# Geographic Features of the Southeast Region

## Southeast Region Land Forms
• **The Atlantic Coastal Plain** is a broad lowland that provides many excellent harbors along the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.
• The **Appalachian Mountain System** is the oldest mountain system in North America. It extends from Canada to the Gulf Coastal Plain of Alabama. Several smaller mountain ranges make up the Appalachian Mountain System, including the Allegheny Mountains, Blue Ridge Mountains, Catskill Mountains, Great Smoky Mountains, Green Mountains, and White Mountains with several of these ranges located in this region.
• The **Blue Ridge Mountains** stretch from Pennsylvania to Georgia and are part of the Appalachian Mountain System.
• The **Dismal Swamp** is a low-lying, poorly-drained wetland located in the Coastal Plain region in southeastern Virginia and in northeastern North Carolina. A variety of wildlife (mammals, reptiles, and birds) make their habitat in the grasses, reeds, herbs, and trees.
• The **Everglades** are wetlands located in southern Florida with many rare and endangered species of plant and animal life.
• The **Eastern Shore** of Virginia and Florida are examples of large peninsulas.
• The **Florida Keys** are small, low-elevated sandy islands formed on the surface of coral reefs.
• The city of **New Orleans** is an example of land with many deltas. Deltas are deposits of sediment that are found at the mouth of a river, often in triangular shapes.
• The **Outer Banks** of North Carolina is an example of barrier islands that protect the mainland from wind and ocean erosion.
• The **Piedmont** is an area of rolling hills that stretches from New Jersey to central Alabama between the Atlantic Coastal Plain and the Appalachian Mountains.


## Southeast Region Water Features

The United States has access to numerous and varied bodies of water. Bodies of water support interaction among regions, form the borders, and create links to other areas. Each river was an opportunity for new western exploration and settlement. People settled along these rivers and used them as a source of food and as trade routes.

• The **Atlantic Ocean** borders the East Coast of the United States and provides access to other areas of the world. It has served as the highway for explorers, early settlers, and immigrants.
• The **Chesapeake Bay** is located between the mainland of Virginia and the Eastern Shore. It is the largest estuary in the United States.
• The **Gulf of Mexico** is located off the southeastern coast of the United States and flows into the Atlantic Ocean.
• **Lake Pontchartrain** is not a true lake, but a brackish estuary located in southeastern Louisiana. It is the second-largest saltwater estuary in the United States.
• The **Mississippi River** flows south from its source in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. It empties into the Gulf of Mexico through a huge delta in southeastern Louisiana. The

Mississippi River is used to transport farm and industrial products. It links ports to other parts of the world.
• The **Ohio River** is a major river that begins at its source in Pennsylvania and flows into the Mississippi River.

## Climate

The climate of the Southeast region is generally warm and sunny. The summers are usually hot, long, and humid. The areas along the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic coast often experience hurricanes from June through November. Nor'easters are powerful storms that form off the East Coast in the Atlantic Ocean, particularly in the fall and winter. The winters in the Southeast are short and often mild with some snowfall and freezing temperatures in northern areas. Spring and autumn are climatic transition periods.

## Cultural Influences of the Southeast Region

Whenever people settle or migrate to an area, they change the culture and landscape to reflect their beliefs, customs, farming techniques, and architecture.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, American Indians were dispersed across the different environments in North America. American Indians lived in all areas of North America. The Eastern Woodland Indians were located from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River. They used the natural resources found around them. Most built shelters from trees cut from the heavily wooded forests. They usually built their shelters near a water feature for food and transportation. Most were farmers, hunters, and fishermen. About 4,000 years ago, there were many different Eastern Woodland tribes. Examples of some Eastern Woodland Indians in the Southeast region are: Seminole (Florida), Cherokee (North Carolina), Powhatan (Virginia), Creek (Alabama), and Catawba (South Carolina).

People who traveled from England to North America settled primarily in the Coastal Plain and the Piedmont regions. Examples of their English influence include Tudor homes and places of worship that reflected the English style of architecture. Many German and Scots-Irish farmers settled mostly in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia along the Migration Route. These immigrants were profoundly dedicated to the ideals of freedom.

Once tobacco became the cash crop of the Virginia colony in the early 1600s, southern plantations were established that depended upon a large source of inexpensive labor to plant and harvest tobacco. Many Africans worked in the tobacco fields in the Coastal Plain and Piedmont regions. African-American culture involved many aspects of music, dance, art, storytelling, customs, and traditions that influenced the Southeast region of the United States.

Many people migrated to the Southeast region and along the sandy shores of the Atlantic Ocean. It was ideal for fishermen to harvest seafood. As people migrated to the Southeast for economic opportunities and the population increased, more fresh fish was

needed to supply the food markets. Additional fertilizer was needed to treat the soil in order to plant vegetables and increase the food supply. New communities developed near the established farming communities. As an example of a positive effect, more fishermen were needed to work on the fishing boats to clean and prepare the fish. More truck drivers were needed to transport the fresh/frozen seafood to the seafood processing plants. As an example of a negative effect, the demand for seafood created overfishing of some fish species, which endangered those species over time. Severe weather conditions also affected the efficiency of fishermen taking their boats out to sea.

Many people migrated to the lowlands of the Southeast region to farm the fertile soil. The soil was best suited for growing tobacco, rice, citrus fruits, and cotton. With proper crop rotation and favorable climatic conditions, industries were needed to process these agricultural products grown throughout the Southeast. As an example of a positive effect, additional farm workers, truck drivers, railroad engineers and conductors, and factory workers were needed to accommodate the demand for farming and to transport the crops to the next step in the process. As an example of a negative effect, without proper crop rotation some crops drained the nutrients/minerals from the soil. In addition, the weather had a major impact on the success of the growing season. Even today, a sudden frost/freeze in the most southern areas of the Southeast region can devastate the large citrus crops that grow best in the sandy soil. In this scenario, the scarcity of fruit crops can impact the job opportunities of the citrus farm workers and force them to migrate to a better crop location.

