



From North to South America, explore the great variety of the Western Hemisphere

Views of the Americas





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From North to South America, explore the great variety of the Western Hemisphere



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Views of the Americas

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Who built Machu Picchu? Why is the United States called a melting pot?

What's an isthmus? How does the Panama Canal work?

In *Views of the Americas*, you'll discover answers to these questions and many more. Through pictures, articles, and fun facts, you'll learn about many of the countries and cities of North, Central, and South America.

To help you on your journey, we've provided the following guideposts in *Views of the Americas*:

■ **Subject Tabs**—The colored box in the upper corner of each right-hand page will quickly tell you the article subject.

■ **Search Lights**—Try these mini-quizzes before and after you read the article and see how much—and how quickly—you can learn. You can even make this a game with a reading partner. (Answers are upside down at the bottom of one of the pages.)

■ **Did You Know?**—Check out these fun facts about the article subject. With these surprising “factoids,” you can entertain your friends, impress your teachers, and amaze your parents.

■ **Picture Captions**—Read the captions that go with the photos. They provide useful information about the article subject.

■ **Vocabulary**—New or difficult words are in **bold type**. You'll find them explained in the Glossary at the end of the book.

■ **Learn More!**—Follow these pointers to related articles in the book. These articles are listed in the Table of Contents and appear on the Subject Tabs.

■ **Maps**—You'll find lots of information in this book's many maps.

■ The **Country Maps** point out national capitals. **Globes** beside Subject Tabs show where countries are located in the world.

■ The **Continent Maps** have a number key showing the location of all countries.

■ The **Icons** on the maps highlight major geographic features and climate. Here's a key to what the map icons mean:



Deserts and Other Dry Areas



Rainforests



Polar Regions and Other Frozen Areas



General Forests



Mountains



The Amazon is home to many different types of wildlife, including the green-cheeked Amazon parrot.

© Eric and David Hosking/Corbis

Views of the Americas

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3

NORTH AMERICA

North America: Land of Plenty 6

Greenland: Frozen Island 8

Canada: The Land of Long Winters 10

Ottawa, Canada: A Welcoming Northern Capital . . 12

Quebec, Canada: La Belle Province 14

United States of America: Melting Pot

of Many Cultures 16

Honolulu, U.S.: Crossroads of the Pacific 18

New York City, U.S.: The Great Culture Mart 20

MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA

Mexico: Ring of Fire 22

Mexico City, Mexico: Sinking City of Palaces 24

Central America: The Isthmus Nations 26

Guatemala: Land of the Quetzal 28

Nicaragua: Volcanoes and Earthquakes

in Central America 30

Panama City, Panama: Land of Many Fish 32

Panama Canal: A Major World Waterway 34

Puerto Rico: Jewel of the Caribbean 36

Cuba: Sugarcane and Politics 38

SOUTH AMERICA

South America: The Unknown Continent 40

Amazon: A Close Look at River Life 42

Andes: World-Class Mountains 44

Colombia: Columbus' South American Namesake . . . 46

Peru: Land of the Inca 48

Machu Picchu: Secret of the Andes 50

Brazil: Half of South America 52

Paraguay: The Once-Forgotten Land 54

Chile: A Long and Narrow Land 56

Easter Island: Land of Giants 58

Argentina: Home of the Gaucho 60

GLOSSARY 62

INDEX 63



Have a great trip!

COUNTRIES OF NORTH AMERICA

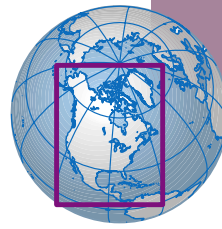
- 1. Canada**
- 2. Greenland**
- 3. Mexico**
- 4. United States**
- 5. West Indies**
- 6. Central America***

*Countries of Central America are Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama (see page 44)
U.S. state of Hawaii off map



Dzoonokwa Totem Pole in Thunderbird Park, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.
© Gunter Marx Photography/Corbis

Morning light on Mount Rushmore, South Dakota, U.S.
© Paul A. Souders/Corbis



Land of Plenty

North America is the third largest continent. Three countries—Canada, the United States, and Mexico—make up most of it. The countries of Central America are also usually considered part of North America. They occupy a narrow strip of land that connects North America to South America. Several islands, including Greenland in the north and the West Indies in the south, are part of North America too.

Because it's so large, the continent has many different types of climate. Most of Greenland is covered with ice all the time—even in summer. But the southern islands and countries are usually hot and humid. In between there are both deserts and rainy areas, but most places have warm summers and cold winters.

North America is rich in **natural resources**. Forests cover a large part of the land. The **fertile** soils of Canada, the United States, and Mexico produce large amounts of corn, cotton, soybeans, tobacco, wheat, and other crops. The continent is also rich in minerals such as coal, iron ore, copper, natural gas, **petroleum**, and silver.

The history of the continent goes back thousands of years. Scientists believe that people from Asia crossed over to Alaska more than 20,000 years ago and then moved southward. Their **descendants** eventually established great civilizations, such as that of the Maya in Central America and the Aztec in Mexico. The first Europeans in the region were the Vikings, who settled in Greenland in about the 900s. It wasn't until 1492 that explorers from other parts of Europe began to arrive.



According to scientists, who were the first people to settle in North America?

- a) Africans
- b) Europeans
- c) Asians

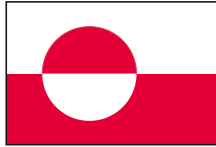
LEARN MORE! READ THESE ARTICLES...

CANADA • MEXICO • UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DID YOU KNOW?
More dinosaur fossils have been found in North America than on any other continent.



Frozen Island



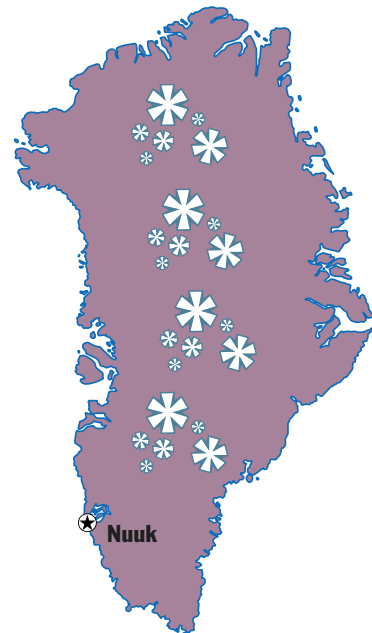
Greenland is the world's largest island. It sits in the North Atlantic Ocean between Iceland (to the east) and the islands of the Canadian north (to the west). Most of Greenland lies within the Arctic Circle. Its northern tip is only 500 miles from the North Pole. The capital city is Nuuk.

Greenland is almost entirely covered in ice. In some places the ice is 10,000 feet thick. Some of the ice is so deep that it is actually below the level of the sea around the island. The people live on the seacoast highlands that are free of ice. Greenland's open land is called "**tundra**." There are very few trees. Grasses, grasslike plants called sedges, and mosslike lichens are the main plants.

The weather in Greenland is cold and may change quickly from sunshine to blizzards. Normal winter temperatures are 21° F in the south and -31° F in the north. Even in the warmest parts of the island, summer temperatures hover around 45° F.

Aside from people, only seven kinds of **mammals** brave Greenland's cold weather on land. They are polar bears, musk-oxen, reindeer, arctic foxes, snow hares, ermines, and lemmings. Seals and whales gather in the ocean waters, and Greenlanders once depended on them for food. Nowadays they are more likely to fish for cod, salmon, flounder, and halibut.

Most Greenlanders are of Inuit (Eskimo) **heritage**. They moved there from North America between 4000 BC and AD 1000. In the early 1700s Denmark **colonized** Greenland, and the Danes still control it today.



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CANADA • NORTH AMERICA • OTTAWA, CANADA



DID YOU KNOW?

The first European settlement in Greenland was founded in 986 by the Viking explorer Erik the Red. About 15 years later, his son Leif Eriksson sailed west from Greenland and became one of the first Europeans to reach North America.



Fishing boats are moored in a harbor in Sisimiut, Greenland.

© Deanna Swaney/Lonely Planet Images



Most of Greenland's surface is covered by

- rice.
- ice.
- trees.



The Land of Long Winters



Canada is the second largest country in the world in terms of land size, after Russia. But it has fewer people than many other countries that are much smaller. This is because much of Canada is a very cold place with long winters. In the northern islands it is often freezing cold even in summer.

Canada has a low **population** for its size. It is one of the world's wealthier countries. Much of the country's wealth lies in its many mines and forests. Minerals such as coal, copper, nickel, and iron ore are found in the mines. Farming is also very important. Canada grows a large amount of grain. It sells a lot of wheat and other products to other countries.

Most Canadians live in towns and cities. Toronto is the largest city in Canada. If you went there, you could see one of the world's tallest structures, the CN Tower, soaring above the skyline. Montreal is one of Canada's oldest cities and has many historical buildings. It also has an important seaport, even though it is nearly 1,000 miles from the Atlantic Ocean!

Canada's official languages are English and French. But many other languages are spoken there, including Inuktitut (the language of the Inuit, or Eskimos) and other Canadian Indian languages. Canadian Indians are also known as First Nations people.

If you visit Canada, you should try to see Niagara Falls. These beautiful waterfalls, on the border between Canada and the United States, were once one of the most famous honeymoon spots in North America.



What is the only country larger than Canada?

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NORTH AMERICA • OTTAWA, CANADA • QUEBEC, CANADA

Banff National Park in Alberta is one of Canada's major tourist destinations.

© David Muench/Corbis

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Churchill, Manitoba, on Hudson Bay, is sometimes called "the polar bear capital of the world." Every fall thousands of bears gather along the shore, waiting for it to freeze so that they can walk out onto the ice to hunt seals.



A Welcoming Northern Capital

Ottawa, the capital of Canada, is one of the country's most attractive cities. It is located on the south side of the Ottawa River in the province of Ontario. Across the river is the province of Quebec.

Since Ottawa is the center of the country's government, it is the public face of Canada for many people. The city has been kept lovely and welcoming. It has many parks and rivers, bicycle paths, museums, art galleries, and universities. Some of Ottawa's historic buildings go back to the early 1800s. The Château Laurier is one of these. It is a house built in the



Château Laurier, Ottawa, Ontario.
© Richard T. Nowitz/Corbis

style of a grand French **château**. Behind it rises Major's Hill Park, Ottawa's oldest park. This is the best place to view the city and to see up and down the Ottawa River.

Dozens of different languages are spoken in Ottawa. But most people speak either French or English, the official languages of Canada.

Many years ago French explorers and hunters traveled through the area that is now Ottawa. Only a few people lived there until the early 1800s. By that time the British ruled the territory. They decided they wanted a route for their ships to be able to travel from the Ottawa River to Lake Ontario, so they built the Rideau Canal. The city of Ottawa began as a base for the workers who built the **canal**. It was called Bytown then but later became Ottawa. It became the capital of Canada in the mid-1800s.

LEARN MORE! READ THESE ARTICLES...

CANADA • NORTH AMERICA • QUEBEC, CANADA



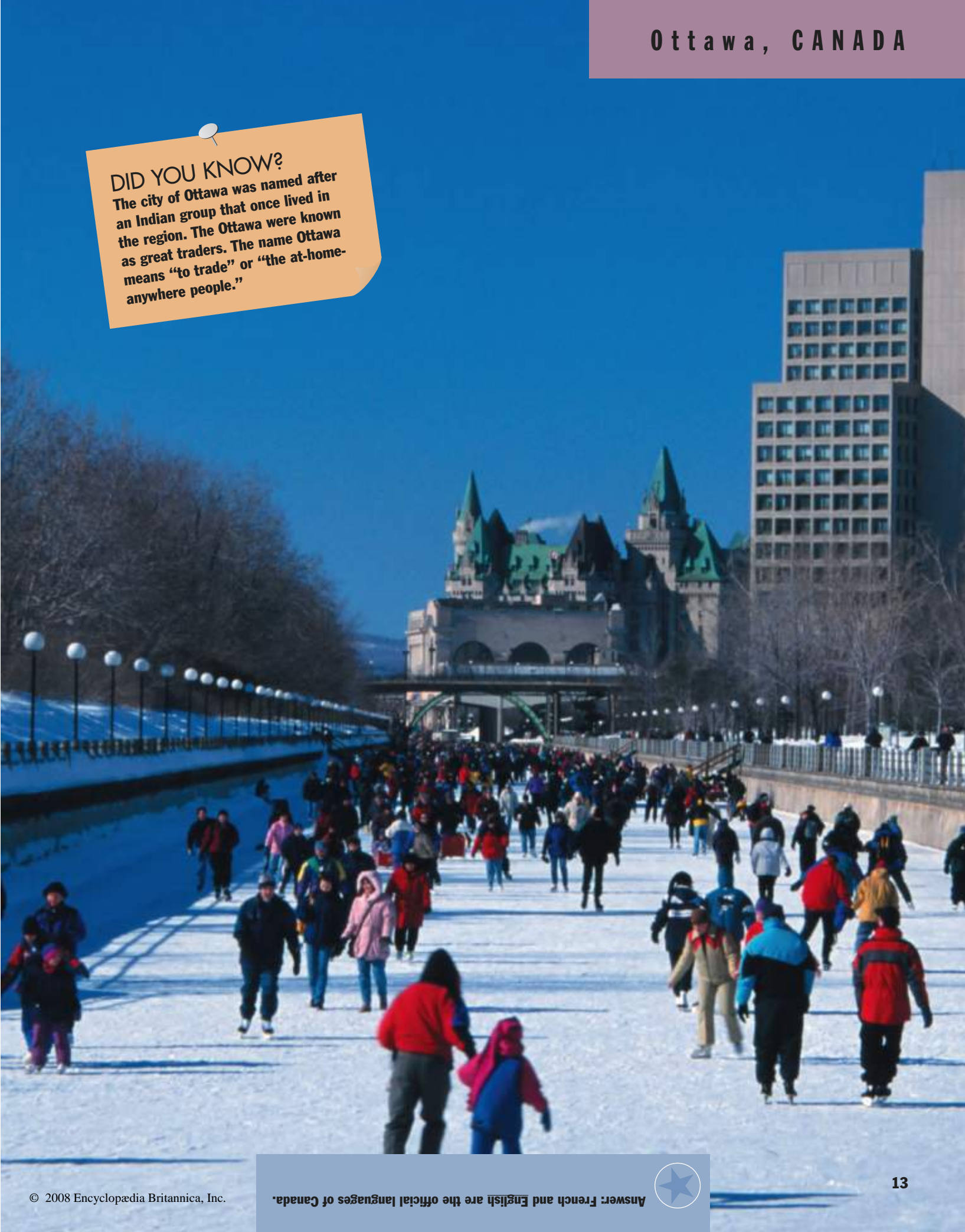
**Find and correct the error in the following sentence:
French and Canadian are the official languages of Canada.**

The Rideau Canal in Ottawa is the world's longest outdoor ice-skating rink.

© Cheryl Conlon/Lonely Planet Images

DID YOU KNOW?

The city of Ottawa was named after an Indian group that once lived in the region. The Ottawa were known as great traders. The name Ottawa means "to trade" or "the at-home-anywhere people."





DID YOU KNOW?

The Magdalen Islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence are one of Quebec's most popular vacation spots. People come to see the islands' many birds and mammals, especially the seals, who arrive every spring to have their young.

La Belle Province

Quebec is both the oldest and the largest in land area of Canada's ten provinces. It's the home of two attractive port cities and a countryside that is covered with forests, rivers, and lakes. No wonder it's known in French as La Belle Province, "the beautiful province."

Quebec City is the capital of Quebec province and the oldest city in Canada. It lies at the point where the St. Lawrence and Saint-Charles rivers meet. The name Quebec comes from the Algonquian Indian word for "where the river narrows." About 150 miles southwest of Quebec City is Montreal, the largest city in the province. It's also Canada's second largest city.



Ice cream sign written in French and English, in Quebec City.

© Richard T. Nowitz/Corbis

The first European to visit the area was Jacques Cartier of France. In 1534 he landed at the site of a Huron Indian village. But it was another 70 years before the French settled in the area. In 1608 Samuel de Champlain founded the city of Quebec, establishing the first permanent **colony** in the region. It served as a fur-trading post for beaver, mink, and other pelts.

During the next 150 years, the French and British fought over Quebec and Montreal. Eventually, a treaty in 1763 granted the area to the British. During the American Revolution, the American colonists tried to seize control of the area. But the British held onto it.

Eight out of every ten people in Quebec are of French **ancestry**. Because of this, both French and English are spoken in Quebec. The people of the province also practice different religions. Generally, the people of French origins are Roman Catholic and those of English origins are Protestant.



What does "Quebec" mean?

LEARN MORE! READ THESE ARTICLES...

CANADA • NORTH AMERICA • OTTAWA, CANADA

There are many beautiful buildings in the Old Quebec historic area of Quebec City. The historic hotel Château Frontenac towers over the area.

© Ron Watts/Corbis

Answer: It's an Algonquian Indian word for "where the river narrows."



Melting Pot of Many Cultures

Dear Class,

We are in Boston, on the northeastern coast of the United States, visiting my brother Rex after a few busy days of sightseeing. We've already been to New York City and Niagara Falls. Later we're going to take a look at the Grand Canyon, Hollywood, and Disneyland. Rex teaches history in one of the universities here. He's invited some of his friends to meet us. One of



Italian immigrants arriving at New York's Ellis Island.

© Bettmann/Corbis

them is from Austria, and another is from Poland. The rest are from Japan, India, and Italy. I tell him that I'm confused. "Don't you have any American friends?" I ask Rex.

He laughs. "They're all Americans."

Helmut, his friend from Austria, says, "Didn't you know that America has people from all over the world?"

"That's why people often describe America as a 'melting pot' of many cultures," says Tajima, from Japan.

"People come here for many reasons. Some become citizens. But students from all over the world also come here to study. I have students from Indonesia, Australia, Iran, and even Iceland in my college," says Rex.

"But who were the first to come here?" Rex's Indian friend, Samir, says the first people who came here were from Asia, more than 20,000 years ago. The American Indians (Native Americans) are their **descendants**. About 500 years ago, Spanish settlers arrived from Europe. Other Europeans followed—from England, Ireland, and Germany and then from Italy, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Greece, and elsewhere. People from Africa were first brought over as slaves. People from every corner of the world have made America what it is today.

Tonight we're going out for a Lebanese meal. I can't wait!

Your classmate,

Lydia

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CANADA • NEW YORK CITY, U.S. • NORTH AMERICA

SEARCH LIGHT

Fill in the blank with the correct phrase: When people call America a “melting pot,” they mean people from _____ live there.



New U.S. citizens recite the Pledge of Allegiance during a ceremony held in Orange Bowl Stadium in Miami, Florida.
© Bettmann/Corbis

DID YOU KNOW?
Christopher Columbus often gets credit as having been the first European in the Americas. But many researchers believe he was about 500 years too late. They think Leif Ericson, the Viking explorer, landed in North America first.



Waikiki Beach, with Diamond Head in the background, is the center for tourism in Honolulu. There are many big resorts along the beach, and people come from all over the world to enjoy swimming and surfing in the waters of the Pacific Ocean.



**Diamond Head
is a:**

- a) sunken battleship.**
- b) rare gem.**
- c) crater of a volcano.**

Crossroads of the Pacific

It is said that no place on Earth has better weather than Honolulu. In the course of an entire year, the temperature rarely gets below 57° or above 88° F. And the sun is usually shining. Honolulu is the capital of Hawaii, a state made up of islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Hawaii became the 50th American state in 1959.



Iolani Palace, Honolulu, Hawaii.
© Michael T. Sedam/Corbis

Honolulu is on Oahu Island. Like Hawaii's other large islands, Oahu formed from material that spewed up from volcanoes on the ocean floor. Diamond Head, the crater, or center, of an old volcano, is one of the best-known landmarks in the Pacific. It got the name Diamond Head when some British sailors found crystals on its slopes and mistakenly thought they were diamonds!

Polynesian people from other Pacific islands were probably the first settlers in Honolulu, but Europeans did not arrive until 1794. That is when Captain William Brown of the British ship *Butterworth* entered the harbor.

Today the modern city of Honolulu is a major port. In the Hawaiian language, its name means "protected bay." It is also called "the crossroads of the Pacific" because of the many ships and airplanes that stop there.

Sun, sand, and sea attract many tourists to Waikiki Beach. Most visitors also go to see the USS *Arizona*, a sunken battleship. It was left in place as a memorial to all the people who died in Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. This attack is what brought the United States into World War II.

DID YOU KNOW?
There are only 12 letters in the Hawaiian alphabet. A, E, I, O, and U are the vowels, and H, K, L, M, N, P, and W are the consonants.

LEARN MORE! READ THESE ARTICLES...

NORTH AMERICA • PUERTO RICO • UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



The Great Culture Mart

Many people describe New York City as the center of culture in the United States. That's because no matter what you're interested in, you'll find it in New York. Whether it's theater, music, ballet, or museums, the city has some of the very best to offer.

The street called Broadway in New York became the center of American theater in the mid-19th century. The number, size, and fame of the Broadway theaters grew as New York City grew. In the 1890s the brilliantly lit street became known as "the Great White Way." Beyond these theaters the city offers free performances of the plays of William Shakespeare in Central Park. Operas and concerts are also held in the park.



Dinosaur skeletons on exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History.

© Michael S. Yamashita/Corbis

New York City has a number of world-class spaces for performances of all kinds. The city's concert halls include those at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts as well as Carnegie Hall and Radio City Music Hall. The groups that perform in these halls include the Metropolitan Opera, the New York City Opera, and the New York **Philharmonic**. The New York City Ballet also performs at the Lincoln Center, in the New York State Theater.

Museums are another important part of New York City's cultural life. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Guggenheim Museum are among the city's art museums. You can also spend many hours in the American Museum of Natural History and its Rose Center for Earth and Space Science. With all of these resources there is always plenty to do in New York City.

LEARN MORE! READ THESE ARTICLES...

MEXICO CITY, MEXICO • NORTH AMERICA • UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



Fill in
the blanks:
Carnegie Hall is a
famous _____
in New York City.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is a favorite spot for visitors and New Yorkers alike. More than 5 million people visit the museum each year.

