



## Mexico Fast Facts

**Population:**

104,959,594 (July 2004 est.)

**Capital:**

Mexico City (Distrito Federal)

**Currency:**

Mexican peso (MXN)

**Religion(s):**

nominally Roman Catholic 89%, Protestant 6%, other 5%

**Language(s):**

Spanish, various Mayan, Nahuatl, and other regional indigenous languages

**Major Events:**

Independence Day, September 16 (1810)  
 Day of the Dead, November 2  
 Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe - December 12

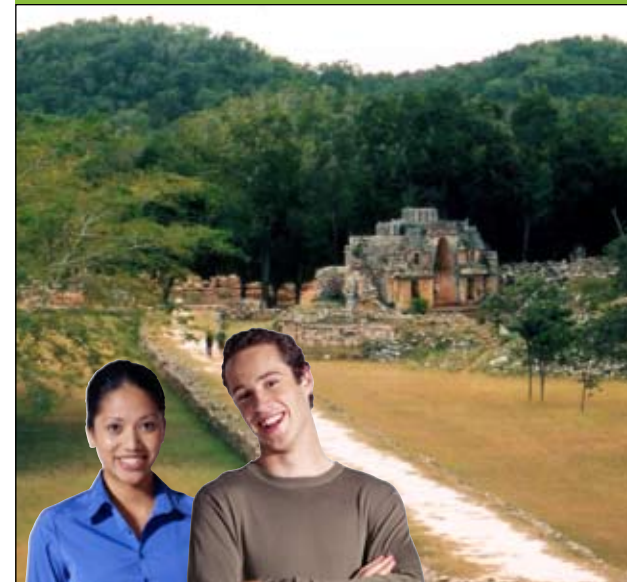
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# IIEPassport Focus... MEXICO

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# Mexico at a Glance...

## About Mexico

Mexico's long and eventful history has left this North American nation with a rich heritage and a varied and fascinating present.

The first inhabitants are believed to have moved into the area, bordered by the U.S., Guatemala, and Belize as well as the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean, in approximately 20,000 BC. The first established civilization was that of the Olmecs. They were followed by several well-known civilizations including the Teotihuacans, the Toltecs, the Mayans, the Zapotecs, the Mixtecs, and the Aztecs.

The indigenous people of Mexico were largely decimated with the arrival of the Spanish and the creation of New Spain. The estimated population of 25 million indigenous people in 1519 dropped to 1 million by 1605. Spain occupied Mexico until September 16, 1810 when Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla led the people in a rebellion. In 1821 Spain agreed to Mexican independence, but the country continued to experience turbulence. In 2000, Vicente Fox was elected president in the fairest, most free election since the Revolution.

Today despite the effects of the colonial period, almost 60 distinct groups of indigenous people survive in Mexico. Many of these groups live in rural areas and have survived largely due to their isolation. The country boasts an amazing range of geography from mountains to oceans, and modern cities rub shoulders with historic ruins and colonial towns. Mexico also has a number of activities to offer including everything from snorkeling to mountain climbing. Whether you would rather trek through ancient ruins, visit a museum, catch a wave, or explore the history of indigenous people, Mexico offers unparalleled opportunities.



The Mexican economy is built on a mixture of modern and traditional industry and agriculture. It is a free market economy, and in the past few years, the government has put more than 90% of Mexico's trade under free

trade agreements with the U.S., Canada, many Central American countries and the European Free Trade Area. The implementation of NAFTA in 1994 tripled Mexico's trading with the U.S. and Canada.

## Education in Mexico

The educational system in Mexico is developing. The system has been improving under President Fox who has promised to make education the top priority for his administration. However, the country still fights the legacy of years of inequitable access and poor quality in its lower grades and poor student retention overall. Subsequently,

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the growth in enrollment in higher education has led to an increase in the number of private institutions, providing high school graduates with several options to continue their education.

Higher education in Mexico consists of universities, technological colleges, and teacher-training institutes. While this contingent includes both public and private institutions, the public institutions significantly outnumber the private institutions. Of these, the largest is the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México--UNAM) in Mexico City, which boasts more than 100,000 students. The Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM -- commonly known as Tec de Monterrey), a non-profit nationwide university system, is one of the largest private institutions, with 95,000 students, 3,500 of them from across the globe.

Many institutions throughout the country are expanding their programs by developing more international curricula

and campuses. They have developed and continue to foster institutional linkages with foreign universities, thereby facilitating the academic exchange of students and professors.

The opportunities for foreign students to study in Mexico are extensive. Programs are offered on a variety of topics including anthropology, history, politics, culture, Latin American studies, sciences, and more. Mexico is an ideal location for studying Spanish and being immersed in the language as well as the culture of Latin America.

Internships and community service programs are also popular alternatives for experiencing a different aspect of life in Mexico. Some programs even offer student teaching or ESL programs. Whatever your interest, Mexico provides amazing opportunities to mature and deepen your studies.



## Online Resources

### Mexican Embassies:

<http://www.embassyofmexico.org> (in U.S.)

<http://www.embamexcan.com> (in Canada)

### EduMexico:

<http://www.edumexico.org>

### Lonely Planet:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com>

### CIA Factbook:

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook>