



EL SALVADOR



Quick Facts

Population ----- 6,100,000
 Official language ----- Spanish
 Capital ----- San Salvador
 Government ----- Presidential Republic
 Religion ----- Catholicism,
 Protestantism, Mormon,
 Pentecostal

Interesting information

El Salvador is about the size of Massachusetts, and is the most densely populated country in Central America. El Salvador has 21 volcanos and some of the best beaches for surfing. About 90% of Salvadorans are Mestizo – of mixed American Indian and European / Spanish decent. The flag of El Salvador was first introduced in 1909. It represents unity (blue) and peace (white). El Salvador's currency is the US dollar. The national dish is a stuffed, grilled corn flour patty called a pupusa.

Salvadoran Immigration and Refugees

The immigration of Salvadorans to the United States is an unfortunate side effect of tumultuous political circumstances which shook the country to its very foundation in the 20th century. One of the first waves of Salvadoran immigrants came to the US after a bloodbath following a peasant uprising in 1932. The uprising was instigated by falling coffee prices and an ensuing wave of unemployment and economic hardship; direct results of the Great Depression in the US. When poor peasants revolted against a government where 2% of the population owned 95% of the country's wealth, an estimated 30,000 of them were brutally slaughtered. These struggles persisted over the years with factions of guerilla soldiers unifying and the government responding by forming so-called "Death Squads," making the country rife with assassinations, murder and unrest.

The Salvadoran Civil War erupted in 1980 and raged until 1992. The war pitted the government against revolutionaries (the FMLN). In this time, anyone suspected of collaborating against the government was murdered if caught. Often times, the victims were innocent civilians caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Unfortunately, many villages were targeted which were suspected of supporting insurgent efforts, with massacres taking the lives of up to 1,000. The FMLN also kidnapped and assassinated government officials and destroyed infrastructure and farmland throughout the country. The United States sent millions of dollars to fund the efforts of the Salvadoran government to suppress the revolution which they saw part of the communist threat which could destabilize the entire region. Many consider this to be a key reason why the fighting continued for so long, and is an extremely controversial issue considering the number of unarmed civilians that were slaughtered. Whether the United States government was aware of the magnitude of human rights violations that were committed is disputable. At the end of the war, 75,000 people had been killed. Between 1980 and 1990, immigration increased fivefold with about 465,000 refugees seeking asylum in the United States. It is estimated that El Salvador lost about 25% of its population at this time.

Immigration continued into the 21st century as more refugees from the war reunified with their families in the US. Additionally, a number of catastrophic natural disasters worsened the situation in the country, causing more waves of immigrants. A 5.7m earthquake in 1986 killed 1,500 and left over 100,000 homeless. Also problematic is El Salvador's susceptibility to extreme weather conditions causing flooding and droughts. In the summer of 2001, for example, a severe drought destroyed 80% of crops causing extreme famine. Currently, about 1.5 million Salvadorans live in the US, making it the countries 6th largest ethnic group. Most Salvadoran immigrants live in California and Texas.



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