Mexico

Location

Mexico is the fourteenth largest country in the world (according to landmass) having 1,972,256km². It is bordered to the north by the United States and the Rio Grande (which runs for 1000 miles) west to the Pacific Ocean and to the east, by the Gulf of Mexico. Guatemala and Belize border the southern tip of the country. Its exact location is between 98 degrees west longitude meridian and 19 degrees north latitude.

Climate

Mexico is not homogeneous. It cannot be categorized as having one climate or one type of terrain. The Highlands have a temperate climate all year around with pleasant summers and mild winters. The northern border states are characterized as having desert terrain and climate. Southeastern Mexico is tropical. The Tropic of Cancer divides the regions. Land north of this is slightly cooler in the winter months and land south of the Tropic of Cancer has very constant temperatures. The capital of Mexico City has an average temperature of about fifteen degrees Celsius year round. Rainfall also varies between regions and time of year. Most of Mexico has a wet and dry season, with the wet season lasting from June to mid-October.

Geography

Much of Mexico is divided by mountain ranges. The Sierra Madres run north to south creating the valleys of Northern and Central Mexico where the majority of the people live. The highest altitudes are mountains measuring up to 18,000 ft. Running from Colima, on the eastern border of the country to Veracruz, on the Atlantic side of the country, is a volcanic belt
giving this part of Mexico its most arable soil. Although Mexico has around 150 rivers, the two major bodies of water that surround the country are the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Gulf of Mexico to the east.

**Population**

The total population of Mexico is about 95.8 million, making it the 11th most populated country in the world. The population growth rate is approximately 2.2 percent per year. The doubling time figure for the country is 31.8 years. Sixty percent of the population of Mexico is located in four major cities, all of which are located in the central area of the country. The largest is the capital, Mexico City, with around 21 million persons. Fifty-six percent of the population is under the age of twenty-four, meaning that the age distribution is “pyramid shaped.” The crude birth rate is 24 per 1000 births and the crude death rate is five per 1000.

**Currency**

The official monetary unit in Mexico is the peso. Around 9.6 pesos equal one U.S. dollar. Ten centavos are equal to one peso. Coins are in 1, 2, 5, 10 pesos and bills are available in 20, 50, 100, 200, 500.

**Language**

The official language of Mexico is Spanish, although many people have some knowledge of English. Some important phrases to know if one travels to Mexico are: *Si*-yes; *Como esta Ud?*-How are you?; *Cuanto cuesta?*-How much is this?; *Como se llama?*-What is your name?; *Donde esta……*-Where is…..?

**Trade and Economy**

The United States is Mexico’s biggest trading partner. Eighty-four percent of exports are sent to the U.S. Japan, Canada, and Italy are next, but make up only about 5 percent of the
export destinations. Since the implementation of NAFTA, the distribution of the GDP has changed. Agriculture was about 5.6 percent of the GDP in 1997. That is down from 8.1 percent in 1994. Corn, beans, feedgrains, coffee, and fruit are some of the most important crops in Mexico. Industry contributed to around 26 percent of the GDP. Manufacturing was 19.1 percent of this with petroleum and mining second and third. Historically corn has been the most important crop for Mexico, with the mining of silver and petroleum have been its most important industries. The service sector makes up a whopping 62.9 percent of the GDP. Growing commerce and tourism make up about 20 percent of the service sector and financial services are about 15 percent. Mexico, just as the rest of Latin America, remains heavily dependent on primary commodity exports. The majority of imports, like exports, come from the United States. Japan, Germany and Canada follow.

Agriculture

Half of the land is considered farmable in Mexico, but only 12 percent is actually used for agriculture, due to lack of water. Over half of that land must be irrigated before it can be used. Most of this land is located in the valley of Mexico City and the surrounding areas of central Mexico. Also, the Veracruz area is a very rich area. Most of the fruits and tropical flowers that are exported come from this area. In metric tons, sugar cane is the most produced agricultural commodity with 46,980,000 metric tons followed by maize (corn), sorghum (animal feed), wheat, and a variety of fruits. Cattle and chickens are the most raised livestock.

Food

*Desayuno* is the first meal of the day. Typically one would have *café con leche* (coffee with milk), *jugo* (juice), *juevos* (eggs). Eggs are prepared in many different ways in Mexico but they almost always are served with salsa. The main meal of the day is *comida*. It occurs in the middle of the day. It may consist of many different things such as soup, salad, beans, rice, the
main course, dessert, and tortillas, etc. The main course could be *chili rellenos* or *tacos* with *carne asada*. Some type of salsa is served with every meal. *Cena* or dinner is usually a light meal that may consist of bread and jam or a small *torta* (sandwich).

**Landmarks**

Mexico has many beautiful landmarks, but the most important are those of the *indigenous* population. There is *Teotihuican*, the former capital of the Aztecs, in central Mexico. There are also ruins of the Mayas and Olmec Indians in southern Mexico. “The Floating Gardens” are a beautiful sight for one to see. *La Plaza de Tres Culturas* is a very important modern landmark in Mexico City. Last, but not least, are the beautiful beaches that surround the country.

**Education**

The majority of Mexico is literate and educated through grade school. More impoverished boys are sent through the equivalent of jr. high or high school, while the girls usually stop at grade school. Children from more affluent families usually attend private schools through college. Most schooling in Mexico is inexpensive in cost, but many families cannot afford to waste the time. Many children need to work to help support the family once they are out of college or high school.

**Important Dates**

Some important dates on Mexico’s calendar are: Jan. 1-New Year’s Day; Feb.5-Constitution Day; Easter Week; May 1-Day of Work; May 5-Cinco de Mayo; Sept 16-Independence Day; Nov. 1 and 2- Day of the Dead; Dec. 8-Festival of the Immaculate Conception; Dec. 25-Christmas. These are all national holidays but, there are also may local holidays and festivals throughout the country.

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