

Minnesota

Contributed by Administrator
Monday, 21 July 2008
Last Updated Thursday, 24 July 2008

Though MINNESOTA is more than a thousand miles from either coast, it's virtually a seaboard state, thanks to Lake Superior, connected to the Atlantic via the St Lawrence Seaway. The glaciers that, millions of years ago, flattened all but its southeast corner gouged out more than 15,000 lakes, and major rivers run along the eastern and western borders. Ninety-five percent of the population lives within ten minutes of a body of water, and the very name Minnesota is a Sioux word meaning "land of sky-tinted water."

French explorers in the sixteenth century encountered prairies to the south and, in the north, dense forests whose abundant waterways were an ideal breeding ground for beavers and muskrats. Fur trading, fishing and lumbering flourished, and the Ojibway and Sioux were eased out by waves of French, British and American immigrants. Admitted to the Union in 1858, the new state of Minnesota was at first settled by Germans and Scandinavians, who farmed in the west and south.

Other ethnic groups followed, many drawn by the massive iron ore deposits of north central Minnesota, which are expected to hold out for two more centuries. Minnesota still thrives on its natural resources and on a progressive social outlook typified by such Democratic heavyweights as Hubert Humphrey, Walter Mondale and Eugene McCarthy. Current governor Jesse Ventura, a former professional wrestler, has garnered attention nationally and beyond for his unconventional and outspoken approach to politics.

More than half of Minnesota's hardy inhabitants, who endure some of the fiercest winters in the nation, live in the southeast, around the so-called Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St Paul. These attractive and basically friendly rivals together rank as the Midwest's great civic double act for their combined cultural, recreational and business opportunities. Smaller cities include the northern shipping port of Duluth, the gateway to the Scenic Hwy-61 lakeshore drive, and Rochester, near pretty river towns like Red Wing and Winona.

The tranquil waters of Voyageurs National Park lie halfway along the state's boundary with Canada. In recent years, the state has earned a reputation as the "Hollywood of the North," thanks to its increased use as an affordable, talent-rich filmmaking locale. Internationally acclaimed fraternal filmmakers Joel and Ethan Coen, responsible for the Oscar-winning, Minnesota-set Fargo, were raised in the Twin Cities' suburb of St Louis Park.