

Culture

Honduras



Archaeologists have demonstrated that Honduras had a rich, multi-ethnic prehistory. An important part of that prehistory was the [Mayan](#) presence around the city of [Copán](#) in western Honduras, near the Guatemalan border. Here a major Mayan city flourished during the classic period (150-900). It has many beautiful carved inscriptions and [stelae](#). The ancient kingdom, named [Xukpi](#), existed from the fifth century to the early ninth century, with antecedents going back to at least the second century. The [Mayan civilization](#) began a marked decline in the ninth century, but there is evidence of people still living in and around the city until at least 1200. By the time the Spanish came to Honduras, the once great city-state of Copán was overrun by the jungle, and the [Lencas](#), not the Mayans, were the main Amerindian people living in western Honduras.

Fort of San Fernando Omoa. Built by the Spaniards to defend against pirates.

On his fourth and final voyage to the [New World](#) in 1502, [Christopher Columbus](#) reached the Bay Islands on the coast of Honduras.^[2] Landing near the modern town of Trujillo, in the vicinity of the Guaimoreto Lagoon. After the Spanish discovery, Honduras became part of Spain's vast empire in the New World within the Kingdom of Guatemala. Trujillo and Gracias were the first city-capitals. The Spanish ruled what would become Honduras for approximately three centuries.

Honduras declared independence from Spain on [September 15, 1821](#) with the rest of the [Central American](#) provinces. In 1822 the Central American State was annexed to the newly declared Mexican Empire of [Iturbide](#). The Iturbide Empire was overthrown in 1823 and Central America separated from it, forming the [Federal Republic of Central America](#), which disintegrated in 1838. As a result the states of the republic became independent nations.

[Silver mining](#) was a key factor in the Spanish conquest and settlement of Honduras, but has been only a minor part of the national economy in recent years. The American-owned [Rosario Mining Company](#) was a major gold and silver producer, but shut down its large mine at San Juancito in 1954.

Following the [attack on Pearl Harbor](#), Honduras joined the [Allied Nations](#) on December 8, 1941. Less than a month later, on the first day of 1942, Honduras, along with twenty-five other governments, signed the [Declaration by United Nations](#).

In 1969, Honduras and [El Salvador](#) fought what would become known as The [Football War](#).^[31] There had been border tension between the two countries after [Oswaldo López Arellano](#), a former president of Honduras, blamed the poor economy on the large number of immigrants from El Salvador. From that point on the relationship between El Salvador and Honduras was acrimonious. It reached a low when El Salvador met Honduras for a three-round football elimination match as a preliminary to the [World Cup](#). Tensions escalated, and on [July 14, 1969](#), the Salvadoran army launched an attack against Honduras. The [Organization of American States](#) negotiated a cease-fire which took effect on [July 20](#), and brought about a withdrawal of Salvadoran troops in early August.^[31]

Contributing factors in the conflict were a boundary dispute and the presence of thousands of Salvadorans living in Honduras illegally. After the week-long war football war in July 1969, many Salvadoran families and workers were expelled. El Salvador had agreed on a truce to settle the boundary issue, but Honduras later paid war damage costs for expelled refugees.^[31]

During the 1980s, the United States established a very large military presence in Honduras with the purpose of supporting the [illegally US funded](#) anti-Sandinista [Contras](#) fighting the [Nicaraguan](#) government, and to support the El Salvador military fighting against the [FMLN](#) guerrillas. The U.S. built the airbase known as [Palmerola](#), near Comayagua, with a 10,000 foot runway so that [C5-A cargo planes](#) could land there, rather than at the public airport in San Pedro Sula. The U.S. also built a training base near Trujillo which primarily trained Contras and the Salvadoran military, and in conjunction with this, developed Puerto Castillo into a modern port. The United States built many airstrips near the Nicaraguan border to help move supplies to the Contra forces fighting the [Sandinistas](#) in Nicaragua. Though spared the bloody civil wars wracking its neighbors, the Honduran army quietly waged a campaign against leftists which included [extra judicial killings](#) and [forced disappearances](#) of political opponents by government-backed [death squads](#), most notably [Battalion 316](#).^[41]

[Hurricane Fifi](#) caused severe damage while skimming the northern coast of Honduras on September 18 and 19, 1974.

