

The Mentone in California and those around the world share more than just a name
Southland town's name is found the world over

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There are Bloomingtons, Newports and Riversides all over the country.
But there's another Southland town whose name is popular the world over.
Mentone.

Yep, Mentone is *out there*.

With 5,700 residents, it is one of San Bernardino County's smallest towns. Yet,
surprisingly, our Mentone is the largest of the four Mentones in the United States.

One is the 20th century ghost town where only a handful of residents remain.

Another has 440 people and sits in a stunning but remote region of the
Appalachians. A third Mentone has 900 people, but plenty more chickens.

A fifth Mentone, in Australia has a beach, but not much more.

Only Menton, France, the probable namesake of them all, could be considered more
than a place on the route to somewhere else. However, when considering its locale on the
resort-riddled Riviera - it's right next to Monte Carlo - it seems odd that the picturesque
ancient city has but a mere 25,000 citizens.

That all the world's Mentones are small simply makes them more precious.

Through history, the European "Mentone" (the Italians, who probably named it,
spell the town with an "e" at the end) was considered quite an asset.

The city has been passed through the centuries among the monarchs and
governments of France, Italy and Monaco.

Folks in Alabama who wrote a history of their Mentone contend the name means a
melodious spring. It would be a fitting tribute for our Mentone, because it sits beside the
sometimes flowing Santa Ana River and has the historic Zanja irrigation stream trickling
through.

But the word "menton" in Italian (and Spanish) means chin. If one looks real hard
and has a good imagination, the town - were it still part of Italy - would be situated in a
land mass that looks a bit like a chin.

Here is a look at the Mentones of the world and how they compare to Mentone,
Calif.:

Menton, France: Travelers undoubtedly have been coming here since the
beginning of time. Found on the itineraries - the ancient road maps of the Roman Empire
- and beloved by royalty and commoners, Menton has luxury hotels, a castle and
numerous grand old villas.

Menton once belonged to counts from the Italian city Ventimiglia and to a royal
family from Genoa, Christopher Columbus' birthplace. In the 14th century, it was
purchased by the lords of Monaco. In the 1800s, France bought it. Menton was a hot spot
during World War II. It suffered extensive damage and was occupied first by the Italians
and then the Germans.

How they're alike: Warm, sunny skies are the hallmark here. Both have beaches,
although the French city's beach has a harbor and ours borders a dry riverbed much of the
year.

Both are surrounded by citrus groves; there's a lemon festival each February in Menton and the National Orange Show each spring in nearby San Bernardino.

Backdrops for both are some pretty breathtaking mountains.

How they're different: Mentone, Calif., was built as a resort "destined to blossom...into a veritable Garden of Eden," as an early newspaper proclaimed. It had an impressive hotel akin to the red-roofed Hotel Del Coronado and was popular with tuberculosis patients seeking a hot, dry climate.

But now tourists quickly pass through Mentone on their way to Southern California's famous ski resorts. Menton, France, has maintained its status as a vacation destination and garden paradise. In fact, Menton's motto is, "My city is a garden."

Mentone, Texas: Even though it's found in several books about ghost towns, Mentone, Texas, remains the government seat of Loving County. That's probably because it's the only *town* in Loving County.

Mentone, Texas, was founded in 1925 by a couple of prospectors who discovered oil nearby. They first named it Ramsey - the last name of one of them - but there was already a Ramsey in the state and the post office rejected the name.

About 40 years earlier, a long-abandoned tiny outpost nearby had been named Mentone by an irrigation company surveyor who hailed from the French city. So the oil guys procured the name.

But the new Mentone didn't thrive, either.

1933 was Loving County's most populous year, with 600 people, most of them in Mentone, according to the "Handbook of Texas Online," published by the Texas State Historical Association. A decade later, as the oil waned, so did the people. In the '50s and '60s, there were about 100. The 1990 census reported 50. Today, only a few remain.

"The townsite is full of debris from the time of the oil boom as well as the County Courthouse and abandoned homes and buildings," writes Henry Chenoweth in "Ghost Towns on the Web." **How they're alike:** Both have small towns in their region named Barstow.

A utility company hampered growth in both places. Mentone Calif., was the hurt when the Redlands Light and Power Co. began siphoning its water source near the close of the 1800s. The drought that followed threatened to turn the community into a ghost town.

