DESIGNED FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY, THE VISUAL WORLD ATLAS REVEALS THE "HIDDEN" FACTS ABOUT OUR PLANET... AND HOW WE ENTER THE NEW MILLENIUM

Inside you will find:

• More than 110 thematic maps.
• More than 50 fact tables from world-renowned organizations.
• More than 130 photographs.
• A glossary and detailed indexes.
• Rich encyclopedic content, reviewed by experts.

The Visual World Atlas is an overview of the state of the world for understanding global issues. Designed for the whole family, this atlas covers hundreds of subjects that touch on different aspects of life on Earth with clarity and precision (geology, environment, politics, demography, economy, etc.). Presenting thousands of statistical facts on the world’s 193 countries, this thematic atlas features accessible text (linked to visual content of exceptional quality). Unique to its genre, for school as well as home, The Visual World Atlas is essential reading for discovering and understanding the world in all its diversity.

WORLD ATLAS
Secondary maps illustrate the country’s population. It gives an indication of the standard of living used to measure a country’s wealth. Divided by the number of inhabitants, it gives an indication of the standard of living used to measure a country’s wealth.

The Visual World Atlas was coined in the 1960s when the Third World was referred to as the "South", and the former colonial powers were considered the "North". The expression "Third World" was coined to refer to the countries that had formerly been colonies of the major powers and that were then developing a new identity not aligned with either the "First World" or the "Second World." The Third World today consists of those parts of the world which are not members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or the European Community. The member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) offer aid to developing countries.

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The Visual World Atlas

Facts and maps of the current world
The Visual World Atlas [document cartographique] was created and produced by QA International
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The Visual World Atlas

Facts and maps of the current world
Subject
Each subject covers two to eight pages and offers a complete comprehension of the theme addressed.

Introduction
An introductory text gives a basic overview of the subject.

Explanatory texts
Explanatory texts complement the visual information.

Legend
A legend describes the symbols used in the main map.

Agriculture
Agriculture is the basis of our food supply. The term covers all exploitation of the land for crop and livestock production. The agriculture sector employs more than 40% of the labor force worldwide. Most farmers live in developing countries. However, today developing countries import more agricultural products than they export, the reverse of the situation up to the early 1990s. Serious food shortages are ravaging about 30 of these countries. Farmers in developing countries practice small-scale agriculture, while many farmers in wealthy countries own vast, highly productive operations.

Agricultural production
The main agricultural plant products are sugar cane, corn, wheat, rice, oats, etc., and vegetables, potatoes, sugar beets, manioc, etc.,yperbaceous, citrus fruits, and foreign plants. The main animal products are milk and pork. When the crops are irrigated by riverwater only, it is called rain-fed agriculture. Rice cultivation, for instance, may be rain-fed, in which case it is a low-yield crop. It may also be irrigated and give better yields.

KEY TO SYMBOLS ON MAP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT IT STANDS FOR</th>
<th>VISUAL PRESENTATION</th>
<th>WHAT IT STANDS FOR</th>
<th>SYMBOL</th>
<th>VISUAL PRESENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mountain range</td>
<td>HIMALAYAS</td>
<td>summit</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kilimanjaro, 5,892 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plateau</td>
<td>Patagonia</td>
<td>depression</td>
<td>▼</td>
<td>Death Valley, -45 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plain and basin</td>
<td>Hungarian Basin</td>
<td>lake</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lake Balaton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desert</td>
<td>GREAT SANDY DESERT</td>
<td>watercourse</td>
<td></td>
<td>Amazon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ocean</td>
<td>INDIAN OCEAN</td>
<td>capital</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dublín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sea</td>
<td>Weddell Sea</td>
<td>geographic reference point</td>
<td>— — —</td>
<td>TROPIC DES CANCROB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coastal element</td>
<td>Gulf of Bothnia</td>
<td>main road</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>island</td>
<td>Caroline Is.</td>
<td>international border</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>continent</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>regional boundary</td>
<td>— —</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>region</td>
<td>MIDDLE EAST</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>country</td>
<td>SOMALI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>territory (ISO country code)</td>
<td>GREENLAND (DK)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>city</td>
<td>Lagos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviated forms of the names of countries comply with the recommendations of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), detailed on page 164.
HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Visual tab
A photographic excerpt reminds you of the chapter within which the subject falls.

Main map
The main map gives you an at-a-glance overview of the theme discussed.

Photographs
The photographs are linked by lines to the places where they were taken.

Enlargements
Portions of the main map are enlarged to give a detailed view of certain regions.

Boxes
Supplementary information is given in secondary maps, illustrations, graphs, and statistical tables.

MAIN ABBREVIATIONS USED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METRIC UNIT</th>
<th>ABBREVIATION</th>
<th>U.S. UNIT EQUIVALENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>millimeter</td>
<td>mm</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>centimeter</td>
<td>cm</td>
<td>0.4 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meter</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>3.28 feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kilometer</td>
<td>km</td>
<td>0.62 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>square kilometer</td>
<td>km²</td>
<td>0.39 square miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cubic meter</td>
<td>m³</td>
<td>1.31 cubic yards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cubic kilometer</td>
<td>km³</td>
<td>0.24 cubic miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gram</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>0.03 ounces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kilogram</td>
<td>kg</td>
<td>2.2 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metric ton</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>1.1 short tons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>million</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>billion</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>degrees Celsius</td>
<td>°C</td>
<td>33.8 degrees Fahrenheit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hectopascal</td>
<td>hPa</td>
<td>0.03 inches of mercury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liter</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>33.8 ounces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>million hectares</td>
<td>M ha</td>
<td>2.47 million acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hour, second</td>
<td>h, s</td>
<td>the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kilometer per hour</td>
<td>km/h</td>
<td>the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kilowatt-hour</td>
<td>kWh</td>
<td>the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>megawatt</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>degree</td>
<td>°</td>
<td>the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before the Common Era</td>
<td>BCE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inhabitant</td>
<td>inhab.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. dollar</td>
<td>$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gross domestic product</td>
<td>GDP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gross national product</td>
<td>GNP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We live in an amazing world!

Earth, our blue planet, has a special something that makes it unique: it is home to life. For millions of years, despite countless natural disasters and wild fluctuations in climate, life has persisted.

For about the past 150 years, life on Earth, as tenacious as it may be, has come under increasing threat. The growing impact of human activities on the planet’s fragile balance is putting its inhabitants at risk. The forecasted ecological catastrophe can be avoided, if we equip ourselves with the means to do so.

And Earth is worth protecting. Our tiny piece of the Universe offers a panoply of breathtaking landscapes, from the vertiginous heights of the Himalayas and the extraordinary aridity of the Sahara to the bursts of color in tropical seas. With so much beauty and diversity, Earth deserves all of our respect.

In order to respect Earth, we have to know it better. Each region of the world stands out, whether for its geography, its geology, its fauna, its population, its political organization, or its economy. You will find out about all of these aspects in *The Visual World Atlas*.

Today, all the continents have been explored and uncovered, but the knowledge that has accumulated makes sense only if it is explained and deciphered. This book does not present the most minute details on each region, but offers a careful selection of relevant information that will enable you to discover our world and understand the phenomena that sweep across it.

*The Visual World Atlas* provides a complete, detailed overview of Earth. It covers 31 subjects in physical and human geography and offers thousands of statistical facts concerning the 193 countries of the world. It contains more than 110 thematic maps, as well as photographs taken all over the world.

With this book in your hands, Earth, in all its diversity, is within your reach. In a world in perpetual change, *The Visual World Atlas* gives you the keys to comprehending the present and grasping the challenges to be met in the future.
### Contents

#### Earth: A Rocky Planet :: 8
- 10 The Solar System
- 12 The planet Earth
- 14 The structure of Earth
- 18 Continental relief features
- 24 Landforms on the ocean floor
- 26 Volcanoes
- 28 Earthquakes

#### Earth: A Blue Planet :: 30
- 32 The world ocean
- 38 Freshwater

#### Earth: A Planet in Balance :: 42
- 44 Climates
- 48 Cold environments
- 50 Arid environments
- 52 Climatic catastrophes
- 58 The biosphere
- 62 The conservation of species
- 64 Atmospheric pollution
- 68 Water and soil pollution

#### Earth: An Inhabited Planet :: 70
- 72 The political world
- 78 World population
- 82 Languages
- 84 Religions
- 86 Sports
- 90 Economics
- 96 Energy
- 98 Agriculture
- 102 Transportation
- 106 Inequalities
- 110 Freshwater resources
- 112 Health
- 114 Illiteracy
- 116 Conflicts

#### The Continents :: 120
- 122 North America
- 128 South America
- 134 Europe
- 140 Asia
- 146 Africa
- 152 Oceania
- 158 Antarctica

#### Glossary
- 161

#### Statistical data sources
- 164

#### Geographical index
- 165

#### Thematic index
- 172

#### Photo credits
- 176
Earth is the largest rocky planet in the Solar System. It offers a variety of ever-changing landscapes. As the immense plates that form Earth’s crust slowly move toward and away from each other, mountains rise, oceans open up, volcanoes erupt. Erosion is also constantly shaping the planet’s relief features: mountains flatten, valleys are dug, coastlines recede. Observing Earth’s landscapes enables us to understand the history of our planet, explain its structure, and anticipate its future transformations.
The Universe contains an almost unimaginable number of galaxies—no fewer than 100 billion! In the midst of this immensity is our galaxy, the Milky Way. The Solar System is located on the periphery of the Milky Way. It includes one star, the Sun, and eight planets, three dwarf planets (Ceres, Eris, and Pluto), more than 160 natural satellites orbiting these planets, millions of asteroids (small, rocky celestial bodies), millions of comets (balls of dirty snow), billions of pebbles, and cosmic dust and gases.

The planets of the Solar System

The planets closest to the Sun are rocky planets. They are also called the inner planets, since they are situated between the Sun and the main asteroid belt. Earth is one of them. The planets situated outside the main asteroid belt are called the outer planets. They are gaseous giants, composed mainly of hydrogen and helium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE INNER PLANETS</th>
<th>MERCURY</th>
<th>VENUS</th>
<th>EARTH</th>
<th>MARS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>diameter [km]</td>
<td>4,879</td>
<td>12,104</td>
<td>12,756</td>
<td>6,794</td>
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<tr>
<td>average distance from the Sun [AU]</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>period of rotation</td>
<td>58.6 days</td>
<td>243 days</td>
<td>23.9 hr</td>
<td>24.6 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mass [relative to Earth]</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>1 [5.9 x 10^24 kg]</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>gravity at the equator [relative to Earth]</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>100% [9.766 m/s²]</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>temperature [ºC]</td>
<td>–173 to 427</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>–88 to 58</td>
<td>–87 to 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of known natural satellites</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1, the Moon</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>composition of the atmosphere</td>
<td>no substantial atmosphere</td>
<td>carbon dioxide, nitrogen</td>
<td>nitrogen, oxygen</td>
<td>carbon dioxide, nitrogen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>date of discovery</td>
<td>known since antiquity</td>
<td>known since antiquity</td>
<td>known since antiquity</td>
<td>known since antiquity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NASA

The orbits of the planets and dwarf planets of the Solar System
Center of the Milky Way
Our Solar System is situated about 28,000 light-years—that is, 280 million billion km—from the center of the Milky Way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE OUTER PLANETS</th>
<th>JUPITER</th>
<th>SATURN</th>
<th>URANUS</th>
<th>NEPTUNE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>diameter [km]</td>
<td>142,984</td>
<td>120,536</td>
<td>51,118</td>
<td>49,528</td>
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<tr>
<td>average distance from the Sun (AU)</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>9.54</td>
<td>19.19</td>
<td>30.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 AU [astronomical unit] = 149,600,000 km</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>period of rotation</td>
<td>9.8 hr</td>
<td>10.6 hr</td>
<td>17.2 hr</td>
<td>16.1 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mass [relative to Earth]</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gravity at the equator [relative to Earth]</td>
<td>214%</td>
<td>107%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>110%</td>
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<tr>
<td>temperature [ºC]</td>
<td>−148</td>
<td>−178</td>
<td>−216</td>
<td>−214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of known natural satellites</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>composition of the atmosphere</td>
<td>hydrogen, helium</td>
<td>hydrogen, helium</td>
<td>hydrogen, helium, methane</td>
<td>hydrogen, helium, methane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>date of discovery</td>
<td>known since antiquity</td>
<td>known since antiquity</td>
<td>1781</td>
<td>1846</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NASA
Formed 4.6 billion years ago, Earth is the largest of the four rocky planets in the Solar System. It has a single natural satellite: the Moon. Earth is the densest celestial body in the Solar System: each cubic meter of the planet weighs an average of 5.5 metric tons. It is also the only planet that has vast oceans of liquid water, within which life appeared 3.5 billion years ago.

Earth seen from space

Earth’s vast oceans, from which it gets its nickname “the blue planet,” can be seen from space. Its continents, with jagged coastlines, are formed of mountains, deserts, lakes—all relief features that are visible from space. Observation satellites can also detect a number of impact craters (the imprints of collisions between Earth and meteorites) and forests. Earth observation satellites are sent into space from launch bases dispersed around the globe.

The Moon is Earth’s only natural satellite. It makes one revolution around Earth in 28 days and always has the same face turned toward the planet (the visible face). Its diameter is 3,476 km, and its surface is pocked with craters produced by collisions with asteroids. Situated only 384,400 km from Earth, the Moon is the most-studied celestial body after our planet. Since the late 1950s, several dozen space missions, manned and unmanned, have explored it.
Phytoplankton, offshore of Namibia
Artificial satellites allow us to study the development and movement of phytoplankton.

Lake Balkhash, Kazakhstan
The affluents of Lake Balkhash are visible on satellite images.
The interior of our planet, with its extreme pressure and temperature conditions, is still a mysterious place. It is where minerals are created and metamorphosed through processes that span millions of years. The immense plates that form Earth’s crust float on the surface of a mass of partially liquid rock. As these plates collide with each other, they build mountains and open up oceans.

**Plate tectonics**

Although it seems to be immobile, the land on which we live moves several centimeters each year. India and Asia, for example, are moving toward each other by 4 to 6 cm every year. This phenomenon, called plate tectonics, results from the fact that the lithosphere, the outer layer of Earth, is fragmented into a dozen huge plates, the tectonic plates, about 100 km thick, that slide over the surface of Earth’s mantle. Plate tectonics is responsible for most of the components of Earth’s surface, including oceans, created when two plates move apart (divergent plates), and mountain ranges (convergent plates) that come into existence when two plates collide. Sometimes, two plates simply slip against each other along what is called a transform fault. Although the movement of lithospheric plates is slow and continuous, it is nonetheless the cause of the most violent and devastating phenomena on the planet: volcanic eruptions and earthquakes.
In the early 20th century, the German geophysicist and climatologist Alfred Wegener noted that the continents looked like they might be able to fit together. He observed, for example, that the contours of the west coast of Africa were an almost perfect match with those of the east coast of South America. He thus formulated the hypothesis, demonstrated in the 1960s, that millions of years ago there was just one huge continent, Pangaea, in a single ocean, Panthalassa. This supercontinent apparently broke up gradually, forming new continents and new oceans that continued to drift on the surface of the globe. The expansion of the sea floor and plate tectonics are responsible for the mechanism of continental drift. The plates carrying continents are moving toward or away from each other at speeds varying from 1 to 18 cm per year.
The interior of Earth

It is impossible to have a completely clear picture of Earth’s internal structure. However, study of the transformations of the planet’s surface and analysis of other planets in the Solar System have supplied much information about the interior of Earth. Our planet has a total mass of about 6 trillion tons and is formed of three concentric layers—from densest to lightest, core, mantle, and crust. Each has an individual chemical composition and specific physical properties. Earth’s crust, composed of oceanic crust and continental crust, represents barely 3% of the planet’s volume.
The movements of Earth’s crust and the erosive action of the wind and water shape a variety of relief features on Earth’s surface, such as mountains, plains, and plateaus.

In spite of the diversity of landforms, all continents have a similar structure, with older and more recent parts. The continents rest on a bedrock formed of very old rocks dating from the Precambrian Era (4.6 billion to 570 million years ago). Most major bedrock zones are situated in the center of the continents.

The landforms of continents

Mountains are the most prominent of Earth’s relief features. They are characterized by more or less steep slopes, and their altitude depends on their age. Plains are vast flat areas in which shallow valleys are carved out by watercourses. Plateaus are large flat stretches edged by escarpments, sometimes very steep. Rivers carve encased valleys, or sometimes gorges or canyons, into them. Many plateaus are not very high, but some, such as the Tibetan Plateau, may reach more than 3,000 m in altitude.
**Great Rift Valley, East Africa**
The Great Rift Valley is an immense graben. It stretches about 5,500 km through East Africa and is divided into western and eastern sections, in the African Great Lakes region.

**Australian Cordillera, Australia**
The old mountains of the Australian Cordillera, rounded and gently sloping, are home to the highest peak on the continent, Mount Kosciusko, at an altitude of 2,228 m.
The formation of mountains

The uplift of a landform is the result of a complex process: a single mountain range may be composed of fragments of oceanic crust, volcanic rock, and metamorphic rock (transformed by high pressure and temperatures). These different types of rock are generally arranged in strata that have been folded, upturned, or even dislocated along faults. With the discovery of the existence of lithospheric plates came great progress in the comprehension of orogenesis (the process of mountain formation). In fact, the movement of oceanic and continental plates is responsible for the formation of most mountains. Subduction mountains, such as the Andes, are created when an oceanic and a continental plate come together, while collision mountains, such as the Himalayas, are the result of an impact between two continental plates.

BETWEEN OCEAN AND CONTINENT

When an oceanic plate 1 collides with a continent, it slides under the continental plate 2. Oceanic sediments scraped away by this contact accumulate in what is called an accretionary wedge 3. As the oceanic plate sinks, the volume of the accretionary wedge increases, to the point that it sometimes rises above sea level and forms coastal mountains 4. Subjected to considerable forces, the continental plate folds and deforms, giving rise to a subduction mountain range 5. When the oceanic plate reaches the mantle, the rocks that form it melt and are transformed into magma 6. These molten rocks sometimes rise to the surface again, where they are expelled by volcanoes 7.

YOUNG MOUNTAINS AND OLD MOUNTAINS

The shape of a mountain depends, in large part, on its age. Formed by recent tectonic shocks, the youngest mountain ranges on the planet (Alps, Himalayas, Rockies, Andes, Caucasus) are very jagged, with steep slopes and pointed summits. Most of them have not finished rising, since the slow movements of lithospheric plates continue to reshape the landforms. The Alps, for example, result from an enormous uplift that took place about 50 million years ago, when the Eurasian Plate collided with the African Plate. The oldest mountains (Uralis, Appalachians, Australian Cordillera, Drakensberg) look less rugged: they have been smoothed out by erosion, which scrapes material from the slopes and deposits it in the hollows. The Appalachians, created more than 300 million years ago, are among the oldest mountains in the world.
The Caucasus Mountains extend to the southern border of European Russia, between the Black Sea, to the west, and the Caspian Sea, to the east. They are the highest in Europe, with Mount Elbrus culminating at 5,643 m.

