

# *Rhyme Travels*

**A Guide to the World in Rhyme**

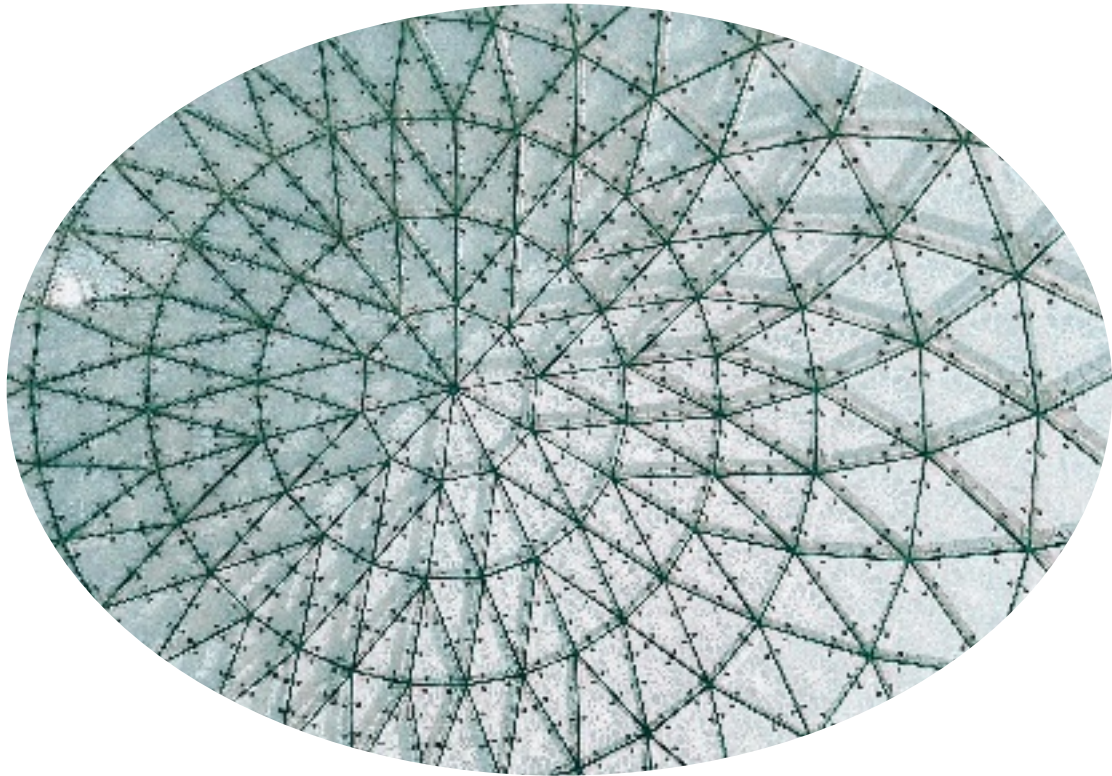
**For Hila, Maya, and Lia.**

**Thanks to my globe-trotting brother, Anthony Savery,  
and my partner on life's journey, Shiri Raz.**

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*This global traveller's guide in rhyme,  
is an epic journey through lands and time,  
blending geography and history,  
with a sprinkle of magic and mystery.*

*Consider this book as a backpack of facts,  
or a dusty, old Atlas of rhyming maps,  
where on every page that you turn,  
there's sights to see and much to learn.*



BATHYMETRICAL  
OF THE  
INDIAN OCEAN

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1. The map is a reproduction of the original map published by the British Admiralty in 1845. It is a bathymetric map of the Indian Ocean, showing the depths of the sea. The map is a reproduction of the original map published by the British Admiralty in 1845. It is a bathymetric map of the Indian Ocean, showing the depths of the sea.

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# *Our Journey Begins*





**Planet Earth** is a precious place,  
a giant ball that spins round and round,  
the third rock from the sun,  
where all types of life can be found.

Yes, we've got elephants and monkeys,  
skyscrapers, aeroplanes and cars.  
But so far, we've only found gas and rock,  
on our neighbours Venus and Mars.

Mother Earth was 'Terra' to the Romans,  
the ancient Greeks named her 'Gaia'.  
Nature has four seasons and elements  
– earth, air, water and fire.

Today, Earth is home to a growing  
eight billion global population –  
that's doubled in just five decades –  
made up of 195 different nations.

So before we start our trip,  
around the world in rhyme,  
let's take a few moments,  
to travel back in time.

A long, long time ago,  
the world was one big mass,  
a huge volcanic continent,  
filled with dust and gas.

Then it began to cool down,  
and a solid outer crust came to be,  
it got so cold that there was ice,  
which melted to form the seas.

Over hundreds of millions of years,  
the land began to separate,  
drifting apart into continents,  
caused by tectonic plates.

Now we have seven continents –  
Africa, Europe and Asia,  
North and South America,  
Antarctica and Oceania.

The rest of the world is water,  
or five oceans to be specific –  
the Atlantic, Indian and Arctic,  
plus the Southern and Pacific.

Within these vast bodies of water,  
are seas such as the Mediterranean,  
the Black, the Red and even Yellow,  
Arabian, Persian and Caribbean.

And these seas connect to rivers,  
including the Amazon, Nile and Zambezi.  
Sometimes rivers flow into lakes,  
like Lake Como, Superior and Galilee.

In areas which receive plenty of rain,  
you'll find lush forests filled with trees.  
The jungles of the Congo and Borneo  
have millions of insect and plant species.

Even in the middle of the desert,  
a barren place with little rain,  
you'll find cactus and palm trees,  
growing on the arid plains.



Then there are great mountains,  
of which Everest is the highest peak,  
high up in the Himalayas,  
to climb it can take weeks.

The coldest places on Earth,  
are the North and South Poles.  
If you travel to these frozen lands,  
you'll need plenty of warm clothes.

The hottest place on Earth,  
is along the equator line,  
it's at the centre of the planet,  
where the blistering sun shines.

Cities are filled with buildings,  
cars, people and commotion.  
Some cities are found inland,  
while others are along the ocean.

New York, London, Paris,  
Mumbai, Sao Paulo and Moscow –  
but there's no bigger city on Earth,  
than Japan's capital of Tokyo.

But wherever we travel,  
wherever we do roam,  
there is only one planet,  
that all humans call home.

And our travels help us realise,  
how great the Earth can be,  
and how precious it is to keep it,  
healthy for you, me and everybody.

So wherever we go,  
and whatever we do,  
let's remember to tread lightly,  
as we're passing through.





The background of the page is a photograph of a desert landscape. It features rolling sand dunes in various shades of orange, tan, and brown. The lighting is warm, suggesting a sunset or sunrise, which creates long, soft shadows and highlights the textures of the sand. The dunes are layered, with some in the foreground and others receding into the distance, creating a sense of depth. The overall mood is serene and expansive.

# *The Middle East*



*Salam Alaikum* and welcome,  
to our Middle Eastern trip.  
Our epic journey begins,  
in the magical land of Egypt.

The **ancient pyramids of Giza**  
are over 4,000 years old.  
They were built for pharaohs and kings,  
who were buried there with gold.

The Sphinx sits on the sand,  
a carved rock that everyone knows,  
a human head on a lion's body,  
with a famously chipped-off nose.

The Egyptian Museum in Cairo  
houses treasures in every room,  
from hieroglyphics and mummies,  
to the Tomb of Tutankhamun.

Cairo is home to 21 million people,  
it's Khan is a busy market with stalls,  
where you can buy drums, lamps  
or rugs, plus some yummy falafel.

The city of Alexandria was founded  
in 332 BCE by Alexander the Great.  
The Lighthouse of Alexandria, now a fort,  
was destroyed in 1480 by an earthquake.



Alexander the Great from Macedonia,  
had an empire that stretched to India.  
Egypt's last pharaoh before the Romans  
was the legendary Queen Cleopatra.

The Mediterranean Sea at Alexandria  
meets the magnificent River Nile,  
it flows 6,600 kilometres from Uganda,  
that's an astonishing 4,100 miles.

Heading down the Nile Valley  
you'll arrive to historic Luxor,  
home to the Valley of the Kings  
and vast temples galore.

The temples of **Karnak** were  
once populated by 80,000 people.  
The capital of ancient Thebes,  
it's the size of ten cathedrals.



Four colossal statues at **Abu Simbel**,  
are cut into cliffs, south of Aswan.  
Depicting the seated pharaoh Ramesses II,  
they overlook Lake Nasser, near Sudan.

The Sinai Peninsula from outer space  
looks like the shape of a heart.  
Holy for Jews, Christians, and Muslims,  
it's where the roots of these faiths start.

At the foot of Mount Sinai,  
100 kilometres from the Red Sea,  
is the world's oldest-working library,  
in Saint Catherine's Monastery.

The Red Sea's coral reef  
is a beautiful, colourful hive.  
The northernmost tropical sea,  
it's great to snorkel and dive.

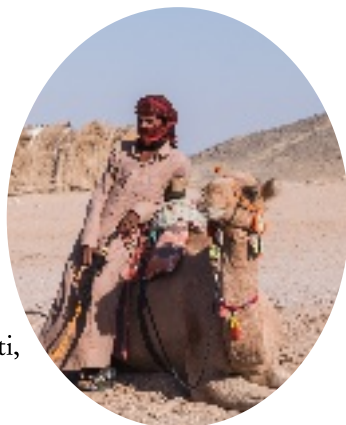






There are many Red Sea resorts  
like Sharm-el-Sheikh, Dahab and Taba,  
and across the border in Eilat  
or by boat to sunny Aqaba.

Aqaba is in the Kingdom of Jordan,  
which is mostly desert land –  
known for its caves, camels, and cacti,  
mountain roads and sand.



Wadi Rum is a magical place  
to camp out under the stars.

This *Wadi*, ‘valley’ in Arabic, has a  
landscape like the planet Mars.



Further north lies mystical **Petra**,  
the ancient capital of the Nabateans,  
nomadic traders on the old Spice Route,  
which was also used by the Romans.

Today, Petra is a man-made wonder,  
its temple caves are a spectacular sight.  
Nicknamed the ‘Red Rose City’,  
magnificent by day or candle-light.

Roman ruins are found in Amman,  
and Jerash, with its fine amphitheatre.

At Madaba, there’s a famous mosaic map  
of the Holy Land in the Byzantine era.

All over the Middle East,  
the **Bedouin** people do roam,  
a traditional tribe who camp outside  
and make the desert their home.

The **Dead Sea**, the lowest point on Earth,  
is some 430 metres below sea level,  
people come to float in its salty water,  
that’s shared by Jordan and Israel.

The small but famous land of Israel,  
has been conquered many times,  
by Babylonians, Romans, and Ottomans,  
before 1948 it was known as Palestine.

After World War II, Israel was declared  
the world's only Jewish state,  
but sadly this part of the Middle East,  
has seen many conflicts to date.

Jerusalem is a holy city  
for Christians, Muslims and Jews.  
The roof of the Tower of David,  
offers the city's best views.

There's the golden **Dome of Rock**,  
the 2,000-year-old Western Wall,  
and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre,  
said to be the site of Jesus' burial.

The impressive Israel Museum  
has one of the oldest Bible books  
– the Dead Sea Scrolls found in a cave,  
definitely worth taking a look.

The little city of Bethlehem,  
is famed for the Church of the Nativity,  
where it's believed Jesus was born,  
at Christmas it's a hive of activity.

The Masada is a rocky plateau,  
with a sunrise you cannot miss.  
See the Dead Sea from above,  
and the ruins of a Roman fortress.

In the middle of the Negev desert,  
is a giant crater called **Makhtesh Ramon**.  
It's like Israel's own Grand Canyon,  
showing millions of years of evolution.

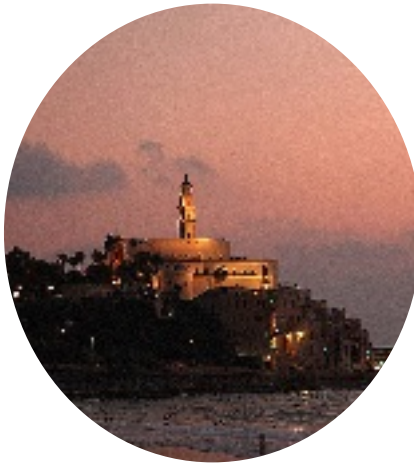






Tel Aviv, meaning ‘Hill of Spring’,  
is the Mediterranean Bauhaus city,  
while **Old Jaffa’s** white stone walls  
contain 4,000 years of history.

On the coast is a Roman city named  
after Augustus Caesar, Caesarea.  
Built by King Herod around 25 BCE  
in what was then called Judaea.



Haifa is a large industrial port,  
home to the **Gardens of the Baha’i** –  
a shining Persian shrine with steps  
that seem to climb up to the sky.

Nazareth is a place of pilgrimage,  
located in the north of Israel,  
the Basilica was built where it’s said  
Mother Mary saw the angel Gabriel.



Also named in biblical stories,  
is the nearby Sea of Galilee,  
it’s a freshwater lake surrounded  
by kibbutz villages and scenery.

The north of Israel borders  
both Lebanon and Syria –  
with the old city of Damascus,  
and the neolithic ruins of Palmyra.

Here, archaeological sites like Ebla,  
south of the Syrian city of Aleppo,  
show an early civilisation like Sumer  
and Babylonia, over 4,500 years ago.

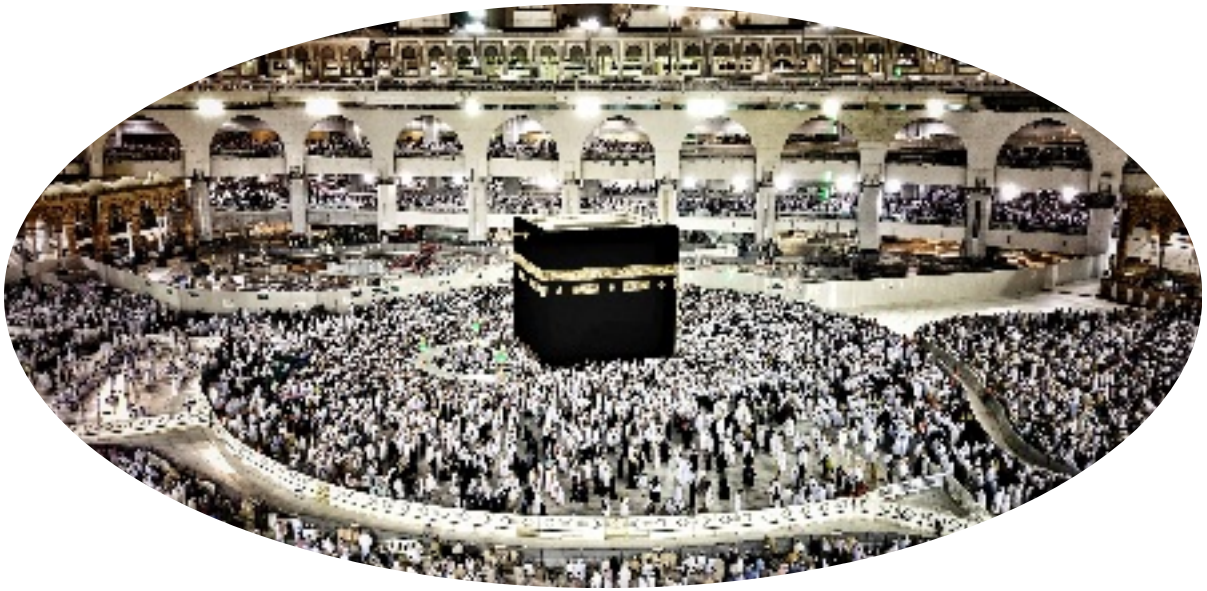
And so we end our journey,  
across the Middle East,  
– a land of history and mystery,  
and with hope, a land of peace.





# Arabia & Central Asia





The Arabian Peninsula  
is an oil-rich desert land,  
stretching from Yemen to Iran,  
it's known for its golden sands.

Between the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden,  
Yemen is the most fertile land in Arabia.  
Together with its neighbour Oman,  
it formed the biblical Kingdom of Sheba.

**Mecca** in Saudi Arabia  
is the holiest city for Muslims,  
birthplace of the Prophet Mohammed  
– each year it brings millions of pilgrims.

To the west lies Medina,  
home to the vast Prophet's Mosque,  
with its green dome and ten minarets,  
here, you'll never get lost.

On the edge of the Arabian desert  
you'll find cities like Abu Dhabi and Dubai  
– part of the United Arab Emirates –  
here the skyscrapers rise so high.

Doha, the capital of Qatar,  
is a futuristic modern city.  
It overlooks the Persian Gulf,  
an important place in history.

For in Iraq, four thousand years ago,  
was the ancient Kingdom of Babylon,  
now it's capital is called Baghdad,  
where the great Tigris River runs.

Between the Tigris and Euphrates,  
was one of the earliest civilisations,  
that invented the wheel and writing,  
in ancient Mesopotamia – the Sumerians.

A Sumerian temple built in 2100 BC,  
stands in south Iraq – the **Ziggurat of Ur**.  
Today, Iraq is home to 42 million people,  
mostly Sunni and Shia Muslims, and Kurds.

Nimrud, near the Tigris, was a major  
Assyrian city, also called Kalhu,  
dating from 1350 BCE, it's known  
for its 'lion king' statues – lamassu.

The ruins of ancient Persia are found  
in Iraq's larger neighbour, Iran,  
as is the rocky Valley of Stars canyon,  
and the sprawling capital city of Tehran.

**Persepolis**, the Persian city, was built  
around 515 BCE for Darius the Great.  
Darius was a devout Zoroastrian,  
now one of the world's oldest faiths.

The east of Iran borders  
Pakistan and Afghanistan,  
which neighbours Tajikistan,  
Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

This region, known as Central Asia,  
lies east of the great sea called the Caspian.  
Once part of the Silk Road trade route,  
the suffix 'stan' means 'land of' in Persian.



Kazakhstan, the world's ninth largest country,  
was part of the historical region of Turan.  
Inhabited by nomads, and later the Mongols,  
it's said to be where horse riding began.

Central Asia has the Karakum desert,  
the shrinking Aral Sea and Lake Balkhash.  
In the Hindu Kush mountains near  
Afghanistan, is the famous Khyber Pass.

This pass connects Kabul, the Afghan capital,  
with Pakistan's Islamabad and Peshawar.  
Afghanistan is a land of mosques, temples,  
and Buddha statues, many ruined by war.

In Pakistan, the lost city of Mohenjo-daro has early ruins dating from 2600 BCE, built by the great Indus Valley civilisation, on the **Indus River** from Tibet to Karachi.



K2, the world's second highest peak, is located near the region of Kashmir, named after the Karakoram mountains, it's a 8,611-metre climb for mountaineers.

North Pakistan has magnificent mosques and palaces at the fort of **Lahore**, built for the Mughal emperor Akbar, near India, wherein lies so much more.





# *India & the Himalayas*

Onwards into India,  
a country made up of large regions  
– like Rajasthan, Kashmir, and Gujarat –  
its population is nearly 1.4 billion.

That's one sixth of the world's people  
living in one colourful country,  
speaking Hindi, Bengali and other languages,  
though English is spoken widely.

Let's begin with New Delhi,  
India's bustling capital city,  
home to the Red Fort,  
built in the 17th century.

Delhi has a large statue of  
**Mahatma Gandhi** called Gyarah Murti –  
who protested against British rule in India  
with his famous Salt March of 1930.



Travel onto Agra Fort,  
also surrounded by red walls,  
it was the home of emperors  
at the time of the Mughals.

Agra is most famous for the  
iconically beautiful **Taj Mahal** –  
a mausoleum finished around 1639,  
made of glistening white marble.

The Golden Temple in Punjab  
was completed around the same time,  
though its gold leaf was added later,  
to this, the holiest **Sikh** shrine.

There are many faiths in India  
– Sikh, Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu –  
and so many temples, caves and holy sites,  
that we can only name a few.



Varanasi alone has over 2,000 temples,  
along the banks of the Ganges River,  
here the Kashi Vishwanath temple  
is dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva.

A sacred river for monks and pilgrims  
to pray, bathe, and light a candle,  
the Ganges runs through northern India  
right to the Bay of Bengal.

The biggest bay in the world,  
spanning India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar,  
Bengal has crocodiles, shipwrecks, and islands  
like Sri Lanka, Andaman, and Nicobar.



Modern Bangladesh was founded in 1971  
but its history goes back to ancient India,  
and Hinduism with 5,000-year-old texts,  
like the Vedas and Bhagavad Gita.

Sri Lanka is a pearl-shaped paradise,  
with boats and beaches galore,  
where locals cook fish and rice,  
as the sun sets on the shore.

Across the sea in southern India,  
are the regions of Tamil Nadu and Kerala,  
where monkeys and tigers live in jungles,  
and locals grow spices called ‘**masala**’.

Bangladesh, home to 169 million people,  
has the River Sangu and hills of Bandarban,  
Lalbagh Fort in the capital Dhaka, and the  
largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans.

At last we arrive in Mumbai,  
the city formerly known as Bombay,  
where the **Gateway of India**,  
shows we have come a very long way.





Head north to the ‘Roof of the World’,  
the gigantic Himalayan mountains,  
home to the Earth’s highest peaks,  
and a spectacular jagged terrain.

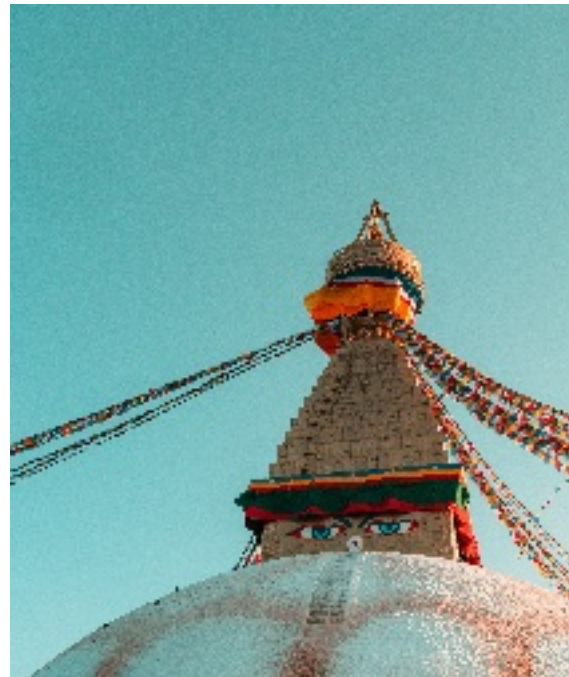
‘Hima’ means ‘snow’ and  
‘Laya’ is ‘abode’ in Sanskrit.  
Together, they span Pakistan, Afghanistan,  
Bhutan, Nepal, China, and Tibet.

**Mount Everest**, the world’s highest peak,  
is over 8,800 metres high,  
that’s 5.5 miles to the summit,  
up in the clouds in the sky.

It takes two months to climb Everest  
from the south or north base.

‘Chomolungma’, it’s name in Tibetan,  
means ‘Holy Mother’, a spiritual place.

The south base camp is in Nepal,  
a country with much to see and do,  
like visiting Hindu and Buddhist temples  
in the capital, Kathmandu.



The circular **Boudha Stupa**,  
with its mandala and painted eyes,  
is what Buddhists believe is a gateway  
between the earth and the skies.

Pokhara, a valley in the Himalayas,  
has many mountain trails to hike.  
Nearby, explore around Phewa Lake,  
by taking a boat, canoe, or bike.



You may see a bear or long-haired yak  
while in the Himalayan mountains,  
but you're less likely to see a yeti -  
known as the abominable snowman.

**Tibet**, to the north of the Himalayas,  
is a mystical place not to be forgotten.  
In the 1950s it was invaded by China,  
but is still the spiritual home of all Tibetans.

**Potala Palace** is a 1,300 year-old  
Tibetan dzong fortress, high up in Lhasa.  
It has 13-storeys, thousands of shrines,  
and was once the home of the Dalai Lama.

East of Nepal, south of Tibet  
is the Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan –  
a land of monasteries and monkeys,  
and unclimbed mountains, where we began.





# *The Far East*



China is humongous  
in every possible way,  
over 1.4 billion people  
reside there today.

Started in 220 BCE  
is **China's Great Wall** –  
some 21,196 kilometres long,  
the largest construction of them all.

Once part of the Silk Road,  
the ancient trade route linking  
Xi'an to the Roman Empire  
– it influenced religion and thinking.

The **Terracotta Army** near Xi'an,  
life-sized statues of horses and soldiers,  
were discovered in pits in 1974,  
but it's more than 2,000 years older.



This marvellous mausoleum was built  
for the first emperor of ancient Qin.  
Today the Republic of China  
has its capital in Beijing.

Here, the Forbidden City,  
once home to the emperor of Ming,  
is a network of palaces, temples, and  
opulent gardens that have to be seen.

The Temple of Heaven is even larger,  
founded in the 15th century,  
thought to be a temple of the Tao,  
the Chinese philosophy of harmony.



In the centre of Beijing  
is the vast Tiananmen Square,  
an area with grand national monuments,  
– many historical events happened there.

Further south on the East China Sea  
is the modern city of Shanghai.  
The Bund waterfront has many skyscrapers,  
like Shanghai Tower, 632 metres high.

Yu Yuan is a unique garden  
with bridges, pools, and rockeries,  
and old pagodas – tiered towers,  
where you can sip some local tea.

All over China you'll find  
paddy fields and tea plantations,  
along the Yangtze River and  
in Huangshan, the Yellow Mountains.

Sichuan is home of the Giant Panda,  
China's cute black and white bear,  
although hundreds have been rescued  
in Chengdu, they are still extremely rare.

In the South China Sea  
is the island city of Hong Kong,  
a financial hub with many towers,  
much like China's third city, Guangdong.

East of China, on the Pacific Ocean,  
is Japan – the 'Land of The Rising Sun'  
– made up of five main islands,  
of which Honshu is the largest one.

Japan has 125 million people  
with 37 million in greater **Tokyo**  
– the world's most populated area –  
it's in the shadow of a great volcano.





For Mount Fuji is Japan's highest peak,  
an iconic sight that everyone knows,  
that for five months of the year,  
is famously covered in snow.



Tokyo balances the traditional  
like the historic temple of Senso-ji,  
with ultra-modern architecture,  
like the towering Tokyo Skytree.

Japan is known for its arts and culture,  
and food like ramen, sashimi, and **sushi**,  
and celebrating the national flower,  
**Sakura**, the cherry blossom tree.

Other Japanese cities include  
Osaka, Nagoya, and Kyoto –  
Kyoto has thousands of gates at the  
**Fushimi Inari** shrine for the Shinto.





Alongside **Zen Buddhism**,  
Shinto is Japan's major religion.  
Their gods in nature, called *kami*,  
are deeply rooted in Japanese tradition.

As are the **Samurai** warriors,  
who ruled Japan for over 700 years.  
Museums around the country display  
their armour, swords, and spears.

Japan's most famous Buddhist temple  
is in the ancient Nara city, Tōdai-ji.  
This temple, with the world's largest  
bronze Buddha, was founded in 738 CE.

Hiroshima was largely destroyed  
by an atomic bomb in 1945.  
Today its park is dedicated to peace,  
and the city is very much alive.

The Korean peninsula lies between  
the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea.  
North and South Korea remain divided  
since the Korean War ended in 1953.

North Korea is a communist state  
and its capital is in P'yŏngyang.  
South Korea's capital is Seoul,  
formerly called Hanyang.



N Seoul Tower, atop of Mount Namsan,  
offers a bird's eye view of the city.

**Gyeongbokgung Palace**, built in 1395,  
was home of the Joseon Dynasty.

The Joseon Kingdom ruled Korea for over five imperial centuries, and many shrines are found in Jeonju, and elsewhere across the country.

Jeju Island, called the 'Hawaii of Korea', has its highest peak – volcano Hallasan. Jingwansa temple, dating from 1000 BCE, is a Buddhist shrine near Mount Bukhansan.

North of China and Korea, but south of Russia, is the nomadic country of Mongolia.

Once the world's largest empire, it ruled from East Asia to the Arabian Peninsula.

The Mongol Empire was founded in the 13th century by **Genghis Khan**.

Today, the **Gobi desert** is a cold wilderness of yurts, circular tents, and farms.



Indeed, the influence of the ancient East, still echoes throughout the ages, from the Buddha, Shinto, or **Confucius**, the greatest of the Chinese sages.





An aerial photograph of terraced rice fields in Southeast Asia. The terraces are carved into a hillside, creating a series of concentric, wavy lines that follow the contours of the land. The rice plants are in various stages of growth, with some appearing as bright green and others as a more yellowish-green. Several palm trees are scattered throughout the terraces, adding to the tropical feel of the landscape. The overall image has a high-contrast, almost painterly quality.

# *Southeast Asia*



Below China and above Australia  
is the region of Southeast Asia.  
Spanning 11 different countries,  
it's a large, diverse area.



Let's start with the Kingdom of **Thailand**,  
a kind of earthly paradise –  
idyllic islands and beaches in the south,  
in the north, temples and fields of rice.

Thailand used to be named Siam,  
right up until the year 1939.

Unlike other parts of Asia,  
it's never been conquered at any time.

Take a **tuk-tuk** around Bangkok,  
to see a big Buddha who's reclining  
at Wat Po near the Grand Palace,  
made of gold-copper that's shining.

Board a train to Ayutthaya –  
which was once Siam's capital,  
from the 14th to 18th centuries –  
to explore ruins of Buddhist temples.

The small city of Korat has a statue  
of Thailand's historic heroine, Lady Mo.  
And the ancient city of Sukhothai,  
has old monasteries with carved stucco.

Get a Thai boat from Krabi  
to the islands of Phuket or Phi Phi.  
These tropical islands have great bays,  
where huge limestones stick out of the sea.





Koh Samui and Koh Phangan

are also very beautiful.

Dance at a Full Moon Party,

or take a dip at an inland waterfall.

Head to the hills in northern Thailand

to the cities of Chaing Rai and Chaing Mai

– both former capitals of the Lanna Kingdom,

with temples, elephants, and tribes.

The Golden Triangle on the Mekong River

is where three countries meet –

Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos –

and a huge white Buddha faces east.

A mostly rural country, once called Burma,

many monks and monkeys live in Myanmar.

In the city of Yangon is **Shwedagon Paya**,

golden temples that look spectacular.

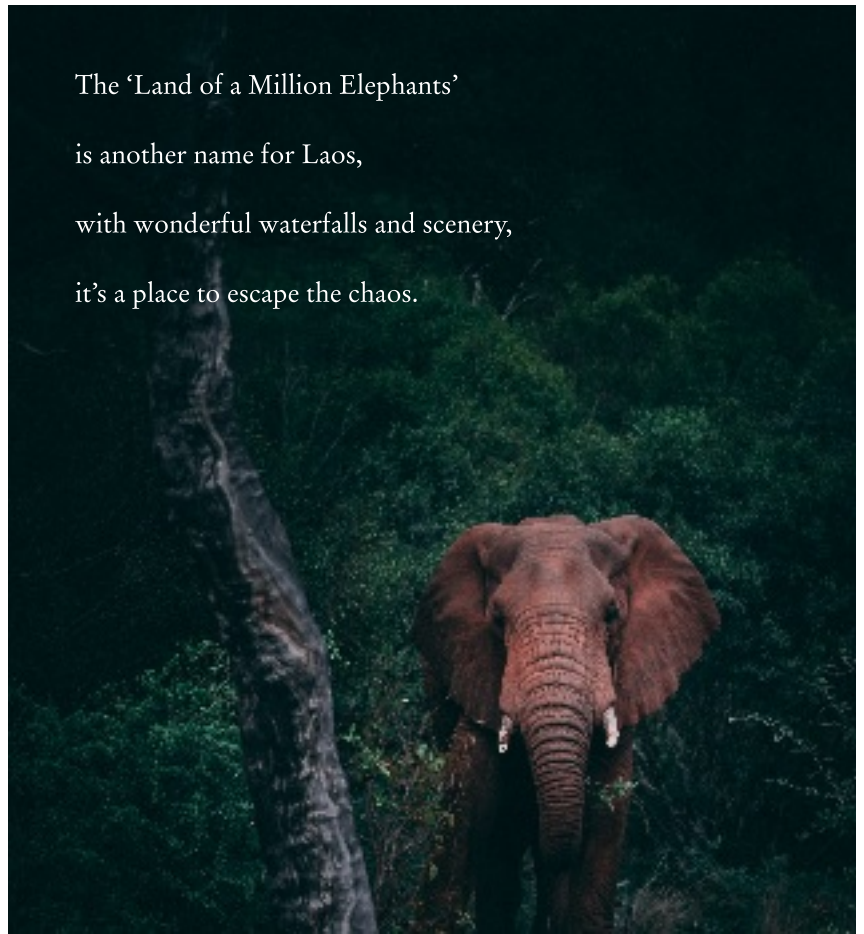


The ‘Land of a Million Elephants’

is another name for Laos,

with wonderful waterfalls and scenery,

it’s a place to escape the chaos.



Vietnam, on the South China Sea,

has over 3,000 kilometres of coast.

The famous limestones of Halong Bay

are best explored by a boat.

In the 1960’s and 1970’s

the Vietnam War raged on and on,

from the city of Hanoi in the north

to Ho Chi Minh, then called Saigon.

The Perfume River flows to Hue,

with flowers that give it a sweet aroma.

Nearby, the ancient My Son temples

were built for the kingdom of Champapura.



But the greatest temple complex in Asia  
can be found across the border,  
the majestic monuments of **Angkor Wat**,  
Cambodia's very own world wonder.

From the ninth to the 15th centuries,  
this was the heart of the Khmer Empire.  
With over 1,000 temple buildings,  
Angkor covers some 400 acres.

Just north of the equator,  
is a country called Malaysia.

It comprises the island of Borneo  
and the Malay Peninsula.

In the capital city of Kuala Lumpur,  
the twin **Petronas Towers** rise high.  
And Borneo is also shared with  
Indonesia and the tiny state of Brunei.

Thick, lush rainforest dominates  
the world's third-largest island, Borneo.  
Home to orangutans, elephants, bats,  
and some rare species of rhinos.

Singapore, south of Malaysia  
is a modern port city that must be seen.  
Visit the Cloud Forest, gardens in the sky,  
with 100 hectares of green.





The Philippines has 7,640 islands

and its capital city is Manila.

It has the brown Chocolate Hills in Bohol

and white, sandy beaches like vanilla.

Indonesia has 17,000 islands

and a population of 270 million.

It's the fourth most populous on Earth,

and today Islam is its main religion.

Jakarta, it's massive capital city

is on the island of Java.

Nearby volcanoes like Krakatoa

are alive with molten lava.

The Sunda islands are home to

the dinosaur-like **komodo dragons** –

the largest lizard, three metres long –

though they rarely attack humans.

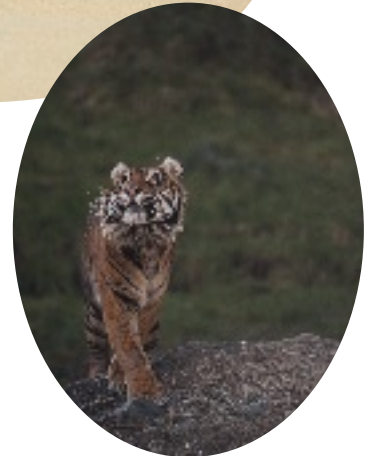


The biggest of the Sunda islands

is the tropical rainforest of Sumatra,

home to endangered Sumatran tigers,

it's also on the line of the equator.



**Bali** is a mountainous island,

with temples and macaque monkeys,

where bamboo and banyan trees grow,

it's a kind of natural sanctuary.

And so we end our journey in Asia,

the biggest continent of them all,

covering 30 percent of Earth's land,

home to 4.7 billion people in total.



# Oceania





The world's smallest continent  
is the region known as Oceania,  
comprising the islands of Melanesia,  
Micronesia, Polynesia, and Australasia.

Yet Australia alone is awesome,  
the sixth largest country by landmass,  
slightly bigger than Western Europe –  
though most of it is outback.

In this arid Australian desert  
there's a giant rock that glows red,  
called **Uluru** – the 'Great Pebble',  
to local tribes, it is sacred.

Australia, for 65,000 years,  
has been the **Aboriginal** people's home.  
They arrived on boats from Africa or Asia,  
but no-one really knows where they're from.

The European explorers didn't arrive  
until the late 17th century,  
and over time built cities like Perth,  
Melbourne, and Sydney.

Canberra is Australia's capital,  
but not everyone knows,  
it's at the foot of the Australian Alps,  
which are sometimes covered with snow.



**Sydney Opera House** is unique,  
with its white sail-shaped shells,  
south of Sydney's Harbour Bridge,  
one of the iconic buildings of the world.



The famous Bondi Beach –  
‘Bondi’ means ‘waves’ in Aboriginal –  
has sunbathers, surfers, and sharks,  
and lifeguards to protect the people.

Melbourne is a coastal city  
in the state of Victoria,  
a mix of cultures, art, and food,  
and sports, along the River Yarra.

The Great Ocean Road stretches  
from Melbourne to Adelaide.  
Stop at the 12 Apostles limestones,  
and many beaches along the way.

**Kangaroo** Island across from Adelaide  
is home to emus, koala bears, and wallabees.  
There's also penguins and sea lions,  
and a forest of tall eucalyptus trees.

Tasmania, 240 kilometres from the mainland,  
is a large island that's mountainous.  
It's home to weird and rare creatures like the  
Tasmanian devil and duck-billed platypus.

Crocodiles are mostly found in the north,  
above the line of the Tropic of Capricorn,  
salty crocs can grow to seven metres long,  
and are dangerous at dusk or dawn.







But Australia's most-awesome sight  
has to be the **Great Barrier Reef**.

Covering 2,000 kilometres near Queensland,  
its size and diversity are beyond belief.

This underwater world has 400 types of coral,  
and thousands of species of colourful fish.

Yet, due to warming sea temperatures,  
many species are on the endangered list.

Made up of two main islands

is the country of New Zealand –  
a landscape blessed by nature,  
where the largest city is Auckland.

New Zealand was first inhabited  
by the people of the Māori,  
who sailed from the Polynesian islands  
like Samoa, Tahiti, and Hawaii.



The **Māori** arrived in long canoes,  
which they called ‘waka’.  
They’re famous for their ‘moko’ tattoos  
and the tribal dance of the ‘haka’.



Aoraki, also known as Mount Cook,  
in Māori means ‘Cloud Piercer’ –  
it’s the highest peak in New Zealand,  
and the country’s longest icy glacier.

Glaciers are like rivers of ice  
or frozen rock that’s extremely cold.  
The Fox and Franz Josef glaciers are said  
to be hundreds of millions years old.

Rotorua is known for its **geysers**,  
boiling water erupting from underground,  
that smells of volcanic sulphur,  
and makes an incredible hissing sound.

**Milford Sound** is a vast, famous fjord –  
a narrow arm of the sea that’s calm.  
Much of New Zealand is pastoral,  
where sheep and cows graze on farms.



Other island nations in the South Pacific  
include Samoa, Palau, Tonga, and Fiji.

On the Fijian island of Taveuni are rare  
flying bats with the face of a monkey.

Papa New Guinea has nine million people,  
– that’s four million more than New Zealand,  
and mountains, coast, and rainforests on  
New Guinea, Earth's second-biggest island.

Yes, the Pacific Ocean is so vast,  
it covers 30 percent of the earth’s surface.  
Far bigger than all the continents combined,  
its depths are as unexplored as space.



# South America



Across the immense Pacific Ocean,  
we eventually arrive in South America.  
The southernmost part of the continent  
is the region of Patagonia.

Shared by Argentina and Chile,  
Patagonia has Cape Horn at its tip,  
where the Pacific meets the Atlantic,  
its treacherous waters have sunk many ships.

But there's plenty of wildlife here including  
millions of penguins with black beaks,  
and icy lakes, glaciers, and fjords,  
with Mount Fitz Roy, its highest peak.

The beautiful Seven Lakes are in Rio Negro,  
and orca whales swim at the Valdes Peninsula.  
The Torres del Paine, meaning 'blue towers',  
are tall mountains in **Chilean Patagonia**.

It's all part of the Andes mountain range,  
the world's longest – 7,200 kilometres long.  
Extending from Venezuela down to Argentina,  
they're the source of the River Amazon.

Argentina's capital, Buenos Aires,  
is a place to dance the tango,  
see a soccer game at the stadium,  
and try a barbecue, called an *asado*.





Cordoba, the second largest city,  
was founded in the 16th century.  
Argentina became independent in 1816,  
before then it was a Spanish colony.

Mendoza is a well-known wine region,  
in the foothills of the Andes,  
near Aconcagua, the highest peak  
in South America, with slopes to ski.

Cueva de las Manos near Santa Cruz  
is a cave with many stencilled hands,  
said to date from 8000 BCE –  
it goes back to the Stone Age of man.

**Iguazu** is the world's largest waterfall park,  
with 275 waterfalls, it can't be missed.  
Marking the border of Argentina and Brazil,  
it's like an ocean tumbling into an abyss.



Near the border of Argentina and Chile  
are the Marble Caves or 'cathedrals',  
reflecting the azure Lake Carrera,  
they have swirling blue cavern walls.

Chile has incredible rock formations,  
like Silla del Diablo, 'The Devil's Chair'.  
Here is the **Milodón Cave**, named after  
an extinct beast, resembling a bear.





The **Atacama desert** in north Chile is one of the world's driest lands, home to the Valle de Luna, a moonlike landscape with pink sands.

This desert and the Andes were home to now-extinct South American tribes, like the Atacameño, Picunche, and Huilliche, and the Mapuche, who still survive.

The Rapa Nui people of **Easter Island** are in the Pacific Ocean far, far away. The Dutch discovered this mysterious place in the year 1722 on Easter Sunday.

Easter Island, now owned by Chile, is famous for its statues with big heads. Known as 'moai', they date from the 1200s, and honour the Rapa Nui dead.

Back on the mainland, between Brazil and Argentina is a land-locked country, Paraguay. Further south on the Atlantic coast is Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay.

Uruguay, five times bigger than Holland, is known for its grassy 'pampas' and hills, and South American cowboys – gauchos, also found in Argentina and southern Brazil.





Heading north, we arrive in Brazil,  
South America's biggest nation –  
the fifth largest on the planet  
and the sixth by population.

Brazil encompasses 7,400 kilometres  
of coast along the Atlantic Ocean,  
the Amazon River and rainforest,  
and cities, where Portuguese is spoken.

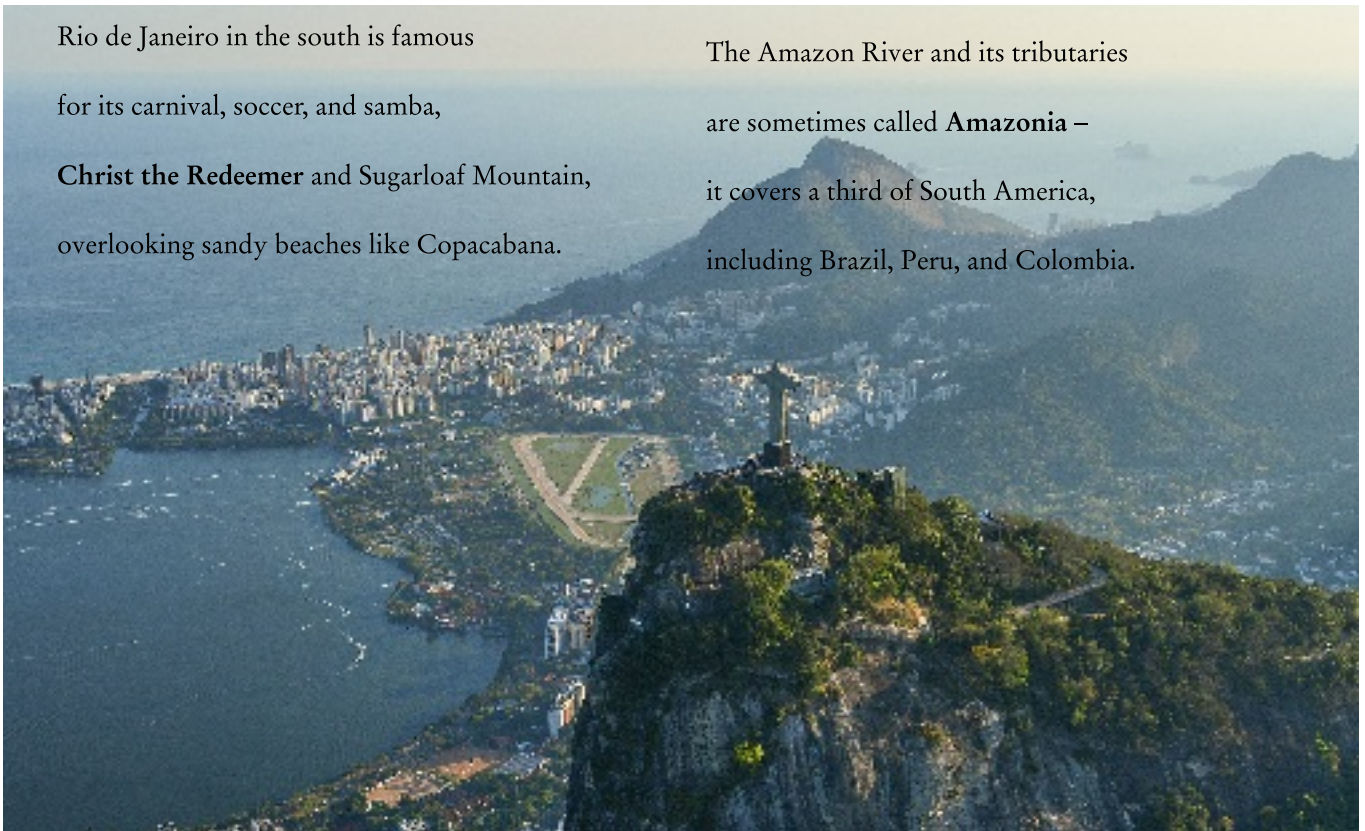
São Paulo is Brazil's largest city,  
though the capital is inland in Brasília.  
On the outskirts of these urban areas  
are poor shantytowns, known as favelas.



