



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Almost twice the size of Texas, Peru is the third largest country in South America. It covers 496,225 square miles (1,285,216 square kilometers). Only about 3 percent of the land is suitable for farming. The population is concentrated in the west. Peru is divided into three distinct geographic regions: the narrow, dry coastal plain (*costa*) in the west; the tropical lowlands of the Amazon Basin (*selva*) to the east; and the high Andes Mountains (*sierra*), roughly in the center. The Andes rise to elevations of 22,000 feet (6,706 meters). Forests, principally in the Andes and the Amazon Basin, cover more than half of the country. Peru's biodiversity allows for a wide variety of flora and fauna. Plant life ranges from desert vegetation to tropical forests. More than four hundred species of mammals—including jaguars, tapirs, alligators, llamas, *alpacas* (similar to a llama), and monkeys—inhabit the interior of the country. Marine life and bird life are equally diverse; the government has set aside more than 50 areas as protected land, some of which is starting to be used for ecotourism.

Mild earthquakes are common, while more destructive quakes take place less frequently. Peru shares with Bolivia the highest navigable body of water in the world—Lake Titicaca. There is little rainfall along the coast, although the winter is foggy, humid, and cool. Temperatures vary significantly between the rugged Andes and the eastern jungles. In the capital city of Lima, the temperature is moderate year-round, averaging 65°F (18°C). The El Niño weather phenomenon

periodically has a dramatic impact on Peru, often causing flooding and mudslides.

History

Several of South America's most advanced cultures lived in pre-Columbian Peru. The last of these groups was the great Incan Empire, which was unsurpassed in the art of stonecutting and also achieved a high degree of economic and political development. Chimu ruins at Chan Chan as well as Incan ruins at Cuzco and Machu Picchu make Peru a favorite destination for archaeologists and tourists. In 1532, the Spanish invaded Peru under the leadership of Francisco Pizarro. They conquered the Incas the next year. The area soon became the richest and most powerful Spanish colony in South America because of its location and many mineral treasures.

Under the leadership of South American liberator José de San Martín, Peru declared independence from Spain in July 1821. With the help of Simón Bolívar, the Venezuelan general who liberated several other countries, the fight for full independence was won in 1824. For a century, Peru worked to secure its territory and build its social institutions.

Peru's 1933 constitution mandated that the country be governed by a president and legislature elected to six-year terms; however, military leaders and dictators dominated Peru until the 1960s. A free multiparty election was held in 1963 and Fernando Belaúnde Terry was elected president. A military junta deposed him in 1968 and ruled for 12 years (a period called *la dictadura*). Belaúnde was reelected in 1980 when the military returned control of the government to civilians.

Economic troubles, which began during *la dictadura*, worsened under Belaúnde and were not resolved during Alán García's presidency (1985–90). In 1980, the Maoist group *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) began a campaign of violent guerrilla warfare aimed at overthrowing the government. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Shining Path and other terrorist organizations were responsible for some tens of thousands of deaths. They held power in the Upper Huallaga Valley and were paid by drug traffickers for protection and the right to operate in the region.

Despite these problems, the country maintained democratic institutions and free elections. In 1990, Alberto Fujimori, a son of Japanese immigrants, was elected president. He promised government reform and vowed to overcome economic problems and terrorist violence. Saying he needed to make drastic changes to enable progress, Fujimori suspended the constitution, dissolved Congress, took emergency powers, and restricted civil liberties. A 1993 national referendum approved a new constitution that outlined a democratic, albeit more executive-centered, government and a free-market-oriented economy. Fujimori was reelected by a large margin in 1995, and his party gained a majority in Congress. Fujimori's popularity was heightened by his successful economic reform, the 1992 capture of Shining Path leader Abimael Guzmán Reynoso, and the resolution of Peru's long-standing border dispute with Ecuador.