### The Highest Summits in the World

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summit</th>
<th>Altitude</th>
<th>Mountain Range</th>
<th>First Ascent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>North America</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount McKinley</td>
<td>6,194 m</td>
<td>Rockies</td>
<td>1913</td>
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<td>Orizaba</td>
<td>5,700 m</td>
<td>Sierra Madre</td>
<td>1848</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>South America</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aconcagua</td>
<td>6,962 m</td>
<td>Andes Cordillera</td>
<td>1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ojos del Salado</td>
<td>6,893 m</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>5,643 m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mont Blanc</td>
<td>4,807 m</td>
<td>Alps</td>
<td>1786</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Africa</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilimanjaro</td>
<td>5,892 m</td>
<td>isolated volcano</td>
<td>1889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Kenya</td>
<td>5,199 m</td>
<td>isolated volcano</td>
<td>1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Everest</td>
<td>8,850 m</td>
<td>Himalayas</td>
<td>1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K2</td>
<td>8,614 m</td>
<td>Karakoram</td>
<td>1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangchenjunga</td>
<td>8,586 m</td>
<td>Himalayas</td>
<td>1955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makalu</td>
<td>8,463 m</td>
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<td>1955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cho Oyu</td>
<td>8,201 m</td>
<td>Himalayas</td>
<td>1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhaulagiri</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manaslu</td>
<td>8,156 m</td>
<td>Himalayas</td>
<td>1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanga Parbat</td>
<td>8,126 m</td>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annapurna</td>
<td>8,091 m</td>
<td>Himalayas</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Antarctica</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Vinson</td>
<td>4,892 m</td>
<td>Ellsworth</td>
<td>1966</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**The erosion cycle**

Erosion, a process of abrasion, transformation, and degradation, is a cycle that begins with the gradual ablation of surface material and continues with the transportation of loose particles to where they accumulate in the form of sediment. Water and wind are the main agents of erosion: through chemical or mechanical procedures, they profoundly alter the landscape. The erosion cycle occurs at different paces, but all are very slow on the human scale: a fissure in a block of granite usually widens by only a few millimeters over a thousand years. Mountainous massifs, semiarid regions, and areas where the surface of the land has been modified by human activity (clear-cutting, construction of roads and cities, etc.) erode most rapidly. The slowest erosion is associated with lowlands where the materials are very hard, such as the Canadian Shield.

**The Evolution of a Landscape**

Fluvial landscapes are transformed by erosion caused by watercourses. When the landscape is very uneven, with high peaks and steep slopes, erosion is very rapid. Watercourses carve out deep V-shaped valleys and sweep away much rocky debris.

As erosion continues, the relief features flatten out: the summits become rounded and the slopes become gentler. The watercourses transport less debris and flow more slowly.

After several million years of erosion, the landscape becomes a peneplain: there are few relief features and they barely rise above the base level. The erosion process slows.

Geological phenomena may cause a sudden elevation of the terrain. In this case, the peneplain is raised high above the base level.

Erosion may then begin again: watercourses once again carve out deep valleys.

Goblin Valley, United States

These rocky mushroom-shaped columns 2 to 3 m high, also called hoodoos, rise by the hundreds in Goblin Valley. They were shaped by erosion, mainly by the wind.
Landforms on the ocean floor are as diverse as continental landforms. Under the surface of the ocean, mountains, plains, plateaus, volcanoes, trenches, and canyons form stunning landscapes and many of these formations are much larger than those on land. For instance, vast abyssal plains are crossed by immense mountain ranges, called oceanic ridges, that stretch almost 70,000 kilometers in length. These underwater mountain ranges are between 1,000 and 3,000 meters high, and running their entire length is a rift, a central subsidence plain that forms as the oceanic plates separate. Where lithospheric plates meet, gigantic oceanic depressions, trenches, reach depths comparable to the altitude of the highest continental peaks. The deepest point is 11,034 meters, in the Mariana Trench in the North Pacific Ocean.

The oceanic crust

While the rocks that make up the continents may be 3.8 billion years old, the rocks that make up the ocean floor are never older than 200 million years old. New oceanic crust is constantly being formed by volcanic activity that takes place in the oceanic ridges. With a thickness of about 10 km, the oceanic crust is also much thinner than the continental crust, which is from 20 to 70 km thick.

Pillow lava

Magma situated under the oceanic ridge forms pillow lava when it comes into contact with relatively cold seawater.
The continental shelf is the part of the continent that extends from 1 to 1,000 km in a gentle slope under the ocean. At the end of the continental shelf, the continental slope is an abrupt drop-off in altitude to more than 3,000 m in depth. An oceanic trench is a deep valley that cuts into the abyssal plain. It may reach depths greater than 10,000 m.

Most of the ocean floor is occupied by vast abyssal plains that begin at the foot of the continental slope and are at a depth of between 3,000 and 6,000 m. An oceanic ridge is an underwater mountain range situated on either side of a long, deep fissure in the ocean floor. An island arc is a string of volcanic islands formed following the subduction of an oceanic lithospheric plate under another oceanic plate.

UNDERWATER LANDFORMS

Depth of seas and oceans

- 6,000–11,034 m
- 5,000–5,999 m
- 4,000–4,999 m
- 3,000–3,999 m
- 2,000–2,999 m
- 1,000–1,999 m
- 500–999 m
- 0–499 m

Deepest zones

- 7,779 m
- 5,579 m
- 3,931 m
- 2,276 m
- 1,000 m
- 0–499 m

Source: Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UCSD
Volcanoes may erupt at various locations all over the world, especially at the borders between lithospheric plates. Violent and spectacular, volcanic eruptions occur when molten rock, called magma, rises from Earth’s mantle. As it rises, the magma releases gases, and the pressure increases to the point that Earth’s crust gives way—and there is a volcanic eruption. About 50 eruptions take place on continents every year; the number of underwater eruptions has not been counted. It is possible to observe volcanic eruptions from close up, since volcanoes do not form haphazardly on Earth’s surface. Rather, they are situated in zones where Earth’s crust is fractured or above hot spots, where magma has pierced the crust.

**How volcanoes work**

Hot, light magma from Earth’s mantle rises toward the surface from the magma chamber in which it had accumulated. Over time, the buildup of material pushes the magma into the pipe and brings it to the surface, where it overflows the crater in the form of lava. The eruption plume is composed of cinders, lava, and rock debris, which are ejected above the crater. The magma that does not reach the surface sometimes penetrates a layer of rock of a different type and solidifies; this phenomenon is called intrusion.
HOT SPOTS
Hot spots occur in the middle of oceanic or continental plates and not at the edges between plates. Pockets of magma rise from Earth’s lower mantle toward the surface and pierce the lithospheric plate. While the lithospheric plate continues to move, the hot spot, still active, remains in one place and continues to pierce Earth’s crust, creating a string of volcanic islands. The Hawaiian Archipelago is one example.

THE PACIFIC RING OF FIRE
Usually, volcanoes emerge along the edges of lithospheric plates, forming an island chain. One of the best known is the Pacific Ring of Fire, which contains many of the world’s volcanoes. The Ring of Fire includes the volcanic archipelagos of the Aleutian Islands, Japan, and the Philippines.

VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS
There are two main types of volcanic eruptions: effusive and explosive. Effusive eruptions involve flows of very fluid lava and free gas emissions from volcanoes that usually have gentle slopes. Explosive eruptions are more formidable and usually involve volcanoes with steep slopes. Very thick, viscous lava blocks the escape of gases in the magma chamber, so that the pressure increases inside the volcano to the point that it causes explosions accompanied by expulsions of rock, lava, and cinders over hundreds of kilometers.
Earthquakes, also known as seisms, are produced when there is a sudden tremor on the surface of Earth due to a discharge of energy issuing from the depths of the planet. The movement of lithospheric plates and the enormous tensions that accumulate at their meeting points are directly responsible for seismic activity. Earthquakes therefore take place mainly along faults in Earth’s crust, at the edges of the plates. There are almost 1 million tremors around the planet each year, but only just over 5% of them are felt. When they occur in urban areas, earthquakes cause disasters, sometimes killing thousands of people. Almost 830,000 people died during the most lethal earthquake in history, which shook northern China in 1556.

The Richter scale

Invented by the American geophysicist Charles Francis Richter, the Richter scale measures the magnitude of an earthquake—that is, the amount of energy that it releases. Each whole number on the scale corresponds to an intensity 32 times higher than the preceding number. Thus, a magnitude 6 earthquake is 32 times more powerful than a magnitude 5 earthquake. Earthquakes of a magnitude above 4 are felt by most people; those with a magnitude above 5 cause damage. Earthquakes of a magnitude above 8 cause total destruction of inhabited zones. They are rare, occurring fewer than four times a year.
Almost three-quarters of Earth’s surface is covered with water. The abundance of liquid water, which distinguishes Earth from all other planets in the Solar System, has earned it the nickname “blue planet.” The four oceans and dozens of seas that form the world ocean contain salt water, while the planet’s glaciers and ice caps contain freshwater. Freshwater constantly circulates through the huge reservoirs that are the oceans and seas, inland waters, the atmosphere, and the biosphere. However, access to it is very uneven from one region to another.
Only 30% of Earth’s surface is exposed land. The rest is covered by a huge body of salt water with a volume of more than 1 billion cubic kilometers: the world ocean. Twice a day, the oceans of the globe rise and fall by several meters. Tides are caused by the gravitational pull of the Moon, and to a certain extent of the Sun, on our planet. The seas and oceans also move in waves—undulations of the surface of the water generated by the wind. Ocean currents, on the other hand, are movements of huge masses of ocean water along very precise routes.

Vast stretches of salt water
The world ocean is divided by the continents into four main regions (Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, and Arctic) and many smaller basins, the seas, most of which are shallow and set back from the oceans. While marginal seas, such as the South China Sea, open out to an ocean, enclosed seas, such as the Mediterranean, are attached to an ocean by a narrow passage. Some salt lakes that have no contact with the ocean are also called seas; an example is the Caspian Sea.
Bay of Fundy, Canada
This bay, about 230 km long, is famous for its very high tides, which may rise by 16 m in just a few hours. This phenomenon is due to the fact that the bay is shallow and funnel-shaped, narrowing as it goes inland.
THE SURFACE TEMPERATURE OF SEAWATER

Water and the atmosphere are constantly exchanging energy in the form of heat. The surface temperature of the seas and oceans thus plays a fundamental role in the regulation of atmospheric processes. Measurement of seawater temperature enables us to follow the evolution of climatic phenomena, such as El Niño, and ocean currents, such as the Gulf Stream, and to predict the formation of cyclones. Seawater temperature also provides information on the development of phytoplankton and shoals of fish. The distribution of surface temperatures is linked to hours of sunlight, which, in turn, depends on the latitude. The temperature of the oceans ranges from 28°C, near the equator, to −2°C, in the high latitudes (north and south), closely following the distribution of solar radiation that reaches the surface of the water.

THE SALINITY OF SEAWATER

The salinity of seawater is the amount of salt dissolved in the water. On average, seawater contains 35 g of salt per liter. The more enclosed the sea, the higher its salinity. For example, salinity is lower than average in the North Pacific Ocean (32 g/l), but higher than average in the Red Sea (40 g/l). The Dead Sea is the saltiest body of water in the world, with a salinity of 330 g/l, and the Baltic Sea is one of the least salty, with a salinity of only 8 g/l. The balance between water evaporation from the oceans and precipitation is responsible for differences in salinity. Under subtropical anticyclones such as those in the Azores, evaporation is very high, and so the seawater is saltier. On the other hand, the equatorial region is subjected to strong and frequent rainfall, which results in a lower salinity level in seawater around the equator.

WAVE HEIGHTS

Earth observation satellites are used to measure wave heights. Wave-height data are used to study relationships between sea and air and their meteorological and climatic consequences. Wave height is also very useful information for marine transport and offshore drilling. In fact, each wave is a shape produced by undulations created by the wind in the high seas. Near the coasts, the wave’s amplitude is determined by the relief features on the ocean floor. The undulation that moves the wave is stopped when it hits the shore.
Littorals

A littoral is a coastal zone between the low-tide line and the high-tide line. This landscape is constantly changing due to the continuous action of the sea, rivers, and wind, and it may take a variety of forms depending on the geological nature of the coast.

A barrier reef (or barrier island) is a sandbar parallel to the shore at a distance of between a few and several dozen kilometers. A lagoon forms behind the reef.

Barriers form at the mouths of rivers. They result from the accumulation and deposit of sediments carried by watercourses.

A ria is a fluvial valley that is submerged following a rise in sea level or a subsidence of land.

Fjords (fjord means "long arm of the sea" in Norwegian) are valleys that were carved out long ago by glaciers, then invaded by water.

Geologic events have sometimes modified the coastline by producing faults. This is the case for very high shore cliffs formed by tectonic faults.

An atoll is a coral reef that forms around a volcanic island. It is ring-shaped and surrounds a lagoon.

Lanzarote, Canary Islands (Spain)
Parts of the volcanic island of Lanzarote, situated in the ocean off southern Morocco, have coastal escarpments that form cliffs, such as the ones around the Papagayo beach.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISLAND</th>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>OCEAN</th>
<th>△ HIGHEST POINT</th>
<th>ALTITUDE [m]</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>7,740,000 km²</td>
<td>Indian and Pacific</td>
<td>Mount Kosciusko</td>
<td>2,228</td>
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<td>Greenland</td>
<td>2,166,086 km²</td>
<td>Arctic</td>
<td>Gunnbjorn</td>
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<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Puncak Jaya</td>
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<td>725,500 km²</td>
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<td>Mount Kinabalu</td>
<td>4,095</td>
</tr>
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<td>587,040 km²</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Mount Maromokotro</td>
<td>2,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baffin Island</td>
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<td>Arctic</td>
<td>Mount Odin</td>
<td>2,147</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sumatra</td>
<td>427,300 km²</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Mount Kerinci</td>
<td>3,805</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honshu</td>
<td>227,400 km²</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Mount Fuji</td>
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<td>Atlantic</td>
<td>Ben Nevis</td>
<td>1,344</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>217,300 km²</td>
<td>Arctic</td>
<td>unnamed summit</td>
<td>655</td>
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</table>
Barely 2.8% of all water on Earth is freshwater. Most of it is found in glaciers and pack ice (77%) and in groundwater (22%). The rest, only 1%, forms the watercourses that irrigate valleys and plains. As it flows down from mountaintops to the ocean, freshwater feeds glaciers, lakes, and rivers. The water evaporates and forms clouds, precipitation from which feeds watercourses. For millions of years, this vast water cycle has created landscapes by carving out valleys, eroding mountains, and changing shorelines. It plays an essential role in the redistribution of water around the planet.

Watersheds
A watershed is a region where all water—precipitation, runoff, and groundwater—flows toward a common body of water. A single watershed may contain a number of smaller watersheds.
**Niagara Falls, on the Canada–United States border**

Although they are not very high, the Niagara Falls are spectacular, as they are wide and have a high discharge rate. Every minute, 155 million liters of water, or the equivalent of 50 Olympic-size swimming pools, flow over the falls from a height of about 50 m!

**Yellow River, China**

The Yellow River (Huang He in Chinese) owes its name to the large quantities of alluvia that it carries.

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**THE LARGEST LAKES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LAKE</th>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>DEPTH</th>
<th>ORIGIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caspian Sea</td>
<td>386,400 km²</td>
<td>1,025 m</td>
<td>tectonic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Superior</td>
<td>82,100 km²</td>
<td>405 m</td>
<td>glacial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Victoria</td>
<td>69,500 km²</td>
<td>82 m</td>
<td>tectonic</td>
</tr>
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<td>Lake Huron</td>
<td>59,900 km²</td>
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<td>Lake Tanganyika</td>
<td>32,900 km²</td>
<td>1,436 m</td>
<td>tectonic</td>
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<td>Lake Baikal</td>
<td>31,700 km²</td>
<td>1,620 m</td>
<td>tectonic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Bear Lake</td>
<td>31,600 km²</td>
<td>82 m</td>
<td>glacial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Malawi</td>
<td>29,500 km²</td>
<td>706 m</td>
<td>tectonic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Slave Lake</td>
<td>28,900 km²</td>
<td>614 m</td>
<td>glacial</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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**THE HIGHEST WATERFALLS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WATERFALL</th>
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<th>HEIGHT</th>
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<td>Venezuela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mtarazi</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>762 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yosemite</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>739 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tugela</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>614 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutherland</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>580 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Della</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>440 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gavarnie</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>422 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>404 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krimmler</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>381 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallaman</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>347 m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Watercourses**

Springs, rivers, and lakes form a network with a hierarchy: each flows into a large watercourse, and all watercourses finally flow into the sea. A river such as the Amazon, for example, is fed by 15,000 tributaries.

Rainwater seeps into the ground and rises to the surface in the form of a spring, then flows down hills and mountains. Sometimes fed by meltwater from glaciers, the stream becomes a torrent; then, fed by more springs, it becomes a young river that continues to flow down the mountain, following steep slopes and forming waterfalls. The river carves out deep gorges, and then broadens. Fed by tributaries, it becomes a large river. As it grows wider, the river forms meanders. Many rivers form deltas at their mouths, and finally flow into the sea. Evaporation of water from the oceans forms clouds, and the water cycle starts over.

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*A Watercourse that flows into another is called a tributary.*

At the beginning of its course, the river rushes down mountain slopes, carving out a bed by creating deep gorges. The riverbed and banks continue to erode, carving out a valley. When it reaches the plain, the river arrives at its base level and forms meanders, where it deposits sediments.

Yellowstone National Park, United States
The Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River help to carve out the riverbed.

Taieri River, New Zealand (South Island)
The meanders of the Taieri River emphasize the bottom of the Starth Taieri glacial valley.
Lakes

Surface water usually flows toward the sea, but sometimes it is held back by a depression or dam and forms a lake. Although most lakes are filled with freshwater, others have high salinity due to a high evaporation rate and accumulation of dissolved mineral salts.

Water in glacial lakes has accumulated in depressions carved out by glaciers and in valleys where moraines (glacial deposits), some of which are 200 m high, have created dams. Most lakes in the northern hemisphere are of this type.

Tectonic lakes occupy natural basins that result from movements of Earth’s crusts along folds and faults. Many are situated below sea level, and some form closed systems with no distributaries.

The craters of some volcanoes fill with water. These volcanic lakes may also form in valleys where lava flows hold back water.

Oxbow lakes sometimes form in the areas around rivers. They are formed in meanders, or oxbows, abandoned by the watercourse. Unless they are regularly fed by new water, they rapidly dry up.

An oasis is formed in a desert when the wind erodes the ground and exposes the water table. Oases also appear where a fault line causes water to flow toward a particular point.

Reservoirs, artificial lakes whose waters are usually held in by dams, supply water for human consumption, irrigation, or production of hydroelectric power.

When a river does not encounter a stronger current as it is flowing into the sea, it deposits its sediments at the mouth. The alluvia—sediment deposits—spread out in a fan shape divided into channels of various widths and shapes. This is called a delta. When a river encounters a tide that is more powerful than its current, the sediments that it is carrying disperse. The river’s mouth opens out like a funnel, and this is called an estuary.

Rio de la Plata estuary, on the border between Argentina and Uruguay
The Rio de la Plata marks the mouth of the Parana and Uruguay rivers.

Nile Delta, Egypt
At its mouth, the Nile forms a vast delta, clearly visible on a satellite image.
Earth is enveloped in a thin layer of air called the atmosphere. Depending on the characteristics of air masses around the globe, different regions have more or less cold, humid, and windy climates. Most weather phenomena take place in the 15 kilometers of the atmosphere closest to the ground. This layer of the atmosphere is also home to many living species. Together, air, water, and a layer of earth form the biosphere, the habitable part of the planet. Living beings and their environments form ecosystems. The constant interactions between the components of an ecosystem maintain its equilibrium. For the last hundred years, the intensification of human activities has caused air, water, and soil pollution and threatens to upset the equilibrium of our planet.
Temperatures, precipitation, humidity, and winds vary enormously from one region of the world to another. So, Earth has a number of very different climates, each one with specific atmospheric and meteorological conditions. The distribution of climatic zones on the surface of the planet depends primarily on latitude, because sunshine conditions (length of the day, alternation of seasons, angle of solar rays) play the most important role in determining climate. Other factors are also involved, such as the lay and orientation of the land, dominant winds, altitude, landforms, and ocean currents.

