

Чаграк Н. І.

COUNTRY STUDIES

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The USA

Canada

Australia

New Zealand

Навчальний посібник для студентів вищих навчальних закладів

Івано-Франківськ

Гостинець

2010

УДК 811.111
ББК 81.2. Англ.
Ч 12

Рецензенти:

Ткачівський В.В. кандидат філологічних наук, доцент
Петрик Т.В. кандидат філологічних наук, доцент

Чаграк Н. І.

Ч 12 Country Studies. Посібник для студентів вищих навчальних закладів. – Івано-Франківськ: Гостинець, 2010. – 158с.

Посібник призначений для студентів фахових факультетів вищих навчальних закладів України за спеціальностями «Туризм», «Готельно-ресторанна справа», а також усіх, хто зацікавлений вивченням англomовних країн. Посібник містить інформацію країнознавчого, лінгвістичного, туристичного характеру, висвітлюючи різні аспекти сучасного життя і туристичний потенціал Великобританії, США, Канади, Австралії та Нової Зеландії.

Затверджено до друку Вченою радою Інституту туризму Прикарпатського національного університету імені Василя Стефаника (Протокол № 1 від 27 серпня 2010 р.)

CONTENTS

ПЕРЕДМОВА

THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CANADA

AUSTRALIA

NEW ZEALAND

SOURCE MATERIAL

ПЕРЕДМОВА

Навчальний посібник з лінгвокраїнознавства є одним з перших, що розглядає англomовні країни в аспекті туризмознавства і розрахований для студентів фахових факультетів вищих навчальних закладів України за спеціальностями «Туризм», «Готельно-ресторанна справа».

Посібник містить інформацію країнознавчого, лінгвістичного, туристичного характеру, висвітлюючи різні аспекти сучасного життя і туристичний потенціал Великобританії, США, Канади, Австралії та Нової Зеландії. Книга складається з 5 розділів, побудованих за єдиною структурою, до якої входять такі підрозділи, як короткі відомості з географії та демографії, економічного розвитку країни, характеристика систем державного управління, освіти, здоров'я, інформація про культуру, мови і національну кухню. Значну частину кожного розділу присвячено туристичному потенціалові країни.

Закріплення лінгвокраїнознавчого матеріалу здійснюється за допомогою типових завдань в кінці кожного розділу, особлива увага в яких приділяється розвитку навичок узагальнення і систематизації та самостійної роботи студента з різними джерелами інформації.

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

CAPITAL: London

AREA: 244,820 sq km (94,526 sq mi)

POPULATION: around 60 mln

ANTHEM: *God Save the Queen*

HOLIDAYS: New Year's Day, 1 January; Good Friday; Easter Monday (except Scotland); Late Summer Holiday, last Monday in August or 1st in September (except Scotland); Christmas, 25 December; and Boxing Day, 1st weekday after Christmas. Also observed in Scotland are bank holidays on 2 January and on the 1st Monday in August. Northern Ireland observes St. Patrick's Day, 17 March; and Orangeman's Day, 12 July, commemorating the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

LOCATION, SIZE, AND EXTENT

The United Kingdom is situated off the northwest coast of Europe between the Atlantic Ocean on the n and nw and the North Sea on the e, separated from the Continent by the Strait of Dover and the English Channel, 34 km (21 mi) wide at its narrowest point, and from the Irish Republic by the Irish Sea and St. George's Channel.

Its total area of 244,820 sq km (94,526 sq mi) consists of the island of Great Britain — formed by England, 130,439 sq km (50,363 sq mi); Wales, 20,768 sq km (8,018 sq mi); and Scotland, 78,783 sq km (30,418 sq mi) — and Northern Ireland, 14,120 sq km (5,452 sq mi), on the island of Ireland, separated from Great Britain by the North Channel. Comparatively, the area occupied by the United Kingdom is slightly smaller than the state of Oregon.

There are also several island groups and hundreds of small single islands, most of them administratively part of the mainland units. The United Kingdom extends about 965 km (600 mi) n–s and about 485 km (300 mi) e–w. Its total boundary length is 12,789 km (7,947 mi), of which 12,429 km (7,723 mi) is coastline.

The Isle of Man, 588 sq km (227 sq mi), and the Channel Islands, comprising Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, and Sark, with a combined area of 194 sq km (75 sq mi), are not part of the United Kingdom but are dependencies of the crown. The 0° meridian of longitude passes through the old Royal Observatory, located at Greenwich in Greater London. The United Kingdom's capital city, London, is located in the southeast part of Great Britain.

TOPOGRAPHY

England is divided into the hill regions of the north, west, and southwest and the rolling downs and low plains of the east and southeast. Running from east to west on the extreme north Scottish border are the Cheviot Hills. The Pennine Range runs north and south from the Scottish border to Derbyshire in central England. The rest of the countryside consists mainly of rich agricultural lands, occasional moors, and plains.

South of the Pennines lie the Midlands (East and West), a plains region with low, rolling hills and fertile valleys. The eastern coast is low-lying, much of it less than 5 m (15 ft) above sea level; for centuries parts of it have been protected by embankments against inundation from gales and unusually high tides. Little of the south and east rises to higher than 300 m (1,000 ft).

The highest point in England is Scafell Pike (978 m/3,210 ft) in the famed Lake District of the northwest. The longest of the rivers flowing from the central highlands to the sea are the Severn (about 340 km/210 mi) in the west and the Thames (about 320 km/200 mi) in the southeast. Other rivers include the Humber, the Tees, the Tyne, and the Tweed in the east, the Avon and Exe in the south, and the Mersey in the west.

Scotland has three distinct topographical regions: the Northern Highlands, occupying almost the entire northern half of the country and containing the highest point in the British Isles, Ben Nevis (1,343 m/4,406 ft), as well as Loch Ness, site of a fabled “monster”; the Central Lowlands, with an average elevation of about 150 m (500 ft) and containing the valleys of the Tay, Forth, and Clyde rivers, as well as Loch Lomond, Scotland’s largest lake; and the Southern Uplands, rising to their peak at Merrick (843 m/2,766 ft), with moorland cut by many valleys and rivers.

Wales is largely mountainous and bleak, with much of the land suitable only for pasture. The Cambrian Mountains occupy almost the entire area and include Wales’s highest point, Mt. Snowdon (1,086 m/3,563 ft). There are narrow coastal plains in the south and west and small lowland areas in the north, including the valley of the Dee.

Northern Ireland consists mainly of low-lying plateaus and hills, generally about 150 to 180 m (500–600 ft) high. The Mourne Mountains in the southeast include Slieve Donard (852 m/2,796 ft), the highest point in Northern Ireland. In a central depression lies Lough Neagh, the largest lake in the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom’s long and rugged coastline, heavily indented, has towering cliffs and headlands and numerous bays and inlets, among them the deep and narrow lochs and the wide firths of Scotland. Many river estuaries serve as fine harbors.

CLIMATE

Despite its northern latitude, the United Kingdom generally enjoys a temperate climate, warmed by the North Atlantic Drift, a continuation of the Gulf Stream, and by southwest winds. Mean monthly temperatures range (north to south) from 3°C to 5°C (37–41°F) in winter and from 12°C to 16°C (54–61°F) in summer. The mean annual temperature in the west near sea level ranges from 8°C (46°F) in the Hebrides to 11°C (52°F) in the far southwest of England. Rarely do temperatures rise in summer to over 32°C (90°F) or drop in winter below -10°C (14°F).

Rainfall, averaging more than 100 cm (40 in) throughout the United Kingdom, is heaviest on the western and northern heights (over 380 cm/150 in), lowest along the eastern and southeastern coasts. Fairly even distribution of rain throughout the year, together with the prevalence of mists and fogs, results in scanty sunshine — averaging from half an hour to two hours a day in winter and from five to eight hours in summer.

FLORA AND FAUNA

With its mild climate and varied soils, the United Kingdom has a diverse pattern of natural vegetation. Originally, oak forests probably covered the lowland, except for the fens and marsh areas, while pine forests and patches of moorland covered the higher or sandy ground. Over the centuries, much of the forest area, especially on the lowlands, was cleared for cultivation. Fairly extensive forests remain in east and north Scotland and in southeast England. Oak, elm, ash, and beech are the most common trees in England. Pine and

birch are most common in Scotland. Almost all the lowland outside the industrial centers is farmland, with a varied seminatural vegetation of grasses and flowering plants. Wild vegetation consists of the natural flora of woods, fens and marshes, cliffs, chalk downs, and mountain slopes, the most widespread being the heather, grasses, gorse, and bracken of the moorlands. There are over 1,600 plant species in the country.

The fauna is similar to that of northwestern continental Europe, although there are fewer species. Some of the larger mammals — wolf, bear, boar, and reindeer — are extinct, but red and roe deer are protected for sport. Common smaller mammals are foxes, hares, hedgehogs, rabbits, weasels, stoats, shrews, rats, and mice; otters are found in many rivers, and seals frequently appear along the coast. There are at least 50 species of mammal native to the region.

There are few reptiles and amphibians. Roughly 230 species of birds reside in the United Kingdom, and another 200 are migratory. Most numerous are the chaffinch, blackbird, sparrow, and starling. The number of large birds is declining, however, except for game birds — pheasant, partridge, and red grouse — which are protected. With the reclamation of the marshlands, waterfowl are moving to the many bird sanctuaries. The rivers and lakes abound in salmon, trout, perch, pike, roach, dace, and grayling. There are more than 21,000 species of insects.

POPULATION

The population of United Kingdom in 2009 was estimated by the United Nations (UN) at 60,068,000, which placed it at number 22 in population among the 193 nations of the world. In 2005, approximately 16% of the population was over 65 years of age, with another 18% of the population under 15 years of age. The overall population density was 245 per sq km (635 per sq mi); in England there were 371 persons per sq km (961 per sq mi), with 4,233 persons per sq km (10,968 per sq mi) in Greater London. The UN estimated that 89% of the population lived in urban areas in 2009.

The capital city, London, had a population of 7,619,000 in that year. Other major metropolitan areas in England, with estimated populations, were Birmingham, 2,215,000; Manchester, 2,193,000; Leeds, 1,402,000; and Liverpool, 975,000. Other large English towns include Sheffield, 516,000; Bradford, 478,800; Bristol, 406,500; and Coventry, 300,844. The major cities in Scotland are Glasgow (1,099,400) and Edinburgh (460,000). Belfast, the major city in Northern Ireland, had a population of 287,500; and Cardiff, in Wales, 305,000.

ETHNIC GROUPS

The present-day English, Welsh, Scots, and Irish are descended from a long succession of early peoples, including Iberians, Celts, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Danes, and Normans, the last of whom invaded and conquered England in 1066–70. According to the 2001 census, about 83.6% of UK residents are English. The Scottish form about 8.6% of the population, Welsh account for 4.9%, and the Northern Irish make up 2.9%. About 1.8% of the population are Indian, and 1.3% are Pakistani. There are about 300,000 persons who belong to a group known as Travellers, a blend of Roma, Irish, and other ethnic groups who maintain an itinerant lifestyle.

LANGUAGES

Spoken throughout the United Kingdom and by over 456 million people throughout the world, English is second only to Mandarin Chinese in the number of speakers in the world. It is taught extensively as a

second language and is used worldwide as a language of commerce, diplomacy, and scientific discourse. In northwestern Wales, Welsh, a form of Brythonic Celtic, is the first language of most of the inhabitants.

Approximately 26% of those living in Wales speak Welsh (up from 19% in 1991). Some 60,000 or so persons in western Scotland speak the Scottish form of Gaelic (down from 80,000 in 1991), and a few families in Northern Ireland speak Irish Gaelic.

On the Isle of Man, the Manx variety of Celtic is used in official pronouncements; in the Channel Islands some persons still speak a Norman-French dialect. French remains the language of Jersey for official ceremonies.

British English refers to the different forms of English spoken in the United Kingdom. In particular it often refers to the written Standard English and the pronunciation known as Received Pronunciation (RP). The term is often used to make a distinction from American English, though in this context it should be referred to as International English, since few if any other English-speaking countries have adopted the changes in spelling introduced by nineteenth century U.S. lexicographers. This article deals with British English in the stricter sense.

Written language

The written language is known as Standard English and dates back to the early 16th century in its current form. It is primarily based on dialects from the South East of England and is used by newspapers and official publications. Standard written English is basically the same in every English-speaking country, apart from a few minor points of spelling, such as *colo(u)r*, *travel(l)er*.

Dialects

The British Isles are the most linguistically diverse area in the English-speaking world. Significant changes in accent and dialect may occur within one region.

The three major divisions are normally classified as Southern English dialects, Northern English dialects and Scottish English and the closely related dialects of the Scots language.

The various English dialects differ in the words which they have borrowed from other languages. The Scottish and Northern dialects include many words originally borrowed from Old Norse and a few borrowed from Gaelic.

There are thus many differences between the various English dialects. These can be a major impediment to understanding among the older dialects, generally found within the United Kingdom. However, modern communications and mass media have reduced these differences significantly. In addition, speakers of very different dialects may modify their speech, and particularly vocabulary, towards Standard English.

Accent

The accent known to many people outside the United Kingdom as British English is Received Pronunciation, which is defined as the educated spoken English of southeastern England. Earlier it was held as better than other accents and referred to as the King's (or Queen's) English, or even "BBC English". Originally this was the form of English used by radio and television. However, for several decades other accents have been accepted and are frequently heard, although stereotypes about the BBC persist. English spoken with a mild Scottish accent has a reputation for being especially easy to understand.

Even in the south east there are significantly different accents. The local inner east London accent called Cockney is strikingly different from Received Pronunciation and can be difficult for outsiders to understand.

There is a new form of accent called Estuary English that has been gaining prominence in recent decades: it has some features of Received Pronunciation and some of Cockney. In London itself, the broad local accent is still changing, partly influenced by Caribbean speech. Londoners speak with a mixture of these accents, depending on class, age, upbringing, and so on.

Outside the south east there are, in England alone, at least seven families of accents easily distinguished by natives:

West Country (South West England)

East Anglian

Birmingham, Black Country and other industrial Midland accents

Liverpool (Scouse)

Manchester and other east Lancashire accents

Yorkshire

Newcastle (Geordie) and other north-east England accents

See Distinguishing accents in English

English outside the British Isles

American English, Canadian English, Australian English, New Zealand English, Caribbean English, Indian English, Irish English, and Pidgin English are among the many newer English dialects that have emerged since the period of emigration from Great Britain during the expansion of the British Empire. Dialect differences are not, in general, an impediment to understanding among the newer overseas dialects, which are for the most part, linguistically very close to each other since, apart from Pidgin, they are all based on Standard English. For examples of differences however, see American and British English differences. A literate, educated English speaker will generally know many forms. Due to the wide reach of US media vis-à-vis the more limited impact of contemporary British culture in the US, knowledge of American English in Britain is more common than the reverse.

RELIGIONS

There is complete religious freedom in the United Kingdom. All churches and religious societies may own property and conduct schools. Established churches are the Church of England (Anglican) and the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian). The former is uniquely related to the crown in that the sovereign must be a member and, on accession, promise to uphold the faith; it is also linked with the state through the House of Lords, where the archbishops of Canterbury and York have seats. The archbishop of Canterbury is primate of all England. The monarch appoints all officials of the Church of England.