The Christ the Redeemer was sculpted,  
in the 1920s, after the First World War.  
A colossal statue of Jesus with open arms,  
it symbolises protection and inspires awe.

Rio de Janeiro in the south is famous  
for its carnival, soccer, and samba,  
**Christ the Redeemer** and Sugarloaf Mountain,  
overlooking sandy beaches like Copacabana.

The Amazon River and its tributaries  
are sometimes called **Amazonia** –  
it covers a third of South America,  
including Brazil, Peru, and Colombia.



This rainforest – the ‘Lungs of the Earth’,  
pumps out 20 percent of the world’s oxygen.  
Yet, large areas of it are destroyed each day  
due to over-farming and deforestation.

Amazonia is home to jaguars, monkeys,  
snakes, and millions of insect species,  
as well as tribes like the Xingu,  
from the Xingu River tributary.

West of the Amazon Rainforest  
is the mountainous country of Peru,  
land of the ancient Inca people,  
who famously built Machu Picchu.

The Inca spoke the Quechua language  
and made wool from alpacas and llamas.  
Today, most Peruvians speak Spanish,  
with 12 million living in the capital, Lima.

**Machu Picchu** means ‘Old Peak’ and  
is one of the world’s new seven wonders.  
Only discovered in 1911 by archaeologists,  
it overlooks the Sacred Valley and yonder.

Cusco, the former Inca capital,  
is the base of the Inca hiking trail,  
where a temple for Inti, the sun god,  
was built without using a wheel.

Peru’s Colca Canyon is a vast valley,  
deeper than the Grand Canyon,  
where the great Andean Condor flies,  
with a wingspan of three metres long.

The Nazca Lines in southern Peru  
– geoglyphs dating from 500 BCE –  
are giant drawings etched into the sand,  
depicting gods, lizards, and a monkey.





The **Uyuni Salt Flat** in the Andes

is in the southwest of Bolivia.

A prehistoric lake that's dry-white salt,  
it looks like the world's biggest mirror.



La Paz in Bolivia is unique –

no capital city on Earth is higher.

The Tiwanaku ruins on Lake Titicaca  
are temples pre-dating the Inca Empire.

**Mitad del Mundo**, the middle of the world,  
is a popular place near Quito, Ecuador.

You can put one foot in each hemisphere,  
as it marks the line of the equator.

Ecuador also includes the Galápagos,  
19 isolated islands in the Pacific Ocean.

It's unusual birds, iguanas, and giant tortoises,  
inspired Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

Venezuela, on the north tip of the continent,  
has the magnificent Angel Falls.

Crashing down from a plateau in Canaima,  
it's the world's highest, at 979 metres tall.

And finally we reach Colombia –  
the 'Gateway to South America' –  
named after explorer Christopher Colombus,  
though he never stepped foot in this area.

Colombia has cities like Bogata and Medellin,  
and produces much of the world's coffee.

In the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta peaks,  
sits Tayrona, the 1,000 year-old 'Lost City'.

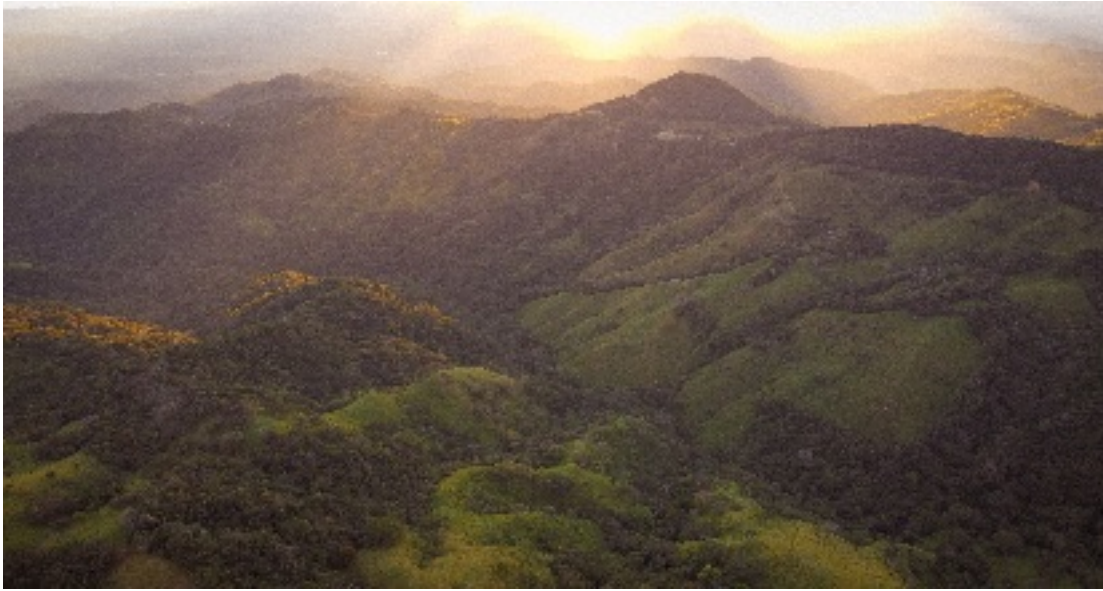
So, from the Andes to the Amazon,  
from lost cities to lush jungle,  
from icy glaciers to dry deserts –  
South America really has it all.



# Central America







On the map of the world,  
the Americas look like an hourglass,  
where North and South America  
are connected by a thin pass.

The narrowest part of Central America  
is where the Atlantic and Pacific meet,  
thanks to the Panama Canal,  
a great engineering feat.

Above Panama is the biodiverse  
‘rich coast’, known as Costa Rica –  
an ecological wonderland where people  
enjoy the pure life – ‘pura vida’.

Costa Rica has the **Monteverde Cloud Forest**,  
with the most colourful birds on earth,  
the active Arenal volcano and its lake,  
plus huge waves that are great to surf.

The best place to see sea turtles  
is at Tortuguero National Park.  
If you’re lucky, you’ll see baby turtles hatch  
but they mostly come out at dark.

To the north is Nicaragua,  
a country known for its volcanoes,  
with great names like Masaya,  
Cerro Negro and Momotombo.

It also has two enormous lakes  
called Cocibolca and Xolotlan,  
also called Nicaragua and Managua,  
they once merged with the ocean.

Nicaragua and Honduras share  
the Mosquito Coast region –  
a rainforest along the Caribbean,  
named after the Miskito Indians.

Honduras is known for its diving  
and dolphins on islands like Roatan,  
the tranquil Lake Yojoa,  
and ancient ruins of Copan.

Copan was once a great city,  
home to the Maya people,  
who disappeared around 900 CE  
but left great altars and temples.

Like the ancient Egyptians,  
the Maya studied maths and astronomy,  
and built great pyramids in the forests,  
yet their disappearance is still a mystery.

To the west, Honduras borders  
the small country of El Salvador,  
and to the north is Guatemala,  
where there's so much to explore.

Let's start with the ruins of **Tikal**,  
once the most magnificent Mayan city,  
with its five pyramids and Grand Plaza,  
and howler monkeys in the trees.

Tikal's temples tower above  
the green, dense Peten forest,  
and the gateway to this area  
is the lake island of Flores.







Further south is **Lake Atitlan**,  
one of the most serene spots, no doubt,  
surrounded by dormant volcanoes,  
it's a popular place to hang out.

The colonial-era churches of Antigua  
lie in the shadow of live volcanoes,  
like Acatenango, Pacaya,  
and the fierce Volcán de Fuego.

Guatemala's neighbour Belize may be little,  
but it's diversity is beyond belief –  
with rainforest, Mayan temples, and islands,  
and a 300-kilometre barrier reef!

The Mesoamerican Barrier Reef –  
the second largest after Australia,  
stretches from Honduras, through Belize,  
to Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula.

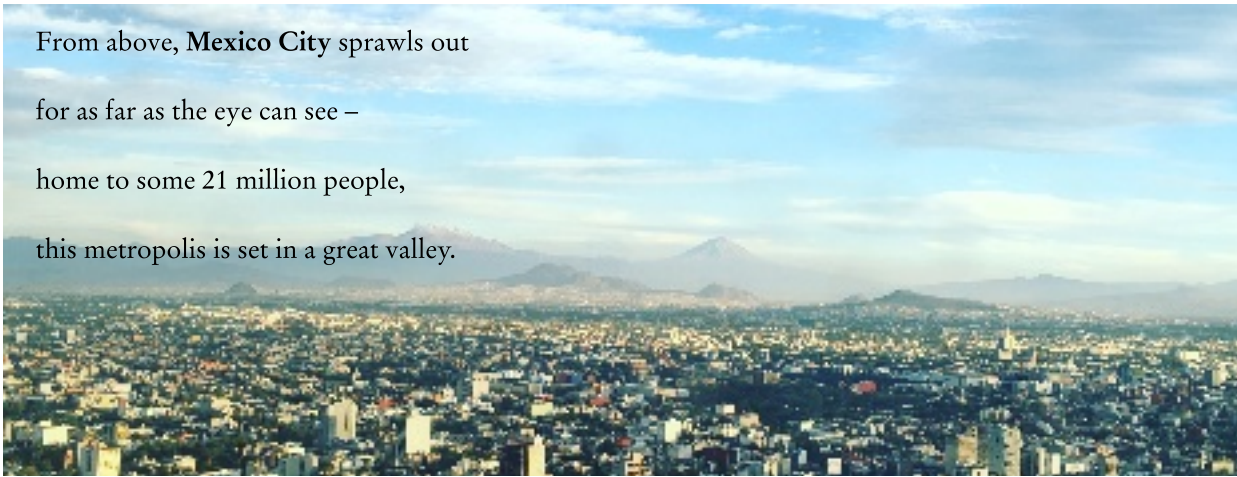
The Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean seas,  
make Yucatán a perfect place to dive.  
From Campeche to the island of Cozumel,  
it's also where Mayan culture thrives.

**Chichen Itza** is a well-preserved  
Mayan city in the centre of Yucatán.  
Built in the late classical Mayan period,  
it's one of the new seven wonders of man.

Here, the famous El Castillo pyramid  
has a very special shadow effect.  
Each spring and autumn equinox,  
it looks like a serpent descends its steps.



From above, **Mexico City** sprawls out  
for as far as the eye can see –  
home to some 21 million people,  
this metropolis is set in a great valley.

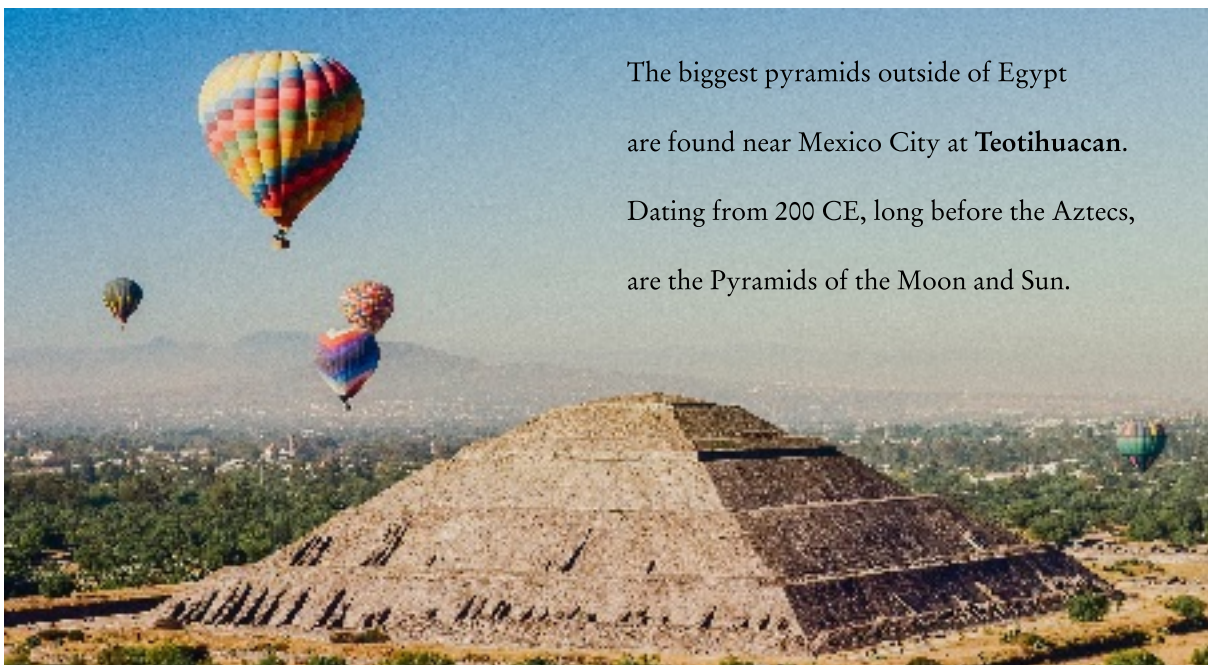


The heart of the city is the Zócalo square,  
also called the Plaza de la Constitución.  
Built on top of a ruined Aztec city,  
it marks Mexico's independence in 1821.

Casa Azul, the Blue House, is the  
former home of painter Frida Kahlo,  
known for her surreal self-portraits  
and her mixed-race roots or '*mestizo*'.

More great Mayan ruins are at Palenque,  
and Tulum, which overlooks the Caribbean,  
as well as the lesser-known Uxmal,  
with its marvellous Pyramid of the Magician.

Chiapas is a charming hilly state,  
with powerful waterfalls like Agua Azul.  
In San Cristobal, the indigenous people  
weave clothes and rugs so colourful.



The biggest pyramids outside of Egypt  
are found near Mexico City at **Teotihuacan**.  
Dating from 200 CE, long before the Aztecs,  
are the Pyramids of the Moon and Sun.



Paricutin, a natural world wonder,  
is in Michoacán, west of Mexico City.  
One of the youngest volcanoes on Earth,  
it suddenly surged from a field in 1943.

Mexico's Pacific Coast brings surfers  
to Puerto Escondido and Acapulco.  
The Gulf of Mexico was once home to  
Olmecs, who lived in Veracruz and Tabasco.

The **Olmec civilisation** originated  
around 1200 BCE, pre-dating the Mayans.  
They carved giant heads out of stone,  
that resemble art by ancient Africans.



Mexican food is famed for its  
nachos, tortillas, fajitas, and **burritos**,  
with spicy salsa and creamy guacamole,  
just watch out for those mosquitoes!



In Northern Mexico is Copper Canyon,  
where six rivers converge in Chihuahua.  
This canyon, home to Rarámuri Indians,  
is deeper than the Grand Canyon in America.

On the northwest Pacific of Mexico,  
are the long beaches of Baja California,  
with **whale sharks** at the Bay of La Paz,  
and the US border city of Tijuana.





An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. The water is a vibrant turquoise, transitioning to a lighter, sandy hue near the shore. A long, narrow white sand beach curves along the right side of the frame. Several small, lush green islands are scattered in the water. Two small boats are visible, leaving white wakes as they move across the water. The overall scene is idyllic and serene.

# *The Caribbean*





The very name ‘**Caribbean**’ conjures up images of a perfect turquoise sea.

This region consists of over 7,000 islands, and small sandy islets, called ‘keys’.

Named after the indigenous Carib people, the Caribbean islands have a varied terrain, and due to its tropical climate, it’s often hit by powerful hurricanes.

The biggest island in the Caribbean is the Latin country of Cuba.

It’s around 110,000 square kilometres, that’s 2,000 times bigger than Bermuda!

The capital of Cuba is **Havana**, famed for its salsa music and cigars, the iconic seawall – the Malecón, and its vintage American cars.

Aside from beaches, Cuba has many *mogotes* – rare round hills that look like green domes, and Caya Coco, a tropical island, which author Ernest Hemingway called home.

Hispaniola, the second largest island, produces sugar, cacao, and coffee, and is divided into two countries – the Dominican Republic and Haiti.



The third largest island is **Jamaica**,  
with beaches like Negril and Montego Bay,  
the Blue Mountains and the capital Kingston,  
home to the laid-back music of reggae.

Reggae is rooted in the rastafari faith,  
known for dreadlocks and rastas.  
Indeed, many Jamaicans are descendents  
of slaves that came from Africa.

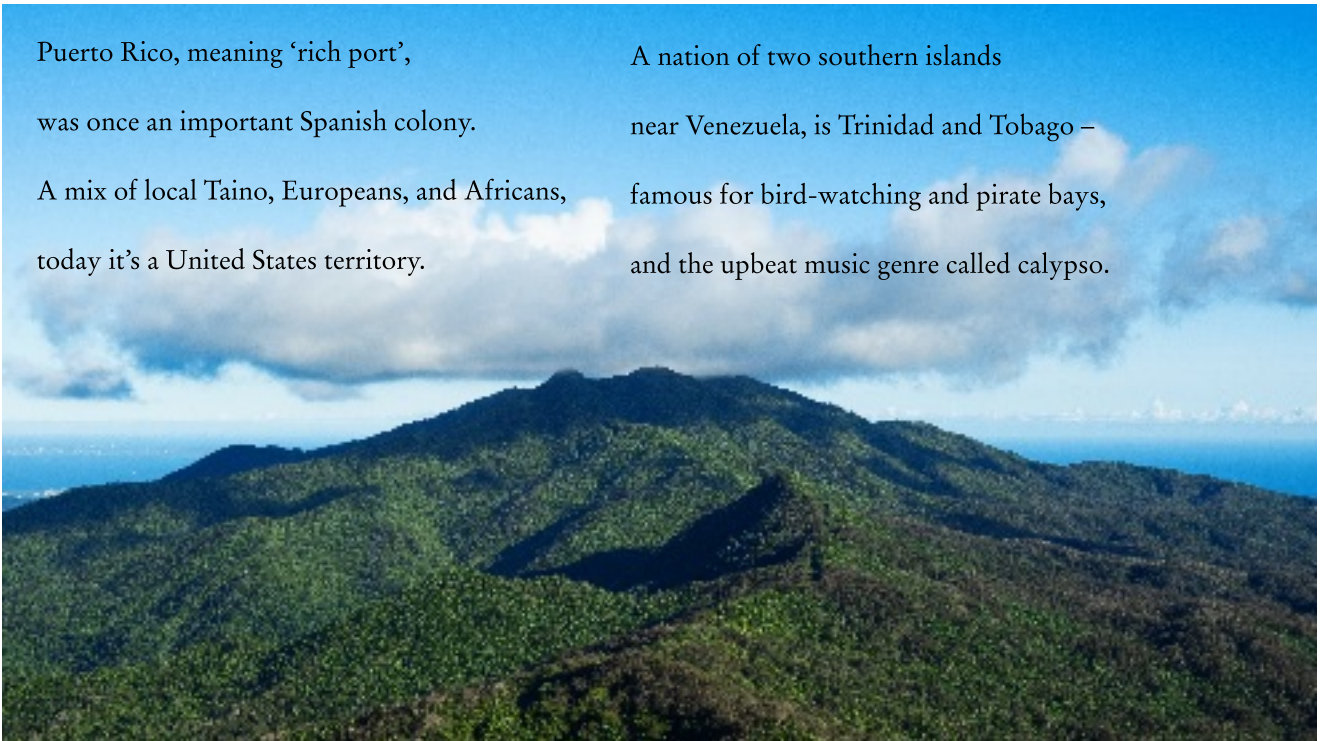


The transatlantic slave trade  
lasted for more than 400 years,  
some 12 million people were enslaved,  
causing much blood, sweat, and tears.

**El Yunque** is a vast tropical rainforest,  
and San Juan's Castillo is an imposing sight.  
Off the shore at Bioluminescent Bay,  
tiny plankton glow blue in the sea at night.

Puerto Rico, meaning 'rich port',  
was once an important Spanish colony.  
A mix of local Taino, Europeans, and Africans,  
today it's a United States territory.

A nation of two southern islands  
near Venezuela, is Trinidad and Tobago –  
famous for bird-watching and pirate bays,  
and the upbeat music genre called calypso.





A string of islands owned by the British  
is the beautiful Turks and Caicos,  
named after a Turkish red hat or 'fez',  
which resembles the top of a cactus.

**The Bahamas** is a cluster of 700 islands,  
of which Andros is the biggest.  
Nassau, the capital, is on New Providence  
and on **Exuma** you can swim with piggies!

There are many more Caribbean islands,  
like Barbados, Antigua, and Aruba,  
the Cayman, Saint Lucia, and Grenada,  
and further in the Atlantic is Bermuda.



It's said that many ships and planes have  
disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle area.  
So let's set sail and head back to land,  
and start our journey in North America.



# *North America*







Welcome to the United States of America,  
otherwise known as the USA.

The third largest nation by population,  
with over 330 million, growing every day.

Also the third largest country by size,  
the USA comprises 50 different states,  
including Alaska and Hawaii,  
some 3,800 kilometres away.



Named after Hamburg in Germany,  
America invented the **hamburger** and fries,  
French fries were inspired by Belgium,  
but in the USA, food can be supersized!

**Hawaii's** four main islands are  
Hawaii, Maui, Kauai, and Oahu,  
known for its volcanoes and canyons,  
and Waikiki beach in Honolulu.



The highest peak in the Pacific Ocean  
is Hawaii's dormant volcano – Mauna Kea.  
Hawaiians say 'Aloha', meaning 'breath of life',  
and originally came from Polynesia.

It's often said that mainland America was  
found in 1492 by Christopher Columbus,  
but actually his ship first landed in,  
what is now called, the Bahamas.

The native tribes of America include the  
Cherokee in the south, Mohicans in the north.  
In 1776, America declared independence  
from the British Empire, on July the Fourth.

The **Apache** Indian tribe from north Mexico  
settled in the second-largest state – Texas.  
Here, you can visit the famous Alamo fort,  
and the cities of Houston and Dallas.



Going west to Arizona is a world wonder

– the breathtaking **Grand Canyon**.

A colourful chasm cut by the Colorado River,  
its rock shows millions of years of erosion.

Death Valley is in the Mojave desert,  
as is a protected forest of Joshua trees.

Nearby, Las Vegas in the state of Nevada,  
is a notorious entertainment city.

Let's go further into California,  
otherwise called the Golden State,  
due to its beaches and corn fields,  
and also gold was found here in 1848.

Today, it's the home of Hollywood,  
and cities like Los Angeles and San Diego,  
the iconic **Golden Gate Bridge**,  
on the Pacific Bay of San Francisco.



It also has the Sierra Nevada mountains,  
Lake Tahoe, and national park of Yosemite,  
the Redwood and **Sequoia** forests,  
with some of the world's tallest trees.