Climates of the world

One-quarter of the planet’s landmass has a dry (arid or semiarid) climate, characterized by drought throughout the year. Regions in the intertropical zone, between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, have a tropical climate with high temperatures due to regular and continual sunshine conditions. The wet tropical climate has abundant and constant humidity, which encourages growth of the tropical rainforest, while the wet tropical climate with dry winter has a wet season with monsoon rains and a dry winter season. Temperate regions have a mild climate and four well-defined seasons. Temperate climates are very diverse, however, as they are influenced by geographic factors such as altitude, relief features, and proximity to the ocean. Mountainous regions and high plateau zones have a cold climate with low temperatures. Finally, at the poles, the temperature rarely rises above 0°C and the ground remains frozen for most of the year.
Some arid regions are dry because of the configuration of landforms that surround them. For instance, when a mountain range borders a shoreline, it holds back much of the humidity contained in the marine air masses. The regions in the lee of this mountain barrier then receive very little precipitation. This is the case for the Patagonia, Great Basin, and Gobi deserts.
The Cycle of the Seasons

Contrary to popular belief, the cycle of the seasons—that is, the periodic changes in climate as the months go by—is due not to the distance of Earth from the Sun but to its inclination: our planet’s axis of rotation is tilted by about 23.5° in relation to the ecliptic (Earth’s orbital plane). This inclination is directly responsible for the variation in sunlight conditions, and therefore for the succession of seasons throughout the year. This also explains why the seasons in the two hemispheres are opposite: summer in the South always takes place during winter in the North.

Temperate regions have four alternating seasons: after spring comes summer, then autumn, and finally winter. Elsewhere in the world, the march of the seasons is less distinct. Subtropical regions have only two seasons: a dry season and a wet season. As the seasons pass, the air temperature and atmospheric pressure vary. Atmospheric pressure is the force that air exerts upon a given surface. It may differ by altitude and temperature. There are therefore zones of high and low pressure. In general, a high-pressure zone, or anticyclone, is responsible for good weather and a low-pressure zone, or depression, is responsible for bad weather.

### Table: Influence of Latitude on Length of Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latitude</th>
<th>Summer Solstice</th>
<th>Spring Equinox</th>
<th>Winter Solstice</th>
<th>Autumn Equinox</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>poles (90°)</td>
<td>24 hr</td>
<td>12 hr</td>
<td>0 hr</td>
<td>12 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helsinki (60°)</td>
<td>19 hr</td>
<td>12 hr</td>
<td>6 hr</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montreal (45°)</td>
<td>16 hr</td>
<td>12 hr</td>
<td>8 hr</td>
<td>12 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairo (30°)</td>
<td>14 hr</td>
<td>12 hr</td>
<td>10 hr</td>
<td>12 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equator (0°)</td>
<td>12 hr</td>
<td>12 hr</td>
<td>12 hr</td>
<td>12 hr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The temperature on the surface of Earth depends directly on the angle at which the Sun's rays penetrate the atmosphere. When this angle of incidence is small—when the rays graze the planet's surface—the Sun's energy is dispersed. On the contrary, heat is at its maximum when the Sun's rays reach the ground at a 90° angle.

Because of Earth's inclination, sunlight reaches the Northern Hemisphere at a maximum angle during the Northern summer. At the same time, the Sun's rays graze the Southern Hemisphere and it is winter in the South.
At the highest latitudes, close to the poles, the climate is dominated by polar air masses, which do not heat up much even during the long period of summer sunshine. In the center of Antarctica and Greenland, where the temperature never rises above 0°C, the ground remains permanently frozen and covered with a thick ice cap, the continental ice sheet. The northern edges of Eurasia and North America have a more temperate climate: summer temperatures rise above the freezing point, which enables a thin top layer of ground to thaw and tundra vegetation to grow.

**The main cold regions**

The coldest regions of the planet are the poles and mountain summits. The poles are permanently frozen, but how far the pack ice stretches toward the middle latitudes varies with the seasons. The highest mountain peaks are also covered with glaciers.

**Pack ice**

In the coldest oceans on the planet, especially at the poles, the seawater is covered by a floating layer of ice, a stretch of frozen seawater formed when the water temperature falls below −1.9°C. These masses of ice, called pack ice, may be 3 to 4 m thick. In winter, Arctic pack ice invades fjords, bays, estuaries, and straits. Hudson Bay is totally icebound during the winter. Antarctica, covered by an ice cap, is also surrounded by pack ice. This layer of ice forms a vast sheet measuring 20 million km² at its maximum winter extent, but it shrinks a great deal in the summer. Pack ice is different from the ice shelves (the Ross Ice Shelf, the Larsen Ice Shelf, etc.) that form the edge of some parts of Antarctica. These are actually floating glaciers, several hundred meters thick, contiguous to the continental ice cap.
Icebergs
In cold regions, glaciers reach the sea before they melt. Waves and tides then break up glacier tongues into gigantic blocks of floating freshwater ice blocks called icebergs, only the tip of which rises above the surface of the water. Pushed by the wind and ocean currents, icebergs travel thousands of kilometers, sometimes drifting as far as the tropics, before melting due to the combined effects of waves, salt, and solar rays.

EXTENSION OF THE ICE CAP DURING THE ICE AGE

For 2 million years, cold periods, called glacial periods (or ice ages), have alternated with warmer, interglacial, periods due to variations in Earth’s orbit around the Sun. Currently, we are in an interglacial period. The last ice age was 18,000 years ago. A huge ice cap covered the continents of the Northern Hemisphere. In the Southern Hemisphere, on the other hand, the ice cap was the same size as today’s, since no continent is close enough to Antarctica to support the ice cap during glacial periods.
One-quarter of the planet’s landmass (about 35 million square kilometers) has an arid or semiarid climate. All of these regions have very low precipitation. Vegetation grows slowly, leaving the ground almost bare. In most cases, this aridity is related to the presence of permanent high-pressure zones that impede the development of clouds. This is the case for “high-pressure” deserts such as the Sahara Desert, the Arabian Desert, the Kalahari Desert, and the Great Sandy Desert. These deserts are situated at latitudes adjacent to the tropics, where the climate features very dry air and high atmospheric pressure. Geographic factors may also be the cause of aridity. “Rain shadow” deserts are situated at the foot of mountains that block humid air from the ocean; examples are the Patagonia Desert, the Atacama Desert and the Gobi Desert.

**Desertification**

Under the combined effects of climatic variations and human activity, more and more previously arable regions are being transformed into deserts. For instance, 4,000 years ago, the Sahara was a fertile region. Today, it is a desert. Desertification involves the degradation of arable land. Each year, 5 to 6 million hectares are affected by desertification on every continent.

**Aridity**

Arid regions are characterized by water resources that are insufficient in comparison to the needs of the vegetation, because there is not enough precipitation or because the water is frozen and thus not usable by plants. Arid regions can be classified according to the volume of precipitation that they receive per year. A very arid zone receives very little precipitation, between 10 and 15 mm per year. This is an absolute desert, and an example is the Namib. Arid zones, such as the Arabian Desert, receive no more than 200 mm of precipitation per year. In semiarid zones, precipitation is below 500 mm in the winter and below 800 mm in the summer. Such zones—for example, the Sahel—are in a state of advanced desertification.
Desertification of the Sahel, in Burkina Faso
The Sahel region, which extends from Senegal to Sudan at the southern edge of the Sahara, is greatly affected by desertification. Its soil has become sterile due to climatic variations and human activity, particularly the intensive farming practiced over the last half-century.
CLIMATIC CATASTROPHES

In spite of industrial and technological progress in recent decades, human beings are still at the mercy of major weather disasters. Tornadoes, cyclones, snowstorms, and hailstorms cause serious destruction and thousands of deaths every year all over the world. Lightning is responsible for electrical blackouts and huge forest fires. And rainstorms may cause floods and landslides.

The most affected regions

Cyclones cause the most damage in coastal regions of the intertropical zone. Tornadoes are most frequent in the eastern United States, while thunderstorms usually hit warm, humid regions near the equator. The more densely populated the region, such as Southeast Asia, the more victims claimed by climatic catastrophes.
THE MOST LETHAL CYCLONES SINCE 1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>NO. DEAD</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>NO. DEAD</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
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<td>India</td>
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<td>Myanmar</td>
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<td>India</td>
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<td>11,500</td>
<td>1963</td>
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<td>China</td>
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THE MOST LETHAL FLOODS SINCE 1900

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<th>COUNTRY</th>
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<th>YEAR</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>NO. DEAD</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
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<td>2,000,000</td>
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<td>China</td>
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<td>1949</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>4,892</td>
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</table>

Source: Em-dat
Cyclones

Andrew, Allen, Mitch, Katrina—these innocuous names are attached to one of the most devastating weather phenomena: cyclones. At their strongest, these gigantic tropical storms may be accompanied by winds of more than 250 km/h. And yet cyclones need only a few factors in place to trigger them: a large mass of warm water, an initial depression, and moderate winds blowing in a constant direction. Like immense steam machines, cyclones transform the humid heat of the atmosphere and oceans into a circular motion. Cyclones are formed only in the intertropical zone, between 5° and 20° latitude on either side of the equator, and have different names depending on the region. In the Pacific Northwest, they are called typhoons; in the North Atlantic and Northeast Pacific, hurricanes; and in the Indian Ocean and Southwest Pacific, cyclones.

INSIDE A CYCLONE

The eye of the cyclone is a very-low-pressure zone, about 30 km in diameter, of relative calm.

The radius of a cyclone may be up to 500 km.

A cyclone is composed of storm bands formed by the elevation of warm, humid air above the ocean.

A cyclone may be from 10 to 15 km thick.

Wind speed may increase to more than 250 km/h near the eye wall (a thick layer of cloud at the periphery of the eye).

STORM SURGE

During a storm surge, ocean water is pulled by the strong sucking effect of the hurricane. This causes the formation of a small “mountain of water” under the hurricane. When the cyclone reaches land, this mass of water unfurls on the coast and floods vast stretches.
THE SAFFIR-SIMPSON SCALE

Since the 1970s, cyclones have been classified according to various characteristics, including wind speed and height of the storm surge. The Saffir-Simpson scale, with five cyclone categories, enables scientists to assess the dangers of a storm and predict the scope of the damage.

**Category 1**
- Wind speed: 118–152 km/h
- Surge height: 1.2–1.3 m
- Trees and shrubs damaged; mobile homes, docks, and moorings of small boats damaged.

**Category 2**
- Wind speed: 153–176 km/h
- Surge height: 1.8–2.6 m
- Small trees uprooted; mobile homes seriously damaged; some roofs damaged.

**Category 3**
- Wind speed: 177–208 km/h
- Surge height: 2.7–3.8 m
- Foliage torn off trees, large trees uprooted; mobile homes destroyed; some roofs, windows, and doors of houses damaged.

**Category 4**
- Wind speed: 209–248 km/h
- Surge height: 3.9–5.5 m
- Traffic lights knocked over; roofs, windows, and doors of houses seriously damaged.

**Category 5**
- Wind speed: over 248 km/h
- Surge height: over 5.5 m
- Some buildings destroyed; many roofs of houses collapsed.

CYCLONES: LETHAL NATURAL DISASTERS

Cyclones play an essential role in the planet’s energy balance, but they are also responsible for the deaths of an average of 20,000 people every year. The destructive effects of a cyclone are felt when it reaches the coast. Violent winds rip up trees and destroy structures. Torrential rains make rivers overflow and cause landslides. Finally, storm surges lead to floods, often with tragic results: more than 300,000 drowned during a cyclone in 1970, when the sea rose 12 m.
Tornadoes

Like cyclones, tornadoes result from the spinning of ascending winds around a low-pressure zone. However, unlike cyclones, tornadoes are of short duration (a number of minutes) and generate extremely violent winds (spikes of 512 km/h were observed by radar at Oklahoma City, in the United States, in 1999). The diameter of a tornado generally varies between 100 and 600 m. It may reach a height of several kilometers. Although tornadoes are usually very localized and of short duration, their violence makes them particularly dangerous and destructive. North America, where an average of 750 occur each year, is the most affected continent, but tornadoes also touch down regularly in Europe, Asia, and Australia.

![VICTIMS OF TORNADOES](image)

**THE FUJITA SCALE**

The suddenness and brevity of tornadoes makes scientific observation of them difficult. In addition, traditional anemometers are not strong enough to resist the winds that accompany the strongest tornadoes. Therefore, a retrospective analysis of the damage must usually be used to assess the violence of the phenomenon. The Fujita scale (named after the Japanese meteorologist T. Theodore Fujita) establishes a six-category classification of tornadoes that links the type and scale of the damage caused to wind speed. The three least violent categories account for 88% of all tornadoes observed. F5 tornadoes, much rarer, are the most lethal.

**CATEGORY F0**

With winds not over 199 km/h, an F0 tornado causes only minor damage: broken tree branches, twisted TV antennas.

**CATEGORY F1**

An F1 tornado, with winds of 120 to 180 km/h, may blow down small trees, overturn trailers, and rip shingles off houses.

**CATEGORY F2**

The winds in an F2 tornado reach 180 to 250 km/h and are capable of destroying wooden structures, moving small vehicles, and knocking down mature trees.

**CATEGORY F3**

With winds of 250 to 330 km/h, an F3 tornado may overturn large vehicles. Walls collapse and objects weighing a number of kilograms are lifted into the air and become projectiles.

**CATEGORY F4**

An F4 tornado (winds of 330 to 420 km/h) destroys solid houses, lifts vehicles, and throws into the air objects weighing about 100 kilograms.

**CATEGORY F5**

An F5 tornado is the most violent. Its winds are over 420 km/h and destroy all sorts of vehicles and structures as they pass.
Floods
Although most floods are linked to a river or lake overflowing its banks after heavy rain, some floods have sea-related causes. This is the case, for example, for storm surges during a cyclone, and for the formation of gigantic waves (tsunamis) following an earthquake. Floods cause not only major material damage but also much loss of life.

Flood in New Orleans, United States
The passage of Hurricane Katrina, in August 2005, caused the dams protecting the American city of New Orleans to fail. Within a few hours, entire neighborhoods were submerged underwater and several hundred thousand people had to be evacuated. It was one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the United States.
Living organisms occupy a layer of earth, water, and air that is very thin in comparison to the volume of the planet. This habitable part of Earth, called the biosphere, is composed of many ecosystems. Each ecosystem is an ecological unit in which animals, plants, and bacteria (the biocenosis) live in a close relationship with their physical environment (the biotope). An ecosystem may be as small as a stone wall or as vast as an ocean. Biotope and biocenosis are tightly interwoven: the different aspects of the biotope (geology, climate, geography, chemistry, etc.) determine the composition and diversity of the biocenosis, which, in turn, influences the environment and may even change it radically.

Biomes

A biome is a homogeneous community of organisms that live in similar geographic and climatic conditions. Most often, a biome refers to a terrestrial community. There are 9 different terrestrial biomes spread throughout the biosphere. They are named according to their dominant vegetation, which is dependent on the climatic conditions. Aquatic communities may also be classified as biomes: marine biomes include coral reefs, estuaries, and the ocean floor, while freshwater biomes include lakes, ponds, and watercourses.
**BIOMES**

**Terrestrial biomes**
- Tundra
- Boreal forest
- Temperate forest
- Temperate prairie
- Maquis
- Tropical rainforest
- Savanna
- Desert
- Rock and ice

**Example of a marine biome**
- Coral reef

Source: FAO

The tundra is a plant formation found in cold, arid regions, composed of mosses, lichens, grasses, bushes, and dwarf trees.

The savanna, found in warm regions with a rainy season, is a grassy area in which tall graminaceous plants and shrubs predominate.

The maquis has a vegetation cover, today degraded, composed of evergreen shrubs that are adapted to drought.

The desert is an arid region where precipitation is under 200 mm per year and with little vegetation.

The polar regions are covered with ice all year long. How far the ice extends varies, however, according to whether it is summer or winter.
Forests

About one-third of the planet’s landmass is covered with forests. Forests are complex ecosystems characterized by generally dense plant cover composed mainly of trees.

The composition of forests varies from region to region as a function of the climate, the nature of the soil, the altitude, and the latitude. The last parameter greatly influences the diversity of animal and plant species (biodiversity) in the forest. In the North, the boreal forest, populated with conifer species such as spruce, larch, and fir, is very homogeneous. Farther south, mixed forests are composed of conifers and deciduous trees, such as birch and willow. They form a transition zone between the boreal forest and the deciduous forests in more temperate zones, where, under the branches of large trees such as oaks and beeches, the undergrowth is generally dense.

The subtropical regions are too dry for forests to grow. The intertropical zones, on the other hand, have the lushest forests on the planet. The tropical rainforest, or equatorial forest, contains incredible biodiversity. Although it covers only 7% of Earth’s landmass, it houses half of all living species on the planet and 20 times more species of trees than do temperate forests. The equatorial forest of Borneo, in the Pacific Ocean, holds the record for biodiversity with no fewer than 10,000 species of plants.

In equatorial regions, day and night are of equal length throughout the year. This regular luminosity encourages the growth of plants.

The canopy is the top story of the forest, situated at a height of between 30 and 45 m. It is home to the majority of plant and animal species.

Soil: a living environment

Far from being inert, soil is crawling with life; it is estimated that one cubic meter of soil is home to about a billion living organisms. The important biological, chemical, and physical processes that take place there have led scientists who study soil (pedologists) to consider it to be a true ecosystem.

In the tropical rainforest, the soil does not have time to become enriched and thick because decomposed plant matter is very quickly reused by other plants.

The tropical rainforest has an average of more than 40 different species of trees per hectare.
**Area of forest per country**

The countries that have the smallest area of forest are those in desert regions, where the climate and nature of the soil are not propitious to the growth of plants. The map opposite shows in red the countries in which forest cover shrank between 1990 and 2005, and in green the countries in which forest cover grew between 1990 and 2005.

**The evolution of the area of forest**

Per country, between 1990 and 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative balance</th>
<th>Positive balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≥ 100 Mha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–99.9 Mha</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1–9.9 Mha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1 Mha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No data

Source: FAO

**Mixed forest, Canada**

In autumn, deciduous trees are distinguished from conifers, as their leaves change color before falling.
For almost two centuries, intensification of human activities has seriously accelerated the pace of extinction of plant and animal species on the surface of the planet. Today, for every new species that appears, 1,000 others become extinct. Protected areas are zones in which measures of various degrees of strictness are taken to preserve biodiversity. Since the creation in 1872 of the first national park (Yellowstone Park, in the United States), the number of protected areas has increased exponentially, and today there are over 100,000.

**Biodiversity**

Biodiversity is the diversity of living species in a given environment. It is usually measured by ecoregion. An ecoregion is a region of Earth that has a unique ecosystem. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) defines 867 ecoregions, some of which are divided up.

**Threat and Protection**

About 15,500 species are threatened with extinction due to pollution, deforestation, intensive farming, urban sprawl, and mining. The regions of the intertropical zone are those where biodiversity is most threatened.