© Bob Krist/Corbis

DID YOU KNOW?

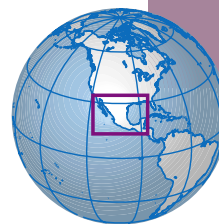
The Brooklyn Children's Museum was one of the world's first museums designed specifically for children. It was also one of the first to offer interactive activities for children.





DID YOU KNOW?

The Aztec introduced the Spanish conquistadores to chocolate and other foods that soon became favorites around the world after the conquistadores brought them back to Europe.



Ring of Fire



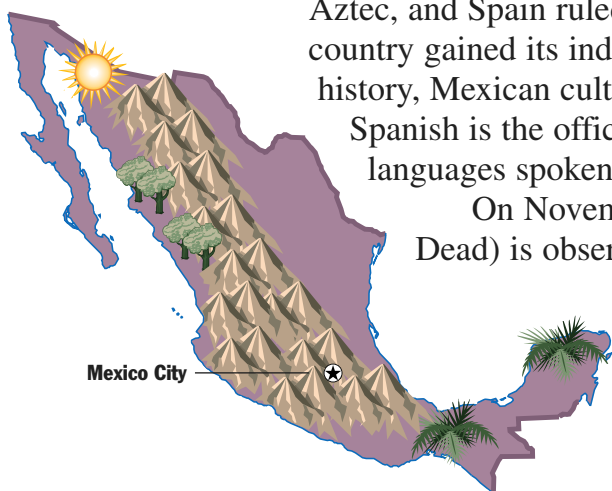
Mexico is a large North American country with ancient cities, beautiful beaches, and snow-capped mountains. Many of the mountains are volcanoes. They are part of the “Ring of Fire,” a chain of volcanoes that form a circle around the Pacific Ocean.

The mountains are just one part of Mexico’s diverse **geography**, which also includes deserts, grasslands, and tropical forests. The tropical forests, in southern Mexico, are home to such animals as monkeys, parrots, and jaguars. Deer, coyotes, snakes, and armadillos are found in the dry north.

Mexico’s history goes back thousands of years. The native Indian Olmec were the first to establish a **civilization** in what is now Mexico. They lived in central Mexico from about 1200 to 400 BC. The Maya, Toltec, and Aztec later built their own cities. The Aztec city of Tenochtitlán was built on the site of what is now Mexico City, the country’s capital.

In the 1500s Spanish conquistadores (soldiers) took over from the Aztec, and Spain ruled Mexico for several hundred years. The country gained its independence in the early 1900s. Because of this history, Mexican culture is part Indian and part Spanish. Although Spanish is the official language, there are about 50 other local languages spoken.

On November 2, the Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is observed. Also called All Souls’ Day, it is a time when families visit the graves of their dead ancestors. Another popular holiday is Cinco de Mayo (May 5), which celebrates a Mexican victory against an invading French army.



Find and correct the error in the following sentence:
Mexico is part of the “Ring of Gold,” the circle of volcanoes that rings the Pacific Ocean.

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CANADA • MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The tower of the Great Palace and surrounding ruins are part of an ancient city in Mexico built by the Mayan people.

© ML Sinibaldi/Corbis



DID YOU KNOW?
Mexico City has more than 350 distinct *colonias*, or neighborhoods. The city is so large that when you take a taxi, you have to tell the driver the *colonia* of your destination as well as the street address!



The center of Mexico City is a plaza popularly known as the Zócalo. The plaza is surrounded by many splendid public buildings.

© Randy Farris/Corbis

Sinking City of Palaces

Mexico City is the capital of Mexico and one of the world's largest cities, with more than 8 million people. It was founded in 1325 as the capital of the Aztec people. The Aztec city was called Tenochtitlán, which



The floating gardens of Xochimilco.
© Peter M. Wilson/Corbis

means “Place of the High Priest Tenoch.”

Tenochtitlán was built on small islands in Lake Texcoco. After Spanish conquerors arrived in the 16th century they began draining the lake in order to use the land. Today most of the water is gone, but the soil is soft and some of the city's streets and buildings are sinking. Since 1900 the city has sunk about 30 feet!

Mexico City is high above sea level—about 7,350 feet. However, it is surrounded by mountain ranges that are much higher. Dust and smoke from cars, fires, and factories are trapped by the mountains and pollute the city's air. The city also lies within an earthquake zone. An earthquake in 1985 destroyed many buildings and killed thousands of people. But most of the city's ancient monuments and palaces remained unharmed.

Many of these monuments are located around a plaza called the Zócalo. They include the National Palace and the Metropolitan **Cathedral**. In another part of the city Chapultepec Park includes a castle, a zoo, and an amusement park. The Pink Zone (“Zona Rosa”) is one of Mexico City's main tourist and entertainment areas. It is the home of orchestras, art galleries, museums, theater groups, and dance companies.

Another interesting area to visit is Xochimilco, with its floating gardens. These are rafts made out of reeds on which plants and flowers are grown. The famous Aztec pyramids of Teotihuacán are located northeast of the city.



Mexico City
was founded by
a) the Aztec.
b) the Inca.
c) the Maya.

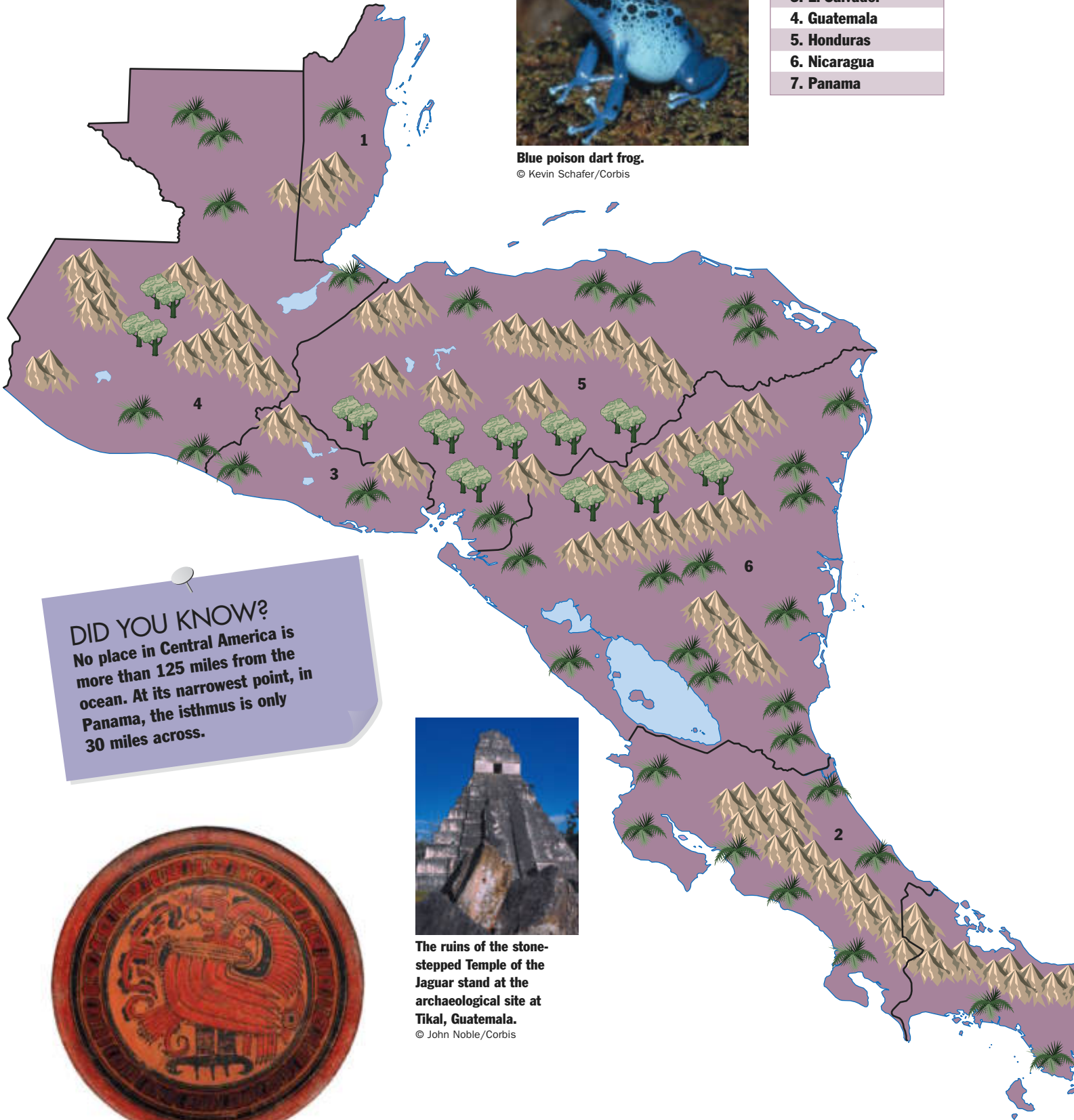
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**COUNTRIES OF
CENTRAL AMERICA**

1. Belize
2. Costa Rica
3. El Salvador
4. Guatemala
5. Honduras
6. Nicaragua
7. Panama



Blue poison dart frog.
© Kevin Schafer/Corbis



DID YOU KNOW?
No place in Central America is more than 125 miles from the ocean. At its narrowest point, in Panama, the isthmus is only 30 miles across.



The ruins of the stone-stepped Temple of the Jaguar stand at the archaeological site at Tikal, Guatemala.
© John Noble/Corbis



Mayan painted tripod plate.
© Bowers Museum of Cultural Art/Corbis



The Isthmus Nations

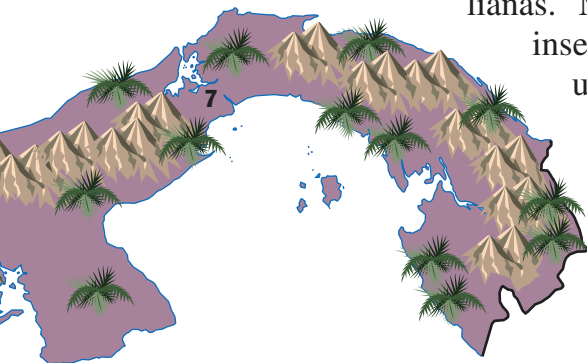
Central America is an **isthmus** that lies between the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. Seven countries lie within its boundaries—Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. Together this cluster of nations stretches from North to South America. The countries share a long and proud history that reaches back thousands of years to the civilizations of the Maya and other native Indian peoples.

The Maya built great cities in northern Central America from about AD 200 to 900, but then they began to decline. When Spanish explorers arrived in the 16th century there were few Maya left. The Spanish soon established **colonies** in the area and ruled them for about 300 years before granting them independence. Because of this, most Central Americans speak Spanish, though many Indians speak their native languages. English is the official language of Belize, which was ruled by England for many years.

Today the people of the region are very diverse. Some are descended from Europeans, while others are of Asian or black African **ancestry** or Maya. Most are mestizos—people of mixed Indian and European ancestry.

Central America is mainly hilly and has many mountains. Swamps, rainforests, and lowlands extend along both coasts. There are many volcanoes, and the region has frequent earthquakes. Most people live along the western side.