Fujimori was elected for a third presidential term in May 2000, but accusations of misuse of power and public funds arose, and the leader fled to Japan and resigned. In 2002, Peru issued arrest warrants for Fujimori, but Japan refused to extradite him. Then in 2005, Fujimori traveled to Chile, where he was arrested and extradited to Peru. In 2009, he was found guilty of authorizing human rights violations in the 1990s and sentenced to 25 years in prison.

After Fujimori fled, his opponent, Alejandro Toledo, was elected as the nation's first president of indigenous heritage. Toledo was largely unsuccessful in delivering on his stated goals of fighting poverty and increasing employment opportunities. He was replaced by former president Alan García, who won run-off elections in 2006 and was reelected in 2010. García aims to improve Peru's economy, in part by employing austerity measures.

THE PEOPLE

Population

The population of Peru is approximately 29.9 million and is growing at 1.2 percent annually. Population density is generally low. Peru's population is ethnically diverse. Many ethnic and linguistic divisions exist among indigenous peoples, some of whom are still fairly isolated in the Amazon jungle. About 45 percent is of indigenous heritage, descendants of the Inca Empire. Another 37 percent is of mixed indigenous and European heritage. Fifteen percent is of European descent (mostly Spanish), and the remaining 3 percent is composed of black descendants of West African slaves, as well as other groups, such as Japanese and Chinese immigrants. About 29 percent of the population is younger

than age 15. Lima is the largest city, with nearly eight million residents. About 77 percent of the population lives in urban areas.

Language

Spanish and the indigenous languages Quechua and Aymara are officially recognized. Many Peruvians speak both Spanish and an indigenous language. Approximately 40 indigenous languages are spoken in the Peruvian Amazon alone and about 30 percent of the people speak no Spanish at all. Quechua was the language of the Inca Empire and is the root of English words such as *condor*, *guano*, *llama*, and *puma*. Aymara is spoken by over 300,000 Peruvians, mainly in southern Peru. Peruvians with more formal education often are taught English as a second or third language.

Religion

The Roman Catholic Church was the state church in Peru until 1979. Today there is freedom of religion and all churches enjoy equal political status, but about 81 percent of Peruvians are Roman Catholic and the church continues to play a significant role in their lives. Protestant and Evangelical churches also operate in the country. Many indigenous peoples who are Catholic mix traditional beliefs with Christian values, sometimes calling indigenous gods by Christian names.

General Attitudes

Peruvians are strong-willed and often nationalistic. They have faced many challenges, both political and economic, but they maintain a strong desire to endure and succeed. The people have a good sense of humor and are accommodating, helpful, and eager to please. Still, they may be sensitive about certain things. Jokes about their lifestyle, especially from foreigners, are offensive. Personal criticism, if necessary, is expected to be expressed in a positive manner.

The Peruvian concept of time is more relaxed than in industrialized nations. Appointments and other meetings may not begin on time, and Peruvians generally consider people to be more important than schedules. However, international visitors from countries where punctuality is more valued are expected to be on time for appointments.

Indigenous people are sometimes discriminated against by Peru's mestizo and European populations. Indigenous people usually live in rural areas, but even those who move to the city and adopt an urban lifestyle are not accepted. This has fueled great resentment and is one source of the country's social problems. Indigenous groups now place some hope in promises of increased investment from international organizations and the government. Urban residents, particularly in Lima, are turning their attention to economic progress. People generally are optimistic about the country's future, especially with the return of democracy, the decrease in major insurgency movements, and the institution of economic reforms.

Personal Appearance

Western-style clothing is worn in Lima and other urban areas. People dress up when going to public places, such as the

plaza de armas (town plaza). It is thought of as bad taste to leave home wearing old or dirty clothes. Rural *campesinos* (farmers) often wear traditional outfits related to their ethnic background. Their clothes commonly are made of handwoven fabrics. In jungle regions, informality is the rule.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

When being introduced or meeting for the first time, members of the opposite sex usually shake hands. Women (and close friends of the opposite sex) commonly kiss each other on one cheek when meeting and parting. Men usually shake hands or pat each other on the shoulder. An arm around the shoulders or a pat on the back is a polite way to greet young people. Typical greetings include *Buenos días* (Good morning), *Buenas tardes* (Good afternoon), and *Buenas noches* (Good evening/night). Friends address each other by first name. Professionals are addressed by their title (*Doctor/a*, *Profesor/a*, etc.). Older people are addressed as *Señor* (Mr.) or *Señora* (Mrs.), followed by their last name. Women and girls often are addressed by strangers as *Señorita* (Miss).