In protected areas, human activities such as cutting down trees, exploiting rivers, and even walking are regulated in order to preserve ecosystems. Some protected areas are gigantic: the biggest, Greenland National Park, has an area of 972,000 km². In 2003, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) counted more than 100,000 protected areas, covering more than 18 million km².
Ginkgo biloba, China
The ginkgo biloba is the only survivor of a family of plants that appeared more than 150 million years ago. Cultivated for centuries, it now exists in its natural state only in China.

Cucumber tree, Socotra
The cucumber tree, which is found now only on the Yemeni island of Socotra, is cut down during droughts to provide fodder for cattle.
The atmosphere, composed of 99% nitrogen and oxygen, has had a remarkably stable composition for millions of years. Gaseous and particulate pollutants make up only a tiny part of the atmosphere, and most of them have a natural origin (volcanoes, decomposition). However, the development of industrial activities over the last two centuries has considerably increased their concentration. Due to the presence of polluting gases, some rain may be 1,000 times more acid than normal. Atmospheric pollution causes particular damage to the health of populations residing in industrial regions, but the effects of this pollution are also felt elsewhere. The wind disperses pollutants to all continents, sometimes very far from the source of the pollution. There are even pollutant particles, such as lead, in the fur of polar bears.

**The greenhouse effect**

Some gases in the atmosphere are able to absorb infrared rays emitted by Earth. This natural phenomenon, called the greenhouse effect, helps to maintain our planet at a temperature conducive to life. Without it, the average temperature on the surface of Earth, which is now 15°C, would be only –18°C. However, because some human activities release quantities of “greenhouse gases” (methane, carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxide, CFCs, etc.) into the atmosphere, they contribute to further increases in the planet’s temperature.

The quantities of greenhouse gases have been increasing in the lower atmosphere for a century and a half. According to numerous studies, this increase is directly responsible for the current global warming.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GAS</th>
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<th>ANTHROPOGENIC SOURCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>carbon dioxide (CO₂)</td>
<td>volcanic eruption</td>
<td>- forest fires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- use of fossil fuels [industry, heating]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>methane (CH₄)</td>
<td>decomposition of matter by microorganisms</td>
<td>- agriculture [animals’ digestion, flooded rice paddies]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- extraction of natural gas</td>
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<tr>
<td>nitrogen oxide (N₂O)</td>
<td>decomposition of matter by microorganisms</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- agriculture [nitrogenous fertilizers]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- transportation</td>
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<tr>
<td>chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)</td>
<td>chloromethane produced by plants in coastal marshes in the tropics</td>
<td>- aerosol sprays</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- refrigerators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- foam insulation</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Responsible for the destruction of the ozone layer, CFCs have been banned in countries that have signed the Montreal Protocol (1987). They are still present in the atmosphere, since their life span is between 60 and 110 years.
While the average annual temperature on Earth’s surface grew by 0.6°C over the last century, studies indicate that it may climb another 1°C to 4.5°C over the next 100 years if greenhouse-gas emissions continue to increase at the current pace.

**THE KYOTO PROTOCOL**

This international treaty, written in 1997, provides for the reduction in greenhouse-gas emissions by an average of 5.2% from 1990 levels by 2012. Most countries have signed the treaty, but it has come into effect only in countries that have ratified it.
Urban pollution and health

The high population density in cities is related to concentration in pollution sources, notably motor vehicles and industry. As a consequence, urban air is more polluted. Air pollution has a major impact on the health of urban populations. Respiratory problems (coughing, bronchitis, lung cancer, etc.) are more common in cities.

Mortality attributable to urban air pollution is particularly high in Southeast Asia. This public-health problem will be amplified in coming years, as forecasts call for most population growth to be absorbed by cities.

Source: World Bank

ATMOSPHERIC PARTICULATE POLLUTION

Atmospheric pollutants are not exclusively gases. Nongaseous pollution includes particulates of different sizes. Soot and dust are coarse particles. Lead, copper, zinc, and cadmium are small metal particles. Finally, nitrates and sulfates are very fine salt particles. Atmospheric particulate pollution is harmful to the health. Particles may come from combustion plants and industrial processes such as mineral extraction, but also from natural sources such as volcanic eruptions or simply erosion of landforms.
Industries, farming operations, mines, street cleaning, and even housecleaning—many human activities release dirty water into nature. Since water constantly circulates, it transports and redistributes around the planet the pollutants, including pesticides, bacteria, hydrocarbons, and heavy metals. The soil is polluted by millions of tons of industrial waste, household trash, fertilizers, and pesticides released into the environment every year.

Pollution of inland waters and oceans
In spite of the London Convention, which, since 1972, has banned dumping of household waste into the sea, huge amounts of solid waste (plastic packaging, cans, fishing nets) continue to float on the surface of the oceans. In addition, many cities all over the world do not always treat their wastewater before releasing it into rivers, seas, and oceans. Every year, 6 million tons of petroleum products are also released into the oceans due to oil spills and leaks from oil refineries and offshore drilling rigs. Finally, during nuclear tests and incidents at nuclear plants (power plants, for example), radioactive elements may be dispersed into watercourses, water tables, seas, and oceans, as well as the soil and the atmosphere.
The origins of soil pollution are domestic, agricultural, and industrial. Household waste is made mainly of biodegradable materials, but it also contains plastics, detergents, solvents, and heavy metals. Spreading of fertilizers increases the quantity of nitrates and phosphates in the soil, disturbing natural nitrogen and phosphorus cycles. However, most nonbiodegradable pollutants come from industry.

### SOIL POLLUTION

#### USE OF FERTILIZERS PER COUNTRY

- **≥ 1,500,000 t/yr**
- **250,000–1,499,999 t/yr**
- **50,000–249,999 t/yr**
- **10,000–49,999 t/yr**
- **< 10,000 t/yr**
- **No data**

*Source: FAO*

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**ACID RAIN**

Rainwater is naturally acid, since the air contains carbon dioxide, which is transformed into carbonic acid in contact with water. However, some polluting gases, notably sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), help to increase this acidity. There are certainly natural sources of these gases, such as volcanic eruptions and certain microbial and chemical processes in the soil, but there are many anthropogenic sources, including use of fossil fuels (thermal power plants, refineries, foundries) and transportation. Rain observed in 1974 in Pitlochry, Scotland, was as acid as lemon juice, or about 1,000 times more acid than normal rainwater. This phenomenon has disastrous effects on the environment, especially forests and lakes.
The appearance of human beings on Earth changed the face of the world. Very quickly, the first peoples drew borders to define their territories, and the continents were gradually divided into nations, where today a wide variety of peoples—with different languages, religions, and lifestyles—live. Conflicts arising from these territorial divisions are still boiling over in a number of regions, but there are also peaceful interactions such as cultural exchanges, development projects, economic transactions, and sports tournaments.
A nation encompasses a people—that is, a group of individuals who share more or less the same culture and traditions and who generally live in the same country. A country is a geographic territory with clearly established borders, belonging to a nation or a group of nations. A country has its own government laws, armed forces, money, capital, and flag. It offers its nationals political rights such as citizenship. Countries are not necessarily homogeneous. Some, such as China, group together a number of nations. Others, such as Switzerland, recognize a number of official languages. Out of the some 240 territories claiming the status of country, 193 are recognized as sovereign; with the exception of the Vatican City, these are all members of the United Nations (UN).

The United Nations
Created in 1945 to maintain world peace, the UN also has mandates concerning the environment, public health, and humanitarian aid. Issues involving international peace are submitted to the Security Council, formed of 15 members, five of which are permanent: China, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Russia.
**Political systems**

A state’s political system is the way in which power is organized and exercised in that state. About one-third of the states in the world have a democratic system, in which the people theoretically hold the power. Another third aspire to a democratic system (emerging democracies). The other countries are under authoritarian systems, in which power is held by an individual (absolute ruler) or a small group of individuals (single party, state religion, army) who impose their authority by force and strictly regulate the lives of their fellow citizens without consulting them. Depending on whether the system is democratic or authoritarian, the powers of the head of state, monarch, or president of a republic are more or less extensive.

**TYPES OF GOVERNMENT**

- Parliament
- Parliament and head of state (joint power)
- President (limited power)
- President (extensive power)
- Communist party
- Absolute monarch
- Army
- Transitional government

Sources: J. Derbyshire, Encyclopedia of World Political Systems; CIA World Factbook; Ministère français des Affaires étrangères

**DEMOCRACY**

In a democracy, each citizen may make his or her voice heard through elections. Representatives elected by the people form the parliament, which debates and votes on laws. The parliament is formed of one or two chambers (upper and lower chambers). The upper chamber, often called a senate, usually has less power than the lower chamber, often called the National Assembly or House of Commons.

Democracy is the political system that is most respectful of individual freedoms; in principle, citizens are equal before the law and enjoy freedom of opinion, expression, and worship, the press is independent, and a number of political parties coexist. In practice, all democracies are imperfect to some degree (discrimination against minorities, government corruption, etc.).
Separation of powers is one principle of democracy. Its aim is to avoid having a small group of people seizing control of an entire country. There are usually three types of power within a democratic nation. Legislative power is in the hands of the people's representatives (parliament), who formulate and pass laws. These laws are applied by judges and magistrates, who thus hold judicial power. Executive power, which consists in administering the state, is in the hands of the government. The government's policy is submitted to the control of parliament: if the assembly disagrees with the policy, it may oppose or even defeat the government. The press, which monitors all three branches of power, is sometimes considered to be a fourth power.

Supreme Court in Washington, United States
The Supreme Court is the highest court in the United States. It guarantees equal justice for all American citizens in compliance with the law. Judicial power, independent of executive power, also guarantees that the government's actions comply with the law.
Westminster Palace is the seat of the British Parliament, where the House of Lords (upper chamber) and the House of Commons (lower chamber) sit. Westminster Palace is known for its majestic clock tower, which houses the bell nicknamed Big Ben.
Women in politics

Although women form about half of the world’s population, their place in politics remains secondary in most countries in the world. Women occupy an average of 16% of parliamentary seats (40% in Nordic countries, less than 7% in Arab countries). Only a dozen countries are currently led by a woman, including Chile, Finland, and Germany. About 7% of ministerial positions, most of them in the social affairs field, are filled by women.

A number of countries are trying to improve women’s representation in political bodies through quotas. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, out of the 39 countries that held parliamentary elections in 2005, 15 had implemented measures in favour of women (voluntary or statutory quotas requiring that political parties present more female candidates or reserving parliamentary seats for women). These countries have twice as many elected women as do countries where no measure has been undertaken (26.9% vs. 13.6%).

However, several countries still do not recognize the right of women to run for office in an election; some, such as Saudi Arabia, do not even allow women to vote. Kuwait allowed women to vote and run for office only in 2005.

Presidential election in Chile, March 2006

Elected president of the Republic of Chile, Michelle Bachelet is one of the few female heads of state.
In the summer of 2005, the world’s population passed the 6.5 billion mark. The population is very unequally distributed on the planet, since developing countries contain a total of 80% of the world’s inhabitants, as well as the highest birth rates. Demographers predict that the population of the 50 least-developed countries may more than double by 2050, while that in developed countries should remain at 1.2 billion. The world’s population would then reach 9.1 billion. Demographers are also predicting an overall aging of the population. The proportion of people aged over 60 years, which went from 8% to 10% over the last 50 years, may double by 2050.

**Continents with more or less people**

Although it covers a huge area, Oceania, which includes Australia, New Zealand, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, contains only 33 million people, most of them in urban areas (72%). In contrast, Asia is by far the most populous continent, with 3.9 billion inhabitants, most of whom still live in the countryside (62%). Today, four people out of 10 live in China or India.
Almost half of the world’s population lives in cities. Although some countries, such as Laos, are still very rural, others, such as Israel, are almost completely urbanized. Urbanization of the population, a recent phenomenon, is intensifying. According to UN estimates, in 30 years, cities will be home to more than 60% of the world’s population. The cities in developing countries should grow the most rapidly, such as Dhaka, Bangladesh; Lagos, Nigeria; and Delhi, India. In developed countries, where urban dwellers already represent three-quarters of the population, the urban population will grow more slowly. Today’s megalopolises, such as Tokyo and Mexico, which together contain almost 4% of the world’s population, will remain the most populous, but will expand less quickly.
Population growth

The rate of population growth is the rate at which a country’s total population has increased or decreased during a given year. This rate takes account of births, deaths, and migration. In Germany, for example, population growth between 2000 and 2005 was slightly positive, thanks to the arrival of immigrants and in spite of a low birth rate. However, population growth will be negative in 2005–2010, since decreasing immigration will no longer be able to compensate for the drop in births and increased mortality due to the aging of the population. After reaching a peak in the late 1960s (2.04%), growth of the world’s population will stand at 1.17% per year for 2005–2010.

Modern human beings, who appeared about 200,000 years ago in Africa, gradually colonized the planet. The first estimates of world population go back to year zero, when Earth had about 300 million inhabitants. A thousand years later, there were only 320 million. Birth and death rates were high but so balanced that the world’s population remained stable for hundreds of years. During the Renaissance in Europe, living conditions improved. A demographic transition began: mortality dropped, but the birth rate remained high. The overall population began to grow, reaching 1 billion in 1800, 2 billion in 1925, and 3 billion in 1960. The demographic transition in industrialized countries was then complete: the birth rate and death rate evened out at a low level. In developing countries, this transition is currently underway: over the last 50 years, the death rate has fallen, and in certain countries, such as China, the birth rate is now on the same path. A century from now, a new population balance should be established in the world, with low birth and death rates, returning stability to the world’s population.
THE MEDIAN AGE OF THE POPULATION

The median age is the age that divides a population into two halves: one-half of the population is older; the other half, younger. The higher the median age, the older the population. For 30 years, the median age worldwide has risen constantly, going from 22.2 years in 1970 to 28.0 years in 2005. However, population aging does not affect all regions of the world in the same way. Between 1950 and 2005, the proportion of people aged over 60 years went from 11.7% to 20.1% in developed regions, but only from 6.4% to 8.1% in developing countries. In Africa, it even dropped slightly, reaching 5.2% in 2005.

WORLD POPULATION IN 2050

Population estimates take account of many demographic variables, among them population growth, population age, and fertility rate (number of children per woman). It is estimated that the world’s population will reach 9.1 billion in 2050. Europe’s demographic load should fall, while Africa’s should rise. The share of the other continents should remain stable. By mid-century, Asia will be home to almost three-quarters of the world’s population.

Street in Old Delhi, India

India's rate of population growth (1.46% per year between 2005 and 2010) is slightly above the world average. The country's demographic load should remain stable in coming years.
Language, exclusive to human beings, is the faculty to express thought through speech, in a linguistic system that has been transmitted. It is one of the main characteristics of a people’s culture. Almost 7,000 different languages are spoken in the world. The division of its population according to language spoken reflects a country’s cultural diversity. About half of all countries have one or several languages designated as official in the constitution or a statute. An official language is often, but not always, spoken by a large proportion of the population.

Language families

A language family is a group of languages that are derived from a single language of origin. There are more than 10 major language families. The Indo-European family includes more than 400 languages with a common Indo-European origin that may go back to 2000 BCE. The languages in this family are the most widely spoken in the world, with almost 3 billion speakers from Europe to Asia. The Indo-European family includes languages spoken in India, the Slavic languages (Russian, Polish), Greek, the Germanic languages (German, English, Flemish, Norwegian, etc.), the Celtic languages, and the languages of Latin origin (French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, etc.). Smaller families, like the Papuan languages (in Papua New Guinea), include almost 3,400 languages, spoken by less than 4% of the world population. Amerindian languages belong to indigenous languages, as well as Australian (mainly Aborigene), Eskimo-Aleut and Tasmanian languages.
Languages and writing

The most widespread language in the world is Mandarin (Chinese), with more than 870 million speakers. Many other languages are used by only several hundred people. Half of all current languages may rapidly disappear, as they are abandoned for international languages.

A language is usually associated with a writing system, a group of symbols allowing the language to be transcribed onto a medium. Many writing systems are alphabetic (Latin, Arab, Cyrillic, etc.), with the alphabetic characters used to construct the sounds of the language. But there are also syllabic writing systems, in which the symbols represent syllables (Japanese) and logographic writing systems, in which each symbol corresponds to a word or group of words (Chinese).

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**THE MOST WIDELY SPOKEN LANGUAGES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>SPEAKERS</th>
<th>MAIN COUNTRIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin (Chinese)</td>
<td>874 M</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>366 M</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>341 M</td>
<td>United Kingdom, countries of North America and Oceania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>322 M</td>
<td>Spain, countries of South and Central America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>207 M</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>206 M</td>
<td>countries of the Middle East and North Africa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ethnologue, SIL International
A religion is a group of doctrines and rituals designed to connect the human soul to the realm of the divine and the sacred. For centuries, religions have overlapped and competed with each other. Their origins are sparked by a person or an event, and some are much older than others. Religions play a cultural and social role, the importance of which varies depending on the people, the period, and the country.

The main religions of the world

Christianity is the most widespread religion today, with almost 2 billion believers worldwide. Its influence is great in European and North American countries, but the greatest number of practitioners is now found in South America and southern Africa. Islam currently has more than 1 billion followers, mainly in Asia and North Africa. Most adherents to Buddhism and Hinduism are in Asia, while most Jews live in the United States and Israel. In some societies, especially in Africa and Oceania, people practice “traditional” forms of religion, in which the beliefs are often transmitted orally.

### The Most Widely Practiced Religions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Followers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>Religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and drawing on the New Testament.</td>
<td>1,928 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholicism</td>
<td>Christian religion that admits the authority of the Pope in Rome.</td>
<td>968 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestantism</td>
<td>Group of religions [Anglicanism, Calvinism, Lutheranism, etc.] formed of Christian churches resulting from the Reform launched in the 16th century by Luther, who was protesting against the mores and practices of the Catholic church.</td>
<td>394 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodoxy</td>
<td>The group of Eastern Christian churches that separated from Rome in 1054.</td>
<td>218 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Religion practiced by Muslims based on the belief in a single god, Allah. The Koran, a collection of the revelations made by Allah to the prophet Muhammad, is the holy book of Muslims.</td>
<td>1,100 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunnism</td>
<td>Branch of Islam based on the texts of the Sunna, which contains accounts of Muhammad’s words, behaviors, and judgments.</td>
<td>913 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiism</td>
<td>When Muhammad died, those who recognized his son-in-law Ali as his successor founded Shiite Islam. Shiism, considered the historical branch of Islam.</td>
<td>176 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>Religion according to which God elected the Jewish people and made an alliance with them.</td>
<td>14 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>Polytheist religion of India descended from ancient tribal religions.</td>
<td>781 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>Eastern religion founded by an Indian wise man, Buddha.</td>
<td>324 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian religions</td>
<td>Confucianism is a Chinese religion based on the teachings of Confucius, a philosopher rather than a religious leader. Founded, like Confucianism, in the 6th century BCE, Taoism is a far Eastern religion based on the philosophy of Lao-tzu and folk beliefs. Shintoism is a polytheist Japanese religion whose deities are personifications of natural forces (stars, animals, plants, etc.).</td>
<td>246 M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adherents.com, from Britannica
According to the precepts of Islam, every Muslim who has the means must make the pilgrimage to Mecca once in his or her life.

The Ganges is a holy river for the Hindus, who go there to perform their ablutions.

Jewish Jerusalem is represented by the Temple Mount Esplanade, also known as the Western Wall or the Wailing Wall. It is the only vestige of the temple of Herod, king of the Jews, destroyed in 70 CE, of which only the west wall has survived.