In [1998](#), [Hurricane Mitch](#) caused such massive and widespread loss that former Honduran President [Carlos Roberto Flores](#) claimed that fifty years of progress in the country were reversed. Mitch obliterated about 70% of the crops and an estimated 70-80% of the transportation infrastructure, including nearly all bridges and secondary roads. Across the country, 33,000 houses were destroyed, an additional 50,000 damaged, some 5,000 people killed, 12,000 injured, and total loss estimated at \$3 billion USD.

Roatan



Roatán, located between the islands of [Utila](#) and [Guanaja](#) ([16.34° N 86.33° W](#)), is the largest of [Honduras' Bay Islands](#). The island was formerly known as Ruatan and Rattan. It is approximately 60 [kilometres](#) long, and less than 8 kilometres wide at its widest point.

The island consists of two municipalities (out of a total of four in the department): *José Santos Guardiola* in east and Roatán (also including the [Cayos Cochinos](#) further south in the west). The most populated town of the island is [Coxen Hole](#), capital of Roatán municipality, located in the southwest. Other important towns include [French Harbour](#), West End, and [Oak Ridge](#), the capital of José Santos Guardiola municipality.

The easternmost quarter of the island is separated by a convoluted channel through the [mangroves](#) that is 15 meters wide on the average. The part cut off from the main island of Roatan this way is sometimes called Helene Island. Some satellite islands at the eastern end are Morat, Barbaretta, Pigeon, and Barefoot Cay. Barefoot Cay formerly was known as Burial Key until 2001, but now is privately owned and houses as luxury resort popular with celebrities.

Located near the largest barrier reef in the [Caribbean Sea](#) (second largest worldwide after [Australia's Great Barrier Reef](#)), it has become an important cruising and [scuba diving](#) destination

in Honduras. [Tourism](#) is its most important economic sector, though fishing is also an important source of income for islanders.

History

The Pre-Columbian residents of the Bay Islands are believed to have been related to [Paya](#), [Maya](#), [Lenca](#) or [Jicaque](#), which were the cultures present on the mainland. [Christopher Columbus](#), on his fourth voyage (1502-1504) came to the islands as he visited the neighboring Bay Island of

Britain, in its aggressive attempt to usurp the colonization of the Caribbean from the Spanish, occupied the Bay Islands on and off between 1550 and 1700. During this time, the [buccaneers](#) found the vacated, mostly unprotected islands a haven for safe harbor and transport. English, French and Dutch pirates established settlements on the islands and raided the cumbersome Spanish cargo vessels laden with gold and other treasures from the new world. The English buccaneer [Henry Morgan](#) established his base at Port Royal on Roatán in the mid-17th century; at that time as many as 5,000 pirates were living on that island.

The main permanent population of Roatán originated from the [Cayman Islands](#) near [Jamaica](#), arriving in the 1830s shortly after the end of slavery in British territories disrupted the economic structure that had maintained Caymanian culture. Caymanians were largely a seafaring culture and were familiar with the area from turtle fishing ventures and other activities. Former Caymanian slave-owners were among the first to settle on the seaside locations throughout primarily western Roatán. Former slaves continued to arrive during the 1830s and 1840s, and altogether, the former Caymanians became the largest cultural group on the island

In the 1850s for a brief period the Bay Islands were declared a colony by Britain, who within a decade ceded the territory formally back to [Honduras](#).

The island populations grew steadily in the latter half of the century, and new settlements became established all over Roatán and the other islands. Individual settlers came from all over the world and played a part in shaping the cultural face of the island. A fruit trade industry started by islanders became very profitable and by the 1870s was taken over by American interests, most notably the [New Orleans and Bay Islands Fruit Company](#). Later companies, the [Standard Fruit](#) and [United Fruit](#) Companies, became the foundation for modern day fruit companies, the industry which gave Honduras the sobriquet "[banana republic](#)".

Although Spanish is spoken in mainland Honduras, the main language on the island is ([creole](#)) English, because the first modern population originated from parts of the British Caribbean. In general, the history of the Bay Islands was driven by the various larger political, economic and cultural forces throughout the entire Caribbean and Central American region.

