In 1607, English explorers on three tiny ships landed at what is today Hampton Roads, the birthplace of Colonial America. They created the first permanent English settlement and the first representative government in America. And, this is where Africans first arrived and first sought freedom. The region's early 17th century settlers who named the area Hampton Roads knew the harbor as Southampton's Roadstead. Hampton was used in honor of the Earl of Southampton, a major investor of the Jamestown settlers, and “Roadstead" is an old English word for a protected harbor. Here in Hampton Roads, centuries of history intersect with modern technology, economic growth, livable communities -- rural, suburban and urban -- a rich culture, a thriving maritime industry, breathtaking beachfront and landscapes and a strong military presence.

Strategically located in southeastern Virginia, Hampton Roads is one of the world’s biggest and deepest natural harbors and home to the world’s largest naval base at Norfolk.

Hampton Roads is also home to the world’s largest shipyard in Newport News and one of the busiest and fastest growing ports on the Eastern Seaboard, the Port of Virginia, with products popular the world over. The harbor flows into the Chesapeake Bay, the nation’s largest estuary, whose watershed covers 64,000 square miles and all or part of six states and Washington, D.C.

Located within 750 miles of two-thirds of the population of America, Hampton Roads' location at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay has long defined the economy and the culture, but it also creates unique challenges. While the many waterways contribute to commerce and the quality of life, they can also create logistical barriers.

Surrounded and bisected by water, Hampton Roads highways include an intricate system of nearly a dozen bridges, tunnels and ferries including the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, a four-lane 20-mile-long vehicular toll crossing and the only direct link between Virginia's Eastern Shore and South Hampton Roads, known as one of the seven engineering wonders of the modern world. Many of these bridge/tunnel connections are major choke points, since no new construction to address congestion has occurred since 1992. The Midtown Tunnel connecting the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth is the most heavily traveled two-lane road in Virginia.

With a population of over 1.6 million, Hampton Roads is among the top 35 largest metropolitan statistical areas, the fifth largest MSA in the Southeast and the largest between D.C. and Atlanta.

But, unlike many metropolitan areas, Hampton Roads' population nucleus is not confined to one central city, instead spread among several cities and counties, including Virginia Beach, the largest in population, and Suffolk, the largest in land area in Virginia.