Gestures

Peruvians are often animated and use a lot of hand gestures while conversing. One beckons by holding the palm of the hand downward and waving all of the fingers. Personal space is limited. People stand very close to each other when they talk, often lightly touching the arm or shoulder of the person with whom they are speaking. Constant eye contact is important. On buses, men usually give their seats to women or elderly persons.

Visiting

Peruvians enjoy visiting one another. Most visits between friends and relatives are unannounced. However, when one visits other people, it is polite to make advance arrangements. Visitors are expected to feel at home and be comfortable. The traditional greeting *Está en su casa* (You are in your house) reflects Peruvian hospitality. Hosts always offer their guests drinks (water, juice, soda, etc.) and may offer other refreshments, but declining them is not impolite. In many areas, those visiting around 5:30 p.m. are invited to stay for *lonche*, a light breakfast-type meal served around 6 p.m. Hosts appreciate special acknowledgment of children in the home. It is polite to show concern for the health of the hosts' family and relatives. When visiting a home, one is not expected to bring gifts, but small gifts such as fruit or wine are welcome on any occasion. Dinner guests commonly bring such gifts.

Eating

Peruvians eat in the continental style, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. They keep both hands (but not elbows) above the table at all times. Proper table manners are important. It is impolite to converse with only one person at the table without including the rest of the group. If this occurs, Peruvians will often repeat the saying *Secretos en*

reunión es mala educación (It is bad manners to tell secrets in gatherings). Guests are expected to eat all of the food that is offered; excuses for not eating something are to be given tactfully. In a restaurant, one summons the server by waving. If service is not included in the bill, a tip is expected, and if service is included, a small tip is still given.

LIFESTYLE

Family

The family unit is important in Peru. Nuclear families have, on average, three children. The father is the head of the family. Because the mother usually spends most of her time at home, she is in charge of the children and their day-to-day activities. The father usually is consulted only for major matters. The mother directs and performs household duties. Women occasionally work outside the home, a trend that is more evident in urban areas. About one-third of the labor force is female. Newly married couples often live in their parents' home until they can afford a place of their own.

Housing

Peru's diverse regions and climates are characterized by a variety of dwellings, from modern housing complexes in metropolitan Lima to ancient ruins incorporated into more modern structures in Cuzco to thatched huts in remote jungle regions. For many city dwellers, home is a brick house with large windows but in close proximity to others, with little room for a yard. Instead, houses share nearby recreational areas. The exterior walls of most houses are painted in pastel colors, and the floors are usually made out of tile or hardwood. It is common for more than one nuclear family to live in the same house. Often, a married child will live with a spouse and children on the second floor of the parental home. In other cases, families rent out their spare rooms. A lot of people, including many professionals, cannot afford to buy their own houses, and so they live in these rooms or, if they are somewhat better off, in apartments. Families who build their own homes will often not do so all at once. Construction is expensive, so many people build in stages. Very poor families live in shantytowns, where houses—most of them made out of adobe—tend to be much less expensive.

Dating and Marriage

Young people in urban areas enjoy dancing at *fiestas* (parties) and social gatherings. Dating is exclusive: people do not date more than one person at the same time. Only after a couple breaks up are they allowed to date others. Men usually marry in their late twenties, while women generally marry in their early twenties. People in rural areas often marry at younger ages. Weddings usually include a civil ceremony, a church wedding, and a party for family and friends. The party frequently includes dancing and a one- or two-course meal. Common-law marriages are prevalent and widely accepted, except among the upper classes.

