in agriculture-related industries.

The economy, which suffered from years of political instability, authoritarian rule, and U.S. economic sanctions (1988–90), has now been enjoying strong growth for multiple years. Government-sponsored infrastructure development projects, growth in transportation services, and foreign investment have fueled this growth. Once high unemployment rates have dropped in recent years.

However, the economy reflects a wide gap, the second largest in Latin America, between rich and poor. About a quarter of Panamanians live in poverty, though the degree of poverty has lessened in recent years.

The official currency is the *balboa* (PAB), which consists mostly of coins and is fixed at a value equal to the U.S. dollar. Bills are U.S. dollars, which are legal tender.

Transportation and Communications

The highway system is the hub of transportation in Panama. Roads are generally in good condition, especially in and around urban areas. The Inter-American Highway runs from the Costa Rican border through Panama City, ending at the Darien Gap. The capital is linked to Colón by the Trans-Isthmian Highway. Some revenues from the national lottery help build and maintain roads. Domestic airlines and shallow waterways also provide transportation. Panama has one railroad, which runs parallel to the canal. In 2014, a metro system began operation in Panama City. Buses, *chivas* (minibuses), and taxis are readily available in cities. In the interior, people walk, use *chivas* or buses, or ride horses. The majority of people do not own cars.

The use of cellular phones has grown rapidly, with text messaging the preferred mode of communication for many. Centrally located public telephones are available in the interior. Communications facilities are well developed. In cities, the internet is accessed at home and in internet cafés. The government has also invested in a nationwide wireless internet initiative, though coverage in rural areas is inadequate. There are many newspapers as well as television and radio stations.

Education

Structure

Education is compulsory and free between the ages of six and fifteen. Primary education begins in first grade and extends until sixth. The secondary level spans grades seven through nine. After completing the secondary level, a student may go on to one of several vocational schools or prepare to enter a university. An upper-secondary level aimed at college preparation is available, for a fee, from grades ten through twelve.

Private schools offer higher quality education, but only the affluent can afford their tuition. This is especially true of bilingual and international schools, which tend to be very expensive. Religious-based schools also exist.

Access

Most school-aged children complete primary schooling and go on to the secondary level. However, rural families may have difficulty sending children to secondary schools—usually located in larger towns—because of unaffordable daily transportation, uniforms and supplies, or room and board in the city. However, the growing availability of scholarships is expanding the number of opportunities rural students have to get a secondary education. Literacy rates among indigenous groups tend to be lower than those of the greater population.

School Life

In recent years, the government has distributed free laptops to public school students—even those in poorer schools—to promote information technology literacy. Curriculum emphasizes the subjects of math, science, and English. Public school curriculum is not very demanding, and many students

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lag behind grade level when it comes to skills such as reading. Private schools are more rigorous. In public schools, lessons tend to focus on memorization of facts. Students are assigned projects and assessed with tests. Parents, especially those in the interior, may complete much of their child's homework themselves in hopes of earning a high score for him or her. Cheating is considered a normal part of school life. Teachers are highly respected. Students attend sporting events and dances at school.

Higher Education

After finishing upper-secondary school and taking an entrance exam, students may enter university. Panama has a national university (the University of Panama), established in 1935, as well as the public Technological University of Panama. The University of Santa Maria la Antigua, a private Catholic school, is also important. Most Panamanians see acquiring a degree or certification of some kind as vital to succeeding in the competitive job market. Those who do not attend universities may seek training at a vocational school.

Health

Panama has a national public health program that provides such services as free examinations, care for the needy, and health education and sanitation programs. Most people have access to modern medical care of some kind, although the best facilities and personnel are in Panama City and Colón. Some rural health centers are understaffed or poorly equipped. Cases of malaria and yellow fever are mostly confined to rural areas.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of the Republic of Panama, 2862 McGill Terrace NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 483-1407; web site www.embassyofpanama.org; Panama Tourist Bureau, phone (507) 526-7000, web site www.visitpanama.com.

