Chihuahua

Pronunciation: chee-WAH-wah.
Origin of state name: Uncertain. May come from the Nahuatl word for “dry, sandy place.”
Capital: Chihuahua.
Entered country: 1824.
Coat of Arms: The coat of arms is shield-shaped, with a red border. Across the top is a depiction of the old aqueduct of Chihuahua. In the center section a head of a Spaniard (left) and an Amerindian (right) represents the mestizo, or blending of two peoples; the lower third depicts Chihuahua Cathedral.
Holidays: Año Nuevo (New Year’s Day—January 1); Día de la Constitución (Constitution Day—February 5); Benito Juárez’s birthday (March 21); Primero de Mayo (Labor Day—May 1); Revolution Day, 1910 (November 20); and Navidad (Christmas—December 25).
Flag: There is no official flag.
Time: 5 AM = noon Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).

1 Location and Size
Chihuahua, the largest state, lies in northern Mexico. It has an area of 245,945 square kilometers (94,960 square miles), about one-third the size of the US state of Texas. Chihuahua is bordered on the north by the US states of New Mexico and Texas, on the south by the Mexican state of Durango, on the east by the Mexican state of Coahuila, on the west by the Mexican state of Sonora, and on the southwest by the Mexican state of Sinaloa. Chihuahua has sixty-seven municipalities. Its capital is also called Chihuahua.

The natural regions of Chihuahua are plateau and mountains (sierras). Chihuahua’s sierras have steep peaks with narrow gorges. The rest of the state is made up of high plateau.

Rivers run generally west from the mountains and reach the Golfo de California. Rivers include the Papigochic, Urique, Batopilas, and Basasseachi. The Conchos River joins the Río Bravo (known as the Rio Grande in the United States) along the Texas border. The Río Bravo flows east to the Gulf of Mexico.
2 ▪ Climate
The climate is dry to semi-arid although there is regular rainfall. The average annual temperature is 20°C (68°F). Annual rainfall ranges from 221 millimeters (8.7 inches) to 1,023 millimeters (40.3 inches).

3 ▪ Plants and Animals
In the high plateau region and on the plains, native plants include lechuguilla (an evergreen succulent), mesquite (a common desert shrub), guayule (a rubber producing plant), and ocotillo (a succulent plant with red flowers). Native animal life includes lizards, rattlesnakes, and small birds and animals such as quail, shrews, rabbits, squirrels, skunks, wild boars, and porcupines.

In the mountains (sierras), native plants include pine and fir trees, poplars, and white cedar trees. Native animals include bats, moles, rats, bears, white-tailed deer, wolves, gray foxes, raccoons, and squirrels. There are nearly three hundred species of migratory and native birds, including spotted owls and blue-throated hummingbirds, along with over eighty species of reptiles.

4 ▪ Environmental Protection
Chihuahua has air quality problems in certain areas where there is heavy traffic. Many roads are not paved, and trucks create dusty conditions. In the border area around El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, safety of the water supply is sometimes threatened. The Conchos River, which eventually joins the Río Grande, is polluted by waste water. After the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was passed in 1992, the Border Environmental Cooperation Commission (BECC) was created to protect the environment in the border areas where development was rapid.

5 ▪ Population, Ethnic Groups, Languages
Chihuahua had a total population of 3,052,907 in 2000; of the total, 1,519,972 (49.8%) were men and 1,532,935 (50.2%) were women. The population density was 12 people per square kilometer (31 people per square mile). In 2000, the capital, Chihuahua, had a population of 670,208. Most people in Chihuahua speak Spanish, but a small percentage (3.2%) speak indigenous languages. About 85% of the indigenous language-speakers are Tarahumara.

6 ▪ Religions
According to the 2000 census, 72% of the population, or 2.2 million people, were Roman Catholic; 6%, or 185,665 people, were Protestant. That year there were also 5,817 Seventh-Day Adventists, 12,016 Mormons, 34,006 Jehovah's Witnesses, and over 160,000 people who reported no religion.