The Ganges in Varanasi, India

Temple Mount Esplanade in Jerusalem, Israel

Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, Israel

Pilgrims at Mecca, Saudi Arabia

The Ganges is a holy river for the Hindus, who go there to perform their ablutions.
There is an extremely wide variety of sports. Whether individual or team, based on physical strength or tactical intelligence, they have in common a striving to outdo oneself, a respect for rules that enable performances to be compared, and the notion of pleasure. Since the explosion of coverage in the media, the social and economic impact of sports has increased considerably. Today, sports is a mass cultural phenomenon, conveying the social values of recognition and success. The Olympic movement has been a major contributor to this trend.

A worldwide phenomenon

Several hundred sports are played around the world. Some, such as Sumo wrestling in Japan, are practiced in only one or a few countries, but most disciplines involve athletes all over the globe. Every year, international-level competitions take place around the world.

SOCCER

Soccer, called football outside of North America, is the most popular sport on the planet. Almost one person in 25, or 260 million altogether, plays soccer. Most professional players play in Europe and South America, but the United States may soon catch up, as almost 18 million American children play soccer.

The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), founded in 1904, now has 207 member national associations. An Olympic sport since 1908, soccer owes its universal appeal to its simple rules and the lack of specialized equipment required, but also to the amazing popularity of the World Cup. No other international event draws as much attention, mainly due to television broadcast of the games: 1.7 billion viewers watched the France–Brazil final in 1998.
A fun game that requires very little equipment, soccer is very popular in Africa.

Young African soccer players, Mozambique

Source: FIFA

Source: ITF

Source: Official web site of each race
The Olympic Games

The Olympic Games originated in antiquity. The first games took place in 776 BCE in Olympia, Greece. These ancient games had only a few sports disciplines, among which were foot races in the stadium, and they took place every four years. This tradition lasted more than 1,000 years. It was revived by Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin: in 1896, the first Olympic Games of the modern era brought 241 athletes and nine sports together in Athens, Greece. Today, more than 10,000 athletes compete at the Olympic Games. The program for the Summer Games includes 28 sports, while the Winter Games, created in 1924, has seven sports. Since 1994, the Summer and Winter Olympic Games have not occurred at the same time every four years, but have alternated every two years. For instance, the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing, China, will be followed by the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver, Canada. From Nadia Comaneci to Carl Lewis, numerous athletes have achieved greatness at the Games, following the Olympic motto “Faster, Higher, Stronger.”

OLYMPIC MEDALS THROUGH HISTORY

Over the history of the Olympic Games, some countries have disappeared and others have appeared. The table below lists the number of Olympic medals won at Summer and Winter Games by some former countries. The colors in the table correspond to outlined zones on the maps below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former Country (Year of Participation)</th>
<th>Summer Games Medals</th>
<th>Winter Games Medals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslavia (between 1924 and 2000)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechoslovakia (between 1920 and 1992)</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Democratic Republic (GDR)</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[between 1968 and 1990]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[between 1968 and 1990]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR [between 1952 and 1994]</td>
<td>1,122</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OLYMPIC MEDALS AT THE SUMMER GAMES

Total medals won per country since 1896

OLYMPIC MEDALS AT THE WINTER GAMES

Total medals won per country since 1924

Source: IOC
First Olympic stadium, Athens, Greece  
The first Games of the modern era were held there in 1896.
To meet their needs and satisfy their desires, human beings use goods, such as housing or books, and services, such as a bank account or a visit to a doctor. An economy comprises the activities of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services, as well as the resulting distribution of wealth. Usually, goods and services are exchanged for money by different actors in the economy (individuals, companies, the state).

In recent decades, the economy has become globalized and international trade has intensified. Some of the goods and services that are produced by multinational corporations (with facilities in a number of countries) are consumed thousands of kilometers from where they originated.

**Economic sectors**

Traditionally, three economic sectors are distinguished. The primary sector involves direct exploitation of natural resources (fishing, agriculture, livestock production, mining, etc.). The industries that transform resources form the secondary sector, which includes a very diverse range of activities, from the agri-food industry to shipbuilding to the pharmaceutical industry to energy production. The tertiary sector encompasses all service activities (banking services, retail, healthcare services, telecommunications, transportation, etc.).

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**THE LARGEST MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>COMPANY</th>
<th>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</th>
<th>INDUSTRIAL SECTOR</th>
<th>TOTAL NUMBER</th>
<th>EMPLOYEES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>General Electric</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Electric and electronic equipment</td>
<td>307,000</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vodafone Group</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>57,378</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ford Motor</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>225,626</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>General Motors</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>324,000</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>British Petroleum</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Oil</td>
<td>102,900</td>
<td>83.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Exxon Mobil</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Oil</td>
<td>105,200</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Royal Dutch Shell</td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>Oil</td>
<td>114,000</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Toyota</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>265,753</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Oil</td>
<td>111,401</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>France Télécom</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>206,524</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Rank by foreign assets

Source: UNCTAD/Erasmus University database
Money, also called currency, is the legal means of paying a debt. Physically, it consists of coins and bills that are exchanged when a payment is made. Currency is also a unit of account: the prices of goods and services are calculated in this monetary unit. Most sovereign countries have their own currency. Money from one country can be exchanged for money from another country at an exchange rate that is fixed or that varies according to supply and demand on the exchange market. However, certain currencies, such as the Cuban peso, are not convertible.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF COUNTRIES

A number of economic units are used to compare countries’ economies. One of these units, the gross domestic product (GDP), measures the total value of goods and services created during one year within the country only. The industrial GDP per inhabitant is used to put into perspective the data regarding industrial activities only, as these are most comparable between rich and poor countries.
International trade

International trade consists of all of the exchanges of goods and services between one country and another. The goods that enter a country constitute its imports, while its exports are the goods that leave it. The nature of the goods exchanged depends on the industrial strengths of the respective country; Brazil, for example, has a wealth of bauxite ore and exports massive amounts of this mineral, while Canada imports large amounts of bauxite to feed its powerful aluminum industry. A country’s import-export flows comprise its balance of trade. The balance of trade is positive when a country exports more than it imports (trade surplus) and negative in the opposite case (trade deficit).

The World Trade Organization (WTO) governs trade practices among its member countries (151 in 2007, including most of the trade powers in the world). When there are disagreements between partner countries, the WTO must make a ruling. In its first eight years of existence, from 1995 to 2002, the WTO was called upon to decide on about 300 disputes.
Employment

Individuals participate in the economy by consuming goods and services, but also by working. Employment is defined as remunerated work. It enables individuals to meet their own needs and sometimes those of their families. Assessing the employment situation involves measuring the unemployment rate—that is, the proportion of people who do not have a job but are available to work. According to estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO), there were about 190 million unemployed people in the world (6.3% of the labor force in 2005). However, having a job does not protect against poverty: in 2005, out of the 2.8 billion employed workers, 1.4 billion earned less than $2 per day. All over the world, young people and women are the most vulnerable to unemployment and job insecurity.

**UNEMPLOYMENT**

In 2005, unemployment rates varied from 3.8% in East Asia to 13.2% in the Middle East and North Africa. About half of those who are unemployed are young people aged 15 to 24 years.

**FEMALE LABOR**

In spite of the progress made with regard to employment equity, there is still a gap between men and women. Women comprise about 40% of workers worldwide. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the proportion of employed women tends to drop. In the Middle East and North Africa, it is growing, but from a very low starting level.

**PROPORTION OF THE LABOR FORCE THAT IS UNEMPLOYED**

![Map showing the proportion of the labor force that is unemployed globally.](source)

**WOMEN AT WORK**

Proportion of women in the total labor force

![Map showing the proportion of women in the total labor force globally.](source)
In 2004, the female labor force represented 46% of the total labor force in Canada. Only 11% of the female labor force, however, worked in the secondary sector, which employs 32% of the male labor force. On the other hand, the tertiary sector employs 87% of the female labor force and 64% of the male labor force.
The world economy is based on an essential resource: energy. Today, the most widely used energy source is oil. The most optimistic experts estimate that underground reserves will be exhausted by 2030 at the latest. Anticipating the oil shortage, the United States, some European countries—such as France—and Japan began to turn to nuclear energy in the 1960s, while countries such as Canada and Brazil adopted hydroelectricity. Other renewable energy sources are now being developed.

The main energy sources

Oil, the main source of energy, is used as a fuel for most vehicles and for lighting, heating, and electricity production. Like natural gas and coal, it is a fossil fuel. It is the product of the transformation of organic matter buried in the ground for millions of years. Nuclear energy also produces electricity, but it generates radioactive waste that is highly toxic to human beings and their environment. Renewable energy sources do not have this drawback. The most highly developed renewable resource is hydroelectricity: energy from a watercourse is transformed into electrical energy. Other renewable energy sources are being developed: wind energy (from the force of the wind), solar energy (from the Sun’s rays), and geothermal energy (from the heat of Earth’s mantle).
Between 1960 and 1970, world oil consumption more than doubled, making oil a major economic stake. This put the producing countries of the Persian Gulf—notably Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia—in a position of strength. In 1973, they gained a larger share of oil revenues and control over the stages of production on their territories, which enabled them to keep prices artificially high. Oil prices shot up and the oil crisis began. Consuming countries made an effort to reduce consumption and develop alternate energy sources (nuclear energy, hydroelectricity, etc.). Gradually, the balance of power was reversed, and in the 1980s the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) countries agreed to reestablish normal prices. Currently, however, oil prices are still unstable due to international conflicts, the growing energy needs of countries such as China, and the exhaustion of world oil reserves. Diversification of energy sources is more important than ever today.
Agriculture is the basis of our food supply. The term covers all exploitation of the land for crop and livestock production. The agriculture sector employs more than 40% of the labor force worldwide. Most farmers live in developing countries. However, today developing countries import more agricultural products than they export, the reverse of the situation up to the early 1990s. Serious food shortages are ravaging about 30 of these countries. Farmers in developing countries practice small-scale agriculture, while many farmers in wealthy countries own vast, highly productive operations.

Agricultural production
The main agricultural plant products are sugar cane, cereals (wheat, rice, corn, etc.), roots and tubers (potatoes, sugar beets, manioc, etc.), soybeans, citrus fruits, and forage plants. When the plants are irrigated by rainwater only, it is called rain-fed agriculture. Rice cultivation, for instance, may be rain-fed, in which case it is a low-yield crop. It may also be irrigated and give better yields.
Farmland comprises zones used, either permanently or temporarily, for plant crops or livestock production. India and a number of countries in eastern Europe stand out with more than 45% of their territory devoted to agriculture.

Indonesia is one of the major rice-producing countries. Most rice cultivation is irrigated, but some is rain-fed.
AGRICULTURE

THE MAIN CEREAL-PRODUCING COUNTRIES
Cereals are plants usually cultivated on a large scale. The main producing countries are also among the largest (China, United States, India, Russia). Consumption of cereals has been dropping for more than a century in wealthy countries, while in developing countries cereals are still the main source of dietary energy. The most-consumed cereals in the world are wheat and rice.

THE MAIN COUNTRIES PRODUCING GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOs)
Genetically modified plants are agricultural plants whose characteristics have been modified, for instance, to increase yield or resistance to insects. They are cultivated commercially in some 20 countries. The most widely grown genetically modified plants are soybeans and corn.

THE MAIN MEAT-PRODUCING COUNTRIES
The main meat-producing countries are China, the United States, and Brazil. They are also the main consumers of meat. A wide variety of animals are raised for their meat, but only three kinds of meat are produced in large quantities: pork, beef, and chicken. Livestock also produce milk and eggs.
In Illinois, a state situated in the northern United States, corn is cultivated intensively; this form of agriculture consumes more resources (water, fertilizer) with the goal of increasing the yield of the land farmed. In contrast, subsistence farming produces food mainly for local populations.
Most human activities require the transportation of people or goods. There are different modes of transportation depending on whether they move on land (ground transportation, including roads and railroads), on water (inland waterways and maritime transport), or in the atmosphere (air transport).

The geography of transportation
Transportation infrastructure is distributed around the planet as a function of geographic constraints and the needs and means of populations.

### MAJOR TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS

**Main transportation infrastructure**
- **Roads**
  - Source: ESR
- **Railroad lines**
  - Source: ESR
- **High-speed-train lines**
  - Source: Containerisation International Yearbook
- **Shipping lanes**
  - Source: GIS

Cities served by the 30 largest airports by number of passengers

Source: Airports Council International

### MAIN PORTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[millions of TEUs]</th>
<th>TEU: equivalent to loading a container 20 feet [6.1 m] long</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>21.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>20.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>14.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shenzhen</td>
<td>13.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pusan</td>
<td>11.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaohsiung</td>
<td>9.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotterdam</td>
<td>8.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>7.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamburg</td>
<td>7.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubai</td>
<td>6.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Containerisation International Yearbook

### MAIN AIRPORTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[millions of passengers]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London (Heathrow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo (Tokyo Int.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankfurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Vegas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Airports Council International

### MAIN SUBWAYS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[millions of passengers]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moscow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seoul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osaka-Kobe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>São Paulo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Transport Geography on the Web, Hofstra University
Maritime transportation

Ships are the form of transportation most used for long distances (international trade) and for transportation of heavy goods, in bulk and in containers. It is estimated that 71% of world freight (96% by weight) transits through shipping lanes, oceanic routes several kilometers wide that link the main ports of the globe. Some major rivers, such as the Amazon and the St. Lawrence, provide ships with routes to the interior of continents. Since the advent of air transport, maritime transport of passengers has been limited to sea cruises in passenger ships and short crossings on ferries.
Road transportation

Ground transportation is by far the most widely used form. In developing countries, non-motorized means of ground transportation—walking, bicycles, and horse and cart—are still very widespread. In developed countries, on the other hand, ground transportation has taken over from all other forms of transportation, due to its rapidity and flexibility. In the wealthiest countries, there are 45 cars per 100 inhabitants and the road networks have more than 10 million kilometers of roads. Road traffic is regulated more or less strictly from country to country. In most countries, drivers must have a driving permit that is adapted to their vehicle, and they must obey speed limits.

Rail transportation

Heavily used in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, rail transportation then declined as road transportation became more popular. The development of high-speed trains in the 1980s, with a maximum speed of 513 km/h, revived interest in railroads. Most of these trains are in operation in Europe and Japan. In spite of its lack of flexibility, rail transportation has several advantages over road transportation. Because most trains run on electricity, they are less polluting than trucks and automobiles. In addition, rail transportation is a form of public transit: trains, subways, and tramways transport hundreds of people at a time without clogging the road network.

Maglev, China

The Maglev, for Magnetic Levitation, is a train that uses magnetic forces to move and is therefore not in contact with the rails when it runs. It has reached a speed of over 500 km/h.
Air transportation

The history of air transportation dates back to the early 20th century: in 1903, Orville Wright’s airplane flew for 12 seconds over a distance of 36 m. More than a century later, the performance of airplanes is of a completely different order. The largest airliners can carry more than 800 passengers from one continent to another. In November 2005, a Boeing 777 airplane established the record for the longest commercial flight by flying the 21,600 km between Hong Kong and London without touching down. Democratized in the 1960s, air travel has become the favorite means of transportation over long distances. Today, the limitations of air transportation are linked less to the capacity of airplanes than to problems with managing air traffic. In 2003, more than 1.6 billion people flew on airplanes, and there were over 21 million commercial flights.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF TAKEOFFS PER YEAR</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PASSENGERS PER YEAR</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF TAKEOFFS PER YEAR</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PASSENGERS PER YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>7,789,100</td>
<td>508 M</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>695,900</td>
<td>47 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1,036,100</td>
<td>36 M</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>638,500</td>
<td>104 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>946,400</td>
<td>86 M</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>529,600</td>
<td>41 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>891,200</td>
<td>76 M</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>518,800</td>
<td>42 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>844,800</td>
<td>72 M</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>486,800</td>
<td>32 M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank

Beluga cargo plane, United States

The Beluga is often used to transport different parts of a plane (wings, fuselage, etc.) that must be assembled at a site different from where they are made. The Beluga is loaded by the front through a door 17 m high. The cockpit is at the bottom of the plane to make room for this immense opening.
Despite economists’ forecasts that globalization of the economy will benefit the poorest the most, inequalities in the world are getting worse in terms of health, nutrition, education, housing, and other areas. Gross national product (GNP) per capita, a country’s main socioeconomic development indicator, ranges from about $100 in the poorest countries to almost $60,000 in the wealthiest. These disparities are aggravated by the fact that in the 1970s, the Third World became heavily indebted in order to finance its development. The borrowed funds, often poorly managed or misappropriated, have not had the anticipated effect. Today, unable to pay back its debt, the Third World is demanding that the debt be written off. At the same time, the wealthiest countries donate to the most disadvantaged countries in the form of official development assistance.

Measuring wealth
The GNP is an indicator that measures the total value of the goods and services produced in a country during one year, as well as its net revenues from foreign countries. Total GNP is used to measure a country’s wealth. Divided by the number of inhabitants, it gives an indication of the standard of living of a country’s population.
OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

The member countries of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) offer aid to developing countries by agreeing to reduce their debt or by providing them with new funding.

MAIN DONOR COUNTRIES OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>ASSISTANCE IN 2005</th>
<th>% OF GNP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$27,622 M</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>$13,147 M</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>$10,787 M</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>$10,082 M</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>$10,026 M</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>$5,115 M</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>$5,091 M</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>$3,756 M</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>$3,382 M</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>$3,018 M</td>
<td>0.3</td>
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</table>

Source: OECD

MAIN RECIPIENT COUNTRIES OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>ASSISTANCE IN 2005</th>
<th>% OF GNP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>$2,192 M</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>$1,472 M</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>$1,202 M</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dem. Rep. of the Congo</td>
<td>$1,034 M</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>$871 M</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Zambie</td>
<td>$836 M</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>$771 M</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>$704 M</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>$563 M</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>$500 M</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD
Development indicators

Development indicators are numerical indicators used to estimate the development of nations. They measure different parameters that affect the quality of life of human beings. GNP measures a country’s wealth or poverty, while life expectancy and infant mortality rate reflect its state of health. Other indicators assess satisfaction of basic human needs, such as access to drinking water, sufficient food, and housing. Still others measure level of education, the guarantee of a population’s future.

To integrate these different parameters into a single indicator, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) calculates the human development index. This index, which takes account of longevity, education, literacy, and standard of living (purchasing power) assesses development on a scale from 0 to 1. In 2004, the index ranged from 0.311 for Niger to 0.965 for Norway.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>INDEX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>0.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>0.960</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.957</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>0.956</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>0.951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>0.950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>0.949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>0.948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>0.947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>0.947</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

World average: 0.741

Source: UNDP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>INDEX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>175</td>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>0.390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>176</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>0.384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>0.371</td>
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<tr>
<td>178</td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>0.368</td>
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<tr>
<td>179</td>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>180</td>
<td>Guinea-Bissau</td>
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<td>181</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
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<tr>
<td>182</td>
<td>Mali</td>
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<tr>
<td>183</td>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>0.335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>184</td>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>0.311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNDP
Access to water is one of the main development indicators. It corresponds to the proportion of the population that has access to at least 20 liters of water per day per person from an improved source (pipeline, protected well, rainwater collection, etc.) less than one kilometer from their residence. In many regions of the world, populations lack water, leading to serious sanitary problems. The East Asia/Pacific region has the largest number of inhabitants without access to improved water sources. Inhabitants of urban areas have a better chance of benefiting from an improved source. Mongolia, for example, has very wide disparities between drinking-water access in urban zones (87%) and rural zones (30%).