Country and Development Data

Capital	Panama City
Population	3,800,644 (rank=128)
Area (sq. mi.)	29,120 (rank=116)
Area (sq. km.)	75,420
Human Development Index	66 of 188 countries
Gender Inequality Index	100 of 188 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$25,400
Adult Literacy	96% (male); 94% (female)
Infant Mortality	10 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	79 (male); 81 (female)
Currency	Balboa

Panama

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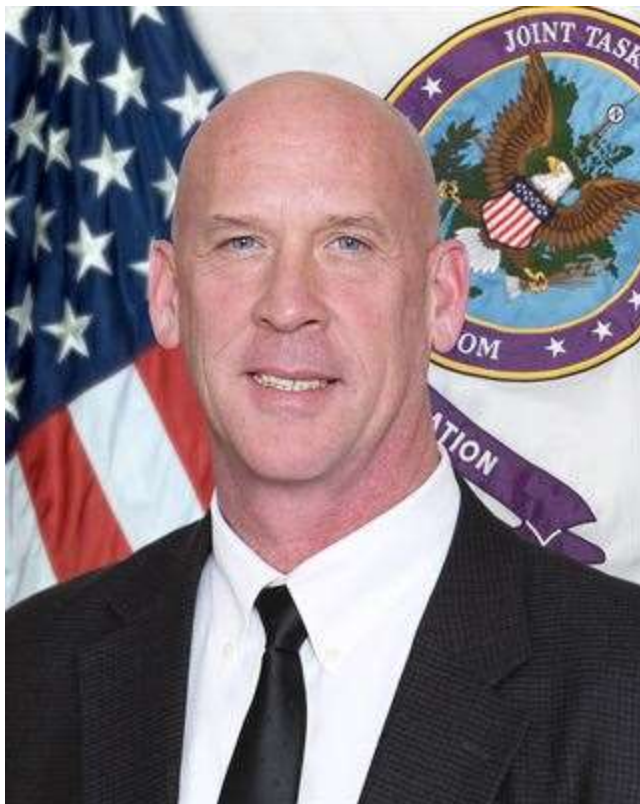
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JOINT TASK FORCE NORTH

Forrest E. Smith

Chief of Staff



Forrest E. Smith is a native of the Finger Lakes region of Upstate New York. He is a 1984 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, and a 2005 SAMS fellow and graduate of the Advanced Operational Arts Studies Fellowship (AOASF) at the school of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) on Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He also served as a faculty member and seminar leader at the School of Advanced Military Studies from 2005-2006.

Smith's assignments as an officer in the Air Defense Artillery (ADA) began in Europe in 1985 with the VII Corps, where he served as a motor officer, platoon leader, executive officer and adjutant in the 6th Battalion, 52d Air Defense Artillery Battalion, 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade in Wurzburg, Germany. After attending the Advanced Officer Course, he returned to the 69th ADA Brigade to command Alpha "Air Attack," a HAWK missile battery, for 30 months. Six months of this command were served as part of Task Force 8-43 ADA, a PATRIOT/Hawk Missile Task Force, in Saudi Arabia and Iraq

in support of the VII Corps in Operation Desert Storm. Follow on staff assignments included three years as a test officer for TEXCOM/OPTEC, before transferring branches to the Acquisition Corps, serving as the assistant program manager for the PATRIOT PAC-3 missile program in Huntsville, Alabama. He returned to the Air Defense branch in 1996, where he served 20 months as the executive officer of 3-43 ADA (PATRIOT), of the 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade. From July 2001 to July 2003, he returned to Europe to command the 5th "Air Attack" Battalion, 7th Air Defense Artillery, as part of the V Corps' 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade. During Operation

Iraqi Freedom, his units deployed to and provided air and missile defense in both Turkey and Israel. He commanded U.S. Patriot forces in Israel as part of Task Force Cobra, the U.S.-Israeli, Arrow Missile and Patriot Missile Task Force with the mission to provide air and missile defense of Tel Aviv and Haifa, Israel. From July 2006 to July 2008, then serving as a colonel, he commanded the Army's largest Air Defense Brigade, the 11th Air Defense Artillery, "Air Attack" Brigade, on Fort Bliss, Texas, where he deployed brigade air attack forces to Iraq, Afghanistan, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Israel. The 11th "Air Attack" Brigade also fielded the Army's first Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile system during that period. He followed brigade command with a military transition team (MTT) assignment as the advisor to the Iraqi army chief of staff with duty at the Iraqi Ground Forces Command Headquarters in Baghdad.

