

Fresno (/ˈfrɛzno/ FREZ-noh), the county seat of Fresno County, is a city in the U.S. state of California. As of 2015, the city's population was 520,159, making it the fifth-largest city in California, the largest inland city in California and the 34th-largest in the nation. Fresno is in the center of the San Joaquin Valley and is the largest city in the Central Valley, which contains the San Joaquin Valley. It is approximately 220 miles (350 km) northwest of Los Angeles, 170 miles (270 km) south of the state capital, Sacramento, or 185 miles (300 km) south of San Francisco. The name Fresno means "ash tree" in Spanish, and an ash leaf is featured on the city's flag.

In 1872, the Central Pacific Railroad established a station near Easterby's—by now a hugely productive wheat farm—for its new Southern Pacific line. Soon there was a store around the station and the store grew the town of Fresno Station, later called Fresno. Many Millerton residents, drawn by the convenience of the railroad and worried about flooding, moved to the new community. Fresno became an incorporated city in 1885. By 1931 the Fresno Traction Company operated 47 streetcars over 49 miles of track.

Before World War II, Fresno had many ethnic neighborhoods, including Little Armenia, German Town, Little Italy, and Chinatown. In 1940, the Census Bureau reported Fresno's population as 94.0% white, 3.3% black and 2.7% Asian. (Incongruously, Chinatown was primarily a Japanese neighborhood and today Japanese-American businesses still remain). During 1942, Pinedale, in what is now North Fresno, was the site of the Pinedale Assembly Center, an interim facility for the relocation of Fresno area Japanese Americans to internment camps. The Fresno Fairgrounds was also utilized as an assembly center.

In September 1958, Bank of America launched a new product called BankAmericard in Fresno. After a troubled gestation during which its creator resigned, BankAmericard went on to become the first successful credit card; that is, a financial instrument that was usable across a large number of merchants and also allowed cardholders to revolve a balance (earlier financial products could do one or the other but not both). In 1976, BankAmericard was renamed and spun off into a separate company known today as Visa Inc.

In the 1970s, the city was the subject of a song, "Walking Into Fresno", written by Hall Of Fame guitarist Bill Aken and recorded by Bob Gallion of the world-famous "WWVA Jamboree" radio and television show in Wheeling, West Virginia. Aken, adopted by Mexican movie actress Lupe Mayorga, grew up in the neighboring town of Madera and his song chronicled the hardships faced by the migrant farm workers he saw as a child. Aken also made his first TV appearance playing guitar on the old country-western show at The Fresno Barn.

Fresno has three large public parks, two in the city limits and one in county land to the southwest. Woodward Park, which features the Shinzen Japanese Gardens, numerous picnic areas and several miles of trails, is in North Fresno and is adjacent to the San Joaquin River Parkway. Roeding Park, near Downtown Fresno, is home to the Fresno Chaffee Zoo, and Rotary Storyland and Playland. Kearney Park is the largest of the Fresno region's park system and is home to historic Kearney Mansion and plays host to the annual Civil War Revisited, the largest reenactment of the Civil War in the west coast of the U.S.

Between the 1880s and World War II, Downtown Fresno flourished, filled with electric Street Cars, and contained some of the San Joaquin Valley's most beautiful architectural buildings. Among them, the original Fresno County Courthouse (demolished), the Fresno Carnegie Public Library (demolished), the Fresno Water Tower, the Bank of Italy Building, the Pacific Southwest Building, the San Joaquin Light & Power Building (currently known as the Grand 1401), and the Hughes Hotel (burned down), to name a few.

Fulton Street in Downtown Fresno was Fresno's main financial and commercial district before being converted into one of the nation's first pedestrian malls in 1964. Renamed the Fulton Mall, the area contains the densest collection of historic buildings in Fresno. While the Fulton Mall corridor has suffered a sharp decline from its heyday, the Mall includes some of the finest public art pieces in the country, including the only Pierre-Auguste Renoir piece in the world that one can walk up to and touch. Current plans call for the reopening of the Fulton Mall to automobile traffic. The public art pieces will be restored and placed near their current locations and will feature wide sidewalks (up to 28' on the east side of the street) to continue with the pedestrian friendly environment of the district.

The neighborhood of Sunnyside is on Fresno's far southeast side, bounded by Chestnut Avenue to the West. Its major thoroughfares are Kings Canyon Avenue and Clovis Avenue. Although parts of Sunnyside are within the City of Fresno, much of the neighborhood is a "county island" within Fresno County. Largely developed in the 1950s through the 1970s, it has recently experienced a surge in new home construction. It is also the home of the Sunnyside Country Club, which maintains a golf course designed by William P. Bell.

