



## The land

Together, **Mexico**, **the United States of America** and **Canada** form the subcontinent of **North America**. Mexico borders the United States to the north and Guatemala and Belize to the south. To the west and south lies the Pacific Ocean and to the east the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea.

**Mexico has 8 times the size of Britain.** The biggest state, Chihuahua, has less than 3 million inhabitants, yet it is larger than the whole United Kingdom.

## Physical features



Mexico has many different physical features. There are **desert lands** in the north, **jungles** to the south and **mountain chains** across the country in a northwest-southeasterly direction, forming between them a number of valleys and plateaux. There are beautiful **beach resorts** along the Pacific, Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean coasts.



**Mexico** is divided into 31 states and the capital, Mexico City (also call Federal District):



## Volcanoes

The country is dotted with volcanoes, many still active, which form some of its highest mountains. They were named by the indigenous inhabitants before the Spanish arrived. These are the highest mountains of Mexico:

- **Citlaltépetl** "Mountain of the stars" 5,700 m
- **Popocatépetl** "Smoking mountain" 5,452 m
- **Iztaccíhuatl** "Sleeping woman" 5,286 m



All these mountains are permanently snow capped and offer interesting challenges to mountain climbers. Unfortunately, due to the rugged nature of these peaks there are no winter sport facilities available in Mexico. Some of the volcanoes and the land that surrounds them have been designated **National Parks**.

Found in the Mexican state of Michoacán, the **Parícutín** is one of the World's most famous volcanoes . In 1943, a farmer was ploughing his

field when he heard a rumbling under his feet, and smoke started coming out of holes in the ploughed soil.

Within six days, the volcano had grown to over 500 feet in height, and had covered two villages, leaving only the towers of a church in view. It later grew to over 1500 feet in height. Scientists from around the world rushed to Mexico for the opportunity to witness the birth of a new volcano.

## Climate

More than half of Mexico lies south of the Tropic of Cancer; therefore, most of the country has mild weather all year. However, because of its many mountains and valleys and its distance from the Equator, Mexico has a wide variety of climates. Also, the changes in altitude mean that there are extremes of weather in different parts of the country.

**Average Monthly TEMPERATURE & PRECIPITATION**

		JAN		FEB		MAR		APR		MAY		JUN	
CITY	ALT.	T	PT	T	PT	T	PT	T	PT	T	PT	T	PT
Acapulco	1	25	10	25	00	26	00	27	00	29	00	28	42
Cancún	1	25	20	25	32	25	23	25	23	25	53	27	50
Chihuahua	1400	9	03	11	03	15	05	15	05	17	10	25	10
Hermosillo	84	15	03	17	15	20	03	23	03	25	03	31	03
Mexico City	2267	12	08	13	08	15	10	17	13	18	03	17	10
Xictepec	2493	8	10	11	03	12	03	13	03	14	03	15	03

		JUL		AUG		SEP		OCT		NOV		DEC	
CITY	ALT.	T	PT	T	PT	T	PT	T	PT	T	PT	T	PT
Acapulco	1	28	21	28	21	28	25	28	17	27	30	26	10
Cancún	1	27	63	27	71	27	114	26	176	26	178	24	23
Chihuahua	1400	23	73	23	64	23	64	20	36	13	06	7	20
Hermosillo	194	32	71	31	64	31	63	25	41	21	03	15	23
Mexico City	2267	18	12	18	10	18	11	18	13	14	13	12	08
Xictepec	2493	14	60	14	60	14	78	13	23	11	18	10	13

Altitude (ALT) in metres, precipitation (PT) in centimetres, temperature (T) in centigrades.

In the dry heat of the northern plains the temperature can reach 40 degrees centigrade or more during the day, although it can get very cold at night. In contrast, some coastal and southern areas only experience humid or dry seasons. Throughout Mexico, the sun shines nearly all year, but you can sometimes see snow in some northern states and on top of the mountains.

## Rivers, lakes and waterfalls



The longest river in Mexico is the Río Bravo which forms more than half the border with the United States. Almost all Mexican rivers have their source in one of the two principal mountain ranges — the western Sierra Madre or the eastern Sierra Madre— and tend to be short.

Rivers in the west, like the Yaqui or the Lerma, flow into the Pacific Ocean, whilst those in the east, like the Usumacinta and the Pánuco flow into the Gulf of Mexico. In the southern states of Quintana Roo and Yucatán the porous limestone creates underground rivers which flow into the Caribbean Sea. Cenotes are natural wells, formed when the roofs of these rivers collapse.

Of the many lakes in Mexico, the largest is Chapala, situated between the states of Jalisco and Michoacán. In the state of Chiapas, the Lacandon jungle surrounds the beautiful Agua Azul (blue water) waterfalls of the Usumacinta river.

## The Copper Canyon

The deepest canyon in the entire sub-continent of North America is found in Chihuahua, Mexico. This is the **Copper Canyon National Park**, which despite being in an area of desert, is covered at the bottom by rich vegetation and trees. The canyon is named after the colour of the rock from which it is formed.



## Regional Economy

Most Mexicans live in cities and work in the areas of services, commerce and manufacturing (production of goods for use or sale). In the region along the border with the United States, cities have expanded as industry grows rapidly and many Mexicans travel there to

find jobs. Cities such as Monterrey (in the state of Nuevo León) have become centres for producing manufactured goods, including cars, steel and glass.



Most of the major bank and financial services are found in either Mexico City, Guadalajara or Monterrey. Mining is important in towns such as Zacatecas which produces silver, copper, lead and zinc.

However, about one third of Mexican families live in rural areas, where the main activity is still agriculture. In the southern states of Oaxaca and

Chiapas many Mexicans work in the textile industry, in agriculture or in traditional craft making.

There are vast oil fields in the Gulf of Mexico in states such as Campeche and Veracruz. Towns grew up around the sites where oil was being extracted, refined and processed.