About 71.6% of the population belong to one of the four largest Christian denominations in the country: the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Scotland, and the Methodist Church in Britain.

Many immigrants have established community religious centers in the United Kingdom. Such Christian groups include Greek, Russian, Polish, Serb-Orthodox, Estonian and Latvian Orthodox, and the Armenian Church; Lutheran churches from various parts of Europe are also represented. There are also sizable communities of Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Buddhists.

In Northern Ireland, about 53% of the population are nominally Protestants and 44% are nominally Catholics; only about 30–35% of all Northern Irish are active participants in religious services. The Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland tend to live in self-segregated communities.

GOVERNMENT

The United Kingdom is a monarchy in form but a parliamentary democracy in substance. The sovereign — Elizabeth II since 1952 — is head of state and as such is head of the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and temporal head of the established Church of England. In practice, however, gradually evolving restrictions have transmuted the sovereign's legal powers into instruments for affecting the popular will as expressed through Parliament. In the British formulation, the sovereign reigns but does not rule, for the sovereign is under the law and not above it, ruling only by approval of Parliament and acting only on the advice of her ministers.

The United Kingdom is governed, in the name of the sovereign, by Her Majesty's Government — a body of ministers who are the leading members of whichever political party the electorate has voted into office and who are responsible to Parliament. Parliament itself, the supreme legislative authority in the realm, consists of the sovereign, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons.

Northern Ireland had its own parliament (Stormont) subordinate to Westminster; however, because of civil strife in Ulster, the Stormont was prorogued on 30 March 1972, and direct rule was imposed from Westminster. After several abortive attempts over the next decade to devise a system of home-rule government acceptable to both Protestant and Catholic leaders, the 78-member Northern Ireland Assembly was established in 1982, but it was dissolved in 1986. As a result of the 1998 "Good Friday Agreement," a Catholic-Protestant power-sharing government came into being in 1999. It was suspended in October 2002, and direct rule from London returned.

There are around 30 major central government departments, each staffed by members of the permanent civil service. The British constitution is made up of parliamentary statutes, common law, and traditional precepts and practices known as conventions, all evolved through the centuries. Largely unwritten, it has never been codified and is constantly evolving.

ECONOMY

The United Kingdom — one of the most highly industrialized countries in the world, with the world's fourth-largest economy, and one of four countries in Western Europe with a trillion dollar economy (the others are Germany, France, and Italy) — lives by manufacture, trade, and financial and commercial services. Apart from coal and low-grade iron ore, some timber, building materials, and natural gas and North Sea oil, it has few natural resources.

The UK has a partially regulated free market economy, somewhere between the US and continental Europe. Based on market exchange rates, the UK is today the sixth largest economy in the world and the third largest in Europe after Germany and France.

The British motor industry is a significant part of this sector, although it has diminished with the collapse of the MG Rover Group and most of the industry is foreign owned. Civil and defense aircraft production is led by BAE Systems, the second largest defense contractor in the world and the continental European firm EADS, the owner of Airbus. Rolls-Royce holds a major share of the global aerospace engines market. The chemical and pharmaceutical industry is strong in the UK, with the world's second and sixth largest pharmaceutical firms (GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca, respectively) being based in the UK.

The service sector is dominated by financial services, especially in banking and insurance. London is the world's largest financial centre with the London Stock Exchange, the London International Financial Futures and Options Exchange, and the Lloyd's of London insurance market all based in the City of London. London is a major centre for international business and commerce and is the leader of the three "command centres" for the global economy (along with New York City and Tokyo). London has the largest concentration of foreign bank branches in the world.

Tourism is very important to the British economy. The United Kingdom is ranked as the sixth major tourist destination in the world.

Agriculture provides 60% of the food needed with only about 2% of the labor force. The remainder of the United Kingdom's food supply and most raw materials for its industries has to be imported and paid for largely through exports of manufactures and services. The United Kingdom is in fact one of the world's largest markets for food and agricultural products and the fifth-largest trading nation. Vast quantities of imported wheat, meat, butter, livestock feeds, tea, tobacco, wool, and timber have been balanced by exports of machinery, ships, locomotives, aircraft, and motor vehicles. The pattern of exports is gradually changing, however.

The British economy is one of the strongest in Europe: as of the early 2000s, inflation, interest rates, and unemployment remained low.

HEALTH

Life expectancy has increased from 50 years at birth in 1900 to 78.38 years in 2009. Rising living standards, medical advances, the growth of medical facilities and their general availability, and the smaller size of the family are some factors in the improved health of the British people.

A comprehensive National Health Service (NHS), established in 1948, provides full medical care to all residents of the United Kingdom. NHS delivers health care through 129 health authorities, each of which receives money from the government and then purchases a preset amount of treatment each year from hospitals. Included are general medical, dental, pharmaceutical, and optical services; hospital and specialist services (in patients' homes when necessary) for physical and mental illnesses; and local health authority services (maternity and child welfare, vaccination, prevention of illness, health visiting, home nursing, and other services).

The patient is free to choose a family doctor from any in the service, subject to the physician's acceptance. General tax revenues meet most of the cost of the NHS; the remainder is paid through National Health Insurance contributions and charges for certain items, including eyeglasses and prescription drugs. Compared with other OECD countries, the United Kingdom's per capita expenditure on health care is low. In the United Kingdom, 6.9% of the GDP went to health expenditures.

International travel can present some unique challenges, and looking out for your health and safety UK is important. Health and safety UK issues include everything from catching a common cold to knowing the rules and regulations that govern the UK. It is a good idea to take some steps to make sure you are able to travel safe. Health and safety UK precautions will help to make your vacation as trouble-free as possible.

One of the easiest and most important ways to ensure that you are able to travel safe on your United Kingdom adventure is by purchasing travel insurance in the UK. Travel insurance in the UK can cover everything from lost luggage to cancelled flights to sicknesses overseas. While some health care providers do cover their clients when traveling overseas, many do not. For families with children in particular, it is a good idea to make sure that you will have some sort of medical travel insurance in the UK in place in case of unforeseen catastrophes.

If you need access to prescription medications while traveling, it is a good idea to bring along a copy of your doctor's prescription. You should also carry prescription drugs in a carry-on bag if you plan to fly, to avoid any mishaps with your checked baggage. You will have less trouble if you also have a copy of your doctor's prescription in your bag when making your way through security at the airport. Pharmacies in the United Kingdom are easily located, and you should have no trouble filling a prescription with a note from your doctor.

Another common safety concern for international travelers is crime. One of the best ways to travel safe is never to be caught out late at night in a dimly lit area. As a tourist, you may also be a target for muggers and pickpockets, but for the most part this activity is relegated to the larger cities in the United Kingdom such as London, Edinburgh, or Glasgow. Travelers should be fine as long as they pay attention to the safety signs UK offers and don't venture into unknown areas of the larger cities late at night.

The popularity of England tourism makes England an ideal vacation spot. As such, and because the United Kingdom is an industrialized nation, health concerns are generally mild. England tourism includes clean drinking water and ready access to hospitals and doctor's offices. Guests from the United States will also note that their England tourism will include free emergency room visits, a nice boon for overseas travelers.

EDUCATION

Although responsibility for education in the United Kingdom rests with the central government, schools are mainly administered by local education authorities. The majority of primary students attend state schools that are owned and maintained by local education authorities. A small minority attend voluntary schools mostly run by the churches and also financed by the local authorities.

Education is compulsory for all children between the ages of 5 and 16. Since 1989, the government has introduced a "National School Curriculum" in England and Wales comprised of four key stages: five to seven (infants); 7 to 11 (juniors); 11 to 14 (pre-GCSE); and 14 to 16 (GCSE). Similar reforms are being introduced in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The main school examination, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is taken in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland at around the age of 16. A separate exam system exists in Scotland. Of the 2,500 registered independent schools, the largest and most important (Winchester, Eton, Harrow, and others) are known in England as "public schools." Many have centuries of tradition behind them and are world famous. The academic year runs from September to July.

Including the Open University, a nonresidential institution whose courses are conducted by television and radio broadcasts and correspondence texts, Britain had 47 universities in the 1990s (compared with 17 in 1945). As a result of legislation, nearly all polytechnics have become universities and started awarding their own degrees in 1993. The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge date from the 12th and 13th centuries, respectively; the Scottish universities of St. Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh from the 15th and 16th centuries. Besides the universities, there are more than 800 other institutions of higher education, including technical, art, and commercial colleges run by local authorities.

National policy stipulates that no person should be excluded from higher education by lack of means. More than 90% of students in higher education hold awards from public or private funds. In 1997, the government began to reconsider its policy of cost-free tuition by announcing that students would become responsible for some of the expense.

LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS

London has more than 500 libraries, among them the British Library, which is the national library and the largest library in the United Kingdom, with about 150 million items in 2005 and an average acquisition rate of about 3 million items per year. Special collections and treasures include the Magna Carta, a notebook of Leonardo da Vinci, original manuscripts of Jane Austen and James Joyce (among others), and musical manuscripts of G.F. Handel and the Beatles (among others). There is a branch location of the British Library at Boston Spa, West Yorkshire.

The National Library of Scotland, with about seven million volumes, is in Edinburgh, and the National Library of Wales, with some four million volumes, in Aberystwyth. Each of these is a copyright library, entitled to receive a copy of every new book published in the United Kingdom. The Bodleian Library at Oxford University is also a copyright library with about 6.7 million volumes; there are nine branch locations of the Bodleian in Oxford. Oxford University sponsors over 100 departmental libraries. The Cambridge University Library, also a copyright library, has 5.9 million volumes throughout five locations.

Other major libraries in London include the University of London Central Library (two million), the London Library (the largest public subscription library), the Science Museum Library (600,000), the Victoria and Albert Museum Art Library, the Public Record Office (containing such national historical treasures as the Domesday Book), and the libraries of such institutions as the Royal Institute of International Affairs (140,000), the Royal Commonwealth Society (150,000), the Royal Geographical Society (150,000), the Royal Academy of Arts (22,000), and the National Library for the Blind. In 2002 a Women's Library opened in London giving a home to publications documenting women's lives in Britain.

There are major libraries at the Universities of Edinburgh (2.4 million), Glasgow (1.4 million), Queen's University in Belfast (1.1 million), and St. Andrew's (920,000). Manchester Metropolitan University has one million volumes.

London has about 395 public libraries. The South Western Regional Library System links the public libraries of Bristol, Devon, Foursite (Somerset, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset), Gloucestershire, Swindon, and Wiltshire.

The United Kingdom is a museum-lover's dream. Almost every city and large town has museums of art, archaeology, and natural history. There are more than 1,000 museums and art galleries, ranging from nearly two dozen great national institutions to small collections housed in a few rooms. London has the British Museum (founded 1759), with its vast collections of archaeological and ethnographic material from all over the world, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, including extensive collections of works of fine and applied arts. In the late 1990s, the British Museum was struggling financially.

The National Gallery, the Tate Gallery, and the National Portrait Gallery are among other prestigious London art museums. Other museums located in London include the London Transport Museum (founded 1978), the National Maritime Museum (1934), the Natural History Museum (1963), and the Science Museum (1857). There is also a collection of royal ceremonial dress at Kensington Palace, and the Sherlock Holmes Museum, featuring Victorian memorabilia, opened in 1990. The Tate Gallery of Modern Art, featuring rotating exhibits arranged by theme, opened in May 2000. There are important museums and art galleries in Liverpool, Manchester, Leicester, Birmingham, Bristol, Norwich, Southampton, York, Glasgow, Leeds, and other cities.

Oxford and Cambridge each have many museums, and several other universities also have important collections. Private art collections in historic family mansions are open to the public at specified times.

The National Museum and Gallery of Wales and the Museum of Welsh Life are in Cardiff. There is also a Welsh State Museum in Llanberis. The national museums of Scotland include the Royal Museum, the Museum of Scotland, and the National War Museum of Scotland, all in Edinburgh. The Museum of Scottish Country Life is in East Kilbride. There are at least three museums in Scotland that celebrate the life and work of native poet Robert Burns. The Ulster Museums and the Northern Irish Folk Museum are in Belfast.

CULTURE

The culture of the United Kingdom refers to the patterns of human activity and symbolism associated with the United Kingdom and the British people. It is informed by the UK's history as a developed island

country, being a major power, and, its composition of four countries — England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales — each of which have preserved and distinct customs, cultures and symbolism.

As a direct result of the British Empire, British cultural influence (such as the English language) can be observed in the language and culture of a geographically wide assortment of countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan, the United States, and the British overseas territories. These states are sometimes collectively known as the Anglosphere. As well as the British influence on its empire, the empire also influenced British culture, particularly British cuisine. Innovations and movements within the wider-culture of Europe have also changed the United Kingdom; Humanism, Protestantism, and representative democracy have developed from broader Western culture.

The Industrial Revolution, with its origins in the UK, brought about major changes in agriculture, manufacturing, and transportation, and had a profound effect on the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the world. The social structure of Britain during this period has also played a central cultural role. More recently, popular culture of the United Kingdom in the form of the British invasion, Britpop and British television broadcasting, and British cinema, British literature and British poetry is respected across the world.

As a result of the history of the formation of the United Kingdom, the cultures of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are diverse and have varying degrees of overlap and distinctiveness.

Music

The music of the United Kingdom, which is part of British music, refers to all forms of music associated with the United Kingdom since its creation, including music inherited from the states that preceded it.

Throughout its history, the United Kingdom has been a major exporter and source of musical innovation in the modern and contemporary eras, drawing its cultural basis from the history of the United Kingdom, from church music, from Western culture and from the ancient and traditional folk music and instrumentation of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. In the 20th century, influences from the music of the United States became most dominant in popular music. The United Kingdom has one of the world's largest music industries today, with many British musicians having had an impact on modern music.

Forms of popular music, including folk music, jazz, pop and rock music, have particularly flourished in Britain since the twentieth century. Britain has had an impact on popular music disproportionate to its size, due to its linguistic and cultural links with many countries, particularly the United States and many of its former colonies like Australia, South Africa, and Canada, and its capacity for invention, innovation and fusion, which has led to the development of, or participation in, many of the major trends in popular music. In the early-20th century, influences from the United States became most dominant in popular music, with young performers producing their own versions of American music, including rock n' roll from the late 1950s and developing a parallel music scene. This is particularly true since the early 1960s when the British Invasion, led by The Beatles, helped to secure British performers a major place in development of pop and rock music. Since then, rock music and popular music contributed to a British-American collaboration, with trans-Atlantic genres being exchanged and exported to one another, where they tended to be adapted and turned into new movements, only to be exported back again. Genres originating in or radically developed by British musicians include blues rock, heavy metal, progressive rock, hard rock, punk rock, electric folk, folk punk, acid jazz, shoegaze, drum and bass, grime, Britpop and dubstep.

Visual Art

From the creation of the United Kingdom, the English school of painting is mainly notable for portraits and landscapes, and indeed portraits in landscapes. Among the artists of this period are Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), George Stubbs (1724–1806), and Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788). William Hogarth painted far more down to earth portraits and satires, and was the first great English printmaker.