Central America has many fascinating plants and animals, particularly in its rainforests. Jaguars and ocelots prowl the forest floors. Spider and howler monkeys scramble through the trees and climb vines called “lianas.” Manatees swim in the rivers. Parrots chatter and insects buzz. Beautiful orchids bloom in clearings, and unusual fruits and nuts are found everywhere.



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NORTH AMERICA • PANAMA CANAL
SOUTH AMERICA



Land of the Quetzal



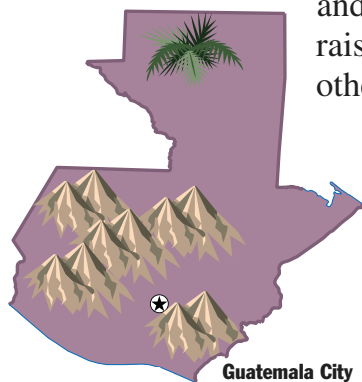
Guatemala is a country in Central America. It was once home to the great Mayan civilization, which ruled from about AD 250 to 900. Today Mayan Indians make up about half of Guatemala's population, and they still have a great influence on its culture. Their crafts, dances, music, and religious ceremonies are similar to those from hundreds of years ago.

Along with the Mayan Indians, the population of Guatemala includes the Ladinos, who have mixed Spanish and Mayan Indian heritage. While the Mayan Indians tend to live in the rural highlands, most Ladinos live in cities. The Ladinos tend to be wealthier than the Indians.

Spanish is the country's most widely spoken language, but one in three Guatemalans speaks an Indian language. Most of the people are Roman Catholic, but many Indians mix Catholic beliefs with traditional religious practices. The town of Esquipulas, in eastern Guatemala, is home to the Black Christ, the most important Catholic shrine in Central America. It was named for the dark wood from which it was carved. Guatemala's many religious festivals include the popular Easter celebrations in the town of Antigua Guatemala.

The land of Guatemala includes mountains, volcanoes, grasslands, and rainforests. The wildlife of the rainforests includes the quetzal, the colorful national bird. There are also many snakes, crocodiles, and iguanas.

Farming is important in Guatemala. Many farmers grow corn, beans, and squash to feed themselves and their families. Other farmers raise coffee, bananas, sugarcane, cotton, and cattle to sell to other countries.



Guatemala City

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CENTRAL AMERICA • MEXICO • NICARAGUA



Fill in
the blank:
Most people in
Guatemala have
at least some
_____ ancestry.

- a) French
- b) Quetzal
- c) Mayan Indian

For gorgeous plumage, few birds surpass the quetzal. Found in rainforests from southern Mexico to Bolivia, the quetzal was the sacred bird of the ancient Maya and Aztec; today it is the national emblem of Guatemala (whose monetary unit is the quetzal).

© Michael & Patricia Fogden/Corbis



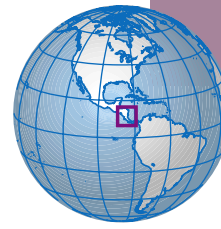
DID YOU KNOW?
 Guatemala has three continuously active volcanoes: Santa María, Fuego, and Pacaya. In 1902 Santa María erupted for 19 days in a row.





**Why do
you suppose
Spanish is the
official language
of Nicaragua?**

**Ash clouds rise into the air during an eruption of
Cerro Negro, Nicaragua's most active volcano.**



Volcanoes and Earthquakes in Central America



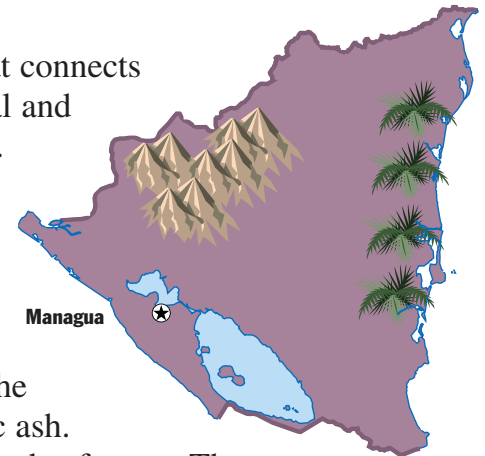
Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America, the strip of land that connects North and South America. The capital and largest city of Nicaragua is Managua.

Nicaragua has two large lakes, Managua and Nicaragua. The area around the lakes is dotted with about 40 volcanoes. Some of the volcanoes are still active. Nicaragua also experiences many earthquakes, which can be very destructive.

The most **fertile** farmland in the country lies near the volcanoes. The soil is rich with **minerals** from volcanic ash. Because of that people have lived in the area for thousands of years. The early people who lived there found this soil perfect for growing beans and corn. They were also skilled craftsmen and left behind stone carvings, pottery, and gold jewelry. But they also discovered the power of the volcanoes. Scientists have found footprints that were left many years ago by people who were fleeing from the lava and ash of an erupting volcano.

Spanish explorers arrived in Nicaragua in the 1500s. The native Indians who lived there resisted, but eventually the Spanish conquered the land. Nicaragua was named for Nicarao, an Indian chief who led the fight against the Spanish. The country finally gained independence from the Spanish in the 1800s.

Many Nicaraguans are farmers, still growing the traditional corn and beans. They also produce coffee, cotton, beef, and bananas, which are sold to other countries. Only a small portion of the land is actually used for farming, however. More than one-fourth of the country is covered with rainforest.



DID YOU KNOW?

Association football, or soccer, is the most popular sport in all Central American countries except for Nicaragua, where baseball is the national pastime.

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CENTRAL AMERICA • GUATEMALA • PANAMA CANAL

Answer: The Spanish conquered much of South and Central America in the 1500s and ruled the region for many centuries. For that reason Spanish is still the official language of Nicaragua, even though Spain no longer controls the country.



Land of Many Fish



Panama City is the capital of the small Central American country of Panama. It lies on the Gulf of Panama near the Panama **Canal**. Panama City used to be a small Indian fishing village. The Spanish name for the city, *Panamá*, means “many fish.”

A Spanish soldier named Pedro Arias Dávila founded Panama City in 1519. It was the first European settlement on the Pacific coast of the Americas. After the Panama Canal opened in 1914, the city became an important center for world trade.

To understand what the city looked like centuries ago, you can visit the area known as San Felipe. Some people call it Casco Viejo, which means “old city.” Here you’ll see many buildings from the **colonial** days. In the building called the Salón Bolívar, the soldier Simón Bolívar worked on ways to unify the South American countries newly freed from Spanish rule. In 1997 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization named the old section of Panama City a World Heritage site. This means that it is an important cultural site that should be protected and preserved.

But it’s the canal that connects the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific Ocean that most visitors want to see. Every day ships from all over the world take the trip through the narrow canal. The ships carry **cargo** and passengers between countries. The canal saves them a journey of thousands of miles around the southern tip of South America.

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CENTRAL AMERICA • GUATEMALA • PANAMA CANAL



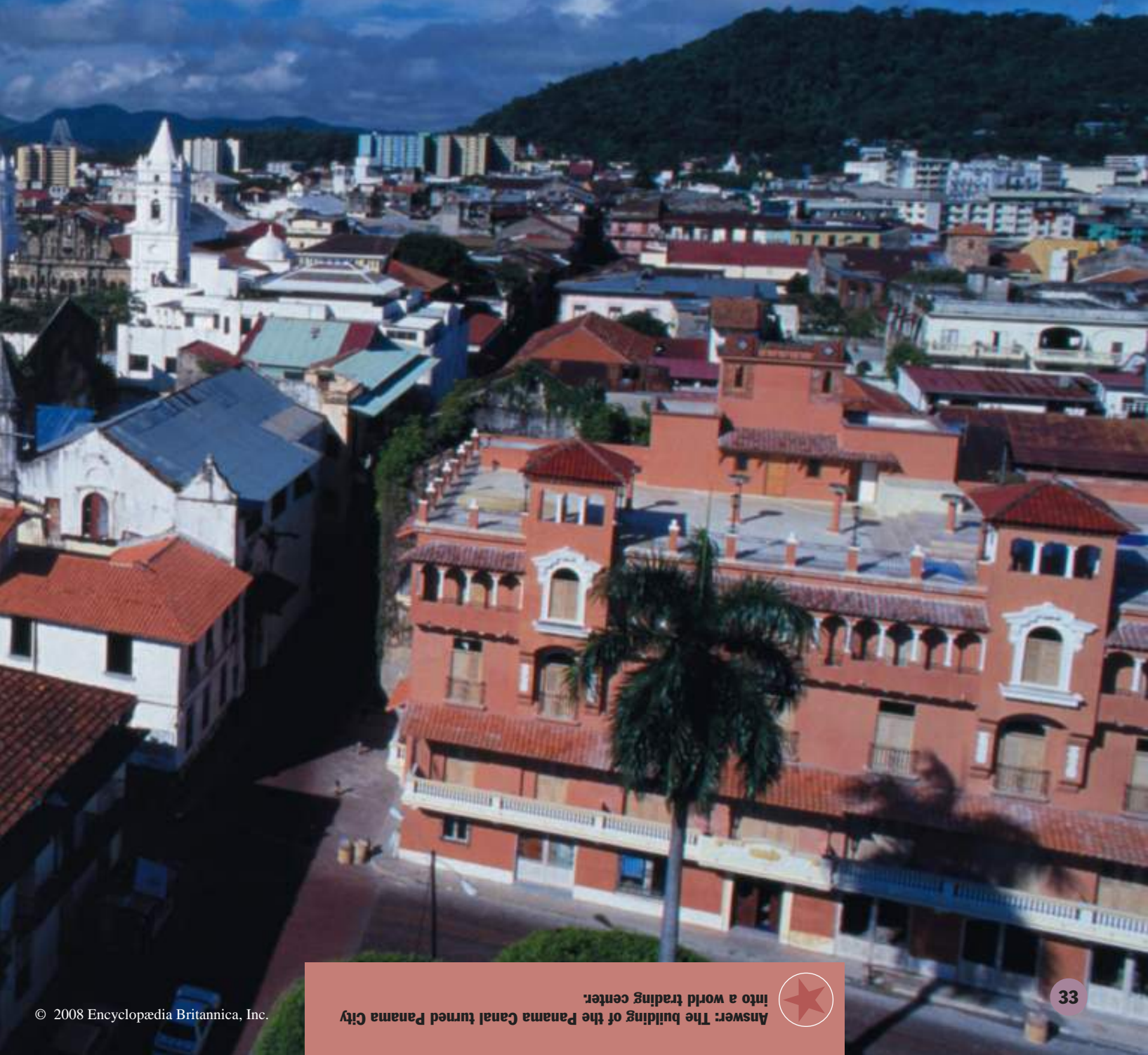
What turned Panama City from a small fishing village into a center for world trade?

DID YOU KNOW?
Because of the way Panama curves, a very strange thing happens when you pass through the Panama Canal. Traveling through the canal from the Atlantic to the Pacific actually takes you from west to east instead of the other way around.



Colonial architecture is a prominent feature of the San Felipe neighborhood of Panama City.

© Alfredo Maiquez/Lonely Planet Images



A Major World Waterway

The Panama Canal is one of the most important artificial waterways in the world. It's located in the Central American country of Panama. The canal cuts through a narrow strip of land to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It is about 50 miles long.



