MEXICO FOR YOU
Official Name: United States of Mexico

Capital: Mexico City

Major cities: Guadalajara, Monterrey, Tijuana, Puebla, Ciudad Juárez, León, Mérida, and Querétaro

Area: 761,600 mi²

Population: 120 million

Official Language: Spanish, along with 62 officially recognized indigenous languages

Currency: Mexican Peso

Religion: Mexico recognizes the freedom of religious practices and beliefs. While the population is predominantly catholic, there is no official religion in the country.

Flag: The Mexican flag has three colors, with green, white, and red strips; with the national emblem, an eagle perched on a cactus devouring a snake, in the center of the white strip. The national emblem has its origin in the legend about the foundation of the Aztec people’s capital, México-Tenochtitlán.
The United States of Mexico’s government structure is a democratic, representative, and federal republic, consisting of 32 states and built around the principle of separation of powers, Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. These states are divided into 2,435 municipalities in the country.

The chief of state is the President of the Republic, elected by the citizens by universal vote every six years.
GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Mexico is located in the south of North America. It shares its northern border with the United States of America, its southern border with Belize and Guatemala, its western coast with the Pacific Ocean, and its eastern coast with the Gulf of México and the Caribbean Sea. The Mexican territory is approximately two million km$^2$. This area of land places Mexico as 14th largest country in the world.

The Tropic of Cancer divides Mexico into two very distinct regions, a tropical one in the south, and a temperate one in the north.

The Mexican territory is traversed by four mountain ranges, including the Sierra Madre Occidental—an extension of the Rocky Mountains, the Sierra Madre Oriental, the Sierra Madre del Sur, and the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt. The topography of these mountain ranges and their location between oceans in the Tropic of Cancer influence the great climactic diversity of Mexico.

Consequently, it is possible to find cold temperatures at high altitudes, just kilometers away from the hottest weather of the coastal plain.
As a result of this variety of climates, Mexico also has a rich diversity of ecosystems in tropical rainforests, mountain forests, deserts, prairies, wetlands, and coastal plains, in addition to equally rich and diverse marine ecosystems. With more than 200,000 species of flora and fauna, Mexico is among the countries in the world with greatest biodiversity.

Mexico has an important network of protected natural areas and national parks. These include:

The Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, which covers 200 square miles of coniferous forests in the mountains of the states of Michoacán and Mexico. Every year, hundreds of millions of butterflies travel more than 2,000 miles, from Canada and over the United States, to spend the winter in these forests in central Mexico.

The Whale Sanctuary of El Vizcaíno in Baja California, an important reproduction site for gray and blue whales, seals, California sea lions, elephant seals, and other species. The lagoons inside the reserve are home to four endangered species of sea turtles.
The Sian Ka’an Biosphere Reserve in the state of Quintana Roo spans 1,219 square miles of tropical rainforest, wetlands, coastal plains, mangroves, canals and part of the Great Maya Reef, the second largest in the world. The natural reserve has rich marine and land fauna, which include the whale shark, sea turtles, crocodiles, howler monkeys, tapir, puma, and hundreds of fish and bird species.

El Pinacate y Gran Desierto de Altar Biosphere Reserve covers more than 4,000 square miles in the Sonoran Desert, and is home to deer, coyotes, peccaries, snakes, lizards, birds, and many other animal species. The diversity of flora is also rich, with many species endemic to the region. Among these species are the saguaro cactus, the most abundance species of cactus in the world. In México, the Sonoran Desert occupies an important Mexican territory in the states of Sonora and Baja California, while in the United States it extends from Arizona to southern California.
Precolumbian Mexico can be divided into two large cultural areas: Mesoamerica and Aridoamerica.

Mesoamerica comprises the center and south of the current Mexican territory, as well as a large portion of Central America. Important civilizations were developed there, including the Olmec, the Teotihuacán, the Maya, the Toltec, and the Aztec, among others. The common denominator across the diverse Mesoamerican cultures was the agricultural practice, the corn and bean-based diet, the construction of cities and sedentary societies, the artistic development, the monumental architecture and science, the political organization and complex society, the polytheistic religion and hierarchy of religious leaders who played a significant role in all aspects of life.

