

## OREGON

Hello! My name is Nathan Cooper, I work at the U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Vienna, and I come from the beautiful state of Oregon. It's a state with majestic natural resources and a fiercely independent character.

Before I talk a bit more extensively about the state's history and culture, let me quickly dispel three common misconceptions about my home state: First, many people often guess Oregon is "somewhere in the middle of the country." Actually, Oregon is on the West Coast of the United States, just above California.

Second, although you may have heard it called "Or-ee-GONE," locals pronounce it "ORE-gun."

And last, contrary to what weather maps often depict, Oregon is not the wettest, rainiest place in America (that's actually in Hawaii).

Oregon is perhaps most famous for its dramatic and diverse landscape. Its rugged coastline contains sprawling beaches and a fascinating array of marine life, including noisy sea lions and vibrant tide pools.

The Western half of the state is dominated by the volcanic Cascade mountain range. There you'll find famous peaks like Mt. Hood, dense evergreen forests and rushing rivers. The western Willamette Valley is also home to the state's two largest cities, Portland and Eugene, as well as a world-class winemaking region. And a vast high-elevation desert covers the eastern half of the state.

Southern Oregon's Crater Lake is the deepest lake in the US. It was formed by a collapsed volcano in the Cascades. These kinds of natural resources have attracted explorers and adventurers to Oregon since its earliest days.

Archeologists have found evidence of human settlements in what is now known as Oregon dating back at least 15,000 years. Large numbers of Native American groups, including the Umpqua, Molalla, Klamath, and Chinook called area home in the 1500s when Spanish explorers first encountered the Oregon coast in 1543.

Centuries later, President Thomas Jefferson commissioned explorers Lewis and Clark to cross the continent in search of a commercial route for trade with Asia. In 1806 they reached what is now known as Oregon. Lewis and Clark's successful continental crossing led to Oregon joining the Union in 1859.

They're still considered Oregon's forefathers.

OK, that's probably enough of a history lesson. Now for a bit of trivia: In no particular order, here are a few other things you might find surprising about Oregon: It's the only state with an official nut—the hazelnut, which is also sometimes called a filbert. It's the home of Nike. The global capital of wind surfing is Hood River, Oregon, on the banks of the Columbia River. Oregon has more ghost towns than anywhere else in the former Wild West. Oregon also has some strangely-named communities. My favorites include the towns of Weed, Drain, Nimrod, and Boring. Oregon is physically the 7<sup>th</sup> largest American state, but ranks only 29 in terms of population.

Politically, Oregon is both extremely independent and strongly polarized. Oregonians pioneered direct legislation by the state's citizens through ballot initiatives and referenda, a system now used throughout the nation. This democratic device allowed Oregonians to go against the national grain with policies like banning self-pumping at gas stations and doing away with sales taxes. Oregon's independent streak comes through clearly in the state's motto: "She flies with her own wings."

Consensus among citizens in Oregon is hard to come by, as recent studies have shown Oregonians to represent some of the most extremely liberal and conservative voters in the nation.

Although Oregonians are generally a pretty low-key bunch, more than a few famous people have come from state, including President Herbert Hoover; the actors Sally Struthers, Kim Novak, and Ginger Rogers; the track star Steve Prefontaine; and the writers Ken Kesey and Raymond Carver.

To find out more about the state, including information about its economic base, please visit [Oregon.gov](http://Oregon.gov). I hope you've enjoyed this quick introduction to the Beaver State, and hope you'll have the chance to visit it one day.