

# The Chihuahua-Pacific Railroad



The Chihuahua-Pacific Railroad, stretching from Ojinaga, Chihuahua, to Topolobampo, Sinaloa, crosses deserts, valleys and imposing mountain ranges to reach the sea and is as astonishing as the scenery it shows us.

The idea of building this railroad came into being about 1861, as an economic enterprise that would join the U.S. Midwest to the recently discovered Oguira Bay (today Topolobampo) in Sinaloa. However, 100 years would go by before the finished railroad, today considered a prime example of engineering, could be inaugurated after joining some stretches of track and finishing others. For all those years, builders had to not only deal with the financial difficulties that a job of this magnitude implies, the change in concessionaires and a revolution, but, above all, the inhospitable terrain that had to be conquered by technical and human efforts.

The 250-kilometer length of track that goes through the heart of the Sierra Madre Occidental, to join Creel, Chihuahua, to the state of Sinaloa, was the most imposing and last built. Joining the city of Chihuahua to Los Mochis, Sinaloa, in a stretch of line that takes 15 hours to traverse,

took 86 tunnels (17.2 kilometers of track) and 37 bridges spanning a total of 3.6 kilometers.

This is the portion of the railway line that most surprises travelers who ride it through the Copper Canyons to see the world that took in the survivors of the Tarahumara culture. The track rises toward Creel and reaches its highest point (2,400 meters) a little beyond it. Then, going through tunnels and over bridges, it descends among imposing canyons, skirting precipices—four of which are higher than Colorado's Grand Canyon—bringing viewers a natural beauty that otherwise could only be seen by its silent inhabitants and the occasional impetuous explorer.

Today, the Chihuahua-Pacific Railway, better known as "Chepe" after its initials in Spanish, is the only commercially operated railroad in Mexico. It offers first and second class service, with all the conveniences, and has daily runs through the Copper Canyon with stops at several intermediate stations where visitors can find accommodations. This allows them to stay over and hike down to the bottom of a canyon, or just observe the breathtaking scenery from the look-out points.