How they're different: Our Mentone was founded in 1887 by the Santa Fe Railway, which made it the farthest point east on its new kite-shaped track. At one point it was a tourist destination, with eight trains every day bringing tourists from Los Angeles. Soon, Southern Pacific built its tracks into town, running 14 trains a day.

Today, the community is more popular as an affordable housing source for East Valley families. Mentone, Texas, would find its favor with hermits.

Mentone, Ala.: This Mentone is situated in the southern Appalachian Mountains in the heart of the 83-mile-long Lookout Mountain park preserve which is filled with gorges, waterfalls, caves and rock formations.

Although only 440 people call Mentone, Ala., home, it hosts hundreds of thousands of tourists each year, many staying in the community's dozen summer camps. Nearby are

the Chickamauga Civil War battlefields, Sequoyah Caverns and history American Indian sites.

"It's beautiful out there. It's God's country," said Patty Tucker, executive director of the DeKalb County Tourist Association and one of Alabama Mentone's few full-time residents.

"The Lookout Mountain hamlet was founded by (former U.S. Calvaryman) John Mason of New York City, " writes DeKalb County Historian John Chambers.

"In 1870, Mason moved his family to Mentone in hopes that the pure mountain air would restore his failing health. John Mason died in 1911 at age 92. Now, that's quite an endorsement of Mentone. "

The town was named by Mason's daughter after she read an article about Queen Victoria vacationing in Menton, France, according to Chambers.

A Post office was established in 1888, but it wasn't until 1936 that Mentone incorporated.

How they're alike: Both towns are adjacent to quality ski areas and nestled beside rivers.

How they're different: Performers from the country music group Alabama were born and raised near Mentone, Ala. Golfer Dave Stockton makes Mentone, Calif., his home.

Mentone, Ala., has a Rhododendron Festival each May. When the weather turns hot in Mentone, Calif, hundreds of folks come to "rock out" by taking a dip in the Santa Ana River.

Mentone, Ind.: Eggs and aviation are the claim to fame for this small town of 900 in the northeastern portion of the Hoosier state.

A 12-foot, 3,000-pound concrete egg welcomes visitors to "The Egg Basket of the Midwest. " that gift from the Northern Indiana Co-op Association was built in 1946 to promote the annual Mentone Egg Show. It now sits on main street in the heart of downtown.

The egg put Mentone, Ind., on the map. It is listed in the "World's Largest Roadside Attractions," a Web site by Flagstaff, Ariz., city planner Martin Ince containing photos and information about huge, kitschy pieces of Americana. (The Cabazon dinosaurs can be found there, too.)

Lawrence D. Bell, founder of one of the country's greatest manufacturing companies, Bell Aircraft, was born here. Bell, who died in 1956, was chosen during World War II to design the country's first jet aircraft, the XP-59A fighter. A few years later, Chuck Yeager flew Bell's X-1 experimental rocket-propelled airplane in the world's first supersonic flight.

The town maintains an aviation museum named for Bell. In 1997, a 50th anniversary celebration of the sonic event was held at Edwards Air Force Base and at the airport in Mentone, Ind.

"It's a thriving little community," said Madeleine Fisher, director of the Bell Memorial Library, which was built when Bell donated money for a memorial honoring his parents. "I was born five miles out of town, I went away to college and I came back."

How they're alike: Both were laid out by railroad companies in the 1880s and named after the French resort town. Both have rivers on the outskirts of town.

How they're different: Mentone, Calif., first industry was rock and gravel processing. Mentone, Ind.'s, first industry was white oak lumber. The California town sits at the base of the mountains and part of a growing metropolitan area. The Indiana town is in a totally flat area and is surrounded by farms; its primary exports are grains, hogs and eggs.

Mentone, Australia: a beach town below Melbourne in Victoria, Mentone has been a quaint vacation spot since the 1800s. Artists flock here for the breathtaking yellow cliffs that line the coast.

But its beauty comes with a fatal flaw: High waves keep washing the beach away, forcing the town government to regularly truck in replacement sand.

How they're alike: Both are named after the French resort town. Residents speak English, but in slightly different flavors.

How they're different: They are worlds and hemispheres apart.