

THE USA

Geography

The United States of America is **the third largest country in the world** (after Russia and Canada). It covers an area of **almost 10 million square kilometres**. It is also **the third biggest country by population** (after China and India). The population of the USA is **about 320 million people**. It is located in **North America**. It is bordered by **the Atlantic Ocean** in the east and by **the Pacific Ocean** in the west. It borders **Canada** in the north and **Mexico** in the south. The capital of the USA is **Washington, D. C.**

The USA consists of **50 states**. The largest of these states by area is **Alaska**. The biggest of these states by population is **California**. Each state has its own state capital and state government. It also has a nickname. For example, Florida is called **the Sunshine State**, Arizona is called the **Grand Canyon State**, and Texas is called the **Lone Star State**.

There are high mountains and long rivers in the USA. **The Rocky Mountains** are the largest mountain range in the USA. Other large mountain ranges in the USA are **the Appalachian Mountains** and **the Sierra Nevada**. The highest mountain in the USA is **Mount McKinley** in Alaska. It is **more than 6,000 metres high**. The longest rivers in the USA are **the Missouri** and **the Mississippi** rivers. There are also five very large lakes on the border between the USA and Canada – Huron, Michigan, Erie, Ontario and Superior. They are called the **Great Lakes**. Between two of these lakes there are the famous **Niagara Waterfalls**. The lowest point in the USA is the **Death Valley**.

There is no official language in the USA but most people speak **English** as their first language. The second most common language is **Spanish**.

History

The first people who lived in America were the so-called **Indians** or **Native Americans**. They came **from Asia** many thousand years ago. There were many groups of Indians in North America – for example the Apache, the Sioux, or the Comanche.

The first Europeans who arrived in America were the **Vikings** but they didn't stay there for long. After **Christopher Columbus** "discovered" America in **1492**, Europeans started moving there in large numbers. The first were **the Spanish** and **the Portuguese** but other people – **the Dutch, the French, the British**, and others – soon followed.

The first British colony in North America was **Jamestown in Virginia**. In 1620, a group of people called the **Pilgrim Fathers** arrived in Plymouth, Massachusetts. They were looking for religious freedom. They got some help from Native Americans and survived. By the middle of the 18th century, Britain had **thirteen colonies** on the Atlantic coast of North America.

The colonists weren't happy with the money that they had to pay to Britain. They thought that it was unfair that they **had to pay taxes but couldn't make decisions** about them. In 1773, some American colonists in Boston threw British tea in the ocean to protest against British taxes. This event came to be known as the **Boston Tea Party**.

The problem with taxes didn't get better so the colonists decided to **declare independence**. They did it **on 4 July, 1776**. The British didn't like it and there was a war. The colonists won and a new country – the United States of America – was born. It was a **republic** and not a monarchy like Britain. The first president of the new country was **George Washington**, one of the heroes of the War of Independence.

The new country grew and grew. In 1803, it **bought a very large piece of land from France**. New states joined the country in the first half of the 19th century – for example Indiana or Michigan. After a war against Mexico, the USA got **Texas, California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona and western Colorado**. In 1850, the country looked pretty much the same as it looks today.

The country was becoming bigger and richer but it had a big problem. **The South** was very different from **the North**. The main way of making money in the South was **growing cotton**. Farmers who grew cotton needed a lot of workers to pick it. They brought **black people from Africa** to do this work. These people were **slaves**. They didn't get any money for their work and they didn't have any rights. The farmers could **buy them and sell them like things or animals**. Many people from the North didn't like it. They thought that everybody should be free.

Slavery was illegal in the North so many black people tried to escape from the cotton farms and get there. The most famous of these people was probably a man called **Frederick Douglass**. When he got to the North, he studied and he wrote a book about his experiences. When the USA got new land in the west, the question was: is slavery going to be legal in the new states? The South was saying yes and the North was saying no. The situation became critical in 1860 when **Abraham Lincoln** became president. He was from the North and he said that there would be no slavery in the new states.