The late 18th century and the early 19th century was perhaps the most radical period in British art, producing William Blake (1757–1827), John Constable (1776–1837) and William Turner (1775–1851), the later two being arguably the most internationally influential of all British artists.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) achieved considerable influence after its foundation in 1848 with paintings that concentrated on religious, literary, and genre subjects executed in a colorful and minutely detailed style. PRB artists included John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and subsequently Edward Burne-Jones. Also associated was designer William Morris, whose efforts to make beautiful objects affordable (or even free) for everyone led to his wallpaper and tile designs defining the Victorian aesthetic and instigating the Arts and Crafts movement.

Visual artists from the United Kingdom in the 20th century include Francis Bacon, David Hockney, Bridget Riley, and the pop artists Richard Hamilton and Peter Blake. Also prominent amongst twentieth century artists was Henry Moore, regarded as the voice of British sculpture, and of British modernism in general. As a reaction to abstract expressionism, pop art emerged originally in England at the end of the 1950s. The 1990s saw the Young British Artists, Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin. Sir Jacob Epstein was a pioneer of modern sculpture.

Randolph Caldecott, Walter Crane, Kate Greenaway, Aubrey Beardsley, Roger Hargreaves, Arthur Rackham, John Leech, George Cruikshank and Beatrix Potter were book illustrators. Arts institutions include the Royal College of Art, Royal Society of Arts, New English Art Club, Slade School of Art, Royal Academy, and the Tate Gallery.

Architecture

The architecture of the United Kingdom includes many features that precede the creation of the United Kingdom in 1707, from as early as Skara Brae and Stonehenge to the Giant's Ring, Avebury and Roman ruins. In most towns and villages the parish church is an indication of the age of the settlement. Many castles remain from the medieval period. Over the two centuries following the Norman conquest of England of 1066, and the building of the Tower of London, castles such as Caernarfon Castle in Wales and Carrickfergus Castle in Ireland were built.

In the United Kingdom, a listed building is a building or other structure officially designated as being of special architectural, historical or cultural significance. About half a million buildings in the UK have "listed" status.

One of the best known English architects working at the time of the foundation of the United Kingdom was Sir Christopher Wren. He was employed to design and rebuild many of the ruined ancient churches of London following the Great Fire of London. His masterpiece, St Paul's Cathedral, was completed in the early years of the United Kingdom.

In the early 18th century baroque architecture — popular in Europe — was introduced, and Blenheim Palace was built in this era. However, baroque was quickly replaced by a return of the Palladian form. The Georgian architecture of the 18th century was an evolved form of Palladianism. Many existing buildings such as Woburn Abbey and Kedleston Hall are in this style. Among the many architects of this form of architecture and its successors, neoclassical and romantic, were Robert Adam, Sir William Chambers, and James Wyatt.

The aristocratic stately home continued the tradition of the first large gracious unfortified mansions such as the Elizabethan Montacute House and Hatfield House.

Fashion

London as one of the world's four fashion capitals, the London Fashion Week is one of the 'Big Four' fashion weeks. Organised by the British Fashion Council, the event takes place twice each year, in February and September. The current venue for most of the "on-schedule" events is Somerset House in central London, where a large marquee in the central courtyard hosts a series of catwalk shows by top designers and fashion houses, while an exhibition, housed within Somerset House itself, showcases over 150 designers. However, many "off-schedule" events, such as On|Off and Vauxhall Fashion Scout, are organised independently and take place at other venues in central London. British designers whose collections have been showcased at the fashion week include Vivienne Westwood, Alexander McQueen and Stella McCartney, while British models who have featured at the event include Kate Moss, Naomi Campbell, Jade Jagger and Jodie Kidd. Fashion designer Mary Quant was at the heart of the "Swinging London" scene of the 1960s, and her work culminated in the creation of the miniskirt and hot pants. Quant named the miniskirt after her favourite make of car, the Mini. The English fashion designer Charles Frederick Worth is widely considered the father of Haute couture.

Events and Holidays

UK holidays and UK festivals can be a great way to experience the history and culture of the United Kingdom. UK holidays encompass national UK holidays and UK festivals, as well as UK festivals that are more specific to England, Scotland, or Wales. Holidays in the UK include religious holidays as well as commemorative observance days, and many travelers even organize their trips around holidays in the UK.

Guy Fawkes Day

Guy Fawkes Day is observed each year on November 5th. This is one of the more popular holidays in England, and memorializes a failed plot to blow up the Parliament building (with members of government inside) in 1605. Though the plot was foiled, the eve of this day is often referred to as Mischief Night, and of the holidays in England, it is a favorite among young people who generally make pranks on this night.

Battle of Britain Day

Observed on September 15th, this is a national holiday that commemorates the anniversary of the historic World War II air battle in 1940. This is one of the more popular holidays in England. A formal remembrance is observed at Buckingham Palace.

Bannockburn Day

On June 24th, 1314, Robert the Bruce drove the English out of Scotland and gained Scots back their independence (for a time). This is one of those Scotland holidays not celebrated in England.

Highland Games

Of all Scotland holidays, the Highland Games are a favorite among foreigners and locals. The Highland Games are also one of the more famous Scotland holidays. The last Saturday in September, travelers will find Scots competing in various traditional highland competitions that are well worth viewing.

Saint David's Day

One of the holidays in the UK celebrated mainly by the Welsh, St. David is the patron saint of Wales and is credited with converting Wales to Christianity. The holiday is observed on March 1st.

Edinburgh International Festival

Each year between August and September, the three week long Edinburgh International Festival takes place in Edinburgh, Scotland. A center for culture, dance, theatre, music, and more, this is quickly becoming one of the most renowned arts festivals in the world.

Glasgow International Arts Fair

Each April, the city of Glasgow put its best foot forward and hosts an international art fair. Local artists and guests display some of the most interesting art in the world at this festival.

Christmas Day

Probably the most widely observed holiday in the UK, Christmas Day is observed on December 25th. The whole country shuts down on the day, and many Brits even take a full two weeks off from work to observe the season. London in particular is a special site at Christmas time.

CUISINE

British cuisine has carved a niche for itself in the hearts of food connoisseurs all over the world. British food has evolved considerably incorporating the cooking styles and cuisines of other countries yet at the same time retaining its originality. Each region of Britain has its own characteristic culinary traditions that have played a major role in enriching the history of British cuisine. For instance, the pork pies have been identified with the culinary customs of the shires, whereas in Cornwall, the pasty constituted an important part of lunch of the workers. Some cuisines in Britain although associated with particular localities have attained a national recognition, like the very famous Yorkshire pudding.

Classic British dishes include: sandwiches, fish and chips, pies (Cornish pasty), Yorkshire pudding, trifle and roast dinners. The staple foods of England are meat, fish, potatoes, flour, butter and eggs. Many traditional dishes are based on these foods. Cheeses are choice regional specialties, including Stilton, farmhouse cheddars and Cheshire Cheese.

Traditional British cuisine is inextricably interwoven with the culture of the country. Some of the popular traditional dishes of the country feature Gammon Steak with Egg, Bubble and Squeak, Black Pudding, Bacon Roly Poly, Pie and Mash with Parsley Liquor, Shepherds Pie, Roast Meats, Roast Beef, Toad in the Hole, Ploughman's Lunch, Cottage Pie, Lancashire Hotpot and many more.

A typical traditional English breakfast would generally consist of baked beans, sausages, mushrooms, eggs, bacon, sandwiches and fried bread. A standard traditional English Sunday lunch invariably features roasted meat, Yorkshire pudding, potatoes and two other vegetable preparations.

The Scottish have their own national dishes, based upon wild products and food, locally produced in this northern region. They include oats, barley, fowl, game, mutton, salmon, herring, and haddock. Oat cakes, shortbread, black buns, bannocks, finnan haddies and haggis are specialties.

British cuisine is an integral part of celebrations and festivities. British wine is an indispensable part of celebrations in the country. In Britain, festival days have always constituted an important part of the country's major celebratory occasions. Some of these are Oak Apple Day, Easter, May Day, Stir-up Sunday, Martinmas, Mothering Sunday and many more. Christmas is the most important festival that is celebrated in the country. During this time, many special dishes are prepared like Christmas pudding, Christmas cake, Sponge cake, Christmas Fruit Mincemeat Tarts and many more.

British cuisine has also borrowed a lot from other international cuisines of the world. There are many similarities with French, Spanish and German food. Presently Indian food, which is spicy, has become a favorite with British people. Indian take-aways can be found all over the UK and are a favourite stop off point after a few pints of beer, especially at the week-end.

Today there is an emphasis on fine, fresh ingredients in the better restaurants and their markets offer countless worldly items. Salmon, Dover sole, prawns, game, and lamb are choice items. Wild fowl and game are specialties.

Restaurants

While there are plenty of opportunities to utilize a hotel kitchen to make a quick snack, dining out can be just as fun as some of the other UK tourist attractions. UK restaurants have come a long way over the years and today UK restaurants are among the finest in the world. Whether you want simple fare for a modest price or the tantalizing specialties of a high end UK restaurant, you'll be delighted to discover that the United Kingdom has it all.

Restaurants in London England have evolved in recent years to include some of the most famous restaurants run by the most sought after chefs. Gordon Ramsay of reality TV fame got his start at restaurants in London England and his famous London restaurant remains a world-class favorite among foreigners and locals alike. Many of the gourmet restaurants in London England are pricey, but plenty are worth the extra cash. Heavily influenced by traditional French cooking, many restaurants in London England today combine European flavors with modern innovation. Many of these restaurants are located in downtown London near such attractions as Trafalgar Square and others- making your dining experience both delicious and historical.

Pubs are yet another type of restaurants in London England and throughout the entire United Kingdom. Many of the pubs in the larger cities like Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Cardiff have gone from dreary places to pound a beer to a hip little food oasis. Many of the more traditional UK food dishes are served up in pubs. The bangers and mash of British fame is making a come-back right along with many other standard UK food dishes.

Edinburgh is home to some of the fancier Scotland restaurants and presents UK food with a flair that is uniquely Scottish. In addition to some of the Scotland restaurant fare many foreigners have heard ominous tales about (haggis, for instance), the Scots provide a bounty of European delicacies that are well worth sampling. Pubs are popular here, too, and in addition to a warm and tasty meal, you're likely to meet some colorful locals as well.

Scotland restaurants are also well known for their fresh ingredients. This is a major boon for any visitor. Many restaurants, small and large, tend their own gardens out back and toss fresh vegetables and herbs in with the dishes. While some of these restaurants are subject to seasonal fare, you can't beat the freshness or the flavor. Since most Scottish cities and towns are located right on the coast, you'll also find that Scotland restaurants feature plenty of fresh seafood. For anyone who loves the flavor of recently caught fish (as recent as that same day), Scotland restaurants is the place to be.

One other unique way to enjoy UK food is through high tea. Although high tea is no longer what it once was due to the workday, high tea is still enjoyed by many. Tourists can even indulge in teatime at many restaurants, and a formal high tea in the late afternoon is an event well worth attending at least once while you are in the United Kingdom. Try the Roman Bathhouse in the city of Bath for a special treat. However you decide to enjoy UK food traditions, the restaurants of UK are sure to delight.

SHOPPING

UK shopping is not as inexpensive as it once was. The strength of the British pound and UK currency has made UK shopping one of the more pricey endeavors on a vacation to the UK. For just about anyone traveling to the UK, shopping UK has been relegated to souvenir or special item shopping. Though you aren't

likely to find a bargain when shopping UK, you will find some interesting souvenirs, and there are some great markets for shopping UK that are worth checking out whether you plan to buy something or not.

UK shopping for fashion is usually centered on London. London is on par with New York and Paris as a major fashion capital in the world, and there are overwhelming amounts of shopping options in London. If it's England shopping you are after, you will likely want to start in London.

England shopping in London is best tackled with a little planning. Knowing what you are looking for can help you eliminate the hassle of pushing through markets or shops that you may not want or need to visit. If London is at the heart of England shopping, then Regent Street is one of the vital veins of this shopping network. Many of the most popular brand stores and bargain outlets can be found on Regent Street. Take a bus or the Tube to avoid parking, as there is basically none available.

Nearby, department store enthusiasts will enjoy a stroll along either Oxford Street or Knightsbridge. These streets are home to the ever-popular Harrods and Harvey Nichols, both of which are insanely appealing for local and foreign shoppers. For music, books, and smaller shops, try the out-of-the-way streets. You won't have as many crowds to fight and some of the local owners are incredibly welcoming to tourists.

Scotland shopping has a different flavor altogether than England. Of course, Glasgow and Edinburgh still feature many of the high end outlets and department stores that tourists will find in London, and of course they still take the same UK currency, but Scotland shopping for many has a quaint feel.

Outside the big cities, Scotland shopping can reveal some of the most unique shops and hand crafted local items in the world. Since many residents of Scotland are the descendants of families who have been in place for many generations, cultural traditions have been passed right down through the bloodline. Some of the most fascinating shops will be found in the smaller villages and gift shops that line the shore. These are great places to pick up gifts or special souvenirs by which to remember your trip to Scotland.

Antique shopping is also quite popular among UK shoppers. As a country with hundreds of years of history, antique shopping can turn up some wonderful goodies for those who love antiques. Most of the larger cities in the UK feature excellent antique shops.

One important thing for travelers to note is that in addition to the high rate of UK currency exchange, the government imposes a tax of about 19% on all purchases. This tax is referred to as the VAT (value added tax). The good news for you regarding VAT is that as a non-British resident you are eligible for a tax refund on your purchases (you should expect to get about 15% back). In order to get this refund, you must get a VAT refund form from the retailer that sells you your goods, and you must have them fill it out for you right then and there. No exceptions.

TOURISM, TRAVEL, AND RECREATION

The United Kingdom is a popular tourist destination, rich in natural as well as cultural attractions. Landscapes range from farmlands and gardens to sandy beaches, moors, and rocky coasts. Architectural sights include stone and thatched cottages, stately country houses, mansions, and castles. Among the many historic dwellings open to the public are the Welsh castles Cilgerran (11th century), Dolbadarn (12th century), and Conway and Caernarvon (both 13th century); the 10-century-old Traquair House near Peebles, the oldest continuously inhabited house in Scotland, and the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh; and Warwick Castle, near Stratford-upon-Avon, the birthplace of William Shakespeare.

Distinguished cathedrals include St. Paul's in London and those in Canterbury, Exeter, Norwich, Winchester, and York. At Bushmills, in Northern Ireland, the oldest distillery in the world may be visited, and some of Scotland's 100 malt whiskey distilleries also offer tours.

Among London's extraordinary attractions are Buckingham Palace, the Tower of London, and Westminster Abbey. Of the wide range of entertainment available, London is particularly noted for its theater,

including the Royal Shakespeare Company. Folk music may be heard throughout the United Kingdom; traditional community gatherings for music and dancing, called ceilidhs, are held in Scotland, often in pubs, and Edinburgh is the site of one of the world's largest folk festivals, as well as an annual festival of classical music and other performing arts.

Scotland, where golf developed in the 15th century, has many superb golf courses, as does the rest of the United Kingdom; some 70 Highland Games and Gatherings take place in Scotland from May to September. Other popular sports include fishing, riding, sailing, rugby, cricket, and football (soccer). Wimbledon is the site of perhaps the world's most prestigious tennis competition. London hosted the summer Olympics in 1908 and 1948, and is scheduled to host again in 2012. England hosted and won the World Cup soccer championship in 1966.

