

EARTH FRIENDLY PLANET

An inspiring journey around the world



*Never does nature say one thing, and wisdom another.
Juvenal, Satires*

Learn Who You Share This Beautiful Planet With!

This e-book gives simple profiles of earth's countries, focusing on environment and wildlife. Find out about neighbouring friends (human or otherwise) in:

- Africa
- Antarctica
- Asia
- Europe
- North America
- Oceania
- South America

Website

When you have read this e-book, you will be so in love with our planet that presumably you will want to help to save it! Visit www.earthfriendlyplanet.com to find a library of useful websites and recommended books.

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Africa

This contrasting land includes hot desert in the north, to swampy rainforest in the south. As it lies near the Equator, there are only two seasons – dry and wet! The proximity to the Equator also brings quicker sunrises and sunsets – often it goes straight from day to night.

North Africa

Algeria

Most of this large country is covered by the Sahara Desert – home to just a few creatures like monitor lizards and sand vipers. Also here live native tribes like Berbers and Tuaregs (called ‘indigo people’ due to their skin being stained from their dark blue robes). The national dish is couscous, always finished with sweet mint tea.

Djibouti

Like most eastern countries, this is set in The Horn of Africa (a peninsula that juts out into the Arabian sea). Again it’s mainly desert, but it also sits on the Red Sea (its name comes from the red-coloured plants near the surface), the most northern tropical sea on earth.



Egypt

Home to the Nile (the world's longest river) and the mysterious Giza pyramids (built on exact cardinal points), the chaotic capital city of Cairo (Um ad-Dunya – 'mother of the world') contains 20 million people. A land of friendly camels (they only spit if distressed), ancient cats and hungry crocodiles.

Eritrea

This green country has almost 700 miles of protected coastline along the Red Sea. If families have leftover Sowa (a fermented barley drink), they place a tin can on a long stick in front of their house, so others can share. If you take coffee, expect an hour's wait – and you are expected to drink three cups!

Libya

This country in the Sahara desert holds the record for the hottest ever temperature recorded, but it is cooler by the Mediterranean Sea. The town of Ghadames has been cleverly built with interconnected white buildings, to keep people cool. The Jebel Acacus mountains contain cave art dating back 12,000 years.

Mauritania

Not to be confused with Mauritius, this lies on the Atlantic Ocean. Like most northern countries, it is nearly all desert and also contains Ben Amera, the second biggest monolith (sandstone) after Australia's Uluru.

Western Sahara

Presently shared by Morocco and Algeria, this small country is mostly made up of Sahara desert, and borders the Atlantic Ocean. It is home to some of the most inhospitable land on earth.

Morocco

Just across the sea from Spain, this is a different world of hot desert, Berber tribes and the Atlas and Rif mountains. The urban areas are a heady mix of souk markets, carpet sellers, hot mint tea and the city of Casablanca. Morocco is known for its beautiful Moorish gardens, orange trees, flamingos, grey cranes, herons and storks.

Sudan

This is the largest country in Africa, divided by the Nile and bordered by the Red Sea. It has a sad history of civil war (Darfur), but now looks to peace. It contains the Nubian Desert, swamps and rainforests. Here once roamed northern white rhinos (now strictly protected, to save the species).

Tunisia

Like Morocco, this is a land of colour and spice. Ornate front doors are often painted bright blue to match the sky. This is the home of the ostrich – the world's largest bird who is second only to the cheetah in speed (he can use his wings as rudders to change direction mid-run).

East Africa

Ethiopia

This country is considered by many as the birth of civilisation. It is also home to the birthplace of Emperor Haile Selassie, the founder of the Rastafarian religion. Now the famine has gone, many parts are full of lush greenery, waterfalls and the villa-rich city of Addis Ababa. It's also the birthplace of Yirgacheffe coffee.

Kenya

Here you can find more wildlife than anywhere else in Africa, including the annual wildebeest migration: lion, leopard, rhino, elephant, buffalo, giraffe, topi, gazelle, monkey, hippo, crocodile, hyena, jackal, cheetah and zebra (they mingle together to confuse the colour-blind lion!) Masai semi-nomads also roam these lands.

Rwanda

This high altitude country is cooler, and home to the mountain 'gorillas in the mist' made known by researcher Dian Fossey. Now over its sad genocide history, Kigali recently became the first city in Africa to receive the Habitat Scroll of Honour for its urban conservation model. It's also the first majority women government.

Somalia

With the longest coastline in Africa, precious spices and exotic nomads, this is a fascinating place. Supermodel Waris Dirie (who fled to London from an arranged marriage and now lives in Austria) continues to highlight the issue of female circumcision in her former homeland.

Tanzania

Known for its annual wildebeest migration near the Kenyan border, this is where Dr Jane Goodall arrived 50 years ago to study wild chimpanzees. Based on Lake Tanganyika, Tanzania also lies on the Indian Ocean and is home to Mount Kilimanjaro – Africa's highest peak.

Uganda

Like Rwanda, its star attraction are the mountain gorillas, hidden in inaccessible bamboo forests. Other flora and fauna include African grey parrots and giant lobelia plants. Uganda (and what is now Democratic Republic of Congo) was the setting for the film African Queen.

Zanzibar

This tropical 'spice island' lies 25 miles off the coast, and grows nutmeg, cinnamon and pepper. It is an oasis of sandy beaches and coral reefs, and contains few of the wild animals found elsewhere in Africa. There are however several birds, butterflies and coral reefs. The north of the island is lined with palm, coconut and banana trees.



Central Africa

Central African Republic

Although desert, this land sits in the basin of the Ubangi River, which flows into the Congo (the largest river after the Nile). Textbook Africa, with lowland gorillas, chimps, forest elephants and bongos (large antelopes with red coats and spiralled horns). National Geographic Magazine voted it the country least affected by light pollution.

Chad

Again mainly desert, but Lake Chad is the second largest wetland in Africa. Marshes attract elephants, hippos, giraffes, wildebeest, lions, antelopes, chimps, birds, ducks and reptiles. Lake Chad also provides 20 million people with the only water supply near the surrounding Sahara desert.

Congo

Not to be confused with the Democratic Republic of Congo (next), this landlocked country next door is home to 80% of the world's wild chimpanzees, who live in dense inaccessible forest. Also find one of Africa's largest tropical ecosystems in Odzala National Park and eastern lowland gorillas in local swamps.

Democratic Republic of Congo

The third largest country in Africa, here you can find just a small section of coastline, and more thunderstorms than anywhere on earth. This country is so big, it is the same size as France, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Norway put together!

Equatorial Guinea

This small comparatively wealthy country (by African standards) has islands and native tribes, and is called 'the Amazon of Africa', due to its lush rainforests, mangroves and shrubs growing in salty coast waters. Home to pygmy tribes and the world's largest 'Goliath' frog (only found here and in Cameroon).

West Africa

Benin

This colourful country is known for its painters. Like most West African countries, it's home to elephants, lions, monkeys, antelopes and hippos ('river horses'). The African Baobab 'upside down' tree produces monkey bread fruit for animals and humans – mysteriously at the end of its life, it thumps to the ground -and mysteriously disappears!

Burkina Faso

Its name meaning 'land of the upright people', the people here harvest local nere trees for their black seeds, to make into stock cubes. The savannah is home to giraffes, the tallest land animals who gain extra water through eating the tall shrubs that others cannot reach. They share these branches with smaller animals, to provide mutual look-out posts.

Burundi

This small landlocked country sits on Lake Tanganyika (the second largest freshwater lake in the world – and the world's deepest). Burundi is also the starting point for the Nile – the world's longest river. Burundi is known for its birds: Trumpeter Hornbill, African Lemon Dove, Handsome Francolin and the ShoeBill.

Cameroon

With beautiful coastline, rainforests, deserts and 200 languages, this country (a bit larger than California) is Africa in a nutshell. Waza and Benoue National Parks are home to hippos, lions, water buffalo, elephants and warhogs. The more remote Boubanjidda National Park is home to lowland gorillas – fiercely protected by local tribes now it is feared their black rhinos may have recently become extinct. In the Dja Reserve, you can find Bantus and pygmy people living together in harmony. The forests and coasts are also home to exotic fruits, including oranges, pineapples, coconuts, grapefruits, limes and bananas (herbs).

Cape Verde

These volcanic islands off the west coast are home to the third largest population of sea turtles in the world (after Oman and Florida). Breeding humpback whales and dolphins are a common sight along the turquoise oceans. Also find unique birds: Alexander Swift, Raso Lark, Lago Sparrow and Cape Verde Warbler.

Gabon

This stunning country is home to rainforests that extend to the sea, mangroves, Savannah and the Cristal mountains. The president was so taken by photographer Mike Nicholl's pictures of 'surfing hippos', that he cancelled or bought out remaining logging. Also has the second most whales and dolphins, after South Africa.

Gambia

This small country is less than 30 miles wide, and entirely surrounded by Senegal. It has 50 miles of Atlantic coastline, and is a dream destination for birds, with over 560 species. Also home to hippos, baboons and rescued orphaned chimps, Gambia's people are so friendly, the country is known as 'the smiling coast'.

Ghana

Bordered by the Ivory Coast, this is the most central country on earth (the exact centre is in the Atlantic ocean). Trees abound here – baobabs, acacia, ebony, mahogany and shea. Wet enough for elephants, monkeys, crocodiles and marine turtles, parrots and butterflies – also hear one of the best dawn choruses in Africa.

