

Peru



Map



Background

- **Land and Climate:** Almost the same size as Alaska, Peru is the third largest country in South America. It covers 1,285,220 sq km. 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. 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. The El Niño weather phenomenon periodically has a dramatic impact on Peru, often causing flooding and mudslides.

People

- **Population:** The population of Peru is approximately 28.7 million and is growing at 1.29 percent annually. Population density is generally low. Peru's population is ethnically diverse. 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 and Greeting:** Spanish and the indigenous languages Quechua and Aymara are officially recognized. Many Peruvians speak both Spanish and an indigenous language. Peruvians with more formal education often are taught English as a second or third language. 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.
- **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 Attitude:** 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, are accommodating, helpful, and eager to please. Jokes about their lifestyle, especially from foreigners, are offensive. Personal criticism, if necessary, is expected to be expressed in a positive manner.
- **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 hand-woven fabrics. In jungle regions, informality is the rule.

Lifestyle

- **Diet and Eating:** 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. Fresh vegetables are eaten in season. 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. 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.

- **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.
- **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.
- **Commerce and Currency:** 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. Business hours vary slightly according to the season but are generally between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. The official currency used in Peru is the Peruvian Nuevo Sol. The exchange rate is 1 US dollars to 3.14672 Peruvian Nuevo Sol.

Society

- **Transportation and Communication:** 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.
- **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. Care in small towns is often unreliable or altogether unavailable. Diseases such as typhoid, yellow fever, cholera, and malaria are active in Peru.