

Central America Independence Day Special

Five nations share common cultural legacy

Sept. 15 is the date commemorated by five nations of Central America – Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica – to celebrate their independence.

All five countries have a shared history as part of the Spanish empire, as well as the short-lived Federal Republic of Central America. The Act of Independence of Central America was signed in 1821 at a meeting held at the National Palace in Guatemala City, which is now the site of Centennial Park. Written by Honduran intellectual and politician Jose Cecillo del Valle, the document was signed by 13 representatives from the various Central American provinces.

Today, despite periods of turmoil, these five countries share common cause in language, culture, geography, economy and history. They also have distinct identities of their own, having grown and developed in the intervening years to become unique nations. Spanish is widely spoken, with native languages Garifuna, Sumo, Miskito, Nahuatl and Rama used in some places. Some creoles are also used by a small number of people, particularly in the Mosquito Coast region.

Christianity is the dominant religion,



The Volcan de Agua is framed by the Santa Catalina Arch in Antigua, Guatemala.

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A Mayan pyramid in Copan, Honduras

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another legacy of the Spanish empire, while the region's most popular sport is soccer. All five nations sit on the Central American Volcanic Arc, formed by an active tectonic subduction zone. This has given the region hundreds of volcanoes, which are a boon to tourism but a contributor to the region's all too common disasters.

Guatemala has strong ties with the Mayan civilization and there are still countless important sites dating back to the late pre-classic and classic periods of Mesoamerican history, notably Tikal and Calakmul. During the Spanish era, the capital was moved first to Antigua, then to modern-day Guatemala City. Antigua still boasts many colonial-era Spanish Baroque-influenced buildings, despite repeated earthquakes. Guatemala City is the most populous urban area in Central America, with nearly 3 million residents.

The region's Mayan connections continue in Honduras, with the Copan Ruins archeo-

logical park being one of the more famous remains. Once the southern border of the Mayan civilization, Copan's population peaked at over 21,000 between the fifth and ninth centuries. The influence of the Spanish can be seen in the capital of Tegucigalpa and many other cities across the country, with Catholic churches being an especially common sight. Tourism continues to grow in Honduras, with the relatively unspoiled coastline offering numerous dive sites and secluded islands.

El Salvador – literally “the savior” in Spanish – exemplifies the region's devotion to Catholicism. Famous for its surf beaches, El Salvador also gained wide recognition for making Bitcoin legal tender in 2021. Tourism contributes to the national economy, and many visitors head to the coast and the large waves coming in from the Pacific Ocean, while others visit Santa Ana to climb the still active volcano Izalco, which last erupted in

2005 and is the highest in El Salvador.

The largest of the Central American countries by area is Nicaragua, whose capital Managua is the second-largest in the region. With eight officially recognized languages, the mix of cultural traditions and ethnicities in Nicaragua generates a large amount of diversity in folklore, cuisine and literature. Tourism is the second-largest industry after agriculture, with coffee in particular being well known. Another sobriquet is the “Land of Poets,” and Nicaraguan Ruben Dario is credited as the father of the Spanish-American Modernism movement.

One of the few sovereign nations without a standing army (it was abolished in 1949), Costa Rica boasts long-standing stability and enjoys relatively high levels of development, education, health and press freedom. Public education is both compulsory and free.

Costa Rica derives from the Spanish for “rich coast,” but during the colonial period



The Iglesia La Merced in Granada, Nicaragua

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El Salvador's Cerro Verde national park is home to the Izalco volcano.

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Playa Espadilla beach is in Costa Rica's Manuel Antonio National Park.

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the region was one of the poorer areas in the empire and only began to flourish after independence. Today the country is known as one of the more progressive in the area for championing human rights and international leadership in environmental issues, as well as for promoting disarmament and peace. Culturally, Costa Rica was where the Mesoamerican and South American cultures met and elements of both sides can still be seen. Tourists are drawn to Costa Rica's abundant beaches and burgeoning ecotourism scene.

Congratulations
to the People of
Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala,
Honduras and Nicaragua
on the Anniversary
of Their Independence

Takehige Ogawa
Honorary Consul of
the Republic of Guatemala in Yokohama
and
Group Representative

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Congratulations to the peoples of
Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala,
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Anniversary of Their Independence

Yoshihisa Morita

Yoshihisa Morita

Supreme Advisor,
Kyoto University of Foreign Studies
Honorary Consul-General of Nicaragua

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This content was compiled in collaboration with the chiefs of mission of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua with information taken from their official tourism websites.