



Welcome to Mexico

"Taking part in the project gave me an insight into a completely different side to this amazing place, it's so much more than just an incredible holiday destination."

Mexico's 1.9 million km² is filled with such diversity and charm it can become any traveller's paradise. Intrepid explorers can come across terrain ranging from high rugged mountains, low coastal plains, desert landscapes, and snow capped volcanoes, whilst marine lovers, beach goers, and surfers have 9,330 km of coastline to play with. The blend of history with modern growth creates opportunities to discover Mexico's marvellous opposing identities, which boasts ancient ruins and thriving industrialised cities, traditional colonial towns, and glitzy resorts, along with natural beauty including deserted beaches and a world beating range of flora and fauna.

Know your History

Mexico has an illustrious but turbulent history, with its first indigenous people thought to have lived there about 20,000 years before Columbus, with the Olmecs (1200 to 600 B.C.) being the first to arise and joined by the Zapotecs in 300 B.C. By 250 A.D. the Maya were building the famous stepped temple pyramids in the Yucatan Peninsula. A string of major civilisations that flourished in Central Mexico from 250 A.D. were succeeded by the Aztecs in the early 14th century.

These highly developed civilizations flourished for nearly 3,000 years, but were wiped out in just two, when the Spaniard Hernan Cortes landed in 1519. It is thought that the Aztecs were initially accommodating, but the Spanish rounded up a 6,000 strong force against them, finding allies in towns that resented Aztec domination. Having been invited into King Montezuma's palace in the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán, they swiftly took him hostage, and by 1521 Aztec resistance had been defeated. Severe treatment, and diseases inadvertently brought in by the invaders massively depleted the indigenous population from 25 million in 1519 to just 1 million in 1605.

For the next 300 years, Mexico (or "New Spain") was under an apartheid rule. Spanish born colonists were considered nobility and acquired vast fortunes and political power, whilst any remaining indigenous people were firmly at the bottom of the pile. However, with Napoleon's occupation of much of Spain in 1808, direct control from the Spanish ceased, and rivalry amongst the Spanish born colonists and criollos (born in New Spain but with Spanish ancestry) intensified, resulting in a rebellion in 1810. Spain finally agreed to Mexico's independence in 1821.

Money Talks

As the 11th largest economy in the world, Mexico has weathered several crises (completely bypassing the 2002 South American crisis) and improved its economic standing. After a period of stagnation in 2001, growth has been slow and steady. Despite this stability – which has reduced

inflation the peso (MXN – the local currency) and interest rates to record lows, as well as increasing per capita income – there are still large gaps between the urban and rural populations, the northern and southern states and the rich and the poor. The government now has to contend with upgrading the infrastructure, modernising the tax system and labour laws and reducing income inequality.

Mexico is currently having a boost in its modern industrial and service sectors thanks to increasing private ownership. Administrations have expanded the competition in ports, railroads, telecommunications, electricity generation, natural gas distribution and airports – all contributing to upgrading the infrastructure. Mexico has an export-oriented economy, and over 90% of the Mexican trade is under Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with more than 40 countries (including the European Union, Japan, Israel, and much of Central and South America). In 2006, trade with the two northern partners accounted for around 90% of Mexico's exports and 55% of its imports.

Get Culture Savvy

Mexico's culture reflects the complexity of its history, and is heavily influenced by the 300 year Spanish colonisation. Culture, tradition, family and religion are seen as core values in Mexican society. Treat them with respect, and Mexicans are warm and high spirited, and will happily welcome you and show you the best of their country, of which they are proud. Modern city life in its major cities is similar in many ways to that of the United States and Europe, whilst life in its smaller villages follows a more traditional way of life.

Food

One of the joys of Mexico is its food. Mexican cuisine is known around the world for its blend of both indigenous and European influences, intense and varied flavours, colourful decoration, and a whole range of spices. Popular dishes include the well known tacos, tortilla and enchiladas. Both meat lovers and vegetarians can be well catered for, as although they are most commonly cooked together, Mexican dishes can either involve a variety of meats (beef, chicken, pork and so on) and vegetables such as peppers, chillies, broccoli, cauliflower, radishes, and a lot of rice.

Art

The combination of indigenous and Spanish influences is also very apparent in Mexico's art, forming its well known folk art traditions. Although Mexico's fine art between the Spanish conquest and the early 20th century mostly imitated European styles, the Mexican Revolution gave birth to a new generation of artists that led a vibrant national movement incorporating political, historic and folk themes. World famous painters include Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Literature

Mexican literature originated from the concepts of the Amerindian and Spanish settlements of Mesoamerica. Writers and poets of note include Juan Ruiz Alarcon and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz.

Music & Dance

Indigenous sounds and heritage form the basis of Mexico's music, commonly using drums, flutes, gourd rattles, sea shells, and singing. Although the ancient style of music is still used in some parts,

much of Mexico's traditional contemporary music derives from the Spanish colonial period. Musical groups called Mariachis, who use singers, guitars, trumpets, violins and marimbas, are popular performers along streets, festivals and restaurants. Traditional dance incorporates a sequence of hopping steps, along with heel and toe movements.

Sports

Traditional national sports are bullfighting and charreira (a type of rodeo) but football is widely regarded as the most popular recreational pastime in Mexico. Boxing is also a favoured sport, in which Mexico has produced several world champions. Other sports include professional wrestling (lucha libre), baseball, fishing, scuba diving, and basketball.

Learn the Lingo

Mexico has huge linguistic diversity, and although Spanish is the predominant language (Mexico has the world's largest Spanish speaking population), the government recognises 62 indigenous Amerindian languages as national languages, however only 6% of the population speaks an indigenous language.

