

TEXAS

Texas – also known as the Lone Star state. It is the second largest state in the country with the second largest population in the country. You may hear people in the U.S. tell you that Texas feels like it is its own country – and that is probably because it used to be. Texas was an independent nation for nine years back in the 19th century.

Texas has two of the seven largest cities in the U.S. – Houston and San Antonio. It has one of the largest metropolitan centers in the country – Dallas/Ft. Worth. Texas has a thriving cultural center in its state capital, Austin. Many films are made in the city, musical bands are discovered, and Austin is home to many artists. A short list of artists and performers include Willie Nelson, Buddy Holly, Tina Turner, Z.Z. Top, and Steve Martin. Texas also has just about every kind of geographic feature – beaches, forests, plains, deserts, mountains, lakes, and rivers. In fact, often Texans forget that there are other countries or even other states out there.

The name of Texas originates from a Caddo Native American word meaning friend. It has a long history with six flags being raised over the state. A popular amusement park got its name from the six flags of Texas. Those flags are the old Spanish flag, the old French flag, the Mexican flag, the independent Texas flag, the U.S. flag and the Confederate flag.

Texas was sparsely populated until Mexico agreed to allow Americans to settle its northern territory. This ultimately led to a revolutionary victory by Sam Houston, the first president of Texas as well as the iconic battle for the Alamo in San Antonio.

After the Civil War, the ranching industry exploded and state's image as home to cowboys and cattle ranchers was born. Although the legendary cattle drives as reenacted in the movie, "City Slickers" were short lived, the image still transcends the state.

Texas was later transformed by the discovery of oil at Spindletop in 1901, adding the oil derrick as yet another famous Texas symbol. To this day, the fictional J.R. Ewing from the TV series, "Dallas," is one of the most popular Texans.

In 1961 the Johnson Space Center in Houston opened, which later played an instrumental role in the U.S. moon landing in 1969.

Texas has its share of important historical figures. Two presidents were born in Texas – Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lyndon B. Johnson. Eisenhower was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in World War II and LBJ was the president who pushed through the momentous 1964 Civil Rights Act that brought the U.S. on the road to establishing equality. Two other presidents have Texas roots, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush.

Where do I fit into the picture of Texas? Like many Texans, my parents were attracted to the state's opportunities. My father worked as a chemical engineer. After moving around,

my parents settled on a suburb of Dallas, called Plano. Now Plano is the ninth largest city in the state with about 260,000 people.

Growing up in Texas, you quickly learn what the most important thing in the entire state is – American football. While the Dallas Cowboys remains “America’s team,” Texans focus their passion on high school football. You may be familiar with the book, “Friday Night Lights” – which then became a movie, and then a TV series. Although some of the story lines may have been a bit Hollywood, life in a Texas high school was pretty accurately portrayed.

I also have to mention the great universities in Texas. Of course, the students and alumnae will rave about the schools’ football prowess, but universities like the University of Texas, Rice and Texas A&M, where I went to school, are recognized internationally for their great academics.

Finally, there is one more word to associate with Texas – big. When you are in Texas, you will discover that everything is bigger – cars, food, universities, you name it. It’s just part of the Texas mentality.

I hope you enjoyed learning a little bit about Texas and hope that you will get a chance to experience it one day.