

# Central America and the Caribbean

In this section, you will learn about the culture, economics, and life of Central America and the Caribbean.

All questions require at least  
**THREE** sentences on own paper.

## PLACES & TERMS

**cultural hearth** the heartland or place of origin of a major culture

**United Provinces of Central America** the name adopted by Central America when it declared independence from Mexico

**Panama Canal** shipping canal that cuts across Central America, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans

**calypso** music, originally from Trinidad, that combines musical elements from Africa, Spain, and the United States.

**reggae** music developed in Jamaica in the 1960s

**informal economy** jobs without benefits, such as street vending and shining shoes, that provide people with a small income

## Native and Colonial Central America

Central America is a cultural hearth. A **cultural hearth** is the heartland or place of origin of a major culture. The Maya built a great civilization in the region.

The Maya built cities with temples and palaces. Each independent city was ruled by a *god-king* and served as a center for religious ceremony and trade.

The Spanish conquest of Mexico opened the door to Central America. Spanish settlers and native peoples are the dominant groups in this region. People from Africa make up a *sizable* percentage of the population in some Central American countries.

In 1823, Central America declared its independence from Mexico. It took the name of the **United Provinces of Central America**. By the late 1830s, the United Provinces had split into separate nations. These became El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras.

## 1. What changes occurred in the 1830s?

Answer in at least **THREE SENTENCES** on own paper.

## Native and Colonial Caribbean

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**What** countries claimed this region?

The original inhabitants of the Caribbean islands called themselves the Taino. The Spanish settled the islands and established sugar plantations. Many Taino died from disease and mistreatment on the plantations.

European slave traders brought Africans to the Caribbean to work on the plantations. By the 1800s, the Spanish, French, British, Dutch, and Danish claimed islands. Most used slave labor on sugar plantations.

In the 1700s, Haiti was a French colony. African slaves worked on Haiti's sugar plantations. In the 1790s, Toussaint L'Ouverture led a slave rebellion.

By 1804, Haiti was independent.

As a result of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Cuba achieved independence from Spain. After occupation by U.S. forces, Cuba became self-governing in 1902.

## 2. Who was Toussaint L'Ouverture?

Answer in at least THREE SENTENCES on own paper.

## Cultural Blends

The Spanish were the most important group of European settlers in Central America. Their language is still *dominant*. Catholicism is the major religion.

In the Caribbean, a greater variety of influences were at work. The Spanish, French, British, Danish, and Dutch mixed with Africans and Native Americans.

Religions of the Caribbean include Catholicism and Protestantism. There is also Santeria, which combines Catholic and African elements. Voodoo is practiced in Haiti. Rastafarianism is found in Jamaica.

Spanish is spoken on the most populous islands in the Caribbean. There are also many French speakers. English dominates in Jamaica. There is also some Dutch and Danish spoken in the region.

## 3. What languages are spoken in this region?

Answer in at least THREE SENTENCES on own paper.

## Economics: Jobs and People

Sugar cane is the Caribbean's largest export crop. Other export crops are bananas, citrus fruits, coffee, and spices. Many people work on farms and plantations. However, the average income is low.

In Central America, too, the main source of income is farming. Plantations here produce ten percent of the world's coffee and bananas.

Trade is important because of the Panama Canal. This great shipping canal cuts across Central America, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

In Central America, because most people make their living on farms, the population is largely rural. In the Caribbean, most people live in urban areas. They hope to find good jobs, but many end up living in slums.

## 4. What are the region's important export crops?

Answer in at least THREE SENTENCES on own paper.

## Popular Culture, Tourism, and Jobs

In both Central America and the Caribbean, music has been influenced by the local cultures.

Calypso music began in Trinidad. It combines musical elements from Africa, Spain, and the United States. Calypso songs have *improvised* lyrics.

Reggae began in Jamaica in the 1960s. Many of the songs deal with social problems and religion. African, Caribbean, and American music fed into reggae.

Education and jobs are major concerns in Central America and the Caribbean. Rapid population growth helps cause high unemployment.

Tourism is important. Island residents can work in hotels and restaurants. There is also an informal economy. People may work as street vendors or offer small services such as shoe shining to earn income.

## 5. What influenced calypso and reggae music?

Answer in at least THREE SENTENCES on own paper.