The United Kingdom is one of the most influential empires in the history of the world, and UK travel is an excellent way to delve deeper into the history and delight this country has to offer. A UK vacation can encompass stops throughout the country, or it may be concentrated in one of the nation's unique countries such as Scotland or Wales. However you plan to organize your UK travel a UK vacation is sure to be a memorable experience.

Deciding when to go to the United Kingdom can depend on your UK travel priorities and the amount of time you have for your UK vacation. Whatever you decide, there are some excellent UK tourist attractions open throughout the year that you'll want to be sure to catch.

England vacations are perhaps the most popular, as London is one of the world's major travel destinations. England vacations can be part of a larger tour of the United Kingdom or can fully suffice as a trip on their own. Touring English castles, stopping at a major theme park such as Alton Towers, or simply exploring the expansive palaces and parks in England are all popular ways to enjoy UK tourist attractions. England vacations give tourists the option of enjoying a high tea at an ancient Roman Bathhouse, or touring some of the world's oldest inhabited castles and palaces such as Windsor Castle or Buckingham Palace.

Travel outside of England can be equally fascinating. The totally unique area of Wales is inhabited by some of the most interesting people in the world; many of who speak English as a second language. The character of this area of the United Kingdom will provide a singular travel experience. Travel to the north, in Scotland, is also distinctly different than travel in England or elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Traditions and culture harkens back to many centuries ago.

Wherever you plan to spend your time, UK tourist attractions are among the most famous and iconic in the world. Shopping and dining out can also provide a unique glimpse into a way of life that is like no other in the world. Many travelers come to London most specifically for the excellent shopping. As one of the major fashion capitals of the world, London is on par with Paris and New York for satisfying and cutting-edge shopping markets. Local shopping in villages can also be a great way to obtain traditional pieces and one-of-a-kind homemade items.

No matter how you plan to take part in UK tourism, the country has something to offer for just about everyone. From history buffs to sports fans to those simply looking to relax at a resort and spa, travel to the United Kingdom is truly a treat.

British Top Attractions

Buckingham Palace

Buckingham Palace has been the official London residence of English royalty since 1837. The palace stands in around 40 acres of garden and while the west facade of the palace building remains virtually as its architect Nash designed it, the east side facing the garden was added in 1847 and entirely replaced in 1913.

You may visit the Throne Room, Music Room, State Dining Room as well as the many beautifully decorated apartments.

The Tower of London and the Crown Jewels

The Tower of London has been home to every Monarch from William the Conqueror (11th Century) to Henry the VIII (16th Century). It has also been the site of the Royal mint, the Royal Menagerie and the Royal Observatory. The Tower of London is infamous for its prison and for having been the scene of countless executions, including that of Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII.

York

The picturesque medieval city of York was second only to London in importance up until the Industrial Revolution. The city, whose 13th century walls are one of the best surviving medieval fortifications in Europe, played a key role in English history. Its magnificent cathedral, medieval streets, grand houses and attractive riverside pubs make it an ideal spot for getting away from it all.

The British Museum

The British Museum is one of the oldest and largest museums in the world. Sir Hans Sloane bequeathed the initial collection to a Chelsea doctor in 1753. The museum then began to attract valuable items being amassed by the British Empire throughout the nineteenth century. The key exhibits include the Rosetta Stone, the Lindisfarne Gospels, Egyptian Hall, the Tomb of Payava, the Elgin Marbles & the Sutton Hoo treasures. The museum is a true treasure, a vast storehouse of collections from the four corners of the world.

Edinburgh and Edinburgh Castle

Edinburgh is the beautiful capital of Scotland and a fantastic place to visit at any time of year. It offers superb sightseeing, wonderful historic buildings to explore, quiet galleries and museums and a wide choice of restaurants, pubs and cafés as well as nightlife to suit everyone. The city has been a stronghold since the 5th century when the Picts built a fortress on what is now the site of the spectacular Edinburgh Castle to protect Scotland from invaders. Edinburgh Castle is perched high on an extinct volcanic outcrop and it dominates the capital's skyline with panoramic views across the World Heritage listed Old and New Towns and out over the Firth of Forth. The castle has been a residence of Scotland's Kings and Queens throughout the centuries. Edinburgh Castle offers a fascinating and absorbing mixture of entertainment and education, a visit here is an essential part of any trip to the United Kingdom. Edinburgh has a range of stunning architecture, both classical and Georgian and has become known as the "Athens of the North". Apart from its varied and stunning architecture, Edinburgh is a visually beautiful place. Enjoy the many parks and gardens or explore the world famous Royal Botanic Garden. Shopping is a delight with the city being home to the world's oldest independent department store.

Stonehenge

Stonehenge is the most important prehistoric monument in the United Kingdom. There are many theories as to the purpose of Stonehenge ranging from a druid temple for sun worship to a burial ground and even an astronomical calendar. Many of the stones were transported there with considerable effort from a great distance away. This was a truly remarkable achievement considering it dates from 3100- 2300 BC.

Windsor Castle

Windsor Castle is one of the Queen's official residences and has been in continuous use for over 900 years. It was originally built for William the Conqueror to guard the approach to London. The State Apartments house excellent works of art including masterpieces by Rembrandt, Rubens, Holbein and Van Dyck as well as magnificent French and English furniture and porcelain. The State Apartments also contain Queen Mary's Dolls' House. It is a 1:12 scale-working model complete with furniture, decorations, running water and electricity.

The Lake District

The Lake District is one of the UK's most beautiful regions, inspiring the great works of Wordsworth and holding generations of tourists in its thrall. The lakes are set among the dramatic Cumbrian Mountains and the region is dotted with attractive towns and pleasant dales.

Stratford-upon-Avon

Steeped in culture and history and set in the beautiful Warwickshire countryside, Stratford-upon-Avon was the birthplace of the greatest playwright ever known - William Shakespeare. Visit the five houses connected with Shakespeare and his family. Open all year round, these sixteenth-century houses feature rare period furnishings and domestic items. Aspects of Tudor life are on display, all set in attractive gardens and grounds. When all Shakespeared out, you can also visit the Butterfly Farm, the Teddy Bear Museum and the Stratford Brass Rubbing Centre.

The London Eye

The London Eye is the world's largest observation wheel, standing at 135 metres high. It provides a 30-minute, slow-moving "flight" over London and is designed to reflect the elements of air, water, earth and time. The passenger capsules are lit internally at the point of embarkation and each capsule accommodates up to 25 people. The eye can handle 1,500 visitors an hour.

Top Things to Do

As one of the most influential countries in the world, with hundreds of years of history under its belt, the United Kingdom has literally thousands of things to see and do. A list of ten of the most popular tourist activities in the UK, in no particular order, is shown below.

Visit Windsor Castle

Windsor Castle is one of the oldest inhabited strongholds in the world. It is one of the most popular things to do in England, and a UK tour of the castle can be booked almost any day of the year. Windsor Castle has been a home to the Sovereign for over 900 years, and today is one of the three official residences of the Queen. First built in 1070 by William the Conqueror, this is one of the best places to tour in England.

Visit the Canterbury Cathedral

Another of the most popular things to do in England, Canterbury Cathedral is not only one of the oldest cathedrals in the UK; it is also full of intrigue. Famous murders and burials have happened within the walls of the cathedral, and a UK tour of the cathedral is fascinating. The cathedral dates back to the year 597, and the archives held by the cathedral date back many centuries detailing the records of births and deaths in the area.

Hike the Lake District

The Lake District is a series of lakes that make up one of the most beautiful stretches of English countryside you're likely to find. Walking along the trails is among the most favorite UK attractions among both travelers and locals. Plenty of pubs can be found in the Lake District to warm weary walking legs, as well.

Visit Buckingham Palace

Buckingham Palace is the official residence of the Queen of England and a massive palace to boot. You'll see a flag outside when the Queen is in residence. Buckingham Palace first became the official royal residence in the nineteenth century, and the changing of the guard happens here daily. Since the castle has heavy security, only certain sections of the palace are available for tours. Summer is the best time to view the castle, as tourists will find the most sections are open at this time.

Watch the Changing of the Guard

The changing of the guard is perhaps one of the most appealing UK attractions to visitors. You can see the changing of the guard outside either Windsor Castle or Buckingham Palace. Changing of the guard doesn't always happen every day, though, so be sure to check ahead before you fight the crowds.

Tour the Castles

Both English castles and Scottish castles are imbued with history. Dating back hundreds of years, a tour of the castles is one of the most popular things to do in Scotland and England. Castles offer a chance to see the historical handiwork of various rulers.

Have Lunch at a Roman Bath

About an hour's bus ride from the city of London you'll find the city of Bath, and in Bath you'll find one of the oldest Roman bathhouses in Europe. Restored and converted into a restaurant, guests can sip tea or nibble sandwiches overlooking the bathhouse.

Visit the Stonehenge

If you'll be anywhere near Stonehenge (and even if you won't), you'll want to find a way to get here. A description of this ancient circle of stones cannot compare to the feeling of seeing it in person. Dating back thousands of years and thought to be the work of the ancient Celts, the stones of the monument are remarkable both for the ingenuity used to move the massive rocks to their resting place and for their relation to astronomy. Tours are available daily, although the most striking time to see Stonehenge is either at sunrise or sunset.

Ride a rollercoaster at Alton Towers

Alton Towers is one of the UK's most appealing modern theme parks. A former mansion converted into a fun park, Alton Towers is full of unique gardens and comes with an interesting history, as well. The mansion was built by the eccentric 15th Earl of Shrewsbury in the 19th century, who spared no expense at making this one of the most elaborate and bizarre homes in England. It's unique design makes for an intriguing theme park.

Take a Golf Tour

Long ago, the monks of St. Andrews Cathedral began chasing a small ball around their greens with clubs, and by the 18th century golfing was one of the most popular sports in Scotland. One of the most popular things to do in Scotland is golf. With over 400 golf courses, Scotland is a golfer's paradise, and travelers will hardly have time to visit each of these historic courses.

TOURIST DESTINATIONS

ENGLAND

As the largest country in the United Kingdom, England is also the most populous and its residents make up more than 80 percent of the entire population of the United Kingdom. Full of history and a welcome place for tourists, vacations in England have long been a popular choice for travelers looking for a place to get away. Tourist attractions in England range from iconic castles, to massive palaces, to modern monuments. No matter how travelers spend their vacations in England, they are usually surrounded by centuries old architecture and traditions.

The group that came to be known as the Anglo-Saxons settled England in the eighth century. It was at this time that many of the territories, whose names still persist to this day, were established. Areas such as Dumbarton, York, Dorchester, Dover, and more still make up the districts of modern day England. Later in the eleventh century, the Anglo-Saxons were conquered by the Normans, crowning William the Conqueror king in 1066 at a ceremony in Westminster Abbey, where succeeding kings and queens of the UK have been coroneted ever since.

Today, vacations in England often center on visiting some of the historic buildings and cathedrals that make England so unique. England is of course home to the busy city of London, and the country has its fair share of incredible landmarks. Some of the most popular tourist attractions in England include Windsor

Castle, Canterbury Cathedral, Buckingham Palace, and the London Zoo. Vacations in England also often include such tourist attraction in England as wide spread English castle or wine tours. England vacation packages meant for travelers with touring in mind are widely available.

If you find the great outdoors calling to you once you reach England, you may choose to visit the Lake District or Hyde Park. The Lake District is a protected area in England with miles upon miles of walking trails and pubs all along the way to wet a dry pallet. Hyde Park can be found in the heart of London and features many historical monuments of its own. England has maintained its forests and shores relatively well over the years, and heading into the wild can be a satisfying experience.

Shopping is often a priority to guests of England. As one of the major fashion capitals of the world, London shopping will meet the needs of even the most enthusiastic shop-a-holic. Even the smaller towns in England will usually have a nice selection of shops and outdoor markets to peruse for clothing and souvenirs. If shopping makes you hungry, England also has some really excellent places to eat. Many restaurants are even influenced by international flavors from neighbors France and India, and tourists will be delighted by the wide array of local and international foods.

If you are hoping to travel to England during a dry season, you may be out of luck. The climate is temperate but fairly wet throughout the year. Summers will be warmer, of course, and you may want to look into England vacation packages for the summer. England vacation packages can also include cruise trips, which is another great way to see the area. Some tourists even book a cruise that sails over to Wales or up towards Scotland.

However you decide to organize your vacation in England, this is sure to be a memorable trip. From plenty of outdoor fun to a concentration of some of the most iconic historical sites in the entire world, England attractions offer a little something for everyone.

Dover

Sometimes referred to as the, “Key to England”, Dover castle is found in the seaside town of Dover, England. The nickname for the castle comes from the history of Dover castle, which has included scenes from almost every period in the United Kingdom’s long account. Dover castle is today, along with the white cliffs of Dover, one of the main tourist attractions to the town.

The history of Dover castle actually begins as far back as the Iron Age, when the site itself was likely used as a fortress before the arrival of the Romans. Dover castle as we know it today was first built up during the reign of Henry II, although of course many additions and changes have taken place over the years. William the Conqueror first took notice of the area in 1066 as he made his way through Dover and Canterbury to Westminster Abbey for his coronation.

The history of Dover castle during the Tudor era included improvements to the structure, which had been attacked multiple times, though unsuccessfully. In the seventeenth century, Dover castle England actually fared well during the English Civil War. Somehow, Dover castle England was held, and a battle never broke out on the site despite the many troops stationed in and around it. Dover castle England was held for the current king during the war.

Dover castle history goes on to reflect major reconstruction of the structure during the eighteenth century, during the wars with Napoleon. Most of the defenses were improved, and new barracks were added to house additional soldiers. In addition to the new barracks above ground, a series of underground tunnels were added to house and keep soldiers, and were actually able to hold up to 2,000 men at one time.

The tunnels would prove to play a continued role in Dover castle history. During the Second World War, the tunnels were used as secret operations rooms, where telephone and radio communications could be sent out without detection. Dover Castle history also goes on to show that the underground tunnels were used

as an underground hospital and command center. Today, visitors to Dover can tour the castle and see a reconstruction of the World War II tunnel scenario. The castle is officially owned by the English Heritage group and remains a great place for tourists to come and visit. The official head of the castle is the Lord Ports, who also acts as the Constable of Dover Castle.

Leeds Castle

Leeds Castle is perhaps the loveliest, most romantic castle in England. This fairy-tail structure is situated on two islands in the middle of the River Len near Maidstone, Kent, not far from London. The nearby village of Leeds should not be confused with the large city of Leeds, located hundreds of miles away in West Yorkshire.

The history of Leeds Castle England can be traced to the ninth century, when a Saxon lord built a manor on one of the islands on the River Len. A Norman nobleman, Robert de Crevecoeur, began constructing the stone structure in 1119. The castle came into the hands of the English monarchy in 1278. King Edward I and his wife, Eleanor of Castille, made many additions to Leeds Castle, giving it much of its present-day appearance. For the next three centuries in the history of Leeds Castle, this romantic fortress was a home to many medieval queens of England.

The most famous resident in the history of Leeds Castle was King Henry VIII, who made further additions to the structure, converting it from a fortress to a royal palace for his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. In the more recent history of Leeds Castle, the grounds were used to host a meeting between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan in 1978.

