

TOPIC: THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



Geography, Location

With an area of more than 9 million square kilometres, the United States is the fourth largest country in the world and includes many different geographical areas. The USA consists of three separate regions. These are the **continental part, Alaska and the Hawaiian Islands**. The US territory abuts three oceans – **the Arctic Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean**. The continental part borders with **Canada and Mexico**. The border with Mexico follows the Rio Grande and the border with Canada crosses the Great Lakes following the Saint Lawrence River.



Alaska



Twister

Weather

Climatic conditions differ greatly. Much of the central US has a **humid temperate climate** with relatively hot summers and cold winters. Extreme weather including thunderstorms and tornadoes is common in these regions. The southern part lies in the **subtropical zone**, southwest is much drier and deserts are found in parts of Arizona, New Mexico and other states. There are areas with more extreme weather – most of Alaska has an Arctic climate, while southern Florida and Hawaii have tropical climates.

Landscape; Important places

The surface of the USA is varied. Much of the central US is covered by flat **plains** and contains fertile **river valleys**. The **Mississippi river** is the largest river in America and the surrounding region was very important for farming and trade. The longest US river is the Missouri River, followed by the Mississippi River. The southern part is more tropical in the east and more desert-like in the west. The western half also has many mountains (the Rocky Mountains) and national parks. The largest mountain range, the **Rocky Mountains** extends from the Canadian border all the way to Mexico. The highest mountain in the US is Mount McKinley in Alaska (6,194m).

There are lots of natural attractions in the US, such as **Yellowstone National Park** with its geysers and Yosemite National Park with its rocks and waterfalls. The Grand Canyon (1,800 m deep and 350 km long) is a spectacular canyon on the Colorado River. In Sequoia National Park you can find some of the largest living trees on Earth. Everglades National Park in Florida is a special wetland where you can see many animals including alligators.



Rocky Mountains

Population

The United States is a diverse and multicultural country. It is the third most populous country of the world behind China and India. There are more than 300 million people in the US. The country is often called a „melting pot“ because it is made up of so **many different ethnic groups**. There are five major ones. The majority of Americans (about 63%) are identified as „white, non-Latino“ while the two largest minorities are Hispanic/Latino (15%) and African-American (13%), Asian and Native American. Over 80% of Americans live in cities and suburbs. New York City is the largest city in terms of population (more than 8 million inhabitants). The official language of the USA is English. There are seven basic dialects.. The highest population density is in the north.

Cities

There are many significant cities on the east coast, such as New York City, Boston and the Capital –



New York

Washington, D.C. **New York** was originally called New Amsterdam. It lies on the Hudson River and consists of five boroughs: Manhattan, Queens, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Staten Island. New York offers a lot of interesting places to visit, e.g. Wall Street, Broadway, the Statue of Liberty – a symbol of freedom standing on Liberty Island – given to the USA by France in 1884, St. Patrick’s Cathedral, the Empire State Building – 381m high.

The capital of the USA is

Washington. It lies on the Potomac River and is the only city that is not a part of a state. It serves as the seat of the federal government, the President, the Congress and the Supreme Court. The city was named in honour of George Washington. There are government buildings, monuments and museums:

The White House is the traditional residence of the President; it has served as the home of every U.S. president except G. Washington.

The United States Capitol is the place where the U.S. congress makes the nation’s laws; it is the seat of the House of Representatives and the Senate

The Lincoln Memorial (resembles a Greek Temple); the Supreme Court, the Jefferson Memorial; the Washington Monument; the Library of Congress, the playhouse where A. Lincoln was shot.

Politics, Government

The American political system is laid out in its Constitution. At the present time, the USA is a federation consisting of fifty states. The US is a federal republic and its government consists of three main branches: the legislative, executive and judicial. **The legislative branch** makes the laws and is represented by the two houses of US Congress: the Senate with 100 members (two for each state) and the House of Representatives, which has 435 members (the number for each state depends on the population).

The executive branch includes the office of the President, his cabinet and other government departments, and it is responsible for carrying out the laws and running the country. President is the head of state, the holder of the highest executive power and the commander-in-chief of the army. The president is elected for a four-year term. He appoints some



Barack Obama

members of the government and representatives of federal bodies, courts etc.

The judicial branch is the federal court system. It consists of the Supreme Court, which is the highest court in the country, and of a network of lower local and federal courts.

Culture

Many of the world's great writers were born in America, such as Mark Twain, Francis Scott Fitzgerald and Edgar Allan Poe. **Hollywood** is famous for its movie industry; it started producing silent films in the early 1900s.

American football is the most popular sport to watch on television, followed by **basketball and baseball**.

History

The North American continent was first populated by people migrating from Asia, thousands of years ago. (Now their descendants are called Native Americans and less than 2% of Americans identify themselves as such.) After Christopher Columbus' voyage in 1492, Europeans started settling the continent. Before the American Revolution, 13 English colonies were established there. However, people in the colonies became fed up with the high taxes they had to pay to the English king, and they declared their independence in 1776. After winning the Revolutionary War against England, America became its own nation.

Soon after, America began to extend its borders west. President Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana territory from France in 1805, which doubled the size of the US at that time. The country faced perhaps the greatest challenge during the Civil War (1861-65) when the Northern and Southern states fought a bloody war, partly due to the South's desire to continue the practice of slavery.

In the 20th century, the US became one of the most dominant powers in the world. It participated in both world wars. The period of more than 40 years after World War II was marked by the political tension between the US and the USSR, known as the Cold War.