

Mexico

Legend has it that Mexico is the country no one ever leaves. Every year millions of tourists pass through and Mexicans jovially warn that a part of them will remain behind forever. Most visitors are vacationing North Americans who wind up on the brilliant beaches of Cancun, Acapulco, Mazatlan and Puerto Vallarta. But those who venture inland are rewarded with the true soul of Mexico. Those who venture into Mexico to serve and to show the love of Jesus Christ are rewarded beyond measure and leave behind eternal blessings.

Facts at a Glance

Full country name:	United Mexican States
Population:	106,202,903 (2005 estimate)
Capital City:	Mexico City
Literacy:	92%
Religion:	89% Roman Catholic 6% Protestant 5% Other (including Judaism)
Government:	Federal Republic
Monetary Unit:	Mexican Peso

The Country

The Republic of Mexico is vast, comprising nearly two million square miles of coastline, desert, rain forest, mountains, and fertile plains. From the American borderlands of the wide, agriculturally rich north, the country narrows gently as it sweeps south and east. The two main mountain ranges, the Sierra Madre Occidental and the Sierra Madre Oriental, hug the west and east, finally merging into the volcanically active central highlands and the capital, Mexico City - the most populous capital city in the world. Further south, the country narrows to only 100 miles, then broadens again before reaching the Guatemalan border. There are two major peninsulas in Mexico that are almost countries themselves. In the west is the poetically barren Baja Peninsula, which seals in the biological riches of the Sea of Cortes. To the east, protruding into the Caribbean like the end of a fish hook, is the Yucatan peninsula, bursting with rain forests, Mayan ruins, and white powder beaches.

The People and Way of Life

Mexicans place a high value on family and traditional values. They are a friendly outgoing people and their generosity is unsurpassed. Visitors who take the time to learn a few simple sentences in Spanish will quickly win their hearts.

The typical Mexican dresses similar to people in Europe and the United States as fashion in Mexico is influenced by international trends. Rural families dress in



more traditional clothes and the indigenous dress worn by many Native Americans often distinguishes them from mestizos [mixed European and Native America ancestry] who generally wear European-style fashions.

Mexican food is unique and diverse, but income level and social class differences often affect culinary customs. The basic diet of working-class Mexicans relies heavily on corn or wheat tortillas, along with beans, chili peppers, and tomatoes. Middle and upper income Mexicans consume a wide array of dishes, influenced by trends in the United States and Europe. Ready-made products such as cold cereal, either produced in Mexico or imported into the country, are often found in Mexican kitchens. Mexico has one of the most highly-developed carbonated beverage industries in the world and per capita consumption of soft drinks is high.

Mexicans enjoy many of the leisure activities found in the United States, including television, movies, rock concerts and sports. Soccer is the most popular national sport and many Mexicans attend traditional bull fights.

Weather/Climate

Mexico has been graced with an unusually temperate climate year-round. The most important thing to remember is that the Mexican summer is also the rainy season. However, the rain rarely lasts more than a few hours, and typically arrives in the late afternoon. Extremes are present only in the North and in Baja, both of which have deserts where the temperature leaps above 100F. Central Mexico has a year-round temperature in the high 80s. Night time temperatures fall somewhat, but rarely break down below a comfortable 60F.

Did you know

- that the vanilla bean is from an aromatic orchid that originally came from Mexico?
- that Cinco de Mayo [the anniversary of the Battle of Puebla where a motley collection of machete-wielding peasants defeated the French army] is celebrated more widely in the United States than in Mexico?
- that Mexico City is the most populous capital city in the world?
- that another name for Aztecs was Mexica, from which the country takes its modern name?
- the Mayas chewed gum, chicle, from the sapodilla tree? Chicle is still used to make chewing gum today?
- that Mexico City is the highest capital city in North America?
- that in 1836 Texas broke away from Mexico?
- that after the Mexican-American war the US paid \$15,000,000 for Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California?
- that the Rio Grande is Mexico's longest river and marks the border with the US along part of its extent?
- that Mexico has 31 states?
- that Mexico, Canada and the United States entered the North America Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] effective January 1, 1994?

