USA

Fittingly for the nation that brought us the Hollywood film industry, the USA is a real superstar of a country. It's made up of 50 unique states that encompass a huge range of different landscapes, from snow-capped mountains and thick forests to deserts and tropical wetlands.





KEY FACTS

Capital: **Washington DC**
Official Language: **None**
Currency: **US Dollar**
Population: **333 million**
Area (land): **9,147,593 sq km**

The US flag has 13 stripes, representing the 13 original colonies that founded the country, and 50 stars, representing the states.

MUSIC AND MOVIES

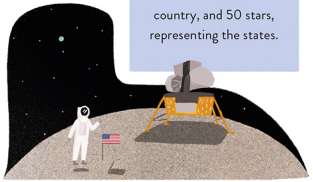
The US entertainment industry is a global player, which keeps turning out the hits. Many styles of music that are now listened to around the world have their origins in the US, including blues, jazz, rock 'n' roll and rap. And the country's film industry, centred in Hollywood, California, has long been the world's major provider of blockbuster movies.



BIG BOX OFFICE

The Top 3 highest-grossing movies of all time are American

Movie	*Year*	*Global Box Office*
Avengers: Endgame	2019	$2.79 billion
Avatar	2009	$2.78 billion
Titanic	1997	$2.19 billion

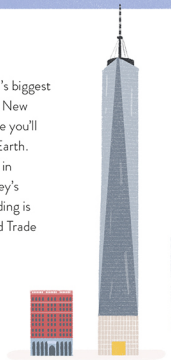


REACHING FOR THE STARS

Since the mid-20th century, the US has sent various spacecraft blasting off across the Solar System, orbiting planets, photographing comets and even touching down on the surface of Mars. Perhaps the USA's greatest astronomical achievement came in 1969, when the *Apollo 11* mission put the first people on the Moon.

MEGA-CITY SKYSCRAPERS

The US is home to some of the world's biggest and most multicultural cities, such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, where you'll find some of the tallest buildings on Earth. The very first skyscraper was erected in Chicago in 1885 and was just 10 storey's high. Today, the country's tallest building is the 94-storey, 541 metre One World Trade Center in New York.



The USA is the world's richest country. In fact, its economy accounts for around a quarter of the world's entire economy.



MANY TRIBES

There are over 500 Native American tribal peoples. Some of the biggest include: Apache • Cherokee • Chippewa • Iroquois • Navajo • Sioux

NATIVE AMERICANS

The first inhabitants of the United States arrived around 20,000 years ago, spreading out and developing into many different tribes, including the Cherokee, Navajo, Choctaw and Sioux peoples. After the arrival of Europeans from the 16th century onwards, Native Americans were forced from their lands. Today there are around 5.2 million Native Americans, many of whom live on reservations – land within states that is managed directly by a tribe.

The US doesn't have an official language, although English is the one that's most widely spoken with over 250 million native speakers. Spanish is the second most popular with over 40 million native speakers.

THE WHITE HOUSE

The person in charge of the United States is the president, who is elected every four years. Each president can serve only two terms in office. There have been over 40 presidents in total following on from the first, George Washington. Since 1801, all presidents have lived in the official residence known as the White House located in the capital, Washington DC.

MOUNTAINS, DESERTS AND SWAMPS

In the US the Rocky Mountains dominate the northwest, while the northeast is blanketed in deciduous forests. In the scorching deserts of the southwest, the Colorado River has carved out one of the world's largest gorges, the 400 kilometre long, 1.8 kilometre deep Grand Canyon. In contrast, the southeast is home to the Everglades, a vast area of wetlands where alligators and snakes patrol the expanses of waterways.





LADY LIBERTY

An icon of the USA, the 46-metre high Statue of Liberty, which stands in New York Harbor, was actually designed in France. It was given to the US in 1886 to commemorate the establishment of the USA just over 100 years earlier.

FACE TO FACE TO FACE TO FACE

Between 1927–41, Mt Rushmore in South Dakota had the giant 20 metre high likenesses of four presidents carved into its side: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt.



