

Connecticut

Hello,

Not many people are familiar with my home state. My name is Jan Krč and I'm the Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Vienna. And I'd like to introduce you to Connecticut. I come from New Haven, Connecticut's second largest city and its principal seaport.

Connecticut is the third smallest state, but also one of the most densely populated. Three and a half million people live within the state's 5 ½ thousand square mile territory.

The name Connecticut comes from the Native American word, Kenetuket, which means, "beside the long tidal river." The official state nickname is the "Constitution State." This is because the early British settlers were governed by the Fundamental Orders of 1638 which are considered by many historians to be the first ever written constitution and these Orders served as the basis for the much better known U.S. Constitution. My state is also known as the "Nutmeg State" and people from Connecticut are sometimes called "Nutmeggers." That nickname may have come from sailors in the 18th and 19th centuries returning from their voyages with this spice.

My state has another nickname, the "Land of the Steady habits." And some people call it the "Yankee State."

Connecticut is one of the original 13 colonies and became an official state in 1788. It's part of the group of states known as New England.

Connecticut was previously home to about 6 to 7 thousand Native Americans before Dutch fur traders arrived in 1614. In 1633, the Dutch purchased land from the Algonquian tribe and erected a fort and trading post at what is now Hartford, the state capital. Later, it was taken over by British settlers from neighboring Massachusetts who established their first settlement in Connecticut at Wethersfield in 1634.

My state is very industrious. It is called the birthplace of Yankee ingenuity, ranking first in the nation in the per capita numbers of engineers and issued patents. As early as 1657, there was a thriving ship building industry in Connecticut.

George Washington even gave Connecticut one more nickname – "The Provision State" because of the aid the state gave during the Revolutionary War.

Eli Whitney, the inventor of the cotton gin in 1798, lived in Connecticut. But did you also know that Whitney was the mastermind behind the idea of mass production? He used standard parts to produce muskets in 1798. That revolutionized industrial production in the U.S. and his cotton gin made that crop pre-eminent in the American south.

In the early 1900s, Groton, Connecticut, became the site of a U.S. Submarine Base. And the state became a munitions supply center in World War I. Connecticut remained an important supplier during the Second World War, producing planes, engines, propellers, submarines and other supplies. The first atomic powered submarine, the U.S.S. Nautilus was launched there in 1954. Today, Groton is still the center for U.S. submarine development and construction.

And modern day Connecticut based factories also produce sewing machines, jet engines, helicopters, motors, hardware, tools, cutlery, clocks, locks and silverware.

Here are some of the firsts for Connecticut:

Founded in 1764, the Hartford Courant is the oldest continuously published newspaper in the U.S.

America's first law school was founded in 1784 in Litchfield.

The first tax-supported public library opened in Salisbury in 1803.

The first commercial telephone exchange was established in New Haven in 1878.

And many other first inventions came from my state like the sewing machine in 1846, ice making machine in 1853, the vacuum cleaner in 1933, the helicopter in 1939 and color TV in 1948.

Connecticut is more than industrial cities. The small colonial towns and rural areas attract many tourists. The resorts along the Long Island Sound shoreline are also popular. In fact, two thirds of the state are open land with more than 100 state parks and forests.

Not only does Connecticut have a beautiful landscape, it's also an easy commute to New York City. That's why many famous people chose to live there. And that might be the reason Connecticut has the highest per capita income of all U.S. states. Katharine Hepburn, Dylan McDermott, Milos Forman and Christopher Walken have all lived in Connecticut. And Meg Ryan grew up in Fairfield.

The 1988 film, "Mystic Pizza," starring Julia Roberts, is based on an actual pizza parlor in Mystic, Connecticut. To this day, the state has the best pizza in the U.S. and it was in a New Haven eatery named Louis that the first ever hamburger was served in 1895.

In addition to celebrities, Connecticut has its share of famous people from history. Nathan Hale, U.S. Patriot and Revolutionary War spy, lived in Connecticut. He uttered the famous last words, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

Mark Twain lived in Hartford from 1871 to 1891 when he published "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn."

Noah Webster, author of the first American dictionary in 1806, also lived in Hartford.

And did you know that Yale students gave us the first Frisbee in 1920 when they discovered that the empty pie plates from Mrs. Frisbee's Pie shop could be sailed across the New Haven Green.

But what I appreciate the most about my state is its liberal, tolerant attitude towards people of diverse backgrounds. The state places great emphasis on education – the first American public school opened there in 1640 and the state's progressive attitudes were already clear in the 19th century when it was strongly anti-slavery. Connecticut was the first state in the Union to elect a woman governor in her own right in 1974 and it was one of the first states to establish gay marriage in 2008.

Connecticut is a great little state, but don't take my word for it...next time you are in New York City, go to the Grand Central Terminal and take the commuter train to New Haven. Come out of the ornate arrival hall of Union Station and tour the most beautiful university campus in the America, Yale. Have a white clam pizza pie at Pepe's and then pop into the Beinecke Rare Book library which features an original copy of the Gutenberg bible or visit the Yale Center for British Art which houses the largest collection of British art outside of the United Kingdom. And in the evening you can catch a Broadway preview show at the Shubert Theater where the Sound of Music premiered in 1959. I promise, you will have a good time!