

Mexico: the yucatan peninsula



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Mexico: The Yucatan Peninsula The Yucatan Peninsula is located in southeastern Mexico, which separates the Caribbean Sea from the Gulf of Mexico, on the northern coastline on the Yucatan Channel. The Yucatan Peninsula lies east of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, a northwestern geographic divider separating the region of Central America from the rest of North America. The Yucatan Peninsula comprises of the Mexican states of Yucatan, Campeche, and Quintana Roo; the northern part Belize; and Guatemala's northern subdivision of El Peten. Geology

The peninsula is the exposed part of the large Yucatan Platform. The Yucatan Peninsula is an unconfined flat lying erosion landscape. Sinkholes, locally called cenotes are widespread in the northern lowlands. According to the Alvarez hypothesis, the mass extinction of the dinosaurs at the transition from the Cretaceous (K) to the Tertiary (T) Periods (the K-T Boundary) 65 million years ago was caused by an asteroid impact somewhere in the Caribbean Basin. The deeply buried Chicxulub Crater is centered off the north coast of the peninsula near the town of Chicxulub.

The now-famous " Ring of Cenotes" outlines one of the shock-waves from this impact event in the rock of ~65 millions years of age, The presence of the crater has been determined first on the surface from the Ring of Cenotes, but also by geophysical methods, and direct drilling with recovery of the drill cores. Water resources Due to the extreme erosion nature of the whole peninsula, the northern half barely consists of any rivers. Where lakes and swamps are present, the water is marshy and is not suitable for drinking water.

The thousands of sinkholes, locally called Cenotes throughout the region provide access to the groundwater system, and the cenotes have long been relied on by ancient and contemporary Mayan people. Vegetation The short and tall tropical jungles are the predominant natural vegetation types of the Yucatan Peninsula. The boundaries between northern Guatemala (El Peten), Mexico (Campeche and Quintana Roo), and western Belize are still occupied by the largest continuous tracts of tropical rainforest in Central America. However, these forests are suffering extensive deforestation.

Etymology There is a popular myth that the name Yucatan comes from the Yucatec Maya phrase for "listen how they speak," or "I don't understand your words" — supposedly said by contact period Maya, when the first Spanish explorers asked, what the area was called. The proper derivation of the word Yucatan is widely debated. However, it is also claimed that the actual source of the name "Yucatan" is the Nahuatl (Aztec) word Yokatlan, "place of richness." People The Yucatan Peninsula comprises a significant proportion of the ancient Maya Lowlands.

There are many Mayan archaeological sites throughout the peninsula; some of the better-known sites are in Chichen Itza, Tulum and Uxmal. Indigenous Mayans and Mestizos of partial Mayan descent still make up a sizable portion of the region's population, and Mayan languages are still widely spoken there. Economy In the late historic and early modern eras, the Yucatan Peninsula was largely a cattle ranching, logging, chicle and henequen production area. Since the 1970's, the Yucatan Peninsula has fixed its economy towards tourism, especially in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo.

Once a small fishing village, Cancun in the northeast of the peninsula has grown into a thriving city. The Riviera Maya, which stretches along the east coast of the peninsula between Cancun and Tulum, houses over 50, 000 beds and is visited by millions of tourists every year. The best-known locations are the former fishing town of Playa del Carmen, the ecological parks Xcaret and Xel-Ha and the Mayan ruins of Tulum and Coba. Climate Like much of the Caribbean, the Yucatan Peninsula lies within the Atlantic Hurricane Belt, and with its almost uniformly flat terrain, it is vulnerable to these large storms coming from the east.

The 2005 Atlantic Hurricane Season was a particularly bad season for Mexico's tourism industry, with two forceful category 5 storms hitting, Hurricane Emily and Hurricane Wilma. The 2006 Atlantic Hurricane Season was a typical year which left the Yucatan untouched, but in the 2007 Atlantic Hurricane Season Yucatan was hit by the Hurricane Dean (which is also a category 5 storm); nevertheless Hurricane Dean left little damage on the peninsula despite heavy localized flooding. Strong storms called nortes can quickly descend on the Yucatan Peninsula any time of year.

Although these storms pummel the area with heavy rains and high winds, they tend to be short-lived, clearing after about an hour. The average percentage of days with rain per month ranges from a monthly low of 7% in April to a high of 25% in October. Breezes can have a cooling effect; humidity is generally high, particularly in the remaining rainforest areas.

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