Guinea Bissau

On the Atlantic Ocean, these islands hold mangrove swamps, powder white sand and azure blue waters. It's home to 5 of the world's 8 tortoises, dolphins, manatees, crocodiles, monkeys, striped antelope, 100 migratory birds and rare saltwater hippos. There is no electricity here, so people sit in darkness and talk when evening falls.

Guinea

Full of rainy and dry forests, this small country is teeming with wildlife. Add cascading waterfalls, African elephants, otter-shrews and Diana monkeys (named after a goddess), and this is the real spirit of Africa.

Ivory Coast

This is a square-shaped country on the Atlantic. It did suffer in the past from a severe toxic spill. But today it is noted for its coconut palms and kola trees (the nuts help people to work without fatigue, and clear the mind).

Liberia

The 'Pepper Coast' gets its name from the melgueta pepper and sits on the Atlantic amongst mangrove forests. This country was founded for the purpose of providing a safe free place for former slaves. Today it is a rainforest paradise and home to pygmy hippos, deserted white beaches, tidal lagoons – and Africa's first woman president.

Mali

This flat landlocked country lies mostly in the Sahara and includes the legendary city of Timbuktu. It's also home to desert elephants who have lived in harmony alongside native tribes for centuries. The Dogon tribe realised that Jupiter had moons, Saturn had rings and that the planets orbited the sun – all before the telescope was invented!

Niger

Not to be confused with Nigeria (next door), this adjacent country is again mainly covered by the Sahara desert. It is home to endangered species like the African painted hunting dog (whose coat literally looks like a palette of paint) and the wild addax antelope.

Nigeria

With its port Lagos being one of the largest cities in the world, this is a big country, but it's not all urban. It's home to tropical rainforest, the world's largest diversity of butterflies and the Drill Monkey – whose bottom is multi-coloured (pink, mauve and blue) which makes it easy for his family to follow him through the forest!

Sao Tome and Principe

These quiet islands sit in the Gulf of Guinea, off the west coast. Here find the world's smallest ibis, the world's largest sunbird and giant species of begonia. It looks more like the South Pacific than Africa. At the beach, watch giant sea turtles come ashore to lay their eggs, and humpback whales play.

Senegal

This Atlantic coastal country is the closest to the USA and completely surrounds the tiny country of Gambia. This is bird paradise with many kingfishers (who eat their own bodyweight in food each day) and millions of pink flamingos with their mesmerising mating dance (their colour comes from algae they eat).

Sierra Leone

Home to the world's third largest natural harbour, this country has rolling hills, rainforests, rivers, 260 types of birds and a chimp sanctuary at Tacugama. Chimps live up to 50 years and are closer to us than gorillas. Like us, they are dependent on family until they grow up, and have a language as complex as ours.

Togo

This small hilly country is full of quiet beaches, coastal lagoons, wooded savannahs, swampy plains and exotic markets. It's also home to elephants, buffalo, antelopes, exotic birds and butterflies and whales (in the Gulf of Benin) each October.

Southern Africa

Angola

With over 1000 miles of beautiful Atlantic coastline, this is where marine turtles come to lay their eggs. The coast gives Angola a nice breeze (but it's not Sweden!). Angola is home to many favourite African animals – elephants, rhinos, leopards and antelopes and western lowland gorillas.

Botswana

Setting of the popular No.1 Ladies Detective Agency novels, this sits in the more fertile Kalahari Desert, and is home to lions, hyenas, antelopes, meerkats and weaver birds in their communal nests. The national park covers 36,000 square km and animals roam free back and forth between here and Namibia.

Lesotho

The most southerly landlocked nation, this is called Africa's 'Kingdom in the Sky', due to the stunning mountain scenery and alpine flowers. Some say it resembles Switzerland. If you meet someone here, they will raise their hand and say 'Khotso', which means 'peace'.

Namibia

This sits in the in the Kalahari Desert and has less people per square km than any country bar Mongolia. Parisian Olivier Houalet has become known here, for his work in helping orphaned cheetahs to live in the wild. Cheetahs are the fastest land mammals and can see 5km into the distance – better than us with a pair of binoculars!

South Africa

This large country juts so far south, you almost reach Antarctica. It has everything from 2000km of coastline to small islands to the flat-topped Table Mountain to the Kalahari Desert and Kruger National Park. Find everything from hippos to penguins – locals are installing the first 'penguin crossing' to keep them safe in urban areas.

Swaziland

Dominated by the Lebombo Mountains, 'Ngwane' is a main hideaway for southern white rhinos. They weigh more than a truck, have a wide flat mouth to graze and are the most social of all the rhinos. They take regular mud baths to keep cool.

Zambia

This cooler landlocked country is full of mountains and valleys, and drained by several rivers including the Zambezi (which runs through six countries) and Congo. Its border with Zimbabwe is the home of the stunning Victoria Falls, one of the wonders of the world. One native bird is the lovely little Chaplin Barbet.

Zimbabwe

Like Zambia, Victoria Falls (that can be seen from miles away) dominate this country – locally they are named 'mosi-oa-tunya', which means 'the smoke that thunders'. Zimbabwe is home to hippos, African painted dogs and elephants.

South East

Most of these countries sit in the Indian Ocean, off mainland Africa.

Madagascar

Home to some of the most unusual flora and fauna on earth. Here you can find the Aye-Aye (a beautifully strange looking lemur), other lemurs that give off police siren calls, spiny octopus trees, bottle-shaped Baobab trees, tomato frogs and giraffe-necked weevils. 98% of all mammals here are found nowhere else.

Malawi

The country's name comes from 'Maravi' – the old name of the Nyanja people who live there. It's not all arid – Malawi has the second deepest lake in Africa, and contains more types of fish than anywhere. Home to the African painted dog with its beautiful mottled coat. Plus endless inland beaches, waterfalls and over 600 species of orchids.

Mauritius

This is another fascinating island, 500 miles from Madagascar. With a strong Creole culture, there is where the extinct dodo came from, now used as a symbol for conservation. This is a tropical paradise with turquoise seas, giant tortoises and pink pigeons. Also home to Port Louis – Africa's wealthiest city.

Mozambique

This land country borders the Indian ocean and is divided by the Zambesi river and also has four big lakes. On Africa's largest coastal plain, this is where you can find black-winged flamingos, freshwater crocodiles, ostrich, porcupines and elephants.

Reunion

Another French-speaking island, this looks like Hawaii in Africa. The main volcano Piton de la Fournaise has erupted more than 100 times since 1640, making it the world's most active. The lava even sometimes reaches the sea.

Seychelles

With the smallest population in Africa, these 115 islands in the Indian ocean are spread out over one million square kilometres. Home to Coco-De-Mer (a sort of sea coconut), jellyfish tree, the world's largest coral, Seychelles Warbler, black parrots, tiny 'Gardener's' frog and Esmeralda – the world's oldest tortoise who is around 180.

Antarctica

This ice-covered continent is actually a desert! So cold, the only creatures that can survive here are a few Arctic birds and mammals with 'blubber' like whales and seals. Human researchers or explorers must wear special clothing and goggles, to protect from frostbite. It's dark a lot of the time, but on a clear day you can see for 10 miles.

Albatross

These are the largest birds, with a wingspan of 2.5 metres. Just one beat of their wings, and they can remain airborne for hours. They can travel thousands of kilometres over several days. Often found following ships, they mate for life and live to 80.

Arctic Tern

This small white 'sea swallow' flies all the way from Greenland to the South Pole on its annual migration. He flies straight through Africa and Brazil (stopping off in the Azores), but it's been found that on the return he makes an s-shaped detour for more favourable winds. It goes quiet, then all the birds all take off together at the same time!

Bird Island

This is a research station in the Southern Atlantic Ocean. Presumably it contains lots of birds. It is a research station used by climatologists (who study climate change). It's 1000km southeast of the Falkland Islands near Argentina, and can only be reached by boat or ship-supported helicopter.



Dolphins

Two that can be found here are small hourglass dolphins, and southern right whale dolphins (the only type with no dorsal fins). Also found are orcas (killer whales) that are actually dolphins, not whales – these social creatures swim up to 100 miles a day, in their natural habitat.

Glaciers

These are mountains and valleys made from ice. The glaciers here appear blue because the ice absorbs all the colours in the spectrum (unless there are air bubbles, then they look white). Although it never rains here, the snow and ice never melt, because it's too cold!

Krill

These little pink shrimp-like crustaceans are the most important part of the food chain in Antarctica. Without them, nothing else could survive, as it's practically what everything else that lives here eats. Krill themselves feed on single-celled plants, and can go without food for 200 days.

Octopus

Surprisingly, a few of our eight-armed friends survive here too. Most have blue blood or 'ink' that they squirt at predators. The octopus swims in a peculiar way, by using jet propulsion to spew water. Did you know it also has three hearts, is highly intelligent and is deaf – simply because it has no ears?

Penguins

We all love penguins with their funny little walks. But underwater, they are graceful swimmers. We are all now familiar with the 'March of the Penguins', where babysitting parents huddle together, whilst the other parent goes off to feed. The main penguins here are Emperors (largest), King (smaller) and Macaroni (yellow crested heads).

