

PERU – INFORMATION SHEET

BACKGROUND

Peru has a long and rich history. Spanish conquistadors received news of a mighty and rich empire lying just south of the present territory of Central America. The indigenous population of Panama referred to this powerful state as the land of Piru or Peru, meaning "land of abundance" in the region's native Quechua tongue. Divided into three major regions; Peru has an approximate land area of 1,285,223 square kilometres. Peru's capital, Lima, is located on the coast, about 13 kilometres from the Pacific Ocean. Lima is home to almost a third of Peru's total population, with a total of two-thirds of the country's population living in the coastal region. The Andean mountains were the traditional home of the ancestral Inca kingdom. Peruvians are strong willed and nationalistic, display a strong sense of humour and are accommodating and eager to please. Nevertheless youth embraces the music and fashion of the USA.

LANGUAGE

Spanish and Quechua are recognized official languages in Peru. Spanish, however, is enforced by both the education system and the government. Introduced by the Spaniards, this enforced linguistic practice continued throughout Peru's republic period from the 1830s to the present. The Spanish spoken in Peru is also unique to the region, combining the Castilian tongue with many native Quechua (Incan) and Aymara terms. Some dozen languages are spoken within the Amazon basin.

RELIGION

Catholicism was introduced by the Spanish in the 1500s and 90% of the population is Catholic, while the other 10% belong to Protestant faiths. Indian groups continue ancient forms of worship under the guise of Catholic rituals. In the Catholic tradition priests and nuns still demand an enormous amount of respect and authority. Among Indian communities the shamans or *brujos/curanderas* are deemed the local counterparts of priests in terms of religious and spiritual authority. Rituals and Holy Places *Huacas* (sacred mountain places) are still considered sacred deity dwellings that demand the veneration of the indigenous populations. The Spanish Catholic missionaries were very aware of these Andean practices, which is why many Catholic churches were built on top of huacas and other pre-Hispanic temples.

FESTIVALS

LABOUR DAY - 1 May

DAY OF THE PEASANT - 24 June

INDEPENDENCE DAY - 28-29 July

BATTLE OF ANGAMOS - 9 October

ETHNIC MAKEUP

There are four major ethnic groups in Peru: Whites (of European ancestry) 10% Mestizos (of mixed European and Indian ancestry—pejoratively referred to as *cholos*) 40% Indians (of Native American ancestry) 45% Afro-Peruvians (of African descent) 5% Indians above all have faced five centuries of ethnically discriminatory and genocide practices against its population. Even after independence their general treatment was not radically different. Indians are still portrayed as backward and inferior and perform the hardest and less remunerative forms of labour. More than sixty Amazon Indian groups face cultural extinction as a result of oil exploration, agricultural production and mining campaigns.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS

Respect for elders and self-discipline is strongly advocated among Peruvians. These values are in contrast to a political scene marked with great levels of authoritarianism and widespread corruption. Peruvians generally consider people to be more important than schedules and time keeping.

MARRIAGE: Peruvians have free choice about whom they can or cannot marry, with class and money two most significant variables in terms of marriage decisions. Many couples decide to live together because of their lack of resources for carrying out both the legal and religious ceremonies.

SOCIAL ETIQUETTE: Lifestyle jokes are considered offensive and personal criticism is expected to be expressed positively.

CHILD REARING PRACTICES: The greatest differences in child rearing practices are between the indigenous and white/mestizo populations. Indian mothers tend to carry their infants in colourful slings upon their backs even while performing agricultural labour. Indian mothers also openly nurse their children in public places, seeing it as a natural function, a practice that is shunned by the more Westernized mestizo and white mothers. Day care is a relatively small sector in Peru and children born in the country's three main geographical regions will likely experience very different child care practices. An Andean child born in a peasant village will most likely spend much of their childhood working on the farm and speak Quechua or Aymara. A child born on the coast will have much more exposure to television, play soccer and attend school. Those living in river towns may have been exposed to much harsher environments riven by corruption and drug related crime.

Day care is largely unregulated and in Lima covers approximately 3% of demand. Boys and girls are strongly encouraged to attend grade and high school although either lack of money or the need for a child's labour at home persuades many lower-class families to keep their children from attending public schools. In general, children are brought up to be respectful of their elders, obedient and hard working. Education in Peru is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, which is in charge of formulating, implementing and supervising the national educational policy.

CUISINE

Seafood and plantains are typical of the coastal diet, while different kinds of meat, corn, and potatoes are much more frequently consumed in the highlands. *Ceviche*, fish marinated in *ají*, a hot sauce made mainly from spicy peppers, tomato, onions and lemon, is an example of a particular Peruvian delicacy. African dishes such as the *cau cau* (tripe casserole) and the *mazamorra* (*chicha* drink made from maize) are Peruvian dishes that reflect this tradition more than others. Meanwhile, roasted guinea pig is also an Andean delicacy dating most probably to pre-Hispanic days.

FAMOUS PEOPLE

There is a strong literary and artistic tradition and poet César Vallejo is considered on a par with Chilean Nobel Laureate, Pablo Neruda. Artists and singers include Fernando de Szyszlo, Joaquín Roca Rey, Vasquez, Chabuca Granda and Susana Baca.

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