

lonely planet

The World



A Traveller's Guide to the Planet

THE WORLD

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Welcome to the World

Third Rock from the Sun. Mother Earth. The Blue Marble. The spinning ball of rock that is the world goes by many names, but it is also the place that each and every one of us calls home. And wherever it is that you call home, you can be sure that if you travel – near or far – the world will exhibit its overwhelming beauty and diversity. Adventure and inspirational experiences await around every corner, so what’s stopping you? Go forth and explore.

Natural Wonders

Comedian Steven Wright once quipped, ‘You can’t have everything – where would you put it?’ Weighing in at 5.97219×10^{24} kg, and with 149 million sq km of landmass (and another 361 million sq km of ocean), the world has room enough to fit ‘everything’. Amidst all of that ‘everything’ there is so much to discover, from rivers deep, like the Nile (snaking 6850km from central Africa to the Mediterranean), and the sunken shores of the Dead Sea (427m below sea level), to mountains high, like the Himalayas (more than 100 peaks over 7200m, including Everest at 8848m), the Andes and the Alps.

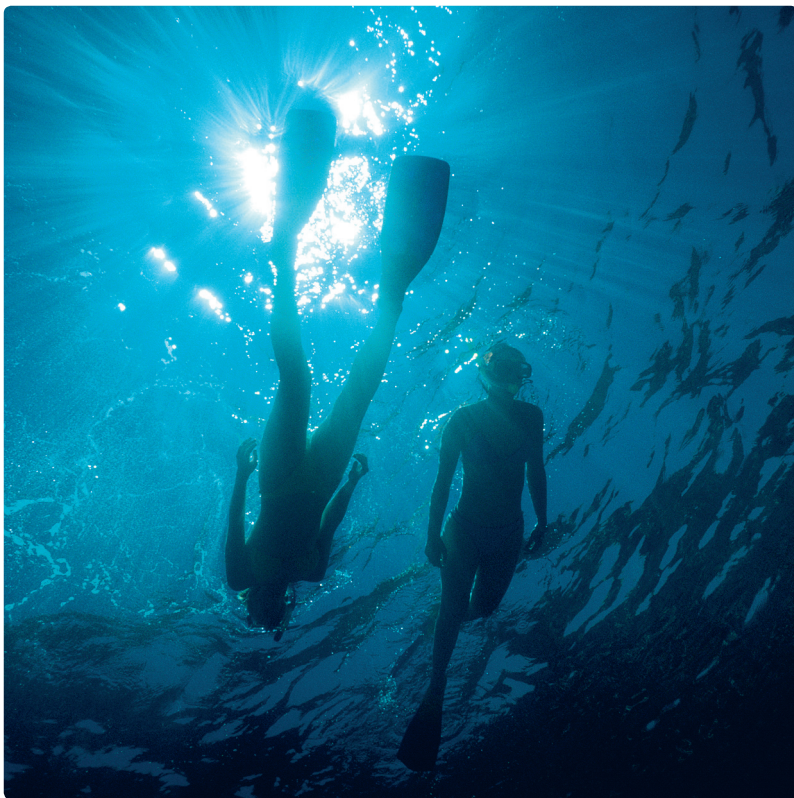
Across seven continents and 221 countries, ‘everything’ takes plenty of wondrous forms. There are mighty expanses of greenery, like the Amazon basin (7 million sq km of jungle), while beneath the crystal-clear Pacific Ocean lies the Great Barrier Reef (stretching 2300km), and the scarred hide of the Grand Canyon is a repository of 2 billion years of geological history.

Not all the world’s wonders are inanimate, however. Wildlife spectacles include the annual wildebeest migration (two million strong) across the Serengeti, the stoic emperor penguins of Antarctica, and the diverse menagerie on the Galapagos Islands, where people seem out of place.

Spectacular Cities

It is people, not animals, who have colonised the entire planet. Since foregoing stone tools, inventing the wheel (3300BC) and first smelting iron (1200BC), humankind has embarked on a big production number that features countless cultures, civilisations and empires. History suggests that humans were naturally inclined to warfare but also – more positively – to congregating and cohabiting, thus, over time the city was born.