Aridoamerica is comprised of northern Mexico and southwest United States. This region was given this name because it is a vast stretch of land with predominantly arid climate. This climate explains the limited development of agriculture and the nomadic hunter-gatherer tendency of the peoples of this region. In Aridoamerica, it is possible to find examples of complex and sophisticated cultures that built Paquimé, Casas Grandes in Chihuahua, or Mesa Verde and Canyon de Chelly in Colorado and Arizona, respectively.

Aridoamerica and Mesoamerica always had an intense relationship, characterized by commercial and cultural exchange, war and migration.
Five hundred years after the arrival of the Europeans, indigenous group from both areas, such as the yaqui, the rarámuri, the seri, the huichol, the ñañhú, the purépecha, the zapotec, the mixtec, the nahua, the maya, and others have maintained their own culture and identity, attesting to the resilience of their roots and their exceptional resistance.

2500 BCE-250 CE

During the pre-classical period, agriculture was developed throughout Mesoamerica. The first great Mesoamerican civilization emerged and developed in the Gulf of Mexico: the Olmec civilization. In the southern Valley of Mexico, Cuicuilco became an important ceremonial center.

300-900 CE

During the beginning of the Classical period, power was consolidated in the central Mexican capital of Teotihuacán, the first monumental city of Mesoamerica and a major political, religious, and commercial hub.

The Maya civilization flourished in city-states, including Bonampak, Palenque, Tikal, Copán and Calakmul. The Mixtecs and Zapotecs constructed Mitla and Monte Albán.
During the post-classic period, the Toltec people established hegemony throughout Mesoamerica, and based its civilization in Tula in central Mexico, where the state of Hidalgo now is. During this period, the splendor of the Mayan world had its center in the Yucatán peninsula, where Chichén Itzá and Uxmal were erected.

Later on, the Aztec Empire was established and expanded its political, economic and military reign from the Valley of Mexico to what is now Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Its headquarters were located in the city of México-Tenochtitlán. By the time the Spanish conquerors arrived, the Aztecs had tax system throughout almost all of Mesoamerica, and they controlled a complex trade network.

### 900-1521 CE

![The Aztec capital of Mexico-Tenochtitlán](image)

### 1492

Christopher Columbus’s fleet arrived to the coast of the Caribbean Ocean.

### 1519-1521

From Cuba, Hernán Cortés arrived on the shores of Mexican territory. In 1521, Tenochtitlán was occupied by Cortés’ forces, due to their superior technology, their use of horses, the support of people who were fed up with Aztec rule, and the epidemics of new diseases imported from Europe by the colonizers.
1521-1600

The Spanish crown established the Viceroyalty of New Spain and its Capital, Mexico City, was built over the ruins of the Aztec capital and a spiritual conquest imposed Catholicism as the only religion permitted.

During the 16th century, Spanish dominance was established in the current Mexican territory based on the Aztec tax system. The exploitation and colonization of California and other northern territories began during this period.

1600-1700

The peak of mining activity and wealth gave rise to many important colonial cities like Zacatecas, Guanajuato, and Taxco. New Spain witnessed a boom in architecture and arts. This was the era known as the Mexican Baroque, which gave rise to architecture and writers like Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Along with mining, agriculture and other economic activities were developed based on the exploitation of indigenous and African slave labor.

New Spain became an important trade intersection for its strategic location between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. In addition to local products, merchandise from Europe, the Caribbean, South America, the Philippines, and China was transported through Mexican ports.
1700-1810

In art and architecture, the latter part of the 18th century corresponded to the rise of neoclassicism. It was a century of political reforms in Spain that would have a strong impact in the colonies of the New World. An economically powerful creole class was consolidated and began to resist control by the Metropolis.

1810-1821

In Dolores, now in the state of Guanajuato, the Priest Miguel Hidalgo summoned a rebellion against the colonial government, sparking the war for independence, which gained traction throughout all of New Spain. José María Morelos, another great leader in the fight for independence, followed Hidalgo’s example. The battle continued even after both leaders died, and in 1821 the army headed by Agustín de Iturbide and Vicente Guerrero defeated the Spanish forces.