Leeds Castle England has been open to the public since 1976 and is maintained by the Leeds Castle Foundation. A Leeds Castle tour includes visits to the old keep, the Gloriette, named after Eleanor of Castille. Dog lovers will enjoy the unique dog collar museum, also part of the Leeds Castle tour. Outside, the Leeds Castle tour features the Culpepper Gardens, a classic English country garden; several aviaries of native and exotic birds, including a duckery with rare black swans; woodland gardens; a grotto; and a yew-tree maze. There is even a 9-hole public golf course.

Leeds Castle provides a venue for many country events in Kent. The castle can be booked for conferences, weddings, and other private gatherings. On the first Saturday of every month, the castle hosts Kentish Evenings, featuring a cocktail reception, a private Leeds Castle tour, and a five-course meal. In June and July, Leeds Castle hosts large open-air concerts, featuring music and performances.

Stonehenge

Travelers throughout the world travel to Stonehenge located in England, each year hoping to catch a glimpse of what many believe to be the work of early Druids. This belief is not substantiated, however, and Stonehenge is surrounded by controversy. It is known that Stonehenge is thousands of years old, and much of the Stonehenge mystery centers on how the gigantic stones were moved. Mainstream archeology continues to be fascinated and baffled by the purpose of Stonehenge, and the site remains one of the most popular tourist attractions in the United Kingdom and throughout the world.

There are conflicting theories on Stonehenge history. Until the late 19th century, it was widely believed that Stonehenge's circular arrangement was the work of ancient Druids. Earlier beliefs were usually influenced heavily by myths and legends passed down through the ages. One story in the 12th century detailed Merlin the wizard constructing Stonehenge by magically transporting the enormous rocks, while still other accounts associated Stonehenge mystery with the medieval court of King Arthur.

The first academic study of Stonehenge England took place in 1740. John Aubrey was the first historian to take measurements of the structure, allowing for greater analysis of the form itself. Though Aubrey also declared Stonehenge England to be the work of the Druids, he was able to demonstrate the possible astronomical role suggested by the placement of the stones themselves. Years later, bronze fragments were found near the site, giving credence to the idea that the site was constructed during the Bronze Age.

One other piece of the Stonehenge mystery puzzle is the Bluestones. The Bluestones are incongruously worked stones that seem to have been added to the monument after its original construction. Theories as to the arrival of the Bluestones include ideas that there was some kind of alliance between groups signified by the merging of two cultural pieces, or that possibly the arrival of the Bluestones was meant to signify the dominance of one group over another. However, the Bluestones did in fact arrive and there is no doubt that Stonehenge mystery is only enhanced by this curious addition.

London

London is the capital of England and the United Kingdom (UK). It is Britain's largest and most populous metropolitan area. A major settlement for two millennia, its history goes back to its founding by the Romans, who called it Londinium. London's core, the ancient City of London, or the 'square mile' financial district, largely retains its mediaeval boundaries. Since at least the 19th century, the name "London" has also referred to the metropolis developed around this core. In modern times, the bulk of this conurbation forms the London region and the Greater London administrative area, with its own elected mayor and assembly.

London is a leading global city being the world's largest financial centre alongside New York City, and has the largest city GDP in Europe. Central London is home to the headquarters of most of the UK's top 100 listed companies and more than 100 of Europe's 500 largest.

London's influence in politics, finance, education, entertainment, media, fashion, the arts and culture in general contributes to its global position. It is a major tourist destination for both domestic and overseas visitors. London contains four World Heritage Sites: the Tower of London; the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; the site comprising the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey and St. Margaret's Church; and the historic settlement of Greenwich (in which the Royal Observatory marks the Greenwich Meridian (0° longitude) and GMT).

London has a diverse range of peoples, cultures and religions, and more than 300 languages are spoken within its boundaries. In July 2007 it had an official population of 7,556,900 within the boundaries of Greater London, making it the most populous municipality in the European Union. The Greater London Urban Area (the second largest in the EU) has a population of 8,278,251 while the metropolitan area (the largest in the EU) has an estimated total population of between 12 million and 14 million. The London Underground network, administered by Transport for London, is the oldest underground railway network in the world and the most extensive after the Shanghai Metro. London Heathrow Airport is the world's busiest airport by number of international passengers and the airspace is the busiest of any urban centre in the world.

London tourist attractions draw tourists to the city from across the globe throughout the year. These tourist spots of London are known for their beauty, heritage and architectural excellence. The various attractions of London reflect the cultural heritage of the British people. London is one of the most desired tourist destinations in the whole world and is crowded by tourists all the year round.

Major Tourist Attractions in London:

- The Tower of London - This is one of the most popular tourist spots in London. This 1000-years-old castle speaks volumes about the heritage of the country.

- St Paul's Cathedral - The cathedral is one of the oldest churches in London. Tourists can have the bird's eye view of London by climbing the steps from the cathedral to the Golden Gallery.
- Tower Bridge - Tower Bridge has been recognized as one of the most fascinating bridges across the globe. The bridge was established in 1894. Tourists can enjoy a magnificent view of the city from the Tower Bridge.
- Madam Tussaud's Museum - The world famous wax museum of Madam Tussaud is one of the greatest museums of the world featuring fascinating wax models of celebrities across the globe.
- Windsor Castle - Situated in the fringes of London, the Windsor Castle is the world's oldest occupied castles. It is still inhabited by the British sovereign.
- ZSL London Zoo - The ZSL London Zoo, located in Regent's Park region is home to more than 12,000 animals including some of the endangered and rare species. Millions of tourists from across the world visit the zoo every year.
- Kensington Palace - The elegant and majestic Kensington Palace is the place where Queen Victoria was born. Later the palace became the residence of late Princess Diana. It is considered as one of the must-visit destinations of London.

Some other London tourist attractions include London Aquarium, HMS Belfast, Shakespeare's Globe Theater, Big Ben, Trafalgar Square and London Eye Millennium Wheel and many more.

One of the best ways to explore London is by availing the London Tourist Pass or the London Pass. It provides a great opportunity for the visitors to visit and explore most of the London attractions either free of cost or at discounted rates. The Travelcard helps the tourists to make an optimum use of the various modes of public conveyance in the city including the tube rail, the terrestrial rail, the bus services, the trams as well as waterways.

Liverpool

One of the most diverse and exciting cities in the United Kingdom, Liverpool was voted the European Capital of Culture for 2008. From soccer, music and maritime culture Liverpool England is steeped in history with no shortage of entertainment throughout the year for all ages and interests.

Liverpool tourism is busiest during the summer months but Liverpool boasts excellent transport links. Whether you arrive by air from John Lennon Airport with connections to all over Europe or by train from London in just over 2.5 hours, Liverpool England offers a fantastic break from the capital. Liverpool tourist information provides a wealth of means to explore the city itself. Book in advance for the Magical Mystery Tour and visit the sights and sounds that inspired some of the Beatles most memorable songs like Strawberry Fields and Penny Lane. Take the Liverpool City Explorer and visit the historic waterfront or hire a bicycle and do it all your own way.

Boasting impressive internationally recognised architecture, including Anglican and Metropolitan Cathedrals, the World Museum Liverpool offers an admission free insight into Liverpool's legacy as a major port. Situated within the heart of the historic waterfront, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Merseyside Maritime Museum at the Albert Dock highlights this heritage. A popular option with Liverpool tourism and one of the best ways to see the city is from the deck of the city's famous ferries while taking a leisurely cruise along the River Mersey.

With more museums and art galleries than most cities other than London, The Tate and Walker Art Galleries reflect the city as a champion of contemporary art. For those theatrical persons check out the Empire and Everyman theatres for touring productions and musicals. Liverpool tourist information lists current events on offer.

A major attraction for Liverpool tourism is the reputation of the city for producing music artists such as local heroes The Coral, Echo and the Bunnymen and most notably the Beatles. No visit to the city for any discerning Beatles fan can be complete without a trip to the Casbah Coffee Club and world famous Cavern Club, still one of the best venues to catch live music. The Liverpool UK art deco style Philharmonic Hall or 'The Phil' as it is affectionately known, is a superb entertainment venue owned and managed by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and provides a program of classical and contemporary music with folk, blues, jazz, rock, pop and comedy shows year round.

Shopping in Liverpool England offers a mix of high street clothing stores with designer brands like Prada and Gucci in the city's newest shopping district, the Met Quarter. More of interest is the independent boutiques like iconic British fashion designer Vivienne Westwood's that can be found along buzzing Cavern Walks.

Built on the back of the Cavern Club the Liverpool nightlife always provided an unforgettable experience. Its popularity is increasing once again. Alma de Cuba, a converted Polish church encourages you to indulge in carefully crafted cocktails, while the city hosts annually Liverpool UK favorite summer electronic music festival, Creamfields. Centred at Concert Square, traditional pubs, designer chic cafes and restaurants make for a lively scene. Elsewhere at Albert Dock, hip boutique bars and clubs, up for it locals and TV show personalities make for long nights and even longer hangovers. Liverpool tourist information lists venues likely to grab your attention from soccer matches, comedy clubs, theatre and music events. It's not hard to see that bursting with personality Liverpool UK is once again a lively city full of culture and one not to be missed.

WALES

Wales is located southwest of its neighbor England and, while the two countries may share a border, they do not share all cultural traditions. Neither is Wales exactly like its northern neighbor Scotland. Those who plan to travel Wales will find that the people of Wales maintain a fiercely independent nature, and continue to lobby for different degrees of independence to this day. Although Wales has not been a sovereign state since 1282 when it was conquered by King Edward I, the country today is still uniquely its own. Tourists who travel Wales will be rewarded with an inimitable traveling experience.

The people of Wales can trace their history back to the fall of the Roman Empire in 410. Wales was at this time divided into several different kingdoms, and Anglo-Saxon king attempted time and again to invade these kingdoms. Offa's Dyke is a popular part of many sightseeing tours in Wales and was constructed in the fifth century by King Offa of Mercia during this time. Wales would eventually become part of the United Kingdom, but today many of the stone castles and dwellings of old remain as reminders of the area's tumultuous past.

Many tourists who travel Wales wonder about the history of the Prince of Wales, especially since the current Prince of Wales is part of the royal monarch and is not from Wales. The title Prince of Wales came about in 1301, when King Edward I of England gave the title to his heir, Prince Edward (who would later become King Edward II). Traditionally, there has not been a native Wales resident holding the title Prince of Wales. Today, the Prince of Wales represents Wales most prominently in his insignia and royal dress, but the role does not have much sway in governmental practice.

Wales is generally thought of in two sections — North Wales and South Wales. North Wales is a wooded play land, and also features its own distinctive dialect and Welsh language. Many residents of Wales are the decedents of the people who have been there for hundreds of centuries, and actually speak English as their second language (Welsh being the first). Sightseeing tours in Wales are an increasingly popular way to see the north, and are well worth it.

South Wales is another great area for sightseeing tours in Wales, and is the home to the capital city of Cardiff. A Wales tour might include an historical trek through this attractive city. Excellent restaurants, great Wales shopping, and plenty of fascinating local people can be found in the streets of Cardiff and throughout the South of Wales.

Other Wales tours can take the shape of a country-wide historic or castle tour, but keep in mind that many of the castles in Wales were actually constructed by the Norman conquerors as a way to govern the native peoples. Many of the castles have not been restored, and yet you will still find that Wales tours of this spots can be intriguing.

Offering everything a traveler could want in the way of relaxation and peace, Wales combines the beauty of nature with the history of a great people. With hip cities to visit, the lovely outdoors to explore, and plenty of great hotels to rest your head in at night, Wales is a great vacation destination for individual travelers and families alike.

SCOTLAND

Located north of England and Wales, Scotland has developed a fiercely independent culture that has survived the political tumult the country has seen. The area is thought to have been settled in 843, when Kenneth I of Scotland became King of the Picts and Scots. The Picts were a northern kingdom that was conquered by the Scots and blended with their kingdom when Kenneth became Scotland's first King. Later in the 11th century William, the Conqueror, led the Normans to defeat the Scots, and the nation is today part of Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

A Scotland golf vacation is one of the most appealing ways to enjoy the country. Scotland boasts more than 400 golf courses ranging in price and exclusivity. A Scotland golf vacation can be an excellent way to combine sightseeing with sport. Since nearly every city in Scotland has a golf course, from Edinburgh to Glasgow to the smaller villages, a golf tour of the country will also land travelers in many of the countries best travel destinations.

Sightseeing in itself can be a consuming activity and can also make for great vacations in Scotland. Many tourists travel to Scotland specifically for the popular Scotland tourist attractions. Scottish castles are abundant, and the remains of many are available for viewing to this day. Many of the older castles have come to ruin, but still stand tall as a symbol of the dangerous life that the Scots of old led. Perhaps it is this danger that has developed the strong character of the Scots, and yet travelers will find that locals are among the most welcoming to tourists in all of the United Kingdom.

Other Scotland tourist attractions can be found on the coast. Since most of the cities in Scotland are located on the coast travelers will find that much of the action happens there. Popular Scotland tourist attractions include the Glasgow cathedral, Mugdock Country Park, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Burn's Cottage, and more. The country is literally filled with both legend and monuments.

Eating at restaurants for those who travel to Scotland can be an adventure. Local fare, for the most part, will center around thick stews, beef, and variations on dishes using oats (such as an oatcake). Haggis is the food most non-Scots think of when they think of Scotland; however, it is considered a delicacy. Travelers will find it available in many traditional Scottish restaurants, but those feeling adventurous should be aware that haggis is made from a mixture of sheep parts (lung, stomach, heart, and liver) and spices.

If all that food leaves you longing for a nap, keep in mind that Scotland has plenty of great hotels to choose from. No matter how you plan to spend your time in this gorgeous northern country, anyone who plans to travel Scotland will be delighted by the welcome of the people and charm of the country.

Scotland attractions encompass everything from magnetic natural beauty to magnificent sites of tourist interest including parks, castles, museums, churches and heritage structures. A large number of

tourists from all over the world come to visit Scotland and its extremely popular destinations that include Edinburgh, Glasgow, Ayrshire and Arran, Fife, Argyll and Bute, Stirlingshire, The Trossach, Angus and Dundee, Isle of Skye and Lochalsh, Aberdeen and Grampian Highlands, Sutherland, Caithness, Loch Ness and Inverness and Orkney.

Scotland is blessed with an eye-catching variety of colorful flowering plants. A large number of beautiful gardens in Scotland never fail to draw the attention of nature-lovers. The wild, beautiful and apparently untouched Scottish countryside is a place, which tourists from all over the world prefer to enjoy. The large Country Houses and Palaces are also very popular destinations of tourist interest. One of the beautiful gardens in Scotland is the Crathes Castle garden. The colorful flowers inside the garden have an immense appeal to the visitors in Scotland.

Scotland is famous for its sheer range of attractions that include magnificent Edinburgh castle, Burns cottage and museum, Rosslyn Chapel, Royal Yacht Britannia, Museum of Scotland, The Burrell Collection, Rabbie's Trail Burners, Guildford Arms and Bon Accord.