The popular neighborhood known as the Tower District is centered around the historic Tower Theatre, which is included on the National List of Historic Places. The theater was built in 1939 and is at Olive and Wishon Avenues in the heart of the Tower District. (The name of the theater refers to a well-known landmark water tower, which is actually in another nearby area). The Tower District neighborhood is just north of downtown Fresno proper, and one-half mile south of Fresno City College. Although the neighborhood was known as a residential area prior, the early commercial establishments of the Tower District began with small shops and services that flocked to the area shortly after World War II. The character of small local businesses largely remains today. To some extent, the businesses of the Tower District were developed due to the proximity of the original Fresno Normal School, (later renamed California State University at Fresno). In 1916 the college moved to what is now the site of Fresno City College one-half mile north of the Tower District.

This vibrant and culturally diverse area of retail businesses and residences experienced a renewal after a significant decline in the late 1960s and 1970s.[citation needed] After decades of neglect and suburban flight, the neighborhood revival followed the re-opening of the Tower Theatre in the late 1970s, which at that time showed second and third run movies, along with classic films. Roger Rocka's Dinner Theater & Good Company Players also opened nearby in 1978,[citation needed] at Olive and Wishon Avenues. Fresno native Audra McDonald performed in the leading roles of *Evita* and *The Wiz* at the theater while she was a high school student. McDonald subsequently became a leading performer on Broadway in New York City and a Tony award winning actress. Also in the Tower District is Good Company Players' 2nd Space Theatre.

The neighborhood features restaurants, live theater and nightclubs, as well as several independent shops and bookstores, currently operating on or near Olive Avenue, and all within a few hundred feet of each other. Since renewal, the Tower District has become an attractive area for restaurant and other local businesses. Today, the Tower District is also known as the center of Fresno's LGBT and hipster Communities.; Additionally, Tower District is also known as the center of Fresno's local punk/goth/deathrock and heavy metal community.[citation needed]

The area is also known for its early twentieth century homes, many of which have been restored in recent decades. The area includes many California Bungalow and American Craftsman style homes, Spanish Colonial Revival Style architecture, Mediterranean Revival Style architecture, Mission Revival Style architecture, and many Storybook houses designed by Fresno architects, Hilliard, Taylor & Wheeler. The residential architecture of the Tower District contrasts with the newer areas of tract homes urban sprawl in north and east areas of Fresno.

Homes from the early 20th century line this boulevard in the heart of the historic Alta Vista Tract. The section of Huntington Boulevard between First Street on the west to Cedar Avenue on the east is the home to many large, stately homes. The original development of this area began circa 1910, on 190 acres of what had been an alfalfa field. The Alta Vista Tract, as the land would become known, was mapped by William Stranahan for the Pacific Improvement Corporation, and was officially platted in 1911. The tract's boundaries were Balch Avenue on the south, Cedar Avenue on the east, the rear property line of Platt Avenue (east of Sixth Street) and Platt Avenue (west of Sixth Street) on the north, and First Street on the west. The subdivision was annexed to the City in January 1912, in an election that was the first in which women voted in the community. At the time of its admission to the City, the Alta Vista Tract was uninhabited but landscaped, although the trees had to be watered by tank wagon. In 1914 developers Billings & Meyering acquired the tract, completed street development, provided the last of the necessary municipal improvements including water service, and began marketing the property with fervor. A mere half decade later the tract had 267 homes. This rapid development was no doubt hastened by the Fresno Traction Company right-of-way along Huntington Boulevard, which provided streetcar connections between downtown and the County Hospital.

The "West Side" of Fresno, also often called "Southwest Fresno", is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city. The neighborhood lies southwest of the 99 freeway (which divides it from Downtown Fresno), west of the 41 freeway and south of Nielsen Ave (or the newly constructed 180 Freeway), and extends to the city limits to the west and south. The neighborhood is traditionally considered to be the center of Fresno's African-American community. It is culturally diverse and also includes significant Mexican-American and Asian-American (principally Hmong or Laotian) populations.

The neighborhood includes Kearney Boulevard, named after early 20th century entrepreneur and millionaire M. Theo Kearney, which extends from Fresno Street in Southwest Fresno about 20 mi (32 km) west to Kerman, California. A small, two-lane rural road for most of its length, Kearney Boulevard is lined with tall palm trees. The roughly half-mile stretch of Kearney Boulevard between Fresno Street and Thorne Ave was at one time the preferred neighborhood for Fresno's elite African-American families. Another section, Brookhaven, on the southern edge of the West Side south of Jensen and west of Elm, was given the name by the Fresno City Council in an effort to revitalize the neighborhood's image. The isolated subdivision was for years known as the "Dogg Pound" in reference to a local gang, and as of late 2008 was still known for high levels of violent crime.