MEXICO

With lava-spewing volcanoes, tropical forests, parched deserts, underground lakes and long sandy beaches, Mexico's landscape is as diverse and intriguing as its history. Today the country is a mixture of many cultures and many people; its capital, Mexico City, is the largest urban centre in the whole of North America.





KEY FACTS

Capital: **Mexico City**
Official Language: **None (Unofficially, Spanish)**
Currency: **Mexican Peso**
Population: **129 million**
Area (land): **1,943,945 sq km**

DINOSAUR DEMISE

66 million years ago, a vast asteroid slammed into the country's eastern coast at a place now called Chicxulub. The impact created a crater 20 kilometres deep and 150 kilometres wide. It sent vast amounts of gas and dust up into the atmosphere, altering the climate and causing the extinction of the dinosaurs.



GREAT CIVILIZATIONS

Before the Spanish arrived in the 16th century, no fewer than six great civilizations had emerged in Mexico over a 3,000-year period. The country is dotted with the remains of their great cities, which were filled with pyramid-shaped temples and intricately carved statues.



CIVILIZATIONS

Olmecs • Teotihuacan • Maya • Zapotecs • Toltecs • Aztecs

NEW CITY ON OLD

The Aztecs controlled an empire of some six million people centred on their capital city, Tenochtitlan. Following the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs in the 1520s, Tenochtitlan was destroyed and rebuilt, eventually becoming Mexico City. Although their empire is gone, the Aztec language (Nahuatl) is still spoken by around 1.7 million people.



SINKING CITY

The Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, was built on an island in the middle of a lake. When the Spanish took over, they began draining the lake to expand the city – not wholly successfully. Much of the land is still waterlogged and many of Mexico City's buildings are now sinking – some by as much as nine metres over the past 100 years.







DAY OF THE DEAD

Perhaps the ultimate family reunion, Mexicans celebrate the Day of the Dead festival from 1st–2nd November. The celebration is perhaps best known for the elaborate skeleton-themed costumes, but it's really about reuniting living family members with those who have passed away. Spirits of the deceased are enticed to the family home with flowers and some of their favourite foods, books and music. Families also go to the graveyard to clean the graves and celebrate the former lives of those there.



MEXICAN TORTILLA DISHES

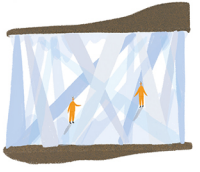
Each can be filled with a mixture of meat, beans, vegetables, rice cheese and sauces:

- Burrito – *Filled tortilla wrapped into a tube shape*
- Quesadilla – *Filled tortilla folded in half and fried*
- Taco – *Open tortilla*
- Enchilada – *Filled tortilla, covered in savoury sauce and then baked*

The ground under foot in Mexico can hold many surprises. The country lies on three tectonic plates, which occasionally shift position, causing earthquakes and volcanic activity.

CRYSTAL CAVES

In 2000, miners drilling a tunnel beneath the town of Naica came upon a natural marvel: a 300-metre-long cave filled with giant crystals. Glistening like giant icicles, these are the largest crystals ever found, with the largest weighing 50 tonnes.



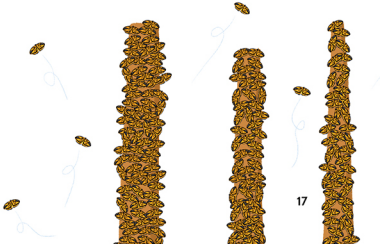


THE GREAT REGENERATOR

Native to the waterways around Mexico City, the axolotl is an amphibian with a unique ability: if it loses a limb or its tail, it can regrow them. It can even regrow parts of its eyes and brain. Unfortunately, the animals are critically endangered owing to habitat loss.

MONARCH MIGRATION

Every year, Mexico marks the final stage in one of the natural world's most epic journeys. In autumn, hundreds of millions of monarch butterflies head south from the USA and Canada in search of warmer winter weather, in some instances travelling for over 4,800 kilometres. After months of flight, they arrive in Mexico's Monarch Butterfly Reserve where their orange wings blanket the trees.