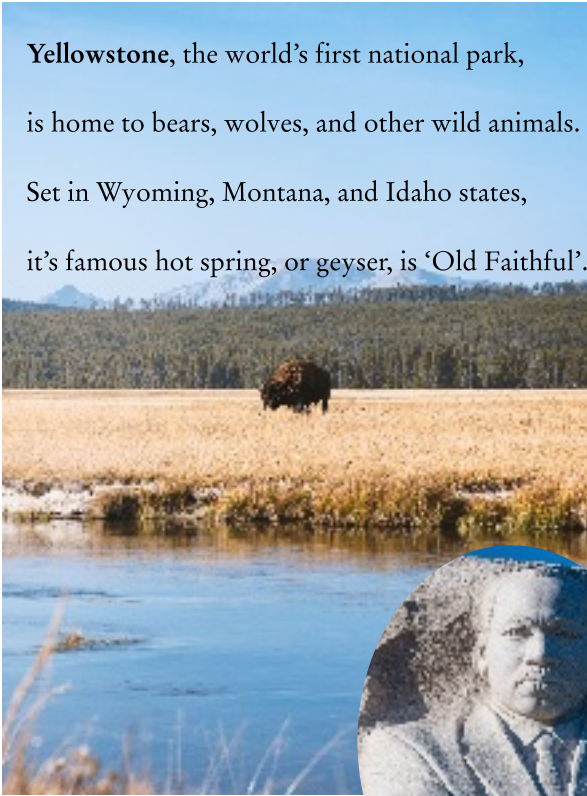
The largest tree by volume  
is the 2,700 year-old 'General Sherman',  
but the tallest tree on earth  
is the 116-metre-high 'Hyperion'.





Further north along the Pacific coast,  
near Seattle is Olympic National Park –  
a million acres of natural wilderness,  
with mountains and forests so vast.

**Yellowstone**, the world's first national park,  
is home to bears, wolves, and other wild animals.  
Set in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho states,  
it's famous hot spring, or geyser, is 'Old Faithful'.



The Rockies is a mountain range  
from Canada down to New Mexico,  
stretching 4,800 kilometres long,  
its highest peak is Elbert in Colorado.

**Mount Rushmore** has four past presidents  
carved into the Black Hills of South Dakota.  
Crazy Horse depicts a native American,  
who fought for his tribe, the Lakota.

The mighty Mississippi, or the 'Big Muddy',  
is the largest river in North America –  
running from Lake Itasca in Minnesota  
down to New Orleans in Louisiana.

New Orleans, in the Deep South, is famed  
for its jazz music and carnival, the Mardi Gras.  
Heading east via Mississippi and Alabama,  
is the mighty Stone Mountain in Georgia.

Montgomery has a statue of Rosa Parks,  
a woman who resisted racial segregation.  
Atlanta is the birthplace of **Martin Luther King Jr.**,  
the civil rights leader who inspired the nation.

Florida, nicknamed the Sunshine State,  
is a hotspot for holidaymakers to go,  
from Miami beach to the Florida Keys,  
and the famous theme parks of Orlando.

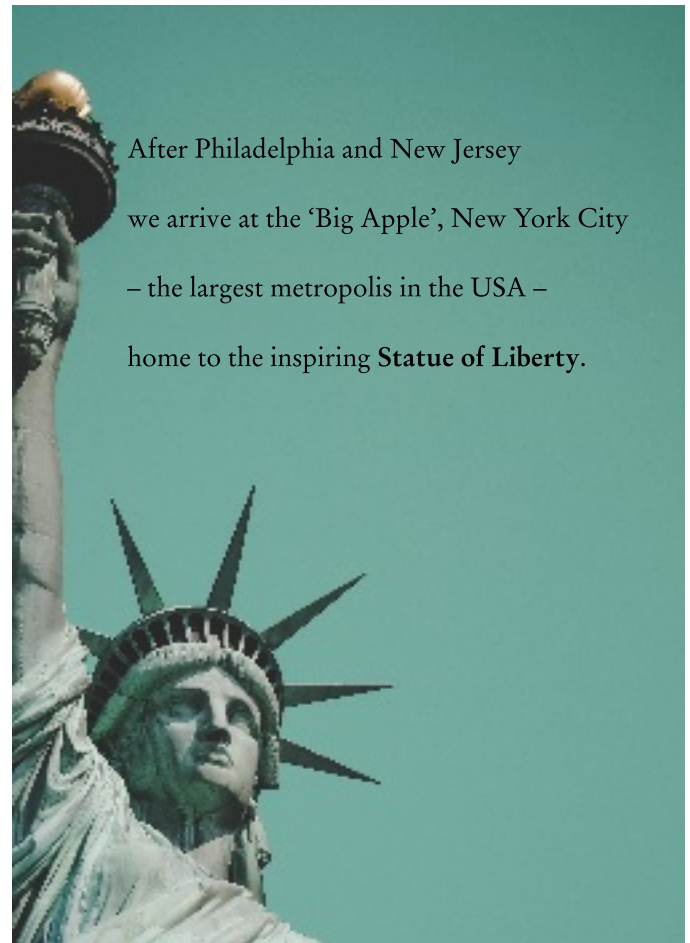


The Everglades in Florida is a subtropical wetland covering some 4,300 square miles. Compared to a shallow, slow-moving river, it's home to turtles, alligators and crocodiles.

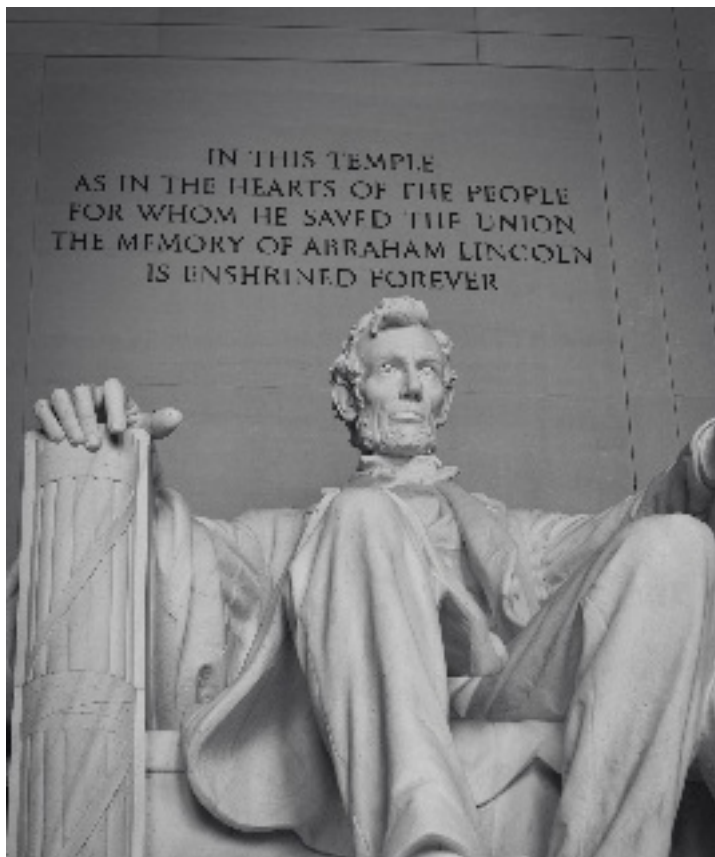
The Appalachians, the east's answer to the Rockies, is a mountain range from Canada to Alabama.

The Great Smokies is an often foggy section, rising along Tennessee and North Carolina.

Going north to the district of Columbia is America's capital, Washington, D.C., with the White House and **Lincoln Memorial**, honouring the president who ended slavery.



After Philadelphia and New Jersey we arrive at the 'Big Apple', New York City – the largest metropolis in the USA – home to the inspiring **Statue of Liberty**.



This colossal statue, a gift from France, was dedicated to Americans in 1886.

Another feat of 19th-century engineering is the outstanding Brooklyn Bridge.

All over Manhattan Island are tall skyscrapers like the iconic Empire State. But right in the middle is Central Park, offering a peaceful, well-needed break.

The city of Boston was founded in 1630 by settlers who came from England.

And the leafy New England region spans Maine, Vermont, and Rhode Island.



Middle America has many more states  
like Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky,  
and Illinois in the midwest,  
with Chicago, the ‘Windy City’.

Far larger than the USA,  
Canada only has 38 million people,  
with 90 percent near the US border,  
in cities such as Ottawa, the nation’s capital.

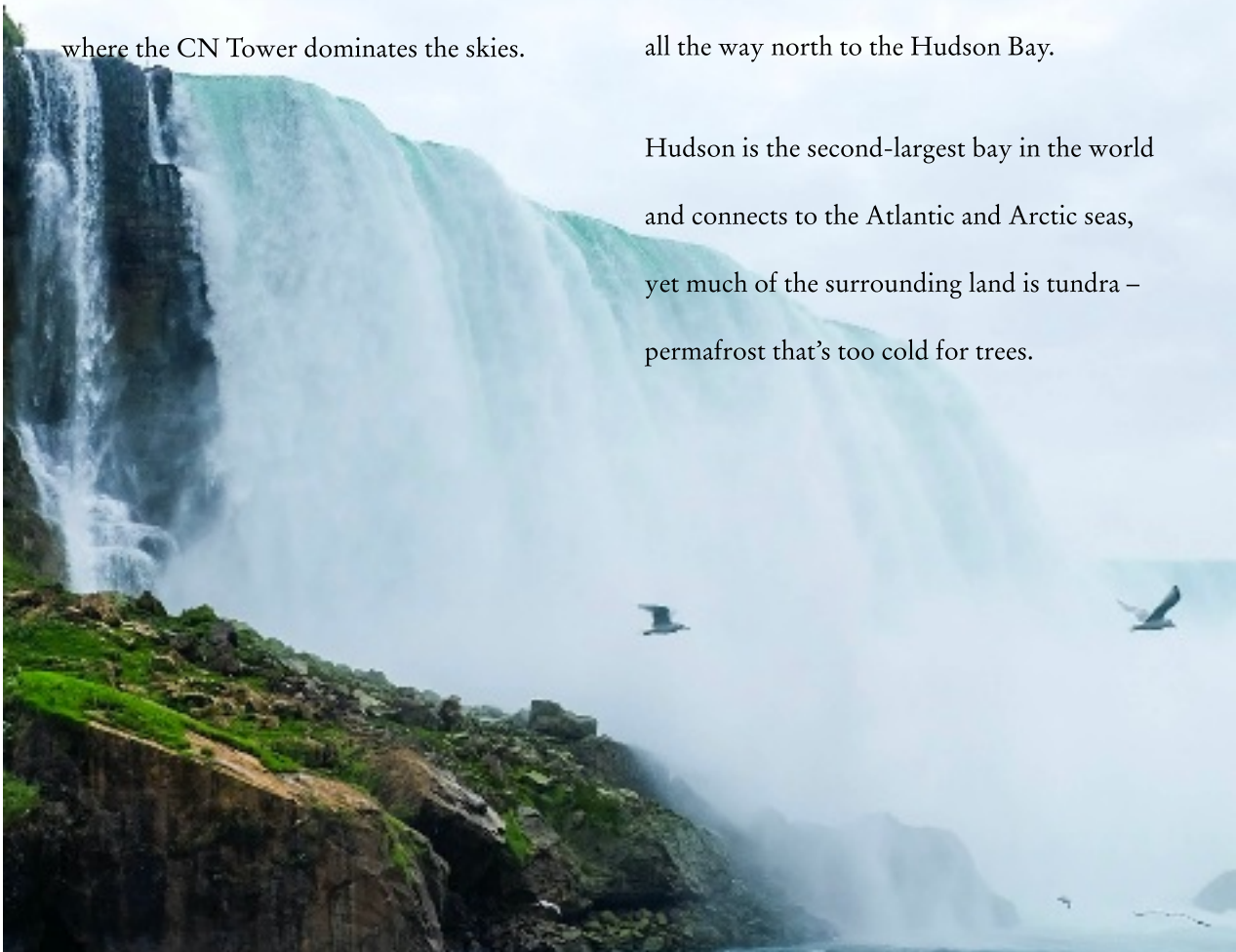
Chicago is on the shores of Lake Michigan,  
a Great Lake with Huron, Erie, and Superior.  
The spectacular waters of **Niagara Falls**  
are on the US-Canadian border.

Canada consists of ten provinces  
and three large territories –  
the most eastern province is  
Quebec, with its old walled city.

North of the United States is Canada,  
the world’s second-largest country by size.  
Toronto is a major city on Lake Ontario,  
where the CN Tower dominates the skies.

Quebec was once a French colony,  
and locals still speak French to this day,  
in the modern city of Montreal,  
all the way north to the Hudson Bay.

Hudson is the second-largest bay in the world  
and connects to the Atlantic and Arctic seas,  
yet much of the surrounding land is tundra –  
permafrost that’s too cold for trees.



For a brief while each autumn,  
the Hudson Bay hosts some **polar bears** –  
beautiful white creatures that cross the ice –  
though their numbers are becoming scarce.



Baffin island, the fifth-largest on Earth,  
is in Nunavut, Canada's biggest territory.  
Named after Englishman William Baffin,  
though Vikings landed here in the 11th century.

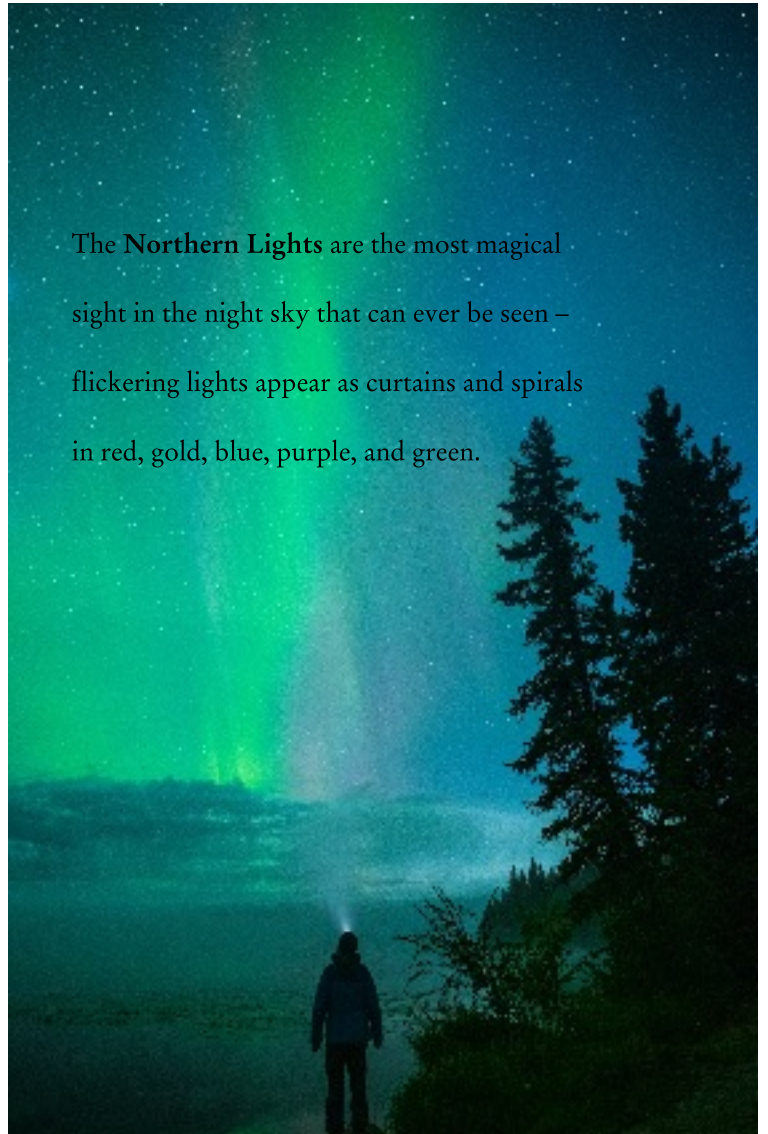
Owned by Russia until 1867,  
Alaska is home to aleut and inuit tribes,  
Denali – the world's third highest peak,  
the Tongass forest and Northern Lights.

Alberta in western Canada  
has the third-largest city, Calgary,  
the turquoise Lake Louise,  
and Banff – a great park to ski.

On the Pacific coast in British Columbia  
is Vancouver, a city with a great seaport,  
surrounded by coniferous forests,  
and near Whistler, a famous ski resort.

Canadian wildlife includes beavers, bison  
and the 'smiling' whale – beluga,  
the big, furry Canadian lynx cat,  
which also lives in Alaska.

Alaska is the largest state in the US,  
and borders northwest Canada,  
the Bering and Beaufort seas,  
and to the east is Siberia.



The **Northern Lights** are the most magical  
sight in the night sky that can ever be seen –  
flickering lights appear as curtains and spirals  
in red, gold, blue, purple, and green.



This spectacular light show can also  
be seen from the skies above **Greenland**,  
located to the east of Canada  
– this is the world’s largest island.

Greenland has only 58,000 people  
but is three times the size of Texas.  
Thanks to its freezing Arctic climate,  
it always feels like Christmas!

Most Greenlandic people are Kalaalit,  
and this huge island is owned by Denmark,  
a country in the region of Scandinavia,  
where the next leg of our journey starts.



# Scandinavia

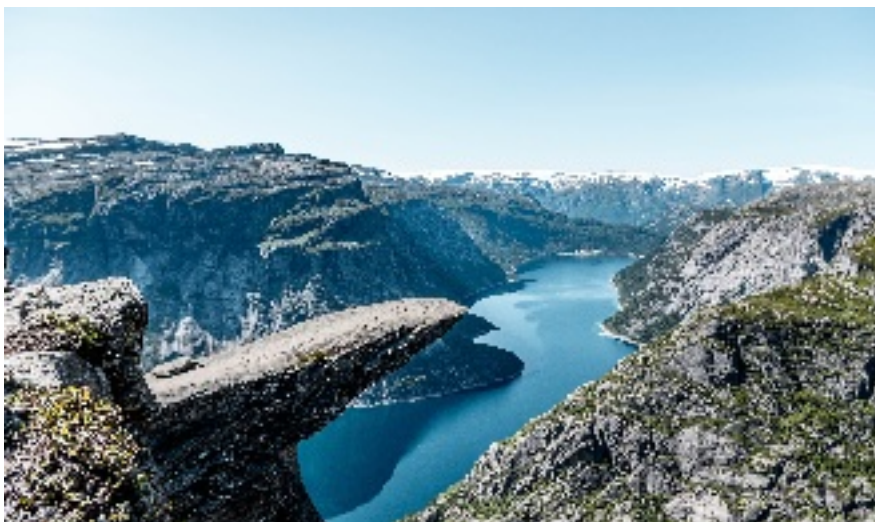




Scandinavia, or the Nordic countries, are set in Europe's northern region, including Iceland, Finland, Denmark, as well as Norway, and Sweden.

Norway, the 'Land of the Midnight Sun', is also the 'Land of the Northern Lights', where each year in the summer months, the sun shines right through the night.

Yes, in Svalbard, north of the Arctic Circle, around June, the sun never goes down. And Longyearbyen on Spitsbergen island, is the world's northernmost town.

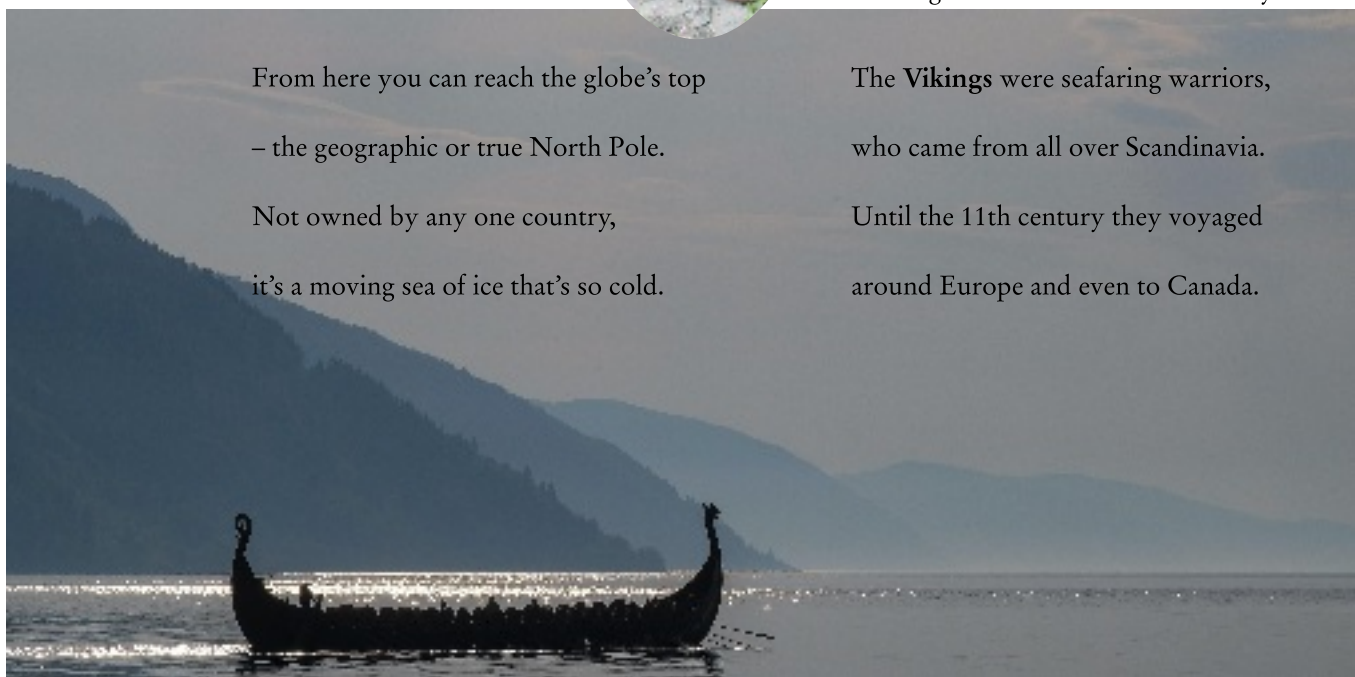


Norway's mainland is famous for its **fjords**, narrow ocean valleys between steep cliffs, a coastal area of breathtaking beauty, it can be explored on a cruise ship.

Akershus Fortress and the Opera House are both in Oslo, the capital city, as is the Viking Ship Museum, housing boats from the ninth century.

From here you can reach the globe's top  
– the geographic or true North Pole.  
Not owned by any one country,  
it's a moving sea of ice that's so cold.

The **Vikings** were seafaring warriors, who came from all over Scandinavia. Until the 11th century they voyaged around Europe and even to Canada.



Vikings may be descendents of the Sami  
– nomadic people who lived in Lapland –  
though the Sami call the area Sápmi,  
which spans Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

The Sami are thought to have lived  
in Scandinavia for thousands of years.  
They live in earth houses not igloos,  
and hunt, fish, and herd reindeers.

Said to be the home of Santa Claus,  
Lapland also has unspoilt trails to ski.  
Further south on the Gulf of Finland,  
is the Finnish capital, Helsinki.

Finland is often called  
the ‘Land of a Thousand Lakes’ –  
but with over 187,000,  
it’s a name that underestimates!

Sweden, the biggest Scandinavian country,  
has a population of ten million today.  
Stockholm, its capital, is on Lake Malor,  
along the Baltic Sea’s Salt Bay.

Sometimes called the ‘Venice of the North’,  
**Stockholm** was built on 30 islands,  
with beautiful houses surrounded by water,  
and lush green areas like Uppland.

The Swedes have a royal family,  
and a number of palaces are open,  
such as Drottningholm near Stockholm,  
and one on an island called Solliden.