**Access to Drinking Water**

Access to drinking water is one of the main development indicators. It corresponds to the proportion of the population that has access to at least 20 liters of water per day per person from an improved source (pipeline, protected well, rainwater collection, etc.) less than one kilometer from their residence. In many regions of the world, populations lack water, leading to serious sanitary problems. The East Asia/Pacific region has the largest number of inhabitants without access to improved water sources. Inhabitants of urban areas have a better chance of benefiting from an improved source. Mongolia, for example, has very wide disparities between drinking-water access in urban zones (87%) and rural zones (30%).

**Share of the Population with Access to Drinking Water**
Less than 3% of all water on the planet is freshwater. It is a resource that is unequally distributed, as most of it is frozen at the poles and the rest is found in water tables, which refill very slowly. Nevertheless, world freshwater reserves would satisfy the needs of humanity if they were better distributed and used. While subtropical regions (North Africa, South Africa, the Middle East, etc.) suffer from a serious lack of water, the temperate and intertropical regions (Canada, Russia, Brazil, etc.) have an abundance of freshwater. In the future, due to population growth, these inequalities are likely to rise. The risk of water shortages may cause conflicts to break out between countries that share watersheds.

**Water consumption**

Water consumption has greatly increased in recent decades. Although the overall increase is attributable to population growth, the rise in consumption per capita results from the easy access to water and economic development in some countries.
Lake Nasser, Egypt
Formed at the border between Egypt and Sudan following construction of the Aswan dam on the Nile, Lake Nasser is a freshwater reservoir containing almost 162 billion m³ of freshwater. By reducing the amount of alluvia in the Nile’s river bed downstream of the dam, this structure is likely responsible for erosion of the Nile Delta.

FRESHWATER RESOURCES

Lake Nasser, Egypt
Formed at the border between Egypt and Sudan following construction of the Aswan dam on the Nile, Lake Nasser is a freshwater reservoir containing almost 162 billion m³ of freshwater. By reducing the amount of alluvia in the Nile’s river bed downstream of the dam, this structure is likely responsible for erosion of the Nile Delta.

FRESHWATER RESERVES

Freshwater available
- ≥ 50,000 m³/year/inhab.
- 10,000–49,999 m³/year/inhab.
- 5,000–9,999 m³/year/inhab.
- 1,000–4,999 m³/year/inhab.
- 100–999 m³/year/inhab.
- ≤ 100 m³/year/inhab.
- No data
Source: FAO

Use of freshwater by sector
- Agriculture
- Domestic
- Industrial
Source: FAO

Regional borders
The health of populations varies from country to country depending on their respective wealth levels, and even on wealth differences within individual countries. The mortality of children under 5 years of age, which is a good reflection of a population’s health, rises as the gross national product (GNP) drops. In many countries in Africa, this figure is above 15%. Children with malnutrition are predisposed to falling ill during epidemics. In wealthy countries, on the other hand, adult obesity is lowering life expectancy, since it is likely to lead to heart disease. Health-care professionals are also unequally distributed around the planet: the countries faced with the direst health crises must make do with the fewest health-care professionals.

**Epidemics and life expectancy**

In developing countries, infectious and parasitic diseases cause most deaths, all age groups combined. Helped along by malnutrition, a shortage of drinking water, lack of vaccinations, and illiteracy, epidemics propagate rapidly. Inequalities of life expectancy at birth, which had narrowed during the 1980s, have increased considerably since. The main cause of this growing disparity is the AIDS epidemic that has struck Africa. More than 7% of the population on the continent is infected. In southern Africa, about one-quarter of the population is affected (and up to 38.8% in Swaziland).

Heart disease and cancer are the scourges of the wealthiest countries, while communicable diseases affect developing countries. As the risk factors for communicable diseases (malnutrition, lack of water, etc.) diminish, the risk factors for chronic conditions (obesity, smoking, etc.) are amplified. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the annual number of deaths due to smoking in the world should grow from 4.9 million in 2000 to more than 10 million in 2020. The increase will be steepest in developing countries.
The share of the national budget devoted to health varies from less than 5% in the poorest countries to more than 20% in the wealthiest ones. Thus, national revenue has a major impact on the state of health and the life expectancy of a country's population. However, it does not explain on its own the inequalities from one country to another. Malaysia, for example, has an infant-mortality rate equal to that of the United States (0.7%), while its GNP is one-quarter the size. Governments that invest in water quality, hygiene education, and installation of an extended health-care system (sufficient number of physicians, vaccinations, etc.) improve their health situation. With a GNP per capita identical to that of India, Vietnam has a life expectancy that is longer by eight years (68 years) and an infant-mortality rate almost four times lower (2.3%), notably because 99% of children under 1 year old are vaccinated, as compared to 70% in India.
More than 750 million people around the world are illiterate, and about 64% of them are women. The illiteracy rate varies hugely from country to country and between genders: in many countries, more women than men are illiterate. The less access a population has to basic education, the higher the illiteracy rate and the more widespread the bad living conditions. In order to make up for the lack of basic education, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is helping to set up nonconventional schooling structures in many developing countries that offer training to everyone in a community—children, teenagers, and adults—and are run by members of the community.

The illiteracy rate counts people over 15 years of age who are unable to read and write a short sentence about their everyday life. It is high in all developing countries where basic education is not systematic. In developed countries, few of which publish data on this subject, illiteracy is less visible, but it exists nevertheless, especially among those excluded from mainstream society.
Child writing, United Kingdom
Learning to read and write begins when a child is about 6 years old. To fight illiteracy, obligatory school attendance for young children must be a priority.

Nonconventional schooling, Uganda
The young students in this school are learning English. Nonconventional schooling includes basic education programs in reading, writing, and arithmetic, for children and adults.
The number of conflicts has dropped significantly since the end of the Cold War, but there are still numerous zones where confrontations occur. The nature of conflicts has changed: although there are still several wars between states and a number of border disputes, most conflicts are civil wars. The parties confront each other within a single country for ideological, ethnic, religious, or economic reasons. In some civil wars, a group claims independence for its territory (armed independence movements). Although officially confined to a single country, civil wars often involve a number of states, which support one or another of the belligerents financially or militarily.
### Civil Wars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Country/Region</th>
<th>Conflict Description</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Guerrillas against the military government for a change of regime</td>
<td>1960–1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Communist group (FARC) against the government for control of the country</td>
<td>since 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Armed group against the government for control of diamond production</td>
<td>1991–2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>Ethnic and religious conflict for control of the country</td>
<td>1999–2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>Islamists against the government for control of the country</td>
<td>1991–2005</td>
</tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Popular liberation movement of Angola against the Unita rebel group for control of the country</td>
<td>1975–2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Ethnic and religious conflict for control of the country</td>
<td>1998–2003</td>
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<td>Rebel group against the government for control of the country</td>
<td>1997–2002</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>Islamists and democrats against the pro-Russian army for control of the country</td>
<td>1992–1997</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Clan conflict for control of the country</td>
<td>1991–2004</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Confrontation between Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq</td>
<td>since 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Mujahadin against the Taliban for control of the country</td>
<td>1992–2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>Ethnic conflict between Tutsis and Hutus for control of Rwanda</td>
<td>1994–2001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In Guatemala, guerrillas against the military government for a change of regime (1960–1996)**

**In Colombia, communist group (FARC) against the government for control of the country (since 1966)**

**In Sierra Leone, armed group against the government for control of diamond production (1991–2002)**

**In Côte d'Ivoire, ethnic and religious conflict for control of the country (1999–2005)**

**In Algeria, Islamists against the government for control of the country (1991–2005)**

**In Ethiopia, ethnic conflict for control of the Congo (1997–2003)**

**In Angola, popular liberation movement of Angola against the Unita rebel group for control of the country (1975–2002)**

**In Chad, ethnic and religious conflict for control of the country (1998–2003)**

**In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, rebel group against the government for control of the country (1997–2002)**

**In Somalia, clan conflict for control of the country (1991–2004)**

**Confrontation between Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq (since 2005)**

**In Afghanistan, mujahadin against the Taliban for control of the country (1992–2001)**

**In Tajikistan, Islamists and democrats against the pro-Russian army for control of the country (1992–1997)**

**In Sudan, animists and Christians against the Islamist government and ethnic conflict in Darfur (1983–2005)**

**In Afghanistan, mujahadin against the Taliban for control of the country (1992–2001)**

**In Tajikistan, Islamists and democrats against the pro-Russian army for control of the country (1992–1997)**

**Ethnic conflict between Tutsis and Hutus for control of Rwanda (1994–2001)**
Freedom of the press

Media propaganda is used in many conflicts to manipulate opinion and the adversary. Freedom of the press is a bulwark against this propaganda. Each year, the French association Reporters Without Borders, through its network of correspondents, lists attacks against journalists (assassinations, imprisonments, assaults, threats, etc.) and the media (censorship, seizures, searches, pressure, etc.). On the basis of this information, it assigns each country a ranking that reflects its freedom of the press. The lower the ranking, the greater the freedom of the press. In 2007, 169 countries were ranked. Their rankings ranged from 0.75 in Iceland to 114.75 in Eritrea.

Military expenditures

Military expenditures are the total amounts allocated to armed forces, governmental defense agencies, and military activities in space but exclude, among other things, the cost of destroying weapons. Although they often represent only a low proportion of government expenditures, they form a major geopolitical indicator for analyzing conflicts in the world. In 2006, world military expenditures stood at $184 per person on average, or 2.5% of the world gross domestic product (GDP).
Antitank mines

Antitank mines are part of the war arsenal long used in many conflicts, alongside powerful antipersonnel mines, which cause many civilian deaths.
The seven continents take up almost one-third of the planet’s surface. Their main characteristics, such as shape, area, relief features, and climate, vary widely. The continents have changed greatly over geological time, as they have been shaped by plate tectonics, volcanism, and sedimentation for millions of years. From the Canadian Far North to the plains of Patagonia, from the Sahara Desert to the steppes of Siberia, our planet offers a huge diversity of landscapes, inhabited by a great variety of peoples.
Great Salt Lake, Utah, United States

The Great Salt Lake resulted from the gradual evaporation of a much larger prehistoric lake, Lake Bonneville.

**PHYSICAL MAP OF NORTH AMERICA**

- Administrative capital
- City with a population of over 1 M inhab.

Sources: USGS, NASA
North America is a large continent extending from the Tropic of Cancer to the North Pole region. Surrounded on three sides by the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic oceans, it represents 16% of the planet’s landmass. The oldest part of the continent, the Canadian Shield, borders Hudson Bay. All around it, the North American platform is home to major watersheds (the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes, the Mississippi, the Rio Grande, and the Mackenzie). While the ancient, eroded Appalachian Mountains form the main relief feature of the eastern part of the continent, the west is marked by high mountain ranges (Rockies, Sierra Madre, etc.) following the Pacific coast all the way from Alaska to Mexico. Relatively sparsely populated except along the coasts, North America has a wide variety of landscapes, from the Chihuahuan desert to the Arctic tundra, including temperate forests and prairies. North America is bordered on the south by Central America, a mountainous isthmus that links it to South America.
Mexico City, Mexico

The most populous city in North America, with 19.4 million inhabitants in 2005, Mexico’s capital is also one of the most polluted cities in the world.
Central America and the Antilles

North America and South America are linked by a narrow strip of mountainous land that stretches almost 2,000 km in length between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. This region, known as Central America, is defined by two isthmuses: the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, 200 km wide, to the north, and the Isthmus of Panama, 80 km wide, to the south. Central America was shaped by tectonic activity, and its highest point is Tajumulco (4,220 m), one of the many volcanoes in the region, situated in Guatemala. The numerous valleys and basins create a very compartmentalized landscape that is reflected in the political fragmentation in the region. The Antilles archipelago, an island arc between Florida and Venezuela, includes two separate groups. The Greater Antilles, to the north, contain the largest and most populous islands of the archipelago: Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola (which consists of Haiti and the Dominican Republic), and Puerto Rico. To the southeast, the Lesser Antilles are composed of a long string of volcanic islands encircling the Caribbean Sea. Constantly swept by trade winds, the Antilles archipelago has a hot, humid climate, punctuated by frequent hurricanes.

The Panama Canal, 80 km long, crosses the Isthmus of Panama to connect the Caribbean Sea with the Pacific Ocean. Opened in 1914, the canal was first administered by the United States. It was returned to Panama in 1999 and has since been a major source of revenue for the country. In 2004, 14,035 ships, or almost 40 per day, have passed through the canal, paying more than $750 million in tolls.
## The Countries of North America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Area (km²)</th>
<th>Population (M inhab.)</th>
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<td>Belize</td>
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## The Territories of North America

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Territory</th>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Virgin Islands</td>
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<td>0.006</td>
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<td>Aruba</td>
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<td>The Netherlands</td>
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<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>Montserrat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anguilla</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bermuda</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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</table>
A range of volcanic mountains crosses this small Central American country.

Mountains, Jamaica
The mountains of central Jamaica have a temperate climate, while the coasts have a tropical climate.
South America accounts for 12% of the planet’s landmass. Its relief features are similar to those in North America. The east side of the continent is an ancient bedrock, formed of the Guyana Plateau in the north, the Brazilian Plateau in the center and the Patagonian Plateau in the south. The plateaus are separated by depressions through which major rivers flow: the Orinoco, the Amazon, and the Parana. The major mountain ranges are found on the west coast: the Andes stretches north to south, from Venezuela to southern Chile. From the high peaks of the Andes to the cold Patagonia region, including the equatorial plains of Amazonia, South America has a number of climatic zones. South of the Tropic of Capricorn, warm temperate climates dominate, with some arid and semiarid regions, while the north has tropical climates. The Andes Cordillera generates a wide variety of climates, depending on latitude, altitude, and orientation of the slopes.
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Situated in southeast Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, with a population of 11.5 million inhabitants, is the second-most populous city in South America after São Paulo.
The Amazon

The source of the Amazon is in the Andes. It crosses Peru and Brazil and then flows into the Atlantic Ocean. This river, which has the greatest rate of flow in the world, pours almost 200,000 m³ of water into the ocean per second. Its watershed covers 7 million km², or more than one-third of the continent. Shared among several South American countries (including Brazil, Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia), the Amazonian forest extends over 3.5 million km², or 30% of all rainforests in the world. This natural environment is home to a very wide variety of endemic species. It is estimated that one-quarter of all bird species in the world live in Amazonia.

The Rio Negro, 2,000 km long, has its source in Colombia and flows into the Amazon at the Brazilian city of Manaus.

Before joining with the Rio Negro, the Amazon is often called the Solimões.

The Madeira, with its source in the Bolivian mountains, is the longest tributary of the Amazon and one of the longest rivers in the world (3,350 km).

The source of the Amazon is in the Andes. It crosses Peru and Brazil and then flows into the Atlantic Ocean. This river, which has the greatest rate of flow in the world, pours almost 200,000 m³ of water into the ocean per second. Its watershed covers 7 million km², or more than one-third of the continent. Shared among several South American countries (including Brazil, Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia), the Amazonian forest extends over 3.5 million km², or 30% of all rainforests in the world. This natural environment is home to a very wide variety of endemic species. It is estimated that one-quarter of all bird species in the world live in Amazonia.

Deforestation of the Amazonian forest is constantly shrinking. The main causes of deforestation are overcutting of the forest’s trees, fires (accidental or deliberate), and land clearing for farming or urban development. Deforestation poses a considerable threat to the biodiversity of the Amazonian forest. Some species of trees that have only one representative per hectare may quickly disappear. In addition, the destruction of forest habitats threatens the survival of many animal species. A total of more than 1,000 species are currently threatened with extinction in the forests of South America.

Deforestation of the Amazonian forest, Brazil

Since 1970, more than 17% of the Brazilian part of the Amazonian forest has disappeared.
Spanish is the national language of nine of the 12 countries in South America, while in Brazil the national language is Portuguese. Since Brazil alone accounts for half the continent in terms of both area and population, South America has just about an equal number of speakers of Spanish and Portuguese.

The explanation for this language distribution dates back to the 15th century. In 1494, Spain and Portugal signed the Treaty of Tordesillas. Following Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America (1492), this treaty was aimed at presenting disputes between Spain and Portugal in the distribution of land yet to be discovered. The Treaty of Tordesillas stipulated that an imaginary line passing 370 leagues (about 2,000 km) west of the Cape Verde archipelago divided Earth in two: the territories situated east of this meridian were declared Portuguese; those to the west, Spanish.

In the ensuing decades, Spain built an empire stretching from Mexico to Argentina, while Portugal settled its colonies in Africa and on the coast of Brazil, officially discovered in 1500. Gradually, the Portuguese pushed the border of their territory westward to the current borders of Brazil. Thus, if we trace the Tordesillas meridian on a modern map of South America, at 46° 37’ west longitude, we note that much of Brazil is situated in the Spanish zone.
Lake Maracaibo, Venezuela
With an area of 13,512 km², this lake in northwest Venezuela covers one of the largest oil deposits on the continent.
The western part of the huge Eurasian continental ensemble, Europe represents only 7% of the planet’s landmass. Its territory, with very jagged coastlines, is tightly interwoven with the surrounding seas, including the Mediterranean Sea, in which there are numerous islands. Europe is divided into four major zones: the old, low mountains of the northwest, marked by glaciation; the broad northern plains; old eroded mountains in the center (Massif Central, Urals); and Alpine-Mediterranean Europe to the south, formed of high mountain ranges (Alps, Pyrenees and Carpathians). The warm waters of the Gulf Stream, the ocean current that crosses the North Atlantic from west to east, considerably moderates the climate of the Atlantic coast of the continent. Farther east, where the Gulf Stream’s influence is not perceptible, continental climates dominate, with large spreads in temperature over the year. Finally, the southern part of the continent benefits from a generally warm, dry Mediterranean climate.
Almost three-quarters of Europe's population live in cities.

Crete is a Greek island that, like the rest of Greece, has a Mediterranean-type temperate climate, with hot, dry summers.

Outside of forests, Scotland has a vegetation of heaths and peat bogs, composed mainly of briars and graminaceous plants.
The Alps

With a length of 1,200 km, the Alps are the largest mountain system in western Europe. A huge natural barrier, the Alps block humid air masses and receive great quantities of precipitation. A number of Europe’s rivers (Rhine, Rhone, Po) and their tributaries have their source in the Alpine massif.

Because temperature drops as altitude rises, the slopes of an Alpine valley present a succession of climates comparable to those that one finds as one travels toward the poles. In the Alps, the valley floors have a climate similar to those of the neighboring plains. Farther up, forests replace farming, and coniferous trees become increasingly dominant, as in boreal forests. At the alpine level, the climate is comparable to that in the Arctic tundra and trees give way to pastures. Finally, the highest land, permanently covered with snow, has the same kind of climate as the ice caps.

Mont Blanc Massif, seen from the Italian side
The highest point of the Alps is Mont Blanc (4,807 m), on the border between France and Italy.
The European Union

The European Union is an international organization with 27 member European states. Its earliest version was formed in the 1950s, in the wake of World War II, with the objective of maintaining peace among the countries of Europe and improving the standard of living of Europeans.

The member states of the Union have set up common institutions. The Council of the European Union is the main decision-making body. It defines the orientations of member states in areas as diverse as energy, agriculture, the environment, and trade. It shares legislative power with the European Parliament, elected every five years by universal suffrage since 1979. Finally, the European Commission holds executive power. It implements policies, manages the budget, sees to the application of laws, and proposes legislation. These institutions function in no fewer than 20 official languages, in conformity with the Union’s motto, “United in Diversity.”