Other major attractions in Scotland include Monasteries and Abbeys (the country is well-known for the famous Abbeys that include Inchcolm Abbey on Inchcolm Island. The ruins of Dryburgh along the river Tweed is also a magnetic place of tourist interest); Churches and Cathedrals in Scotland (several historical churches and ruined cathedrals in Scotland are ready to pull the attention of the tourists. Two of such structures include carved Rosslyn Chapel and the magnificent St. Andrew's Cathedral).

Apart from the many historic buildings that represent a wide range of architectural styles, public and commercial museums are also a major source of attractions in Scotland.

Scottish Castles

Scottish castles sprung up as an attempt at defensive against feuds with England and other neighboring countries. Scottish castles generally provided a home for its inhabitants, along with a structure to provide protection against attack. Tower houses were often the basis of Scottish castles. Tower houses were tall towers that stood high above the ground to protect its residents from attacks and pillaging from down below. Often times, Scottish castles expanded out from the main Tower houses in times of peace.

Airth Castle

The Airth Castle is one of the oldest castles offering Scottish castle accommodation. This fourteenth century castle has been restored and now combines a spa with Scottish castle accommodation. This incredible castle was once the home of the Robert the Bruce and his family and today combines history with modern luxury. This is also the largest venue in Scotland for Scottish castle weddings. A church on the grounds and plenty of elegant rooms make this one of the most popular places for Scottish castle weddings.

Edinburgh Castle

Resting on a hill that has hosted a castle since 1000 A.D., Edinburgh Castle is one of Scotland's oldest castles. This castle is representative of the Scotland of old that existed when Scotland was an independent nation. In 1573 the castle staged its last defense against the Brits in the name of Mary Queen of Scots. Situated on a mound of volcanic rock, Edinburgh Castle offers the most stunning views in the city and perhaps throughout Scotland. Tours of Edinburgh Castle are available.

Stirling Castle

Stirling Castle is one of the first castles in Scotland to pop up during the renaissance, and is a beautiful structure set on a rocky hill. Well worth touring for its beauty, Stirling Castle was also one of the last strongholds of the old Scottish nation before it was conquered. Stirling Castle was attacked on sixteen different occasions as warring nations fought to lay claim to its valuable defense location, finally falling to the Brits in the sixteenth century. Home to some of the most famous Scottish Kings and Queens since the

early days of Alexander I, the views from Stirling Castle rival those seen from the famous Edinburgh Castle, and is open seven days a week for tours throughout the year.

Palace of Holyroodhouse

The Palace of Holyroodhouse is today the official residence of Queen Elizabeth in Scotland. The palace comes with its own sordid history, and has been a home to everyone from Mary Queen of Scots to James VII. It was originally founded as a monastery in 1128, and became the official residence of Scottish rulers in later days. Today, the Palace of Holyroodhouse is used for official state business and entertaining. Steeped in history and available for tours, the Palace of Holyroodhouse is an excellent spot for touring.

Auchen Castle Hotel

Another popular place for Scottish castle weddings, the Auchen Castle Hotel is a smaller castle set on beautifully maintained grounds. The original castle structure was a Tower house built in 1220. It was rebuilt as a larger structure in the 1300's by the sons of Sir Roger Kirkpatrick, who are thought to have helped in the murder of the castles ruler at the time. These sons also created a curious set of underground tunnels, whose purpose is still not fully understood. Having seen its share of bloodshed, the Auchen Castle Hotel of today is a more peaceful retreat than its ancient counterpart, and its history blend with modern comfort to offer an intriguing place to make your stay.

Scone Palace

Scottish Kings of old were coronated here at Scone Palace on a rock that was believed to have magical qualities. Though it spent many years at Westminster Abbey after Scotland was conquered, it was returned to Scotland in 1996 and remains on display at Edinburgh Castle. Scone Palace was once the center of the Pict Kingdom, and over the centuries hosted a monastery and served as the home of various Scottish rulers. Today, Scone palace is the residence of the Earl and Countess of Mansfield, and much of the castle is open for daily tours.

No matter what your travel plans to Scotland include, a stop at one of the famous Scottish castles is well worth the time. Tours of castles throughout Scotland are also available for anyone interested in seeing multiple castles.

Edinburg

Edinburgh is the capital city of Scotland and one of the larger cities in Western Europe. Many hail the city of Edinburgh as the cultural center of Scotland (though others might make a case for Glasgow). With a population of about half a million people, Edinburgh Scotland is able to maintain a laid back pace and is a welcoming city for tourists. Though the city itself has a long and bloody history, the Edinburgh of today is peaceful and quite beautiful. No matter what brings you to Edinburgh Scotland, you be sure to discover a plethora of activities and sites.

Perhaps the most popular Edinburgh attraction is Edinburgh castle, a famous Scottish castle. Edinburgh castle rests atop the Castle Rock in the center of the city of Edinburgh Scotland. Castle Rock has been a major site for military forces of many civilizations, since about 900 AD. As one of the major strongholds of independent Scotland, Edinburgh castle is fully of history and meaning for the Scots. Most of the current structure was built in 1574, however one chapel in the castle dates back to the twelfth century.

Another popular Edinburgh attraction is the area of the city referred to as Old Town. Old Town is at the heart of the city, where you'll find Edinburgh castle, and has many other popular places to see. Some excellent restaurants and Scottish hotels can be found in Old Town, as well as some of the oldest architecture in the city.

Just across the valley and slightly to the North is the area of Edinburgh known as New Town. For the most part, New Town was constructed in the late eighteenth century and features wider roads for strolling and driving than Old Town, as well as a nice selection of shops and traditional eateries.

During the summer, the most popular Edinburgh attraction is the Edinburgh Festival, which has grown to be the United Kingdom's largest arts festival. Each August, thousands of travelers take a flight to Edinburgh to be a part of this intriguing and famous festival. Music, dance, and many other activities will line the streets of the city for a full four weeks. If busy crowds aren't your cup of tea, however, you'll find that the best rates for Edinburgh hotels and other attractions can be found when the festival isn't going on.

Travelers to Scotland and the United Kingdom will notice that there are many dialects of English spoken in the UK, and even varying dialects spoken within one country. Scotland is no exception, and travelers will find that the residents of Edinburgh have their own special dialect. Travelers will also find, though, that Edinburgh is one of the most welcoming European cities for tourists and a great place to take a vacation.

Getting to Edinburgh for your vacation can be as fun as your stay. A cruise to the city might be a great way to see the coast and other parts of the UK as well. A flight to Edinburgh can be booked through most major airlines or their partners. For the best deals on a cheap flight to Edinburgh, avoid flying during the Edinburgh Festival in the summer.

As the capital of Scotland since 1437, Edinburgh has seen the changing of its leaders throughout its long history, and yet has managed to retain an incredible amount of cultural identity and independence. The former home and birthplace of Mary Queen of Scots attracts more than 13 million tourists every year, and is the second most visited tourist destination in the United Kingdom. Despite all of the fanfare, however, Edinburgh is still one of the most beautiful cities in the world and certainly in Europe.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland has developed for tourism significantly in the last decades. While the Troubles may have prevented visitors from seeing Belfast in the 1970s and 1980s, Northern Ireland travel is now safe, fun, and full of surprises! .With politics now much calmer, you can plan a trip to Northern Ireland without concern for your safety. If you love Ireland, odds are, you will enjoy a trip to its neighbor in the north and all of the attractions, natural beauty, and history that continue to draw visitors from around the globe.

Northern Ireland is officially a separate country from the Republic of Ireland and is still considered part of the United Kingdom. This means that when you cross the border from Ireland to Northern Ireland, currencies changes and your prices will no longer be in Euros but in British pounds. While flights into Belfast can be found, if you are traveling on a budget you will most likely fly to Dublin. From this capital city, you can continue your trip to Northern Ireland by train, bus, or rental car. A new motorway linking Dublin and Belfast has cut down on travel time between the two cities, making Belfast an easy trip from Dublin in less than a day.

Most Northern Ireland travel begins in Belfast. Belfast is both the largest city and the capital of Northern Ireland. A major seaport, Belfast was once a very important place for industry. Many people don't know that the famous ocean liner the Titanic was built in the Belfast shipyards. However, industry has declined in recent decades, and Belfast had an opportunity to reinvent itself. The compact city has a variety of architecture including Georgian, Edwardian, and Victorian influences. Some of the top attractions in the city include Belfast City Hall, the Grand Opera House, Belfast Castle, and Queen's University. If you're traveling with kids, the Belfast Zoo and the W5 Interactive Science Centre are perfect for an afternoon's entertainment.

Many visitors plan Northern Ireland travel to explore the country beyond Belfast. One of the most popular attractions on the whole island is the Giant's Causeway, located along the coast in County Antrim.

The result of a volcanic eruption, the stunning basalt columns are all hexagons, and the tallest stand at 36 feet. Watching the waves crash against the rocky coast at this UNESCO World Heritage Site is sure to be a memorable moment during your trip to Northern Ireland. Other popular activities along the shoreline include fishing, kayaking, and other water sports. Another attraction not to be along this coast is the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge, offering an adventurous crossing between two cliffs.

History buffs should plan a Northern Ireland trip just to see the castles, monuments, and monasteries spread throughout the island. From Norman castles to Stone Age archaeological sites, you will learn about all the people who called this area of the island home over the centuries. Some of the top attractions to see include Enniskillen Castle, Devenish Island Monastic Site, and Beaghmore Stone Circles. Beyond history, Northern Ireland also offers visitors a variety of artistic, cultural, and culinary adventures. Contemporary Northern Ireland is flourishing and waiting for your visit!

Belfast

Belfast has always had a fierce, often bloody history. The Troubles of 1960 to 1994 have not faded from Ireland's consciousness, but active negotiations and peace efforts have soothed this strong activist region. Unlike many other Irish regions, present-day Northern Ireland is a province under the rule of the United Kingdom. After decades of political turmoil, violence, and activism, Belfast has at last found some degree of peace, when a cease-fire between the British and the IRA was called in 1994. The cease-fire continues to this day, although the long-seated division between British supporters and IRA supporters still lingers.

As the city struggled to rebuild itself after bombings, raids, vandalism and destruction, Belfast emerged like a delicate butterfly from a dusty cocoon. New houses, restaurants, stores, and apartments were constructed, and central electric and water lines linked the surrounding areas. Belfast became a gateway to the rest of Northern Ireland. Leaving from Belfast Tourism groups can easily travel to Derry, take in the hazy, green slopes and seascapes of the Northern Ireland coast, trek to the Mountains of Mourne, visit Ballycastle, and explore the numerous castles scattered through the province.

The city itself is awe-inspiring: daunting Victorian architecture, modern art festivals and exhibits, savvy new clubs and bars mixed with old-fashioned pubs and eateries, and a bevy of energy and activity. The city's rapid growth, due to the current peace status and massive investments, lends a sense of optimistic vigor to the surrounding city streets and establishments. There is such a feeling of history and possibility within the city walls — a sense of old and new that is striking, even when compared to other Irish cities. A trip to Ireland is not complete without an extended stay in Belfast Tourism companies proclaim.

There are several must-see spots around Belfast. Any traveler partial to the spirits will happily doff a quaff at the Crown Liquor Saloon, Belfast's most famous bar. Although it is popular with tourists, the Crown is a beloved bar for locals too. Hikers will head for the hills, specifically heading to the top of Cave Hill for an unsurpassed view of the entire city. If you're new to Belfast tourism kiosks and companies are located throughout the city. They can provide helpful information, maps, suggestions, and tour ideas. The arts scene is also alive and kicking, with many patrons journeying to check out the Belfast international arts and entertainment offerings. The clubs and bars of Belfast are famously fabulous and always hopping. Outside the main city of Belfast Northern Ireland has many splendid destinations. In the suburbs, hikers and bikers can explore Cave Hill Country Park and Belfast Castle.

Answer the questions:

1. What is the total area of the UK?
2. What parts does the UK consist of?
3. What are the dependencies of the country?
4. What are the principal geographic characteristics of the UK?
5. What are the country's main rivers, lakes and mountains?
6. Describe the climate of the country.
7. Name the largest cities of the United Kingdom.
8. What ethnic groups live there?
9. What century does Standard English date back?
10. What are three major English dialects?
11. What religions are the most prevailing in the UK?
12. What are the main governmental institutions of the UK?
13. How would you characterize the economy of the country?
14. What can the UK travel insurance cover?
15. What is the main school examination in England, Wales and Northern Ireland?
16. What are the most popular universities in the UK?
17. Where are the largest libraries located?
18. What are the most prestigious museums and galleries in the UK?
19. Who represented British visual art of 20th century?
20. What is the most famous work of the architect Christopher Wren?
21. When does the London Fashion Week take place?
22. What fashion designer is the father of Haute Couture?
23. What are the main events and holidays in Britain?
24. What special dishes are cooked at Christmas?
25. What do traditional English breakfast and Sunday dinner consist of?
26. What are the most popular brand stores in London?
27. What are the top British attractions?
28. What places and sights are worth visiting in England? Scotland? Wales? Northern Ireland?
29. What attractions are the most popular in London?
30. What castles is Scotland famous for?

Write a short summary of British cuisine.

Make presentation on:

- a) Popular British Destinations;
- b) London City Tour;
- c) Castles of Scotland;
- d) Top things to do and see when in the UK.

Promote the United Kingdom as a tourist destination.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CAPITAL: Washington, DC (District of Columbia)

AREA: 9,629,091 sq km (3,717,813 sq mi)

POPULATION: around 300 mln

ANTHEM: *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

HOLIDAYS: New Year's Day, 1 January; Birthday of Martin Luther King Jr., 3rd Monday in January; Presidents' Day, 3rd Monday in February; Memorial or Decoration Day, last Monday in May; Independence Day, 4 July; Labor Day, 1st Monday in September; Columbus Day, 2nd Monday in October; Election Day, 1st Tuesday after the 1st Monday in November; Veterans or Armistice Day, 11 November; Thanksgiving Day, 4th Thursday in November; Christmas, 25 December.

TIME: Eastern, 7 am = noon GMT; Central, 6 am = noon GMT; Mountain, 5 am = noon GMT; Pacific (includes the Alaska panhandle), 4 am = noon GMT; Yukon, 3 am = noon GMT; Alaska and Hawaii, 2 am = noon GMT; western Alaska, 1 am = noon GMT.

LOCATION, SIZE, AND EXTENT

Located in the Western Hemisphere on the continent of North America, the United States is the fourth-largest country in the world. Its total area, including Alaska and Hawaii, is 9,629,091 sq km (3,717,813 sq mi). The conterminous United States extends 4,662 km (2,897 mi) ene - wsw and 4,583 km (2,848 mi) sse - nnw. It is bordered on the n by Canada, on the e by the Atlantic Ocean, on the s by the Gulf of Mexico and Mexico, and on the w by the Pacific Ocean, with a total boundary length of 17,563 km (10,913 mi). Alaska, the 49th state, extends 3,639 km (2,261 mi) e-w and 2,185 km (1,358 mi) n-s.

It is bounded on the n by the Arctic Ocean and Beaufort Sea, on the e by Canada, on the s by the Gulf of Alaska, Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea, and on the w by the Bering Sea, Bering Strait, Chukchi Sea, and Arctic Ocean, with a total land boundary of 12,034 km (7,593 mi) and a coastline of 19,924 km (12,380 mi). The 50th state, Hawaii, consists of islands in the Pacific Ocean extending 2,536 km (1,576 mi) n-s and 2,293 km (1,425 mi) e-w, with a general coastline of 1,207 km (750 mi). The nation's capital, Washington, DC, is located on the mid-Atlantic coast.