Life Cycle

According to superstition, a pregnant woman ought to give

into her *antojos* (cravings) or risk losing her baby. Though no longer an accepted belief, this tradition is still largely followed. Once the baby is born, it is given a name. Often, this is the name of one of the parents, but in other cases it could be the name of a Catholic saint or a movie star or other celebrity. Although Peruvian children legally become adults when they turn 18, girls by tradition enter adulthood on their *quinceañera* (or fifteenth birthday). The *quinceañera* is celebrated throughout Peruvian society, regardless of a family's economic standing.

Funerals are big events. The three days after a death correspond with an official period of mourning, known as a *velorio*, during which relatives and close friends visit the grieving family to offer their condolences. After the *velorio*, between six and eight men carry the coffin to the cemetery. The family of the deceased will typically wear black for an entire year.

Diet

Main staples in the diet include potatoes, rice, beans, fish, and a variety of tropical fruits. Soups are also common. Corn, native to Peru, is a staple among the indigenous people. Guinea pigs are eaten throughout the country and are raised in nearly all rural homes and some urban ones. *Ceviche* (marinated raw fish seasoned with lemon and vinegar) is popular on the coast. *Papa a la Huancaína* is a cooled, sliced baked potato topped with sliced eggs and a sauce (such as hot chili). Highland dishes often include potatoes, onions, and garlic. Fresh vegetables are eaten in season. People purchase most food on a daily basis, either in small corner stores (in cities) or large open-air markets. Bargaining is common in the markets but not in other types of stores.

Recreation

The most popular sport in Peru is *fútbol* (soccer). Peruvians enthusiastically follow World Cup competitions, especially when their national team is participating. Basketball, volleyball, and gymnastics are also favorites. Families enjoy picnics, and movies provide entertainment. Sunday is a favorite day for outings. Watching television and surfing the internet are becoming more popular. Most people vacation during July and December.

The Arts

Music is important to most Peruvians. International music is widespread, especially with the younger generation and along the coast, but traditional music is also very popular. Traditional songs often are about Peru, Peruvian culture, people's feelings, or animals. Three instruments used to play traditional music are the *charango*, a small guitar of sorts; the *antara*, an assortment of vertically placed flutes tied together; and the *quena*, which is similar to a recorder. Two types of music and dance from the mountains are *baile de las tijeras* (dance of the scissors) and *huayno*. Most cities have their own dances. The *zamacueca* is an athletic dance that is performed in Lima by those of African descent to the rhythm of a traditional drum, the *cajón*.

Folk arts, especially textiles, are integral to Peruvian culture. Many textiles are made from the wool of the *alpaca*;

clothing is made from this thick wool, along with wall hangings and other decorative art. *Alpacas*, condors, people, and ruins like Machu Picchu are frequently featured on these wall hangings. *Retablos*, another form of folk art, are wooden boxes that feature three-dimensional religious scenes or everyday moments. Pottery and metalworking are other prevalent crafts. Like many other Latin Americans, Peruvians have written about the problems in society, specifically the problems concerning indigenous peoples. An indigenous literary genre known as *Indigenista* focuses on indignities suffered by native peoples. Peruvian literature is often romantic, with mythological or fantastical themes. In 2010, Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa won the Nobel Prize in Literature for his sometimes controversial political writing.

Holidays

Peru's national holidays include New Year's Day, Easter (Thursday–Sunday), Countryman's Day (24 June), St. Peter and St. Paul's Day (29 June), Independence Day (28 July), National Day (29 July), St. Rose of Lima Day (30 Aug.), Navy Day (8 Oct.), All Saints' Day (1 Nov.), Immaculate Conception (8 Dec.), and Christmas. Independence Day is one of the most popular holidays. It is celebrated with fireworks and bands at the local *plaza de armas*. Schools usually take a one- or two-week break and businesses may close for such celebrations. Many local holidays honor patron saints or celebrate the harvest, as well as provide recreational opportunities.

