The United States consists of fifty states. It is a vast country. If you were to drive from the east coast to the west coast, you would pass through four time zones and cover around 4,500 kilometers. In addition, it would take you approximately 5 days with almost no stops. This should give you an idea of the size of the country. Obviously, with a country of this size there are bound to be regional differences. In this text we will focus on the different regions in the United States and on what makes them distinct.

We will divide the country into six different regions although other divisions are also possible. These regions are New England, the Middle Atlantic states, the South, the Midwest, the Southwest and the West. Let us begin by looking at one of the oldest regions in the United States – New England.

New England

New England is the name given to the six states which lie in the northeastern corner of the United States, starting with Maine at the top and down to Connecticut. This is the smallest region and gets its name from the English Protestant settlers who came to the new world looking for religious freedom and settled in this area.

New England played a dominant role in the development of the new nation because settlement occurred early here. From the 17th to the early 19th century it was the country’s cultural and economic center. The economy in this region was chiefly based on shipbuilding, fishing and trade and small scale farming. When the industrial revolution reached America in the first half of the 19th century, factories sprang up in
Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island. These factories manufactured goods such as clothing and rifles. Today, many of the traditional industries have moved elsewhere — either to other states or abroad — and new industries such as microelectronics have moved in.

The most important city in the region is Boston, Massachusetts where two of the most famous teaching institutions in the United States are situated — Harvard and Yale.

Middle Atlantic States
Five states make up this region — New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland. Early settlers to the region included Dutch immigrants, Swedes, Quakers (an English Protestant sect) and immigrants of many other nationalities as well. In other words, early settlers came from more varied backgrounds than the settlers of New England. These early settlers were farmers and traders and the Middle Atlantic states served as a bridge between the north and the south. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was the seat of the early revolutionary American government and was the birthplace of the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

New York State and Pennsylvania are the largest states in the region. As the new country expanded in the 19th century, these states soon became centers of heavy industry (iron, glass and steel). Today, New York is still the largest city in the nation and an important financial and cultural center.

Like New England, much of the traditional heavy industry in this region has relocated and been replaced by other industries such as communications.

The South
The South is, today, the fastest growing region in the United States and is perhaps one of the most distinctive as well. This vast area stretches from Virginia south to Florida, west to central Texas and north to parts of Missouri and Oklahoma.

The area was first settled by English Protestants. After 1800 the differences between the industrial north and the rural south became more and more pronounced, however. Southern settlers raised cotton and tobacco on large farms called plantations. Many workers were needed on these plantations and the southern economy depended heavily on the use of slave labor. To northerners it was immoral to own and keep slaves. To southerners it was a necessity in order to preserve their way of life and economy.

Gradually, these differences became so great that in 1860, eleven southern states left
The Southwest

The Southwest covers western Texas, parts of Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada and southern California. In general this area is much drier and therefore less densely populated. There are large desert areas in the region and wide open spaces.

This region differs from the rest of the United States in ethnicity as well. Historically, parts of the Southwest belonged to Mexico and following the Mexican-American War (1846-48) the United States obtained much land from Mexico. There has always been a strong Mexican heritage in the border states and immigration from Latin America (both legal and illegal) increased dramatically after immigration laws were changed in the 1960s. Today, the Hispanic population (Spanish Americans) is the fastest growing minority in the US. In the 2000 year census, Hispanics surpassed African Americans as the largest minority group in the US.

It is also in the Southwest that many Native American reservations are to be found. Cherokees are the most populous American Indian tribe today, but it is a sad fact that Native Americans as a whole make up less than 1 percent of the population.

Although the Southwest is still an area of vast, uninhabited spaces, this region, along with the South, is one of the fastest growing regions of the US. Here too, air-conditioning has made the region much more comfortable. The Civil War devastated the South socially and economically and recovery was slow. Today, however, the South is one of the most dynamic economic regions in the country. Atlanta, Georgia, home of CNN and host to the 1996 summer Olympic Games, is one of the most important cities in the region.

The Midwest

This region stretches west from Ohio to eastern Colorado and north up to North Dakota. In the early 1800s, easterners moved to this vast region in search of better farmland. New immigrants from Europe bypassed the east coast entirely and settled directly in the interior of the land. Many German immigrants settled in Missouri and Swedes and Norwegians settled in Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota.

Most of the Midwest is flat and enormous areas of fertile soil in this region made it possible to harvest large amounts of cereal crops such as wheat, oats and corn. That is why this region came to be known as the nation’s “breadbasket”.