More than half of the world’s population now live in cities. They are the pulsating beacons that attract us, with their bright lights and human interaction, epicentres of culture, industry and endeavour. And each has its own distinctive character: New York with its skyscrapers and taxicabs, London with its parks, pubs and palaces, Sydney with its bridge and Cape Town set against the rugged panorama of Table Mountain. A tour of urban conurbations will take you to geographical oddities (Istanbul straddling the border of Europe and Asia), and cities of faith (Jerusalem, holy to Judaism, Islam and Christianity), cities with thousands of years of history (Athens, Damascus, Varanasi) and booming new cities mushrooming across Asia, Africa and South America.



Heron Island, Great Barrier Reef, Australia

Man-Made Marvels

Cities may be the hubs that you pass through as you roam, but they are not necessarily humankind's greatest achievements. These are many and dispersed, assuming myriad physical forms.

Mystery clings to many, such as the Great Pyramid of Giza built in 2560BC, the Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an and the mighty stone *moai* of Easter Island. Others no less awe inspiring were built for specific purposes, like St Basil's Cathedral in the Kremlin, the Great Wall of China, and the Taj Mahal, a monument to love. More modern spectacles like the architectural extravaganzas of Dubai and the Shanghai skyline may lack the gravity of history but if anything are more dazzling.

All of these monuments contribute to the ways of life that go on around them, which reminds us that not all of human-

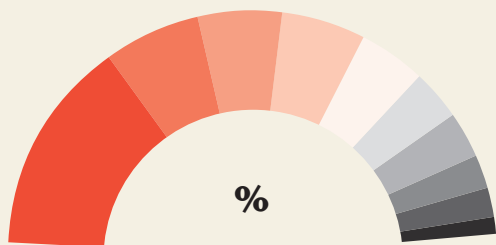
kind's achievements are tangible. Just as intoxicating and just as worth getting out and seeing are cultures, festivals and events, from Viennese coffeehouse culture to Cuban jazz, from full moon parties on Koh Samui to Maasai warrior dances under an African sunset.

There is all this and plenty more besides to be encountered as you venture into the world. This book can act as inspiration and as a first step on your own voyage of discovery. Listed here is every country; each includes enough of a taste of its top sites and experiences to get your feet itchy, basic practical information to help you start planning, and a map to help you plot a rough itinerary. Where exactly you want to go and how you proceed from here is entirely up to you, but we encourage you to get out there and do it!

Need to Know

Most widely spoken languages

If you can speak one or more of the following languages, you can communicate with these percentages of the world's population.



- ▲ Mandarin 14.4%
- ▲ Spanish 6.2%
- ▲ English 5.4%
- ▲ Hindi/Urdu 5.7%
- △ Arabic 4.4%
- △ Portuguese 3.3%
- △ Bengali 3.1%
- ▲ Russian 2.3%
- ▲ Japanese 1.9%
- ▲ French 1.1%

Languages

It's the babble of Babel out there! There are almost 7000 languages spoken in the world today. These are divided into six major language families, and around 130 smaller ones. The distribution of languages across the globe reflects movements of people through history, and language families include some unlikely relatives: for example, Albanian is related to English, Hindi, Persian and Russian. The size of countries

and populations don't necessarily account for numbers of languages, either: in New Guinea almost 450 languages are spoken by a population of only 3.5 million people.

It's estimated that half of the world's population speaks more than one language. Fear not if you don't: a smile can go a long way, even amongst people you share no language with. That said, learning a few words of the language spoken at your destination can open a lot of doors.

Time

We all know that as the world orbits the sun, the planet is also spinning, meaning that for some of us the sun is setting, and for others it is rising. So, when it is bedtime in Sydney, locals will be reaching for a late-afternoon chai in Mumbai, lunching in London or getting ready to rise in New York. To make life easier, the world is divided into time zones.

Time zones

The clever fellows at London's Royal Observatory saw to it that from the 1880s Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) was adopted as the global reference time. Each time zone is designated as either being + or – whole numbers of hours (or half hours) from GMT. In 1972, Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) replaced GMT (it works the same way, but UTC accounts for stray 'leap seconds').

Websites

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Travel portal

Time and date (www.timeanddate.com) Time differences

XE (www.xe.com) Currency conversion

world time zones

VANCOUVER
SAN FRANCISCO
LOS ANGELES

WASHINGTON
NEW YORK
BOSTON

-12 -11 -10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0
GMT

MEXICO CITY
DALLAS

SÃO PAULO
RIO DE JANEIRO

DUBLIN
LONDON

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