Porpoises

These marine mammals are related to whales and dolphins, but are smaller and stouter. They are faster, but do not tend to dive out of the water. They look similar to dolphins.

Seals

The main species found in Antarctica are large Weddell Seals and Elephant Seals (so-called because their nose looks like an elephant's trunk). Seals have flippers, which have evolved from four legs. How do you know the difference between a seal and a sea lion? Easy – sea lions have ear flaps! Walruses live much further north.

Snow Petrel

These pure white birds look like pigeons or doves, with black beaks. To find a mate, the male must copy all the acrobatic skills of the female! If a human goes near its nest, it emits a foul-smelling liquid from oily semi-digested krill, and squirts it at you. Sounds effective enough!

Whales

Whales live here, but understandably migrate to warmer waters each year to breed and give birth. Blue whales are so big, their tongue weighs as much as an elephant. They are long as the 100m sprint you did in school! They live mainly on krill, and communicate by echolocation, and sing to each other over 1000 miles.



Asia

This is the largest and continent and contains over half of the world's people. It's separated from Europe by the Ural mountains. Like Africa, this is a continent of contrast – from the paddy fields of China to orange-robed monks in 'Buddhist country' to the Middle East.

Eastern Asia

Bangladesh

One of the first countries to ban plastic bags, here you can find Bengal tigers, Himalayan black bears, jackals, monkeys and leopards. Flowers include water hyacinth, jasmine, water lily, rose, hibiscus, magnolia and wild orchids. Birds include cuckoos, hawks, owls, kingfishers, parrots, woodpeckers, myna and blue-bearded bee-eaters.

Bhutan

The king of this country has installed 'Gross National Happiness', based on the Genuine Progress Indicator (endorsed by The Green Party). The country has banned plastic bags, tobacco, wrestling, MTV and billboards, on the grounds that they do not make anyone happy! The statistics bear it out – it now is 8th in 'happiness' rankings.



Brunei

This sits on the rainforest-covered island of Borneo. Home to tortoise, small bear, monkey, lizard, scorpion, crocodile and centipede. Borneo is also of course home to orang utans, whose favourite fruit is durian – a fruit that some say tastes like onion-flavoured custard. But it stinks so much, it's banned on public transport!

Burma

Near India, China and Thailand lies this mysterious land of jungles, snow-capped mountains and beautiful beaches. Native trees are teak, acacia, bamboo, coconut and rubber. Native animals are tiger, leopard, rhino, buffalo, wild boar, deer, antelope, elephant, gibbon and monkey. Other creatures include parrots and Burmese pythons.

Cambodia

Lying in the tropics of the IndoChina peninsula, this is a land of ancient trees, remote hill tribes, colourful pagodas and temples buried in the jungle. Local wildlife includes elephant, deer, wild oxen, panther, bear, tiger and dhole (wild dog), cranes and ibis. Each year, a Water Festival celebrates the Tonle Sap reversing its waters.

China

The oldest civilisation in the world is also the most populated. Full of rivers including the Yangtze, China houses the Giant Panda, a bear that lives on bamboo in the remote forests. Other native species are South China Tiger, red-crowned crane and White-Flag Dolphin (one of only two species of freshwater dolphin in the world).

East Timor

One of the world's youngest countries due to recent independence from Indonesia. This is a tiny island rich in coral reef and lots of wildlife like giant frog fish, box fish, scorpion fish, monkey, deer, civet cats, crocodile, snake, gigantic water buffalo and green pigeon. Also renowned for its coffee.

Hong Kong

We all think of Hong Kong as an island of skyscrapers, but actually most is rural. Located on China's south coast, here can you find bamboo forests, mountains, beaches, natural harbours – and the Mai Po Sanctuary for Wild Birds.

India

India is a very large country ('sub-continent') that ranges from the northern Himalayas to Rudyard Kipling's 'Jungle Book' territory with its elephants, tigers and serpents – you may even bump into Baloo the bear! India also has beautiful coasts like Goa, and is home to the mango tree – mangoes are the most widely eaten fruit on earth.

Indonesia

With a strong Buddhist influence, this nation includes the islands of Bali and Sumatra. Also home to Javan and Sumatran rhinos, Sumatra is also a natural home to endangered orang utans, who spend most of their time in trees. Like us, males grow beards and if it rains, they use leaves to make themselves an umbrella!

Japan

These islands of North East Asia are home to a unique culture: tea ceremonies, Zen gardens, sumo wrestling, kimonos, pagoda architecture. Here is Mount Fuji, cherry blossom (reported on weather bulletins), red-faced 'snow monkeys', red-crowned cranes and whooper swans. The residents of the Okinawa regularly live to 100.

Laos

Once known as 'the land of a million elephants', environmentalists are keen for their habitats to be protected more. This country borders many countries including China, Burma and Vietnam. Find leopard cat, java mongoose, goat antelope, gibbon, Malayan sun bear, Asiatic black bear, green peafowl birds and dolphins in the Mekong River.

Macau

Like Hong Kong, most people here are ethnically Chinese. Facing the South China sea, the people here have the longest life expectancy in the world – must be all that sea air! With little arable land, wildlife is not so diverse, but there is colourful greenery from the many parks, gardens, baroque churches and pastel-coloured buildings.

Malaysia

Home to skyscrapers, stilt houses, coral reefs, rainforests, mangroves and the world's largest cave passage, this contrasting large area also is home to the world's third largest island of Borneo – another home for orang utans. Common birds include kingfishers, storks and green imperial pigeons.

Maldives

This popular honeymoon destination lies so below sea level, it is hoping to become the first zero-carbon economy in the world, to encourage others to take climate change seriously. Sitting in the Indian Ocean, The President has been the most pro-active of any world leader, on the issue of climate change.

Mongolia

In the heart of Asia next to China and Siberia, this vast plain of a land has 2 million nomadic people – and 20 million horses! Wildlife includes black-tailed antelope, lynx, fox, snow leopard, argali (mountain sheep) and ibex. Many birds migrate from the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and the bottom third is covered by the Gobi desert.

Nepal

In the Himalayas, this shares Mount Everest with China and Tibet. Nepal holds 8 of the world's ten highest mountains and near the Indian border you can find elephants, tigers, deer and buffalo and wild ox. Home to 'Yeti' abominable snowman, the most likely explanation is a Himalayan Brown Bear – which can walk upright. But some still stay it's a group of human hermits!

North Korea

Cut off from the world, there is not much information about this remote country in East Asia. Mostly hills, mountains and valleys, 80% of the country is mountainous and four distinct seasons (including a windy winter!) give rise to roe deer, bear, tiger, lynx, water shrew and the three-toed woodpecker.

Philippines

On the South China Sea, these volcanic islands (formed from the second largest archipelago) are covered in tropical rainforests, where spotted and mouse deer hide. The national bird is the Philippine eagle. The Apo Reef is the largest coral reef system in Asia and the second in the world (after Australia's Great Barrier).

Singapore

These 63 islands near Malaysia are one quarter hot tropical rainforest. A rich land that has invested in many nature reserves, bird sanctuaries and botanic gardens. It is the most densely populated country, after Monaco in Europe.

South Korea

Next door to China and the Yellow Sea, this country has more mountains than most. A breathtaking landscape of hills and valleys, each summer the country is covered in blooms from the Rose of Sharon. Home to bear, woodpeckers, river deer, water shrew and lynx. Wild Siberian tigers have not been seen here since 1920s. Here's hoping.

Sri Lanka

Waterfalls and banyan trees are everywhere, and Rain Trees produce clusters of pink powder-puff flowers. Off the coast find blue, humpback and sperm whales with dolphins. Birds includes peacock, parakeet and Paradise Flycatcher. Wildlife includes elephants, leopard, turtle, monkey, reptile, deer and sloth bear.

Taiwan

This leaf-shaped island lies off the eastern coast, south of Japan and north of the Philippines. 'Asia's version of Hawaii' teems with unique wildlife: mountain goat, Formosan rock money, blue magpie, Mikado pheasant and grass lizard. The Pacific Ocean is home to coral reef and three dolphins – bottlenose, spinner and spotted.

Thailand

With its tropical climate and hundreds of outlying tropical islands, this is known for its cuisine. Wildlife includes gibbons and many elephants. With hundreds of tropical islands, Buddhist temples and mesmerising Thai dancing, this is the heart of southeast Asia.

Tibet

Next door to China and the spiritual home of the Dalai Lama, at 4000 metres above sea level – this is 'the roof of the world'. Its highest peak (on the border with Nepal) is Mount Everest. Many people here are Buddhist monks. It's a land of monasteries, orange robes, hypnotic chanting and prayer flags blowing in the wind.

Vietnam

On the east of the Indochinese peninsula, this S-shaped strip of land is mainly mountains and hills. A land of wildlife – bear, tiger, leopard, elephant and the dhole Asian dog. Also a land of flowers – peach flower, orchid, yellow apricot and chrysanthemum.

Western Asia

Armenia

A country of mountains, the average altitude is over one mile high! There are 5 scenic canyons, 200 mineral springs and close-knit extended families who welcome you as one of their own. Also welcoming you are local wildlife: wild boar, porcupine, lizard and snake.

Azerbaijan

Named after fire 'azer', this ancient country on the Caspian Sea is covered in mud volcanoes and mountains. Also home to over 4500 species of flora, and the good-tempered Karabakh horse.

