

IOWA

Hello, my name is Alexandria Sturtz and I am currently teaching English in Austria. Many people consider the Mid-West a “flyover region”—a place you only see out of the window of a plane on the way to your next destination. One of those states is Iowa, where I come from.

Iowa is located centrally with five states sharing its border. It’s the only state whose eastern and western borders are formed completely by rivers—the Mississippi River to the East and the Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers to the West.

Iowa is best known for its production of corn, soybeans, hog, and ethanol. The state also manufactures a wide range of products, including heavy machinery that often contributes to farming.

Before Iowa was a leading producer in agriculture, it was a tall-grass prairie inhabited by a variety of Native American tribes. The most notable were the Meskwaki, the Sioux, the Sauk, and the Ioway—the tribe Iowa is named after. When these tribes lived in Iowa, the land was rich with bison, fertile soil, and rivers flowing with fish. As time progressed and European settlers moved further west, the French claimed Iowa. The European population didn’t grow too large. Today, Iowa is home to a little over three million people with a landmass about one and a half times larger than Austria. Its biggest cities are Des Moines, its capitol, Cedar Rapids, my hometown, and Davenport. Des Moines has the golden dome of the State Capitol Building and was once featured in Jack Kerouac’s novel, *On the Road*. In his book, he wrote, “...the prettiest girls in the world live in Des Moines.” Of course, if he said it, it must be true.

Cedar Rapids, the second largest city, thrives on manufacturing, including the largest cereal factory in the world, Quaker Oats. Often times when I’m driving through the city on

interstate 380, I can smell the berries or honey, and I can guess which cereal is being made that day.

Aside from cereal and pretty girls, the state is also home to the famous *Field of Dreams* baseball field located in Dyersville and featured in the movie, *Field of Dreams*. Hordes of tourists flock to the site each year. Furthermore, Iowa holds the Registers Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa, or more commonly known as, RAGBRAI. Each summer it attracts thousands of cyclists to see the glorious countryside as they ride 310 miles across the state. And finally, as a whole, we like to boast our invention of the beloved taco pizza. A slice of pizza covered in salsa, lettuce, beef, cheddar cheese, and topped with broken tortilla chips; this is one delicious dish we claim as our own.

With a population of only three million people, Iowa is too small to host professional sports teams. This doesn't bother us one bit, as we take pride in our university athletics. Iowa has two universities with a long-standing rivalry that can pit families against each other. The University of Iowa, in the state's old capitol, Iowa City, boasts a football team, the Hawkeyes, with a legacy of NFL drafts and a wrestling team with 23 National Championships. Iowa City also hosts the Writers Workshop and is hailed as a UNESCO city of literature. The university also boasts famous alumni, such as actor Gene Wilder, and authors Tennessee Williams, James Van Allen, and Flannery O'Connor. President Herbert Hoover's birthplace is in nearby West Branch.

Then there's Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa, near the current state capitol, Des Moines. The colors red and gold represent this school's teams, the Cyclones. This university is known for science and engineering. This university has been a forerunner in its fields—it is the birthplace of the first electronic digital computer, and the only university nationwide with a U.S.

Department of Energy research laboratory as a part of the Manhattan Project. Iowa State University is also known for its yearly Battle of the Bands, called VEISHA, and one of the most successful women's basketball teams in the nation.

Whether you're driving through or planning to stay awhile, I think every Iowan would agree that we have not only the prettiest girls in the world, but the landscape and the people living there aren't too bad, either.