Smith returned from Iraq to Fort Bliss in 2009, and served sequentially as the chief of staff for 36 months and as deputy commander for 12 months for Joint Task Force North. Seven of his 30 years of military service have been in support of DoD support to law enforcement agency counter narcotics missions. Before battalion command as a major, he served 35 months as a joint operations planner and chief of plans for counterdrug support to California and Arizona, at what was then known as Joint Task Force-Six (Counterdrugs).

He assumed his current duties as Joint Task Force North's chief of staff in December 2014.

Smith is married to the former Elma Dolores Rodriguez of El Paso, Texas. He has three children: Dakota Bleu, Alexandra Paige and U.S. Air Force Capt. Tara Brittani.

JOINT TASK FORCE NORTH PARTNERS

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)
- United States Coast Guard (USCG)
- DHS Joint Task Force – West (JTF-W)
- DHS Joint Task Force – East (JTF-E)
- DHS Joint Task Force – Investigations (JTF-I)

Department of Justice

- Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)
- El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC)

High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program

Regional Partnerships

- Caribbean Border Interagency Group (CBIG)
- Corpus Christi Regional Coordinating Mechanism (RECOM)
- New Mexico/West Texas Alliance to Combat Transnational Threats (ACTT)
- Arizona Alliance to Combat Transnational Threats (ACTT)
- California Coastal Regional Coordinating Mechanism (RECOM)
- San Diego Regional Coordination Mechanism (RECOM)

National Guard

- National Guard Bureau (NGB)
- States' National Guard Counter Drug Programs

MILITARY SUPPORT TO LAW ENFORCEMENT

JTF-N missions support counter drug law enforcement agencies with active-duty and Reserve military forces. JTF-N works closely with the National Guard Bureau and states' National Guard counter drug programs to synchronize active-duty and National Guard counter drug support maximizing DoD's contribution. Federal law enforcement partners from the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice, and High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) programs submit support requests to JTF-N. JTF-N provides operational support based on these requests and a comprehensive threat assessment.

Once a military unit agrees to participate, JTF-N facilitates mission planning and execution with the unit and the supported agency.

JTF-N is an effects multiplier, assisting law enforcement agencies to secure the homeland by providing supplemental and unique capabilities.

NOTE: JTF-N can support any Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security or High Intensity Drug Trafficking area organization or component.

MILITARY OPERATIONAL SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

In after-action reports, participating military units have repeatedly remarked that JTF-N homeland security support missions are among the best readiness opportunities in which they have ever participated. Missions yield significant real-world operational experience that enhance unit's combat effectiveness against dynamic transnational threats.

Military units are able to exercise 90 percent of their wartime mission tasks in austere environments, which may include desert or mountainous terrain. Military support operations to law enforcement closely mirror duties that units will perform in overseas contingency deployments, to include support civilian authorities.



While executing JTF-N operational missions, units may also concurrently enhance readiness at some of the nation's best ranges located near the mission sites. Moreover, flexibility in mission execution dates allows units to integrate JTF-N missions into their pre-deployment training cycle.

To maximize value to the unit, JTF-N assigns field grade officers as mission planners to assist participating units throughout the mission planning and execution process.

JTF-N normally funds most mission-related costs to include transportation of personnel and equipment, billeting and rations, expendable supplies, and service support contracts required for mission accomplishment.

"I wish we conducted this ground recon mission before our CTC rotation. Our troopers would have performed area reconnaissance and security operations at a higher level." -6-1 CAV Commander.

