

**Module: Latin America and the Caribbean**  
**Topic Content: Mexico and Central American Countries**

**Mexico and Central American Countries**



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## Module: Latin America and the Caribbean

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#### Mexico



Mexico is a North American country located south of the United States and northwest of Central America. In the north, the Rio Grande forms part of the Mexico-United States border. The Pacific Ocean borders Mexico in the west and in the south, and the Gulf of Mexico borders the country in the east.

The majority of Mexico's population lives on the southern part of the Central Mexican Plateau. This is because the southern part of the plateau has a mild climate compared to the rest of the country. Some of Mexico's largest cities are located on the southern plateau, including the capital, Mexico City.

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#### Mexico City



For centuries, Mexico City has functioned as a major center for culture, trade, and government. The city was first established as Tenochtitlan, and served as the capital of the Aztec Empire. Tenochtitlan was nearly destroyed during the Spanish conquest. The city was rebuilt and renamed Mexico City. After serving as the capital of New Spain, Mexico City became the capital of Mexico upon the country's independence.

As of 2018, Mexico City was the most populous city in North America. It has more than 20 million people living in the greater metropolitan area. This massive population has contributed to the city's pollution problems. In particular, air pollution is a serious issue for Mexico City. Pollutants from factories, cars, and other vehicles cause heavy smog that hangs in the air. This thick, visible smog makes it difficult to breathe, and impacts the health of the population.

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**Guatemala**



Guatemala is located along Mexico's southern border. It is the most populous country in Central America. More than 1000 years before it was colonized by the Spanish, this area served as the heart of Mayan civilization. You can see evidence of this history in the country's large indigenous population. Around 40% of Guatemalans are ethnically Mayan.

Additionally, Mayan ruins exist throughout the country, like those at Tikal, an ancient Mayan city located in the rainforests of Guatemala. The city contains many large plazas and stone structures, including six pyramid temples.

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**Belize**



Belize is located on the coast of the Yucatán Peninsula. This small country was once a colony of the British Empire, and as such, the official language of Belize is English. Spanish and Creole are also commonly spoken among the country's diverse population. Tourism accounts for most of the Belizean economy. People travel from around the world to visit the country's coastal resorts and coral reefs. One of the most popular attractions is the Lighthouse Reef, which is an atoll famous for the Great Blue Hole. This incredible landform is actually an underwater sinkhole.

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**El Salvador**



El Salvador lies on the Pacific coast of Central America. It is the smallest and most densely populated country in the region. It is also the only Central American country without a Caribbean coastline.

Earthquakes and volcanic activity are frequent in El Salvador. In fact, it has the nickname, “Land of Volcanoes.” Volcanic activity has helped produce some of the most fertile soil in the region, which is used to grow cash crops like sugar cane, coffee, and cotton. Many Salvadorans live in extreme poverty because a small number of landowners possess most of the country’s arable land. This unequal land distribution was at the root of a violent civil war that plagued the country throughout the 1980s.

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**Honduras**



Honduras shares borders with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. It is a rugged, mountainous country with narrow areas of coastal land. Ninety percent of the population is mestizo. This term is used throughout Latin America to describe people with mixed American Indian and European ancestry.

The Honduran economy traditionally focused on the primary sector by exporting crops like coffee and bananas. However, the secondary sector has gradually expanded with the apparel industry. Despite this, Honduras remains one of the least developed nations in Latin America. It suffers from high underemployment and unequal distribution of wealth. This has led to a high rate of out-migration.



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**Nicaragua**



Nicaragua is located between Honduras and Costa Rica. This nation has a mountainous interior surrounded by coastal plains. The western part of the country contains Lake Nicaragua and Lake Managua. These are the two largest freshwater lakes in Central America. Most of the country's population lives in this region.

Nicaragua is the least developed nation in Central America. Roughly half of the population lives below the poverty line. The nation's economic development has been hindered by multiple factors. This includes civil war, natural disasters, and poor infrastructure. The situation has forced many Nicaraguans to migrate from the country.