Many people migrated to the western area of the Southeast region, where the Appalachian Mountain System is located. Throughout the old, rounded mountains and valleys, a variety of forests provided loggers with many opportunities to saw down trees. These natural resources were transported by truck drivers to sawmills and cut into different sizes of lumber. As an example of a positive effect, many lumber mills and lumberyards provided jobs, not only for the loggers and lumber mill workers, but also for railroad engineers, truck drivers, and construction workers. As an example of a negative effect, many forests were cut down without seedling replenishment. This led to deforestation, soil erosion, the loss of animal habitats, and the destruction of fragile ecosystems.

States and regions are interdependent upon each other for natural, human, and capital resources to support their major industries. Manufacturing areas were clustered near centers of population. Once people moved from place to place, the acquisition and distribution of natural resources was needed. Major ports and harbors located in Norfolk, VA; Charleston, SC; New Orleans, LA; and Miami, FL allow humans to travel and to transport cargo to and from other parts of the United States and the world. Today, the Southeast region has established several international airport hubs located in Washington, D.C.; Richmond, VA; Charlotte, NC; Atlanta, GA; and Miami, FL and a multitude of interstate highways that lead to other regions of the United States. Large railroad hubs are located in Washington, D.C.; Atlanta, GA; and New Orleans, LA. A vast network of interstate highways/tractor trailers, airport hubs/airplanes,

railroads/trains, and ports/cargo ships enable the transportation of products throughout the United States and the world.

## **Major Industries of the Southeast Region**
• **Agricultural Industry**: After the Civil War, the major crops of tobacco and cotton had been destroyed in the Southeast region. Even though the climate was conducive for agriculture, the soil was not. The farmers were unable to produce ample crops or raise livestock to make a living. The fertile soil had been depleted of its minerals from the lack of crop rotation. Therefore, the livestock were unable to graze in the fields. Most farmers migrated westward to find fertile soil to farm and raise livestock. Today, frequent rain and/or a long growing season make it possible for many different crops to grow well in the Southeast region. Tobacco, sugar cane, citrus fruits, peanuts, rice, soybeans, and cotton are important crops in this region. Farmers also raise poultry and hogs, as well as beef and dairy cattle. Eggs are also a product of the Southeast.
• **Fishing/Seafood Industry**: Fish and seafood are important products of the Southeast region. Warm waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, as well as the Chesapeake Bay, are key areas for fishermen. After harvesting a variety of fish (such as tuna and shrimp), the fishermen sell their catch to industries that process fish products and to agricultural industries that convert fish byproducts into fertilizer.
• **Manufacturing Industry**: Due to the proximity to the cotton fields in the Southeast, many textile factories/mills were established in small nearby towns.
• **Mining and Fossil Fuel Industries**: The mountains of the Southeast region contain the natural resources of coal, copper, lead, and iron ore deposits. Coal was a key natural resource that was used to heat houses, buildings, and industries throughout the East Coast. The working conditions of these miners were dangerous and unhealthy. Salaries were low. In the past, the miners used physical labor to dislodge and remove the rocks and minerals from the mines. They transported the natural resources by railroad to industries in the Northeast region to process. The steel mills and their employees were dependent on the natural resources located in the Southeast mines. Many miners and their families chose to migrate to the West for better jobs and for better working conditions. Today, more advanced methods of mining and extracting the natural resources from the mines make the process more efficient.
Through advanced technology, the miners can efficiently extract the minerals that are embedded underground. Most of the world is powered by non-renewable fossil fuels such as coal, petroleum, and natural gas. Deposits of coal, petroleum, and natural gas can be found in the Southeast region. Oil rigs are located in the Gulf of Mexico and coal mines are located in the Appalachian Mountains.
• **Tourism Industry**: Many historical sites such as Jamestown, VA; Atlanta, GA; New Orleans, LA; and Washington, D.C. are located in the Southeast. There are also many recreational destinations such as state and national parks, as well as cultural centers in the region. Beaches are also an important destination for tourists in the Southeast. The tourism industry is dependent upon park rangers, recreation, and historic tour guides.
A state is an example of a political region. States may be grouped as part of different regions, depending upon the criteria used. Cities serve as centers of trade and have political, economic, and cultural significance. Students should have many opportunities

to determine the absolute and relative locations of these states, the capital cities, and the additional cities significant to the historical development of this region.

## **Additional Cities Significant to the Historical Development of the Southeast Region**

• **Jamestown** (Virginia): Jamestown is now located on an island in the James River in southeastern Virginia. It was the first permanent English settlement in North America. John Rolfe cultivated a better tasting tobacco that became the first cash crop of the Virginia colony.

• **Miami** (Florida): Miami is located in southeastern Florida. Tourism is its main industry with its extensive recreational and convention facilities. It is also a popular cruise ship port. Other industries include processing and shipping agricultural products, aircraft building, and textiles. Over half the population is Hispanic, with a strong Cuban influence on the city.

• **New Orleans** (Louisiana): New Orleans is located in southeast Louisiana along natural levees on the banks of the Mississippi River. It is a major United States port. Tourism has a major impact on New Orleans' economy.

• **Washington,** (D.C.): Washington, D.C. is located on the east bank of the Potomac River between Maryland and Virginia. The United States Constitution established the District of Columbia (D.C.) allowing Congress to designate it as the nation's capital. It is a federal district, not a part of any state.