

NORTH AMERICA

North America is massive and there is a huge amount to find out about here. From polar bears in the treeless [Arctic tundra](#) of Greenland and [Canada](#), to the sun-kissed beaches and coral of [St Lucia](#) in the Caribbean. It is a striking and very varied continent.

From east to west the cities of Boston and Los Angeles, or Port-Au-Prince and Portland, Oregon, don't appear to have much in common, but they are all found in the same land, North America.

North America is a vast continent and is home to more than 528 million people.



Grand Canyon, USA

It is made up of lots of different countries. The biggest is Canada, the world's second largest country in the world after Russia.



Spirit Island, Canada

North America's smallest country is St Kitts and Nevis, made up of a pair of tiny islands in the West Indies. Can you guess what each one is called?



St Kitts and Nevis beach

North America is made up of three big areas or regions: Central America; the Caribbean; and, finally, Mexico, USA, Canada plus Greenland (known as Northern America).



Chichen Itza, Mexico

Many wonderful animals, volcanoes and rainforests can be found in Central America.



Blue Morpho butterfly, Costa Rica



The Pitons, St Lucia

The USA is made up of 50 states, the biggest state is Alaska.



Statue of Liberty, USA

On the national flag of the USA, the stars represent each state.



Night time in Las Vegas

Canada is home to the Rocky Mountains and the brown and black bear.



Black Bear

It also has a longer coastline than any other country in the world.



Rocky Mountains, Canada

Facts about North America

- **Population:** more than half a billion people!
- **Land Mass:** 24,680,330 square kilometres (or 95,29,130 square miles). This is the third largest continent after [Asia](#) which takes the gold medal for size while [Africa](#) takes the silver.
- **Countries:** 23
- **Highest Peak:** the USA's [Denali](#) rises to 6,168 metres (20,237 feet) above sea level.
- **Largest Lake:** Lake Superior is 82,100 square kilometres (31,700 square miles) in area, about the same size as the country of Panama. It's the largest lake in the world!
- **Longest River:** The [Mississippi River](#) is 5,960 kilometres (3,700 miles) long.
- **Smallest Country (by land area and population):** [St Kitts and Nevis](#), a two-island nation in the Caribbean.
- **Biggest Country (by land area):** [Canada](#) is close to 10 million square kilometres in size. The [UK](#) could fit inside its borders forty times over!
- **Largest Nation (of people):** the USA is home to almost 312 million, more than half of the population of North America.
- **Languages:** English, Spanish and French are most commonly spoken. In the Canadian state of Quebec four of every five people speak French at home.

On the border of the [USA](#) and [Canada](#), the spell-binding [Niagara Falls](#) is one of the most visited natural wonders of North America. Also super popular with tourists are the USA's awesome Grand Canyon and the [rainforests](#) of Costa Rica. The Tortuguero National Park is simply bursting with wonderful wildlife.



Niagara Falls



Grand Canyon, USA



Red-eyed tree frog, Costa Rica

While in [Mexico's Chichén Itzá](#) and in the modern day American cities of New York and Las Vegas tourists get a flavour of this continent's human history, culture and architecture.



Chichén Itzá, Mexico

Maple syrup poured over pancakes, chocolate-chip cookies and coconuts are all likely to leave you with a sweet taste in your mouth when thinking about this continent.

Food production is big business here. Most of North America's Prairies or [grasslands](#) have been converted into farmland for cereals like maize or wheat, after all this continent has a lot of people to feed.



Harvest time in North America

Mexico grows millions of tonnes of sugarcane each year and numerous Caribbean countries earn a living, in part, by exporting fruit to the rest of the world. Banana farmer Regina Joseph living in Dominica spoke to Odd and Izzi about farming and Fairtrade.



Regina Joseph, Dominica

Oil and other raw materials like metal ores and timber are sold here but cutting-edge technology also finds a home on this continent.

Information and communication technology companies like Google, Yahoo, Apple, Intel and Microsoft have between them changed the world from their North American base. If the networking site Facebook were a country it would be the third largest by population, so there's no doubting this continent's influence!



North Americans design software

'The American dream' that everyone, from whatever family, race or religion, has the opportunity to work hard and be successful here is an attractive idea that has drawn millions of migrants to the USA and Canada over many decades. The mix of people and languages spoken today in these countries reflects the waves of immigrants that have arrived from Europe, elsewhere in North America like Mexico, and more recently Asia.



Ellis Island, New York

On Ellis Island you can visit a fascinating museum dedicated to the twelve million immigrants who passed through the national immigration station established here in the nineteenth century. The job of the immigration station was to register newcomers to the country before they began a new life in the USA.

The personal details of immigrants were collected here, a place known as 'America's Golden Door', for more than sixty years and the museum holds an archive containing moving and surprising stories of these hopeful travellers.

The population of North America is not evenly spread over its land, for example one fifth of the US citizens live on one fiftieth of the country, in a region bordering the Atlantic Ocean between Boston and capital city Washington DC. Why do you think so many people live so close to the sea in this vast continent?



Boston is on the Atlantic coast

A home near the coast can be great for trade, or just handy for surfing, but it is on the seashore in North America that humans and nature can come to blows.

It is in Caribbean countries like Jamaica, along with the USA, that the population was radically changed by the brutal slave trade. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries millions of Africans were forcibly shipped to what was then the New World to work on plantations for their European masters.



Old slave huts, South Carolina, USA

Pssst Secret Fact: Far back in history Native Americans or the so-called ‘first peoples’ are thought to have arrived from Asia via a land bridge with this neighbouring continent during the last ice age. Their numbers were drastically reduced when contact with European settlers exposed them to new diseases like smallpox. But today the lands and people of Native America are protected. Five hundred Native American tribes are recognised in the USA and more than 600 in Canada.

The Inuit are the aborigines of the Arctic regions of Greenland, Canada and the USA. These resourceful people used to survive by fishing and hunting whale, walrus and caribou and today work hard to preserve some of these traditional skills.



Inukshuk statue, Whistler, Canada

Against the backdrop of the dark winter months experienced in this harsh [polar climate](#) the Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights inspired fantastical myths and legends that were told by the Inuit, about invisible giants and the spirits of animals. Even now, for the thousands of tourists who flock to the Arctic region between September and March each year, it is a truly amazing atmospheric lightshow. This continent has the natural wow factor!



Northern Lights