

PART TWO: HIGHLANDS OF CENTRAL AMERICA

Vocabulary

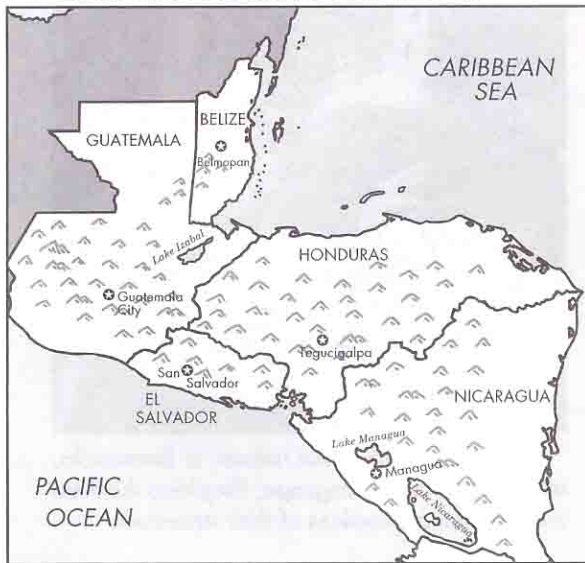
tamale

fault line

cloud forest

plaza

THE NORTHERN HIGHLANDS



The mountains of Central America curve southeastward from the Mexican border. Their highest peaks are in Guatemala. Farther south they become lower, until in Nicaragua they taper off and disappear in the San Juan (sahn WHAHN) River valley. The mountains rise again in Costa Rica and



Indians use hand tools to farm steep hillsides in Guatemala. Landslides sometimes take away whole fields.

continue southeastward through Panama until they join the mountains of Colombia.

Most Central American cities grew from villages among these mountains. People prefer to live in the springlike tierra templada rather than in hot, insect-infested land along the sea.

The Coffee Region. Central American scenery changes abruptly as one leaves the coast. Highways that follow gentle grades along the coast wriggle up dozens of switch-back turns into the clouds. On these mountainsides, row upon row of coffee bushes produce a large part of the income in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Costa Rica.



Much of the world's best coffee comes from the highlands of Central America. Coffee bushes grow on shaded hillsides around Lake Ilopango in El Salvador.

Volcanic eruptions over the centuries have left a layer of rich soil where the coffee farms are. Coffee needs a wet season with plentiful rain and then a dry season for the cherrylike fruit to ripen. It will grow in the tierra caliente, but coffee of the best quality comes from higher altitudes. Only