

Alaska History

Alaska is a state located in the northwest extremity of the United States West Coast, just across the Bering Strait from Asia. An exclave of the U.S., it borders the Canadian province of British Columbia and territory of Yukon to the east and southeast and has a maritime border with Russia's Chukotka Autonomous Okrug to the west. To the north are the Chukchi and Beaufort seas of the Arctic Ocean, while the Pacific Ocean lies to the south and southwest.

Alaska is the largest U.S. state by area and it is the third least populous and the most sparsely populated state, with an estimated population of 738,432. Approximately half of Alaska's residents live within the Anchorage metropolitan area. The state capital of Juneau is the second largest city in the United States by area.

Alaska was occupied by various indigenous peoples for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans. The state is considered the entry point for the settlement of North America by way of the Bering land bridge. The Russians were the first non-native people to settle the area beginning in the 18th century, eventually establishing the colony of Alaska that spanned most of the current state. The expense and difficulty of maintaining this distant possession prompted its sale to the U.S. in 1867 for \$7.2 million, or approximately two cents per acre. The area went through several administrative changes before becoming organized as a territory on May 11, 1912. It was admitted as the 49th state of the U.S. on January 3, 1959.



While it has one of the smallest state economies in the country, Alaska's per capita income is among the highest, owing to a diversified economy dominated by fishing, natural gas, and oil, all of which it has in abundance. United States armed forces bases and tourism are also a significant part of the economy; more than half the state is federally owned public land, including a multitude of national forests, parks, and wildlife refuges.

Alaska's indigenous population is proportionally the highest of any U.S. state, at over 15 percent. Close to two dozen native languages are spoken, and Alaskan Natives exercise considerable influence in local and state politics.

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