Kyrgyzstan

This landlocked mountainous country is often called the Switzerland of Asia, with its valleys, basins and Lake Issyk-Kol – the world's second largest alpine lake. Find spruce and birch tree, golden eagle, brown bear, mountain goat, wild boar, lynx and snow leopard (his feet is covered in fur, to act as natural snow shoes).

Tajikistan

Another remote and mountainous alpine nation, more than half this country is above sea level. Most people speak ethnic languages and they share a strong cultural history with neighbours Afghanistan and Iran. It is the smallest country in central Asia. Wildlife includes brown bear, Siberian ibex, red marmot and wolf.

Turkmenistan

Most of this is desert, mountains, steppes and ancient mystical cities. The forests are home to Persian lynx, goat and snow leopard. Desserts are home to gazelle, wildcat, fox, jackal, wild boar, monitor lizard, gecko and rare pink deer. The Caspian shore provides a watery home to local tortoises.

Uzbekistan

With over 100 ethnic communities, this landlocked country is a melting pot of different cultures. Also as diverse in its wildlife, where amongst mountains, alleys, rivers, lakes and waterfalls – you can find brown bear, deer, lynx, wild boar, snow leopards and Bukhara deer.



Middle East

This theoretically includes southwest Asia and Egypt. But this is an easy to use guide, not a map! Egypt is listed under North Africa.

Afghanistan

With the dramatic Pamir Mountains and Wakhan Corridor, native wildlife includes ibex, lynx, wolf, snow leopard and Marco Polo sheep. Birds include myna, rock dove, raven, raptor, buzzard and the world's least-known bird – large-billed reed warbler. The land also produces roses, and could be used to produce eco-friendly hemp and pomegranates – both of which could give a good income to local farmers.

Bahrain

These 30 or so islands translate as 'two seas' after the welcoming water surrounding the desert land. Birds abound here – larks (desert, crested and hoopoe), plus bee-eaters, rollers and lesser kestrel.

Cyprus

A beautiful island linked with Turkey (north) and Greece (south), there is a green line in the capital Nicosia, to separate the two. Rich with olive trees and citrus fruits, lizards and migrating birds from the Nile Delta, also find protected wild donkeys in Karpaz National Park.

Iran

Between the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea, Iran has cypress trees and fragrant myrtle. Birds include Siberian crane, falcon, imperial eagle and Dalmatian pelican. Also find black bear, cheetah and blue whales. There are still hopes that Caspian tigers still roam this land.

Iraq

Another ancient country, some believe it to be the site of The Garden of Eden. With two welcome big rivers in a desert country, the marshes and Mesopotamian Wetlands are important in the south for wintering water birds, including White-Headed Duck.

Israel

Along with the Dead Sea (you float – even if you can't swim!), explore ancient Tel Aviv, Galilee and Jerusalem. Near the Mount of Olives, a new tree is planted for every new child born here, to ask for peace. Mount Carmel's coastal mountains are home to the Baha'i Faith.

Jordan

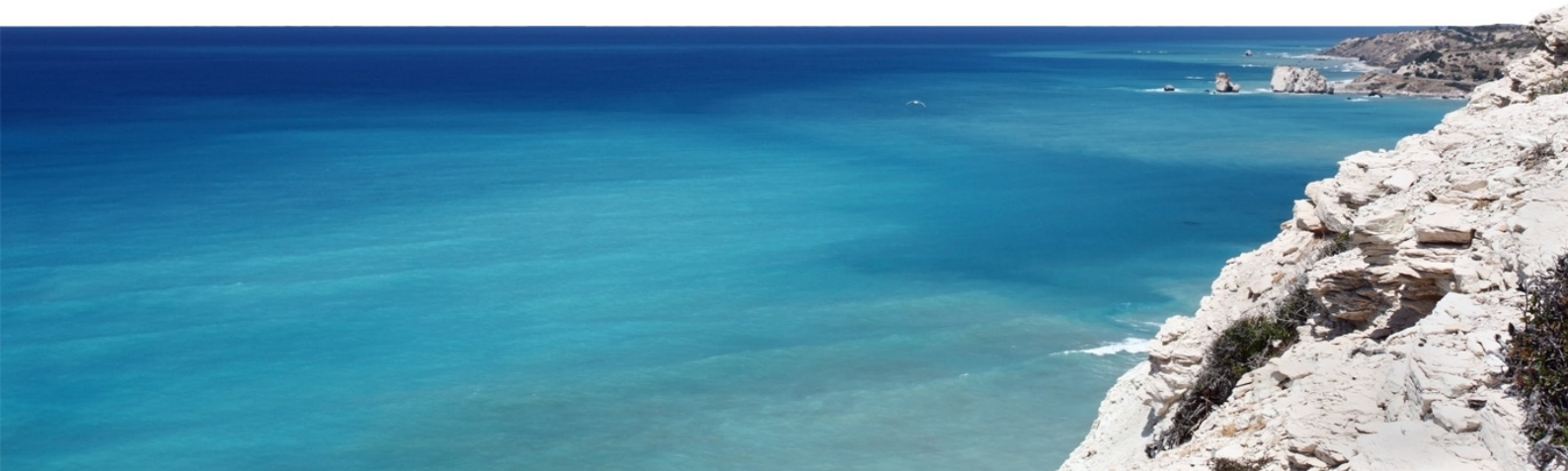
Famed for its marine wildlife on the Red Sea, this nation also contains Mujib Reserve (the lowest nature reserve in the world). Wadi Rum is like a moon landscape, dotted with red, yellow and orange mountains. Here also find oak and pistachio trees, over 1000 species of fish, coral, sea turtles, dolphins, sea cows and whale sharks.

Kuwait

On the northeast Arabian peninsula (next door to Saudi Arabia), this is one of the smallest countries on earth, mostly composed of desert, although there is a natural deep harbour. The island's wildlife suffered during the Gulf War, but now you can find camels, lizards, snakes and many birds, including the lesser Kestrel.

Lebanon

On the Mediterranean Coast, this land also contains fertile land and alpine peaks. An ancient land listed in the New Testament, its capital Beirut has overcome its difficulties to be called the 'Paris of the East'. Famed for ancient cedar forests, loggerhead turtles, colourful wildflowers, medicinal plants and of course, olive oil.



Oman

With 3000km of coastline, this is packed with beaches, caves, wadis and deserts. With many laws to protect local wildlife, here you can find Arabian leopard, Arabian oryx, gazelle, ibex, desert fox, wild cat, plus breeding turtles and 22 species of whales and dolphins. There are also many bird sanctuaries.

Pakistan

This big country (larger than the UK and France together) is south of the Arabian sea. Covered in mountains, it also has over 1000km of coastline. It's home to leopards, vultures and falcons. A land of great contrast, you can also find sub-tropical pine forests, pine forests and the Himalayas.

Palestinian Territories

This lies between the Mediterranean Coast and the Jordan River. It comprises the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Ein Kenya Nature Reserve is named after its natural springs, with lots of beautiful wildlife. It's interesting that both tourist websites of here and Israel go out of their way to promote peace and reconciliation.

Qatar

This beautiful country is surrounded on three sides by sparkling blue waters, and sits in the Arabian Gulf, with the only land border meeting Saudi Arabia. It has hot humid summers and mild winters. The Arabian oryx is protected here – due to its horns, it is believed to be the animal behind the legend of the unicorn.

Saudi Arabia

This large land is the home of Islam's two holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. Lying on the Red Sea, a quarter of this country is desert and home to Bedouin tribes, but the south gets lots of rain and supports wildflowers, apricot, lime and quince trees. Local creatures include black kite, antelope, hyena, camel, wolf and Arabian oryx.

Syria

With olive trees, palm trees, daisy meadows, oleander meadows and vineyards, local shopkeepers offer you a tiny cup of Arabic coffee, a glass of mint tea or lemonade while you browse. When you go, they will say 'ma salaam' – may you go in peace. Also exchange greetings with the local wildlife – Jackal, wolf, antelope and bear.

Turkey

Istanbul is the only city in the world that straddles two continents; Europe and Asia. There is where St John, St Paul and St Peter lived and preached, and Mary spent her last days. Local wildlife includes bear, lynx, wild boar, deer, otter, fox and, buffalo and the protected Van Cat (one green eye, one blue eye!). Cranes migrate here too.

United Arab Emirates

Of the 7 states, Dubai is the best-known. Birdlife flourishes here: herons, ducks, chestnut-bellied sand grouse, little green bee-eaters and Indian rollers that explode into brilliant blue rolling displays as they take flight. Also find flamingos (the locals have built an island to protect them). Offshore, find dugongs and green turtles.

Yemen

Full of desert sand, lush greenery, coral reef, mountain villages and the port of Aden, this is a land of contrasts. Find desert rose and prickly pear cactus. Or look for wildlife: striped hyena, fox, hare, mongoose, lizard and camel. Socotra Islands are called 'Asia's Galapagos Islands' – here is a Dragon Tree that melts a bright red liquid.



Europe

This continent's similarities are regional: The Isles, Baltic States, Mediterranean countries, Scandinavia etc. One unfortunate consequence of the EU has been to try to blend everything together. But this guide is about geography and the wonder of nature, so let's see what each individual country has to offer!

