

UNCLASSIFIED

MEXICO - COUNTRY SUMMARY

Geography

Mexico, the third largest country in Latin America (after Brazil and Argentina) is one-fifth the size of Canada. The extremely varied topography of the country ranges from low desert plains and jungle-like coastal strips to high plateaus and rugged mountains. From a low desert in the north, the plateau rises to 2,400 metres above sea level near Mexico City.

Mexico's climate is generally more closely related to altitude than to latitude. Most of Mexico is dry; only about 12% of the total area receives adequate rainfall in all seasons. Temperatures range from tropical in the coastal lowlands to cool in the higher elevations.

Mineral resources are plentiful, especially silver, gold, copper, lead, zinc, molybdenum and coal. Mexico is a major producer of oil and natural gas.

People

Mexico is the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world and the second most populous country in Latin America (after Brazil). More than half of the people live in Central Mexico; however, significant internal population shifts have occurred over the last few decades - less than 40% of the population still live in rural areas. The majority of the people are "Mestizos" (of mixed Spanish-Indian blood).

History

An advanced Indian civilization existed in Mexico prior to the Spanish conquest. The major Indian cultures were the Olmec, the Maya, the Toltec, and the Aztec. Hernan Cortes conquered Mexico in 1519-21 and founded a Spanish colony which lasted nearly 300 years. Independence from Spain was proclaimed by Father Miguel Hidalgo on September 16, 1810, and the Republic was established on December 6, 1822.

Mexico was led for much of the next quarter century by General Santa Anna, a chaotic period which included a ruinous war with the USA resulting in Mexico losing half its territory. After the deportation of Santa Anna, the presidential terms of Benito Juarez (1858-71), a full-blooded Zapotec Indian, were interrupted by the period of the Empire. Archduke Maximilian of Austria, installed as Emperor of Mexico in 1865 by Napoleon III of France, was deposed by Juarez and executed in 1867. General