



## DESTINATION MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi entered the Union on December 10, 1817, as the 20th state. Jackson, the state's capital and largest city, was founded at about the same time. The state takes its name from the Mississippi River, the great waterway that forms the state's western boundary. The river's name was derived from an Algonquin term for "big river." Mississippi is commonly nicknamed the Magnolia State because of the great number of magnolia trees that grow within its borders. The blossom of the magnolia is the state flower. The state of Mississippi ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> in size among the states.

Mississippi's warm climate and rich soil is ideally suited to cotton, which became the main crop even before 1800 and remained the mainstay of its economy until the 20th century.

### Facts at a Glance

<b>Area:</b>	48,286 sq mi
<b>Population:</b>	2,844,658 (2000)
<b>Capital City:</b>	Jackson
<b>Nickname:</b>	Magnolia
<b>Motto:</b>	Virtute et Armis (By Valor and Arms)
<b>State Bird:</b>	Mockingbird
<b>State Flower/Tree:</b>	Magnolia

### Brief History

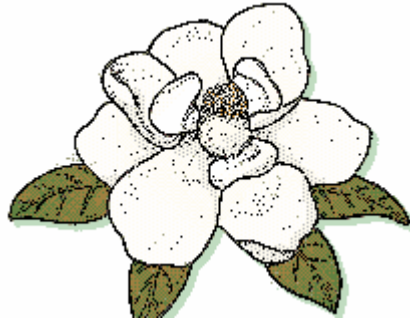
First explored for Spain by Hernando de Soto who discovered the Mississippi River in 1540, the region was later claimed by France. In 1699, a French group established the first permanent settlement near present-day Ocean Springs. Great Britain took over the area in 1763 after the French and Indian Wars ceding it to the U.S. in 1783 after the Revolution. Spain did not relinquish its claims until 1798, and in 1810 the U.S. annexed West Florida from Spain, including what is now southern Mississippi.

For a little more than one hundred years, from shortly after the state's founding through the Great Depression, cotton was the undisputed king of Mississippi's largely agrarian economy. Over the last half-century, however, Mississippi has diversified its economy by balancing agricultural output with increased industrial activity.

Today, agriculture continues as a major segment of the state's economy. For almost four decades soybeans occupied the most acreage, while cotton remained the largest cash crop. In 2001, however, more acres of cotton were planted than soybeans, and Mississippi jumped to second in the nation in cotton production (exceeded only by Texas). The state's farmlands also yield important harvests of corn, peanuts, pecans,

rice, sugar cane, and sweet potatoes as well as poultry, eggs, meat animals, dairy products, feed crops, and horticultural crops. Mississippi remains the world's leading producer of pond-raised catfish.

The state abounds in historical landmarks and is the home of the Vicksburg National Military Park. Other National Park Service areas are Brices Cross Roads National Battlefield Site, Tupelo National Battlefield, and part of Natchez Trace National Parkway. Pre-Civil War mansions are the special pride of Natchez, Oxford, Columbus, Vicksburg, and Jackson.



### **The Mississippi River**

All the rivers of Mississippi drain into the Gulf of Mexico, either directly or by way of the Mississippi River. The Mississippi follows a meandering course along the state's western edge. The river was designated the state line in 1817, but subsequent shifts in its sluggish course transferred small sections of Louisiana and Arkansas to points east of the river, while some sections of Mississippi are now on the western bank. During the flood season the surface of the river in its lower course is elevated more than 10 feet above the surface of the land. As a result, artificial levees and other flood-control structures are needed to contain the river.

The Mississippi is the largest and most important river in North America. The river has played a central role in the exploration and economic development of the continent, and it is a principal artery for bulk freight, carrying more than any other inland waterway in North America.

The Mississippi River system, comprising the Mississippi River and its tributaries, drains 1,150,000 square miles. It is the largest drainage system in area in North America and the third largest in the world. Its discharge, which averages about 593,000 cubic feet per second, is the sixth largest in the world. The Mississippi River, from Lake Itasca in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico, is about 2340 miles long. However, if the river system is measured from the headwaters of the Missouri River, the Mississippi's longest tributary, to the Gulf of Mexico, its length totals about 3710 miles.