

North Carolina

By Tom Kirvan

TAR HEEL STATE BOASTS BEAUTY AND VARIETY

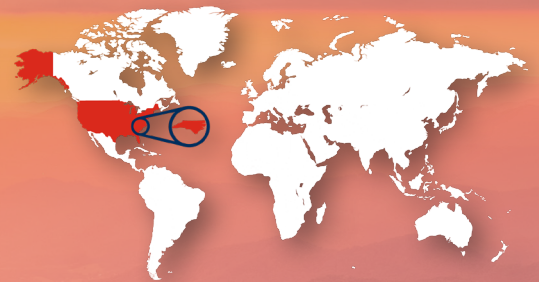
North Carolina, affectionately known as the Tar Heel State, is located in the southeastern region of the United States, and has a population of 10.7 million people, making it the ninth most populous state in the country. The state is characterized by a diverse population, with significant African American, Hispanic, and Native American communities. The state's cultural fabric is enriched by various traditions and influences from these groups. Urban areas such as Charlotte, Raleigh, and Greensboro are particularly varied and vibrant, offering a mix of cultures and lifestyles.

North Carolina boasts many distinct landscapes, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in the east to the Appalachian Mountains in the west. The state is divided into three main geographic regions: the Coastal Plain, the Piedmont, and the Mountains. The Coastal Plain, as the name suggests, features beautiful beaches and coastal towns, while the Piedmont is known for its rolling hills and urban centers. The western part of the state is dominated by the Appalachian Mountains, including the Great Smoky Mountains and Blue Ridge Mountains, offering stunning natural scenery and outdoor recreational opportunities.

North Carolina's history can be traced to when European explorers arrived in the 16th century, and the area became one of the original Thirteen Colonies. The state played a significant role in the American Revolution and was a key battleground during the Civil War. In the 20th century, North Carolina emerged as a leader in the tobacco, textile, and furniture industries. The state has also been a center for civil rights movements and educational advancements, particularly with the establishment of prestigious universities such as Duke, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Wake Forest.

Historically known for its tobacco and textile industries, the state has evolved to become a leader in technology, finance, and education. The Research Triangle Park (RTP), located between Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill, is one of the largest research parks in the world, housing numerous high-tech companies and research institutions. The banking sector is also significant, with Charlotte being the second-largest banking center in the United States after New York City. Additionally, agriculture remains vital, with North Carolina being a top producer of tobacco, sweet potatoes, and poultry.

Raleigh, the state capital, is known for its research and educational institutions, being part of the RTP. It is a rapidly growing city with a strong emphasis on innovation and cultural development. Charlotte, the most populous city, is a major financial hub with a population of around 900,000. Known as the "Queen City," Charlotte is home to



Fast Facts

Capital: Raleigh

Population: 10.7 million

Economic engines: Technology, finance, insurance, and agriculture

Highest Mountain: Mt. Mitchell, 6,684 feet

North Carolina

the headquarters of Bank of America and numerous other financial institutions, making it a bustling urban center with a thriving economy and vibrant cultural scene.

Top 5 Must-See Tourist Destinations

- **Biltmore Estate:** Located in Asheville, the Biltmore Estate is the largest privately-owned home in the United States. Built by George Washington Vanderbilt II in the late 19th century, this magnificent mansion features 250 rooms, beautifully landscaped gardens, and a winery. Visitors can tour the opulent interior, stroll through the gardens, and enjoy wine tastings, making it a must-see attraction.
- **Great Smoky Mountains National Park:** Straddling the border between North Carolina and Tennessee, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is renowned for its biodiversity, scenic beauty, and for being the most-visited National Park in the country. The park offers numerous hiking trails, including a segment of the Appalachian Trail, stunning viewpoints like Clingmans Dome, and opportunities to see wildlife such as black bears and elk. It is a paradise for nature enthusiasts and outdoor adventurers.
- **Outer Banks:** The Outer Banks is a string of barrier islands off the coast of North Carolina, known for their pristine beaches, historic sites, and unique charm. Key attractions include the Wright Brothers National Memorial in Kitty Hawk, where the first powered flight took place, the Cape Hatteras National Seashore with its iconic lighthouse, and the scenic drive along Highway 12. The Outer Banks are perfect for beach lovers, history buffs, and those seeking a tranquil getaway.
- **Blue Ridge Parkway:** Often referred to as “America’s Favorite Drive,” the Blue Ridge Parkway stretches for 469 miles through the Appalachian Highlands, offering breathtaking views, picnic areas, and hiking trails. In North Carolina, the parkway traverses the Blue Ridge Mountains, providing access to notable sites such as Mount Mitchell, the highest peak east of the Mississippi River, and the charming town of Blowing Rock. The scenic drive is particularly popular during the fall when the foliage is vibrant.
- **Historic Downtown Wilmington:** Wilmington, a coastal city, boasts a beautifully preserved historic downtown area with cobblestone streets, antebellum homes, and the Riverwalk along the Cape Fear River. Visitors can explore the Battleship North Carolina, a World War II-era battleship-turned-museum, and enjoy the vibrant arts scene, shops, and restaurants. The nearby Wrightsville Beach offers opportunities for surfing, fishing, and relaxing by the sea.