The Mississippi River, which stretches all the way from the Canadian border in the north to the Gulf of Mexico in the south, was the region’s lifeline moving both people and goods along the river. Mark Twain, a native Missourian, immortalized the life of the Mississippi in his famous novel The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

Today the region’s hub is Chicago, Illinois which is the third largest city in the nation. Because of declining heavy industry in this region, notably car manufacturing in Michigan, the region has, in recent years, been referred to as the “Rust Belt” as opposed to the “Steel Belt” which it was known as earlier. The 2000 census indicates clearly that more and more people are moving from the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt. This is due both to the decline in industry and the desire for a warmer climate.
ing has made the hot climate livable and many retired Americans have moved to Arizona. Dams along many of the rivers of the region have brought water to desert towns such as Las Vegas, Nevada making it possible for them to grow into huge cities. Irrigation has also made it possible to grow crops in, for example, the Central Valley of California, which is well known for its vegetables and fruits.

The West
The West stretches from Colorado to northern California in the west and up to Washington and Montana in the north. This region also includes the last two states to join the union, Alaska and Hawaii. To many people the West has always symbolized the “last frontier”. Yet California has a history of settlement that is far earlier than most mid-western states! Spanish priests followed after the Conquistadores (Spanish conquerors) and established missions along the California coast even before the start of the American Revolution.

All of the region’s 11 states are partly mountainous and population in the West is, in general, sparse with the exception of California which is the most populous of all of the

Flyfishing in the Alaskan wilds
Travel Project – Off the Beaten Track

Let us imagine that you really have won a free trip, but this time to the United States. As you now know, the United States is a huge geographical area covering four time zones. Although it is tempting to travel to one of the better known tourist sites, perhaps you would like to get off the beaten track and travel to your own personal paradise? Wherever you choose to travel, one of the conditions of this prize is that before receiving any prize money, you must submit a detailed itinerary (a list of places where you want to go) and an estimated budget of all possible expenses. In addition, the entire trip must be planned down to the smallest detail beforehand. In other words, in this project you are going to be your very own travel agency and travel agent!

How to get started:
You have now read a text about the USA. Now decide where you want to go, which region or city that you would like to explore. Then go to the Internet and do more research. Obviously the length of your stay will depend on the amount of comfort you require. If you are traveling as a backpack tourist who is interested in visiting the Grand Canyon, for example, and if you are willing to sleep in a tent, you will probably be able to extend your stay by several days. If, however, Disney World in Florida and a comfortable hotel is more to your liking then your stay will be shorter. These are things that you have to take into consideration.

Budget limitations:
Let us say that prize money is (unfortunately) only NOK 25,000. You are not allowed to use any personal money. This sum must cover all travel expenses, food, accommodation, entrance fees etc. You are free to travel at any time within the coming year and you can stay as long as you have money left. One of your main tasks, in other words, is to see how long your money will last beforehand so that you can order a round trip plane ticket for specific dates.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE
Imagine that you have won first prize in a Lonely Planet contest and that you can travel to any destination in the world with a million Norwegian kroner in your bank account. In groups discuss where you would go and why.
Some things to consider:
• What is the current rate of exchange? How much is NOK 25,000 in US dollars?
• When is it cheapest to fly to the US? What is the difference in price between low and high season for example?
• Which airlines are the least expensive and what will a round trip ticket to your destination cost?
• Do you need additional transportation such as train, bus, taxis etc? What does this cost?
• Where do you plan to stay? What is the price per night? How many nights can you afford to stay there?
• Are there any entrance fees that must be calculated?
• How much money do you need for eating expenses per day? Although you can’t really know this beforehand, try to write a realistic food budget – for example $15 dollars per day. Any left-over money can be used on unexpected expenses.
• Do you plan to remain in one place or travel within the US? What will this cost?

**Detailed plans:**
Another condition for this prize money is that before leaving Norway you must submit a detailed outline of all your activities for each day you are in the United States. Study the following example:

**Monday, September 24, 20..**

• After breakfast, excursion to The Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island (Ferry fee $11.50)
• Afternoon – stroll through Central Park
• Evening – Movie ($8.00)

**Tuesday, September 25, 20..**

**Final steps:**
Do you have a valid passport? If not, what does a passport cost?
Are there any special requirements for entering the United States?
Check this out on the American Embassy’s home page on the Internet.

When you have planned out everything, present your travel plans to your classmates in class. This can be done in several ways. Perhaps you would like to give a power point presentation? Wall posters or transparencies are also possible ways of presenting your findings. A written report or detailed travel brochure is also a possibility.

**Evaluation:**
Who, in your opinion, has managed best to fulfill the requirements of this project? Was there anything that surprised you while working on this project? What is the most valuable thing that you have learned?

“I haven’t been everywhere, but it’s on my list.”
Susan Sontag