BRAZIL

Everything about Brazil seems larger than life. It's around the size of all the other countries in South America put together. It's home to the world's largest rainforest and the world's largest river. And its most populous city, São Paolo, is not just the largest in South America, but the largest in the entire southern hemisphere.





KEY FACTS

Capital: **Brasilia**
Official Language: **Portuguese**
Currency: **Real**
Population: **212 million**
Area (land): **8,358,140 sq km**

Rio de Janeiro means "River of January". It was given its name by Portuguese explorers who first arrived on 1 January, 1502, and mistook the great bay here for a river.



VIEW FROM THE TOP

Brazil's second largest city, Rio de Janeiro is one of the world's most popular tourist destinations. Every year, two million visitors pack its long sandy beaches. The city is overlooked by one of the world's best-known statues, *Cristo Redentor* (Christ the Redeemer), which sits perched on a mountain some 700 m up. Completed in 1931, the towering figure is 30 m high.

PARTY TIME

Rio has been hosting a carnival since 1723. What started as a simple celebration before a period of fasting in the lead up to Easter has grown into a raucous five-day street party. It's centred on a gaudy, glittering parade in which samba musicians and dancers perform alongside huge, elaborate floats.



FAVELAS

As in many countries, there is a great difference between the lives of rich and poor people in Brazil. While the well-off enjoy large houses, many of the country's less fortunate inhabitants are crammed into shanty towns called favelas. Built quickly using cheap materials, favelas are particularly associated with Rio de Janeiro where several line the hillsides surrounding the city's centre.

FOOTBALL

Football is by far the most popular sport in Brazil, both to play and watch. It's also hosted the competition twice, in 1950 and 2014. The attendance of 199,854 for the final game of the 1950 tournament was the largest ever crowd for a football game.



FOOTIE FANATICS

1958 • 1962 • 1970 • 1994 • 2002
– the five years in which Brazil has won the FIFA Football World Cup, more than any other nation.

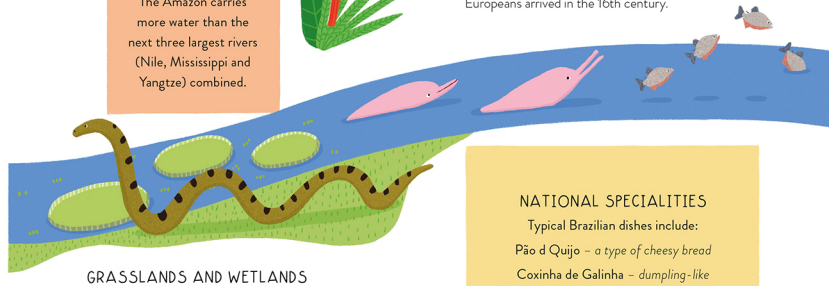
There are no bridges anywhere along the Amazon River. If you want get from one side to the other, you'll have to use a ferry... or swim (watch out for the piranhas!).



MIGHTY RIVER AND RAINFOREST

The Amazon powers its way through the north of Brazil. Surrounding it are the 5.5 million sq km of the Amazon Rainforest, around two thirds of which lie in Brazil. Millions of incredible creatures lurk within – stealthy jaguars, shoals of piranhas, colourful parrots and bird-eating spiders the size of dinner plates. But many of its species are now under threat. Around 20% of the forest has been cleared, mainly for farmland and housing, since Europeans arrived in the 16th century.

The Amazon carries more water than the next three largest rivers (Nile, Mississippi and Yangtze) combined.



GRASSLANDS AND WETLANDS

Though best known for its rain-soaked jungles, Brazil boasts numerous other amazing habitats, including a vast stretch of grassland in the centre of the country known as the Cerrado. In the southwest is the Pantanal, the world's largest tropical wetlands. Here, among a great patchwork of swamps, lagoons and islands, you can find caimans (a relative of the crocodile), giant anteaters and the world's biggest snake, the green anaconda.

NATIONAL SPECIALITIES

Typical Brazilian dishes include:

Pão d Quijo *– a type of cheesy bread*

Coxinha de Galinha *– dumpling-like deep-fried chicken fritters*

Feijoada, *a stew made with pork, beans and rice, perhaps the country's most popular dish*





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