Remember:

The letters **LL** together are pronounced as **Y**

The letter **J** is always pronounced as **H**

The letter **V** is soft, so pronounce it as **B**

ENGLISH	SPANISH	ENGLISH	SPANISH
Greetings		Numbers	
Hi	Hola	1	Uno
Goodbye	Adios	2	Dos
Pleased to meet you!	Mucho gusto!	3	Très
How are you?	Como estas?	4	Cuatro
Good morning	Buenos días	5	Cinco
Good afternoon	Buenas tardes	6	Seis
Good evening/night	Buenas noches	7	Siete
8	Ocho		
About Yourself		9	Nueve
My name is...	Me llamo...	10	Diez
I am from England	Soy de Inglaterra	11	Once
I don't speak Spanish	No hablo Español	12	Doce
I don't understand	No entiendo	13	Trece
What's your name?	¿Cómo se llama usted?	14	Catorce
15	Quince		
In the Shop		16	Dieciséis
I would like.../I want...	Quiero	17	Diecisiete
How much does it cost?	Cuánto vale?	18	Dieciocho

Please	Por favour	19	Diecinueve
Thank you (very much)	(Muchas) gracias	20	Veinte
Yes	Sí	100	Cien
No	No	500	Quinientos
1000	Mil		
In the Restaurant			
Chicken	Pollo		
Vegetables	Vegetales		
Beef	Res		
Meat	Carne		
Cheese	Queso		
Fish	Pescado		
Tomato sauce	Salsa de tomate		
Beer	Cerveza		
I am a vegetarian	Soy vegetariano		

Lay of the Land

Covering almost 2 million km², Mexico is the 5th largest country in the Americas and borders with the US in the north, Guatemala in the south and east, and also Belize in the east.

The north of the country is the driest and some areas can experience temperatures of over 43°C during the day. Only those creatures that can survive such conditions, such as snakes and armadillos, can be usually be found here.

The Sea of Cortes enjoys such diversity in marine life that it contains a third of all water mammal species that can be found in the oceans, with whales and dolphins to be seen.

The west coast of the country is a vast plain that contains all the costal states: Tampico, Veracruz, Tabasco, Campeche, and the peninsula of Yucatan, which divides the Gulf of the Caribbean Sea. Abundant marine life and great formations of coral reef present in the coasts of Yucatan and Quintana-Roo make this area perfect for diving or snorkelling.

The historic central area of the country enjoys a pleasant and cool climate throughout most of the year since it is surrounded by the "volcanic axis" formed by various peaks that are snow-capped for as long as five months every year.

The Pacific coast of Mexico offers the famous beaches of Puerto Vallarta, Acapulco, Mazatlan and Ixtapa, where hot and humid weather is to be expected from May through to September, followed by the hurricane season.

The southeast of Mexico is home to the state of Chiapas, rich with natural resources due to the fact that it is flanked by the mountain range known as the Sierra Madre de Chiapas, and that it also contains the thick jungle called the Lancandona, the largest in the country and the home of thousands of species of tropical plants and animals such as the cockatoo, the ocelot, the jaguar, and several kinds of monkeys and parakeets.

What's the Weather like?

Central America covers a large area and weather may vary from coast to coast, at different altitudes, and at different latitudes. The mountains and plains on the Caribbean side have heavy rain September to February. The mountains and plains on the Pacific side have little rainfall from December to April.

In central and north Mexico the dry season is longer and although there is a wet season the rain usually falls in late afternoon for a short period. The height of the wet season can be very hot and humid. In general altitude determines the temperature.

Biodiversity

Mexico is ideally placed geographically for high biodiversity. Part of the Central American corridor, the country is one of the five most important regions of the world, and one of the 12 countries considered mega-diverse – taking first place in reptilian biodiversity with 740 known species, 574 of which are endemic! Mexico concentrates around 10% of all known species on earth. It also boasts 526 species of mammals, 290 varieties of amphibians (although this number is rapidly rising), 1,150 species of bird, and 26,000 vascular plants.

However, Mexico still suffers from dramatic ecological problems. INEGI (Instituto de Engenharia Mecânica e Gestão Industrial, or the Institute for Mechanical Engineering and Industrial Management) has reported that Mexico has a deforestation rate of 1.2 million acres annually, which is one of the worst in the world. INEGI Environmental Review has also reported that Mexico has 242 species in danger of extinction, 435 considered threatened, 244 considered rare, and 84 subject to special protection.

Good Books

Guidebooks

- Lonely Planet: Mexico. John Noble & Sandra Bao. 2007

Wildlife

- Mexico: Adventures in Nature. Ron Mader

Fiction

- King of the Moon: A novel of Baja California. Gene Kira Gringos, trans. Charles Portis.
- The Treasure of Sierra Madre. Bruno Traven

Teaching Guides

- Essential Grammar in Use with Answers: A Self-study Reference and Practice Book for Elementary Students of English 2nd Edition. Raymond Murphy. Cambridge University Press,

2002. ISBN 9780521529327

- Essential Grammar in Use with Answers: A Self-study Reference and Practice Book for Intermediate Students of English 3rd Edition. Raymond Murphy. Cambridge University Press, 2004. ISBN 9780521532891
- Lessons from Nothing: Activities for Language Teaching with Limited Time and Resources (Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers). Bruce Marsland. Cambridge University Press, 1998. ISBN 9780521627658
- Games for Children (Resource Books for Teachers). Gordon Lewis & Gunther Benson. Oxford University Press, 1999. ISBN 9780194372244
- Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching 2nd Edition. Diane Larsen-Freeman. Oxford University Press, 2000. ISBN 9780194355742

CONTACT INFORMATION

Call us on 020 7613 2422 (UK) / 1 949 336 8178 (US)

Mail us on info@frontier.ac.uk

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