

# Australia – The Island Continent

A **continent** is a large **landmass** on Earth. There are seven continents on our planet. From smallest to largest in size, they are: Australia, Europe, Antarctica, South America, North America, Africa and Asia.

Asia is the largest continent in terms of population, with approximately 4 billion people. Antarctica is the smallest, with almost 5000 people.

Australia is sometimes called the island continent because it is a large landmass surrounded by oceans. Like Antarctica, it is separated from all of the other six continents by water.

Australia shares important connections with the other continents. It shares some of its history with Europe, and particularly with the countries of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Australia also shares some of its people with other European countries. **Immigrants** from countries such as Italy, Greece and Hungary came to live in Australia after the end of the Second World War in 1945. Immigrants from other European countries and from other continents came too and continue to come to Australia to live today.





Thousands of European immigrants arrived in Australia to start a new life after the Second World War.

## Connections

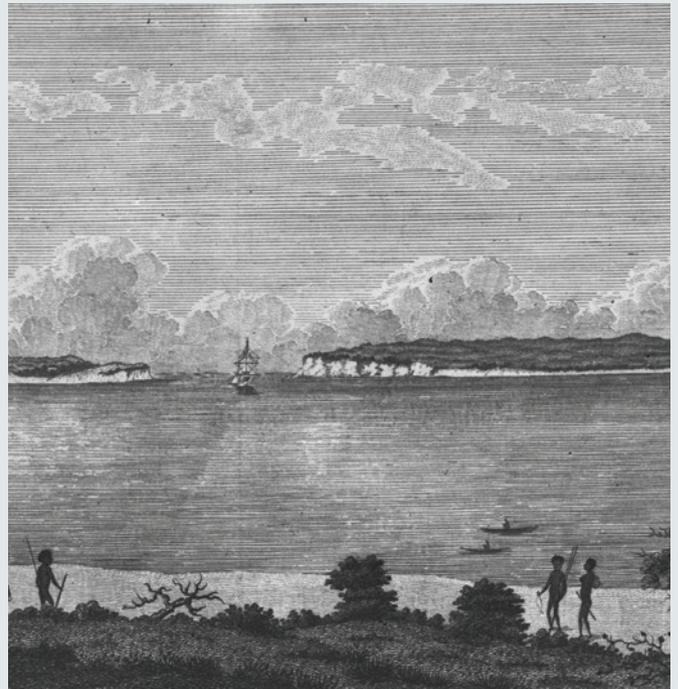
Australia also shares important connections with the continent of North America. Like one of the most significant countries of North America – the United States of America – Australia was a land invaded and then **colonised** by people from far away. Colonisation had far-reaching consequences for the people already living in the land – in Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and in the United States, the Native Americans.

In both Australia and the United States, governments have worked to make peace with the original inhabitants, whose traditional ways of life have been changed forever.

## Environments

It is important to look at the different **environments** of some countries in these continents. In some of these countries, people have changed the environment to make a better life for themselves, but

such change hasn't always benefited the environment. In other countries, people have lived in harmony with their environment, using resources **sustainably**.



The arrival of Europeans changed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' way of life forever.

# North America

The continent of North America is in the Northern Hemisphere. Australia is in the Southern Hemisphere. It takes more than 13 hours to fly from a city on the east coast of Australia to a city on the west coast of North America.

North America is the world's third-largest continent in terms of area. It measures approximately 24 million square kilometres, covering 16.5 per cent of the Earth. Of the estimated 7 billion people living on Earth, 542 million of them live somewhere in North America. This makes North America the fourth-largest continent in terms of population.

## Land

There are 23 countries in North America, but most of the continent is made up of three countries: Canada, the United States of America and Mexico. The continent is bordered in the west by the Pacific Ocean, in the east by the Atlantic Ocean, in the south by the Caribbean Sea and in the north by the Arctic Ocean.

## Mountains

Important mountain ranges in North America are the Rocky Mountains in the west and the Appalachian Mountains in the east. Down through the Rocky Mountains runs the Great Divide, which is North America's great **continental divide**. Mount McKinley in the Alaska Range, in Alaska, is the highest mountain peak in North America. It is 5500 metres high.



Mount McKinley is the highest mountain peak in North America.



The continent of North America

## Climate

Because North America is such a large continent, its **climate** varies a lot. In the north, it is very cold with snow on the ground for many months of the year. In the south, the weather is tropical. The weather for most of the continent, however, is **temperate** and suitable to grow crops for food.

## Rivers

There are many rivers in North America, including the Mississippi, the Yukon and the Churchill. The Mississippi River is the major river of the largest **drainage system** in North America. It flows entirely in the United States of America and is 3770 kilometres long.



The Mississippi River runs from Lake Itasca in the north right down to the Mexican Gulf in the south.

## Influences on The Environment

People have had a major influence on the environment of the North American continent. Today, one of the major influences is **population density**. There are some areas of North America where air pollution rises to dangerous levels because of high population.

In Mexico City, approximately 9 million people live in a land area of 1485 square kilometres. The government has implemented many plans to fix the problem of air pollution, including constant **air monitoring**. If the levels of **pollutants** in the air reach unacceptable levels, factories are closed, school hours are changed and a “day without a car” program runs for two days a week.



Mexico is the fifth-largest country in North America and has the 11th-highest population in the world. It is also the most populated Spanish-speaking country in the world.



The United States is the second-largest country in North America and has the highest population. The country has many spectacular natural features, including the Grand Canyon, which people wish to preserve for future generations to enjoy.