SOCIETY

Government

Peru is a republic. It is divided into 25 regions and the constitutional province of Callao. The president, currently Alan García, holds executive power and serves a five-year term. Under the constitution, presidents may not serve two terms consecutively. The executive branch is headed by the president and also includes two vice presidents and a Council of Ministers, the members of which are appointed by the president. The unicameral Congress consists of 120 members, who serve five-year terms. The Supreme Court is the country's highest judicial authority. Major political parties include the National Unity Party, the Nationalist Party Uniting Peru, and the Peruvian Aprista Party. Several other parties are also active. All citizens age 18–70 are required to vote.

Economy

The Peruvian economy faced severe strains in the early 1990s: inflation was high, output was low, and the standard of living was dropping. Government reforms have cut hyperinflation from 7,600 percent in 1990 to about 2 percent in 2006, attracted foreign investment, and produced stability and economic growth. However, the pace of economic growth has been slowed by global economic downturns and the recurring El Niño phenomenon. Unemployment remains high, and more than half of all Peruvians live in poverty.

Peru's natural resources include copper, silver, gold, iron

ore, oil, timber, and fish. Peru has a relatively wide economic base with a variety of industries it can depend on for growth. Wheat, potatoes, sugarcane, rice, and coffee are important agricultural products. Agriculture accounts for about one-third of all employment. Peru's fishing industry is one of the largest in the world but recently has suffered setbacks because of El Niño. Peru is a member of the Andean Community trade bloc with Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. The currency is the *nuevo sol* (PEN).

Economic dependence on the lucrative drug trade has been a major challenge for the country. Drug traffickers sell locally grown coca leaf (the basis of cocaine) to Colombian drug cartels for eventual export. Although many farmers would prefer to make a living raising crops like coffee or cacao, they cannot afford to stop growing the more profitable coca leaf. This is likely the main reason that Peru remains one of the world's largest producers of coca.

Transportation and Communications

Buses are the most popular form of transportation. Many middle- and upper-class families own a car but regularly use public transportation, because gasoline is expensive. In rural areas, people travel on foot or with the help of animals. Most roads are not paved. Two main roads, the Pan-American Highway and the Marginal Jungle Highway, run the length of the country from north to south. Train and air travel are available on a limited basis; some train routes are very scenic.

The privatization of the telecommunications system has increased and improved service. Telephone lines are available in most rural areas and cell phone use is widespread. Internet cafés, known in Peru as *cabinas de internet*, now provide service, mostly in urban areas. Peru has several daily newspapers.

Education

Peruvians are generally well educated. Public education is free and compulsory between ages seven and sixteen. However, schools lack basic materials, and facilities are inadequate. Peru has increased efforts to extend primary schools into remote areas. Secondary education is also free in Peru. About half of eligible children are enrolled in secondary schools. Enrollment in both primary and secondary schools is increasing. The average adult has completed at least six years of school, and more young people are staying in school. The literacy rate is higher among teenagers than adults. Peru has more than 30 universities, including the University of San Marcos in Lima, one of the oldest in South America.

Health

Medical care is adequate in major cities but less developed in other areas. Quality care is available only through expensive private clinics. Hospitals, especially those outside of Lima, are often short on medicine, food, and other supplies and equipment. Many Peruvians are superstitious about health care and are reluctant to use medical facilities. They prefer using home remedies made of herbs and roots before going to a doctor. Many people also rely on the treatments of a *curandero/a* (native healer). Care in small towns is often unreliable or altogether unavailable. Diseases such as typhoid,

yellow fever, cholera, Chagas, and malaria are active in Peru. Water is not always safe to drink. Roughly 20 percent of the population suffers from malnutrition, and women and children are particularly affected.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

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POPULATION & AREA

Population	29,907,003 (rank=39)
Area, sq. mi.	496,225 (rank=21)
Area, sq. km.	1,285,216

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	63 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	74 of 155 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$8,500
Adult literacy rate	96% (male); 89% (female)
Infant mortality rate	28 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	69 (male); 73 (female)

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).