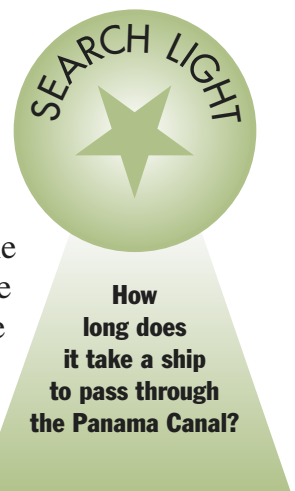
(Top) Construction of the Panama Canal; (bottom) two men stand in front of canal locks under construction in 1913 as part of the Panama Canal project.

The Panama Canal can cut thousands of miles from a ship's voyage. Ships traveling between the east and west coasts of the United States, for example, can shorten their trip by more than 9,000 miles. Without the canal, they would have to go around the southern tip of South America.

Many different kinds of goods are shipped through the canal. Thousands of ships carry more than 200 million tons of **cargo** through it each year. The most important goods include **petroleum** and grains.

The Panama Canal uses what is called a lock system. Locks are huge tanks with gates at each end. They are used to raise or lower boats from one water level to another. This is necessary because the lake through which the canal passes is at a higher level than the oceans.

First a boat enters the lock, and the gate is closed behind it. If the boat needs to rise to a higher level, water is added to the lock. As the water rises, the boat floats higher. When the lock is full of water, the gate in front of the boat is opened. The boat can then travel out onto the higher part of the canal. The process is reversed for boats going in the other direction. It takes about nine hours for a ship to go through the canal.



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CENTRAL AMERICA • PANAMA CITY, PANAMA • SOUTH AMERICA

A small tugboat leads a large ship out of one of the Panama Canal's locks.

DID YOU KNOW?

Boats pay to use the canal, just as cars do on some roads. A large cruise ship might pay more than \$100,000. A man named Richard Halliburton paid the lowest toll ever recorded. He paid just 36 cents when he swam the length of the canal in 1928.



San Juan is the capital and largest city of Puerto Rico. In the 17th and 18th centuries walls were added to protect it. The San Juan Gate was once the main entrance to the city.

**DID YOU
KNOW?**

Puerto Rico is home to a kind of frog called the *coquí*. It was named after its loud croak, which sounds like “Ko-kee! Ko-kee!” This much-loved frog has become a symbol of the island.

Jewel of the Caribbean



The island of Puerto Rico is a self-governing commonwealth of the United States. This means it has the right to make its own laws, but it has some ties with the United States. Puerto Ricans are American citizens, but they do not elect representatives to the U.S. Congress or pay U.S. taxes.

Located in the West Indies, Puerto Rico lies in the northern Caribbean Sea. The island is mostly hilly, though it is flatter along the coast. Most of the people live in the coastal area. Rainforests cover parts of the north. Many of the island's trees were cut down for lumber or farming. Special plans now encourage **conservation**. New forests have been planted with such fast-growing trees as eucalyptus, teak, and Honduran pine.



Puerto Rico was known as Borinquén to the native Arawak Indians who settled on the island hundreds of years ago. Their **descendants** were living there when in 1493 Christopher Columbus became the first European to reach the island. Columbus claimed the island for Spain, and soon Spaniards had established a settlement there.

Puerto Rico was a Spanish colony for almost four centuries. At the end of the 1800s, the United States defeated Spain in the Spanish-American War. Afterward the island was turned over to the United States. In 1951 the island became a commonwealth. Some people on the island want it to become a U.S. state, but in elections most of the people have voted against this.



True or false?
Puerto Rico is one of the 50 states of the United States.

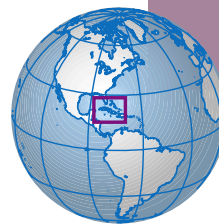
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 CUBA • NORTH AMERICA • UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



**More than 2 million people live in Havana,
Cuba's capital city.**



**True
or false?
Cuba is
ruled by Spain.**



Sugarcane and Politics



The country of Cuba is part of the West Indies, a group

of islands in the Caribbean Sea. The country is made up of one main island and about 1,600 smaller islands. The capital is Havana, on the northwestern coast of the main island.



Many Cubans are farmers. For a long time the most valuable crop has been sugarcane. Sugarcane grows as a tall, thick grass, and it is from this plant that we get sugar. Cuba also produces tobacco, and Cuban cigars are famous worldwide. Other major crops are coffee, rice, and tropical fruits. Although making sugar from cane is still important, many factories have been closed. Tourism is now the largest source of income for Cuba.

Cubans speak Spanish, and the country's culture reflects its Spanish background. The island was claimed for Spain by Christopher Columbus in 1492 and was ruled by Spain until the 1890s. African culture has also influenced Cuba. Many Africans were taken to the island long ago to work as slaves on the sugar plantations.

Cuba saw major changes when Fidel Castro took over the government in 1959. Castro was strongly **communist**, and he developed a close relationship with the government of the Soviet Union. This caused problems between Cuba and its neighbor the United States, since the United States strongly disagreed with the political ideas of the Soviet Union. In fact, Cuba was nearly the center of a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union in 1962. The problems remained even after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

DID YOU KNOW?

Large stalks of sugarcane are often sold in fruit markets in Cuba. For children it's a treat to have a small section of sugarcane to suck on, like a Popsicle.

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HONOLULU, U.S. • PUERTO RICO
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



The bright green emerald tree boa is native to the Amazon Basin of South America.

© David A. Northcott/Corbis



True or false?
a) Christopher Columbus landed in South America.
b) South America was once connected to Africa.
c) South America is attached to North America.



Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

© Richard T. Nowitz/Corbis

The Unknown Continent



Scientists believe that millions of years ago South America and Africa were part of the same ancient **landmass** now known as Gondwanaland. In fact, if you view South America and Africa as puzzle pieces, you'd see that the two continents fit roughly together. Slowly, South America broke away and began to drift westward. Today the **Isthmus** of Panama links South America to North America. The South American mainland is divided into 12 independent countries and one dependent state.

The Andes Mountains, one of the longest and highest mountain ranges in the world, lie in South America. The continent also features the Guiana Highlands and the Brazilian Highlands, which contain some of the oldest rocks on Earth. The Amazon River in South America is one of the greatest rivers of the world. A huge quantity of the world's freshwater flows through the Amazon **basin**. The river makes the lush Amazon rainforest possible.

For thousands of years South America was **isolated** from the rest of the world. Outsiders didn't know about ancient peoples such as the Inca who lived on that continent. Then in 1498 Christopher Columbus landed in South America. Spanish and Portuguese **colonizers** and adventurers followed. They **converted** many of the native Indians to Christianity. Nowadays most South Americans speak Spanish or Portuguese.

South America's many unusual animals—such as llamas, alpacas, jaguars, sloths, and armadillos—were new to the first visiting Europeans. Today many people visit South America to see its rainforests and to enjoy its rich animal life.

COUNTRIES OF SOUTH AMERICA

1. Argentina
2. Bolivia
3. Brazil
4. Chile
5. Colombia
6. Ecuador
7. French Guiana
8. Guyana
9. Paraguay
10. Peru
11. Suriname
12. Uruguay
13. Venezuela

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AMAZON • ANDES • MACHU PICCHU

DID YOU KNOW?

Many interesting and important dinosaur fossils have been found in South America. The oldest dinosaur fossil ever found was of Eoraptor, a three-foot-long dinosaur that lived in Argentina more than 220 million years ago.



A Close Look at River Life



Find and correct the error in the following sentence:
The Amazon rainforest has many trees, plants, animals, people, and insects.

At the heart of South America lies the Amazon River **basin**. It is nearly as large as the United States, but few people live there. Nonetheless, the area is full of living things. They are all part of a giant **tropical** forest called the rainforest. There are so many plants, animals, birds, and insects there that no one has been able to list them all! Some of them exist nowhere else in the world.

The rainforest is a very important place. It helps control the world's **climate** by absorbing gases in the air that can cause a problem called **global warming**. It also provides a home for the many animals in the area.



Emerald tree boa in the Amazon basin.
© David A. Northcott/Corbis

There are bright-colored birds, including green and yellow parrots with red heads, pink flamingos, and beautiful hummingbirds. There are also millions of butterflies, some as big as small birds.

The treetops are alive with playful monkeys. On the ground are funny-looking animals called tapirs that resemble hairy pigs. There are also animals that you wouldn't enjoy meeting. The spotted jaguar, a large member of the cat family, is one. The anaconda is another. It is one of the world's largest snakes and can swallow a whole deer in one gulp! There are also huge hairy spiders, many-legged centipedes, and army ants that eat almost everything that they find.

It's not a good idea to swim in the Amazon River. What looks like a floating log might actually be a dangerous crocodile. There are electric eels that can hurt a person with an electric shock. And there are harmless-looking fish called piranhas that are actually quite ferocious, though they don't usually bother people.

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ANDES • BRAZIL • SOUTH AMERICA



DID YOU KNOW?
 Many of the plants found in the Amazon rainforest contain substances that can be used as medicine to fight diseases such as cancer. These plants are not found anywhere else in the world.

The Amazon is home to many different types of wildlife, including the green-cheeked Amazon parrot.

© Eric and David Hosking/Corbis



World-Class Mountains

The Andes are the tallest mountains in the Western **Hemisphere**. The highest peak, Mount Aconcagua in Argentina, is 22,831 feet high. The mountains run north to south for the entire length of South America—5,500 miles in all. They separate a narrow strip of land along the west coast from the rest of the continent.

The Andes region is made up of many high **plateaus** surrounded by even higher peaks. In some sections, the chain separates into two ranges. The Cordillera Oriental is the eastern mountain range, and the Cordillera Occidental is the western range.



Andean condors.
© Galen Rowell/Corbis

Because of the extreme **altitudes**, the mountains can be a very difficult place to live. There are few plants above 16,000 feet, but between 8,000 and 11,500 feet there is plenty of good farming. This is the zone where most of the people of the Andes live and where most of the cities are. Just above this zone is where llamas and alpacas are raised. These relatives of the camel are valuable for their wool and for other purposes. At higher elevations there is less **oxygen** to breathe. Few people live at heights greater than 12,000 feet. Shepherders, though, sometimes live as high as 17,000 feet.

The best-known people ever to live in the Andes were the Inca. When Europeans arrived in the mountains in the 1500s, the Inca ruled much of the area. Remains of the magnificent Inca city called Machu Picchu can still be seen in the mountains of Peru.

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ARGENTINA • CHILE • PERU



Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain, is more than 29,000 feet tall. How much taller than Mount Aconcagua is it?
a) about 600 feet
b) about 16,000 feet
c) about 6,000 feet

Mount Fitzroy and Mount Torre belong to the part of the Andes Mountains in southwestern Argentina. Altogether, the Andes Mountains pass through seven different countries in South America.

© Francesc Muntada/Corbis

DID YOU KNOW?

Andean condors are among the largest flying birds on Earth. Their wings measure 10 feet across from tip to tip and are strong enough to allow these giants to fly as many as 200 miles a day looking for food.



DID YOU KNOW?

Colombia is among the world's leading producers of emeralds. The mysterious beauty of these fiery green gemstones has inspired many legends. They were long believed to cure certain illnesses.