Twenty-four of the 27 countries of the European Union have formed a zone where people and goods move without restrictions, the Schengen area. In this zone, trade is facilitated and travelers do not have to present identification documents at borders.

The history of the European Union began in 1951, when Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands united within the European Coal and Steel Community. This successful integration led to the creation, in 1957, of the European Atomic Energy Commission (EAEC) and the European Economic Community (EEC). In 1967, these three communities merged within the EEC. In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty transformed the EEC into the European Union, with expanded mandate and responsibilities. Over the years, the six founding countries were joined by 21 other states. Bulgaria and Romania entered in January 2007. Turkey, Croatia, and Macedonia also wish to be admitted into the European Union. To do this, they must demonstrate that they have a stable democratic political system and an operational and competitive market economy. Since 2002, a new currency, the euro, replaced the national currencies of 15 countries of the European Union (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain).

The European flag

On a sky-blue background, the stars symbolizing the peoples of Europe form a circle signifying a union. The unchanging number of stars is 12, symbol of perfection and plenty.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Area [km²]</th>
<th>Population [M inhab.]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>69,700</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The countries whose names are underlined are members of the European Union.

* Figures presented here factor in the European part and the Asian part of Russia.
** Without Greenland
*** Vatican City is not a UN member but maintains a permanent observer mission at the organization's headquarters.
Asia alone represents one-third of the planet’s landmass, and 60% of the world’s population lives there, half of them in China and India. Separated from Africa by the Red Sea 😁 and the Isthmus of Suez 😁, Asia encompasses the Indonesian 😐, Philippine 😐, and Japanese 😐 archipelagos, situated to the south and east of the mainland.

Asia and Europe belong to the same continental mass, Eurasia. Their common border has been fixed arbitrarily along the Ural Mountains 😈. Asia has a wide variety of relief features, from the plains and plateaus of Siberia, India, and Arabia to the imposing mountain ranges that cross the continent from west to east (Hindu Kush 😃, Himalayas 😃). Asia also presents a broad range of climates. Southeast Asia, irrigated by abundant monsoon rains, has a tropical climate. In Arabia and the interior of the continent, where mountains keep humidity from penetrating, there are immense arid and semiarid areas. In northern Asia, the Siberian anticyclone creates very contrasting climatic conditions, with severe winters and very hot summers.
Chinese metropolises increasingly resemble Western cities.

Siberia, Russia

Siberia has an area of more than 12 million km², from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.
Tokyo, Japan
Tokyo is by far the most populous city in the world, with more than 35 million inhabitants.

Yak caravan, Tibet
The vast Tibetan Plateau in western China is a high plateau with a dry, cold climate.

The Chocolate Hills on the island of Bohol, Philippines
On Bohol, one of the 7,107 islands of the Philippine archipelago, many of the hills that rise above the rainforest turn brown in the summer.
The Himalayas

The Himalayas have 10 peaks rising above 8,000 m (including Mount Everest, Kangchenjunga, and Annapurna), making them the highest mountain range in the world. With a length of 2,500 km and a width of 200 to 400 km, it stretches in an arc from the high Tibetan plateau to the north to the Ganges plain to the south. To the west, the high-altitude Indus Valley separates the Himalayas from the Hindu Kush and the Karakoram range, where the peak of K2 rises.

Mount Everest seen from the north, Tibet

The “roof of the world,” reaching an altitude of 8,850 m, is situated in the heart of the Himalayas.
The Asian archipelagos

The Indonesian and Philippine archipelagos, which comprise more than 20,000 islands, form the zone most affected by volcanism on the planet. The explosion of the volcanic island of Krakatau, in 1883, was of unparalleled violence.

The Japanese archipelago includes four main islands (Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku) and more than 3,000 small islands, stretched over a distance of 3,000 km from north to south.

Bordered to the east by the deep Japan Trench (10,374 m), the archipelago is the result of the subduction of the Pacific Plate under the Philippine and Eurasian plates, and is part of the Pacific Ring of Fire. Volcanic activity is manifested by frequent earthquakes, such as those that destroyed Tokyo (1923) and Kobe (1995).

Bromo Volcano, Indonesia
Situated in the eastern part of the island of Java, Mount Bromo is not very active, but it continuously emits a plume of white smoke. Its eruptions, though infrequent, pose a risk to the many tourists who venture to the summit.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flag</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Area (km²)</th>
<th>Population (M inhab.)</th>
<th>Flag</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Area (km²)</th>
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<td>🇲dives</td>
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</table>
1. Cape Verde
- Praia

2. Physical Map of Africa
- Administrative capital
- City with a population of over 1 M inhab.

3. Oasis, Morocco
- Permanent towns have been built in some oases in the Moroccan desert.

Sources: NIMA, NASA
Bisected by the equator, Africa has an area of 30,365,000 square kilometers, or 20% of the planet’s landmass. It is formed mainly of very old bedrock. The mountains, modest in size, are concentrated in the northern part of the continent (Atlas), the south (Drakensberg), and especially in the east (Ethiopian Massif), where they have been chiseled by a series of fault troughs, the Great Rift Valley, which includes the West Great Rift Valley and the East Great Rift Valley. Although the regions situated at the northern and southern ends of the continent have warm temperate climates, most of Africa has tropical or desert climatic conditions. The intertropical zone, covered with forest and savanna, is irrigated by powerful rivers (Congo, Niger), while the regions adjacent to the tropics, where the deserts are found (Sahara, Namib, Kalahari), have almost none. The population is very unequally distributed in Africa. The desert regions are almost uninhabited, as opposed to high-density zones such as the northern Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia), the Nile River Valley, and the Great Rift Valley region.
Cairo, Egypt

With a population of over 11 million inhabitants, Cairo is the largest city in Africa.
The Sahara

With an area of more than 8 million km², the Sahara is the largest desert in the world. It extends from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea and covers most of North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, and Sudan). Fertile 4,000 years ago, the Sahara is now one of the most arid deserts in the world; southern Libya and Egypt receive less than 10 mm of rain per year.

Humans have lived in the Sahara since prehistory. Today, despite its extremely arid environment, more than 5 million people live in the Sahara. This rapidly growing population is increasingly urbanized. The main peoples of the desert, originally nomadic (the Tuaregs in Algeria, Libya, Mali, and Niger; the Sahrawis in the western Sahara and Algeria; and the Tubus in Chad, Niger, and Libya), are becoming city dwellers. Most of the cities are situated in the Maghreb Sahara (Morocco, Algeria, Libya), where some urban areas have a population of over 100,000.

More than 4,000 km long, the Great Rift Valley tectonic fault, which includes the West and East Great Rift valleys, crosses eastern Africa from the Red Sea to the mouth of the Zambezi River. It results from the gradual separation of the Somalian lithospheric plate. This process is just beginning: in several million years, East Africa will detach itself to become an independent continent.

The intense volcanic activity in the region has led to the formation of the highest mountains in Africa, such as Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya. The largest lakes in Africa (Victoria, Tanganyika, Malawi), tectonic in origin, are also situated along the Great Rift Valley. Paleontologists think that the Great Rift region was the birthplace of the first human beings, more than 2 million years ago.
Independence of African states

Starting with the “great discoveries” of the 15th century, the European countries colonized all of Africa (with the exception of Ethiopia) to profit from its natural wealth. Exploitation of African natural resources and labor, often going as far as slavery, lasted until the 20th century.

The countries of Africa became emancipated one after another, between 1910 and 1993, under a wide variety of circumstances. Although some obtained their sovereignty in the 1960s without resistance, others won it after an insurrection or a full war of independence.

In 1963, African countries united to form a common front to deal with the problems facing the continent (political instability, human rights, public health, underdevelopment, etc.). Today, the African Union’s membership extends to almost all of the continent’s countries as members. In some cases, former colonizing countries maintain a strong economic grip on their former territories, a grip sometimes called neocolonialism.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Population</th>
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<td>Congo</td>
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<td>322,463</td>
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</table>
Fiji

The some 300 islands that make up the Fiji archipelago have a total area of 18,274 km².
Oceania represents 6% of the planet’s landmass and has 33 million inhabitants. Unlike other continents, Oceania consists not of a landmass surrounded by seas, but of a large number of islands sprinkled in the Pacific Ocean. With an area of 7,740,000 square kilometers, Australia is the true continent of Oceania. Among the continent’s thousands of other islands, fewer than 10 have an area over 10,000 square kilometers. Although they have some climatic and geographic features in common, the islands of Oceania do not form a homogeneous grouping. Bisected by the Tropic of Capricorn, Australia has a number of climatic zones. The north part of the island, with its monsoon rains, has a tropical climate, while the south and east coasts have a warm temperate climate. In the center, desert conditions dominate. The archipelagos, except for New Zealand, have high temperatures and abundant precipitation all year round. They are frequently swept by cyclones during the austral winter.
Sydney, Australia
Australia's largest city, Sydney, has a population of over 4.2 million inhabitants.

Lake Wanaka, New Zealand
The islands of New Zealand have a coastal climate, moderated by the Pacific Ocean.

Great Barrier Reef, Australia
The Great Barrier Reef, a coral reef stretching along the northeast coast of Australia, is an extraordinary marine biome. It is about 2,500 km long and is home to almost 1,500 species of fish, 4,000 species of mollusks, and 400 species of coral.
Australian biodiversity

Situated in the center of a lithospheric plate, Australia has remained isolated from the other continents for more than 100 million years. This isolation explains the large number of plant and animal species endemic to Australia—that is, found nowhere else in the world.

The kangaroo, Australia’s emblematic animal, belongs to the group of mammals called marsupials, whose females raise their young in a stomach pouch. Almost all marsupials come from Australia, Tasmania, and New Guinea. The koala and the wallaby are also marsupials. Among the other animals native to Australia are the duckbill platypus, an archaic mammal species that reproduces by laying eggs.

The Australian flora is composed of species adapted to the extreme climatic conditions that reign in a large part of the country. Eucalyptus is one of the species originating on the island.

**Some Australian Animals**

There are 50 species of kangaroos, among them the grey kangaroo.

The red kangaroo is the largest (up to 1.5 m in height) and most common kangaroo.

Koalas eat eucalyptus leaves, ingesting from 500 g to 1 kg each day.

The duckbill platypus is an amphibian mammal with a beak resembling a duck’s.

Parry wallabies are very sociable and live in groups of 30 to 50 individuals.

The Australian forest has 600 species of eucalyptus.
The islands of Oceania

The 7,500 islands in the Pacific, about 500 of which are inhabited, are divided into three regional groupings, determined essentially by geographic, ethnic, and cultural factors. Melanesia includes the largest and highest islands. Because these islands are of volcanic origin, many of them are fertile and mineral-rich. Micronesia and Polynesia, on the other hand, are tiny islands that generally rise barely above sea level. New Zealand, in Polynesia, is an exception; its two mountainous islands are separated by Cook Strait. The North Island has volcanic activity, while the South Island is crossed by the New Zealand Alps.

Australia is a gigantic island, often considered the true continent of Oceania. It has a fairly uniform geologic profile: most of its territory is composed of a plateau 300 to 600 m in altitude. The landscapes of eastern Australia are more varied. Along the east coast is a mountain range, the Australian Cordillera. Finally, the center of the island, from the Gulf of Carpentaria, in the north, to the mouth of the Murray River, in the south, is marked by low-altitude watersheds (lakes Eyre, Darling, Murray). Five major Australian cities (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide) contain one-third of the population of Oceania, while the interior of Australia is almost uninhabited.
## The Countries of Oceania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Area (km²)</th>
<th>Population (M inhab.)</th>
<th>Flag</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Area (km²)</th>
<th>Population (M inhab.)</th>
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## The Territories of Oceania

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<th>Sovereign Country</th>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>Area (km²)</th>
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</table>
The Transantarctic Mountains, which reach an altitude of more than 4,800 m, separate Western Antarctica from Eastern Antarctica.

Beaufort Island

On this small island, with an area of 22 km², in the Ross Sea, the fauna and flora are protected.
Antarctica is the only continent that is not inhabited on a permanent basis and it is also the coldest continent. Its total area of 14,200,000 square kilometers is 98% covered with an ice cap that is up to 4,000 meters thick in some places. Its high relief profile (an average of 2,300 meters altitude) contributes to the severity of the climate. Powerful winds sweep down the mountain slopes and cool the atmosphere. The temperature drops below −70°C in the center of the continent in the winter, and it does not rise above 0°C in summer, except on the coasts. The air is very dry and most of the continent receives less than 100 millimeters of precipitation per year.

An uninhabited continent

The inhospitable climatic conditions prevent permanent population settlement in Antarctica. The only inhabitants of the continent are several thousand researchers in scientific stations. They are there temporarily, as long as it takes to fulfill their missions. Scientific research in Antarctica has led to important discoveries, notably that of the reduction of the ozone layer. Antarctica also offers a privileged site for studying the climate and the effects of global warming.

For the past 10 years, other visitors have been arriving on the southernmost continent: tourists. Almost 28,000 of them, mostly from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia, came in 2004–2005 to wander across the ice cap or tour the continent by boat. The main tourist attractions are the fauna and the scientific stations. Some 30 companies throughout the world offer trips to Antarctica. In spite of the precautions that they take, the growth of the tourism industry may disrupt the environment and the scientific research on the continent.

Once it was discovered, in the 19th century, Antarctica quickly became the subject of territorial claims by many countries. Neighboring countries, such as Chile and Australia, as well as very distant countries, such as France and Norway, tried to carve out a part of the continent for themselves. The Antarctic Treaty, signed in 1959 to avoid partition of the territory, gives the continent international status. It suspends territorial claims, proscribes military activities, and provides for international cooperation with regard to scientific research. Over the years, a number of international agreements have been added to the treaty to protect fauna (seals, whales) and impose a 50-year moratorium on exploitation of mineral resources (starting in 1998).

Today, however, in spite of the legal arsenal that protects Antarctica, the debate continues. A number of countries maintain their claims and some are trying to keep the door open to exploitation of natural resources. Others would like the continent to become a vast ecological reserve.
The wind sweeps through some high grasses that have taken root in a sand dune.
**affluent**
Watercourse that flows into another watercourse.

**alluvia**
Rocks and other debris carried and deposited by a watercourse.

**altitude**
Vertical distance of a point in relation to a reference level, generally sea level.

**amphibian**
That which lives or moves as well on land as in the water.

**anemometer**
Instrument that measures wind speed.

**anthropogenic**
Caused by human beings.

**anticyclone**
Zone of high atmospheric pressure.

**apartheid**
Regime in South Africa that imposed racial segregation against blacks in favor of the white minority.

**arable**
Relating to land that can be cultivated.

**archipelago**
Group of islands.

**artificial satellite**
Device placed in orbit around a celestial body.

**ascent**
Action of climbing a mountain to its peak.

**asteroid**
Small celestial body in orbit around the Sun.

**atmosphere**
Gaseous layer that surrounds certain celestial bodies, including Earth.

**atmospheric pressure**
The force that air exerts by pressing on a given area.

**bay**
A body of water partially enclosed by land and open to the sea. A bay is generally smaller than a gulf.

**bedrock**
Ancient eroded land on which volcanic or sedimentary rock rests.

**biodiversity**
The variety of living species that populate a given environment.

**birth rate**
Number of births in a population over a given period, usually one year.

**chronic disease**
A disease of long duration, the symptoms of which are minor at first but may evolve into serious complications.

**conifer**
Tree whose leaves, in the form of needles or scales, generally persist through the winter, and whose fruits are cones.

**container**
Metallic crate of standardized size, used for shipping merchandise.

**continent**
Large landmass surrounded by water.

**cordillera**
Long, narrow mountain range.

**deciduous tree**
Tree in the flowering plants group whose leaves are wide, as opposed to the narrow needles of conifers.

**demographer**
Expert in the study of populations.

**depression**
A part of a landmass that is sunk below its surroundings. Meteorology: low-pressure zone.

**detergent**
Cleaning product.

**development**
Improvement in the situation of a region or a population, usually from an economic standpoint.

**domestic**
Relating to life in the home.

**dominant wind**
Wind that blows in a constant direction in a region, such as the trade winds.

**estuary**
Mouth of a river where the current meets the tides, forming an indentation in the coastline that may be more or less wide and more or less deep.

**extinction**
Complete and irreversible disappearance.

**fault**
Fracture in Earth's crust that causes a horizontal or vertical movement in relation to the other.

**fauna**
All of the animal species that live in a given region.

**fertilizer**
Organic or mineral product that is introduced into the soil to increase its capacity to support plant growth.

**flood**
Sudden rise in the level of a watercourse due to heavy precipitation or snow melting.

**flora**
All of the plant species that live in a given region.

**fossil fuel**
Fuel that was formed millions of years ago from the remains of plants and animals buried in rock [oil, coal, natural gas].

**freight**
Transportation of goods.

**freshwater**
Water containing very low amounts of mineral salts.

**geographic**
Relating to geography, the science that describes and explains the existing physical and human aspects of Earth's surface.

**geographic pole**
Each of the two points (North Pole and South Pole) of Earth's surface through which Earth's axis of rotation passes.

**geological**
Relating to geology, the science that studies the Earth, the materials that compose it, and the forces and processes that shape and transform it.

**government**
Political system of a nation or group of individuals who administer the nation, usually called ministers.

**graben**
Wide, elongated depression with steep sides, formed by the subsidence of a block of terrain between two faults.
**Grassaceous plants**
Family of plants that includes the high grasses that dominate savannahs.

**gulf**
A large area of sea partially enclosed by land, more or less open to the sea. A gulf is generally larger and more enclosed than a bay.

**heavy metals**
Metals such as lead and mercury, which have special chemical properties and many of which are toxic to humans and the environment.

**hemisphere**
One of the two halves of the globe, defined by the equator (Northern and Southern hemispheres) or by the Greenwich meridian (Western and Eastern hemispheres).

**humidity**
Water vapor contained in the air, the result of transpiration of plants and evaporation from the oceans, rivers and lakes.

**hydrocarbons**
Substances formed solely of carbon and hydrogen molecules, present in crude oil and natural gas.

**hydroelectricity**
Electricity produced from the force of water.

**ice cap**
Mass of continental ice that permanently covers the polar regions, also called inlandsis.

**ice shelf**
Thick layer of floating ice that borders some parts of Antarctica, distinct from the pack ice and ice cap.

**immigration**
The arrival of people from another country who are moving to the new host country.

**intensive farming**
Agriculture that consumes more resources (water, fertilizer, etc.) in order to increase the yield of cultivated land.

**irrigation**
Artificial watering of farmland.

**isthmus**
Narrow band of land between two stretches of water, connecting two larger landmasses.

**latitude**
Coordinate of a point on Earth’s surface that indicates, in degrees, the angular distance of this point from the equator.

**lightning**
Brief, intense flash of light caused by an electrical discharge between two clouds or between a cloud and the ground during a storm.

**lithospheric plates**
Immense portions of the lithosphere that slide on top of the asthenosphere and whose movements shape Earth’s relief features.

**longitude**
Coordinate of a point on Earth’s surface that indicates, in degrees, the angular distance of this point from the Greenwich meridian.

**magma**
Very viscous liquid formed of molten rocks from the depths of Earth.

**malnutrition**
Pathologic state caused by poor nutrition, usually due to an insufficient or incomplete diet.

**manufactured**
Produced industrially.

**mass**
The amount of matter contained in a body, expressed in grams.

**megalopolis**
Extremely large urban area.

**meridian**
Imaginary line from pole to pole, perpendicular to the equator.

**meteorite**
Fragment of rock originating in space, which is not completely consumed as it passes through the atmosphere and lands on Earth.

