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Hola Mexico!

This is Mexico!

Mexico is located in the south of the continent of North America. It has a diverse landscape that includes mountains, rainforests and deserts. This means that its climate is also very varied and there are a wide range of plants and animals found there, including many types of cacti and over 700 species of reptile. Some people live in rural communities and others live in large cities. Mexico City is the capital of Mexico. It is home to nearly nine million people, with a vibrant, diverse population and a rich cultural heritage.

Mexico City and the Popocatépetl volcano

Chihuahuan Desert

The Chihuahuan Desert is one of the largest in North America. It covers parts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Mexico. Winters are cool and summers are extremely hot. There is very little rainfall, but the Rio Grande River runs through the desert and provides water for the animals, plants and people who live there. The Chihuahuan Desert is said to have more species of cacti than any other desert. Shrubs and cacti, such as Mormon tea and prickly pear, are found in the desert. There are many different animals, such as the pronghorn antelope and kit fox, that thrive in the desert.

Festivals and celebrations

Mexican people celebrate many different festivals and special days across the year. They are a central part of Mexican culture and may involve music, food, dancing and special clothes.

Dia de la Independencia (Independence Day)

This festival celebrates the start of Mexico's fight for independence from Spain in 1810. On 15th September, the President of Mexico rings a bell in the National Palace in Mexico City then shouts, 'Viva Mexico!' from the balcony. The Mexican flag is waved, and people sing the national anthem. The following day, banks, schools, offices and many businesses close and there are parties and parades for everyone to enjoy.

Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)

This festival takes place during the first two days of November. It is a positive celebration to remember loved ones who have died. Families set up brightly decorated altars with photographs of the deceased. Relatives place their loved ones' favourite foods on altars and skeleton costumes and skull decorations are popular.

Fiesta de Santa Cecilia (Festival of Saint Cecilia)

Mexicans celebrate Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians, on 22nd November. Musicians take part in open-air concerts and people celebrate with food and drink. Over 500 musicians perform a song called *Las Mañanitas* that is dedicated to Saint Cecilia.

Food

Food plays an important part in Mexican culture. Many Mexican foods can be traced back thousands of years to the Aztecs or Maya and some contain flavours from other countries, including Spain. Traditional Mexican foods include chocolate, corn tortillas, avocados and beans. Popular Mexican dishes may contain a mixture of these ingredients, such as enchiladas, guacamole or churros with chocolate.

Music

Music and dance are essential to the culture of Mexico. Each region of Mexico has traditional dances that are accompanied by music and feature colourful costumes. One well-known type of music is mariachi, which is performed by a group of musicians playing violins, trumpets and guitars. A traditional Mexican song is *La Cucaracha*, which means 'The cockroach'.

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Maya

The Maya were a group of indigenous people who lived in Mexico and other parts of Central America over 3000 years ago. The Maya were experts in farming, pottery, writing and maths. Around AD 900, the Maya civilisation began to decline, and the people moved into small villages, rather than staying in the great cities they had built. There are still some Maya people today who follow the lifestyle, language and traditions of the ancient Maya.

Maya calendar

The Maya created a calendar that was based on their understanding of maths and astronomy. It was highly complex and used three different calendars to record the days, months and years.

Maya ball game

The Maya played a ball game called *ulama* on a long, stone-lined court. Teams would compete to get a large, rubber ball through a stone ring using their knees, elbows or hips. The leader of the losing team was killed after the game.

El Castillo

El Castillo is a Maya temple in Chichén Itzá. During the spring and autumn equinox, the Sun casts a shadow that slithers down the steps of the temple like a snake.

El Castillo in Chichén Itzá, Mexico

Maya timeline

3114 BC	The Maya calendar begins.
1000 BC	Maya settlements develop.
750 BC	Large stone structures are built in Maya cities.
600 BC	The Maya create a settlement at Tikal that later becomes a major city.
300 BC	The Maya begin to use a monarchy government and develop a writing system known as glyphs.
100 BC	The largest known ancient city in the Americas, Teotihuacan, is founded in the Valley of Mexico.
250 AD	The Maya become one of the most significant civilisations. They dominate Central America.
900 AD	The Maya civilisation begins to mysteriously decline. People begin to live in smaller villages and abandon the great Maya cities.
1200	The Maya abandon their northern cities.
1400	The surviving Maya suffer a period of warfare, natural disasters and disease.
1500	Spanish explorers take land and wealth from the remaining Maya.

Glossary

civilisation	A well-organised and developed society.
climate	The weather in a particular place over a period of time.
culture	The lifestyle of a group of people or a society.
diverse	Very varied or different.
equinox	A time when the length of the day and night are the same.
festival	A celebration or special event held to mark a particular occasion.
heritage	Traditions, languages or buildings from the past that are important to a particular society.
indigenous	People, plants or animals that originated in a place.
landscape	A large area of land.
patron saint	A holy person who is specially chosen as a protector over a person, place, object or activity.
region	A geographical area with its own unique features or characteristics.
tradition	An activity, custom or belief that people have continued to follow for a long time.

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