TOPOGRAPHY

Although the northern New England coast is rocky, along the rest of the eastern seaboard the Atlantic Coastal Plain rises gradually from the shoreline. Narrow in the north, the plain widens to about 320 km (200 mi) in the south and in Georgia merges with the Gulf Coastal Plain that borders the Gulf of Mexico and extends through Mexico as far as the Yucatan. West of the Atlantic Coastal Plain is the Piedmont Plateau, bounded by the Appalachian Mountains. The Appalachians, which extend from southwest Maine into central Alabama — with special names in some areas — are old mountains, largely eroded away, with rounded contours and forested, as a rule, to the top. Few of their summits raise much above 1,100 m (3,500 ft), although the highest, Mt. Mitchell in North Carolina, reaches 2,037 m (6,684 ft).

Between the Appalachians and the Rocky Mountains, more than 1,600 km (1,000 mi) to the west, lies the vast interior plain of the United States. Running south through the center of this plain and draining almost two-thirds of the area of the continental United States is the Mississippi River. Waters starting from the source of the Missouri, the longest of its tributaries, travel almost 6,450 km (4,000 mi) to the Gulf of Mexico.

The eastern reaches of the great interior plain are bounded on the north by the Great Lakes, which are thought to contain about half the world's total supply of fresh water. Under US jurisdiction are 57,441 sq km (22,178 sq mi) of Lake Michigan, 54,696 sq km (21,118 sq mi) of Lake Superior, 23,245 sq km (8,975 sq mi) of Lake Huron, 12,955 sq km (5,002 sq mi) of Lake Erie, and 7,855 sq km (3,033 sq mi) of Lake Ontario. The five lakes are accessible to oceangoing vessels from the Atlantic via the St. Lawrence Seaway. The basins of the Great Lakes were formed by the glacial ice cap that moved down over large parts of North America some 25,000 years ago. The glaciers also determined the direction of flow of the Mississippi River and, it is believed, were responsible for carrying soil from what is now Canada down into the central agricultural basin of the United States.

The great interior plain consists of two major subregions: the fertile Central Plains, extending from the Appalachian highlands to a line drawn approximately 480 km (300 mi) west of the Mississippi, broken by the Ozark Plateau; and the more arid Great Plains, extending from that line to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

The Continental Divide, the Atlantic-Pacific watershed, runs along the crest of the Rocky Mountains. The Rockies and the ranges to the west are parts of the great system of young, rugged mountains, shaped like a gigantic spinal column that runs along western North, Central and South America from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, Chile. In the continental United States, the series of western ranges, most of them paralleling the Pacific coast, are the Sierra Nevada, the Coast Ranges, the Cascade Range, and the Tehachapi and San Bernardino mountains. Between the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada–Cascade mountain barrier to the west lies the Great Basin, a group of vast arid plateaus containing most of the desert areas of the United States, in the south eroded by deep canyons.

The coastal plains along the Pacific are narrow, and in many places the mountains plunge directly into the sea. The most extensive lowland near the west coast is the Great Valley of California, lying between the Sierra Nevada and the Coast Ranges. There are 71 peaks in these western ranges of the continental United States that rise to an altitude of 4,267 m (14,000 ft) or more, Mt. Whitney in California at 4,418 m (14,494 ft) being the highest. The greatest rivers of the Far West are the Colorado in the south, flowing into the Gulf of California, and the Columbia in the northwest, flowing to the Pacific. Each is more than 1,900 km (1,200 mi) long; both have been intensively developed to generate electric power, and both are important sources of irrigation.

Separated from the continental United States by Canadian territory, the state of Alaska occupies the extreme northwest portion of the North American continent. A series of precipitous mountain ranges separates the heavily indented Pacific coast on the south from Alaska's broad central basin, through which the Yukon River flows from Canada in the east to the Bering Sea in the west. The central basin is bounded on the north by the Brooks Range, which slopes down gradually to the Arctic Ocean. The Alaskan Peninsula and the Aleutian Islands, sweeping west far out to sea, consist of a chain of volcanoes, many still active.

The state of Hawaii consists of a group of Pacific islands formed by volcanoes rising sharply from the ocean floor. The highest of these volcanoes, Mauna Loa, at 4,168 m (13,675 ft), is located on the largest of the islands, Hawaii, and is still active.

The lowest point in the United States is Death Valley in California, 86 m (282 ft) below sea level. At 6,194 m (20,320 ft), Mt. McKinley in Alaska is the highest peak in North America.

CLIMATE

The eastern continental region is well watered, with annual rainfall generally in excess of 100 cm (40 in). It includes all of the Atlantic seaboard and southeastern states and extends west to cover Indiana, southern Illinois, most of Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, and easternmost Texas. The eastern seaboard is affected primarily by the masses of air moving from west to east across the continent rather than by air moving in from the Atlantic. Hence its climate is basically continental rather than maritime. The Midwestern and Atlantic seaboard states experience hot summers and cold winters; spring and autumn are clearly defined periods of climatic transition.

Only Florida, with the Gulf of Mexico lying to its west, experiences moderate differences between summer and winter temperatures. Mean annual temperatures vary considerably between north and south: Boston, MA, 11°C (51°F); New York City, NY, 13°C (55°F); Charlotte, NC, 16°C (61°F); Miami, FL, 24°C (76°F).

The Gulf and South Atlantic states are often hit by severe tropical storms originating in the Caribbean in late summer and early autumn.

The prairie lands lying to the west constitute a sub humid region. Precipitation usually exceeds evaporation by only a small amount; hence the region experiences drought more often than excessive rainfall. Dryness generally increases from east to west. The average midwinter temperature in the extreme north — Minnesota and North Dakota — is about -13°C (9°F) or less, while the average July temperature is 18°C (65°F). In the Texas prairie region to the south, January temperatures average 10–13°C (50–55°F) and July temperatures 27–29°C (80–85°F). Rainfall along the western border of the prairie region is as low as 46 cm (18 in) per year in the north and 64 cm (25 in) in the south. Precipitation is greatest in the early summer — a matter of great importance to agriculture, particularly in the growing of grain crops. In dry years, the prevailing winds may carry the topsoil eastward (particularly from the southern region) for hundreds of miles in clouds that obscure the sun.

The Great Plains constitute a semiarid climatic region. Rainfall in the southern plains averages about 50 cm (20 in) per year and in the northern plains about 25 cm (10 in), but extreme year-to-year variations are common. The tropical air masses that move northward across the plains originate on the fairly high plateaus of Mexico and contain little water vapor. Periods as long as 120 days without rain have been experienced in this region. The rains that do occur are often violent, and a third of the total annual rainfall may be recorded in a single day at certain weather stations.

The contrast between summer and winter temperatures is extreme throughout the Great Plains. Maximum summer temperatures of over 43°C (110°F) have been recorded in the northern as well as in the southern plains. From the Texas panhandle north, blizzards are common in the winter and tornadoes at other seasons. The average minimum temperature for January in Duluth, Minnesota, is -19°C (-3°F).

The higher reaches of the Rockies and the mountains paralleling the Pacific coast to the west are characterized by a typical alpine climate. Precipitation as a rule is heavier on the western slopes of the ranges. The great intermountain arid region of the West shows considerable climatic variation between its northern and southern portions. In New Mexico, Arizona, and southeastern California, the greatest precipitation occurs in July, August, and September, mean annual rainfall ranging from 8 cm (3 in) in Yuma, Ariz., to 76 cm (30 in) in the mountains of northern Arizona and New Mexico. Phoenix has a mean annual temperature of 22°C (71°F), rising to 33°C (92°F) in July and falling to 11°C (52°F) in January.

North of the Utah-Arizona line, the summer months usually are very dry; maximum precipitation occurs in the winter and early spring. In the desert valleys west of Great Salt Lake, mean annual precipitation adds up to only 10 cm (4 in). Although the northern plateaus are generally arid, some of the mountainous areas of central Washington and Idaho receive at least 152 cm (60 in) of rain per year. Throughout the intermountain region, the uneven availability of water is the principal factor shaping the habitat.

The Pacific coast, separated by tall mountain barriers from the severe continental climate to the east, is a region of mild winters and moderately warm, dry summers. Its climate is basically maritime, the westerly winds from the Pacific Ocean moderating the extremes of both winter and summer temperatures. Los Angeles in the south has an average temperature of 13°C (56°F) in January and 21°C (69°F) in July; Seattle in the north has an average temperature of 4°C (39°F) in January and 18°C (65°F) in July. Precipitation in general increases along the coast from south to north, extremes ranging from an annual average of 4.52 cm (1.78 in) at Death Valley in California (the lowest in the United States) to more than 356 cm (140 in) in Washington's Olympic Mountains.

Climatic conditions vary considerably in the vastness of Alaska. In the fogbound Aleutians and in the coastal panhandle strip that extends southeastward along the Gulf of Alaska and includes the capital, Juneau, a relatively moderate maritime climate prevails. The interior is characterized by short, hot summers and long, bitterly cold winters, and in the region bordering the Arctic Ocean a polar climate prevails, the soil hundreds of feet below the surface remaining frozen the year round. Although snowy in winter, continental Alaska is relatively dry.

Hawaii has a remarkably mild and stable climate with only slight seasonal variations in temperature, as a result of northeast ocean winds. The mean January temperature in Honolulu is 23°C (73°F); the mean July temperature 27°C (80°F). Rainfall is moderate — about 71 cm (28 in) per year — but much greater in the mountains; Mt. Waialeale on Kauai has a mean annual rainfall of 1,168 cm (460 in), highest in the world.

FLORA AND FAUNA

At least 7,000 species and subspecies of indigenous US flora have been categorized. The eastern forests contain a mixture of soft - woods and hardwoods that includes pine, oak, maple, spruce, beech, birch, hemlock, walnut, gum, and hickory. The central hardwood forest, which originally stretched unbroken from Cape Cod to Texas and northwest to Minnesota — stills an important timber source — supports oak, hickory, ash, maple, and walnut.

Pine, hickory, tupelo, pecan, gum, birch, and sycamore are found in the southern forest that stretches along the Gulf coast into the eastern half of Texas. The Pacific forest is the most spectacular of all because of its enormous redwoods and Douglas firs. In the southwest are saguaro (giant cactus), yucca, candlewood, and the Joshua tree.

The central grasslands lie in the interior of the continent, where the moisture is not sufficient to support the growth of large forests. The tall grassland or prairie (now almost entirely under cultivation) lies to the east of the 100th meridian. To the west of this line, where rainfall is frequently less than 50 cm (20 in) per year, is the short grassland. Mesquite grass covers parts of west Texas, southern New Mexico, and Arizona. Short grass may be found in the highlands of the latter two states, while tall grass covers large portions of the coastal regions of Texas and Louisiana and occurs in some parts of Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

The Pacific grassland includes northern Idaho, the higher plateaus of eastern Washington and Oregon, and the mountain valleys of California.

The intermountain region of the Western Cordillera is for the most part covered with desert shrubs. Sagebrush predominates in the northern part of this area, creosote in the southern, with saltbrush near the Great Salt Lake and in Death Valley.

The lower slopes of the mountains running up to the coastline of Alaska are covered with coniferous forests as far north as the Seward Peninsula. The central part of the Yukon Basin is also a region of soft wood forests. The rest of Alaska is heath or tundra.

Hawaii has extensive forests of bamboo and ferns. Sugarcane and pineapple, although not native to the islands, now cover a large portion of the cultivated land.

Small trees and shrubs common to most of the United States include hackberry, hawthorn, serviceberry, blackberry, wild cherry, dogwood, and snowberry. Wild flowers bloom in all areas, from the seldom-seen blossoms of rare desert cacti to the hardiest alpine species. Wild flowers include forget-me-not, fringed and closed gentians, jack-in-the-pulpit, black-eyed Susan, columbine, and common dandelion, along with numerous varieties of aster, orchid, lady's slipper, and wild rose.

An estimated 428 species of mammals characterize the animal life of the continental United States. Among the larger game animals are the white-tailed deer, moose, pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, black bear, and grizzly bear. The Alaskan brown bear often reaches a weight of 1,200–1,400 lbs. Some 25 important furbearers are common, including the muskrat, red and gray foxes, mink, raccoon, beaver, opossum, striped skunk, woodchuck, common cottontail, snowshoe hare, and various squirrels.

Year-round and migratory birds abound. Loons, wild ducks, and wild geese are found in lake country; terns, gulls, sandpipers, herons, and other seabirds live along the coasts. Wrens, thrushes, owls, hummingbirds, sparrows, woodpeckers, swallows, chickadees, vireos, warblers, and finches appear in profusion, along with the robin, common crow, cardinal, Baltimore oriole, eastern and western meadowlarks, and various blackbirds. Wild turkey, ruffed grouse, and ring-necked pheasant (introduced from Europe) are popular game birds. There are at least 508 species of birds found throughout the country.

Lakes, rivers, and streams teem with trout, bass, perch, muskellunge, carp, catfish, and pike; sea bass, cod, snapper, and flounder are abundant along the coasts, along with such shellfish as lobster, shrimp, clams, oysters, and mussels. Garter, pine, and milk snakes are found in most regions. Four poisonous snakes survive, of which the rattlesnake is the most common. Alligators appear in southern waterways and the Gila monster makes its home in the Southwest.

POPULATION

The population of United States in 2009 was estimated by the United Nations (UN) at 296,483,000, which placed it at number 3 in population among the 193 nations of the world. The population density was 31 per sq km (80 per sq mi), with major population concentrations are along the northeast Atlantic coast and the southwest Pacific coast. The population is most dense between New York City and Washington, DC.

Suburbs have absorbed most of the shift in population distribution since 1950. The UN estimated that 79% of the population lived in urban areas in 2009, and that urban areas were growing at an annual rate of 1.33%. The capital city, Washington, DC (District of Columbia), had a population of 4,098,000 in that year. Other major metropolitan areas and their estimated populations include: New York, 18,498,000; Los Angeles, 12,146,000; Chicago, 8,711,000; \ Dallas, 4,612,000; Houston, 4,283,000; Philadelphia, 5,325,000; San Diego, 2,818,000; and Phoenix, 3,393,000. Major cities can be found throughout the United States.

ETHNIC GROUPS

The majority of the population of the United States is of European origin, with the largest groups having primary ancestry traceable to the United Kingdom, Germany, and Ireland; many Americans report multiple ancestries. According to 2004 American Community Survey estimates, about 75.6% of the total population are white, 12.1% are blacks and African Americans, and 4.2% are Asian. Native Americans (including Alaskan Natives) account for about 0.8% of the total population. About 1.8% of the population claim a mixed ancestry of two or more races. About 11.9% of all US citizens are foreign-born, with the largest numbers of people coming from Latin America (17,973,287) and Asia (9,254,705). Some Native American societies survived the initial warfare with land-hungry white settlers and retained their tribal

cultures. Their survival, however, has been on the fringes of North American society, especially as a result of the implementation of a national policy of resettling Native American tribes on reservations.

