

Highland Cloud Forests. Until the 1950s, many Central American highlands were covered with dense **cloud forests** (so called because they are often wrapped in clouds). Trees of many varieties grew to great heights in the damp climate of the cloud forests. But as Central America's population grew, most of the forests were cut down to make room for farming and grazing.

Today the dwindling forests no longer hold moisture in the soil. Less water evaporates, fewer clouds cling to the hills, and less rain falls. Wild animals and birds grow fewer in number as Central America's climate becomes drier and drier.

Quetzal

More than 500 kinds of birds live in Central American forests, but none of them are as beautiful as the rare, long-tailed quetzal (keht SAHL). This bird of shimmering red and emerald green aroused the admiration of early Indians as they glimpsed it floating among trees of the cloud forest. Because they did not know God, they made the mistake of worshiping this beautiful creature that God had made.

The basic unit of money in Guatemala is named for the quetzal. So even though the bird has become rare, its picture appears on every bank note and coin of the nation.

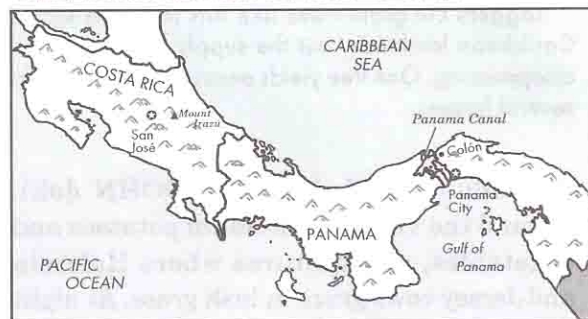


Study Exercises

1. In what country are Central America's (a) highest mountains? (b) lowest mountains?
2. Give the Spanish name for the climate in which coffee grows best.
3. (a) Who lives in the tierra fría of Guatemala? (b) In what ways are these people different from those who live in the tierra templada?
4. Why does Guatemala have many earthquakes?

5. What changes take place when cloud forests of the highlands are cut down?
6. Name these capitals, and tell which country each one is in.
 - a. Its name means "Holy Saviour."
 - b. It is the largest city in Central America.
 - c. It was once a silver-mining town.

THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS



Highlands of Costa Rica. A row of massive volcanoes begins south of the San Juan River valley and continues into Panama. Some of them erupt from time to time, but most of them are dormant or extinct.

In central Costa Rica, the mountain ranges broaden out to surround a large valley known as the Meseta Central (may SEH tah sehn TR AHL). In this valley and on the slopes of the surrounding mountains live most of the people in Costa Rica. The Meseta Central has a refreshing climate because the valley lies in the tierra templada.

On some mountain heights, magnificent forests of rosewood, cedar, oak, and other valuable trees remain. But much of Costa Rica's lumber has been sold to other countries, and mountain forests continue to shrink by thousands of acres every year. The government has tried to control the cutting of trees by setting aside national forest reserves.

A Costa Rican Highland Village. Perched on the rugged shoulders of the volcano Irazú (ee rah SOO) is the village of Rancho