While many homes in the neighborhood date back to the 1930s or before, the neighborhood is also home to several public housing developments built between the 1960s and 1990s by the Fresno Housing Authority. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development has also built small subdivisions of single-family homes in the area for purchase by low-income working families. There have been numerous attempts to revitalize the neighborhood, including the construction of a modern shopping center on the corner of Fresno and B streets, an aborted attempt to build luxury homes and a golf course on the western edge of the neighborhood, and some new section 8 apartments have been built along Church Ave west of Elm St. Cargill Meat Solutions and Foster Farms both have large processing facilities in the neighborhood, and the stench from these (and other small industrial facilities) has long plagued area residents. The Fresno Chandler Executive Airport is also on the West Side. Due to its position on the edge of the city and years of neglect by developers, is not a true "inner-city" neighborhood, and there are many vacant lots, strawberry fields and vineyards throughout the neighborhood. The neighborhood has very little retail activity, aside from the area near Fresno Street and State Route 99 Freeway (Kearney Palm Shopping Center, built in the late 1990s) and small corner markets scattered throughout.

In the north eastern part of Fresno, Woodward Park was founded by the late Ralph Woodward, a long-time Fresno resident. He bequeathed a major portion of his estate in 1968 to provide a regional park and bird sanctuary in Northeast Fresno. The park lies on the South bank of the San Joaquin River between Highway 41 and Friant Road. The initial 235 acres (0.95 km<sup>2</sup>), combined with additional acres

acquired later by the City, brings the park to a sizable 300 acres (1.2 km<sup>2</sup>). Now packed with amenities, Woodward Park is the only Regional Park of its size in the Central Valley. The Southeast corner of the park harbors numerous bird species offering bird enthusiasts an excellent opportunity for viewing. The park has a multi-use amphitheatre that seats up to 2,500 people, authentic Japanese Garden, fenced dog park, two-mile (3 km) equestrian trail, exercise par course, three children's playgrounds, a lake, 3 small ponds, 7 picnic areas and five miles (8 km) of multipurpose trails that are part of the San Joaquin River Parkway's Lewis S. Eaton Trail. When complete, the Lewis S. Eaton trail system will cover 22 miles (35 km) between Highway 99 and Friant Dam. The park's numerous picnic tables make for a great picnic destination and a convenient escape from city life. The park's amphetheatre was renovated in 2010, and has hosted performances by acts such as Deftones, Tech N9ne, and Sevendust as well as numerous others. The park is open April through October, 6am to 10pm and November through March, 6am to 7pm. Woodward Park is home to the annual CIF(California Interscholastic Federation) State Championship cross country meet, which takes place in late November. It is also the home of the Woodward Shakespeare Festival which began performances in the park in 2005.

Formed in 1946, Sierra Sky Park Airport is a residential airport community born of a unique agreement in transportation law to allow personal aircraft and automobiles to share certain roads. Sierra Sky Park was the first aviation community to be built[citation needed] and there are now numerous such communities across the United States and around the world. Developer William Smilie created the nation's first planned aviation community. Still in operation today, the public use airport provides a unique neighborhood that spawned interest and similar communities nationwide.

Fresno is marked by a semi-arid climate (Köppen BSh), with mild, moist winters and hot and dry summers, thus displaying Mediterranean characteristics. December and January are the coldest months, and average around 46.5 °F (8.1 °C), and there are 14 nights with freezing lows annually, with the coldest night of the year typically bottoming out below 30 °F (−1.1 °C). July is the warmest month, averaging 83.0 °F (28.3 °C); normally, there are 32 days of 100 °F (37.8 °C)+ highs and 106 days of 90 °F (32.2 °C)+ highs, and in July and August, there are only three or four days where the high does not reach 90 °F (32.2 °C). Summers provide considerable sunshine, with July peaking at 97 percent of the total possible sunlight hours; conversely, January is the lowest with only 46 percent of the daylight time in sunlight because of thick tule fog. However, the year averages 81% of possible sunshine, for a total of 3550 hours. Average annual precipitation is around 11.5 inches (292.1 mm), which, by definition, would classify the area as a semidesert. Most of the wind rose direction occurrences derive from the northwest, as winds are driven downward along the axis of the California Central Valley; in December, January and February there is an increased presence of southeastern wind directions in the wind rose statistics. Fresno meteorology was selected in a national U.S. Environmental Protection Agency study for analysis of equilibrium temperature for use of ten-year meteorological data to represent a warm, dry western United States locale.