Trays of coffee beans are dried in the sunshine on the roof of a farm building in northwestern Colombia. Colombia grows much of the world's supply of coffee beans.

© Jeremy Horner/Corbis



**True
or false?**

**There are more
kinds of birds found
in Colombia than in
all of North America.**

Columbus' South American Namesake



Colombia, in South America, is the only American nation named for Christopher Columbus. Its capital city, Bogotá, sits on a high **plateau** in the Andes Mountains.

Colombia is a land of beaches, deserts, jungles, grasslands, and mountains. The Andes range runs the length of the country. Southeast of the mountains, rivers crisscross the lush green Amazon rainforest. In the east are grasslands called the Llanos.

Since Colombia lies close to the **equator**, its climate is generally hot. But it's cooler in the highlands. The rainforest gets more than 100 inches of rain annually. The Llanos region has dry and wet seasons.

Colombia is home to many different kinds of plants and animals. There are more than 130,000 different plants in the country, including a kind of water lily called *Victoria amazonica*. Its leaves are large and strong enough to support a child. Just some of the animals found in Colombia include jaguars, ocelots, peccaries, tapirs, deer, anteaters, monkeys, and the rare spectacled bear. There are more than 1,550 kinds of birds in Colombia. That's more than Europe and North America have combined. These birds include the huge Andean condor and the tiny hummingbird.

Before the Spaniards landed in the area in the 1500s, there were many Indian tribes living there. They crafted gold and made stone sculptures. The Spaniards took the people's lands and made them slaves. Many other Indians died of disease. Finally, the people **revolted**, and Colombia became free in 1813. Spanish is still the official language of Colombia.



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ANDES • PERU • SOUTH AMERICA

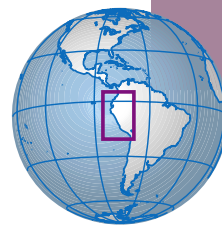


A Peruvian girl displays a style of traditional dress that is still worn among some of the country's inhabitants.



Unscramble these words having to do with Peru.

- deAns
- caln
- mazonA



Land of the Inca



Peru is a large South American country that lies just south of the **equator**. In the west it has a long coastline on the Pacific Ocean. Many of Peru's major cities are located on a narrow strip of flat land along the coast. Among them is Lima, the capital. Eastern Peru is part of the huge **basin** of the Amazon River. It is nearly covered with rainforests. Between the coast and the Amazon region are the Andes. Some peaks in this mountain range reach higher than 20,000 feet. High in the Andes is Lake Titicaca, one of the largest lakes in South America.

Around AD 1200 a group of Indians called the Inca formed the city of Cuzco in what is now Peru. From there they set out to conquer other Indian peoples along South America's west coast. Eventually the Inca ruled over as many as 12 million people. But their great **empire** was destroyed when Spanish soldiers seized the land in the 1530s. Spain ruled until Peru won its independence almost 300 years later.

Today Peru still has many reminders of the Inca. The country's name comes from a word meaning "land of abundance" in Quechua, the Inca language. The name refers to the riches that the Inca got from the land, including great amounts of gold. Indians who still speak the Quechua language make up about half of Peru's population. And in the Andes there is Machu Picchu. The remarkable stone remains of this Inca settlement attract visitors from all over the world.



DID YOU KNOW?

Peru is known for two domesticated animals that are native to the Andes, llamas and alpacas. These animals are surefooted climbers well suited for life in the mountains.

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ANDES • BRAZIL • COLOMBIA



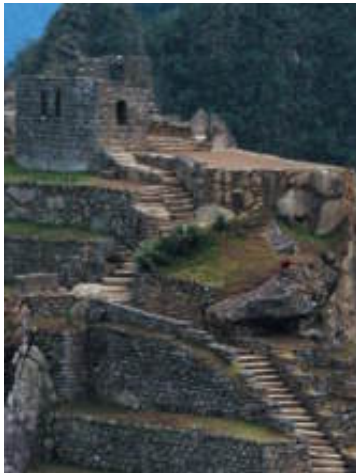
For hundreds of years Machu Picchu was known only to a few people who lived nearby. The rest of the world learned about the site only when an archaeologist named Hiram Bingham discovered it in 1911.



**Why
did the
Inca abandon
Machu Picchu?**

Secret of the Andes

A long time ago, a group of people who worshiped the Sun lived in South America. They constructed incredible stone buildings high in the Andes, a chain of mountains in the western part of the continent. These



Religious center, Machu Picchu.
© Craig Lovell/Corbis

people were the Inca. Their most famous creation was Machu Picchu, in the mountains of Peru.

The Inca ruled a large **empire** and had a lot of gold. Their fame reached far and wide. Even the rulers of Spain heard about their “land of gold.” In the 1500s the Spanish invaded the Inca empire. The invaders killed many people, took their gold, and destroyed their religious buildings. The Spanish invasion brought an end to the Inca empire.

Although the Inca had no written records, they left behind **archaeological** clues about their lifestyle. One big clue is Machu Picchu. At some point the Inca **abandoned** the site. No one is sure why. Some people think it’s because the site didn’t have enough water. After Machu Picchu was abandoned, trees and plants grew over it. This kept it hidden from the Spanish during their invasion. The site remained unknown to people outside of the Andes until an archaeologist found it in 1911.

If you visit Machu Picchu, you’ll find great temples and palaces. You’ll also see dozens of stepped **terraces** for farming all around the site. There are also a plaza, houses, and a cemetery. Walkways and thousands of stone steps connect the different parts of the site. These structures were probably built in the 1400s and 1500s. But amazingly, almost all of them are still in very good shape. The Inca must have been some builders!

DID YOU KNOW?

The name **Machu Picchu** means “old peak” in **Quechua**, the language of the Inca.

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ANDES • PERU • SOUTH AMERICA



Rio de Janeiro is the second largest city in Brazil. It is located on the Atlantic Ocean in the southeastern part of the country.

© Richard T. Nowitz/Corbis

SEARCH LIGHT



Which of the following can be said of Brazil?

- It makes up half of South America.**
- It's named for a tree.**
- The national sport is basketball.**
- The Nile River is in Brazil.**



Half of South America



Brazil, the largest country in South America, took its name from brazilwood. The first European settlers in Brazil shipped a lot of brazilwood back to Europe, where it was used to produce valuable red dyes.

Brazil covers nearly half of the continent. It has a long coastline along the Atlantic Ocean. It shares borders with every South American country except Chile and Ecuador. The capital of Brazil is Brasília. Two other Brazilian cities—São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro—rank among the world's largest. Both of these cities lie on the coast. The Amazon River is a key natural feature of Brazil. It is the largest river in the world in terms of the amount of water it carries. More than 1,000 tributaries, or smaller rivers, empty into the Amazon. During the river's annual flood, it pours more than 46 million gallons of water per second into the Atlantic Ocean.

The lush Amazon rainforest covers much of the river's huge **basin**. This rainforest contains the most varied plant life on Earth. Nearly 50,000 kinds of animals are also found there. So many different kinds of plants and animals live in the forest that many of them haven't been named yet!

Brazil's national sport is association football, or soccer. The Brazilian team has won the World Cup soccer championship five times. Pelé, a Brazilian national hero, is considered to be one of the greatest soccer players ever.



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AMAZON • PARAGUAY • SOUTH AMERICA

DID YOU KNOW?

The large and gentle monkey called the "muriqui" is found only in the eastern forests of Brazil. It is one of the world's most endangered animals.



DID YOU KNOW?

The first people to live in what is now Paraguay were the Guaraní Indians. Today many of Paraguay's people speak two languages—Guaraní and Spanish.





The Once-Forgotten Land



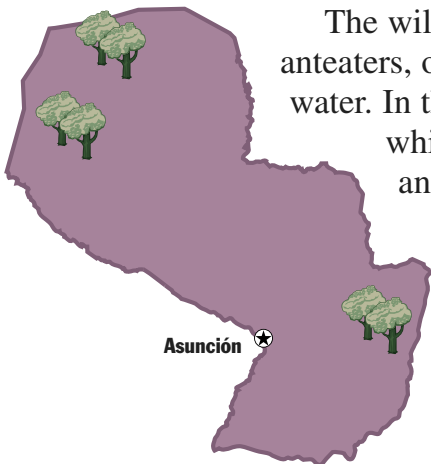
Not long ago nobody knew much about Paraguay, a country in South America. For much of the 1800s and 1900s Paraguay was ruled by **dictators** who kept the country isolated from the rest of the world. But in the 1990s the country began to open up and encourage visitors.

Paraguay is located in the south-central part of South America. Its capital is Asunción. The country is surrounded by land, and rivers provide the only way to get to the Atlantic Ocean. This makes the rivers very important to Paraguay. In fact, the country's name may come from an Indian word meaning "river that gives birth to the sea."

The Paraguay River divides the country into two natural parts. To the east the land is mostly wooded hills and grassy plains. To the west is a dry, flat region called the Chaco Boreal. It is part of the larger Gran Chaco region, which extends into Bolivia and Argentina.

The wild animals of Paraguay include bats, monkeys, armadillos, anteaters, otters, jaguars, and nutrias, which are rats that can live in water. In the Chaco there is a small number of Chacoan peccaries, which look something like wild pigs. Scientists thought these animals were **extinct** until some living ones were found in the early 1970s.

The people of Paraguay live mostly in the east. More of them work in farming than in any other kind of job. They grow sugarcane, **cassava**, corn, rice, and tobacco. They also produce a tea called "yerba maté," which is popular in Paraguay and neighboring countries.



For a long time most people knew little about Paraguay. Why?

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ARGENTINA • BRAZIL • CHILE

Traditional Latino dancing is showcased at an outdoor plaza in Asunción, Paraguay.

© Sarah JH Hubbard/Lonely Planet Images

Answer: Paraguay was run by dictators for much of the 1800s and 1900s. These leaders didn't let the country's people have much contact with people in other countries.



A Long and Narrow Land



No other country has a shape like Chile's. The country stretches along South America's Pacific coast for a long 2,700 miles but is only a skinny 110 miles wide. Chile controls Easter Island in the Pacific and claims part of Antarctica as well. Its capital is Santiago.

Most of Chile is dominated by the Andes Mountains. Many people there raise llamas and alpacas for wool. But the country is so long that it has many habitats other than the **alpine**. The north is mainly desert. Some **cacti** and shrubs grow there. Central Chile is **temperate** and has land that's good for farming. Most of Chile's people live there. The area is known for its unique *matorral* habitat, with mixed trees, shrubs, cacti, and grass. But people have cleared away much of this growth for firewood. Very few people live in the far south. There are grasslands suitable



Fill in
the blank:
Chile is about

longer than it
is wide.

- a) two and a half times
- b) 250 times
- c) 25 times



Llamas graze near a snow-capped volcano in northern Chile. People use llamas to carry things. Llamas are also used as a source of food, wool, and hides.

© Graham Neden—Ecoscene/Corbis

for raising **livestock** in the area called Chilean Patagonia. But most of the region is rugged and quite cold.

Chile faces many kinds of natural disasters, including volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and **tsunamis**. In the winter there are fierce storms and floods. Summer often brings **drought**.

Like much of South America, Chile was **colonized** by Spain in the 1500s. The country won independence in the early 1800s. But the long period of Spanish rule had a lasting effect. Most Chileans are mestizos, a mix of Spanish and American Indian ancestry. And most people speak Spanish.