On the east of Sweden, down the Göta Canal,  
is its second-largest city, Gothenburg.  
Much further north is Abisko National Park,  
with an Alpine lake, glaciers and icebergs.





The Kingdom of Denmark is the most southern country in Scandinavia – it consists of 443 islands, on Europe’s Jutland Peninsula.

The largest of these islands is Zealand, home to the Danish capital of Copenhagen, with its famous statue of the **Little Mermaid**, from fairytales of Hans Christian Anderson.

Nicknamed the ‘Land of Fire and Ice’, Iceland may be relatively small – but it has many natural wonders, from volcanoes to glaciers to waterfalls.

The **Blue Lagoon** is a steaming hot pool, near the town of Grindavik. And there’s a black sandy beach, on the shores of the capital, Reykjavik.



Reykjavik’s modern church has a statue of Norse explorer Leif Eriksson, who discovered Canada in 1000 CE, said to be before any other European.

From Dettifoss waterfalls to **Hekla volcano**, Iceland has so much more to see – many people take the Ring Road route that circles round the entire country.

And finally there’s the Faroe Islands, 17 tiny islands owned by the Danes, known for their rugged volcanic rock, its frequent gale winds, and rain.





# *The British Isles*





The British Isles is a rather  
strange-looking land.  
Depending on how you view it,  
it could be a dragon, a witch, or a man.

The two main islands are Great Britain,  
with England, Scotland, and Wales.  
To the west is Ireland and Northern Ireland,  
an 'Emerald Isle' of many old folk tales.

Let's start in the very north of Scotland,  
the **Shetland Isles** in the North Sea,  
halfway between Scotland and Norway,  
known for their short, gentle breed of pony.

The Inner and Outer Hebrides  
are islands on Scotland's Atlantic side,  
the biggest is called Lewis with Harris,  
followed by the beautiful isle of Skye.

Ben Nevis is Britain's highest peak,  
in Scottish Gaelic, mountain is 'ben'.  
Nearby, **Glen Coe** is a hiker's dream,  
a Highland valley is called a 'glen'.

The name Scotland comes from Latin,  
'Land of the Scots', from 'Scotia'.  
Settled by the Celts from Ireland,  
in Roman times it was 'Caledonia'.

One Roman icon is Hadrian's Wall,  
on the border of England and Scotland,  
built in 122 CE, it stretched 117 kilometres,  
across the whole of the British island.





Loch Lomond is Scotland's largest lake,  
though there's deeper water at Loch Ness,  
famed for its mythological monster,  
it's near the city of Inverness.

Other Scottish cities include Glasgow,  
Dundee, Perth, and Aberdeen,  
plus Stirling with its mediaeval castle,  
once home to Mary, the Scots' Queen.

But **Edinburgh Castle** and Arthur's Seat,  
are the best-known rocks of them all,  
looming over the Royal Mile, Holyrood park,  
and the entire Scottish capital.

Next, we arrive in Northern Ireland,  
which lies across the Irish Sea,  
also known as the region of Ulster,  
its main cities are Belfast and Derry.

Formed millions of years ago are the  
hexagonal rocks of **Giant's Causeway**  
– named after mythical giant, Finn McCool,  
they're a national treasure today.



The Republic of Ireland, or Eire,  
is made up of 26 different counties,  
with poetic names like Kilkenny,  
Limerick, and Tipperary.

It's little-known that the Celts arrived  
from Europe around 500 BCE.  
And legend has it, 1,000 years later,  
St Patrick ridded all snakes from the country.

Today, Ireland has five million people,  
and Dublin is its capital city,  
with the Liffey River, Celtic museums,  
and Trinity College's famous old library.



Blarney Castle in County Cork  
is a place that can't be missed –  
it houses the legendary Blarney Stone,  
that people come from all over to kiss.



The majestic **Cliffs of Moher**  
are just south of the Galway Bay –  
out to sea are the Aran Islands,  
all part of the Wild Atlantic Way.

The west coast of Ireland  
is some 2,600 kilometres long –  
where rugged cliffs meet the Atlantic,  
it's inspired many Irish folk songs.

Head south to Wales, or Cymru in Welsh,  
– in mediaeval times it was 'Cambria' –  
the smallest country on Britain's mainland,  
the north of which is mostly Snowdonia.

The mighty Mount Snowdon or 'Eryri',  
is the jewel in the Welsh crown –  
the second-highest mountain in Britain,  
it's 1,085 metres up, or down.

The Isle of Man in the Irish Sea  
is named after a Celtic god, Manannán.  
Historic Anglesey on the north coast,  
is the largest isle in Wales and England.

Pen y Fan in South Wales is the highest peak  
of the red-green hills of the **Brecon Beacons**.  
Cardiff Castle in the Welsh capital sits on top  
of a fort originally built by the Romans.



Crossing the River Wye and the Severn –  
the largest river in Great Britain,  
we arrive to the ‘green and pleasant land’  
of England, home to around 68 million.

Not far from Wales is the city of Bristol,  
on the River Avon’s winding path,  
which leads to a small city named after  
its 2,000 year-old Roman Bath.

Near Bath is an area of beauty, the Cotswolds,  
mostly in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire.  
It’s just south of Stratford-upon-Avon,  
the birthplace of writer William Shakespeare.

**StoneHenge**, a prehistoric giant stone circle,  
is just north of the town of Salisbury.

A mysterious monument dating from the  
Bronze Age, dating from 3000 to 1500 BCE.



The North has the Lake District in Cumbria,  
16 lakes, the largest being Windermere.

The Peak District is part of England’s ‘spine’ –  
the Pennines from Yorkshire to Derbyshire.

Liverpool and Manchester are on the Mersey,  
Newcastle was built on the River Tyne –  
nearby the **Angel of the North** sculpture  
spreads its wings above an old coal mine.

Liverpool is the birthplace of The Beatles,  
a band also known as the fab four –  
global icons of rock and roll – who sang  
‘All You Need is Love’ and many more.

London, England’s historic capital city,  
is home to nearly ten million people –  
famous for the River Thames, Big Ben  
clock tower, and St Paul’s Cathedral.



Founded in Roman Britannia in 47 CE,  
this foggy city was once called Londinium.  
Today, Roman, Egyptian and other relics  
can be seen at the British Museum.

It's also known for Buckingham Palace,  
one of the residences of the Royal family,  
the iconic **Tower Bridge** and Tower of London,  
a fort with a thousand years of history.



Yes, from Romans, Saxons, and Normans,  
to the Fire of London and the Great Plague,  
to the blitz of the Second World War,  
London has survived throughout the ages.

Kew Gardens and Hampton Court Palace  
are heritage sites near Richmond,  
once home to King Henry the VIII,  
who founded the Church of England.

West of London, in the Berkshire countryside,  
is the millennium-old **Windsor Castle**.

South of London, in Kent, are England's oldest  
churches, St Martin's and Canterbury Cathedral.

The south coast has the White Cliffs of Dover  
and Portsmouth's great naval ships,  
the Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey,  
and Cornwall, with Land's End at its tip.



# Central Europe



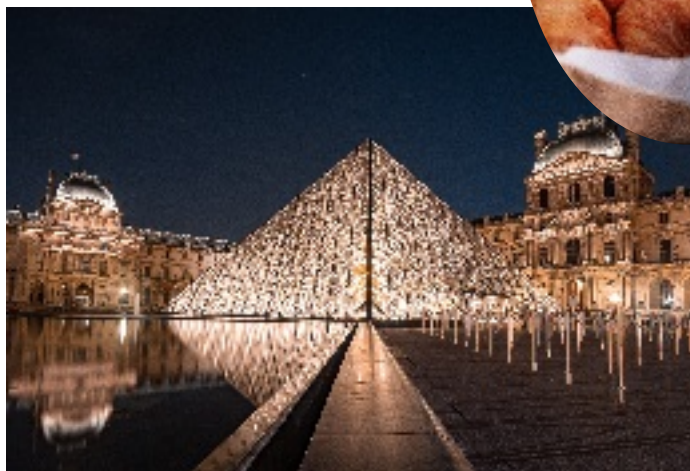
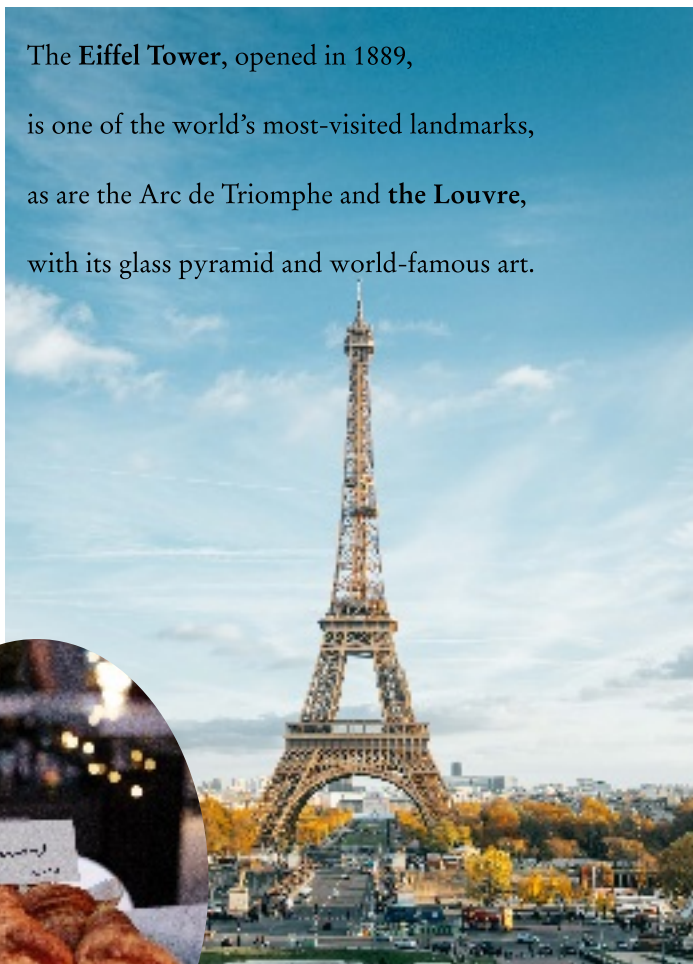


Across the English Channel by ferry  
or even by tunnel, we arrive in France.  
Renowned for its culture and cuisine,  
it's a European country that enchants.

French cuisine is perhaps the world's best,  
with cheeses like Camembert and Brie,  
they invented baguettes, crepes, and **croissants**,  
and even the phrase, 'Bon Appetit!'

France is part of mainland Europe,  
the world's second's smallest continent,  
comprising some 50 different countries,  
many influential and important.

The **Eiffel Tower**, opened in 1889,  
is one of the world's most-visited landmarks,  
as are the Arc de Triomphe and **the Louvre**,  
with its glass pyramid and world-famous art.



The French capital city is Paris,  
home to around 11 million people,  
and historic buildings on the River Seine,  
like the gothic Notre-Dame Cathedral.

West of Paris is opulent Versailles,  
a palace built in the 17th century –  
a place for kings and briefly Napoleon,  
and the First World War Peace Treaty.

France, the frontline of World War I,  
saw many battles like the Somme,  
where from July to November 1916,  
a million soldiers' lives were gone.

The east of France includes the regions of Burgundy, Alsace, and Champagne – famed for their wines and vineyards that receive much sunshine and rain.

**Mont-Saint-Michel**, a place of pilgrimage, is an abbey on a tiny island in Normandy. The Carnac Stones is a prehistoric collection of aligned standing stones in Brittany.



Mont Blanc is France's highest mountain, set in the Alps, near Lake Geneva. The lavish cities of Nice and Monaco, are on the Cote d'Azur, the French Riviera.

Brussels is the capital city of France's smaller neighbour, Belgium – known for the EU headquarters, Grand Place, and the metallic spheres of the Atomium.

Field upon field of **lavender** flowers can be seen in the region of Provence, where each summer the hills seem to be painted purple, with a delicate fragrance.

Although a relatively small country, Belgium can be split into two main areas – Flemish-speaking Flanders in the north, in the south, French-speaking Wallonia.





The Lion's Mound in Waterloo,  
marks where Napoleon lost in battle.  
The Ardenne is an area of rolling hills,  
woodland and mediaeval castles.

The Ardenne extends into Luxembourg,  
one of the world's smallest countries,  
as well as the east of France,  
and the Rhineland of Germany.

But first let's go to the Netherlands,  
sometimes mistakenly called Holland,  
– that's just two of its 12 provinces –  
the Netherlands means 'low lands'.

Much of the country is below sea-level,  
and the Netherlands is known for its canals,  
wonderful **windmills**, tulips, and daffodils,  
and farms with Dutch Friesian cows.



Delft is famous for its porcelain crockery,  
and Europe's largest port is Rotterdam.  
The Hague has the International Court,  
yet the Netherlands capital is **Amsterdam**.

The Rembrandt and Van Gogh museums,  
house some of the best art in the world,  
and nearby is a house where Anne Frank hid,  
while writing her *Diary of a Young Girl*.

Heading east is Germany or 'Deutschland',  
once known as the Kingdom of Prussia,  
today it has a population of 83 million,  
second-only in Europe to Russia.

Located in the heart of Europe,  
Germanic tribes influenced history,  
like the 'Engles', who went to England,  
as did the Saxons from Old Saxony.



The River Rhine or the Rhineland,  
includes historic cities like Bonn –  
the birthplace of composer Beethoven  
– and Kolner Dom cathedral in Cologne.

The mountainous Black Forest region  
has the Roman spa town of Baden-Baden,  
a land of fairytales and evergreen forests,  
it's a cyclists' and hikers' haven.

**Neuschwanstein Castle** in the town of Füssen  
inspired the fairytale castle of Disney.  
Nearby is one of Europe's cleanest lakes,  
King's Lake, also known as Königssee.

Berlin has the Reichstag Building,  
and the remains of the Berlin Wall –  
which separated East and West Germany,  
until 1989, when the 'Iron Curtain' did fall.

The **Brandenburg Gate** with a four-horse chariot,  
is a monument based on the Greek Acropolis.  
Outside Berlin, also built in the 18th century,  
is the vineyard-terraced Sanssouci Palace.

Other German cities are Munich, Nuremberg,  
and the old riverside town of Bamberg,  
modern cities like Frankfurt and Stuttgart,  
and the northern port city of Hamburg.



The Zugspitze Massif is in the  
Wetterstein mountains, Bavaria –  
the highest peak in Germany –  
it's right on the border with Austria.

South of Germany is Switzerland,  
'Suisse' in French, in German 'Schweiz'.  
A land known for its mountains,  
chocolate, watches and pocket knives.



It's also a land of lakes like  
Constance, Geneva, and Lugano.

It shares Lake Maggiore with Italy,  
which is next to the town of Locarno.

The **Swiss Alps'** highest peak is Dufourspitze,  
yet the most famous is the Matterhorn.

The Pilatus Massif has views of Lake Lucerne  
from its highest peak, called Tomlishorn.



Basel has a building designed by philosopher  
Rudolph Steiner called the **Goetheanum**.

And the old house of scientist Albert Einstein  
in the capital, Bern, is now a small museum.

North of Zurich are the most powerful  
waterfalls in all Europe, the Rhine Falls.

On the banks of the Limmat River in Zurich,  
are the gothic towers of **Grossmünster Cathedral**.

East of Switzerland along the River Danube,  
is the larger, land-locked country of Austria.

Due to its prime, central location,  
it was once the heart of an empire.



Yes, the Austro-Hungarian Empire ruled  
Eastern Europe until the First World War,  
and Vienna, or Wein, was once the capital,  
of the Holy Roman Empire before.

So unsurprisingly, Vienna has many palaces,  
like Schönbrunn, Hofburg, and Belvedere.  
And the Venus of Willendorf figurine,  
said to date back 25,000 years.

Vienna was where Sigmund Freud  
analysed the human psyche and dreams.  
It's also home to the Wiener schnitzel,  
and delicious Viennese ice cream.

The Eisriesenwelt, the world's largest ice cave,  
is more like a giant work of frozen art.  
**Salzburg**, famous for its mountains and music,  
is the birthplace of classical composer Mozart.



And south of Austria is Slovenia,  
a country with 'love' in its name.  
It's capital is lovely Ljubljana,  
surrounded by the Julian Alps terrain.

Triglav is its highest mountain,  
and its most beautiful lake is called **Bled**.  
Slovenia borders the Balkans in the east,  
where our next journey lays ahead.







# *The Balkans*



The Balkans is a group of countries in Europe's southeastern peninsula, between the Adriatic and Black Seas, named after the mountains in Bulgaria.

The sparkling, turquoise Adriatic Sea runs along the coastline of Croatia.

**Pula's** seaside Roman amphitheatre, is in the rustic north region of Istria.

Inland is the capital city, Zagreb, on the banks of the River Sava.

And flowing from the Italian Alps, is the northern River Drava.

Croatia has more than 1,000 islands, like Brac, Korčula, and Hvar, Diocletian's Roman palace in Split and the Church of Donatus in Zadar.

Plitvice Lakes, Croatia's largest national park, has 16 cascading lakes and 90 waterfalls. A beautiful area surrounded by forest land, home to bears, rare birds, and wolves.



The backbone of the western Balkans is a strip of mountains called the Dinaric, which stretch to the very south of Croatia, to the red-walled town of **Dubrovnik**.





South of Dubrovnik is the ‘Black Mountain’ – the small, young country of Montenegro. Known for its coastline, caves, and canyons, in winter its peaks are caked in snow.

Mount Lovćen’s dark, granite summit overlooks the beautiful Bay of Kotor – but there’s bigger mountains like Bobotov, in the lofty national park of Durmitor.

Montenegro is also home to one of the world’s deepest canyons, **Tara**, and southern Europe’s largest lake – that’s shared with Albania – Skadar.

Around 2000 BCE, Albania was inhabited by ancient tribes called the Illyrians, though it was later conquered by the Romans, Huns from Asia, and Ottomans.

Today, Albania has three million people and its capital city is called Tirana.

The Albanian Alps highest mount is Korab, and the River Drin flows to Macedonia.

Macedonia is both a region of Greece and North Macedonia is its own nation.

Its capital, Skopje, was invaded many times due to its central Balkan location.

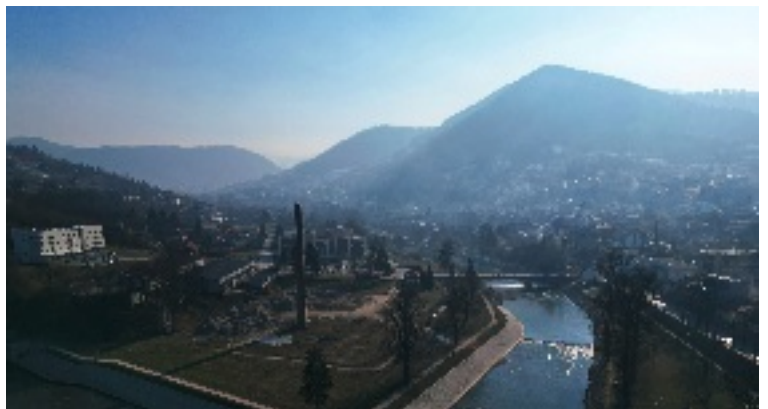


Kosovo, the smallest of the Balkans declared independence in recent decades.

Serbia, a larger country, has an ancient Celtic and Roman fortress in Belgrade.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is further north, with old mosques in its capital, Sarajevo.

The mysterious, grassy **Bosnian ‘pyramids’** are natural hills in the region of Visoko.



Bulgaria, the second-largest of the Balkans, has the Balkan mountains, 'Stara planina', which extend from Serbia to the Black Sea, and overlook the capital city of Sofia.

Vitosha is Bulgaria's highest peak, Pirin has the famous ski slopes of Bansko, Rila has an iconic mountain monastery, that was built over 1,000 years ago.

Older are the Thracian tombs of Kazanlak, with frescoes dating from 400 BCE. Like the Illyrians, the Thracians were tribes but they lived in Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey.

Sofia's most famous landmark is the cathedral of **Alexander Nevsky**.

The Iskar River flows to the Danube and through the gorges of the Sofia Valley.



North of the Danube that runs from the Black Forest to the Black Sea – is the diverse land of Romania, the largest of all Balkan countries.

The colossal rock statue of an old king,

**Decebalus**, welcomes us to Romania.

Carved on the Danube's Iron Gates,

a giant gorge on the border with Serbia.





Romania, which means ‘of Rome’,  
has a population of around 22 million.  
Not Italian, it’s a union of Moldovians,  
Wallachians, and Transylvanians.

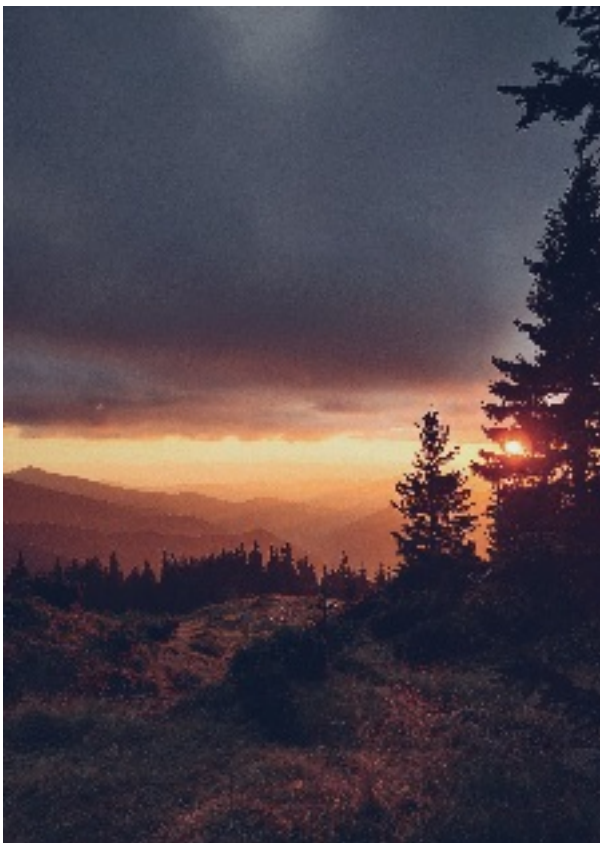
It’s famous for its cave **bears** and bats,  
found in the region of Transylvania,  
where the spooky 13th-century **Bran Castle**,  
claims to be the home of Count Dracula.

But the real blood-thirsty ruler,  
Vlad the Impaler, lived in Poenari.  
Heading north in the **Carpathian mountains**,  
is the elegant, painted Sucevita Monastery.



The Palace of Parliament in Bucharest,  
is one of the largest buildings ever known.  
It was built for a Communist dictator,  
who in 1989, was finally overthrown.

Communism and the Soviet Union  
play a large role in modern history,  
that affects every country in Eastern Europe,  
as we’ll see in the next part of our journey.







# *Russia & Eastern Europe*



Russia is the largest country  
in the world, by far.  
Once a gigantic empire,  
its rulers were called tzars.

Today Russia spans two continents –  
the east of Europe and north of Asia,  
covering 17 million square kilometres,  
of which, 77 percent is **Siberia**.



Much of Russia is the taiga –  
a vital pine-tree wilderness,  
home to wolverines and bears,  
it's the world's second-largest forest.

