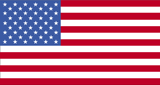
**United States Facts**

**Fast Facts**

**Population:**

296,483,000

**Capital:**

Washington, D.C.; 4,190,000

**Area:**

9,826,630 square kilometers (3,794,083 square miles)

**Language:**

English, Spanish

**Religion:**

Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish

**Currency:**

U.S. dollar

**Life Expectancy:**

77

**GDP per Capita:**

U.S. $36,300

**Literacy Percent:**

97

The United States of America, the third largest country by size in the world, is a nation of staggering natural, geological, and cultural diversity. Occupying the middle portion of the North American continent, the country's varied landscapes run the gamut from tropical beaches in Florida to alpine peaks in the Rocky Mountains, from rolling prairie lands and barren deserts in the West to dense wilderness areas in the Northeast and Northwest. Interspersed throughout are some of the world's largest lakes, deepest canyons, mightiest rivers, and most populous cities.

Though a relatively young nation, the United States has enjoyed a meteoritic rise in global importance since declaring independence from Britain in 1776. Advances in the past hundred years in particular have established America as a world leader economically, militarily, and technologically.

The U.S. is generally divided into six large regions: New England; the mid-Atlantic; the South; the Midwest; the Southwest, and the West. Though loosely defined, these zones tend to share important similarities, including climate, culture, history, and geography.

New England hosted some of the first settlers in the New World. These intrepid travelers left Europe, mainly England, in search of religious freedom. Their thrift and ingenuity created an intellectual, cultural, and economic epicenter in the region that lasted nearly 200 years. Visitors flock to the states of New England—Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont—for, among other things, a dose of American history and for the world-famous explosion of colors from the region's fall foliage.

The mid-Atlantic region includes Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. These 19th-century industrial powerhouses attracted millions of European immigrants and gave rise to some of the East Coast's largest cities: New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. They're also home to some of the most picturesque scenery in the nation, including the ancient peaks of the Appalachians and the tranquil Chesapeake Bay.

The South comprises Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. This most distinctive of U.S. regions took decades to recover from the devastation of the Civil War. But over the past half-century, a so-called New South has emerged, supplementing its agricultural base with modern manufacturing and industry and attracting a flock of transplants and retirees to its mild climate, laid-back lifestyle, and varied landscapes.

The American Midwest is perhaps most difficult to define culturally and geographically. Home to the Great Lakes and much of the mighty Mississippi River, the highly fertile soils in the Midwest make it the country's agricultural epicenter. Dubbed the "nation's breadbasket," the region comprises the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Starkly beautiful landscapes define the America Southwest. A land of prairie and desert, the Southwest is made up of Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas, although parts of neighboring states are often considered part of this region. The Southwest is home to some of the world's great natural marvels, including the Grand Canyon and Carlsbad Caverns, and many manmade wonders as well, like the ruins of the Chaco culture.

The American West, home of rolling plains and the iconic cowboy, epitomizes the pioneering image of the United States. But this region is a profoundly diverse one, ranging from endless wilderness to barren desert, coral reefs to Arctic tundra, Hollywood to Yellowstone. The states of the West include Alaska, Colorado, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

**ECONOMY**

* Industry: Petroleum, steel, motor vehicles, aerospace, telecommunications, chemicals, electronics
* Agriculture: Wheat, corn, other grains, fruits; beef; forest products; fish
* Exports: Capital goods, automobiles, industrial supplies and raw materials, consumer goods, agricultural products

—Text From *National Geographic Atlas of the World, Eighth Edition*