The Isles

Geographically, most of these form the 'British Isles', but many Irish, Isle of Man and Channel Islands residents are not so fond of this term! This is just a fun guide (not political), so we shall call them 'The Isles' instead, to keep everyone happy!

Channel Islands

These islands near France include Jersey and Guernsey, plus the small isles of Alderney, Herm and traffic-free Sark. The sunnier climate supports beautiful flowers: bluebells, primrose and wild daffodils all flourish. Add cove beaches, stunning cliff pathways and over 100 miles of coastline. Also home to blonde hedgehogs!

England

Surrounded by three seas, the far corners teem with seals and some whales. From the sandy Cornish beaches to the wilds of Northumberland, there is something for everyone. Native wildlife includes red deer, hedgehogs, badgers, water vole and sleepy dormouse. England is famed for its beautiful birdsong and cottage gardens.



Ireland

This is the third largest island in Europe, and renowned for its greenery (caused by rain – and lots of it!). The people are warm and some speak the ancient language of Gaelic. Along with gems like Ring of Kerry and the Aran and Skellig Isles, the coast is amazing, with turtles, sharks, whales, dolphins and seabirds.

Northern Ireland

With some of the most stunning mountain scenery in Europe, also here are 200km of sandy beaches and rivers. Giant's Causeway is a mysterious rock formation in County Antrim that may be due to volcanic activity, but the locals say legendary giant Finn McCool built it! Northern Ireland has the largest freshwater lake in the Isles.

Scotland

As well as the mainland and Highlands, Scotland has several islands including the Shetlands, Orkneys (windy!) and Western Isles. Some are closer to Scandinavia than London. Sea life abounds, as do red deer, golden eagles and red squirrels (although they are native to Scandinavia). Like Ireland, many rural people speak Gaelic.

Wales

Home of the best singers, a beautiful language and two of the highest peaks in Britain (Snowdon and Ben Nevis), Wales is also home to Britain's only coastal national park, pretty villages and over 750 miles of award-winning beaches. Spot whales, dolphins and seabirds galore: guillemots, razorbills, chough and puffins.

Isle of Man

This tiny island contains rare orchids and a stunning coastline teeming with seabirds, whales, dolphins and the odd orca (killer whale). On a good day, you can even see basking sharks. The Calf of Man is a bird sanctuary just off the coast. Local wildlife includes the famed Manx cat, plus bats and polecats.

Northern Europe

All countries 'on top of the earth' receive the midnight sun – where it is all day or all night for several months a year. They also get to see 'aurora borealis' ('northern lights') – skies awash with different colours, due to electrically charged particles. Visit [Google Images](#) and take a look – stunning.

Denmark

It's easy to see why Denmark was recently voted the happiest nation on earth. With a small gap between rich and poor, they also benefit from surprisingly warm weather, flat land that's good for walking and cycling, and Copenhagen is an outstanding example of 'new urbanism'. And no-one lives more than 30 miles from the sea!

Estonia

This considers itself 'Scandinavia with a twist'. Separated from Finland by a short trip across the sea, it lies on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. Rich in pine, birch, spruce and aspen trees, here you can find hare, fox, deer, wolf, lynx, bear and elk. Estonia holds the European record for highest number of bird species seen in a day.

Faroe Islands

These 18 Danish islands rise from the sea in the middle of the North Atlantic, and are difficult to spot on a map. Green grass, fresh air and volcanic mountains, make it a great stop-off for two million pairs of migrating birds. The island is popular with puffins – their short wings make for great swimming underwater.

Finland

Finland is colder than Denmark, so most people live in the south. A land of lakes and islands, it's mostly flat and contains the northern destination of Lapland, where Father Christmas lives! Pine, spruce, birch and larch forests cover most of the country. Local wildlife includes brown bear, grey wolf, elk, reindeer and whooper swan.

Greenland

Owned by Denmark, this is the world's largest island and it is at the forefront at concerns over melting ice and climate change. Surprisingly, it's not all ice. There are many wildflowers including Greenlandic bluebell. Also find hot springs, polar bears, reindeer, musk oxen, seals, whales and sharks.

Iceland

This large island 600 miles north of Norway greets you with pretty-coloured buildings in Reykjavik, hot bubbling springs (used to heat the island's water), spurting geysers and boiling mud pools. Like Greenland, there are lots of wildflowers. It's also run by the world's first gay (female) president who has banned strip clubs and lap dancing.

Norway

This western country has thousands of islands and beautiful fjords (where mountains plunge hundreds of metres into the sea). Watch seals and porpoises play, and eagles soar above. Woodpeckers bore into the pine trees, and puffins live here. The town of Narvik is the most northerly on earth, but the Gulf Stream warms it up a bit!

Sweden

Quiet, intelligent and liberal Swedes live in the third largest country in Europe, but with a low population. Stockholm sits on thousands of tiny islands, and most of the north is covered by forests, although there are pretty seaside towns like Gothenburg. Look for the Arctic Fox or moose. Swedes stay longer in school than anyone else!



Central Europe

Austria

This large country contains the Alps (home to deer, golden eagles, butterflies and beetles) and the Tirol (a federal state in the west). Also home to Mozart's birthplace Salzburg ('salt castle') and Vienna, which lies on the Danube (this begins in Germany's Black Forest).

Belgium

Lying in the northwest, Belgium is divided in two – the Dutch-speaking Flanders up north, and the French-speaking Walloons down south. As well as Brussels, here you can find the beautiful waterfront cobbled city of Bruges, with tree-lined canals and green spaces.

France

This large country contains one of the world's best-run (and completely state-funded) railway – SNCF. Home of the Alps, vineyards and chic coastal resorts of Nice and Cannes, lots of wildlife lives here too: wild boar, roe and red deer, wolf, fox, brown bear, badger, ibex and chamois, plus semi-wild horses and lizards.

Germany

The most populous country in Europe borders Denmark and many other countries. Home to stunning scenery including Bavaria, the Black Forest and fairytale castles, this sits on the banks of the Rivers Danube and Rhine. Berlin's roofs are covered in solar panels, and the small town of Freiburg is one of the greenest on earth.

Liechtenstein

This state lies within the Alps between Austria and Switzerland. In summer the meadows bloom with wildflowers, the rare ghost orchid and one-leaved bog orchid. Also home to butterflies, red deer, ibex, snow hare, golden eagle, Eurasian pygmy owl, boreal owl, three-toed woodpecker and jack grouse.

Luxembourg

This small landlocked country lies more than 200 miles from the sea. Most people live in the capital Luxembourg City. Nearby are beautiful forests, hills and low mountains. It's also home to the Ardennes and Moselle Valley. It's often called 'Little Switzerland', and like their European friends, most people in Luxembourg speak several languages.

Netherlands

Below sea level, this is a flat land of canals, cycle paths, tulips, windmills and beautiful coast. It was also the birthplace of popular painter Vincent Van Gogh. Local wildlife includes otters and badgers. Locals have installed green roofs for butterflies and birds, and a collection of underpasses for resident amphibians and hedgehogs.

Switzerland

This visually stunning country is full of sparkling lakes, alpine hills and snow-capped mountains. Local wildlife includes wolf, lynx, bear and fox. Switzerland is one of the best countries in the world for animal welfare – social animals are not allowed to be housed alone, and new dog guardians must attend 'school' to ensure good welfare.

Vatican City

This is its own little country, in the middle of Rome. Just 110 acres and with a population of 800, it's ruled by the Pope. Half is covered in beautiful gardens, fountains and sculptures. It has its own postal service, currency, newspaper, radio station and army (Swiss Guards in their striped pantaloons).

Southern Europe

Andorra

This small country nestled in the Pyrenees Mountains is surrounded by France and Spain. The people speak a language called Catalan and have the second highest life expectancy in the world. The area is landlocked, with lots of rugged mountains and a coast-to-coast long-distance footpath, just like England.

The Azores

Owned by Portugal, these 9 volcanic islands are 900 miles away from Europe, and only 2000 miles away from North America (lying on its plate). They form the most westerly point of Europe. With garden-like islands, the blue seas support dolphins and whales.

Cyprus

This island is listed twice in this guide, as politically it's in Europe – but geographically it's in Asia! Rich with olive trees and citrus fruits, lizards and migrating birds from the Nile Delta, also find protected wild donkeys in Karpaz National Park.

Gibraltar

This small island is dominated by the Rock of Gibraltar, known for its protected apes who receive a daily supply of water and food, plus regular vet care and microchipping. The island forms the entrance between Spain and Africa. Some of the finest caves in Europe.

Greece

The most southerly country in Europe, this lies on the Aegean, Ionian and Mediterranean seas. Packed with culture and mountains, lakes and wetlands. Local food includes aubergine (eggplant if you're an American reader!) and olives. Wildlife includes deer, wolf, badger, lizard and snake. Also find pine, chestnut, fir and cypress trees.

Italy

Shaped like a boot, Italy's history and food is dominated by regions, plus the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. A country of classical cities: Rome, Florence, Verona, Milan, Venice, Naples and Pisa. The sense of family is strong, and most adult children stay at home until they marry. Wildlife includes boar, brown bear, lizard and whale.

Madeira

In the north Atlantic ocean, this is known as the 'floating garden', and is a sub-tropical archipelago. It is closer to Africa than to Europe. Also contains rugged coastlines, beautiful natural beaches and the most colourful displays of flowers ever.