This epic railway ends near the Russky Bridge,  
the journey from Moscow takes seven days.  
Here, Russia meets China and North Korea,  
in Vladivostok city, on the Golden Horn Bay.

Siberia is a vast province of ice and tundra,  
stretching east of the mountains of Ural,  
three great rivers – Yenisei, Ob, and Lena –  
and the world's deepest lake, Baikal.

The indigenous **Nenets** and Yakut people,  
are tribes which date from the early ages of man.  
And the famous Trans Siberian Railway runs  
from Moscow all the way to the Sea of Japan.



Back in the heart of Moscow, Russia's capital, is the historically significant Red Square – the Kremlin Palace, **Saint Basil's Cathedral**, and Lenin's Mausoleum, are all found there.

Vladimir Lenin was the founder of Russia's Communist Party and 1917 Revolution, which meant that until 1991, Russia was known as the Soviet Union.

South of Moscow is Sochi – a beachside city on the Black Sea, where Europe's highest mountain, Elbrus, attracts people who snowboard and ski.

Further east is the Caspian Sea, but don't be fooled into a mistake, bordering five countries including Russia – it's the world's largest freshwater lake.



And far away in the north is **St Petersburg**, Russia's second-largest and old imperial city, home to the huge State Hermitage Museum, and canals that connect to the Baltic Sea.





The three Baltic states next to Russia  
are Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Once part of the Soviet Union,  
they're set around the Gulf of Riga.

**Riga** is the capital city of Latvia,  
a long time ago called Livonia –  
ruled by Vikings, Crusaders, and Sweden,  
it also included present-day Estonia.



In 1991 Latvia became independent again  
and Latvians today are a proud people.  
Riga has the historic House of the Blackheads,  
and the iconic, gothic Riga Cathedral.

Estonia's capital is the mediaeval city of **Tallinn**,  
and it shares, with Russia, the great Lake Peipus.  
Lithuania, which has survived fires and plagues,  
has its historic capital in the city of Vilnius.

South of Lithuania is land-locked Belarus,  
where Minsk is the capital city.

To the west is the nation of Poland, which gave us  
composer Chopin and scientist Marie Curie.

Marie Curie, the first woman to win a Nobel Prize,  
was born in Warsaw, the Polish capital.

Warsaw has the Uprising and Polin museums,  
and a completely-restored Royal Castle.



Karkow is famed for Wawel Castle,  
the legendary King Krak and Wawel dragon.  
A mysterious Crooked Forest is near Germany,  
where pine trees are bendy, if you can imagine.

Auschwitz, near Krakow, was a concentration camp,  
once a place of death, suffering, and pain.  
Over 6 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust,  
reminding us to never let this happen again.

Southwest of Poland is the Czech Republic,  
also known as the country of Czechia,  
made up of two large regions –  
called Moravia and Bohemia.

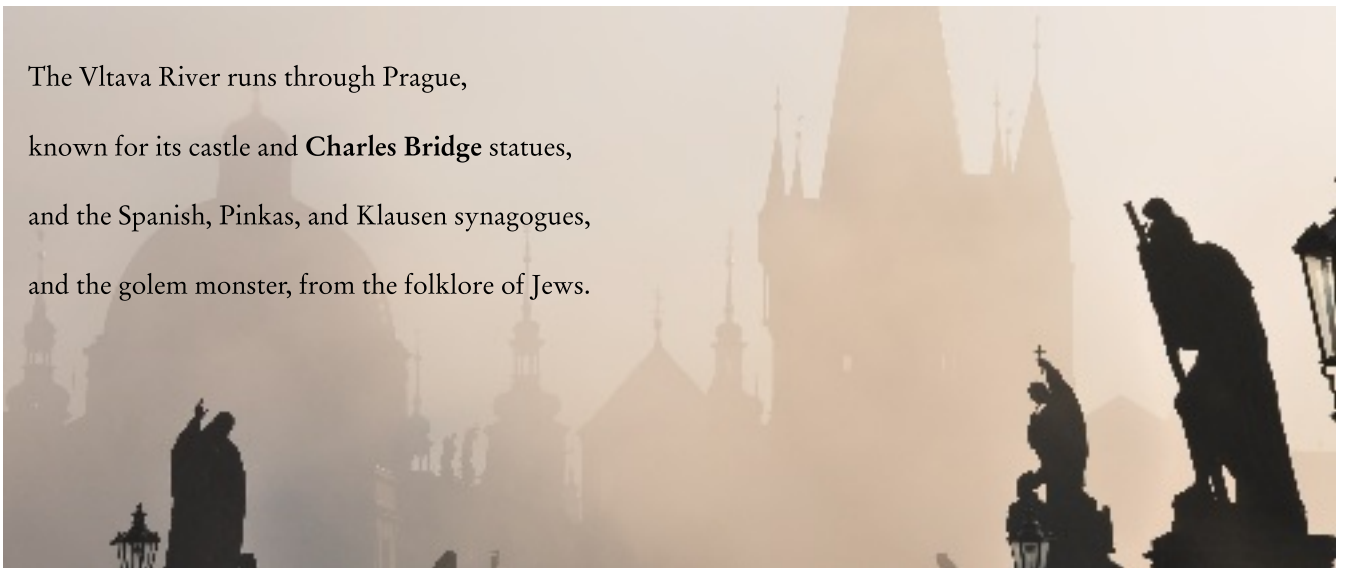
With its forest, rock pillars, and Kost Castle,  
Bohemia was a great kingdom of the past.  
And near Bald Mountain in Moravia  
is a statue of the Slavic sun god – **Radegast**.

A country with over 100 fairytale castles  
is Czechia's old neighbour, Slovakia –  
with the snow-capped Tatra mountains  
and mediaeval forts at Bojnice and Bratislava.

Hungary borders with Slovakia, Austria,  
Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Romania.  
It's capital city is beautiful **Budapest** –  
'Queen of the Danube', in Hungarian 'Duna'.



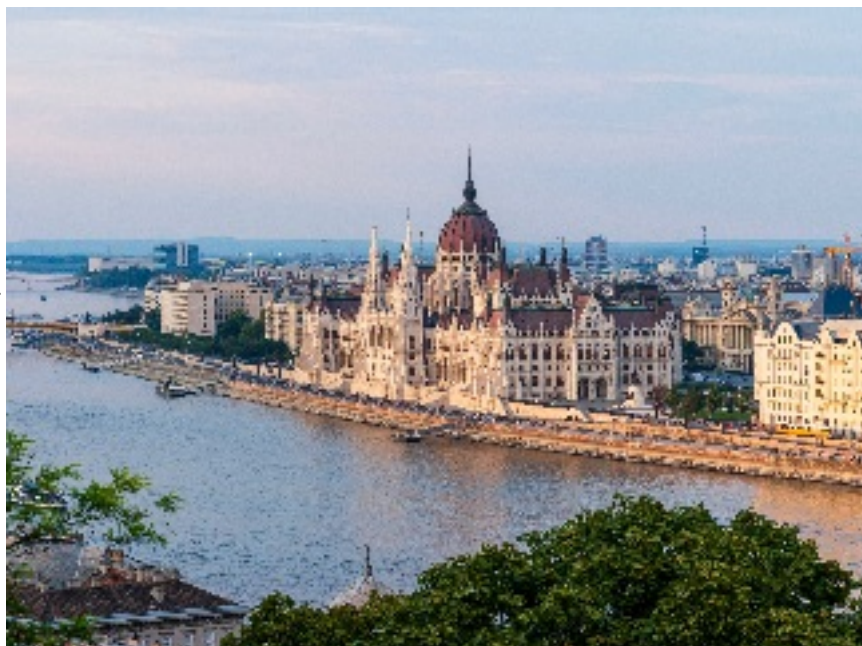
The Vltava River runs through Prague,  
known for its castle and **Charles Bridge** statues,  
and the Spanish, Pinkas, and Klausen synagogues,  
and the golem monster, from the folklore of Jews.





Made up of two parts – Buda and Pest,  
this city dates back to the Romans,  
but there's much more to see in Hungary,  
like Bükk National Park and Lake Balaton.

East of Hungary, west of Russia,  
is the enormous country of Ukraine –  
home to 44 million people,  
it's twice as large as Great Britain.



Kiev, the capital, has **St Sophia's Cathedral**,  
with its 13 exquisite golden domes.  
And in central and eastern Ukraine,  
millions of sunflowers are grown.

The famous Potemkin steps overlook  
the Black Sea port of Odessa.  
And the Sea of Azov lies between  
Russia and the Crimean Peninsula.

And east of the Black Sea is the  
mountainous country of Georgia,  
which, just like its neighbour, Turkey,  
bridges the continents of Europe and Asia.

The River Kura runs through the capital Tbilisi,  
the River Abasha cuts through Martvili Canyon.  
Batumi is famous for its black sandy beaches,  
so let's hop over to the Mediterranean.



# *The Mediterranean*





Welcome to a sea whose name means  
'Middle Earth' – the Mediterranean.

From ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome,  
it's been the cradle of civilisations.

Let's start in the eastern island of Cyprus,  
settled for more than ten millennia –  
in coastal towns like Paphos and Limassol,  
and the old capital city, Nicosia.

**Ancient Kourian** is a ruined Greek city,  
with mosaics in the House of Eustolios.  
And there are many mediaeval churches  
cut into the mountains of Troodos.

Cyprus is the third largest Mediterranean  
island, after Sicily and Sardinia in Italy.  
The south of the island is Greek-Cypriot,  
and the north is owned by Türkiye or Turkey.



Turkey, one of the oldest settled countries,  
was home to the Anatolians and Assyrians.  
Covering the Anatolia and Balkan peninsulas,  
it has a population of around 84 million.

Turkey's great city, **Istanbul**,  
straddles the Bosphorus Strait.  
This is an important waterway where  
the Black and Marmaris seas separate.  
  
Istanbul was once Constantinople,  
founded by the Emperor Constantine.  
From 330 BCE to 1453 it was  
the capital of ancient Byzantine.



Then it became the Ottoman Empire,  
which ruled far and wide until 1923,  
when the capital was moved to Ankara,  
in what we now call Turkey.

The Blue Mosque in Istanbul  
has five main domes and minarets.  
The Grand Bazaar is one of the world's  
largest and oldest covered markets.

**Cappadocia** is a rocky region with  
churches carved into mountain sides.  
You can see it's great canyons from  
above, on a hot-air balloon ride.

Pamukkale is famous for its terraced,  
thermal springs and water pools.  
Once used as Roman and Turkish baths,  
its source is completely natural.

**Ephesus**, in western Turkey, was once the  
most important ancient Greek city.  
Famed for the wondrous Temple of Artemis,  
that was destroyed by the Goths in 262 CE.

Göbekli Tepe, said to be the oldest  
temple site on Earth is near Syria.  
With ruins dating from 9000 BCE,  
it predates the ancient Egyptian era.

Antalya, on Turkey's Turquoise Coast,  
is blessed with a crystal blue sea,  
with Hidirlik tower and Hadrian's Gate,  
and Roman and Greek archaeology.



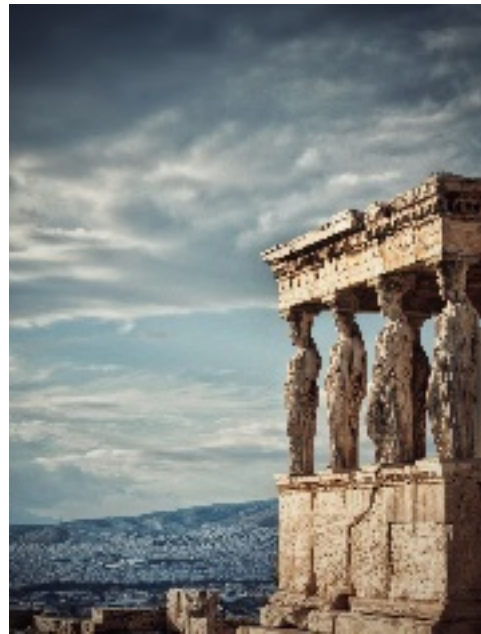


Greece, or Hellas in Greek,  
is comparable in size to England.  
Once the heart of the Hellenistic empire,  
it encompasses over 2,000 islands.

The land of Zeus, Apollo, and Helios,  
and the other gods of Greek mythology.  
It's also the land of Socrates, Plato, and  
Aristotle – the giants of Greek philosophy.

High on a hill above the capital Athens  
is the unmistakable **Acropolis** –  
built around 525 BCE,  
it was originally used as a fortress.

Dedicated to the goddess, Athena,  
is the famous Parthenon temple.  
Nearby is ancient **Agora**, a sacred  
meeting place, made of marble.



The temple of Olympian Zeus  
was made for the Greek god king.  
The Panathenaic Stadium from 600 BCE,  
is a race course, that's still working.

There are many more ruins in Greece,  
such as Delphi, dedicated to Apollo,  
and Olympia, where the first Olympics  
were held, some 2,800 years ago.

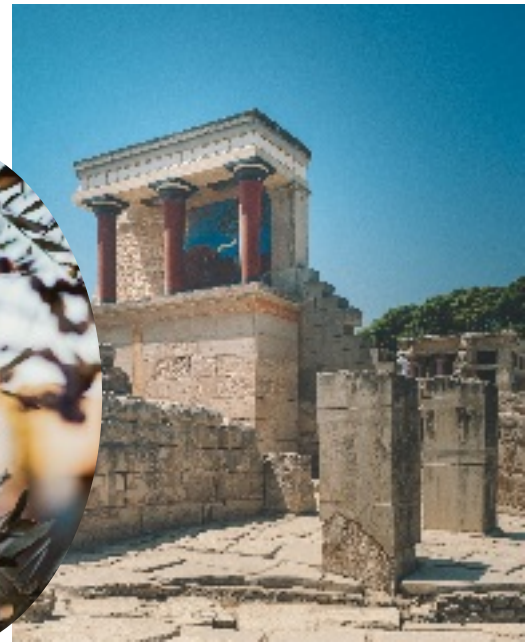


West of Athens is the Peloponnese,  
once home to the Kingdom of Sparta.  
Today it's a green region of cypress and  
**olive trees**, like those found in Kalamata.

North of Athens is Greece's highest mountain,  
the mystical, cloud-covered Mount Olympus.  
Further east is the port city of Thessaloniki,  
and the mountain monastery of Athos.

Greece has two major bays or seas –  
the Ionian and the Aegean,  
these seas play host to many islands,  
and form part of the Mediterranean.

Ionian islands include Corfu and Zakynthos,  
Aegean islands include Kos and Mykonos.  
An ancient seven wonder – the Colossus,  
fell in an earthquake in 226 BCE on Rhodes.



One of the most beautiful islands, with its  
cliffs and whitewashed churches, is **Santorini**.  
And **Chania** in Crete, the largest Greek island,  
is reminiscent of 'floating' Venice in Italy.

Crete was home of the Minoan civilisation,  
named after the Greek legend Minos,  
who ruled the Aegean until 1100 BCE,  
their ruined palace was found at **Knossos**.





Stretching like a long leg or boot,  
is the lush land of Italia,  
on the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian seas,  
it's a deliciously diverse peninsula.



Let's start in the northeast with Venice,  
a city of canals and boats called gondolas,  
the 16th-century **Rialto Bridge**,  
St Mark's Square and its Basilica.

Venice, like much of Italy, is famed  
for its dreamy ice cream – *gelato*.  
Yet, ice cream was brought to Italy from  
China by Venetian explorer Marco Polo.  
Just south of Venice is Bologna,  
two great mediaeval towers stand here.  
And going west is Verona, the setting  
of *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare.



The north of Italy is dominated by the Alps,  
with the Dolomites in the northwest,  
and three great lakes – **Maggiore**, Como, and  
Garda – it's impossible to choose the best.

The mountain ski resort of Turin  
is along Italy's longest river – Po.  
The Apennines run from here to the  
very south, and include some volcanoes.

One of Italy's largest cathedrals is in Milan  
– the fashion world's capital city.

It's also home to the *Last Supper* mural,  
by Renaissance genius Leonardo Davinci.

Da Vinci was born in the region of Tuscany,  
famed for his ideas and art like the *Mona Lisa*.  
Tuscany also has a 12th-century tilted tower,  
better known as the Leaning Tower of Pisa.



Florence, the Tuscan capital is famed for its  
Duomo cathedral, a terracotta-tiled dome,  
and Michelangelo's perfect sculpture of **David**,  
which makes other statues look like stone.



Perhaps the greatest of all capitals,  
is the 'Eternal City' of Rome.

Once the home of the Roman Empire,  
and grand amphitheatre – **the Colosseum**.

Rome has the spectacular **Trevi Fountain**,  
the Roman Forum and the Pantheon.

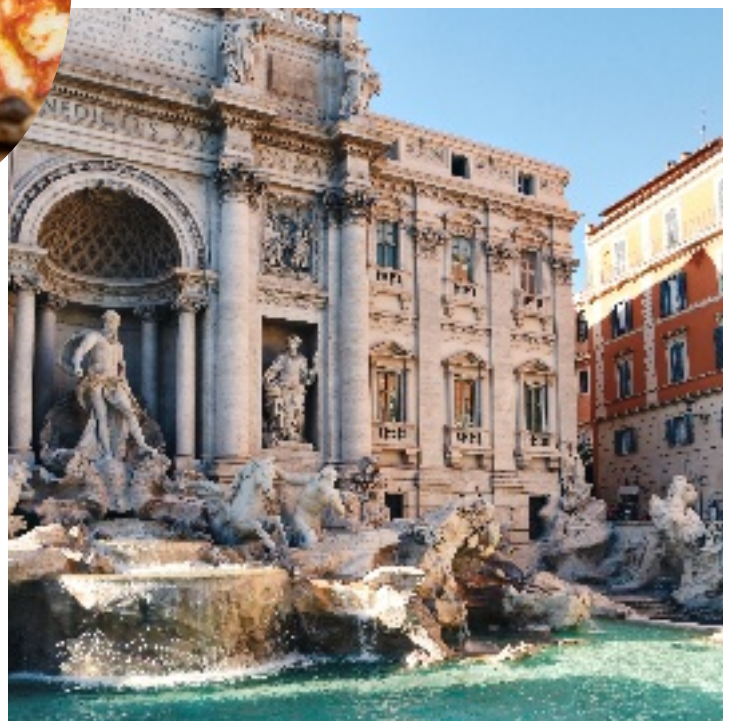
The Roman empire fell around 476 CE,  
and Italy was only unified in 1861.



Across the Tiber River in Rome is the world's  
smallest state – the Vatican, or Vaticano.

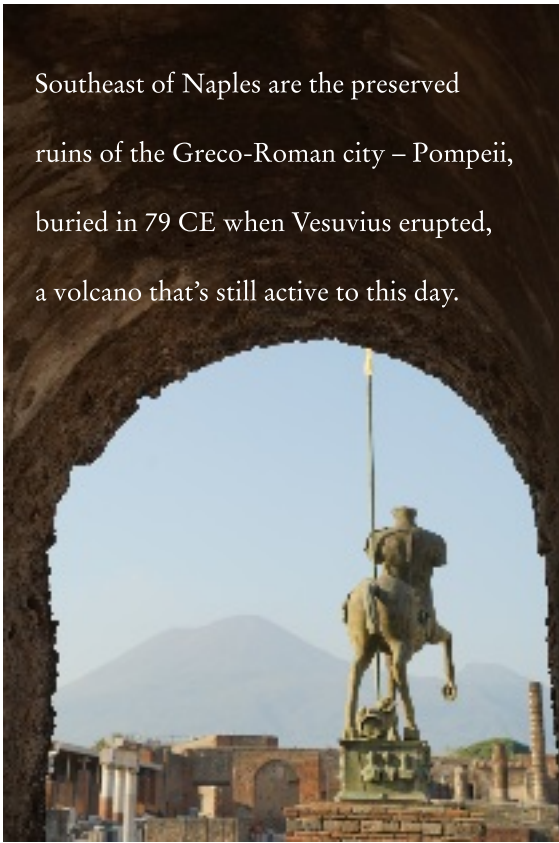
Home to St Peter's Basilica, the Pope, and  
the Sistine Chapel ceiling by Michelangelo.

South of Rome is the 'new city',  
better known as Naples or Napoli,  
credited for giving the world **pizza**,  
it's near the amazing coast of Amalfi.





Southeast of Naples are the preserved ruins of the Greco-Roman city – Pompeii, buried in 79 CE when Vesuvius erupted, a volcano that's still active to this day.



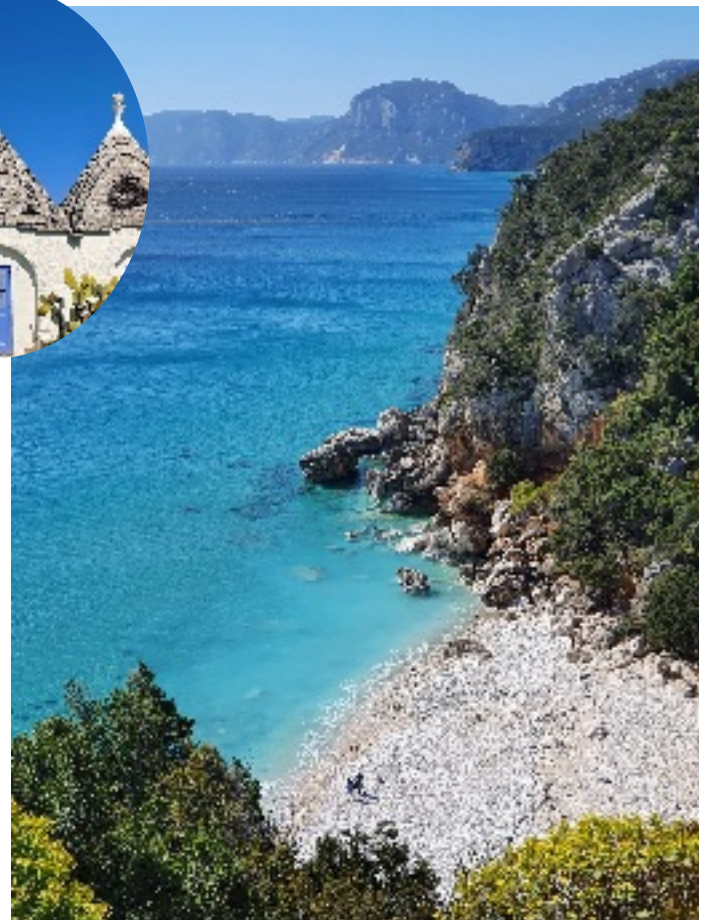
Malta is a small island near North Africa, Monaco, a kingdom on the French Riviera. Mallorca, Menorca, and Ibiza are part of the Balearic islands, owned by Spain or España.

Puglia, the southern 'heel' of Italy, has many cone-like houses called 'trulli'. And just off Italy's 'toe' is the largest Mediterranean island, Sicily.

**Sicily** has Europe's highest volcano, Etna, and the very-active volcano, Stromboli, magical mosaics and catacombs in Palermo, with over 1,000 mummified dead bodies.

Inhabited since the Bronze Age is the large Italian island of **Sardinia**.

And just north of here is the rugged, French-owned island of Corsica.



