



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

## BACKGROUND

**Land and Climate.** Almost the same size as Alaska, Peru is the third largest country in South America. It covers 496,226 square miles (1,285,220 square kilometers). Peru is divided into three distinct geographic regions: the narrow, dry coastal plain (*costa*) in the west; the high Andes Mountains (*sierra*), roughly in the center; and the tropical lowlands of the Amazon Basin (*selva*) to the east. 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. Only about 3 percent of the land is suitable for farming. The population is concentrated in the west. 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*, 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.

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. In the capital city of Lima, the temperature is moderate year-round, averaging 65°F (18°C). Temperatures vary significantly between the rugged Andes and the eastern jungles. 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 stone-cutting and also achieved a high degree of economic and polit-

ical 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 1826. 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 with the aim of overthrowing the government. The Shining Path and other terrorist organizations were responsible for some tens of thousands of deaths during the 1980s and 1990s. 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 November 2000. In 2002, Peru issued arrest warrants for Fujimori. Despite pressure from Amnesty International, which cites Fujimori's alleged human-rights abuses, Japan has refused to extradite him.

After Fujimori fled, his opponent, Alejandro Toledo, was elected as the nation's first president of indigenous heritage. Toledo's main challenges include continuing to reduce the threat from Peru's rebel groups, rooting out government corruption, and making economic reforms effective in the lives of Peru's many poor.

## THE PEOPLE

**Population.** The population of Peru is approximately 27.9 million and is growing at 1.36 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 one-third of the population is younger than age 15. Lima is the largest city, with approximately eight million residents. About three-fourths 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 about 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 90 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 nationalistic. They have faced many challenges, both political and economic in nature, but maintain a strong desire to endure and succeed. The people have a good sense of humor and are accommodating 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 the 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.

## 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 seat 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. Most families live in humble circumstances without many of the modern conveniences common in more industrialized nations. Newly married couples often live in their parents' home until they can afford a place of their own.

**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.

**Diet.** Main staples in the diet include 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. *Ceviche* (raw fish seasoned with lemon and vinegar) is popular on the coast. *Papa a la Huancaína* is a 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.

**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 *cajón* is an athletic dance that is performed in Lima by those of African descent.

Folk arts, especially textiles, are integral to Peruvian culture. Many textiles are made from the wool of the *alpaca* (similar to a llama); clothing is made from this thick wool, along with wall hangings and other decorative art. Ruins like Machu Picchu, *alpacas*, condors, and people 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 *Indianista* focuses on indignities suffered by native peoples. Peruvian literature is often romantic, with mythological or fantastical themes.

**Holidays.** 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 providing recreational opportunities.

**Commerce.** Peru's average workweek is slightly more than 48 hours, one of the longest in the world. Businesses are open at least six days a week. Some small businesses close between 1 and 3 p.m. each day for a *siesta* (break), but this is not as common today as it once was. Many shops remain open late into the evening. Business hours vary slightly according to the season but generally are between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Some government offices close as early as 1 p.m.

## SOCIETY

**Government.** Peru is a republic. It is divided into 24 *departamentos* (similar to states) and the province of Callao. The president, currently Alejandro Toledo, holds executive power and serves a five-year term. Under the constitution, presidents may serve two consecutive terms. 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, composed of 16 judges, is the country's highest judicial authority. Major political parties include the Peru Possible Party, the National Unity Party, the Independent Moralizing Front, and the Popular

## Peru

Action Party. Several other parties are also active. All citizens age 18 and older may 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 2.5 percent in 2004, 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 can not 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. Internet cafés, known in Peru as *cabinas 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. However, the Shining Path controlled school facilities in some areas, so the government has attempted to reestablish control in these 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

### POPULATION & AREA

Population .....	27,925,628 (rank=39)
Area, sq. mi. ....	496,226 (rank=19)
Area, sq. km. ....	1,285,220

### DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank .....	79 of 177 countries
Adjusted for women .....	67 of 140 countries
Real GDP per capita .....	\$5,260
Adult literacy rate .....	94% (male); 82% (female)
Infant mortality rate .....	26 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy .....	68 (male); 73 (female)

expensive private clinics. Hospitals 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 rely on the treatments of a *curandero/a* (native healer) as well. 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

#### Events and Trends.

- In December 2005, some remnants of the Shining Path guerrilla group killed eight Peruvian police officers in a remote coca-growing area of the Andes Mountains. Consequently, President Toledo called for a state of emergency in central Peru in an effort to combat the influence of drug traffickers in the region.
- In November 2005, former president Alberto Fujimori was arrested in Chile after having returned to South America from Japan in hopes of running for the Peruvian presidency in 2006. Peru's Congress banned Fujimori from running for office until 2011, however. Congress also sought to extradite the former leader, who fled Peru on corruption charges in 2000, but had to await the decision of Chilean courts.
- In May 2005, a Congressional commission reported that President Toledo had committed electoral fraud. President Toledo was guilty of participating in the forging of 80 percent of the signatures submitted in his party's application to run in 2000 elections. Even so, Congress voted to allow Toledo to remain in office.
- In January 2005, about 150 military reservists took control of a remote police station, demanding President Toledo's resignation. Although the group agreed to withdraw a few days later, the uprising was a sign of President Toledo's deep unpopularity in Peru, where he usually gets about 10 percent approval ratings.

**Contact Information.** Embassy of the Republic of Peru, Consular Section, 1700 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036; phone (202) 833-9860; web site [www.peruvianembassy.us](http://www.peruvianembassy.us). Commission for the Promotion of Peru; phone (866) 661-7378; web site [www.peru.info/perueng.asp](http://www.peru.info/perueng.asp)

**CultureGrams**<sup>TM</sup>  
People. The World. You.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company  
300 North Zeeb Road, P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 USA  
Toll Free: 1.800.528.6279  
Fax: 1.800.864.0019  
[www.culturegrams.com](http://www.culturegrams.com)