Malta

This small southern country on the Mediterranean lies south of Sicily and is near Tunisia. Home to honey-coloured limestone architecture, clear skies and blue sea – find historic palaces, cathedrals and forts. The local language has Arabic influences.

Monaco

This tiny state is just 9 miles from Italy, and 11 miles from Nice in France. Known for being a tax haven (it's the most densely populated state in the world), the manicured streets, lush parks and fountains give clues to its immense wealth.

Portugal

This warm country on the Iberian peninsula is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and split by the river Tagus. Trees include eucalyptus, maple, cork oaks, pines, poplar, chestnut and olive. Flowers are lavender, rosemary, thyme, mimosa and orchids. Also find fox, wild boar, lynx and golden eagle, plus flamingos in south coastal lagoons.

San Marino

This tiny country lies on the eastern side of the Apennine mountains, just 6 miles off Italy's Adriatic coast. Situated in the hills, it is rumoured that the land was given to a stonecutter by a rich woman, whose son he had cured. In the second world war, it remained neutral, and was home to 100,000 refugees.

Spain

This warm country on the Mediterranean Sea owns the Balearic Islands and Canary Islands – blessed with year-round sun due to their close proximity to Africa. Home to flamenco dancing and beautiful music, the hills of northern Spain resemble Ireland. The Pyrenees near the French border are home to wolf and Iberian lynx.

Eastern Europe

These countries are nearly all near the Ural Mountains, which used to separate Europe from Asia. Many became part of Europe, after the break-up of the USSR.

Albania

This southeast country has a coastline that extends hundreds of miles into the Adriatic (part of the Mediterranean Sea). Nearly all of it is mountains and pine and oak forests of the Boreal Kingdom, with bear, polecat, wolf, wildcat, deer, Balkan lynx and wild goats. Birds include woodpecker, hawk, pine martin, falcon, owl and golden eagle.

Armenia

Bordered by Turkey, this is full of turquoise lakes, lush forests with bears and rocky highlands, and semi-desert flowers. Armenia has become one of the first countries to introduce 'eco-taxes' to protect the environment. It's nestled between the Caspian Sea (the world's largest lake) and the Black Sea (it's blue, but darker when stormy).

Azerbaijan

Near Turkey, this lies on the Caspian Sea and is blessed with 8000 rivers. Popular here is the hamam 'public sauna' (in days of old, women could ask for a divorce if they did not receive their bi-weekly hamam voucher!) Or say hello to a good-tempered Karabakh horse.

Belarus

This landlocked country is near Russia. Nearly half is covered by cornflower-thick forests and streams, and it also lies on the watershed of the Baltic and Black Sea. Millions of people were affected here by the winds blown in from Chernobyl. Even today, volunteers help people to recuperate from cancer and leukaemia.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

This land contains the least-discovered areas of the European Alps. It sits on the gorgeous Adriatic Sea and is home to one of two remaining primeval forests in Europe. The beech trees can reach over 60 metres. The Skakavac waterfall is another attraction, and the Alps provide some of the richest flora and fauna in Europe.

Bulgaria

Also in south east Europe, this lies on the Black Sea. A pretty, small country with an ancient history, there are stunning beaches, bear-rich mountains, lynx and rare birds. The north is dominated by the vast lowlands of the Danube. Known for its folk music.

Czech Republic

Lying in central Europe between Poland and Germany, this landlocked country has rivers that flow to the North, Baltic and Black Seas. Prague is a beautiful city, sitting on 9 hills with a river, baroque gardens, narrow streets and 500 spires. Local wildlife includes wolf, wildcat, lynx, grouse and bustard.

Croatia

This used to be part of Yugoslavia. It has one thousand islands, a beautiful coast and the river Danube. The country has won awards for some of the cleanest waters in the Mediterranean Sea. The Dalmation Coast gives the spotted dog his name. Find 92 waterfalls, forests, gorges, rivers, deep blue lakes, lynx, wolf, bear and chamois.

Georgia

In eastern Europe, this neighbour of Russia lies between the Black and Caspian Seas. A pretty little country with churches, watchtowers and castles, and lots of wildlife due to its lack of development and high mountains.

Hungary

This landlocked country in central Europe houses Budapest – ‘the Paris of the East’. A small and ancient country with a unique language that’s difficult to learn, find hundreds of therapeutic mineral springs that gush up from the depths of the earth. The river Danube splits the country in half.

Kazakhstan

Situated on the Asian border, this is the 9th largest country in the world, and covers two time zones and five climate zones. With forests in the north and deserts in the south, it stretches from Russia’s Siberia to the deserts of China and the Caspian sea. The country has recently set up nature parks, to protect its rare saiga antelopes.



Latvia

On the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea, this pine forested land is home to deer, wild boar, moose, lynx, bear, fox, beaver and wolf – plus oak and linden trees. Migrating birds flourish along with the national white wagtail. There are more wolves and beavers than anywhere in Europe and even Atlantic salmon come here to breed.

Lithuania

The most southern of the three Baltic States (Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania), this is on the southeast shore of the Baltic Sea, with 100km of sandy coastline and a warm water port. It has dense forests, meandering lakes and local wildlife includes wolf, otter, fox, ermine and badger. The language is derived from Sanskrit.

Macedonia

Once part of Yugoslavia, this landlocked country is south of the Aegean River near Greece. It's full of lakes and mountains, and covered in oak, beech and pine trees. Brown bears are popular here.

Moldova

This eastern landlocked country close to the Black Sea. It's very hilly, with forests of beautiful coloured leafy trees, plus deer, wild boar, wolf and badger. The River Prut area is home to many species of birds.

Montenegro

This country on the Adriatic coast contains beaches, rivers, mountains and Durmitor National Park with its 18 glacial lakes. The locals explain the stony land: God looked in his bag from which he had delivered animals, humans, birds, fish and water, and there were a few stones left. So he threw them down, and created Montenegro!

Poland

This central country is surrounded by the Baltic Sea and over 10,000 lakes – the highest number in the world after Finland. Many animals still survive in the ancient woodland like brown bear, grey wolf, Eurasian lynx, moose, beaver and red deer. One quarter of all migratory birds come to Europe to breed here in the wetlands.

Romania

North of the Balkan peninsula, this sits at the end of the Lower Danube (which passes through 10 countries), bordering the Black Sea. It has one of the largest undisturbed forests in Europe. Its forests house deer, bear, lynx, chamois and wolves. Its province of Transylvania 'land beyond the forest' is known for its main inhabitant – Dracula!

Russia

This is the largest country in the world, with the largest forest reserves and a quarter of the world's water. St Basil's Cathedral's flame-shaped dome is one of its architectural wonders. Siberia covers nearly all the east (where Siberian tigers live in the birch forests), so most people live in the west. The people of Abkhazia regularly live to 100.

Serbia

Formerly part of Yugoslavia, this is passed through by the Danube river. A third is covered by forest and national parks, and many plants and animals that have disappeared elsewhere, can be found here. Birds include Cetti's Warbler and the Red-Rumped Swallow.

Slovakia

This central country has a remarkable culture, plus mountains, plains and rivers. The 'blue eyes' of the Slovak mountain get their name from the location and shade of the surrounding background. Just five miles from the centre of Bratislava is a natural area of forests, streams and ponds.

Slovenia

Just touching the Alps, this borders Italy and is the most forested area after Finland and Sweden, and is home to 1% of all living creatures and 2% of all freshwater species. They protect their greenery so much, you are not allowed to remove flowers from the mountains. Local wildlife includes roe deer, squirrels, wolf, wildcat, and ibex.

Ukraine

This country contains pine, fir, beech, lime, oak and elm forests. It is home to red and roe deer, elk, wild boar, fox, wolf, brown bear, field mouse and lynx. Bird life includes crane, wood grouse, eagle, quail, skylark, pink starling, martin and heron.

North America

Many people think of the USA and Canada, but Mexico is part of North America too, as are Central American countries. The Caribbean Islands don't really belong to any continent, but are included here.

The 3 Northern Countries

Canada

With a lower population but the same landmass as the USA, Canada is packed with rocky mountains, pine forests, maple trees and national treasures like Val-Morin and British Columbia. Here you may come across a grizzly bear on his trip to find fresh salmon at the river. Canada is also home to a strong environmental movement.

Mexico

Marshes, forests, mangroves and beautiful beaches on blue Caribbean waters, one of the oldest civilisations, and the Mayan pyramids and Yucatan Peninsula are legendary. Find rosewood, walnut, ebony and mahogany trees and exotic wildlife: jaguars, pumas, turtles and pink flamingos.



USA

With its influence, you may be surprised to learn that the USA contains only just under 5% of the world's population. The city of Portland in Oregon is often called the greenest city in the world, and California is up there too – the town of Carmel is 'most dog-friendly city'. The USA is home to breathtaking natural scenery like the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park and Alaska. Manatees swim the shore of Florida, the north is home to bears and antelopes, and Boston is popular for visiting whales.

Central America

Belize

The only country in Central America where English is the official language, this is on the Caribbean coast and lined with coral reef and island keys. This is a rainforest paradise jungle, and contains the longest barrier reef in the western hemisphere.