Spain and its neighbour, Portugal, share a large peninsula called Iberia – named after the Ebro River which flows to the Mediterranean, north of Valencia.

To the northeast of Spain is France, separated by the peaks of the Pyrenees.

To the northwest is the Atlantic Ocean, the regions of Galicia and Basque country.

The Cave of Altamira in Cantabria has prehistoric drawings on its walls, dating from around 14,800 years ago, one depicts a Spanish emblem - **the bull**.

**Barcelona**, Spain's second-largest city, is the colourful capital of Catalonia, known for its art and architecture like Gaudi's unfinished La Sagrada Familia.



Barça is also the home of the **Nou Camp**, one of football's greatest stadiums, and a multitude of art galleries, like the National Art and Picasso Museum.

Madrid has the Cybele fountain, the Royal Palace and is Spain's capital.

Nearby, **Toledo's Alcazar** fortress is an important national symbol.

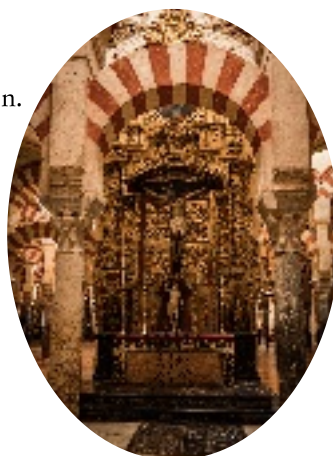






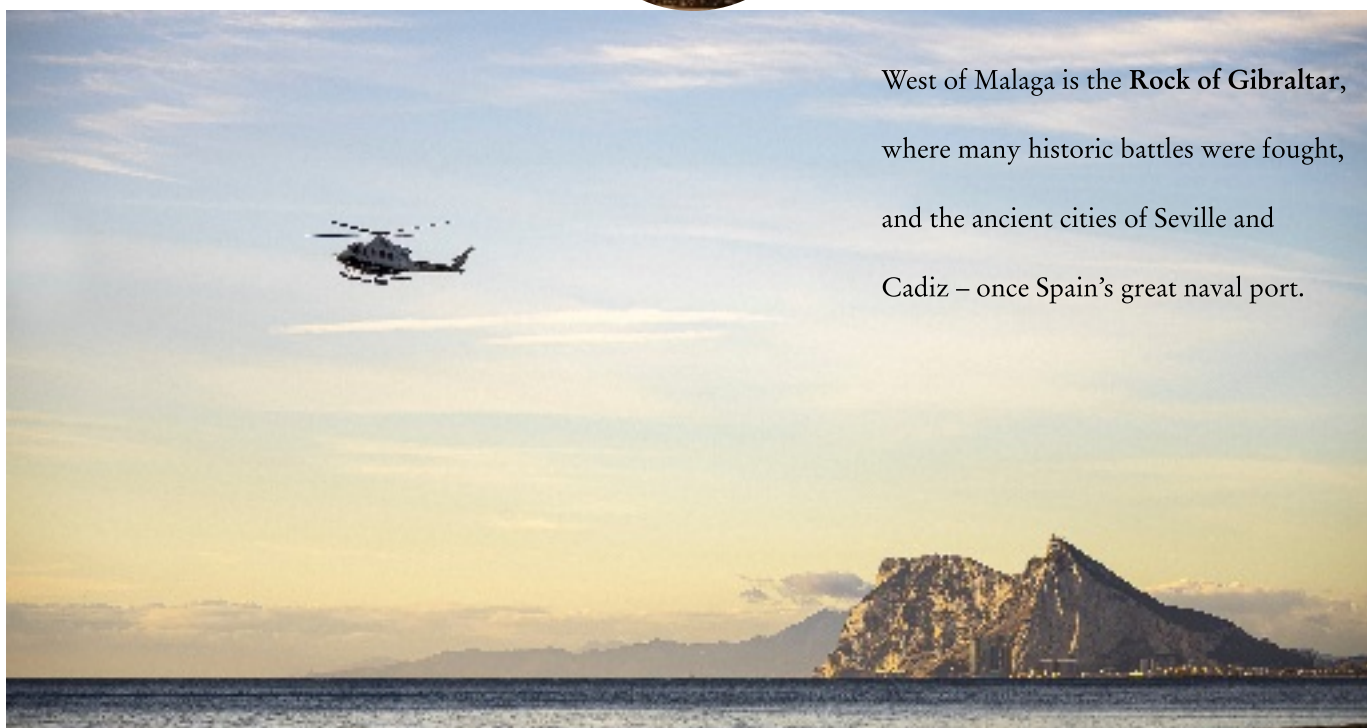
**Cordoba's 'Mezquita'**, once a mosque, is now the Cathedral of the Assumption. Spain had many Jews and Muslims before they were expelled in the Spanish Inquisition.

In the Middle Ages much of Spain was ruled by Muslim invaders, the Moors. Then the Spanish Inquisition lasted for over 300 years, until disbanded in 1834.



The Moorish influence can be seen in the Castle of Lorca in Murcia, and in **the Alhambra**, 'red palace', in the hills of the Sierra Nevada.

The Sierra Nevada rise in Andalucia, a region also known as the Costa del Sol, home of Flamenco music and dance, and the birthplace of artist Pablo Picasso.



West of Malaga is the **Rock of Gibraltar**, where many historic battles were fought, and the ancient cities of Seville and Cadiz – once Spain's great naval port.

Next we arrive in Portugal, mostly  
on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean,  
but due to its culture and climate,  
it's part of the Mediterranean.

The southern coast, called the Algarve,  
from Al-Gharb, meaning 'west' of Andalucia,  
was also ruled by Moors and Crusaders,  
who built Silves Castle in Roman Lusitania.

Belém Tower and Jerónimos Monastery  
were both built in the 15th century,  
in the capital Lisbon on the River Tagus,  
they represent Portugal's 'Age of Discovery'.

**Sintra Palace**, just north of Lisbon, is a  
colourful royal residence, open to the public.  
The monarchy lasted from King Alfonso I  
until 1910, when it became a republic.



The **Douro River** cuts through the north  
and flows to the city of Porto –  
here you can see Porto's Cathedral  
and the Crystal Gardens of the Palácio.

And so ends our Mediterranean cruise  
and indeed this entire European chapter,  
as we look towards our final journey,  
to the second-largest continent – Africa.





# *North Africa & the Sahara*

The mother of mankind and the world's oldest continent – Africa, is home to 1.4 billion people, that's about the same as India.

Once called Alkebulan or Aphrikē, Africa is made up of 54 countries, yet until the late 1950s, many were European colonies.



Rich in minerals, Africa was divided by the French, Spanish, English, and Portuguese, whose languages are still widely spoken with others like Yoruba and Swahili.

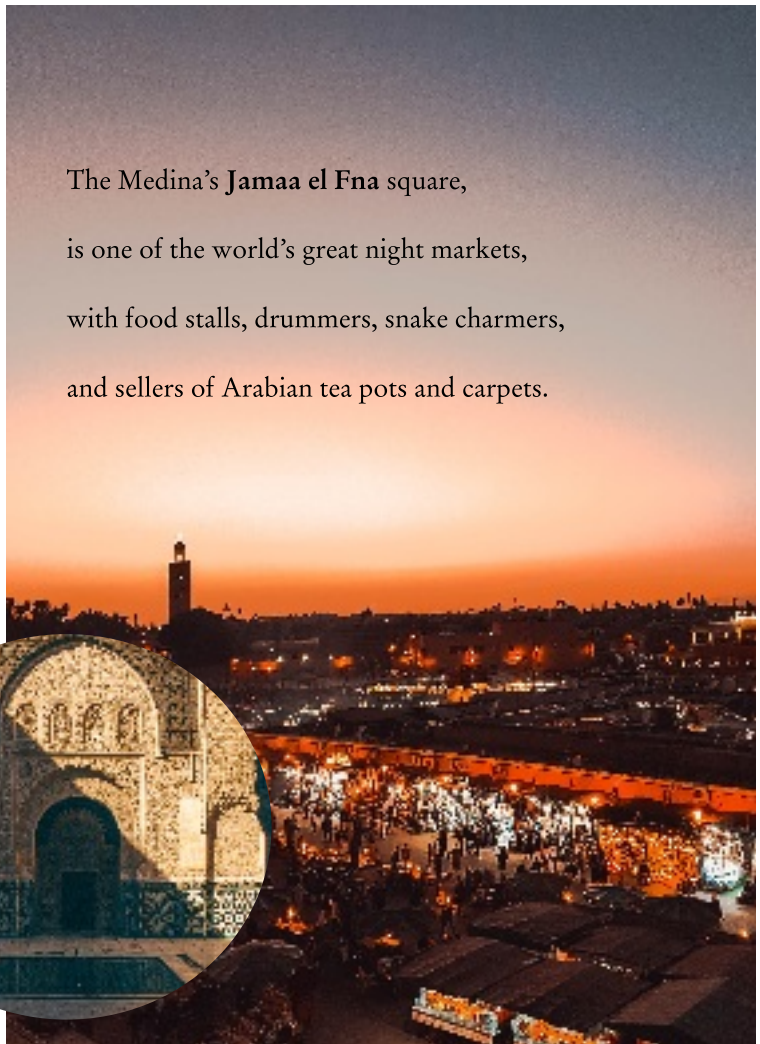
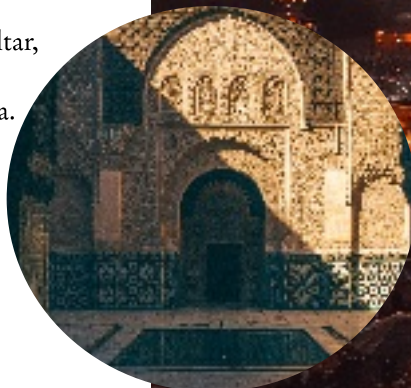
Let's start in the northwest or Maghreb, which means 'west' of Arabia.

Once the land of the Moors, it includes Morocco, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria.

Morocco, across the Strait of Gibraltar, is the only kingdom in North Africa.

**Marrakesh** is a magical walled city, famed for its old town, the Medina.

The Medina's **Jamaa el Fna** square, is one of the world's great night markets, with food stalls, drummers, snake charmers, and sellers of Arabian tea pots and carpets.





Nearby the crashing **Ouzoud waterfalls**  
empty into the El-Abid River,  
high in the Atlas Mountains, home of  
the native **Imazighen** people, or Berbers.

The Atlas Mountains run across North Africa  
and their highest peak is Toubkal.

They separate the desert from coastal cities  
like Agadir, Fez, and Rabat, the capital.

The **Hassan II mosque** is in the largest city,  
Dar el Beida, also known as Cassablanca.

All over the country are old Moorish forts,  
like the orange Ait Ben Haddou kasbah.

The Kasbah Museum and fine beaches  
are in the coastal city of Tangier,  
which is not far but not near  
to the Algerian capital, Algiers.



Algeria is the largest country in Africa,  
you may be surprised to hear,  
yet 80 percent of it is a yellow, sandy desert  
that's been spreading for 20,000 years.

Yes, this is the largest desert on Earth,  
'Al-Sahra' in Arabic – **the Sahara**,  
covering a third of all Africa,  
it was once a lush, green savanna.



Going east lies Egypt and the pyramids,  
where our long journey began,  
but let's follow the River Nile,  
all the way south to Sudan.

Tunisia has almighty sand dunes  
at the Grand Erg Oriental,  
and the Phoenician ruins of Carthage,  
one of ancient Rome's great rivals.

Libya, east of Tunisia, has its capital  
in the large port city of Tripoli.

The Fezzan region borders the Sahara,  
the north is on the Mediterranean Sea.

The man-made Lake Nasser  
is shared by Egypt and Sudan,  
and the central Nile Valley  
is home to the indigenous Nubian.

Sudan has over 200 pyramids, more than  
Egypt, dating from 4,500 years ago,  
built by the ancient Nubian and Kushites  
at places like Kerma, Napata, and **Meroe**.





Khartoum, Sudan's capital is where the White Nile, which flows from Lake Victoria, meets the Blue Nile, which flows from Lake Tana in northwest Ethiopia.

Sudan is mostly dry, arid land, but is part of the Great Green Wall – a project to plant 8,000 kilometres of trees right across Africa to Senegal.

This 'wall of trees' is set to save the Sahel – the large semi-arid zone between the Sahara and the savanna, where droughts are commonly known.

In west Sudan, around the size of Spain, is the huge, troubled region of Darfur. South Sudan, one of the youngest countries, was declared in 2011, after a long war.



Chad is a large land-locked nation, great for remote desert camel treks, it shares Lake Chad with Niger – meaning '**River of rivers**' in Tamashek.

Tamashek is spoken by the **Tuareg** people, veiled nomads, the Bedouin of the Sahara. Many Tuareg live in the land of Mali, as do the Dogon tribe and the Bambara.

Mali, last stop on the trans-Saharan route, has fabled ancient cities like Timbuktu. And horn-like rock formations at Hombori – West Africa's answer to Australia's Uluru.



**Djenne**, one of the oldest cities in Africa, is a 2,300-year-old mudbrick ‘city of clay’. Bamako, on the Niger River, Mali’s capital, is a centre of African music and culture today.

The Mali Empire in the 14th century was ruled by Musa Keita, the richest man in the world. Now Mali’s Boucle du Baoulé National Park is home to the odd giraffe and **gazelle**.

Western Sahara is a disputed land with its capital city in Laayoune.

And Mauritania bridges the desert sands with those of the Atlantic Ocean.

The Canary Islands have **Mount Teide**, the Atlantic’s highest point and volcano, and Tenerife, La Gomera, and Lanzarote – Spanish islands off the coast of Morocco.



The Azores and Madeira are islands in the North Atlantic owned by Portugal. Cape Verde is a former Portuguese colony, nearer the West African country of Senegal.



# West Africa



**Senegal**, on the tropical Atlantic Coast is the western-most ‘Gateway to Africa’ – between the Senegal and Gambia rivers, is the sprawling capital city of Dakar.

The House of Slaves museum in Dakar shows the brutal history of the Atlantic slave trade – northeast of Dakar is the salty Lake Retba, better known as the rose-coloured Pink Lake.

The Saloum Delta is a lush wetland with salt marshes, islands, and mangroves, a national park home to warthogs, **monkeys** and bird species like **pink flamingos**.

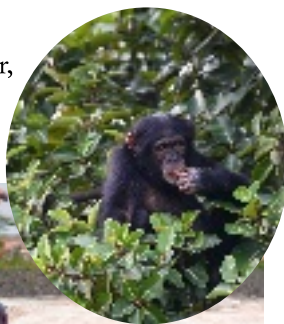
Gambia, the smallest country in mainland Africa measures, at its widest point, only 30 miles, yet it has the beaches of Banjul, Gambia River, and a tropical rainforest with crocodiles.



Guinea and Guinea-Bissau are known for their large reserves of iron ore. Liberia, like many African nations, is home to many people who are poor.

**Freetown**, the capital of Sierra Leone was founded as a haven for freed slaves in 1792, their descendents are the Creole people, who speak the Krio language too.

The Ivory Coast gets its name from the sad trade in elephant tusks, or ivory. Today, it’s major urban hub is Abidjan, and Tai forest is home to chimpanzees.



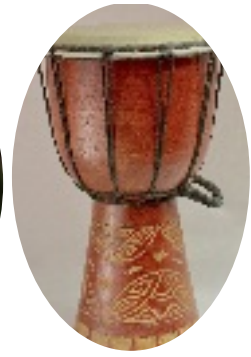


Called the Gold Coast until 1957,  
is the independent nation of Ghana.  
Once the Kingdom of the Akan people,  
it exports gold, **cocoa**, and **bananas**.

It's also home of the **djembe** and kpanlogo  
– drums that come from the capital, Accra –  
and the 14th-century Larabanga Mosque,  
sometimes called West Africa's Mecca.

At the heart of Ghana is Lake Volta,  
the largest reservoir that's man-made.  
At Boti Falls, in the east, there's a giant  
umbrella-shaped rock that gives shade.

North of Ghana is the nation of Burkina Faso,  
with the mud mosque of Bobo-Dioulasso.  
This area is drained by the River Mono,  
which flows through the country of Togo.



Another narrow nation on the Gulf of Guinea  
is Benin, formerly the Kingdom of Dahomey,  
which lies west of an African giant – Nigeria,  
the continent's most populous country.

Nigeria has over 225 million people  
and its landmass is larger than Texas,  
its capital city is Abuja, but the largest,  
home to some 15 million, is Lagos.

A mystical monolith that looks like it has  
human eyes, is the landmark **Zuma Rock**,  
sacred to the Gwari people and one of  
the earliest tribes known as the Nok.





The now-extinct Nok and other tribes lived  
for thousands of years in Nigeria.

The Yoruba people planted forest groves,  
like Osun-Osogbo in the country's interior.

On the coast, south of Lagos Lagoon,  
is the nature preserve called Lekki –  
with monkeys, snakes, and other creatures,  
and Africa's longest footbridge or canopy.

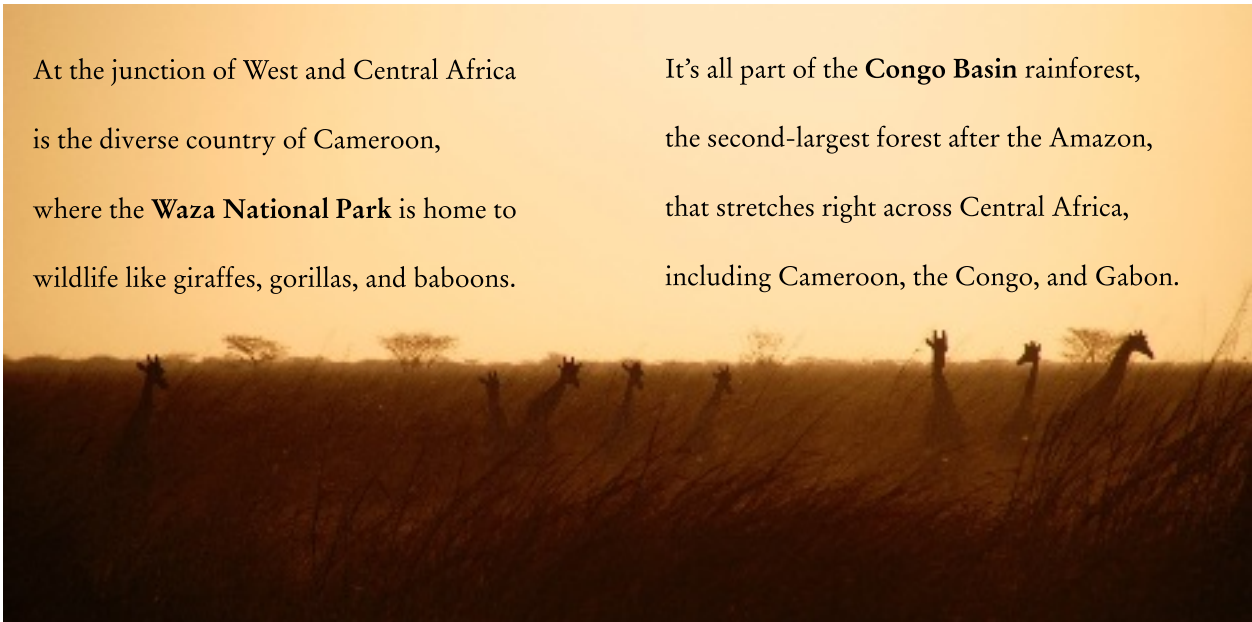
Near Douala city is Cameroon Mountain,  
called the 'mountain of greatness', or Fako.

It's the highest peak in West Africa,  
and also an imposing, active volcano.

Cameroon is named after Rio dos Camarões,  
the Wouri, or 'River of Prawns' in Portuguese.  
It has Yaoundé as its capital, Ekom Nkam falls,  
and highland forests with many tree species.

At the junction of West and Central Africa  
is the diverse country of Cameroon,  
where the **Waza National Park** is home to  
wildlife like giraffes, gorillas, and baboons.


It's all part of the **Congo Basin** rainforest,  
the second-largest forest after the Amazon,  
that stretches right across Central Africa,  
including Cameroon, the Congo, and Gabon.





A full-page background image featuring a giraffe's silhouette against a vibrant orange sunset. The giraffe's head and long neck are prominent, with the sun positioned behind its neck, creating a halo effect. The sky is a deep orange, and the foreground shows dark, silhouetted trees.

# Central & East Africa



If Central Africa is dominated by  
the immense rainforest of the Congo,  
then East Africa is characterised by  
its mountain rifts and vast plateau.

Due to its rather pointy shape,  
the east is called the Horn of Africa,  
where the Red Sea meets the Indian Ocean,  
it's also known as the Somali Peninsula.

But let's start in Equatorial Guinea,  
a small country on Africa's central west,  
with five volcanic islands in the Atlantic,  
but not on the equator, as its name suggests.

The equator line cuts through Gabon,  
whose French-named capital is Libreville.

Just south is the Republic of Congo,  
it's capital on the Congo River is Brazzaville.

On the other side of the Congo River,  
is the mega city of Kinshasa,  
with over 17 million people,  
it's the second biggest in Africa.

Kinshasa is the capital of DR Congo,  
which until 1997 was called Zaire –  
DR stands for Democratic Republic and it's  
Africa's second-largest country by area.





In the 1300's this region formed the ancient Kingdom of Kongo or Bakongo. In 1483 the king of Manikongo became Christian and changed his name to Alfonso.

The River Congo and its sister the Kasai, cross north and south of the equator, measuring some 4,370 kilometres long, after the Nile, it's Africa's second-longest river.

The Congo Basin is a vital rainforest covering an area larger than India! With over 300 million hectares – that's 13 percent of Africa.

Salonga, one of Africa's largest national parks, is a thick forest reached by the River Congo, with rare animals like the bush elephant, Congo peacock and pygmy chimp, or bonobo.

The source of the River Congo is the freshwater Lake Tanganyika, one of the Great African Lakes, with Lake Malawi and Lake Victoria.

Lake Tanganyika is shared by DR Congo, Zambia, Tanzania, and **Burundi**. Burundi's capital is Bujumbura, where the local people speak Kirundi.

North of Burundi are the Virunga mountains, with the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, home to endangered **silverback gorillas**, who also live across the border in Uganda.



The lush, fertile ‘Pearl of Africa’ –  
Uganda has its capital in Kampala,  
on the shores of Africa’s largest lake,  
the Nile’s chief source – Lake Victoria.

One of the world’s oldest countries is  
Ethiopia, once the kingdom of Abyssinia,  
– a ‘utopia’ twice the size of France,  
it’s capital is the ‘New Flower’ – Addis Ababa.

Never colonised in over 2,000 years,  
there’s over 117 million people in Ethiopia,  
such as the Amhara and Tigray – it’s Africa’s  
second-most populous country after Nigeria.

The **Ethiopian Highlands** and its mountains,  
have the source of the Blue Nile – Lake Tana.  
In the south, shared with its neighbour Kenya,  
is Lake Rudolf, also known as Lake Turkana.



The **Danakil desert** in northeast Ethiopia  
may look like it's covered in white snow.  
But it’s actually a desert of salty rock, and  
one of the lowest, hottest places we know.