1821-1848

Agustín de Iturbide named himself the Emperor of Mexico and remained in power for more than one year. The new nation experienced years of political instability. Most of the 19th century was characterized by the struggle for power between political and economic factions—the centralists, federalists, and liberalists—with opposing views about the future of the newly independent Mexico.

Following the secession of Texas and the war with the United States, Mexico lost more than half of its territory. In addition to Texas, the once Mexican territory, which is now New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah and Colorado, was ceded to the United States of America.
1857-1867

Benito Juárez, a liberal, indigenous Zapotec, became the president of Mexico and pushed forward important reforms, such as the separation of church and state, opposed by conservative groups who initiated a civil war. With the support of some conservative Mexican groups, France invaded Mexico and established a monarchy headed by the Austrian prince, Maximilian of Hapsburg. An important battle during the French Intervention, which the French eventually lost, took place in Puebla on May 5, 1862. After years of fighting, the Mexican troops regained control of the capital and expelled the invaders once and for all.

1876-1910

General Porfirio Díaz ruled Mexico. He expanded industry, railroads, and the modernization of the country, while establishing a dictatorship that limited the proper exercise of democracy. Social injustices proliferated and popular dissent grew among distinct sectors of society.

1910-1917

Francisco I. Madero was the leader who called upon the people to rise against the Díaz government. The Mexican Revolution began. Madero was joined by Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa to lead the army of farm workers. Díaz was ousted, but Madero was assassinated and the battle continued for years. En 1917, under the leadership of Venustiano Carranza, the revolutionary forces created a congress where the current constitution of the Republic of Mexico was born.
1920-1930

The triumph of the Revolution gave way to important artistic and cultural expression. In the 1920s, Muralism emerged as a movement that sought to use art as an instrument of accessible education for all. Muralism would dominate the panorama of Mexican painting for the next two decades. Among the movement’s pioneers are David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera y José Clemente Orozco.

1934-1940

In his government, President Lázaro Cárdenas implemented transformative social reforms, spearheaded the agrarian reform and in 1938 nationalized the petroleum industry. Mexico received thousands of refugees from the Spanish Civil War, including important academics, scientists and artists who would make great contributions to the country.

1942-1946

Mexico entered the Second World War with the Allies. The Mexican Social Security Institute was founded to offer medical attention to workers.

1950-1960

The Mexican economy grew and the institutions that emerged in the aftermath of the Revolution were consolidated. In the 1950s, a generation of artists known as “la ruptura” (“the rupture”) emerged with an aesthetic propos-
1985-1986

A destructive earthquake hit Mexico City. Thousands of people died, and the material damage was immense. A strong current of solidarity ran deep among the citizens of Mexico in the face of tragedy. In 1986, Mexico organized the World Cup in soccer for the second time.

Works from the “Ruptura” artistic movement

1968

Mexico hosted the Olympic Games and simultaneously witnessed violent repression against the student protests that questioned authority and sought new democratic alternatives for universities and for the country.

1970

Mexico organized the World Cup in soccer for the first time.

1985-1986

al distinct from that of the muralists, and produces a body of work in dialogue with the global artistic vanguard. As the muralists did, this generation certainly positioned Mexican visual arts on the world stage.
1988-2000

These years marked a period of profound political and economic transformation in Mexico. In 1988, for the first time, the PRI, the only party in power for decades, was challenged in the presidential elections by a strong democratic movement. Mexico signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Canada in 1994. The Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas gained arose with complaints about the recognition of the rights of indigenous people.

In 2000, Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN), the opposing party to the government, won the presidential election and became the first president from a party other than the dominant party that governed for most of the 20th century.

2001-2012

The PAN controlled the federal government of the country, but the 32 state governments and the capital of the republic are divided across the three major parties—the PAN, the PRI and the PRD. Neither of them has an absolute majority in Congress. The economy remained stable and the institutions were developed to guarantee transparency in public administration. In 2006, the president Felipe Calderón began the “War on Drugs.”

The PRI returns to power in 2012 with Enrique Peña Nieto, who has managed to negotiate with his congressional opponents to approve structural reforms in education, labor, and energy, among others.
Education in Mexico is mandatory from preschool until high school. Public education is free during the mandatory years. A typical student enters kindergarten at the age of four, elementary school at the age of six, and studies there for six school years. After, the student goes to secondary school for three years, and then studies for three years in high school. Upon finishing high school, the student can go to university or to a technical school.