**metropolis**
The largest city in a given region.

**monarch**
Head of state who is a hereditary member of royalty.

**monsoon**
Seasonal wind that brings heavy precipitation in some tropical regions.

**moraine**
Rocks or other debris carried and deposited by a glacier.

**moratorium**
Voluntary suspension of a decision to allow time to study its consequences.

**mortality**
Number of deaths in a population over a given period, usually one year.

**mouth**
Place where a watercourse flows into the sea or into a lake.

**natural satellite**
Celestial body in orbit around a planet or another celestial body.

**net migration**
Difference between the number of immigrants and the number of emigrants.

**nomadic**
Relating to migratory people that are constantly moving.

**nuclear**
Relating to atoms and their energy.

**oasis**
Region of a desert made fertile by the presence of water.

**ocean current**
Movement of great masses of seawater along a stable path at a regular speed.

**orbit**
Trajectory described by one celestial body circling around another due to the effects of gravity.

**organic**
Relating to living beings and the materials derived from them.

**pack ice**
Vast layer of ice floating on the sea in polar regions.

**parallel**
Imaginary circle whose plane is parallel to the equator.

**pasture**
Land where livestock may graze.

**peninsula**
Portion of land surrounded by the sea on all sides but one, where an isthmus that may be wide or narrow connects it to the mainland.

**pesticides**
Products that destroy harmful organisms.

**phytoplankton**
All of the plants that live in suspension in seawater and are moved from place to place by sea currents.

**planisphere**
Map that portrays both hemispheres of Earth.

**polar circle**
Imaginary line situated at latitude 66° 34’ north [Arctic polar circle] or south [Antarctic polar circle]. It designates the edge of the polar zone in which the day lasts 24 hours at the summer solstice and the Sun does not appear at all at the winter solstice.

**polytheist**
Said of religions in which a number of gods are worshipped, as opposed to monotheist religions.
population growth
Increase in the total population of a region taking account of the number of births, deaths, and migrations. The population growth rate may be positive or negative.

precipitation
All of the liquid and solid forms in which water contained in the atmosphere reaches Earth’s surface [rain, snow, sleet, fog, dew, etc.].

propaganda
All of the actions orchestrated to manipulate public opinion.

quota
Quantitative limit to be reached or not to be passed.

radioactive
Said of the property to spontaneously emit electromagnetic particles or rays that are often dangerous.

referendum
Consultation of all of the citizens regarding a specific question.

relief features
All of the differences in ground level [depressions and elevations] of the surface of a region.

renewable energy
Energy whose source can regenerate naturally.

rural
Relating to the countryside, as opposed to the city.

sanitary
Relating to health.

sediment
Solid mineral material [rocks, sand, mud] that has been weathered away from its original surroundings by an erosion agent, carried by water, ice, or wind, and deposited in another place. Organic material may also form sediment.

seismic wave
Vibration generated by an earthquake that propagates in all directions and causes the surface of Earth to shake.

shield
Large territory composed of eroded primary rock.

slope
Each of the sides of a mountain.

speaker
An individual who speaks a given language.

strait
Natural, relatively narrow maritime passage between two coasts.

subduction
Phenomenon through which one oceanic plate slides under another lithospheric plate.

T

tectonic
Relating to Earth’s crust, its formation, and its deformations.

territory
In the political sense, region under the jurisdiction of a nation that is more or less distant from it.

tide
Daily rise and fall in the level of the ocean, due mainly to the gravitational pull of the Sun and the Moon.

toponym
Proper name that designates a place.

trade wind
Constant wind blowing from east to west in the intertropical zone, notably over the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

tributary
See affluent.

tropics
Parallels situated at 26° 23’ north latitude [Tropic of Cancer] and south latitude [Tropic of Capricorn]. They correspond to the latitudes at which the Sun is at its zenith at the solstices.

universal suffrage
Electoral system in which all citizens who have reached the age of majority have the right to vote.

urban
Relating to the city, as opposed to the countryside.

urban area
Large urban concentration composed of a city and its suburbs.

urban dweller
Individual who lives in a city.

waterfall
Almost-vertical drop of a watercourse due to a sudden change in the level of its bed.

watershed
Area trained by a watercourse or by all of its tributaries.

water table
Vast stretch of underground water formed by infiltration of rainwater into the ground. It feeds springs.

wave
Undulation at the surface of a sea or lake caused by the wind.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISO CODE ELEMENTS* USED IN THE ATLAS</th>
<th>Sovereign countries of territories:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country names:</td>
<td>IT Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGO Angola</td>
<td>AR Argentina</td>
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<td>ALB Albania</td>
<td>AU Australia</td>
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<td>AND Andorra</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Permission to use extracts from ISO 3166-1:2006 was provided by Standards Council of Canada, in cooperation with IHS Canada. No further reproduction is permitted without prior written approval from Standards Council of Canada.
Vanua Levu, island ... 152 G5  
Vanuatu ... 152 F5  
Varanasi, city ... 140 G6  
Vatican City ... 134 E4  
Vättern, Lake ... 134 H2  
Victoria, capital ... 147 J5  
Victoria Island ... 37, 122 E2  
Victoria, Lake ... 39, 146 G5  
Victoria Land ... 158 D2  
Vereeniging, city ... 146 F7  
Verkhoyansk Mountains ... 141 K2  
Vernadsky, res. sta. ... 158 H2  
Victoria, capital ... 147 J5  
Victoria Island ... 37, 122 E2  
Victoria, Lake ... 39, 146 G5  
Victoria Land ... 158 D2  
Vienna, capital ... 134 E4  
Vientiane, capital ... 141 I7  
Vietnam ... 141 I7  
Vijayawada, city ... 140 G7  
Vilnius, capital ... 134 F3  
Vilyuy, watercourse ... 141 K2  
Vinson Massif ... 21, 158 G2  
Virgin Islands, terr. ... 125 C1  
Virginia Beach, city ... 122 G4  
Visakhapatnam, city ... 140 G7  
Vistula, watercourse ... 134 F3  
Viti Levu, island ... 152 G5  
Vitória, city ... 129 F5  
Volga, watercourse ... 38, 134 G3  
Volga Uplands ... 135 H3  
Volgograd, city ... 135 H4  
Volta, Lake ... 146 C4  
Vosges, mount. range ... 134 D4  
Vostok, res. sta. ... 150 C2  
Vpadina Akchanaya, depression ... 140 D4  
Vpadina Kaudny, depression ... 140 D4  
Waddington, Mount ... 122 D3  
Wake Island, terr. ... 141 D7  
Wallamal, waterfall ... 39  
Wallis and Futuna, terr. ... 152 G5  
Warsaw, capital ... 134 F3  
Washington, D.C., capital ... 122 G4  
Washington, Mount ... 122 H4  
Weddel Sea ... 32, 158 H2  
Weifang, city ... 141 J5  
Wellington, capital ... 152 G8  
Wellington Island ... 129 E7  
Wenzhou, city ... 141 K6  
Weser, watercourse ... 134 D3  
West Bank, terr. ... 140 B5  
West Great Rift Valley, basin ... 146 D5  
West Siberian Plain ... 140 E2  
Western Ghats, mount. range ... 140 F7  
Western Sahara, terr. ... 146 B2  
White Nile, watercourse ... 146 G4  
White Sea ... 134 E2  
Wilhelm, Mount ... 152 D4  
Wilkes Land ... 158 C2  
Windhoek, capital ... 146 E7  
Winnipeg, Lake ... 122 F3  
Winnipegosis, Lake ... 122 F3  
Wuhan, city ... 141 J6  
Wuxi, city ... 141 K5

XYZ

Xi Jiang, watercourse ... 141 J6  
Xiamen, city ... 141 J6  
Xian, city ... 66, 141 J5  
Xiangfan, city ... 141 I6  
Xiantao, city ... 141 J5  
Xianyang, city ... 141 I5  
Xingu, watercourse ... 129 E3  
Xinyang, city ... 141 J5  
Xuzhou, city ... 141 J5  
Yablonovy Range ... 141 J3  
Yalu Jiang, watercourse ... 141 K4  
Yamoussoukro, capital ... 146 E4  
Yangon, city ... 141 H7  
Yangzi Jiang, watercourse ... 38, 141 H5  
Yantai, city ... 141 K5  
Yaqundé, capital ... 146 E4  
Yaqui, watercourse ... 122 E5  
Yaren, capital ... 152 F4  
Yellow River [see Huang He] ... 39  
Yellow Sea ... 141 K5  
Yellowstone River ... 40  
Yemen ... 140 C7  
Yerevan, capital ... 135 H4  
Yerupajá, summit ... 129 F4  
Yiyang, city ... 141 J6  
Yosemite, waterfall ... 39  
Yucatán, peninsula ... 122 G5, 125 B1  
Yukon, watercourse ... 122 D2  
Yulin, city ... 141 J6  
Zagreb, capital ... 134 E4  
Zagros Mountains ... 140 C5  
Zambezi, watercourse ... 146 G6  
Zambia ... 146 F6  
Zanzibar, island ... 147 G5  
Zaozhuang, city ... 141 J5  
Zard Kuh, summit ... 140 D5  
Zarghun, summit ... 140 E5  
Zeil, Mount ... 152 C6  
Zhangjiakou, city ... 141 J4  
Zhanjiang, city ... 141 J6  
Zhengzhou, city ... 141 J5  
Zhong Shan, res. stat. ... 159 B2  
Zhuozhou, city ... 141 J6  
Zibo, city ... 141 J5  
Zigong, city ... 141 I6  
Zimbabwe ... 146 F6  
Zurich ... 134 D4
THEMATIC INDEX

Main subjects are in bold.

A
abyssal plain 24, 25
accidentary wedge 20
acid rain 64, 69
Africa 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151
African Union 150
age, median 81
agricultural product 98
agriculture 64, 69, 95, 98, 99, 100, 101, 110, 111
Antilles 125
antarctic Treaty 159
antarctica 48, 49, 158, 159
anticyclone 34, 46, 140
Antilles 125
aphelion 46
arable land 50
archipelago 27, 33, 125, 140, 142, 153, 156
arid environment 50, 51
aridity 50, 149
armed forces 118
armed independence movement 116
army 116, 118
Asia 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145
asteroid 10, 12
asthenospher 16
atmosphere 10, 11, 34, 47, 54, 64, 66, 68
atmospheric pollution 64, 65, 66, 67
atmospheric pressure 46, 47
  high-pressure 46, 50
  low-pressure 46, 54, 56
Australia 155, 156
authoritarian system 74
B
balance of trade 92
barrier reef 36
bedrock 18, 147
billionaire 106
biocenosis 58
biodegradable 69
biome 58, 59, 124, 130, 136, 142, 148, 154
  boreal forest 58, 59, 60, 137
  maquis 59
  savanna 59, 147
  temperate forest 58, 59, 60, 123
  tropical rainforest 44, 58, 59, 60, 131, 142
  tundra 45, 48, 59, 123, 137
biosphere 58, 59, 60, 61
bioore 58
birth rate 80
border dispute 116
boreal forest 58, 59, 60, 123
Buddhism 84, 85
C
canopy 60
canyon 18, 24, 147
carbon dioxide 27, 64, 65, 69
Central America 123, 125
Central 100
Christianity 84, 85
cider 26, 27
citizenship 72
city 57, 56, 68, 79, 84, 85, 124, 130, 136, 142, 148, 149, 154, 156
civil war 116, 117
ciff 36
climate 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 60, 124, 130, 135, 136, 137
  green 140, 142, 147, 148, 153, 154, 159
  44, 45, 50, 51, 59, 140, 149
  cold 44, 45, 142
cold temperate 45
continental with cool summer 45
continental with hot summer 45
continental with short, cold summer 45
cold 45
Mediterranean 45, 135, 136
mountain climate 45
semiarid 44, 45, 50, 51, 140
subtropical humid 45
tropical 44, 45, 127, 140, 147, 153
warm temperate 45, 147, 153
wet tropical 44, 45
wet tropical with dry winter 44, 45
climatic catastrophes 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57
cold environment 48, 49
collision mountain 20
composition of Earth 16
conflict 110, 116, 117, 118, 119
counter 58, 60, 61, 137
conservation of species 62, 63
carrier 103
continental crust 16, 24
continental drift 15, 16
continental ice sheet 48
continental plate 20, 27
continental shelf 25
tropical slope 25
convection 16
coral reef 36, 58, 154
core 16
Coubertin, Pierre de 88
country 72, 73
crater 12, 13, 26, 41
crop 98
crust 14, 16, 18, 20, 24, 26, 27, 41
current, ocean 32, 34, 44, 49, 135
damage 12, 34, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 153
dam 41, 111
day 46
deat 66, 80, 108, 112, 113
debt 106, 107
deciduous tree 58, 60
decolonization 150
deforestation 62, 131
delta 36, 40, 111
democratic system 74, 138
demographer 78
demographic transition 80
depression 18, 24, 41, 46, 54, 128
desert 12, 41, 45, 50, 51, 59, 123, 146, 147, 149, 153
  absolute 50
  high-pressure 50
  rain shadow 50
desertification 50, 51, 149
developing country 78, 79, 80, 81, 98, 100, 104, 107, 112, 114
development Assistance Committee 107
development indicator 106, 108, 109
disease 112
dominant wind 44, 54
drought/dry 44, 45, 50, 59, 60, 63
dwarf planet 10
E
Earth 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17
  composition 16
  observation 12, 34
  structure 14, 15, 16, 17
earthquake 14, 28, 29, 57, 144
ecliptic 46
economics 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95
  economic development 91
  economic sector 90
ecoregion 62, 63
ecosystem 58, 60, 62
education 106, 108, 114, 115
El Niño 34
official language 72, 82
offshore drilling 34, 68
oil 68, 96, 97, 133
oil crisis 97
oil spill 68
oil tanker 68
Olympic Games 88, 89
Olympic movement 86
orbit 10, 46
organic pollutant 68
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 107
Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) 97
orogenesis 20
ozone layer 64, 159
P
Pacific Ring of Fire 26, 27, 144
pack ice 38, 48
Panama Canal 125
Pangaea 15
Panthalassa 15
parliament 74, 75, 76, 77, 138
House of Commons 74
lower chamber 74, 76
upper chamber 74, 76
pasture 98
peneplain 22
people (nation) 72, 82
perihelion 46
pesticides 68
petroluem 68, 96, 97
phytoplankton 13, 34
pipe 26
plain 18, 24, 25, 38, 135, 140, 143
planet 10, 11, 12, 16
planet, dwarf 10
plate tectonics 14, 15
plateau 18, 24, 25, 44, 128, 140, 142, 143, 156
plateyus 155
pole 44, 48, 59, 110, 123
political system 74, 138
authoritarian 74
democratic 74, 138
politics 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77
pollutant, organic 68
pollution 62, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 124
air pollution 62, 66
atmospheric pollution 64, 65, 66, 67
pollutant particle 64, 66
polluting gas 64, 66, 69
radioactive pollutant 68
soil pollution 68, 69
urban pollution 66
water pollution 68, 69, 111
Polynesia 156
population 78, 79, 80, 81, 124, 130, 136, 140, 142, 147, 148, 154
aging 78, 80, 81
balance 80
density 52, 66, 78
distribution 78, 124, 130, 136, 142, 148, 154
growth 66, 80, 81, 110
urban 79
port 102, 123
poverty line 106
power 74, 75, 138
executive 75, 138
judicial 75
legislative 75, 138
prairie, temperate 58, 123
precipitation 34, 38, 44, 50, 58, 59, 159
press 74, 76, 118
pressure 46, 47, 50, 54, 56
high 46, 50
low 46, 54, 56
protected area 62
R
radioactive waste 68, 96
rail network 104
railroad 102, 104
rain 40, 44, 52, 55, 57, 64, 69, 98, 140, 149, 153
rainforest 44, 58, 59, 60, 131, 142
reading 114, 115
records, temperature and precipitation 45
relief 12, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 45, 123, 140, 159
religion 74, 84, 85
Reports Without Borders 118
reservoir 41, 111
ria 36
Richter, Charles Francis 28
Richter scale 28, 29
rift 19, 24, 149
Rift Valley 19, 147, 149
Ring of Fire 26, 27, 144
river 38, 40, 41, 55, 57, 68, 131, 137
affluent 13
distributary 40
meander 40, 41
tributary 40, 131, 137
riverbed 40
road 102, 104
road network 104
rock 14, 16, 18, 20, 24, 26, 27
metamorphic 20
volcanic 16, 20
S
Saffir-Simpson scale 55
Saheb 50, 51, 147, 149
Sahel 51, 147, 149
salinity 34, 41
satellite 10, 11, 12, 13, 34
artificial 12, 13, 34
natural 10, 11, 12
Saturn 11
savanna 59, 147
Schengen area 138
schooling 115
sea 32, 34, 135
season 44, 46, 48, 59
dry season 46
fall 46
rainy season (monsoon) 59, 140, 153
spring 46
spring equinox 46
summer 46, 48
summer solstice 46
wet season 46
winter 46, 48
winter solstice 46
seasons, cycle of the 46
Security Council 72
sediment 20, 22, 36, 40, 41
seism 28
seismic activity 28
seismic wave 28
senate 74
separation of powers 75
executive 75, 138
judicial 75
legislative 75, 138
service activity 90, 95
ship 103
shipping lane 102, 103
shore cliff 36
shoreline 38, 45
slavery 150
snow 48, 52
soccer 86, 87
soil 51, 60, 68, 69
soil pollution 68, 69
solar energy 96
Solar System 10, 11
South America 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133
Southern Hemisphere 46, 47, 49
space mission 12
species, conservation of 62, 63
species, threatened 62, 63
sport 86, 87, 88, 89
spring 40
standard of living 106, 108, 110
storm surge 54, 55, 57
stream 40
subduction 20, 25, 144
subway 102, 104
summit 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 48, 143, 144
Sun 10, 32, 46, 47, 49
angle of solar rays 47
solar ray 44, 47
sunlight 34, 46
sunshine 44, 48
supercontinent 15

T

tectonic fault 149
tectonic lake 41, 149
tectonic shocks 20
tectonics, plate 14, 15
temperate forest 58, 59, 60, 123
temperate prairie 58, 123
temperature 10, 11, 16, 26, 34, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 64, 65, 159
territory 72, 116, 126, 157
Third World 106
threatened species 62, 63
thundershow 52
tide 32, 33, 36, 41, 49
Tordesillas meridian 132
Tordesillas, Treaty of 132
tornado 52, 56
torrent 40
trade, balance of 92
trade, international 90, 92, 103
train 104
transportation 64, 69, 102, 103, 104, 105
air 102, 105
ground 102, 104
maritime 34, 102, 103
rail 102, 104
road 102, 104
Treaty of Tordesillas 132
tree 55, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 131, 137
corner 58, 60
deciduous 58, 60
trench 24, 25, 144
tropical rainforest 44, 58, 59, 60, 131, 142
tsunami 29, 57
tundra 45, 48, 59, 123, 137
typhoon 54

U

unemployment 94
United Nations [UN] 72
United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 108
Universe 10
Upper chamber 74, 76
Uranus 11
urban area 78, 102
urban sprawl 62
urbanization 79

V

vaccination 112, 113
valley 18, 22, 25, 36, 38, 40, 41, 137, 143, 147, 149
vegetation 58, 59
vehicle 66, 96, 104
Venus 10
volcanism 26, 144
volcano 16, 20, 24, 26, 27, 41, 64, 125, 127, 144, 149, 156
volcanic eruption 14, 16,
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