

## RHODE ISLAND

Hello, I'm Antoinette Van Zabner, a member of the Fulbright Commission in Austria and I come from Rhode Island, the smallest state in the U.S. But don't be fooled by its size.

Rhode Island is the second most densely populated state. More than one million people live in the 3,140 square kilometers of this New England state.

Rhode Island has the longest official name of any state – The State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. The long name comes from the merger of two settlements – Rhode Island Colony, established on what is now called Aquidneck Island in Narragansett Bay and Providence Plantations, founded by Roger Williams, a minister, in the area now known as the city of Providence, Rhode Island's capital.

In 1636 Roger Williams left the Massachusetts Bay Colony in a dispute over religious views and established a colony for religious freedom and political tolerance. The area was given to him by the Narragansett and Pequot Native American tribes.

Other religious dissidents joined but following a disagreement, they split into a second settlement in what is now Newport. Later, the two small settlements rejoined as they battled the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Rhode Island isn't really an island. However, about 14% of the state is made up of bays and inlets, and there are more than 30 islands in Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay. Rhode Island also has a coast on the Atlantic Ocean, where you can find beautiful beaches, earning it the nickname "The Ocean State."

My favorite resort is Newport with its fabulous beaches and famous mansions. The Breakers, The Elms and Marble House were some of the summer homes of America's most influential and wealthy families. The Vanderbilts and the Astors came from New York City to sail their yachts, to enjoy their private beaches, and to play tennis at the current site of the International Tennis Hall of Fame. Today many of these homes are museums and showcase the Newport Music Festival. The Newport Cliff Walk runs behind many of these mansions and offers spectacular views. Worthwhile visiting are also the Newport Jazz Festival and the Newport Folk Festival.

My favorite city is Providence, the capital, with its architectural and historical treasures. Founded in 1636, it is one of many cities claimed, like Rome, to be founded on seven hills.

Benefit Street is a treasure of Colonial and Victorian architecture. The mansions and more modest Federal style homes have doors that open Rhode Island right onto the sidewalk. The Providence Preservation Society has placed plaques, indicating when they were built, and who originally owned or designed them.

The Providence Athenaeum, the fourth oldest U.S. library, was founded in 1753. The Greek revival building was constructed in 1844. A frequent visitor was Edgar Allen Poe, who was

a resident of Providence in the 1840s.

Not to be forgotten is the Columbus Theater, home of the Rhode Island International Film Festival. The Columbus Theater and the Providence Performing Arts Center remain Rhode Island's two finest surviving historic movie theatres.

Rhode Island is also known as the birthplace of America's industrial revolution. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Thomas Somers founded the Beverly Cotton Manufactory, using machine plans from England. Soon after, Moses Brown and Samuel Slater created the first commercially successful cotton spinning mill, which led to a thriving textile industry in the state. Silverware and jewelry manufacturing still exists in Rhode Island, but many other companies moved south during the Great Depression. The abandoned factories are now museums, offices and housing. Today Rhode Island's largest industry is health services, followed by tourism and manufacturing.

Rhode Island is a state of many firsts. It was the first colony to declare independence on May 4, 1776. However, it was the last colony to become a state because the people of Rhode Island waited to be sure the Bill of Rights was included in the U.S. Constitution. The first U.S. Navy ship was commissioned by the Rhode Island general Assembly in 1775.

The Rhode Island State House was the first building with a marble dome built in the U.S., in 1895. The dome of the State House is the fourth-largest self-supporting marble dome in the world, after St. Peter's Basilica, the Minnesota State Capitol, and the Taj Mahal, and one of the first public buildings to use elect Rhode Island city. The building served as the United States Capitol exterior in the 1997 film Amistad. It also served as the City Hall of Capital City in Disney's Underdog.

The First Baptist Church in America is the First Baptist Church of Providence, also known as the First Baptist Meetinghouse. It was founded by Roger Williams in 1638. The present church building was erected in 1774 and 1775.

The Touro Synagogue is a 1763 synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, that is the oldest synagogue building still standing in the United States and the oldest surviving Jewish synagogue in North America.

The first circus in the U.S. was in Newport in 1774. The state hosted the first open golf tournament in 1895 and the first polo match in the U.S was played in 1876 near Newport. Built in 1828, the Providence Arcade (also called the Westminster Arcade) was the country's first indoor shopping mall and was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1976.

Although Rhode Island was heavily involved in the slave trade in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was the first state to send troops when President Lincoln called for help at the start of the Civil War. It was the first state to enact a law prohibiting slavery and, in 1866, the first to abolish segregation in public schools.

The Quakers played an important role in Rhode Island's history. In 1783, Moses Brown and other Quakers waged the petition campaign to abolish slavery. Providence is home to Moses Brown, a Quaker institution, the third oldest private school in the country. It's known for rigorous academics and Friends school philosophy and my preparatory school, Lincoln School, the only all-girls Quaker School in North America.

Many immigrants settled in Rhode Island, including those with Italian, Irish, English, Portuguese and French heritage.

For such a small state, Rhode Island boasts an impressive academic community, including Brown University, a private Ivy League research university. Brown is the third oldest institution of higher education in New England and seventh oldest in the US. The Rhode Island School of Design was founded in 1877 by a group of women who had raised funds to showcase women's art at the 1876 Centennial Exposition. The University of Rhode Island has nationally ranked programs in pharmacy, landscape architecture, and oceanography. And last but not least, world renowned Johnson and Wales University's college of culinary arts boasts famous alumni, including celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse.