

## 1. Elevation: Lowlands and Highlands

The Southeast is a region of lowlands and highlands. The low Coastal Plain stretches along the southeastern coast from Virginia to Louisiana. The water level of the rivers and swamps in this region rise and fall with the ocean tides each day. When the ocean rises at high tide, seawater flows onto this lowland area. When the tide pulls back, water levels drop.

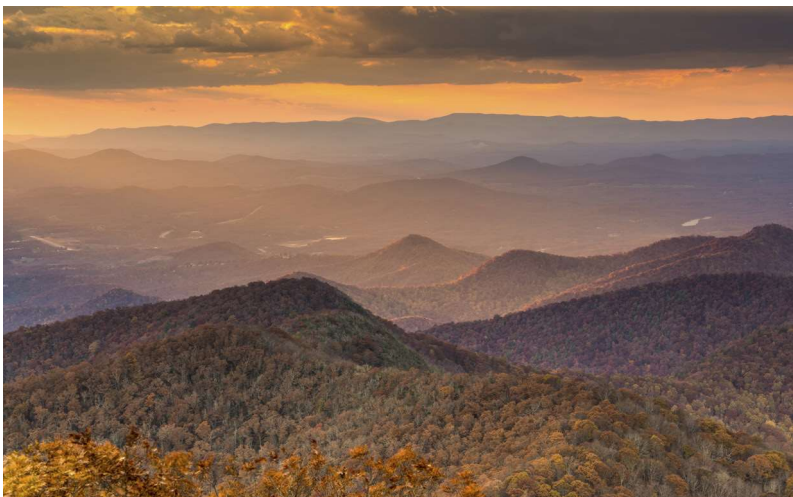
The Coastal Plain ends at the **foothills** of the Appalachian Mountains. This area of low, rolling hills is called the *Piedmont*. Piedmont, in French, means “foot of the mountains.” Beyond the Piedmont rise the Appalachian Mountains. Some of the peaks in this mountain chain are more than 6,000 feet high.

Elevation affects life here in many ways. For example, elevation affects climate. The higher the elevation of a place, the colder it is. Plants that grow well in the warm lowland freeze in the cool highland. Elevation also affects soil. Lowland soil is rich and good for farming. Highland soil is rocky and not easy to farm.

Elevation affects travel, as well. Travel in the lowlands is faster and easier, while travel in the highlands is slower and more difficult. People from the mountains sometimes joke that the only way to get to some of the tiny Appalachian towns is to be born there!



Lowlands are common in the Southeast. During high tide, seawater flows onto these lowlands.



The Appalachian mountain range stretches through many states. These mountains are in North Carolina.

# Geographic Features of the Southeast





Shipping by boat is important for cities in the Southeast. These cargo ships are carrying goods along the Mississippi River.

## 2. Rivers and Ocean

The Southeast has a long coastline and many rivers. Most of its rivers begin in the Appalachian Mountains. On the eastern side of the Appalachians, rivers flow across the Piedmont and the Coastal Plain to the Atlantic Ocean. In the southern Appalachians, rivers flow into the Gulf of Mexico. On the western side of the mountains, they flow into the Mississippi River.

Southerners use their rivers and the ocean for fun. Swimming, fishing, and boating are popular water sports.

People in the Southeast also use their waterways for transportation. Shipping by boat is an inexpensive way to move crops and goods over long distances.

Many port cities developed along the coast where rivers reach the sea. One of the busiest port cities is Miami, which is located near the southern tip of Florida. Much of its trade is with countries in Central and South America. For this reason, people of Miami call their city the “Gateway of the Americas.”

The port of Miami is also home to many cruise ships. Each year, millions of people leave Miami on cruise ships for vacations at sea. No wonder Miami is also known as the “Cruise Capital of the World.”

### 3. The Fall Line

Many of the rivers that cross the Coastal Plain are **navigable**. A navigable river is one that is both deep and wide enough for ships to use. But when ships reach the Piedmont, they stop. The place where they stop is called the **fall line**. A fall line is an imaginary line at the point where rivers drop from higher land to lower land.

In this case, the fall line is where the Piedmont meets the Coastal Plain. The edge of the Piedmont drops sharply at this point. As rivers flow over this drop, they form waterfalls. Ships cannot continue to sail upstream beyond these falls.

For early settlers in the Southeast, the fall line was a problem. Settlers on the Coastal Plain depended on rivers to send their crops to market. But when settlers moved up to the Piedmont, they had no good way to ship their crops to the coast.

Some people saw this problem as an opportunity. Traders set up trading posts right on the fall line, where goods that arrived by boat from the coast could be traded for meat and crops raised in the highlands.

Other people settled on the fall line because they knew how to use falling water to run machines. They built sawmills, flour mills, and workshops that ran on waterpower. Many fall-line towns—such as Richmond, Virginia; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Macon, Georgia—grew into large cities.

This powerful rapids area of the Potomac River shows the presence of a fall line. Ships cannot travel past the fall line to trade goods.



## 4. Natural Resources

While a lot of people choose to live in the Southeast for its many rivers, others live in the area because it is rich in **natural resources**. Natural resources include land, oceans, forests, minerals, and fuels.

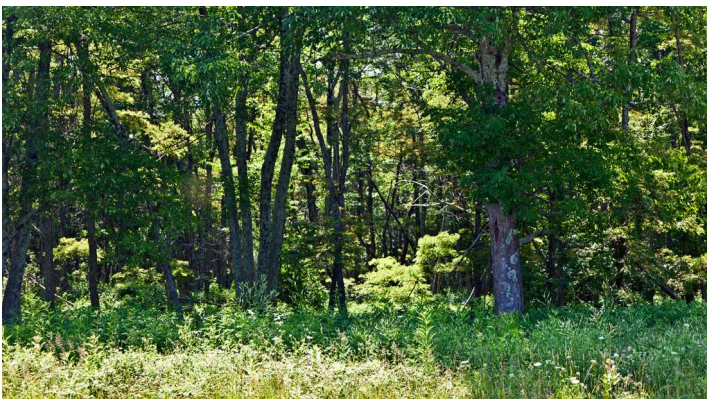
Land was the first natural resource that attracted people to the Southeast. Growing crops and raising animals were two of the largest **industries** for many years. An industry is all the businesses that produce one kind of good or provide one kind of service.

Today, many industries are important to the economy of the region. On your tour of the Southeast, you learned about two industries that developed from resources hidden under the ground. One is the coal mining industry. Another is the oil industry.

The Southeast's steel industry is built on another hidden resource. In the 1800s, people discovered iron at Red Mountain in Alabama. Iron ore is used to make steel. Built at the foot of Red Mountain, Birmingham, Alabama, became a steelmaking center.

Some industries are based on the Southeast's large forests. Sawmills cut trees into lumber. Paper mills grind wood into gooey wood pulp. This pulp is then used to make paper. Furniture makers turn trees into tables and chairs. Right now, you may be sitting on a chair that was made in the Southeast.

A forest is an important natural resource in the Southeast. Industries, such as the paper industry, use this resource to make goods we want.





## 5. A Long Growing Season

The business of growing crops and raising animals is called **agriculture**. Agriculture is an important part of the economy of the Southeast. Most farmers need three things from nature: good soil, plenty of rain, and a long growing season. The Southeast has all three.

Many crops grow well in the Southeast, cotton being a good example. Cotton plants need plenty of water and six months of warm weather, and the Southeast meets these needs perfectly.

In the 1800s, cotton was the main crop grown in the Southeast. Then disaster struck when a little bug called the boll weevil invaded cotton fields. The boll weevil destroyed the cotton before it was ready for harvest, leaving many farmers ruined. Those who survived learned a hard lesson. No longer could they depend on just one crop.

Today, the Southeast is a region of mixed agriculture. Farmers on the Coastal Plain grow rice, cotton, peanuts, and other warm-weather crops. Orange groves cover large parts of Florida. Piedmont farmers raise dairy cattle, peaches, and tobacco. Farmers in Appalachia grow corn and apples in mountain valleys.

Citrus fruits and cotton are important crops in the Southeast. People around the United States use these crops every day.

## 6. Dangerous Weather

Not every day is sunny in the Southeast. This area has many different types of weather. Some weather is dangerous and can hurt people or destroy property.

Rain falls all year long in the Southeast. Sometimes, storms bring too much rain, which can result in a flood. During a flood, a river fills with more water than it can hold. The extra water flows over the river's banks onto its **floodplain**, or a low, flat land along a river.

Most rivers flood from time to time, but floods become dangerous when people live and work on floodplains. Floods do much more than cover the floodplain with muddy water. The water can destroy homes, crops, and people's lives.

Though floods can cause a lot of damage, the most dangerous storms are hurricanes. Hurricanes are powerful storms with winds of 74 miles per hour or more. They form over warm water but can move onto land. As a hurricane grows, it produces heavy rain and high waves. Almost every year, at least one hurricane strikes the Southeast.

**Tornadoes** are another threat to the Southeast. A tornado is a violent and powerful windstorm shaped like a funnel. Tornadoes form over land and can have wind speeds of 300 miles per hour. The winds of powerful tornadoes are strong enough to lift cars and destroy houses. The people of the Southeast have to prepare for several tornadoes each year.

It is hard for scientists to predict the paths of hurricanes and tornadoes. Many cities in the Southeast have tornado and hurricane warning systems so that people can do their best to be ready for them.



Floods can cause a lot of damage to buildings in towns and cities. In Miami, store owners put sand bags in front of doors to prevent water from getting inside.

Tornadoes are very dangerous. They can cause a lot of damage to property and nature.