The Fasil Ghebbi fortress and other royal  
castles can be found in the Gondar region.  
And **Aksum**, once a large Christian kingdom,  
has the historic Church of Our Lady of Zion.

The Ethiopian Empire once covered the  
Red Sea states of Djibouti and Eritrea.  
Eritrea became independent in 1993,  
and its capital city is called Asmara.





Somalia, at the eastern tip of Africa's Horn, is one of the world's poorest nations, with its capital in Mogadishu, it's north of the equator on the Indian Ocean.

Kenya is a country blessed with wildlife parks like Tsavo, Amboseli, and the Masai Mara, named after the ancestral **Masai people**, it's the land of the lion, leopard, and **cheetah**.



Mombasa is a large coastal city, but Kenya's capital is in Nairobi. The long coast down to Mozambique is named after the language – Swahili.

Tanzania is the home of Africa's best-known savanna with spectacular wild terrain, lion, elephant, rhino, leopard, and buffalo – the 'big five' of the Serengeti Plains.

The Ngorongoro Crater, near Serengeti, is a vast volcanic bowl called a caldera, home to a few hundred elephants, and thousands of hyenas, gazelles, and zebras.







Tanzania has east and west mountain rifts,  
and Africa's highest peak – **Kilimanjaro**,  
'njarō' means white or snow in Chagga,  
and between these rifts is a great plateau.

Tanzania's biggest city is Dar es Salaam,  
though the capital city is in Dodoma.

It's a country with many different people,  
the largest groups are Bantu and Sakuma.

One of the oldest cultures on earth  
is the **Saan tribe**, bushmen with spears,  
who hunt across southeastern Africa,  
their tradition goes back 7,000 years.

But one of nature's greatest events is the  
migration of a million **wildebeest**, or gnus.  
Wildebeest are a type of antelope,  
as are gazelles and spiral-horned kudus.

The central and east regions  
are really Mother Africa's heart,  
and all that's left is the south,  
where our next journey starts.





# Southern Africa





Southern Africa is the large tip,  
south of the Congo and Tanzania,  
between the Indian and Atlantic oceans,  
with the Namib desert, and Zambezi River.

Out in the Indian Ocean is Seychelles,  
the smallest African country, with 115 islands,  
and some of the world's best beaches,  
like **Anse Source D'Argent's** pink sands.

Another island nation is Mauritius,  
named after a Dutch prince called Maurice.  
Surrounded by a beautiful coral reef,  
it has the Tamarind falls and Ebony forest.

Mauritius once had the **Dodo**,  
a now extinct flightless bird,  
today it still has **flying foxes**,  
giant red bats that look absurd.



The fourth largest island on Earth –  
Madagascar is known for its lemur species,  
Tsingy National Park and its '**limestone forest**',  
and tall baobabs – iconic 'upside down' trees.

On Africa's mainland is Mozambique,  
with its capital city in Maputo,  
where the great Zambezi River ends,  
dotted with coral islands like Bazaruto.

The Zambezi River flows east from Angola,  
though the River Nile is much longer,  
via Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia,  
it means 'Great River' in the language of Tonga.





Malawi is known for the massive Lake Malawi,  
Liwonde National Park and capital, Lilongwe.

**Victoria Falls** along the Zambezi River are  
on the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Twice as wide, twice as deep as Niagara Falls,  
Victoria Falls are a natural wonder,  
their name in the local Lozi language,  
Mosi-oa-Tunya, means ‘smoke that thunders’.

Zambia’s largest and oldest national park,  
similar in size to Wales, is called Kafue,  
while the smaller Kasanka park is home to  
diademed monkeys, whose fur is blue.

Zimbabwe, formerly called Rhodesia, has  
Hwange National Park, one big outdoor zoo.  
Zebras and **elephants** gather at Lake Kariba  
and dams like Masuma and Mandavu.



Angola, a large country on the Atlantic coast,  
has beautiful waterfalls called Kalandula,  
**Miradouro da Lua**, ‘viewpoint of the moon’,  
bright red rock cliffs, near the capital, Luanda.



Namibia is a nation of world record numbers –  
the **Namib desert** is the oldest on earth,  
with the highest sand dunes at 300 metres,  
and Skeleton Coast, the most-dangerous surf.



The Skeleton Coast is named after **shipwrecks**  
and scattered bones of whales and sharks.

**Lake Etosha** is a large salt pan in the north,  
Namib-Naukluft is Africa's largest nature park.

The Dorsland baobab, at 2,100-years-old,  
is one of Africa's oldest and best-loved trees.  
Hoba, a chunk of iron weighing 64 tonnes,  
is Earth's largest meteorite, cosmic debris.



Africa's second desert after the Sahara,  
the Kalahari, encompasses much of Botswana.  
Its name means 'great thirst' in Tswana,  
home to wildlife in its semi-arid savanna.

Botswana has the Chobe Game Reserve and  
Okavango Delta, where travellers go on a safari,  
and there's plenty more in South Africa,  
like Mala Mala, Aquila and Shamwari.



At last, we arrive in South Africa,  
often called the ‘world in one country’ –  
with mountains, safaris, beaches, and cities,  
it also has a long and turbulent history.

Once a multitude of tribal kingdoms,  
in 1910 South Africa was unified,  
and from 1948 until the early 1990s,  
black people suffered under apartheid.

Today, South Africa is the ‘Rainbow Nation’,  
home to a diverse melting pot of people,  
speaking Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, and more,  
it also has not one, but three capitals.

The capitals are Cape Town, Bloemfontein,  
and the old colonial city of Pretoria.

Further south are the towering Tugela Falls,  
taller than Zambia’s waterfalls, Victoria.

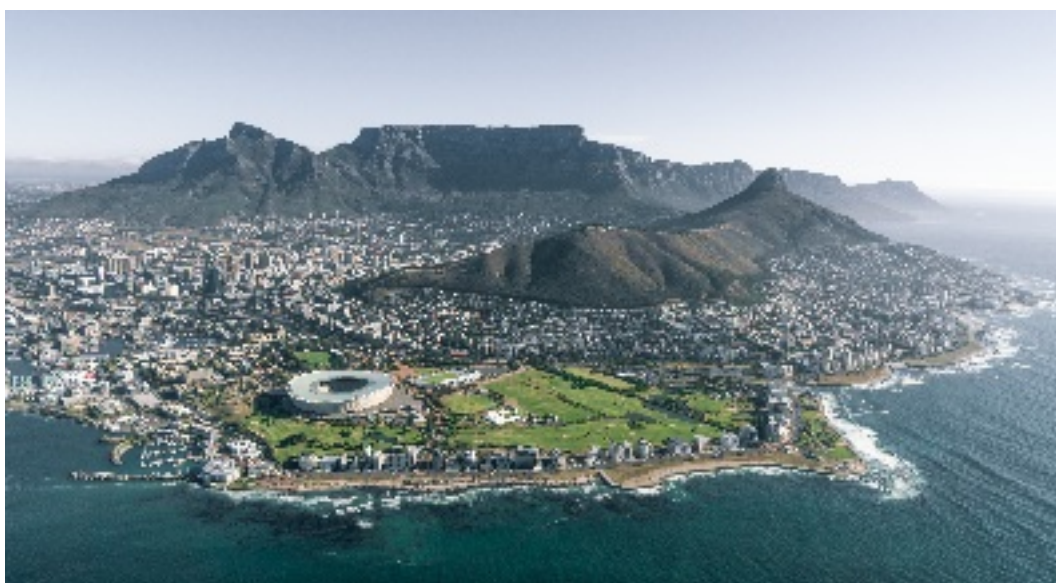


Tugela Falls are in the KwaZulu-Natal province,  
and the ‘Dragon’s Mountains’ – Drakensberg,  
a beautiful region that’s shared with Lesotho,  
a land-locked enclave, south of Johannesburg.

Found in some caves north of Johannesburg,  
was a fossilised early human skull,  
called Mr. Ples from ‘plesianthropus’,  
it’s said to be over 2.5 million years old!

Head north to the huge **Kruger National Park**,  
via the lush, green **Blyde River Canyon**,  
– one of the largest canyons in the world –  
before going south to the port city of Durban.



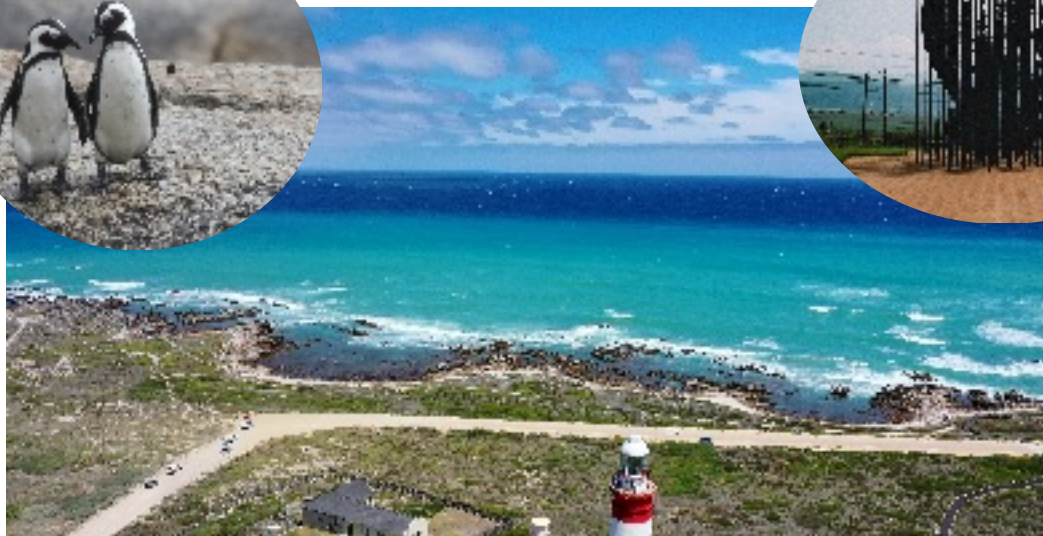


Following the Indian Ocean coastline,  
witness seals, dolphins and whales at play,  
along South Africa's Garden Route from  
Port Elizabeth to Cape Town's Mossel Bay.

Cape Town, one of world's great coastal cities,  
is overlooked by the flat-top **Table Mountain**,  
while the southwestern Cape of Good Hope,  
is popular for flocks of African **penguins**.

Robben Island, eight kilometres from Cape Town,  
was once a prison surrounded by the sea,  
where ex-president **Nelson Mandela** was held captive,  
until people worldwide demanded he be set free.

**Cape Agulhas**, a village and lighthouse,  
is the southernmost point of mainland Africa,  
but is 6,400 kilometres from the South Pole,  
and the remote, icy continent of Antarctica.





A photograph of an Antarctic landscape. In the foreground, there are large, jagged icebergs floating in dark water. The middle ground shows a vast, flat expanse of snow and ice. In the distance, a single penguin stands on the horizon line. To the right, a dark, rocky mountain peak is partially covered in snow. The sky is a pale, overcast blue.

# Antarctica

At the most southern end of the world,  
is the ice-covered continent of Antarctica –  
with no permanent residents, no countries,  
it's around twice the size of Australia.

Antarctica – the world's giant freezer –  
attracts explorers and scientists today,  
and its thick ice sheets play an important  
role of deflecting the sun's powerful rays.

The coldest place on Earth, with temperatures  
as low as  $-80^{\circ}$  celsius in the interior,  
there's no trees or shrubs, only hairgrass,  
on the western Antarctic Peninsula.

Mount Erebus is an active volcano and  
Vinson Massif is Antarctica's highest peak.  
And the large, local Emperor penguins,  
can dive in waters of up to 550 metres deep.

The Southern Ocean is home to **elephant seals**  
and blue **whales** – the largest creature that exists,  
weighing 200 tons, equal to 33 elephants,  
they're sadly on the endangered species list.

Lake Vostok, beneath 3.5 kilometres of ice  
has a research station built by the Russians,  
and the **South Pole** was first reached in  
1911 by Roald Amundsen, a Norwegian.

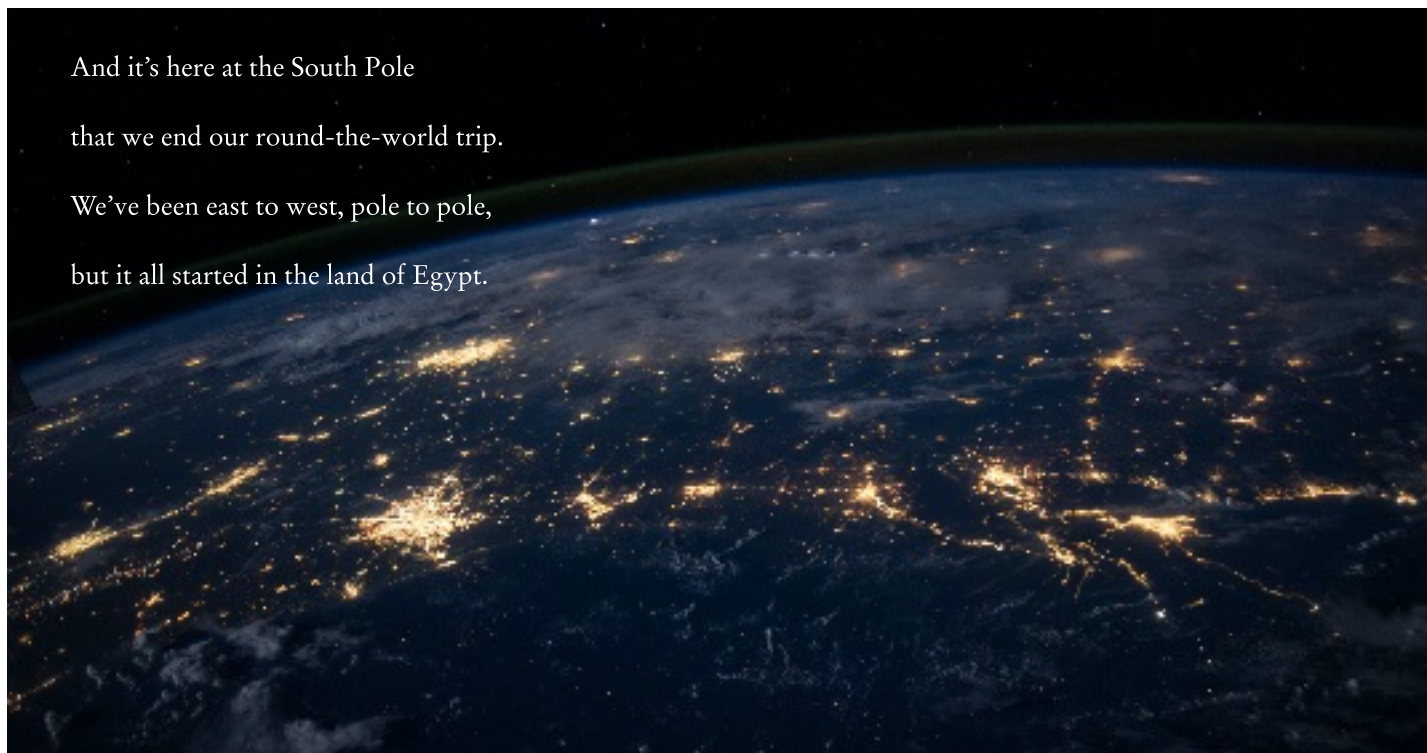






# *Journey's End*

And it's here at the South Pole  
that we end our round-the-world trip.  
We've been east to west, pole to pole,  
but it all started in the land of Egypt.



We then travelled east through Arabia,  
and onto India, China, and Southeast Asia,  
before passing Oceania and Australia,  
and across the Pacific via Polynesia.

From Cape Horn, we went north through the  
Americas, Alaska, Greenland, and Scandinavia,  
then down the British Isles and Central Europe  
to the Balkans, Eastern Europe and Russia.

After a Mediterranean odyssey we crossed  
North Africa, the Sahara, and the Congo,  
then Africa's Horn and southern regions,  
where human life started a long time ago.

We learnt about the Saan, Nubian, Rapa Nui,  
Aboriginal, Maori, and other tribes,  
and discovered the temples of the Shinto,  
Maya, Inca, Greeks, and many ancient sights.

From magical Mecca to the majestic Taj Mahal,  
from Sydney Opera House to the Statue of Liberty,  
we've been to the world's largest country – Russia,  
to the world's smallest nation – Vatican City.





We went to the lowest point – the Dead Sea,  
to Mount Everest, the world's highest place,  
to the dry Atacama and Namib deserts,  
to the Amazon Rainforest, visible from space.

We've seen all kinds of incredible animals,  
from komodo dragons to kangaroos,  
to polar bears and blue whales,  
and millions of wildebeest, or gnus.

Yes, our world seems unfathomably big,  
but yet sometimes it feels quite small.  
Some places seem busy and overcrowded,  
while in the wild, there's no-one at all.

Humans have built great kingdoms,  
conquered seas and created borders,  
but we live in a nameless nature,  
which has its own ingenious order.

Earth takes 365 days and six hours,  
to rotate around the sun,  
which sends light and life to flowers,  
plants, animals, and everyone.

And while history shows mankind has  
fought on land, by sea, and in the air,  
one truth brings us all together –  
this is the only planet we all share.



# Appendix





### **The New Seven Wonders of the World**

1. Great Wall, China
2. Chichen Itza, Mexico
3. Petra, Jordan
4. Machu Picchu, Peru
5. Christ the Redeemer, Brazil
6. The Colosseum, Italy
7. Taj Mahal, India

### **The Natural Seven Wonders of the World**

1. The Northern Lights, Norway
2. The Grand Canyon, United States
3. Paricutin, Mexico
4. Victoria Falls, Zambia
5. Mount Everest, Nepal
6. Great Barrier Reef, Australia
7. Rio de Janeiro Harbour, Brazil

### **The Ancient Seven Wonders of the World**

1. Colossus of Rhodes, Greece
2. Great Pyramid of Giza, Egypt
3. Hanging Gardens of Babylon, Iraq
4. Statue of Zeus at Olympia, Greece
5. Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, Turkey
6. Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, Turkey
7. Lighthouse of Alexandria, Egypt

### **The World's Biggest Countries by Area**

1. Russia: 17,098,250 km<sup>2</sup>
2. Canada: 9,879,750 km<sup>2</sup>
3. United States: 9,831,510 km<sup>2</sup>
4. China: 9,600,013 km<sup>2</sup>
5. Brazil: 8,515,770 km<sup>2</sup>
6. Australia: 7,741,220 km<sup>2</sup>
7. India: 3,287,260 km<sup>2</sup>

### **The World's Biggest Countries by Population**

1. China: 1.44 billion
2. India: 1.38 billion
3. United States: 331 million
4. Indonesia: 274 million
5. Pakistan: 221 million
6. Brazil: 215 million
7. Nigeria: 214 million

### **The World's Biggest Cities by Population**

1. Tokyo, Japan: 37.4 million
2. Delhi, India: 29.4 million
3. Shanghai, China: 26.3 million
4. São Paulo, Brazil: 21.8 million
5. Mexico City, Mexico: 21.6 million
6. Cairo, Egypt: 21 million
7. Dhaka, Bangladesh: 20.2 million

### **The World's Biggest Islands (excluding Australia)**

1. Greenland: 2,166,086 sq km
2. New Guinea: 821,400 sq km
3. Borneo, Indonesia: 748,168 sq km
4. Madagascar: 587,295 sq km
5. Baffin, Canada: 507,451 sq km
6. Sumatra, Indonesia: 443,066 sq km
7. Honshu, Japan: 227,898 sq km

### **The World's Biggest Lakes**

1. Caspian Sea, Russia & others: 371,000 sq km
2. Lake Superior, Canada & USA: 82,100 sq km
3. Lake Victoria, Uganda & Tanzania: 68,870 sq km
4. Lake Huron, Canada & USA: 59,600 sq km
5. Lake Michigan, USA: 58,000 sq km
6. Lake Tanganyika, Tanzania & Congo: 32,600 sq km
7. Lake Baikal, Siberia: 31,500 sq km

### **The World's Longest Rivers**

1. Nile, Egypt, Sudan, and others
2. Amazon, Brazil, Colombia, and others
3. Yangtze, China
4. Mississippi, United States
5. Yenisei, Siberia and Mongolia
6. Yellow, China
7. Ob, Siberia

### **The World's Biggest Forests**

1. Amazon Rainforest, Brazil, Bolivia & others: 7M sq km
2. Taiga (Boreal forest), Russia & Arctic: 6.8M sq km
3. Congo Rainforest, Cameroon & Congo: 2.02M sq km
4. Valdivian Rainforest, Chile & Argentina: 248,100 sq km
5. Tongass National Forest, Alaska: 68,790 sq km
6. Bosawas Biosphere Reserve, Nicaragua: 22,014 sq km
7. Sundarbans, Bangladesh & India: 10,000 sq km

### **The World's Biggest Deserts**

1. Antarctic: 14.2 million sq km
2. Arctic: 13.9 million sq km
3. Sahara, Algeria, Tunisia & others: 9.0 million sq km
4. Arabian, Jordan, Saudi Arabia & others: 2.6 million sq km
5. Gobi, Mongolia: 1.3 million sq km
6. Patagonian, Argentina and Chile: 0.67 million sq km
7. Great Victoria, Australia: 0.65 million sq km

### **The World's Highest Mountains by Continent**

1. Asia: Mount Everest, Nepal: 8,850 m
2. South America: Mount Aconcagua, Argentina: 6,962 m
3. Africa: Kilimanjaro, Tanzania: 5,895 m
4. Europe: Mount Elbrus, Russia: 5,642 m
5. North America: Denali, Alaska: 5,500 m
6. Antarctica: Vinson Massif: 4,892 m
7. Oceania: Jaya Peak, New Guinea: 4,884 m

\* The world's second-highest peak is K2 (Karakoram) in Pakistan and China, Asia, at 8,611 metres.



## **The World's Youngest Countries**

1. South Sudan, established 2011
2. Kosovo, established 2008
3. Montenegro and Serbia, established 2006
4. East Timor, established 2002
5. Palau, established 1994
6. Eritrea, Czech Republic and Slovakia, established 1993
7. Croatia, 1991

## **The World's Oldest Countries (Uninterrupted to this day)**

1. Egypt, 3100 BCE
2. India and Afghanistan, 3000 BCE
3. China, 2100 BCE
4. Ethiopia and Greece, 980-900 BCE
5. Armenia, 782 BCE
6. Japan, 660 BCE
7. Iran, 550 BCE

## **The World's Oldest Civilisations (approximate)**

1. Mesopotamia, Iraq, 4000 BCE
2. Indus Valley, India & Pakistan, 3300 BCE
3. Ancient Egypt, 3100 BCE
4. Ancient Nubia, Sudan, 2500 BCE
5. Ancient China, 2100 BCE
6. Olmec, Mesoamerica, Mexico, 1200 BCE
7. Ancient Israel & Greece, 1000 BCE

\* Carthage was founded by the Phoenicians in 814 BCE, Rome was founded in 753 BCE, and the Persian (Achaemenid) Empire, was founded in 550 BCE. The Nok (Nigeria) civilisation may date back to 1500 BCE.

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