

El Salvador has a 400-kilometre-long boundary with Honduras, running through hilly and frequently forested regions. The short west boundary with Guatemala is in the hot, rolling lowlands. In the east, the Gulf of Fonseca separates the country from Nicaragua and helps form the 307-kilometre Pacific coastline of this, the only country in Central America without a Caribbean coast.

Honduras is either mountainous or at least hilly virtually throughout. In the northeast, in the area bordering Nicaragua, it is also heavily forested as are most of the coastal regions and much of the western region bordering with Guatemala. Honduras has the longest borders in Central America. They total 1 530 kilometres of land boundaries (with Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador) and 820 kilometres of coastline. It is therefore exposed to all the countries in the region except Costa Rica and is close to both the Belizean and even the Cuban coasts. Only 72 kilometres of its extensive coastline is on the Pacific but this small strip abuts the Gulf of Fonseca, a strategically important waterway adjoining the coasts of El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Nicaragua's national territory is a mix of a Pacific coastland of plain and low hills, a central mountainous region with the huge Lake Nicaragua and the only slightly less impressive Lake Managua, and a heavily wooded or jungle eastern area. The last of these areas covers a large part of the country and has extremely poor communications. The north is particularly mountainous and hills are widespread throughout Nicaragua. The two lakes mentioned facilitate to some degree potential transport in the central regions but their ease of access could add to control problems on the Costa Rican border, a very short distance to the south of Lake Nicaragua. The troublesome border with Honduras is, as mentioned, mountainous and tends to dense forest there as in the east of the country. The Gulf of Fonseca completes a Pacific coastline running north and west from Costa Rica for several hundred kilometres and which is, even then, not nearly as long as Nicaragua's Caribbean coastline.

Costa Rica, the southern most republic, shares its northern and western border with Nicaragua. It is hilly, heavily forested or jungle in the centre and east, and scrub plain in the west, reflecting the general division of the country into a western coastal plain rising quickly into the high central mountain range and ending in the east with the jungle Caribbean coast. Only the Nicaraguan border has posed problems recently as Panama has kept well out of the Central American embroglio.

The above-mentioned terrain and other factors are added to a less than hospitable climate in most of the Central American region. Generally speaking, the climate is hot. And while the central highland belt to some extent escapes the heat, the Atlantic and Pacific coastal regions are very steamy indeed with high humidity and temperatures the rule. Rainfall is common throughout the region but is particularly heavy in the "rainy season," which varies to some extent in the various countries.