

Regions of Mexico

Although Mexico is divided into states, it is easier to think of the country in terms of its regions. Each region has features that make it unique. For example, the volcanoes of the Central Highlands are very different from the hills of Chiapas or the deserts of Baja California.

The Central Highlands

The most heavily populated region in Mexico is the Central Highlands. This area sits on a high plateau, surrounded on three sides by mountains. To the east is the Sierra Madre Oriental. To the west is the Sierra Madre Occidental, and to the south is the Neo-volcanic Cordillera. It is in this last range that you can find most of Mexico's volcanoes, including Orizaba—Mexico's tallest mountain. In the Aztec language, it is called Citlaltépetl, which means "star mountain." The Central Highlands are also home to the majority of Mexico's lakes. Lakes Chapala and Pátzcuaro are among the largest lakes in Mexico.

Northwest deserts

Northwest Mexico, made up of Baja California and the states of Sonora and Sinaloa, is the most isolated part of the country. The land is dry, hot, and barren. Some deserts in this area have hardy vegetation, but others, such as the Algodones Dunes, support little life. There is some vegetation around the Gulf of California, as well as a few fertile spots, called **oases**, which are fed by underground springs.

The Central Plateau

Two long mountain ranges follow the Pacific and Gulf coasts of Mexico. To the west is the steep Sierra Madre Occidental, and to the east is the rolling Sierra Madre Oriental. Between these two ranges lies the Central Plateau. This high-altitude area is dry, though not as hot and dry as the northwest. It has few rivers or lakes. Mining, ranching, farming, and forestry are among the industries operating in this region.

The tropical lowlands

The Gulf Lowlands follow the eastern coast of Mexico from Tamaulipas state to the state of Veracruz. This flat plain lies between the Gulf of Mexico and the Sierra Madre Oriental mountain range. Its tropical climate makes it an ideal home for many different kinds of plants and animals.

The mountainous south

In the Southern Region, winters are warm and dry, whereas summers are hot and humid. Several mountain ranges, including the Sierra Madre del Sur, the Sierra Madre de Oaxaca, and the Sierra de Soconusco are located in this region. Dry, deciduous forests still stand in some northern parts of this sparsely populated region. Thick rainforest makes up the vegetation in the southern Chiapas state. Unfortunately, heavy logging has destroyed many of the forested areas in the south.

The Yucatán Peninsula

The most eastern part of Mexico is the Yucatán Peninsula, which juts into the Gulf of Mexico. The Yucatán is a flat, low-lying limestone shelf covered by tropical forest. Limestone dissolves easily, so the peninsula is full of caverns and underground rivers. A feature unique to this area is the **sinkhole**. A sinkhole forms when the ground between a cavern and the earth's surface grows too thin and collapses. Sinkholes can cause damage to buildings and roads.

Mexico's Pacific coast is a favorite destination for tourists.

Thick rainforest covers much of southern Mexico.

