Central America Landforms

Mountains:

The **Sierra Madre Occidental** range runs north to south, from the Sonora-Arizona border southeast through Sonora, Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Durango, Zacatecas, Nayarit, Jalisco, Augascalientes to Guanajuato, where it joins the Sierra Madre del Sur and the Transverse Volcanic Axis of central Mexico.

These steep mountains are cut through with canyons, including Copper Canyon, the deepest in North America. The highest point is Cerro Mohinora at 10,662 ft (3,250 m)

**Sierra Madre del Sur** is a mountain range in southern Mexico, extending 1,000 m from southern Michoacan east through Guerrero to eastern Oaxaca.

Coastal Plains:

The **Gulf Coastal Plain** lies to the east of the Sierra Madre Occidental range fronting the Gulf of Mexico. The **Belize Rainforest** is vast, covering half of this Central American country. The Belize Rainforest features the lush dense jungle that most people associate with rainforests, but it also has other distinct geographic features, due to its location between the temperate northern and tropical southern regions of the Americas. The Belize Rainforest is home to thousands of mountainous and underground caves, herb trails, river valleys, foothills, tropical waterfalls and even pine trees. The Belize Rainforest is so vast, remote and isolated that to this day, some of it remains almost entirely unexplored.

The very narrow **Coastal Plain** along the Pacific Ocean coastline rises quickly into the foothills of the mountains, while the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean coastlines are wider and rise gently into the interior. The **Isthmus of Panama** is a narrow strip of land that connects two larger landmasses and separates two bodies of water. The Isthmus of Panama in Panama links the continents of North and South America, and separates the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Plateaus:

The **Central Mexican Plateau** consumes much of northern and central Mexico. It extends from the border with the **USA** on the north to the Cordillera Neovolcanica in the south, with the **Sierra Madre Occidental** mountain range on the west and the **Sierra Madre Oriental** on the east. It averages 5,988 ft (1,825 m) above sea level and is covered mostly by deserts and xeric scrublands.
**Volcano's:**

A long line of ancient volcanoes (*many still active*) extends from the Pacific Ocean (*north of Guadalajara*) on eastward to the **Gulf of Mexico**, just to the south of Veracruz. **Orizaba Volcano**, the third highest mountain in North America, is located here. Orizaba is also called by its Aztec name *Citlaltepetl*, which means “Star Mountain.” It’s also called **Volcan Pico de Orizaba**, meaning “Volcano Peak of Orizaba.” Orizaba is the third highest mountain in North America, with only Denali (Mt. McKinley) in Alaska and Mount Logan in Canada being higher.

**Peninsulas:**

The mountainous **Baja California** extends about 750 miles (*1,200 km*) south from the **U.S.** border. Baja California is the Second-longest peninsula on earth longer and is considered warm and dry throughout the year.

Mexico’s limestone **Yucatan Peninsula** is tree-covered, with thick tropical jungles along its borders with Central America countries.

The **Yucatan Peninsula** separates the Caribbean Sea from the Gulf of Mexico. The Yucatan Peninsula is a mix of beaches, jungles and history that has become a magnet for tourism. The peninsula is a large landmass in southeast Mexico that creates a partial border between the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. While it's mainly in Mexico, the Yucatan Peninsula also includes Belize and the northern portion of Guatemala.

**Rivers:**

The Rio Grande, rising in the San Juan Mountains of the U.S. State of **Colorado**, flows generally south to the Gulf of Mexico for 1,885 miles (*3,000 km*) and forms much of Mexico’s northern border with the United States.

The two largest lakes in the country of Mexico are Lake Chapala and Lake Cuitzeo.

**Bodies of Water:**
The **Pacific Ocean** is located between Americas to the East of the Pacific Ocean basin and the Asian and Australian continents to the West. The Equator divides the Pacific Ocean into the North Pacific Ocean and the South Pacific Ocean.

The **Atlantic Ocean** located between Americas to the West of the Atlantic Ocean basin and the continents of Europe and Africa to the East. The Atlantic is the world’s second largest ocean and covers 25% of the Earth’s surface, after the Pacific Ocean. In size the Atlantic Ocean is comparable with roughly 6.5 times the size of the USA.

The **Gulf of Mexico** is bordered by the United States to the north (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas), six Mexican states to the west. The Gulf of Mexico’s shape is a relatively simple, roughly circular structural shape. The United State’s largest river, (Mississippi River) empties into the Gulf of Mexico through the state of Louisiana.

The **Caribbean Sea** is a tropical sea in the center of the Caribbean area. The body of water is part of the Atlantic Ocean. The sea is southeast of the Gulf of Mexico. The Caribbean Sea has many islands, which are popular among North American tourists because of their tropical climate. The Caribbean Sea is famous around the world as a tourist destination.