



Ecotourism helps protect approximately two-thirds of Costa Rica's undisturbed tropical rain forests. Hanging bridges, like the one above, are used to protect the rain forest floors while tourists admire the landscape. (For more on tropical rain forests, see pages 30 and 120.)



The Sonoran Desert is wetter than most deserts, receiving up to 12 inches (300 millimeters) of rain each year. Its summer rainy season sustains a variety of plants and animals—over 20 percent of Mexico's plant species.

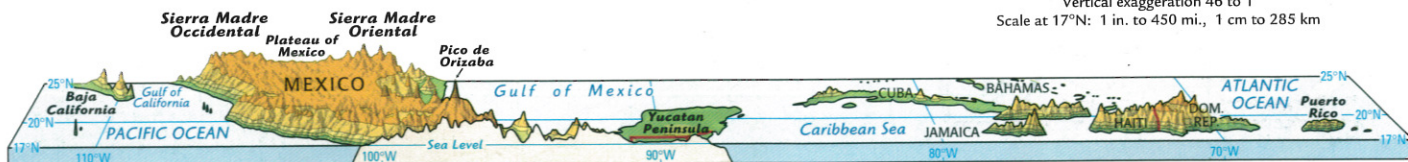
Trickle Down

The Colorado River is the main river in the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. Much of the river's water is diverted to Los Angeles. Hydroelectric dams and irrigation for agriculture have also reduced the amount of water reaching the river's delta. Some years the river never reaches its mouth at the Gulf of California.



CROSS SECTION

Vertical exaggeration 46 to 1
 Scale at 17°N: 1 in. to 450 mi., 1 cm to 285 km



VOLCANOES

Most Recent Eruption

- ▲ 1900 or later
- △ Between 1 A.D. and 1899
- Plate boundary

The colliding Cocos and Caribbean plates create an arc along the western edge of Central America. A second arc is located in the eastern Caribbean. The sediment from volcanoes created many of the mountains and islands in Middle America, as well as the region's rich soil. (For more on volcanoes, see pages 16-17.)