The Southern states didn't like it. They were afraid that soon they would have to free their slaves and lose their money. They decided to stop being part of the USA and make their own country, **The Confederate States of America**. In 1861, **a war between the North and the South started**. It lasted for **four years and more than 600,000 soldiers died in it**. The North won in 1865 and **slavery was abolished**. Unfortunately, Abraham Lincoln was killed in a theatre.

The USA grew very quickly. It became **the richest country in the world**. It took part in **World War One**. It helped Britain, France and other allies against Germany, Austria and Turkey. After World War One, the USA was very prosperous but in 1929, there was a **big economic crisis**. Millions of people lost their money and their jobs.

In 1941 the Japanese attacked **Pearl Harbor** in Hawaii and the USA entered **World War Two**. American soldiers fought in Europe as well as in Asia. The war ended in 1945. The Allies (Britain, the USA, Russia, France and other states) won. After the war, the US **helped European countries to recover**.

After World War two, **the USA and Russia (Soviet Union) became enemies**. They didn't fight each other directly so this period is called the **Cold War**. Russia supported communist regimes all over the world and the USA opposed them. In **Korea** and in **Vietnam**, there were bloody wars. At the end of the 1980s, **the Soviet Union started collapsing** (thank God!) and the Cold War was over.

Economy

The USA is **the largest economy in the world**. It is one of the leading countries in many areas, for example medicine and technology. The currency in the USA is the **United States dollar**. Most Americans work in services and industry. Only about 1 % of Americans work in agriculture. Some of the most famous American companies are for example Coca-Cola, Ford, Amazon, Nike, MacDonald's, KFC, and others.

Symbols

The flag of the United States is probably the most famous flag in the world. It is called the **Stars and Stripes**. It is **red, white, and blue**. There are **fifty white stars** on a blue background and **thirteen horizontal red and white stripes**. The stars represent the 50 states that are part of the USA today. The stripes represent the thirteen original colonies.

The national bird of the USA is the **bald eagle**. The national mammal of the USA is the **North American bison**. The national flower of the USA is the **rose**. The national tree of the USA is the **oak tree**. The national motto of the USA is "**In God We Trust**". It is written on every dollar bill. The national anthem of the USA is the **Star-Spangled banner**.

There are also many unofficial symbols of the USA. When people see these things, they immediately think about the USA. Some of these unofficial symbols are **hamburgers, Coca-Cola, apple pie, Uncle Sam, baseball, American football, the Hollywood sign**, and other things.

Political institutions

The United States is a **democratic country**. It is one of the oldest democratic countries in the world. Every adult citizen can **vote in the elections**. The government of the USA has **three branches**: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch. These branches should be independent.

The head of the legislative branch is the **Congress**. It has two parts: The **House of Representatives** and the **Senate**. The Congress meets in the **Capitol Building** in Washington, D. C. There are **435** members of the House of Representatives and **100** Senators. Their main job is to **make laws**.

The head of the executive branch is the **President**. He lives and works in the **White House** in Washington, D. C. His job is to take important decisions. People can vote for president **every four years**. A single person can be elected president only **twice**. The voting system is strange. One candidate can get fewer votes than the other and still win. It happened for example in 2016 when **Donald Trump** became the 45th president although his opponent got about 3 million more votes altogether.

The head of the judicial branch is the **Supreme Court**. It meets in the Supreme Court Building in Washington, D. C. It has nine members. Its main job is to check that the laws created by the Congress are used well and that they are constitutional.

There are two main political parties in the USA. The **Democratic Party** is more left-wing and the **Republican Party** is more right-wing. The symbol of the Democratic party is a **donkey** and the symbol of the Republican party is an **elephant**. There are also some other, smaller parties.

Famous places

Yellowstone National Park

There are many famous national parks in the USA. Millions of tourists from the USA and from other countries visit them every year. The **oldest** national park in the USA and in the World is the Yellowstone National Park. It was created in 1872. It is located in **Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho**. There are many thousands of **hot geysers**. You can also see a lot of wild animals there, for example **bisons or coyotes**. You can try **hiking, fishing, cycling, skiing** and other activities in the park.