7 ▪ Transportation
The network of highways and roads is over 16,985 kilometers (10,615 miles) and connects all parts of the state. Over 2,200 kilometers (1,375 miles) of railroad serves the state, especially the tourists areas. By the end of 1910 there were three rail lines in operation. In 1961, the completion of the Chihuahua-Pacifico, known as ChP or Chepe, changed life in Chihuahua. Now remote areas could be reached and both mining and tourism expanded. In 1998, Ferromex, a private company, took over
control of the railroad from the government. There is an international airport in the city of Chihuahua.

**History**

When the Spaniards first arrived, Chihuahua was inhabited by more than one hundred different indigenous groups. Among them were the Taraumara, Apache, Comanche, and Guarojío. The first Spaniard to visit was Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, whose expedition covered territory from the US state of Florida to the Mexican state of Sinaloa.

The first Spanish settlements date back to the 16th century, when haciendas (country estates) and mining centers were first established. Some Franciscan (Roman Catholic) missions and the Carapoa villages (which are now a single town) were also founded in the mid 1500s. In 1598, the military garrisons known as El Paso and Ciudad Juárez were first built. Yet, the Spanish colonizers only loosely controlled the region during most of the 16th century.

The growth of the mining industry in the 17th century generated more economic activity but also provoked more indigenous uprisings. Tensions developed between the miners and the hacienda owners, who were interested in forcing indigenous groups to work as slaves. The interest Roman Catholic priests had in converting the indigenous people motivated several interventions by the Spanish crown to reduce tensions in the region.

The Independence War provoked Chihuahua hacienda owners and miners to side with the royalist forces against the independence movement. Yet, by 1821 the inevitable Mexican independence led leaders in Chihuahua to join the new country. The Plan of Iguala of 1821 established the framework that consolidated the new republic. Later, the region of Durango was separated from Chihuahua to create a new province. Chihuahua officially became a state of Mexico in 1824. The first state constitution was ratified in 1825.

An ethnic war that sought to exterminate Apache and Comanche indigenous people in 1830 caused much bloodshed. It almost entirely achieved its goal, nearly wiping out the indigenous population. After Texas achieved independence, Chihuahua resisted an effort to annex the state to the United States. Yet, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 gave the United States a significant part of a territory previously considered part of Chihuahua. With the help of Chihuahua's governor Luis Terrazas, liberal national leader Benito Juárez (1806–1872) resisted the French occupation in Chihuahua in the mid-1860s.

Chihuahua was a central battleground during the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920). There was discontent against the Díaz regime, but the historic tensions with neighboring Coahuila, Madero's home state, were strong as well. This tension prevented the discontent against the central government from becoming a fueling force for the revolution in Chihuahua. Yet, even the United States sent troops to the state and occupied it for almost a year. Peasant revolutionary leader Francisco Villa (1878–1923), known as Pancho Villa, extensively fought in Chihuahua. He demanded land distribution and recognition of the peasants as legitimate actors in Mexican politics. Villa's famous military Northern Division was first assembled in Chihuahua.
After the revolution, Chihuahua remained a center of Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) influence. Its location close to the United States made it a strategic state for Mexico. It also allowed for the development and eventual consolidation of the oldest and most important opposition party during PRI rule, the National Action Party (PAN). Chihuahua leader Luis H. Álvarez became the PAN presidential candidate in 1958, after an unsuccessful run for the state governorship. This showed Chihuahua’s emergence as a center of active political opposition against the ruling PRI. Economic development was strong in the cities and along the Texas border during the 1960s through the 1990s, but people in rural areas continued to live in poverty.

In 1992, Chihuahua was one of the first states to elect a governor who was not a member of the PRI. The North American Free Trade Treaty (NAFTA), a trade agreement between Mexico, the United States, and Canada, was signed in 1992 and took effect in 1994. Because Chihuahua shares a border with the United States, much economic development occurred in the state after NAFTA was signed. However, small farmers found it difficult to compete in the North American competitive market.