Costa Rica

With tropical, cloud, dry and oak forests, this tiny country covers 0.03% of the planet, yet holds 6% of all its creatures. Popular species include green and hawksbill turtles, great blue heron, Scarlet Macaw, manatees, humpback whales, bottle-nosed dolphins and coral. Also nearby is the beautiful Cocos Island.

El Salvador

This small central American country is the only one with no Atlantic coastline, nevertheless you see dolphins and whales passing through its Pacific waters. Its 'shade-grown' coffee farms are home to endangered wildlife. The Stinking Toe Tree has 'big fat toe' branches and edible fruit that leaves a foul lingering smell!

Guatemala

This is Mayan country (half the population derives from this ancient race). There is rich culture everywhere. This small country has stunning wildlife like jaguars, pumas, tapirs, howler and spider monkeys. Birds include Quetzals, scarlet macaws and storks.

Honduras

This country is full of blue waters, green jungles, white mountains and Pico Bonito National Park. Find tapirs, white-tailed deer, jaguars, toucans, whilst at sea enjoy bottle-nose dolphins, parrot fish, kapok trees (the fluffy seeds are used in bedding), bony-plated armadillos and lovable sloths (they give birth upside down!)

Nicaragua

This large country's name means 'surrounded by water'. A rainforest delight for monkeys, three-toed sloths, giant lizards, iguanas, anteaters, white-tailed deers, tapirs, guardabarranco birds and turquoise-browed Motmot ('clock birds'). At the ocean, find turtles and the world's only freshwater sharks.

Panama

The most southerly country, this is mainly hills and mountains, with over 500 rivers, rainforest and cloud forests. It holds the record for the most species of birds seen in one day, and is also home to the Smithsonian Institute for Tropical Research. It's surprisingly not the home of the Panama Hat – that's from Ecuador.

Caribbean Islands

Most of these are in the southeast Gulf of Mexico, and are a chain of islands surrounding the Caribbean Sea. Many are close to Florida.

Anguilla

A peaceful little place blessed by tropical trade winds, this is a religious island (it has a church every two square miles). With 12 miles of white powder beaches and clear blue waters, who would not dream of lazing here awhile? Local wildlife includes hermit crabs, mangrove cuckoos, red-footed tortoise and tiny orange butterflies.

Antigua and Barbuda

With warm winds and safe harbours, these islands are famed for their unbroken coral reef. Barbuda is practically empty and famed for its pink sand, coral reef and Frigate Bird Sanctuary housing the most aerial of waterbirds. Antigua has 365 beaches – one for every day of the year!

Aruba

Cooled by trade winds, miles of beautiful beach and thousands of friends you have not yet met, the reef here plunges to depths of 110 feet where octopus, moray eel and barracuda thrive. Donkeys were the main form of transport here once. Happily, locals now look after them in a special sanctuary.

Bahamas

This has the world's longest underwater limestone cave, secluded islands and so much wildlife (iguanas, flamingos, American redstarts and parrots), that there are more non-human species than people. The water is so clear that visibility is an amazing 200 feet. Of the 100 plus birds here, 28 are not found anywhere else on earth.

Barbados

This is the home of dream beaches and tidal pools that house ghost crabs and sea roaches, as well as sea moss that is made into a local health drink. Add Harrison's Cave with its underground bubbling streams, thundering waterfalls, deep pools, mahogany trees and sea anemones, and you have paradise on earth.

Bermuda

This 'pink sand' paradise is not in the Caribbean, it's hundreds of miles north of the Bahamas, just 600 miles from North Carolina. The tropical reef is home to millions of creatures. You can also find whistling tree frogs, sea turtles, white-tailed tropic birds, indigo bunting and Great Kiskadee (his call sounds like 'qu-est-ce que dit?')

British Virgin Islands

With powder sand beaches and lush green mountains, banyan trees and volcanic outcrops, this is where the Caribbean meets the Atlantic in a sheltered cove of calm shores and beautiful coral. Local marine delights to admire are drum fish, octopus, starfish, golden moray eels and spiny lobsters.

Cayman Islands

As the peaks of a massive underwater ridge, these islands are just 400 miles from Miami, and home the hawksbill turtle and black-billed whistling duck. The 'seven-mile beach' of coral sand is actually just 5.5 miles now, due to annual erosion.

Cuba

Famed for Havana cigars and vintage American cars, this island has 4000 miles of coastline and is home to the world's smallest frog and bird, migrating land crabs, and bee hummingbirds whose wings beat at 80 beats each second. They are so small, people mistake them for insects!

Dominica

Not to be confused with the Dominican Republic (next), two thirds is covered in tropical rainforest, rivers, streams and waterfalls. It's the whale capital of Central America, with 22 species. The only country where sperm whales live all year round.

Dominican Republic

Situated on the Tropic of Cancer, this is a blend of European, African and native Indian culture. With mountains and valleys, and the lowest point of Lake Enriquillo, this island also has 100 miles of beautiful beaches and 30,000 square miles of lush tropical islands – with more native birds than most places.

Grenada

Known as 'The Isle of Spice', these three islands are famed for food, flowers and calypso music – so musical, the local buses play reggae! The coast is marked by small bays and characteristic white or black sands. No new building can be higher than a palm tree. No doubt the local Grenada Dove is happy about this.

Guadeloupe

These 'butterfly' islands contain 50 beaches (many only reachable by foot). You can find sand of all kinds (white, black or gold), plus pebble beaches, coral reef, palm trees and big surfing waves. At night, millions of frogs sing to you. In the rainforest, listen to sugar birds, black woodpeckers and moorhens.

Haiti

This large island was devastated in 2009 by a huge earthquake, and is still picking up the pieces. The island used to be lush and had suffered beforehand from deforestation. We must help them and their native wildlife. Many North American birds migrate here – indigo buntings, warblers and swallows.

Jamaica

Just 600 miles south of Miami, most people think of Bob Marley, and it's true this is Reggae Country. But it's also a beautiful mountainous land with over 120 rivers and springs, limestone cave labyrinths, gushing waterfalls and mineral springs. Bog Walk is a tropical watershed forest, and another attraction is Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge.

Martinique

One of the 'Windward Islands', this is the Pompeii of the Caribbean, with underwater shipwrecks due to a volcanic eruption in 1902 at Mount Pelee. Elsewhere, mountains are surrounded by dense forest, waterfalls, rolling hills, rivers and coves. In the south, find 'petrified trees' – these are fossils, not scared trees!

Montserrat

Home of cooling trade wind breezes, black sand and magical frangipani and red hibiscus scents, this island was a haven years ago to Irish Catholics. Today they have a shamrock on their passport, celebrate St Patrick's Day and even the 'bam-chick-a-lay' dance looks Irish. Find Montserrat oriole birds and mango, papaya and coconut trees.

Netherlands Antilles

Just off the Venezuelan coast, this is all hills, volcanoes and scenic mountains. Find whiptail lizards basking in the sun, and geckos using their suckers to climb up walls (locally named the 'plakipak' or 'sticky stick'). This is also the home of the Cuchubi – the Caribbean mocking bird.

Puerto Rico

This mountainous country was once covered in rainforest. It's still home to 300 miles of beach and a dry forest filled with cacti. Also home to the little Coqui Frog with his ko-kee chirp, and Rio Camuy – the third largest underground river in the world.

Saint Barthelme (or St Barts)

This small island is most unusual, with a lot of Swedish influence. With 21 beaches, there are warm water sharks, green sea turtles, and migrating whales and dolphins.

Saint Kitts and Nevis

This lush tropical paradise looks more like the South Pacific, and consists of a dormant volcano covered in tropical rainforest. The ground rises up to a cloud forest filled with green velvet monkeys. Full of old plantation houses. Lovely.

Saint Lucia

Set in the middle of the eastern Caribbean, the forest here dominates the mountains, whilst your nose enjoys the scents of jasmine, scarlet chenille and wild orchids. The island is at the top of an underwater volcano, giving great coral reef and marine life like turtles, nurse sharks, seahorses, angel fish, and golden spotted eels.

Saint Martin

This is the smallest Caribbean island. The Simpson Bay lagoon is landlocked, yet large enough to sail in. The surrounding waters contain sea turtles, sharks, rays and octopi.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

These 32 islands together form a lush tropical rainforest and heaven for divers. Containing the oldest botanical gardens in the western hemisphere, you can also see pods of whales and dolphins, green turtles and beautiful birdlife like hummingbirds, whistling warblers and the St Vince Parrot.

Trinidad and Tobago

With more than 450 birds, reptiles, mammals and amphibians (and more than 620 types of butterflies), this is South America in one Caribbean Island. Tobago is smaller but has one of the highest bird densities on earth, and contains the oldest protected rainforest in the world. Trinidad is larger and known for partying and the steel drum.

United States Virgin Islands

Comprising three islands (St Thomas, St Croix and St Jon), these are nicknamed Rock City, Twin City, Love City (and Small City for the local Water Island). The north shore is famed for its seahorses.

Oceania

Clear blue sky, tropical islands, green mountains, hula dances – sounds lush, doesn't it? Oceania includes Australia and New Zealand, plus thousands of isolated islands including Hawaii and Fiji. Aloha!

The Big Islands

Australia

Home to Aborigines who hold the red sandstone Uluru as sacred, this country has a low population and wonderful creatures like kangaroo, koala and platypus. Queensland contains the Great Barrier Reef (the only natural wonder visible from space), which is home to coral, humpback whales, sea turtles and dugongs.

