

Quick Facts About Guatemala

Culture

Guatemala is home to 21 indigenous Mayan groups, each with their own language. Around half of the population in Guatemala is indigenous descendant from the Maya civilization. Most modern Maya still practice pre-Hispanic traditions that allow them to preserve their heritage.

Geography

Guatemala is the most northern of the five Central American countries. It is bounded on the north and west by Mexico, on the southeast by Honduras and El Salvador, and on the east by Belize and the Caribbean. Guatemalan coastlines cover about 200 miles on the Pacific Ocean and 70 miles on the Caribbean Sea. Compared to a state in the US, Guatemala is roughly the size of Tennessee. Guatemala's total area of 42,042 square miles contains diverse landscapes ranging from thick jungle to rugged mountains and volcanoes. About two-thirds of the country's total land area is mountainous, with fertile valleys that have produced world-famous coffees. The country is roughly divided into four geographic regions: the central-western highlands, a low northern plateau section that is largely jungle, the southern volcanic regions of the Sierra Madre, and the tropical coastal lowlands.



Climate

With geographic regions that range from mountainous forests to lowland jungles, Guatemala's climate varies throughout the country according to altitude. The department of El Petén, a tropical lowland region, is often described as hot and humid throughout the year. The central and southern mountainous regions are characterized by moderate temperatures and a rainy season from May to the beginning of October. During the dry season, days are clear and the weather is hot at midday, with chilly to cold mornings and evenings.

The city of Antigua is known as the Land of the Eternal Spring because of its pleasant climate.

Economy

The economy is primarily agricultural, employing about 40% of the labor force. Major products include sugarcane, corn, bananas, and coffee. The currency is the quetzal (pronounced "ket sal"), and it has an exchange rate of approximately 7.5Q per \$1. Guatemala has one of the highest poverty rates in Latin America, and its income distribution is among the most unequal in the world. More than half of Guatemala's 15 million people live in poverty. Currently 22% of the population lives below the international poverty line of \$1.25/day and 56% has to make do with less than \$2.50/day.

Poverty weighs more heavily on the indigenous population; 74.2% of which live in poverty. The majority of Guatemalans have basically no access to healthcare.