

THE USA

The United States of America is the richest and one of the biggest countries in the world. It has a population of about 295 million people. It is divided into 50 states; two of them, Alaska and Hawaii, are not on the mainland. Alaska is the largest state and it is situated in the north of Canada, while Hawaii are a lot of islands situated in the Pacific Ocean on the west.

The flag is very known and it is also called '**stripes and stars**'. In fact there are 50 stars which symbolize the 50 states and 13 stripes which symbolize the first 13 states that were colonized by English people.

The capital of USA is **Washington D.C.**, in the District of Columbia.

English is the national language even if there are a lot of other languages.

CLIMATE

Because of its vastness, the climate and the landscape of the USA are extremely varied. There are about 12 types of climate and the landscape goes from arid deserts in Nevada on the west, to deep green forests in Virginia on the east and to wide and grassy plains in the Prairies. Most of the USA has a continental climate with very cold winters and very hot summers. There are also a lot of weather hazards like floods, storms, violent winds, tornadoes and earthquakes (in California).

MOUNTAINS AND PLAINS

There are two major chains of highlands, the **Appalachian Mountains**, in the east, and the **Rocky Mountains**, in the west, divided by the **Central Plains**. Other mountain chains are **Sierra Nevada** and the **Cascade Range**. The highest mountain is **Mount McKinley** in Alaska (6198 m.). The **Grand Canyon**, in Arizona, is one of the most tourist attractions in this area which consists in a very deep valley built by a river, the Colorado.

RIVERS AND LAKES

In the USA there are a lot of rivers and some of them are very very long. The longest and probably the most famous river is the **Mississippi** whose name was given by the native Indians. This word in their language means 'father of waters'. There are many rivers that flow into it, such as the **Missouri** and the **Ohio**. Other important rivers are the **Colorado**, the **Columbia**, the **Rio Grande**, the **Hudson** and the **Potomac**.

Along the Canadian border there are 5 huge lakes, the **Great Lakes** and they are **Huron**, **Michigan**, **Eire**, **Ontario** and **Superior**. The largest is the **Superior**. The only one which is contained within the American border is the **Michigan**. This lake is also famous for the presence of **Niagara falls**. Another important lake is the **Great Salt Lake** in Utah and in its water there is a big quantity of salt.

TIME ZONES AND AMERICAN REGIONS

There are four time zones in the USA from east to west: the **Eastern**, **Central**, **Mountain** and **Pacific** zones. Each zone is an hour apart, for example when in New York it's midnight , in Chicago it's 11p.m, in Denver it's 10 p. m. and in Los Angeles it's 9 p.m..

The United States is one country with one government, one language and one monetary system.

The U.S. is grouped into six regions:

1. **New England** located in the North East and consisting of 6 states
2. The **Mid Atlantic States** with 6 states
3. The **South** with 11 states
4. The **Midwest** with 8 states
5. The **Great Plains** with six states
6. The **West** consisting of 11 states

ECONOMY

The economy is based on the **service sector** (banking, insurance, transportation, retail, publishing, entertainment); **industry** (oil, weapons, consumer products, aerospace, automobiles, electronics, informatics, telematics); **agriculture**, especially in the production of soybeans and grains (corn, wheat).

THE GOVERNMENT

The USA is a Federal Union of 50 states and the District of Columbia. The government is based on the **Constitution**, a set of rules describing how America must be governed. The Constitution also provides for three equal and independent branches of government: the legislative branch, **the Congress**, the executive branch, **the President**, and the judicial branch, **the Supreme Court**.

The **President** of the USA is the head of state, head of government and chief of the armed forces. The American President is one of the most powerful men in the world. A number of secretaries assist the President in the administration of the nation. The President is directly elected by the people every four years and can be re-elected only once. The actual president of the USA is Barack Obama.

MAJOR AMERICAN CITIES

WASHINGTON is the national capital of the USA. Situated on the Potomac river, it is a cosmopolitan city of great beauty. There are many historical places to visit. The best known building is the White House, home of the American presidents since 1800. The president lives here with his family.

CHICAGO is the second city of the US in population and industry. It's No. 1 in US in steel production, radio, musical instruments, manufacturing and other industries. Chicago is also a world centre for science and arts. The University of Chicago has produced many Nobel prize-winners.

LOS ANGELES is the largest city in California. It has a mild climate and splendid beaches. It is a conglomerate of many towns including Beverly Hills, the traditional home of the stars, Hollywood and Disneyland. Los Angeles is a very important industrial city as well as a cultural centre.

SAN FRANCISCO is the most important city in northern California. It is situated in many hills and it is the city where Americans dream of going to live. It is a charming, multilingual and multicultural metropolis. It is also an important centre of education, the universities of California are famous all over the world.

NEW ORLEANS, located on the east bank of the Mississippi River is an important port. The city, which is often called the Paris of America, is famous for the charm of its French Quarter. New Orleans is also famous as the birthplace of jazz and blues.

BOSTON is the capital and the principal city of Massachusetts. It is the leader in education since 1636. The first important American schools, like Harvard University, were established there.

NEW YORK

It is located on the eastern coast of the United States, at the mouth of the Hudson river. It is the largest city in the USA with eight million inhabitants speaking 80 languages. It is divided in five districts: Manhattan, Queens, Bronx, Brooklyn and Richmond which are joined to each other by immense bridges. New York is the financial and cultural capital of the US with the largest number of banks, as well as important museums such as Metropolitan Museum. New York is famous for being "the city that never sleeps". In fact there are over 30.000 restaurants, many bars, clubs, theatres and shops open all day and night.

Manhattan is the business and commercial centre of New York City and it is situated on a large island in the middle of Hudson river. It is home to many prestigious offices located in famous skyscrapers like the Empire State Building or the Trump Tower. Manhattan includes all the places that New York is famous for: Wall Street, Fifth Avenue, Broadway, the Empire State Building, Rockefeller Center, Central Park, Little Italy, Chinatown and Harlem. All these neighbourhoods reflect that New York is a microcosm of the human race.

New York is called The Big Apple, but where does this nickname come from? There are various theories: one says it comes from the vendors of apples at the corner of the streets during the Great Depression. Another suggests that it comes from the title of a 1938 film. A third one says it was the name of a popular night club where people enjoyed listening to jazz music in the 1930s and '40'.