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**Costa Rica**

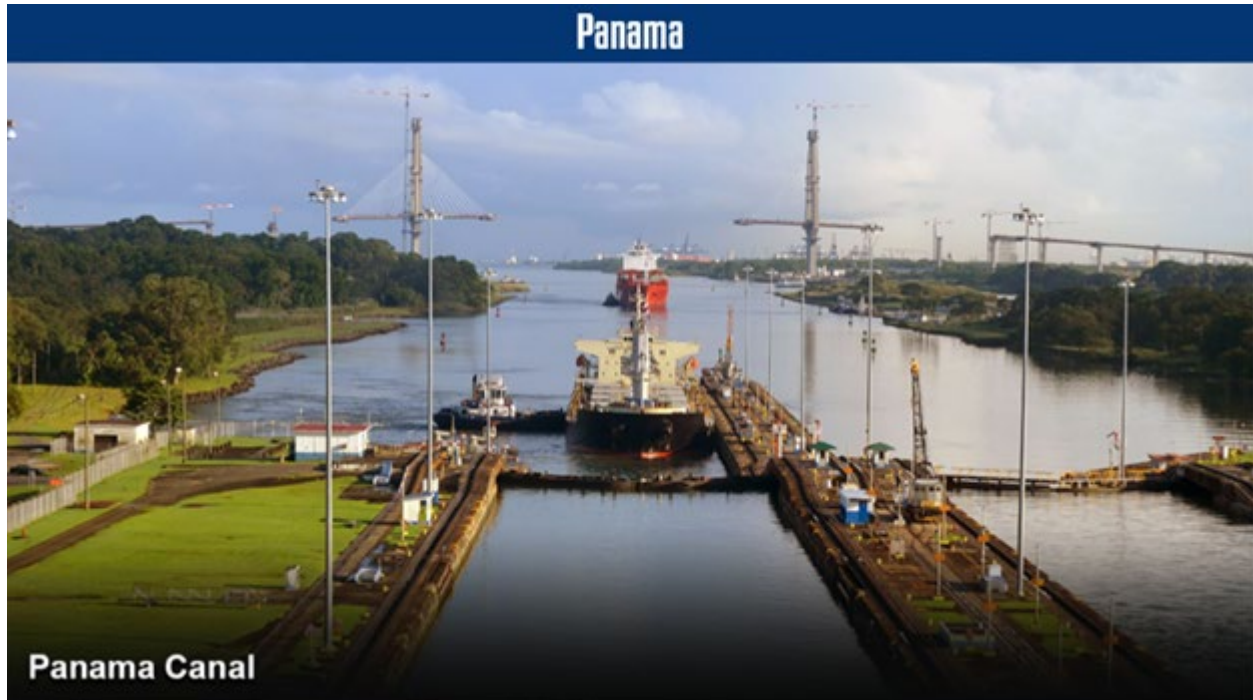


Costa Rica is located between Nicaragua and Panama. Thanks to a stable democratic government, Costa Rica has the highest standard of living in Central America. The country has a skilled workforce and a diverse economy. Specifically, it has large industries in the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors. In the primary sector, Costa Rica is a major exporter of coffee and bananas. In the secondary sector, Costa Rica manufactures and exports technological goods like computer chips and medical equipment. In the tertiary sector, Costa Rica has a huge tourism industry based around the country's beaches and tropical rainforests.

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#### Panama



Panama is located at the southernmost part of Central America. It is on a narrow isthmus that connects the continents of North America and South America. Panama can be roughly divided into three areas. The eastern side of Panama is sparsely populated with dense forests. The western side of Panama is mostly rural, with small farms that practice subsistence agriculture. These farms grow crops for food instead of profit. The most densely populated area of the country is in the center, around the Panama Canal. This man-made waterway enables ships to quickly travel between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. In 1999, the United States transferred complete control of the Canal to Panama.