The language of instruction is Spanish. However, many schools in the country also offer classes in one of the 62 native languages in indigenous areas.

Mexico has a free-market export-based economy. It is the second largest economy in Latin America, and is the 15th largest country in the world.

The petroleum industry has an important role in the Mexican economy. The mining, steel, automobile, petrochemical and textile industries also constitute significant economic activity in Mexico. Mexico is a producer of medical equipment and domestic appliances. It is the primary exporter of flat screens and has begun developing its aerospace industry.
Mexico is a major producer of fresh and processed foods. It is the primary exporter worldwide of avocados, blackberries, hot peppers, bell peppers, tomatoes, and lime, and other agricultural products. Tequila and beer are also important exports.

The United States is Mexico’s main trade partner. The United States is the primary destination for Mexican exports, while Mexico is the second most important market for U.S. goods. The current figures for bilateral trade between the two countries exceed 500 thousand million dollars. With NAFTA, trade and interdependence has intensified among Mexico, Canada, and the United States, stimulating the North American economy.
With more than 20 million visitors per year, Mexico’s economy relies heavily on tourism as a major source of jobs. Tourism is the third largest source of income for Mexico.

With 6,000 miles of coasts, Mexico is home to some of the best beach destinations worldwide. Among these popular destinations are Cancún, the Riviera Maya and Cozumel in the Caribbean; Los Cabos, Acapulco, Puerto Vallarta, Huatulco, Mazatlán and Ixtapa in the Pacific.

The diversity of landscapes, woods, forests, deserts and mountains by the sea are major attractions for eco-tourism.

Many archaeological zones like Teotihuacán, Palenque, Tula, Monte Albán, Uxmal, Chichén Itzá, and others consistently receive tourists from around the globe.

Cities like Guanajuato, Morelia, Puebla, Zacatecas or Oaxaca are known for their colonial architecture. In places like San Cristóbal de las Casas, in Chiapas, or Pátzcuaro, in Michoacán, the convergence of the mestizo and indigenous worlds is apparent.

Mexico City is itself a principal touristic destination with impressive attractions and an enormous cultural and gastronomic offerings.
The great geographic and cultural diversity of Mexico is also reflected in its music and dances. Each of the indigenous peoples of Mexico conserves their own musical and dance demonstrations. There is a wide variety of regional traditions with different degrees of indigenous, European or African influence and contributions.

Among the most characteristic traditions are: the mariachi, originally from Jalisco in the west of the country; the jarocho music and dance, with harps and jaranas (Mexican guitars) from Veracruz; the huasteco sound and folk dance, huapango; the northern bands with German influence; the wind ensembles, popular in the state of Sinaloa, as well as among the indigenous communities around the country.

Mexico has a solid tradition of concert music. Among the renowned musicians of this genre are Manuel M. Ponce, José Pablo Moncayo, Silvestre Revueltas and Carlos Chávez. In modern dance, the Mexican José Limón is considered one of the most relevant masters.

Many Mexican popular music artists nowadays have remained true to their roots while incorporating global sounds into their work.

Mexican popular art is among the richest and most diverse in
the world. The craft of silver-smithing in old mining towns; indigenous ceramic pottery; lacquer pottery with Asian influence; Talavera mosaics with Spanish origin; diverse textile traditions; and basket-weaving are century-old, or even millennia-old, artisanal traditions that continue to thrive in Mexico and that have not given in to mass industrial production.

Painting and sculpture were widely developed among the pre-Columbian cultures in Mexico and into the colonial era. The above-mentioned 20th century Muralism also has pre-Hispanic antecedents. In Bonampak, Chiapas, and in Cacaxtla, Tlaxcala, there are beautiful examples of pre-Hispanic murals. Mexico has been—before and after Muralism and "the rupture" generation—fertile ground for great artists. Francisco Toledo and Gabriel Orozco are among the greatest contemporary artists of the current day.

Literature has also been a long and rich tradition in Mexico. Since the poems of Prince Netzahualcóyotl in the 15th century, and Sor Jua-

Work by contemporary Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco
Cinema has a special place in Mexican culture since the birth of the art form in the late 19th century. During the 1940s and '50s, Mexico became an important film production center and its movies gained popularity throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Mexican film served as a vehicle to project an image of Mexico abroad. Mexico's cultural influence in Latin America and in Spain owes much of its prominence to cinema. Currently, Mexico has great filmmakers who honor the country's cinematographic tradition. Among them are Emmanuel Lubezki, Alfonso Cuarón, Guillermo Del Toro, Alejandro González Iñárritu, and many Oscar-winning actors and actresses.

Mexican author Juan Rulfo

Director Alfonso Cuaron on the set of his movie 'Gravity'
TRADITIONAL GARMENTS

In Mexico, many indigenous peoples preserve their tradition of producing their own clothing with ancient techniques, and maintain the unique and traditional apparel of their ancestors. Diverse indigenous and mestizo communities preserve particular outfits for popular festivities, dances and/or religious celebrations. Other traditional wear has its origin in working clothes. This is the case of the charro outfit, originally used by workers on the cattle plantations of central and western Mexico.

POPULAR FESTIVALS & TRADITIONS

Throughout the year, distinct popular festivals and celebrations take place throughout Mexico.

Prior to the celebration of Christmas, the tradition of Posadas has its origin in the ritual practiced by Spanish mission-
aries to Christianize the indigenous peoples. Posadas reenact Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem to search for a place to stay. Families go from door to door carrying candles and singing, asking for shelter until the owners of the house open the door, at which point the party begins and the children break a piñata and eat candy. In Mexico, Three Kings’ Day, a Spanish tradition that celebrates the arrival of the Three Wise Kings on January 6, is equally as important as Christmas. On that day, children usually receive gifts and families eat the traditional rosca with chocolate.

Day of the Dead is one of the most important festivities in Mexico that resulted from the merging of the Catholic religion and the pre-Hispanic rituals. Throughout the country, especially in indigenous communities, families build altars with flowers to which they make offerings of food and drinks that the deceased enjoyed.
Mexican cuisine is also extremely diverse and is a product of various influences—indigenous, European, African, and Asian. Each town and each region has its own culinary traditions.

However, the common denominators across Mexican cuisine come from the indigenous tradition: tortilla and other corn derivatives, pepper, tomatoes, and beans. Along with chocolate, avocado, and pumpkin, these products, which are now common and popular worldwide, originated in Mexico and Central America.

Tacos, tostadas, atole, tamales, and mole, are also originally pre-Columbian recipes though they eventually incorporated ingredients and techniques from elsewhere. Modern Mexico is a hub of culinary activity and Mexican cuisine was recently named an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO.
SPORTS

Many archaeological sites show the remains of fields where the ancient ball game was played. In Michoacán, the purépecha people still practice a variant of this pre-Hispanic game. Evidently, athletic sports have very ancient roots in Mexico.

Another traditional Mexican sport, charrería (a variation of rodeo), comes from the work of the horsemen in the fields.

Today, soccer is the most popular sport in the country, which has hosted two World Cups in 1970 and in 1986.

Baseball is also a popular sport, especially in the North of the country, on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico and on the Yucatán peninsula.

Mexican boxing has produced a number of world champions.

Wrestling is also a noteworthy part of the country’s popular culture. The Mexican version of the sport is a mix of dramatic performance and athletic skill. In the 1960s and beginning of the '70s, many movies were filmed in which the protagonists were fighters, equivalent to the super heroes in the United States.
MEXICAN COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

Mexico and the United States have maintained an intense relationship since their respective births as independent nations. Many Mexicans have crossed the border in search of new horizons in the north. Previously, the Mexicans who lived in the territories that eventually came under U.S. ownership became the first Mexican-Americans.

Throughout the whole American Union there are communities of Mexicans and their descendants—children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren—born in this country. Their Mexican origins are diverse: Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Oaxaca, Zacatecas, Puebla, Guerrero, Veracruz... There are nearly 30 million people whose daily work contributes significantly to the economic prosperity and cultural richness of this country.