

Countries Of The World: Colombia

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Image 1: The Laguna de Guatapé in Guatapé, Colombia. You can view the lake from atop the Peñón de Guatapé, a small mountain nearby. Photo by: Getty Images/Nav preet Amole.

Colombia is a country in South America. It sits at the top of the continent. This is where South America meets Central America. For this reason, Colombia has a special nickname. It is called the "gateway to South America."

Colombia is large. It is the fourth biggest country in Latin America. The country has many different kinds of land. The Andes Mountains run through its center. Beaches line the north and west. In the north and south are deserts. In the east are grasslands.

Nature

Colombia has forests, mountains and beaches. Many different plants grow here. Many different animals live here, too. Jaguars live in the jungles. So do poisonous frogs. The mountains are home to birds and bears.

Long ago, much of Colombia was covered in forests. Over time, people started cutting them down in some places. They cleared the land. They wanted to create farmland. Now only a few areas have their original forests.

The government has set up national parks. The land is protected in these places.

People And Culture

Colombia's people come from different backgrounds. Some are related to the native people. These were the first to live in Colombia. Some Colombians are related to Africans. Others are related to people who came over from Europe.

These backgrounds create a rich culture. The country has special foods, music and art.

Government And Economy

Colombia is a democracy. In a democracy, the people rule. They vote to elect their leaders.

Like the United States, Colombia is run by a president. The people vote for their president. They also vote for lawmakers. Some lawmakers serve in the Senate of Colombia. Others serve in the House of Representatives.

Colombia produces many goods. They include coffee, bananas and oil. The country makes money selling these items to other countries. The United States is its biggest buyer.



History

People have been living in Colombia for thousands of years. One of the first native groups was the Muisca. They built an advanced civilization. The Muisca ruled for hundreds of years.

Later, the Spanish came to Colombia. They began settling in 1525. That was about 500 years ago. The Spanish settlers wanted gold. By 1538, they had taken over the Muisca. The Spanish ruled Colombia for more than 250 years.

In the 1700s, people became tired of Spanish rule. In 1881, the city of Cartagena fought back. It declared freedom from Spain. The city of Bogotá soon followed. Bogotá is Colombia's capital. Spanish soldiers tried to retake control. But rebel forces drove them out.

Colombia became a free country. First, it was part of a bigger country. This country was called Gran Colombia. It was made up of Colombia, Panama, Venezuela and Ecuador.

Gran Colombia fell apart in 1835. Venezuela and Ecuador had become independent. Panama remained part of Colombia, though. It did not separate until 1903.

Since gaining independence, Colombia has had several civil wars. Different groups have fought for power. They have struggled over who should lead the country. Colombia has enjoyed little peace.