New Zealand

This is a good 1000 miles or so away from Australia. With two islands (North and South), find mountains, volcanoes, hot springs, geysers and fjords. The flightless kiwi bird is a funny little fellow with nostrils on the end of his beak. Other endemic species include the beak-headed reptile Tuatara and the world's smallest 'Hector' dolphin.



The Small Islands

American Samoa

Between New Zealand and Hawaii, this has one of the best-protected harbours in the South Pacific. The rainforests are home to seabirds and many local animals. And people are so happy, they sing on the bus!

Christmas Island

This little island is nearly all rainforest. About 2000 miles from Australia, it is simply a dot on the map. It is surrounded by coral reef and you have probably seen this island on TV wildlife programs – it's here where the native red crabs make their migration down to the coast, to breed and release their eggs into the sea.

Cocos (Keeling) Islands

A colourful island, brimming with dolphins, turtles and seabirds who come to explore. Its close neighbour is Christmas Island (above).

Cook Islands

These 15 islands are spread out over an area the size of India, but with a population of just over 10,000. With their own language and government, no new building can be taller than a palm tree! The sand is white, the lagoons are blue, the pace is slow – even the daily greeting 'kia orana' means 'may you live long'.

Coral Sea Islands

This small group of islands northeast of Australia's Queensland is very remote. Hardly anyone lives here – just research staff monitoring the local birds and turtles.

Fiji

We've all heard of this friendly group of over 300 islands. Famed for coconut trees, hot springs, orchids, sandy beaches and its friendly, softly-spoken people. Local wildlife includes iguanas and lots of beautiful colourful birds. Fijian is a nice language. Say hello 'bula', yes 'io' or coconut 'niu!'

French Polynesia

These 100 islands cover more than 2 million square miles (as large as Europe), and include the island of Tahiti. Famed for friendly people and its native dance and music, some say that Bora Bora may be the most beautiful island on earth. The Tahitian alphabet only contain 13 letters, so say hello ' 'ia orana!'

Guam

A relaxing island in the western Pacific, it's easy to find a white sandy beach with no footprints. The cool breezes and scented flowers make this paradise. Fruits include papaya, guava, limes and mountain apples. Trees include banyan and flaming trees. Jungles are home to deer and water buffalo. Birds include Rose-Crowned Fruit Dove.

Hawaii

Famed for its hula dance, floral garlands and some of the best coffee, there's nowhere on earth like Hawaii – a group of 6 islands, active volcanoes and the world's tallest sea mountain. On the coast find humpback whales, coral reefs, sea turtles and Hawaiian monk seals.

Kiribati

Located around 4000km from Hawaii, this group of over 30 coral islands are shaped in ring-shaped lagoons. The island is a little sanctuary for sea birds like the Phoenix Petrel and the White-Throated Storm Petrel.

Marshall Islands

These 5 islands cover a huge expanse of around one million square miles. The sea is deep blue and the corals are pink. It's one of the most amazing places on earth, with incredible underwater sea life.

Nauru

In the deep blue Pacific Ocean waters lies this tiny island is a 'coral atoll'. It is one of the tiniest nations on earth with just 10,000 people. The local wildlife like it that way, and native sea birds stop to visit. Also here are beautiful frangipani flowers, banana trees and coconut palms.

New Caledonia

Ecologically and biologically important, as this is not a volcanic island, but part of the old super continent Gondwana. This is a swanky island, called 'Paris of the Pacific', as it contains French boutiques.

Niue

This island sounds idyllic! As well as beautiful coasts with whales and dolphins, butterflies flock to undisturbed rainforests and frangipani perfume hangs in the air. Everything shuts at 4pm and there are no translations for 'hurry' or 'rush'.

Norfolk Island

This beautiful island ticks all the boxes: sandy beaches and lush trees. There are no roads, ports or trains, and cows still have right of way!

Northern Mariana Islands

These island contains black sand and smoking volcanoes, and is home to plumeria and 'red flaming' trees, along with bananas, papaya and coconut fruits. Local wildlife includes collared kingfishers, manta rays and turtles – plus astounding coral reef.

Palau

One of the world's most beautiful tropical paradises, here you can find amazing marine life and coral and lakes. Hundreds of islands teem with forests, waterfalls and ancient caves. Heaven!

Papua New Guinea

As we return in the west to looking at local currencies to support small shops, it's good to know that the people here have been trading 'bead money' all along, with great success. North of Australia, this island is home to more than 850 tribes and as many languages, and is famed for its butterflies, moths and 300 types of orchids.

Pitcairn Islands

Only one of these islands is inhabited, and some say it is the most remote place on earth to live! Most are descendents of the Bounty Mutineers and Tahitians who accompanied them. Crystal clear waters, native birds and Christian's Cave.

Samoa

These 10 islands are halfway between New Zealand and Hawaii. Covered in rainforest and volcanic peaks, banyan trees and tropical blooms are everywhere, and waterfalls cascade into local rivers. Relax on the white sandy beach and sip coconut water, whilst watching the graceful Siva Dance. When are we going?

Soloman Islands

A Polynesian paradise of 992 islands, although only around a tenth are inhabited. It's mainly deep mountain forests, with beautiful coral beaches.

Tonga

The first country in the world to greet the new day, this is a happy and religious country, where everything shuts down on Sunday. Elders are given huge respect, everyone sings (including the whales) and church bells ring.

Tuvalu

Nine islands make up the fourth smallest country in the world. Its name means '8 standing together' – the 9th island has only been lived on since the 50s. Coconut palms cover most of the land, with large lagoons and a coral reef to complete.

Vanuatu

Another island with over 100 languages, these 80 plus islands include some of the world's most beautiful rainforests and underwater volcanoes. Local to this island is the 'flowerpot snake'.

Wallis and Futuna

These two little countries are a few hundred kilometres from each other, and are very different. Wallis Island is semi-desert enclosed by a lagoon, whilst Futuna is the beach destination, with a volcano at its centre.

South America

Bordered by the Pacific to the east and the Atlantic to the west, South America is home to the Amazon and the Andes, the world's longest river and mountain chains.

Argentina

Lying between the Andes and Atlantic Ocean, this land of tropical rainforests, beaches, snow-covered mountains and Patagonia (big foot) contains unique wildlife. The far south (near the South Pole) is home to whales, penguins and migrating seabirds.

Bolivia

Famed for its beautiful Inca people playing panpipes. Here you can find sloth, spectacled bear, llama, alpaca, camel, chinchilla, tree lizard, capybara (a large herbivorous rodent), blue morpho butterfly and Andean condor.



Brazil

This large country houses most of the Amazon River Basin, which is home to one third of all the world's wildlife, including beautiful pink river dolphins. There are also beautiful beaches and the world's largest wetlands. Eco-friendly Curitiba city diverts flood waters to create new lakes, and there is 50m² of green space per resident.

Chile

This long narrow country contains the Atacama Desert, the driest place on earth. But wild flamingos here have glands to expel the salty water, so live on the few lakes. The people of Vilcabambo regularly live to 100, and offshore lie the mysterious statues of Easter Island.

Colombia

This contains a little of the Caribbean, Andes, Pacific Coast, Amazon and Orinoco river. The national bird is the Andean Condor, which can fly up to 300km in one day. Columbia contains more species of birds than anywhere on earth. The local Cumba dance involves people dancing in a circle, holding a lit candle in their hands.

Ecuador

This is the smallest country in the Andes, and includes the Amazon and Inca ruins. Locals make the 'panama hat' from plaited toquilla straw. Offshore lie the Galapagos Islands – home to giant tortoises.

Falkland Islands

These islands lie 400 miles off the tip of Argentina. They are home to soaring albatross, elephant seal, walrus, penguin and orca (killer whale). They are also home to the native green spider.

French Guiana

This is small coastal strip of land containing dense rainforest and mountains, near the Brazilian border. It is known for its hot pepper, Cayenne.

Guyana

This Caribbean-like nation is a tropical paradise. It contains 200 types of birds including the blood-coloured woodpecker, crimson fruit crow and rufus-winged ground cuckoo. St Georges Cathedral is one of the tallest wooden churches in South America.

Paraguay

In the heart of Central America, this is a land of steamy subtropical rainforests, packed with butterflies. The locals still speak the native Guarani language. Often called 'South America's forgotten corner', this is packed with amazing wildlife.

Peru

Known to most western children as the home of Paddington Bear 'from darkest Peru', he was inspired by the spectacled bear – the only bear residing in South America. Also find condor, puma, primate, serpent and one in every five of the world's butterflies. Also here is the magical city of Machu Picchu, one of the seven wonders of the world.

Suriname

This tropical paradise is between the Caribbean and South America. It is called 'the beating heart of the Amazon' with its rainforests and jungles, and is influenced by many cultures.

Uruguay

Sharing its land border with Brazil, this mild country is the home of doves: eared, sharp-shinned and tiger-heron. Also popular here are sea lions and golden dorado fish.

Venezuela

On the River Orinoco, this country of wetlands, cloud forests and the world's highest waterfalls (Angel Falls) is rich with wildlife: river dolphin, anaconda, armadillo, jaguar, porcupine, red howler monkey, tapir, anteater, sloth, manatee, coastal crocodile, giant river otter, anteater, giant river otter and spectacled bear.

The End!



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