



# The United States of America

**The US is the third largest country in the world (over 9.8 million km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of about 300 million people) and it consists of 50 states and the capital, Washington, D.C. It also possesses some territories in the Pacific and the Caribbean. Here is a look at the main US regions and some important cities.**

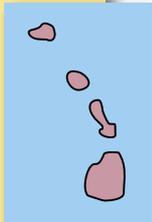
## Alaska

Separated from the US mainland by Canada, Alaska is the largest and least populated US state. It was bought from Russia in 1867. Alaska has an arctic climate and is partly covered by glaciers. It is the site of the highest US mountain, Mount McKinley, 6,138 m above sea level.



## Hawaii

Hawaii is the only US state situated only on islands. All the islands were formed by volcanic eruptions and the spectacular scenery and tropical climate make them a popular tourist destination. The surprise Japanese attack on the US naval base in Pearl Harbor, west of the Hawaiian capital Honolulu, brought the US into World War II, in which it joined the Allies (UK, France, USSR).



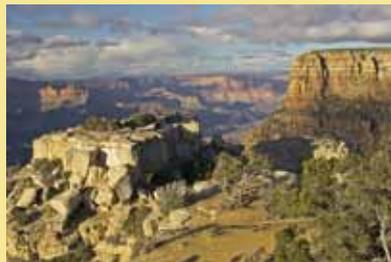
## The West

High mountains run from the north to the south (the Rocky Mountains) and the area has a lot of unspoiled countryside popular for hiking and camping. It was first settled by Spanish missionaries but now has a varied mix of immigrants from all around the world, resulting in the tolerant, open-minded attitudes of local people. California is known for its film industry (Hollywood) and hi-tech and computer industry (Silicon Valley). The lowest point in the US is Death Valley in California at 86 m below sea level.



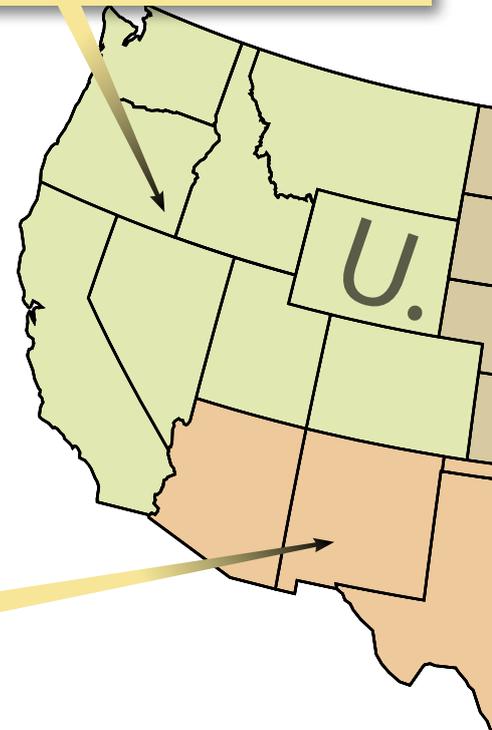
## The Southwest

This is a hot dry region, with deserts and lovely scenery (the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley...). It was home to various Native American tribes and even now there are Indian reservations. The US won some parts of this region from Mexico in the Mexican-American war (1846-8) and Spanish culture is still strong there. Texas is the second largest state (after Alaska) and an important center of oil production.



## The South

This region was devastated by the Civil War (1861-5), a conflict between the South (which supported slavery because its main industry, agriculture, was dependant on this type of labor) and the North (which was against slavery because it profited more from industries which were not as dependant on slave labor). The North won and slavery was abolished, but for many years blacks were segregated and discriminated against. The region has a mild climate suitable for agriculture and is a popular destination for retired people.



## The Midwest

The flat fertile land of this region makes it perfect for farming – it is nicknamed “the nation’s breadbasket” with huge fields of corn, wheat and other grains. There are fewer large cities (Chicago) and not a very dense population. People from this area tend to be thought of by those in larger cities as “hicks” (= people who are not very cosmopolitan and spend more of their time with farm animals than at cultural events).



## Mid-Atlantic

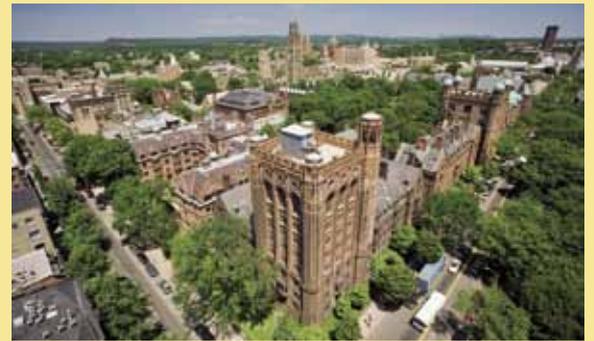
This region was settled by people from various European countries and became the center of industry. Some of the most populous US cities are situated here, as well as the US capital.

New York City is still very cosmopolitan and it is the most populous city in the US (over 8 million people). It has remained the center of finance (Wall Street) as well as culture (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Carnegie Hall...).



## New England

The first European settlers (mainly English Protestants seeking religious freedom) settled in this region in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and it became the country’s cultural and economic center for a long time. Even today, it is home to some of the most prestigious universities (Harvard, Yale...).



## Washington, D.C.

Named after the first US president George Washington, it is the capital city of the US and the seat of government. The US government consists of three branches: executive (the president and his cabinet; the US does not have a prime minister), legislative (the Congress, made up of the Senate, into which two representatives from each state are elected, and the House of Representatives, where the election of members is based on the population of each state) and judicial (Supreme Court with nine judges and many lower-level federal courts). There are two dominant parties in US politics: the more conservative Republicans and the more liberal Democrats.



## Philadelphia

On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed and adopted in Philadelphia. By adopting it, the US declared its independence from Britain and also stated that all men are equal and have certain rights: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (this, however, did not include black slaves, who were officially listed as being 3/5 of a human to justify their lack of rights). July 4 is now celebrated as Independence Day – it is a popular holiday with parades, fireworks and sporting events. Before establishing Washington, D.C. as the capital of the US, the government met both in Philadelphia and in New York.