CATEGORIES OF JTF-N SUPPORT TO FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES:

Operational Support

- Air, ground and maritime surveillance radar
- Aviation support missions
- Aviation reconnaissance
- Ground sensor operations
- Ground reconnaissance operations
- Ground transportation
- Unmanned aircraft systems

Engineering Support (Southwest border only)

- Road/bridge construction and improvement
- Border lights installation
- Personnel/vehicle barriers

Intelligence Support

- Intelligence analytic support
- Intelligence preparation of the operational environment
- Geospatial intelligence support
- Reserve intelligence analyst support

General Support

- Transportation
- Tunnel detection
- Sustainment
- Mobile Training Teams/Table Top Exercises

Interagency synchronization

- Cooperative defense – facilitating bi-national information sharing
- Point of integration operations
- Support interagency planning process

Technology Integration

- Biometrics
- Ground/air/maritime sensor integration
- Information efficiency and networks
- Leverage Department of Defense science and technology investment



"It is an absolute honor to serve as the commander of this great organization which partners with law enforcement professionals and forces from the National Guard to counter transnational criminal organizations and deter the flow of illicit drugs into the United States. I have been involved in counter drug operations for over five years and I have been awed by the dedication and expertise displayed by the individuals and organizations dedicated to this important mission. However, our adversaries are equally determined and they are adaptive.



Drug overdoses are now the leading cause of death among Americans under age 50 with over 60,000 deaths estimated in 2016. These substances sap the strength and intellect of our fellow citizens, lead them to financial and social ruin, and bring violence to our neighborhoods. Further, the potential exists for transnational criminal organizations to develop alliances with terrorist or insurgent groups while sharing infrastructure, financial networks, and logistical corridors – all of which would foster crime, corruption and ever growing regional instability.

The Department of Defense brings hard earned skills and unique capabilities to the fight against these threats. In the process of providing invaluable support to our law enforcement partners, units perform their mission essential tasks, often in an austere expeditionary environment to sustain or improve their readiness for their wartime mission.

Joint Task Force North has proudly supported this mission for nearly 30 years and remains unwavering in our commitment to Protecting the Homeland!"

- Army BG Laura L. Yeager
Commander, Joint Task Force North

JOINT TASK FORCE NORTH
PROTECTING THE HOMELAND

HISTORY

For nearly 30 years, Joint Task Force North (JTF-N) has played an integral role in supporting law enforcement efforts in the nation's counterdrug campaign along the U.S. border.

Based on Fort Bliss, Texas, JTF-N serves as a joint service command comprised of active-duty and Reserve Component Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, Department of Defense (DoD) civilian employees, and contracted support personnel.

JTF-N provides DoD active-duty support to U.S. law enforcement agencies in the identification and interdiction of transnational criminal organizations' activities within and along the nation's borders and entries into the United States.

As an element of U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) and under operational control of U.S. Army North (ARNORTH), JTF-N operates within NORTHCOM's entire area of responsibility – encompassing most of North America and the Caribbean and including air, land and sea approaches.

Over its history, JTF-N has conducted more than 6,400 missions in support of law enforcement agencies. In the last 16 years, it has assisted these agencies in the seizure of over \$15.2 billion in illegal drugs, keeping them off American streets.

Joint Task Force North
Building 11603,
Old Ironsides Drive
Fort Bliss, Texas 79918-0058

To request support or to inquire about training opportunities, please contact:

JTF-N Joint Operations
Coordination Center
915.313.7777

Email:
n.nc.bliss.jtf.n.list-jocc-all-dl@mail.mil

www.jtfn.northcom.mil

October 2017



JOINT TASK FORCE NORTH
PROTECTING THE HOMELAND



MISSION

Joint Task Force North supports federal law enforcement agencies in the conduct of counter drug/counter transnational organized crime operations and facilitates Department of Defense training in the USNORTHCOM area of responsibility to disrupt transnational criminal organizations and deter their freedom of action in order to protect the homeland and increase DoD unit readiness.