

Chapter 10

Geography of Mexico

What is the difference between Mexico's four coastal regions?

Hernan Cortes

- **Spanish explorer who conquered Mexico**
- **Described physical features of Mexico as:**
 - **Crumpled piece of paper example**
- **Mountain ranges –**
 - **Sierra Madre Occidental –western coast**
 - **Sierra Madre Oriental – eastern coast**
 - **Plateau (area of high, flat land) lies between**

The Heartland Region

- **Natural Hazards**
 - **Central plateau is geologically unstable**
 - **Mexico is located at the intersection of four tectonic plates – North American, Caribbean, Pacific, and Cocos plates**

Active Volcanoes, Plate Tectonics, and the "Ring of Fire"



- **Climate Factors**

- **Low precipitation to the north, moderate to the south**

- **Higher elevation keeps temperatures mild, even though it is in the tropics**

The Four Coastal Regions

1. Northern Pacific Coast

- Dry, hot, and little population**
- Some of countries best farmlands – because of irrigation**
- Baja California – mostly mountainous desert**

2. Southern Pacific Coast

- Smaller mountain ranges**
- Little farmland**
- Large tourism business**

3. Gulf Coast Plain

- Vast deposits of petroleum and natural gas along the plain and offshore**
- One of world's major oil-producing regions**

4. The Yucatan Peninsula

- Generally flat**
- Limestone bedrock that creates underground caverns**
- Landscape is dotted with sinkholes**

A Place of Three Cultures

**What are the three cultures
that help make up modern
Mexico?**

Plaza de las Tres Culturas

- **The Three Cultures – is located on the site of an Aztec center that fell to the Spanish in a 1521 battle**
- **In the center there are restored ruins of an Aztec temple pyramid**
 - **One side has a 1609 Spanish church**
 - **Another side has twin office buildings of glass and concrete**
 - **A busy eight-lane highway runs past the plaza**
 - **<http://sobreturismo.es/2008/08/27/tlatelolco-lugar-de-una-matanza/>**

3 Cultures

- 1. Native American**
- 2. Spanish**
- 3. mestizo**

Aztecs and Spaniards

- **Early 1400's, Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlan was center of an empire**
 - **Built on an island in a lake, current site of Mexico City**

- **The Spanish Conquest**
 - **Hernan Cortes, with 600 soldiers, marched into Tenochtitlan in 1519**
 - **Spaniards destroyed the Aztec empire within 2 years**
 - **Became colony of New Spain**

- **New Spain**

- **Four social classes emerged**

- 1. Peninsulares – born in Spain**

- 2. Criollos – Spanish ancestry born in America**

- 3. Mestizos – mix of Native American and Europeans**

- 4. Indians – Native to America**

Road to Democracy

What events led to the eventual development of Democracy in Mexico?

- **Resentment between classes**
 - **Miguel Hidalgo – a criollo priest**
 - **Sparked a war for independence**

- Independence did not mean democracy
 - 100 years to achieve democracy
 - End of 1800's, Mexico stable enough to attract foreign capital and industry
 - Oil reserves developed
 - Gap between rich and poor grew even bigger

- The Mexican Revolution
 - 1910, peasants and middle-class Mexicans rebelled, standing up to the military dictator
 - By 1920, a new president and a new constitution

Social Conditions

- Rural Life
 - After the revolution, the government began program of buying out landowners and breaking up large haciendas – **land redistribution**
 - **Ejidos** – farmland owned by members of a rural community practiced **subsistence farming**
 - 1/3 of Mexican farms are **latifundios** (large commercial farms)
 - 3-4 million rural families are **migrant workers**

- Urban Life
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ of Mexico's population live in cities
 - Better opportunity for jobs
 - Majority of people are very poor

Economic Activities

- 1993, **NAFTA** (North American Free Trade Agreement) was designed to compete with the European Union, a free-trade network in Europe

- Major Industries

1. Petroleum

2. Tourism – the “smokeless industry”

- Border Industries

- **Maquiladoras**- factories that assemble products almost exclusively for consumers in the U.S.

- Responsible for large amount of air and water pollution