LEARN MORE! READ THESE ARTICLES...

ANDES • ARGENTINA • PERU

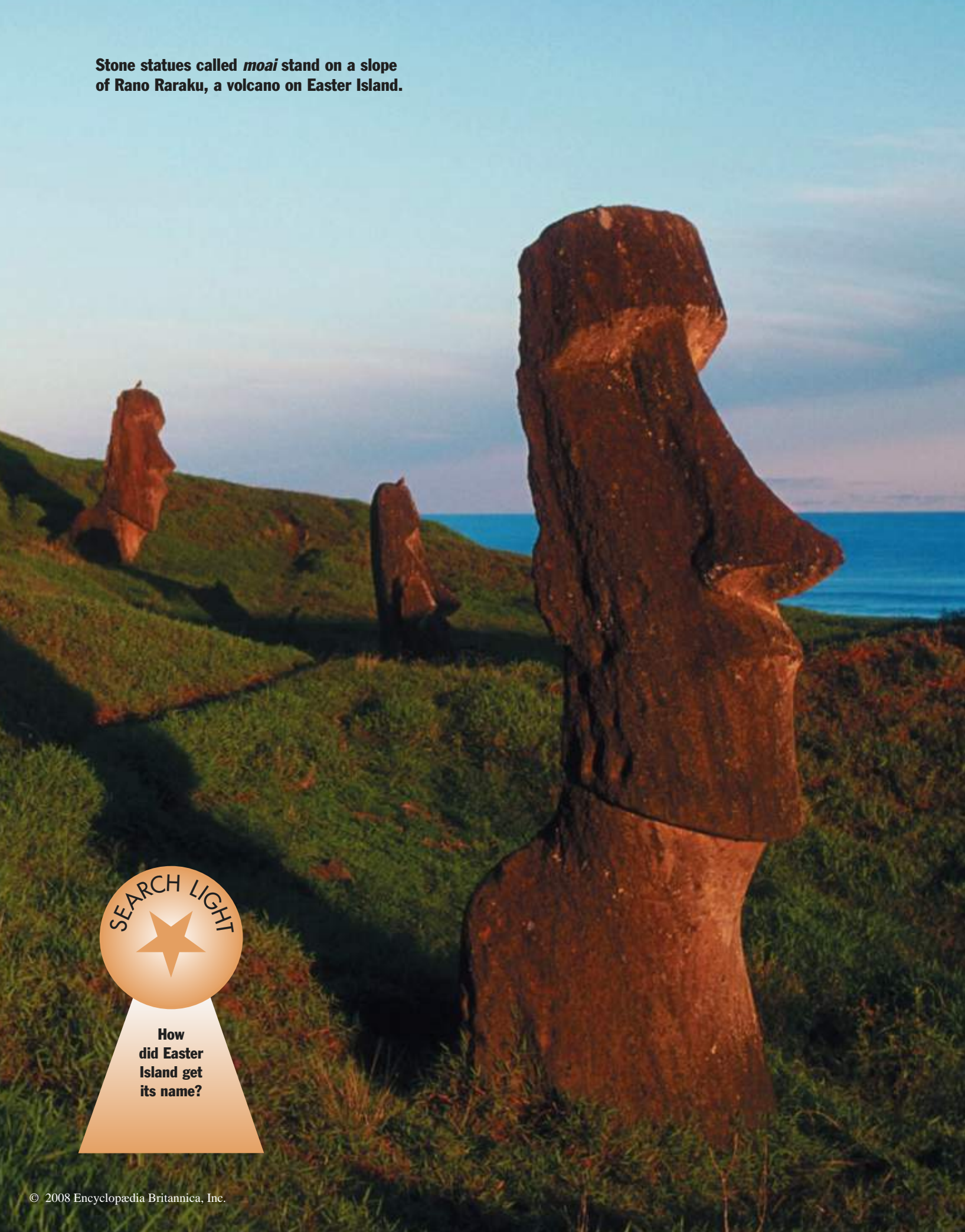


DID YOU KNOW?

The Atacama Desert in northern Chile is perhaps the driest place on Earth. Some parts of the desert have not had a drop of rain for hundreds of years.



Stone statues called *moai* stand on a slope of Rano Raraku, a volcano on Easter Island.



SEARCH LIGHT



How
did Easter
Island get
its name?

Land of Giants

Easter Island is located in the eastern part of the Pacific Ocean. The people who live on the island call it Rapa Nui. But the first European visitors to land there, the Dutch, named it Paaseiland, meaning “Easter Island,” because they arrived on Easter Sunday. Today Easter Island is a part of the South American country of Chile.



A line of moai statues.
G. Renner/Robert Harding Picture Library

Easter Island is only 14 miles long and 7 miles wide. It lies 2,200 miles west of Chile. Although the island is small and isolated, it is famous throughout the world for its huge stone statues of people. They are called *moai*. There are more than 600 *moai* on the island. They stand on giant stone platforms called *ahus*.

Some of the *ahus* have as many as a dozen statues.

All of the *moai* were carved after about AD 700. Some of them have rounded heads and stubby bodies. One famous *moai* is a lifelike figure of a kneeling man. The statues made at a later date are very tall and slim. These *moai* have a huge **topknot** called a *pukao* on the top of their heads. Most of them are between 10 and 20 feet tall. One statue from this period is 32 feet high. It is made from a single block of stone that weighs nearly 82 tons. The *pukao* on its head alone weighs about 11 tons. One unfinished statue is about 68 feet tall. Its back is still attached to the rock from which it was carved.

DID YOU KNOW?
No one is sure why the Easter Island statues were carved or what they mean. Many people believe that the statues honored important people who were revered as gods after their death.

LEARN MORE! READ THESE ARTICLES...
CHILE • HONOLULU, U.S. • MACHU PICCHU

Answer: The Dutch named the place Paaseiland, meaning “Easter Island,” because they arrived there on Easter Sunday.



Home of the Gaucho



At the southern end of South America lies Argentina, the second largest country on the continent—only Brazil is larger. The capital is Buenos Aires.

The landscape of Argentina is **diverse**, with four main regions. The mountains of the Andes rise in the northwest. The dry Gran Chaco lowlands lie in the north. In the south is the cold dry region of Patagonia. The Pampas grasslands cover the heart of the country.

The Pampas has rich soil and lots of rainfall. It is there that you'll find most of Argentina's farms and ranches. It's also where you'll find gauchos—the famous Argentine cowboys. In the 1700s and 1800s these wandering horsemen hunted large herds of escaped horses and cattle that roamed over the Pampas. Argentine writers celebrated the gauchos in poems and stories. Today the gauchos have a more settled lifestyle, working on the farms and ranches.

The Argentine people are as diverse as the land. The first people who arrived in what is now Argentina were American Indians (Native Americans). They traveled there from North America thousands of years ago. Today most of the population is European. The largest groups are from Spain, Italy, France, Britain, Germany, Poland, and Russia.



Spanish is the national language of Argentina. But because Argentina has so many **immigrants** from different parts of Europe, many other European languages are also spoken. Some Indian languages can be heard as well.

LEARN MORE! READ THESE ARTICLES...

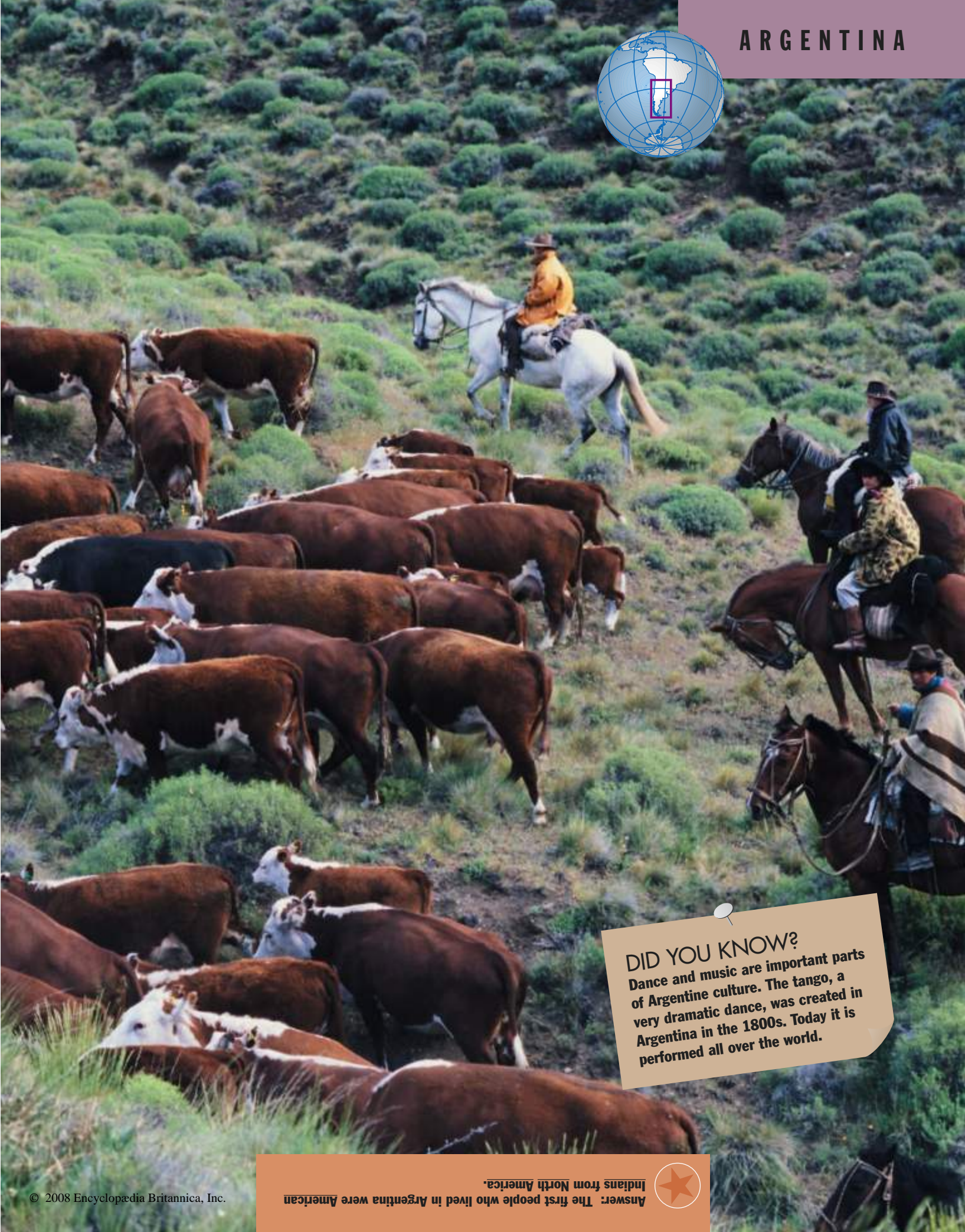
ANDES • CHILE • PARAGUAY



Find and correct the errors in the following sentence:
The first people who lived in Argentina were Spanish immigrants from Europe.

Ranchers on horseback drive cattle in Patagonia, the largest region of Argentina.

