

## Physical Geography of Central America

### Chapter 7 Lesson 1

#### *What landforms and waterways do Mexico and Central America have?*

- I. Physical Geography of Mexico and Central America
  - Forms an isthmus that connects North and South America
  - Shaped like a funnel wider in the north and smaller in the south
- A. Land Features
  1. Mexico is the largest nation and accounts for  $\frac{2}{3}$  of Central America
  2. Two mountain systems run along the coast
    - a) Sierra Madre Occidental (Spanish for “western”)
    - b) Sierra Madre Oriental (Spanish for “eastern”)
    - c) They join in the southern highlands.
  3. Central Plateau
    - a) Located between the mountain systems
    - b) Mexico City is located within this region
  4. Peninsula
    - a) Yucatan Peninsula bulges northeast into the Gulf of Mexico
    - b) Baja California extends to the south in western Mexico
  5. Ring of Fire rims the Pacific Ocean
    - a) The Sierra Madre Occidental are made of volcanic rock, but there are no active volcanoes.
    - b) Mountains in the southern part of Central America have numerous active volcanoes
    - c) Benefits: fertile productive soil
  6. Earthquakes are common
    - a) Magnitude 8.0 earthquake hit Mexico City in 1985 and killed thousands of people.
    - b) Another struck El Salvador in 2002 which caused a hill to collapse and crush homes, killing hundreds of people.
- B. Bodies of Water
  1. Bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the west
  2. Gulf of California is an inlet of the Pacific Ocean
  3. The east has two arms of the Atlantic Ocean
    - a) Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea
  4. Major Rivers
    - a) Northern Central America has a dry climate, so has few rivers
    - b) Southern Mexico and Central America received more rain
      - (1) Landscape is steep and mountainous
      - (2) Rivers are short
    - c) Rio Grande and Rio Bravo

5. Largest lake is Lake Nicaragua in Nicaragua
6. Panama Canal
  - a) Built in early 1900s
  - b) Makes it possible for ships to go through Panama instead of going around South America.
  - c) Saves time and money

#### C. Climates

1. Lies in the tropics
  - a) Highlands are cool and lowlands are hot.
2. Tierra caliente - "hot land"
  - a) Sea level to 2,500 feet
  - b) Major crops: bananas, sugarcane, and rice
3. Tierra templada - "temperate land"
  - a) Most people live in this region
  - b) Major crops: coffee, corn, and wheat
4. Tierra fria - "cold land"
  - a) Chilly nights
  - b) Used only for dairy farming and growing hearty crops like potatoes, barley and wheat
5. Tierra Helada - "frozen land"
  - a) Not much human activity
  - b) 20 - 55F

#### D. Tropical Wet/Dry Climate

1. Wet season during the summer
2. Dry season in winter months
  - a) Last longer in the areas farther from the equator
3. Hurricane season in the summer and early fall
  - a) 1998 - hurricane killed 9,000 people in Honduras and destroyed 150,000 homes

#### E. Natural Resources

1. Oil and natural gases located around the Gulf of Mexico
  - a) Export in oil helps the Mexican economy
  - b) Oil fields are starting to dry up
2. Gold and silver are mined in the central parts of Mexico
  - a) Caught the interest of the Spanish when they began to explore and expand.
3. Copper, iron ore, and bauxite (used to make aluminum)

## II. Physical Geography of the Caribbean Island

### A. Major Islands -there are more than 30 countries and territories here

1. Greater Antilles: Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico
  - a) Cuba and Jamaica are independent countries

- b) Hispaniola is an island with two countries - Haiti and the Dominican Republic.
- c) Puerto Rico is a commonwealth of US (still US citizens, but have their own government)
- d) Formed by a single mountain chain
- 2. Lesser Antilles: Most are independent countries.
  - a) Many prior were colonies of France, Britain, Spain, or the Netherlands.
  - b) Culture still reflects those of their previous colonial period
  - c) Formed by volcanic mountains
- 3. Bahamas - an independent nation consisting of more than 3,000 islands
  - a) Only about 30 are inhabited

#### B. The Caribbean Sea

- 1. Trade winds blowing east to west brought Europeans to the area
- 2. These voyages sparked European settlement of the Americas
- 3. Warm waters of the Caribbean feed the Gulf Stream.
  - a) Carries warm water up the eastern coast of the US

#### C. The Climate of the Caribbean Islands

- 1. wet/dry climate
- 2. Rainfall is seasonal but varies in amount
- 3. Prone to hurricanes - about 7 hit every year

#### D. Natural Resources

- 1. Lots of fish
- 2. Few timber left
- 3. Trinidad and Tobago have oil and natural gases.
- 4. Dominican Republic exports nickel, gold, and silver.
- 5. Weather brings tourists