



Peru



Full name: Republic of Peru

Population: 29,180,900 (2008) Urban: 72.3 % Rural: 27.7 %

Capital: Lima

Area: 1.28 million sq km

Peru is the third-largest country in South America after Brazil and Argentina, ranking it amongst the world's 20 largest nations.

Major languages: Spanish: 80.3%

Quechua: 16.2%

Other languages: 3.0%

Foreign languages: 0.2%



Although Spanish is commonly spoken across the country, Quechua is a major legacy of the Inca Empire, and is still spoken with regional dialects in many parts of Peru. Other languages are also spoken such as Aymara (in Puno) and a massive variety of dialects in the Amazon jungle, which are divided up into 15 linguistic families and 43 different languages.

Major Religions: Roman Catholic: 89,03%

Evangelical: 6,73%

Other religions: 2.56%

Peru is a naturally religious country: a diversity of beliefs and freedom of worship can be seen from the wide range of festivals and rituals that feature both Catholic fervor and the mysticism of age-old pre-Hispanic cultures.

Life expectancy: 69 years (men), 74 years (women) (UN)

Monetary unit: 1 nuevo sol = 100 centimos

Main exports: The Petroleum industry of Peru is one of the oldest in the world, while its fisheries are among the richest in the world

GNI per capita: US \$3,450 (World Bank, 2007)

President: Alan Garcia

History

The Inca Empire (1200 - 1500 BC) was possibly the most organized civilization in South America. Their economic system, distribution of wealth and architecture impressed the first of the Spanish invaders. It was conquered by the Spanish Empire in the 16th century. Independence was declared in 1821 but consolidated only after the Battle of Ayacucho, three years later.

Machu Picchu: One of the most famous symbols of the ancient Inca Empire, often known as the 'Lost City of the Incas'. It is located 2430 metres above sea level on a mountain ridge above the Urubamba Valley and discovered by Hiram Bingham in 1911.



Landscapes

From the misty coastal region, through the arid dunes and Atacama Desert, scaling the heights of the Andes and into the humid Amazon River basin, Peru features almost every type of environment.

- It is home to 84 of the 104 life zones that exist on our planet, which makes it the perfect place for the 20% of the world's birds and 10% of the world's reptiles who live there.
- Lake Titicaca is the highest navigable lake in the world as well as the largest lake in South America!
- Peru has so far converted 13% of its territory into Protected Natural Areas.
- The highest point in Peru is formed by Nevado Huascarán, at 6,768 meters.
- The highest dune in the world is Cerro Blanco, 1176 m from the base, near Nasca

Recent Politics

Alan García won presidential elections in June 2006; his first term ended with the economy in tatters; nationalist rival Ollanta Humala has a majority in Congress. Alejandro Toledo, elected in July 2001, was the first President in Peru, of native Indian origin and in 2003, Beatriz Merino became the first female Prime Minister of Peru.

In its recent past Peru has alternated between democracy and military dictatorship. Also, it is deeply divided politically and economically. A small elite of Spanish descent controls most of the wealth and political power, while indigenous Peruvians are largely excluded from both and make up many of the millions who live in poverty.

Food and Drink

- The three staples of Peruvian cuisine are corn, potatoes and chiles, from which many different varieties and creative dishes are made! Seafood is the main diet along the coastline and the most famous Peruvian dish is ceviche, a raw fish or shrimp marinated in lemon or lime juice and traditionally accompanied by corn and sweet potatoes.
- The most traditional Peruvian food is cuy, which is guinea pig!
- Peru's national drink is pisco sour, which is made from grape brandy, lemon, egg white and a dash of cinnamon. Another national favorite is Inka Cola, a yellow colored drink that tastes like cream soda.

Dress

- Peruvian dress depends very much on the region of the country. In rural Peru many women wear brightly-colored and multi-layered petticoats known as polleras.
- The Peruvian poncho dates back to the seventeenth century. The heavy ponchos used in Cajamarca keep out the rain and are as long as those used in Puno. In Cuzco, ponchos are short and have elaborate geometric figures against a red background.
- Traditional dress is capped off by woolen or straw hats but in the coldest reaches of the Andes, the highlanders tend to wear the chullo, a woolen cap fitted with earflaps.