The official record high temperature for Fresno is 115 °F (46.1 °C), set on July 8, 1905, while the official record low is 17 °F (−8 °C), set on January 6, 1913. The average windows for 100 °F (37.8 °C)+, 90 °F (32.2 °C)+, and freezing temperatures are June 1 thru September 13, April 26 thru October 9, and December 10 thru January 28, respectively, and no freeze occurred between in the 1983/1984 season. Annual rainfall has ranged from 23.57 inches (598.7 mm) in the "rain year" from July 1982 to June 1983 down to 4.43 inches (112.5 mm) from July 1933 to June 1934. The most rainfall in one month was 9.54 inches (242.3 mm) in November 1885 and the most rainfall in 24 hours 3.55 inches (90.2 mm) on November 18, 1885. Measurable precipitation falls on an average of 48 days annually. Snow is a rarity; the heaviest snowfall at the airport was 2.2 inches (0.06 m) on January 21, 1962.

The 2010 United States Census reported that Fresno had a population of 494,665. The population density was 4,404.5 people per square mile (1,700.6/km<sup>2</sup>). The racial makeup of Fresno was 245,306 (49.6%) White, 40,960 (8.3%) African American, 8,525 (1.7%) Native American, 62,528 (12.6%) Asian (3.6% Hmong, 1.7% Indian, 1.2% Filipino, 1.2% Laotian, 1.0% Thai, 0.8% Cambodian, 0.7% Chinese,

0.5% Japanese, 0.4% Vietnamese, 0.2% Korean), 849 (0.2%) Pacific Islander, 111,984 (22.6%) from other races, and 24,513 (5.0%) from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 232,055 persons (46.9%). Among the Hispanic population, 42.7% of the total population are Mexican, 0.4% Salvadoran, and 0.4% Puerto Rican. Non-Hispanic Whites were 30.0% of the population in 2010, down from 72.6% in 1970.

There were 158,349 households, of which 68,511 (43.3%) had children under the age of 18 living in them, 69,284 (43.8%) were opposite-sex married couples living together, 30,547 (19.3%) had a female householder with no husband present, 11,698 (7.4%) had a male householder with no wife present. There were 12,843 (8.1%) unmarried opposite-sex partnerships, and 1,388 (0.9%) same-sex married couples or partnerships. 35,064 households (22.1%) were made up of individuals and 12,344 (7.8%) had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 3.07. There were 111,529 families (70.4% of all households); the average family size was 3.62.

As of the census of 2000, there were 427,652 people, 140,079 households, and 97,915 families residing in the city. The population density was 4,097.9 people per square mile (1,582.2/km<sup>2</sup>). There were 149,025 housing units at an average density of 1,427.9 square miles (3,698 km<sup>2</sup>). The racial makeup of the city was 50.2% White, 8.4% Black or African American, 1.6% Native American, 11.2% Asian (about a third of which is Hmong), 0.1% Pacific Islander, 23.4% from other races, and 5.2% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 39.9% of the population.

To avoid interference with existing VHF television stations in the San Francisco Bay Area and those planned for Chico, Sacramento, Salinas, and Stockton, the Federal Communications Commission decided that Fresno would only have UHF television stations. The very first Fresno television station to begin broadcasting was KMJ-TV, which debuted on June 1, 1953. KMJ is now known as NBC affiliate KSEE. Other Fresno stations include ABC O&O; KFSN, CBS affiliate KGPE, CW affiliate KFRE, FOX affiliate KMPH, MNTV affiliate KAIL, PBS affiliate KVPT, Telemundo O&O; KNSO, Univision O&O; KFTV, and MundoFox and Azteca affiliate KGMC-DT.

Fresno is served by State Route 99, the main north/south freeway that connects the major population centers of the California Central Valley. State Route 168, the Sierra Freeway, heads east to the city of Clovis and Huntington Lake. State Route 41 (Yosemite Freeway/Eisenhower Freeway) comes into Fresno from Atascadero in the south, and then heads north to Yosemite. State Route 180 (Kings Canyon Freeway) comes from the west via Mendota, and from the east in Kings Canyon National Park going towards the city of Reedley.

Fresno is the largest U.S. city not directly linked to an Interstate highway. When the Interstate Highway System was created in the 1950s, the decision was made to build what is now Interstate 5 on the west side of the Central Valley, and thus bypass many of the population centers in the region, instead of upgrading what is now State Route 99. Due to rapidly raising population and traffic in cities along SR 99, as well as the desirability of Federal funding, much discussion has been made to upgrade it to interstate standards and eventually incorporate it into the interstate system, most likely as Interstate 9. Major improvements to signage, lane width, median separation, vertical clearance, and other concerns are currently underway.

Passenger rail service is provided by Amtrak San Joaquins. The main passenger rail station is the recently renovated historic Santa Fe Railroad Depot in Downtown Fresno. The Bakersfield-Stockton mainlines of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway and Union Pacific Railroad railroads cross in Fresno, and both railroads maintain railyards within the city; the San Joaquin Valley Railroad also operates former Southern Pacific branchlines heading west and south out of the city. The city of Fresno is planned to serve the future California High Speed Rail.