© Corbis



DID YOU KNOW?
Dance and music are important parts of Argentine culture. The tango, a very dramatic dance, was created in Argentina in the 1800s. Today it is performed all over the world.



G L O S S A R Y

abandon to leave without planning to return

alpine mountainous

altitude the distance of an object above a specific level (such as sea level) on a planet or other heavenly body

ancestry all the family members who lived before a particular individual

archaeology (adjective: archaeological) the science that deals with past human life as shown by fossils, tools, and other material left by ancient peoples

basin in geography, the area of land drained by a river and its branches

cacti (singular: cactus) flowering plants of dry regions that have water-storing fleshy stems and, usually, sharp spines

canal artificial waterway for boats or for draining or supplying water to land

cargo goods transported in a ship, airplane, or other vehicle

cassava tropical plant that has a thick underground root-like part and can be made into a number of foods

cathedral large Christian church where a bishop is in charge

château castle or large country house, especially in France

civilization the way of life of a people at a particular time or place; also, a fairly advanced culture and technology

climate average weather in a particular area

colony (plural: colonies; adjective: colonial; verb: colonize) 1) in general, a settlement established in a distant territory and controlled by a more powerful and expanding nation; 2) in biology, a group of similar organisms that live together in a particular place

communism (adjective: communist) system of government in which all property is owned by the state or

community and all citizens are supposed to have a share in the total wealth

conservation the care and protection of something fragile, unique, and valuable, such as rare wildlife or ancient structures

convert to change; to win over to a new or different belief

descendant member of a recent age group of a family or similar division that began years earlier

dictator person who rules with total power, often in a cruel or brutal way

diverse varied; different

drought long period of dry weather

empire a major widespread area under a single government, or a number of territories or peoples under one supreme ruler

equator imaginary circle running east-to-west around the Earth that lies halfway between the North Pole and the South Pole

extinct no longer existing

fertile rich and productive; able to yield quality crops in large quantities

geography the natural physical features of an area; also, the study of the countries of the world and of the Earth's surface features

global warming increase in the average temperature on the planet Earth

hemisphere half of the planet Earth or of any other globe-shaped object

heritage background or descent

immigrant person who goes to another country to live

isolate to keep separate or alone

isthmus narrow strip of land connecting two larger land areas

landmass large area of land

livestock animals kept or raised, especially farm animals such as cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, and horses

mammal class of warm-blooded animals that feed their young with milk from special mammary glands, have an internal backbone, and are more or less covered with hair

mineral substance that is not animal or plant and is an important nutrient for living things

natural resources the materials or qualities supplied by nature (such as minerals or waterpower) that make a place valuable to people, usually for industrial and manufacturing purposes

oxygen very common gas that is one of the basic elements necessary for animal life

petroleum liquid taken from the ground and not yet cleaned or separated into such products as gasoline and kerosene; also called crude oil

philharmonic large orchestra that plays classical music

plateau wide land area with a fairly level surface raised sharply above the land next to it on at least one side

population all the people living in a country or other specific area

revolt to rise up (often violently) against the power of a ruler or government

temperate having mild weather

terrace area of hillside that has been leveled off to allow farming on the land

topknot short mound of hair worn on the top of the head

tropical having to do with the Earth's warmest and most humid (moist) climates

tsunami huge ocean wave produced by an undersea earthquake or volcanic eruption

tundra treeless plain with few plants, most often in extremely cold regions

I N D E X

alpacas (mammals)
Did you know? *page 49*

Amazon (river and region in South America) *page 42*
Brazil *page 53*
Peru *page 49*
South America *page 41*
LEARN MORE *look under* rainforests

American Indians
Canada *page 10*
United States of America *page 16*
LEARN MORE *look under* Arawak; Aztec civilization; Guaraní; Inca civilization; Mayan civilization

Andes (mountains in South America) *page 44*
Peru *page 49*
South America *page 41*
LEARN MORE *look under* Machu Picchu; volcanoes

animals: *look under* birds; endangered animals; fishing; frogs; llamas; snakes; polar bears

Arawak (people)
Puerto Rico *page 37*

Argentina (country) *page 60*

association football (sport)
Brazil *page 53*

Asunción (city in Paraguay)
Paraguay *page 55*

Atacama Desert (region in Chile)
Did you know? *page 57*

Aztec civilization
Did you know? *page 22*
Mexico *page 23*
Mexico City *page 25*

baseball (sport)
Did you know? *page 31*

Belize (country)
Central America *page 27*

birds (animals): *look under* condors; parrots; quetzals

Bogotá (city in Colombia)
Colombia *page 47*

Brazil (country) *page 53*

Broadway (street in New York City, U.S.)
New York City *page 20*

Canada (country) *page 10*
LEARN MORE *look under* Ottawa; Quebec

canals (man-made waterways): *look under* Panama Canal

Castro, Fidel (Cuban leader)
Cuba *page 39*

cattle
Argentina photograph *page 61*

Central America *page 27*
LEARN MORE *look under* Cuba; Guatemala; Mexico; Nicaragua; Panama City; Puerto Rico

Chile (country) *page 57*
Easter Island *page 59*

coffee
Colombia photograph *page 46*

Colombia (country) *page 47*

colonialism
Central America *page 27*

Columbus, Christopher (Italian explorer)
Cuba *page 39*
Puerto Rico *page 37*

condors (birds)
Did you know? *page 45*, photograph *page 44*

Costa Rica (country)
Central America *page 27*

Cuba (country) *page 39*

dances: *look under* folk dances; tango

deserts: *look under* Atacama Desert

dinosaurs (ancient reptiles)
Did you know? *page 7*, *page 41*

Easter Island (island in the Pacific Ocean) *page 59*

El Salvador (country)
Central America *page 27*

emeralds (gemstones)
Did you know? *page 46*

endangered animals
Did you know? *page 53*

Eoraptors (dinosaurs)
Did you know? *page 41*

Ericson, Leif, *also called* Leif Eriksson (explorer)
Did you know? *page 9*

Eskimo (people): *look under* Inuit

fishing
Greenland *page 8*

folk dances
Paraguay photograph *page 54*

France (country)
Quebec *page 15*

frogs (animals)
Central America photograph *page 26*
Did you know? *page 36*

gauchos (Argentinian cowboys)
Argentina *page 60*

Gondwanaland (ancient continent)
South America *page 41*

Greenland (island and dependency of Denmark) *page 8*
North America *page 7*

Guaraní (people)
Did you know? *page 54*

Guatemala (country) *page 28*

Havana (city in Cuba)
Cuba *page 39*, photograph *page 38*

Honduras (country)
Central America *page 27*

Honolulu (city in the U.S.) *page 19*

Inca civilization
Andes *page 44*
Machu Picchu *page 51*
Peru *page 49*

Indians (Native Americans): *look under* American Indians

Inuit, *also called* Eskimo (people)
Greenland *page 8*

islands: *look under* Cuba; Easter Island; Greenland; Magdalen Islands; Oahu; Puerto Rico

- isthmus** (strip of land)
Central America *page 27*
- Ladinos** (people)
Guatemala *page 28*
- Latin America:** *look under* Central America; South America
- llamas** (animals)
Chile photograph *page 57*
Did you know? *page 49*
- Llanos** (region in South America)
Colombia *page 47*
- locks** (canals)
Panama Canal *page 34*
- Machu Picchu** (ancient Inca city in Peru) *page 51*
- Magdalen Islands** (islands in Canada)
Did you know? *page 14*
- Mayan civilization**
Central America *page 27*
Guatemala *page 28*
Mexico photograph *page 22*
- medicine** (science)
Did you know? *page 42*
- Mexico** (country) *page 23*
- Mexico City**, *also called* Tenochtitlán (city in Mexico) *page 25*
- Montreal** (city in Canada)
Canada *page 10*
- mountains:** *look under* Andes; volcanoes
- Native Americans:** *look under* American Indians
- New York City** (city in the U.S.) *page 20*
- Niagara Falls** (waterfall in North America)
Canada *page 10*
- Nicaragua** (country) *page 31*
- North America** (continent) *page 7*
LEARN MORE *look under* Canada; Greenland; Mexico; United States of America
- Oahu** (island in Hawaii, U.S.)
Honolulu *page 19*
- Olmec** (people)
Mexico *page 23*
- Ottawa** (city in Canada) *page 12*
- Pampas, the** (grasslands in Argentina)
Argentina *page 60*
- Panama Canal** (canal in Central America) *page 34*
Panama City *page 32*
- Panama City** (city in Panama) *page 32*
- Paraguay** (country) *page 55*
- parrots** (birds)
Amazon photograph *page 43*
- Patagonia** (region in Argentina)
Argentina *page 60*, photograph *page 61*
- Pelé** (Brazilian athlete)
Brazil *page 53*
- peoples:** *look under* American Indians; Inuit; Ladinos
- Peru** (country) *page 49*
LEARN MORE *look under* Machu Picchu
- piranhas** (fish)
Amazon *page 42*
- polar bears**
Did you know? *page 11*
- Portugal** (country)
South America *page 41*
- Puerto Rico** (island commonwealth) *page 37*
- Quebec** (province in Canada) *page 15*
- quetzals** (birds)
Guatemala photograph *page 29*
- rainforests**
Amazon *page 42*
Brazil *page 53*
Nicaragua *page 31*
- Rio de Janeiro** (city in Brazil)
Brazil *page 53*, photograph *page 52*
- Santiago** (city in Chile)
Chile *page 57*
LEARN MORE *look under* South America
- sculpture**
Easter Island *page 59*, photograph *page 58*, photograph *page 59*
- slavery**
Cuba *page 39*
- snakes** (animals)
Amazon *page 42*, photograph *page 42*
South America photograph *page 40*
- soccer** (sport): *look under* association football
- South America** (continent) *page 41*
Andes *page 44*
LEARN MORE *look under* Amazon; Argentina; Brazil; Chile; Colombia; Paraguay; Peru
- Spain** (country)
Central America *page 27*
South America *page 41*
- sports:** *look under* association football; baseball
- sugarcane** (plants)
Cuba *page 39*
- tango** (dance)
Did you know? *page 61*
- tapirs** (animals)
Amazon *page 42*
- Tenochtitlán** (ancient city in Mexico): *look under* Mexico City
- Toronto** (city in Canada)
Canada *page 10*
- totem pole**
North America photograph *page 6*
- United Kingdom** (island country)
Ottawa *page 12*
Quebec *page 15*
- United States of America** (country) *page 16*
Cuba *page 39*
Panama Canal *page 34*
Puerto Rico *page 37*
LEARN MORE *look under* Honolulu; New York City
- Vikings** (Norse people)
Did you know? *page 9*
- volcanoes**
Did you know? *page 29*
Honolulu *page 19*, photograph *page 18*
Mexico *page 23*
Nicaragua photograph *page 30*
- water lilies** (plants)
Colombia *page 47*
- West Indies** (island group in the Atlantic Ocean): *look under* Cuba; Puerto Rico
- World Heritage sites**
Panama City *page 32*
- World War II**
Honolulu *page 19*
- Zócalo** (square in Mexico City, Mexico)
Mexico City *page 25*, photograph *page 24*

Who built Machu Picchu?

Why is the United States called a melting pot?

What's an isthmus?

How does the Panama Canal work?

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