

New Jersey



Go ahead, crack jokes. Take your best shots. Jersey can take it. New Jersey has been a national punchline since at least the 1800s and, according to one 2002 study, the funniest joke in the world is about Jersey. The state is, by turns, venal, greedy, smelly, rude, hopelessly corrupt and hilariously inept.

So why is New Jersey one of the top-10 states in tourist spending? If Jersey's so bad, why do so many people vacation here? Why do so many people want to *live* here? The truth is New Jersey is much more than it's cracked up to be. Yeah, sure, it earns its reputation in a thousand ways every day, but the state is as complex and diverse as America offers and about the size of a toaster oven. It's a mighty, pugnacious little dynamo.

Consider these contrasts: It's the nation's most densely populated and urbanized state, yet over 40% of it is forested and the Pine Barrens are the largest preserved coastal habitat between Boston and Richmond; it has the most roads per square mile, as well as the second-highest percentage of farmland; state citizens enjoy the nation's highest per capita income and the highest taxes, and are one of the most ethnically diverse, immigrant-rich groups.

Most visitors come to New Jersey for its famous beaches and boardwalks – for Atlantic City's casinos, Cape May's Victorians and Asbury Park's clubs. Yet there's high culture in Princeton, New Brunswick and, get this, Newark. The Delaware Water Gap and the canals of Lambertville provide lovely canoeing and hiking. There's American Revolution history, sculpture parks, amazing pizza, gourmet cuisine and, oh: Did you hear the one about the guy...

NEW JERSEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Taking in New Jersey's best views while strolling the **Hoboken waterfront** (p236) and **High Point hilltop** (p249)
- Swimming at **Island Beach State Park** (p230) and **Cape May** (p274)
- Impressing bouncers at the nightspots in **Atlantic City** (p269)
- Hitting resurgent rock venues at **Asbury Park** (p220)
- Absorbing art and culture at **Newark Museum** (p241), **WheatonArts** (p278), and **Thomas Edison National Historical Park** (p243)
- Hiking the **Appalachian Trail** (p248) and the **Pine Barrens** (p261)



■ POPULATION: 8,707,739

■ AREA: 7417 sq miles

HISTORY

New Jersey has always been a place with identity issues, a state of division and diversity ever since its founding. In 1674, Lord John Berkeley and Sir George Carteret were given the land grant for the territory, and they soon divided it into East Jersey (whose capital was Perth Amboy) and West Jersey (capital in Burlington). The dividing line ran from the state's northwest corner south to the coast's Little Egg Harbor, below Long Beach Island; adjusted slightly, this still marks today's cultural divide between North Jersey and South Jersey.

This division persists due to geography: New Jersey – sandwiched between New York City and Philadelphia, colonial America's two biggest cities – was, and is, a vital transportation corridor between them. This proximity to commercial hubs, immigration gateways and easy transportation attracted a diverse mix of settlers and led to the state's economic importance.

Geography is also why New Jersey was the main battleground during the American Revolution. The British held Manhattan, the patriots were headquartered in Philadelphia, and their armies met most often in the middle – New Jersey saw over 600 battles and skirmishes (see p36). After the war, East and West Jersey were made whole, and the state capital moved to Trenton.

In the 1830s, the Morris Canal and the Delaware & Raritan Canal were built, and railroads soon followed; these rail lines opened up the coast, and shore resorts soon made New Jersey one of the East Coast's prime vacation destinations. Even more, these transportation links spurred the state's booming agriculture (in the 1870s over 60% of the state was farmland) and its manufacturing prowess. Trenton, Paterson, Camden and Newark became some of the nation's largest manufacturing centers, drawing African Americans and immigrants with their wealth of jobs.

Into the 20th century, Jersey's industrial leadership was symbolized by the 'wizard of Menlo Park,' Thomas Edison, whose many inventions helped usher in the modern age. Meanwhile, US President Woodrow Wilson – former president of Princeton and New Jersey governor – saw the country through WWI.

After WWII, however, manufacturing in New Jersey collapsed – as it did throughout the country – and its suburbs expanded like

wildfire. This in-migration was spurred by massive road-building whose epitome was the NJ Turnpike, completed in 1951 and dubbed 'the greatest highway of all.' Yet industry left behind a slew of toxic-waste sites and abandoned factories, and NJ's once-thriving cities became scarred by poverty and crime.

Beginning in the 1970s, New Jersey shifted from muscle to mind, from blue collar to white collar, as it led the telecommunications revolution and focused on services and high-tech research, particularly in medicine. Jersey today contains wealthy exurbs of New York and Philadelphia, it's home to numerous corporate headquarters, and it is a continuing magnet for immigration, particularly from India, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines and Latin America.

In addition to these things, Jersey is also known for its ethically challenged government and its high taxes – both of which have roots in the sacred cow of state politics, 'home rule.' This is the term for the peculiar division of the state into 566 municipalities (some of them only a few square miles), each with its own mayor, police and fire departments and school system. These services are expensive, which accounts for the taxes, and they make for an extremely localized political culture that has encouraged, perhaps, the 'pay-to-play' shenanigans, the kickbacks and bribes between contractors and city officials (and the mob), that keep state prosecutors so busy. Home rule, though, gives residents a stronger voice in shaping their communities, and it appeals to the one thing Jerseyans won't ever give up, their stubborn individuality.

LAND & CLIMATE

New Jersey is actually a peninsula: with the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Delaware River on the other, only 48 miles are not bordered by water. The state includes two of North America's major geographic regions: the mountainous Appalachian system slants across the state's top half, and across the bottom stretches the flat Atlantic Coastal Plain, which stretches to Texas. This transition zone, and the predominance of coastal wetlands, accounts for the state's rich diversity in flora and fauna.

Did we say 'mountains'? New Jersey's highest point is but 1803ft tall. The state's most dramatic feature is the Delaware Water Gap,