Other national parks

Another famous American national park is the **Yosemite National Park**. It is located in the Sierra Nevada in California. You can see a lot of animals, trees and rocks there. Another national park located in the Sierra is the **Sequoia National Park**. There are high mountains, deep canyons and of course the Sequoia trees – the tallest trees in the world. The **Death Valley National Park** is located in eastern California. It is the lowest place in the USA. The **Grand Canyon National Park** is located in Arizona. It was created by the Colorado River. You can see a lot of wildlife and some very beautiful sunsets there. The **Everglades** is a national park in Florida. You can see crocodiles and alligators there.

Niagara Falls

The Niagara Falls is a famous tourist attraction that lies **on the border between the USA and Canada**. The Niagara Falls are about **50 metres high**. They are part of the Niagara river which flows from Lake Erie into Lake Ontario.

Mount Rushmore

Mount Rushmore is one of the most famous symbols of the USA. It is located in **South Dakota**. It was created at the beginning of the 20th century. There are the faces of four American presidents made out of rock. The presidents are **George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt**.

Hawaii

Hawaii is **the youngest** American state. It is the only US state completely made up of islands. It is a very popular destination for tourists. There are famous **beaches and active volcanoes**. The capital of Hawaii is **Honolulu**. The nickname of Hawaii is **The Aloha State**. Aloha is a Hawaiian word for both hello and goodbye.

Famous people

There are many famous people from the USA. People all over the world know who the current **American president** is and they can name at least a few **Hollywood actors**. Some of the richest people in the world come from the USA. The USA is the country with **the greatest number of Nobel Prize winners**. Scientists who are born in other countries are attracted to American universities. The most popular **pop singers** usually come from the USA. American literature is one of the greatest in the world and there are a lot of **great writers** from the USA.

Pocahontas

Pocahontas was a famous **Indian princess**. The legend says that she **saved captain John Smith**, an English soldier, from her own father. The story is nice but it may not be true. There is a famous **Disney animated movie** about it.

George Washington

George Washington was **the first American president**. His picture is on the American quarter dollar and on the one dollar bill. He was originally a rich farmer from Virginia. He was the leader of the American army in the War of Independence. He was one of the people who wrote the American Constitution.

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln was one of the most famous American presidents. His picture is on the American one cent coin and on the five dollar bill. He was born in Kentucky and his family was poor. He was **the president of the USA during the Civil War**. He was against slavery. The North won the war but Lincoln was murdered.

Thomas Alva Edison

Thomas Alva Edison was a famous **American inventor**. He invented more than 1,000 things. His most famous invention is **the light bulb**. He created the world's first industrial research laboratory. He lived in Menlo Park in New Jersey for some time and his nickname was "The Wizard of Menlo Park".

Neil Armstrong

Neil Armstrong was a famous American astronaut. He was **the first man who walked on the Moon**. He was the captain of Apollo 11 which landed on the Moon in 1969.

Louis Armstrong

Louis Armstrong was a famous American **jazz musician**. He played the trumpet and he sang. He also protested against school segregation in the USA. He travelled around the world and he was one of the first great celebrities of the 20th century. One of his most famous songs is *What a Wonderful World*.

Albert Einstein

Albert Einstein was born in Germany but he later moved to the USA and he became an American citizen. He is the most famous **physicist** of the 20th century. He is famous for his **theory of relativity**.

Michael Jordan

Michael Jordan is a famous **basketball player**. Many people think that he is the greatest basketball player in the history of the game. He played for Chicago Bulls and Washington Wizards. He won two gold medals in the Olympic Games.

Bill Gates

Bill Gates is **one of the most famous businessmen** in the world. He founded the **Microsoft** company and earned a lot of money. He was the richest man for a long time but he was overtaken by Jeff Bezos. He gave a lot of his money to the **Bill and Melinda Foundation** which helps people around the world. They finance, for example fight against diseases such as malaria.

Homer Simpson

Homer Simpson is a **simple guy from Springfield**. He works in a nuclear power plant. He likes **his family, doughnuts, and beer**. He always wears a white T-shirt and blue jeans. His wife's name is Marge. They have three children – Bart, Lisa, and Maggie.

The overview is largely based on the following sources:

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