In 2004, estimates place the number of Native Americans (including Alaska Natives) at 2,151,322. The number of those who claim mixed Native American and white racial backgrounds is estimated at 1,370,675; the 2004 estimate for mixed Native American and African American ancestry was 204,832. The largest single tribal grouping is the Cherokee, with about 331,491 people. The Navajo account for about 230,401 people, the Chippewa for 92,041 people, and the Sioux for 67,666 people. Groups of Native Americans are found most numerous in the southwestern states of Oklahoma, Arizona, New Mexico, and California. The 1960s and 1970s saw successful court fights by Native Americans in Alaska, Maine, South Dakota, and other states to regain tribal lands or to receive cash settlements for lands taken from them in violation of treaties during the 1800s.

The black and African American population in 2004 was estimated at 34,772,381, with the majority still residing in the South, the region that absorbed most of the slaves brought from Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries. About 1,141,232 people claimed mixed black and white ethnicity. Two important regional migrations of blacks have taken place: (1) a "Great Migration" to the North, commencing in 1915, and (2) a small but then unprecedented westward movement beginning about 1940. Both migrations were fostered by wartime demands for labor and by postwar job opportunities in northern and western urban centers.

More than three out of four black Americans live in metropolitan areas, notably in Washington, DC, Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, New Orleans, Newark, Baltimore, and New York City, which had the largest number of black residents. Large-scale federal programs to ensure equality for African Americans in voting rights, public education, employment, and housing were initiated after the historic 1954 Supreme Court ruling that barred racial segregation in public schools. By 1966, however, in the midst of growing and increasingly violent expressions of dissatisfaction by black residents of northern cities and southern rural areas, the federal Civil Rights Commission reported that integration programs were lagging.

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the unemployment rate among nonwhites in the United States was at least double that for whites, and school integration proceeded slowly, especially outside the South. Also included in the US population are a substantial number of persons whose lineage can be traced to Asian and Pacific nationalities, chiefly Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Indian, Korean, and Vietnamese. The Chinese population is highly urbanized and concentrated particularly in cities of over 100,000 population, mostly on the West Coast and in New York City. According to 2004 estimates, there are over 2.8 million Chinese in the United States. Asian Indians are the next largest group of Asians with over 2.2 million people in 2004. About 2.1 million people are Filipino. The Japanese population has risen steadily from a level of 72,157 in 1910 to about 832,039 in 2004. Hawaii has been the most popular magnet of Japanese emigration.

Hispanics or Latinos make up about 14% of the population according to 2004 estimates. It is important to note, however, that the designation of Hispanic or Latino applies to those who are of Latin American descent; these individuals may also belong to white, Asian, or black racial groups. Although Mexicans in the 21st century were still concentrated in the Southwest, they have settled throughout the United States; there are over 25 million Mexicans in the country. Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans, who often represent an amalgam of racial strains, have largely settled in the New York metropolitan area, where they partake in considerable measure of the hardships and problems experienced by other immigrant groups in the process of settling in the United States; there are about 3.8 million Puerto Ricans in the country. Since 1959, many Cubans have settled in Florida and other eastern states. As of 2004, there are about 1.4 million Cubans in the United States.

LANGUAGES

The primary language of the United States is English, enriched by words borrowed from the languages of Indians and immigrants, predominantly European. Very early English borrowed from neighboring French speakers such words as *shivaree*, *butte*, *levee*, and *prairie*; from German, *sauerkraut*, *smearcase*, and *cranberry*; from Dutch, *stoop*, *spook*, and *cookie*; and from Spanish, *tornado*, *corral*, *ranch*, and *canyon*. From various West African languages, blacks have given English *jazz*, *voodoo*, and *okra*. According to 2009 estimates of primary languages spoken at home, about 81% of the population speak English only.

When European settlement began, Native Americans living north of Mexico spoke about 300 different languages now held to belong to 58 different language families. Only two such families have contributed noticeably to the American vocabulary: Algonkian in the Northeast and Aztec-Tanoan in the Southwest. From Algonkian languages, directly or sometimes through Canadian French, English has taken such words as *moose*, *skunk*, *caribou*, *opossum*, *woodchuck*, and *raccoon* for New World animals; *hickory*, *squash*, and *tamarack* for New World flora; and *succotash*, *hominy*, *mackinaw*, *moccasin*, *tomahawk*, *toboggan*, and *totem* for various cultural items. From Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, terms such as *tomato*, *mesquite*, *coyote*, *chili*, *tamale*, *chocolate*, and *ocelot* have entered English, largely by way of Spanish. A bare handful of words come from other Native American language groups, such as *tepee* from Dakota Siouan, *catalpa* from Creek, *sequoia* from Cherokee, *hogan* from Navaho, and *sockeye* from Salish, as well as *cayuse* from Chinook.

Professional dialect research, initiated in Germany in 1878 and in France in 1902, did not begin in the United States until 1931, in connection with the *Linguistic Atlas of New England* (1939–43). This kind of research, requiring trained field-workers to interview representative informants in their homes, subsequently was extended to the entire Atlantic Coast, the north-central states, the upper Midwest, the Pacific Coast, the Gulf states, and Oklahoma.

The New England atlas, the *Linguistic Atlas of the Upper Midwest* (1973–76), and the first two fascicles of the *Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States* (1980) have been published, along with three volumes based on Atlantic Coast field materials. Also published are atlases of the north-central states, the Gulf states, and Oklahoma. In other areas, individual dialect researchers have produced more specialized studies. The definitive work on dialect speech, the American Dialect Society's monumental *Dictionary of American Regional English*, began publication in 1985.

Dialect studies confirm that standard English is not uniform throughout the country. Major regional variations reflect patterns of colonial settlement, dialect features from England having dominated particular areas along the Atlantic Coast and then spread westward along the three main migration routes through the Appalachian system. Dialectologists recognize three main dialects — Northern, Midland, and Southern — each with subdivisions related to the effect of mountain ranges and rivers and railroads on population movement.

The Northern dialect is that of New England and its derivative settlements in New York; the northern parts of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa; and Michigan, Wisconsin, northeastern South Dakota, and North Dakota. A major subdivision is that of New England east of the Connecticut River, an area noted typically by the loss of /r/ after a vowel, and by the pronunciation of *can't*, *dance*, *half*, and *bath* with a vowel more like that in *father* than that in *fat*. Generally, however, Northern speech has a strong /r/ after a vowel, the same vowel in *can't* and *cat*, a conspicuous contrast between *cot* and *caught*, the /s/ sound in *greasy*, *creek* rhyming with *pick*, and *with* ending with the same consonant sound as at the end of *breath*.

Midland speech extends in a wide band across the United States: there are two main subdivisions, North Midland and South Midland.

North Midland speech extends westward from New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania into Ohio, Illinois, southern Iowa, and northern Missouri. Its speakers generally end *with* with the consonant sound that begins the word *thin*, pronounce *cot* and *caught* alike, and say *cow* and *down* as /caow/ and /daown/.

South Midland speech was carried by the Scotch-Irish from Pennsylvania down the Shenandoah Valley into the southern Appalachians, where it acquired many Southern speech features before it spread westward into Kentucky, Tennessee, southern Missouri, Arkansas, and northeast Texas. Its speakers are likely to say *plum peach* rather than *clingstone peach* and *snake doctor* rather than *dragonfly*. Southern speech typically, though not always, lacks the consonant /r/ after a vowel, lengthens the first part of the diphthong in *write* so that to Northern ears it sounds almost like *rat*, and diphthongizes the vowels in *bed* and *hit* so that they sound like /beuhd/ and /hiuht/. *Horse* and *hoarse* do not sound alike, and *creek* rhymes with *mee*k. *Corn bread* is *corn pone*, and *you-all* is standard for the plural.

The sounds of American speech can be identified with a number of public figures. President John F. Kennedy spoke the Northeastern coastal dialect associated with Boston, while President Jimmy Carter spoke with a Southern coastal dialect. The North Midlands speech is familiar to those who have heard Neil Armstrong and John Glenn, while the South Midlands speech was the speech of President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

In the western part of the United States, migration routes so crossed and intermingled that no neat dialect boundaries can be drawn, although there are a few rather clear population pockets.

Spanish is spoken by a sizable minority in the United States; according to 2009 estimates, about 11.4% of the population speak Spanish as the primary language of their household. The majority of Spanish speakers live in the Southwest, Florida, and eastern urban centers. Refugee immigration since the 1950s has greatly increased the number of foreign-language speakers from Latin America and Asia.

Educational problems raised by the presence of large blocs of non-English speakers led to the passage in 1976 of the Bilingual Educational Act, enabling children to study basic courses in their first language while they learn English. A related school problem is that of Black English, a Southern dialect variant that is the vernacular of many black students now in northern schools.

Differences in British English and American English

American English has both spelling and grammatical differences from British English, some of which were made as part of an attempt to rationalize the English spelling used by British English at the time. Unlike many 20th century language reforms (e.g., Turkey's alphabet shift, Norway's spelling reform) the American spelling changes were not driven by government, but by textbook writers and dictionary makers.

The first American dictionary was written by Noah Webster in 1828. At the time America was a relatively new country and Webster's particular contribution was to show that the region spoke a different dialect from Britain, and so he wrote a dictionary with many spellings differing from the standard. Many of these changes were initiated unilaterally by Webster.

Webster also argued for many "simplifications" to the idiomatic spelling of the period. Somewhat ironically, many, although not all, of his simplifications fell into common usage alongside the original versions, resulting in a situation even more confused than before.

Many words are shortened and differ from other versions of English. Spellings such as *center* are used instead of *centre* in other versions of English. And there are many other variations. Conversely, American English can sometimes favor more wordy or elongated versions of British English, as in *transportation* for *transport*.

A key area where American English has grown (on both sides of the Atlantic), is in the world of Business and Commerce, where use of the rhetorical euphemism is common. One example would be the phrase "are you comfortable with that". This phrase will typically be used by a business manager introducing a change which may, or may not, be welcome. A negative answer is neither expected nor, indeed invited. However, the question is, at least on the face of it, conciliatory.

American English has further changed due to the influx of non-English speakers whose words sometimes enter American vernacular. Many words have entered American English from Spanish, Native American languages, and so on.

Examples of common American English loanwords, not common in British English (many, however, would be recognised due to Hollywood movies):

From African languages

gumbo	okra, or a stew thickened with okra
-------	-------------------------------------

From Chinese

gung ho	eager or fervent
---------	------------------

From Dutch

cookie	baked sweet, never called a biscuit, digestive; sometimes called shortbread
kill	creek

From English

attic	a loft; the topmost story of a house
back and forth	as in backwards and forwards
to back up	to reverse
bill (paper money)	a note
blanket (small)	rug
bug	any kind of insect
bushel	a common unit of measurement
cabin	a humble dwelling
the check	the bill
closet	a cupboard or wardrobe
corn	maize
deck	a pack of cards
draperies	curtains
elevator	a lift
fall	the season also known as autumn
faucet	tap
hog	a pig
jack	a knave within a deck of cards
junk	as in rubbish
rear	as in raising an animal or child
mad	as in the sense of being angry

noon	midday (originally <i>nones</i> , the ninth hour of daylight, or 3pm)
plumb	as being complete
rooster	a male fowl
skillet	frying pan
sleet	small, hard "snowflakes"
soccer field	a football pitch
stocks	as in stocks and bonds; shares
suspenders	braces
trash	rubbish
trunk	boot
yard	a garden
zero	as in nought

From French

banquette	a raised sidewalk
beignet	a square, holeless doughnut
boudin	a spicy link sausage
cafe au lait	a mixture of half milk and half coffee
chowder	a thick seafood stew
jambalaya	rice cooked with herbs, spices, and ham, chicken, or seafood
lagniappe	an extra or unexpected gift
pain perdu	New Orleans-style French toast
pirogue	a canoe made from a hollowed tree trunk
praline	a candy made of nuts suspended in a boiled sugar syrup
toboggan	a sled
zydeco	a native Louisiana style of music

From Native American languages

bayou	a swampy, slow-moving stream or outlet
cape (<i>kepan</i>)	a headland
chinook	a strong wind blowing down off the mountains
hickory (<i>pawcohiccora</i>)	a North American deciduous tree of the genus <i>Carya</i>
high muckamuck	an important person
mugwump	a political independent
that neck of the	an expression; from whence a person hails

woods (<i>naiack</i>)	
powwow	a gathering or meeting, esp. of Native Americans
raccoon	the raccoon, a small mammal
skunk (<i>seganku</i>)	the skunk, a badgerlike, foul-smelling mammal
squash (<i>askutasquash</i>)	a vegetable, similar to English marrow
succotash	mixture of corn and other vegetables like peas, beans
tipi	a pyramidal tent -- also <i>tepee</i>
woodchuck (<i>wuchak</i>)	a marmot-like mammal

From Spanish

adobe	a mud-based construction material
arroyo	gulch, often dry except when it has rained recently
barrio	shantytown or historically poverty-afflicted area of a city
burro	donkey
barbecue	a grill
desperado	criminal
fiesta	party
frijoles	beans
gringo	a disparaging term for a foreigner, esp. English or American
hacienda	particular style of house
hammock	a bed
hombre	man
maize	a kind of grain
mesa	flat topped mountain
pronto	immediately

From Yiddish

klutz	a clumsy person
kvetch	complain
lox	cured salmon
schlep	to carry or to travel
schmuck	a fool, or the penis
schmutz	dirt
shlemiel	a fool

From Japanese

tycoon	successful business leader
honcho	leader, i.e.: "The Head Honcho"

RELIGIONS

US religious traditions are predominantly Judeo-Christian and most Americans identify themselves as Protestants (of various denominations), Roman Catholics, or Jews. Over 141 million Americans reported affiliation with a religious group. The single largest Christian denomination is the Roman Catholic Church, with membership in 2004 estimated at 66.4 million. Immigration from Ireland, Italy, Eastern Europe, French Canada, and the Caribbean accounts for the predominance of Roman Catholicism in the Northeast, Northwest, and some parts of the Great Lakes region, while Hispanic traditions and more recent immigration from Mexico and other Latin American countries account for the historical importance of Roman Catholicism in California and throughout most of the sunbelt. More than any other US religious body, the Roman Catholic Church maintains an extensive network of parochial schools.

Jewish immigrants settled first in the Northeast, where the largest Jewish population remains; at last estimates, about 6.1 million Jews lived in the United States.

Over 94 million persons in the United States report affiliation with a Protestant denomination. Baptists predominate below the Mason-Dixon line and west to Texas. By far the nation's largest Protestant group is the Southern Baptist Convention, which has about 16.2 million members; the American Baptist Churches in the USA claim some 1.4 million members.

A number of Orthodox Christian denominations are represented in the United States, established by immigrants hoping to maintain their language and culture in a new world. The largest group of Orthodox belongs to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, which has about 1.5 million members.

A number of religious groups, which now have a worldwide presence, originated in the United States. One such group, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), was organized in New York in 1830 by Joseph Smith, Jr., who claimed to receive a revelation concerning an ancient American prophet named Mormon. The group migrated westward, in part to escape persecution, and has played a leading role in the political, economic, and religious life of Utah; Salt Lake City is the headquarters for the church. As of 2004, there are about 5.4 million members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

GOVERNMENT

The Constitution of the United States, signed in 1787, is the nation's governing document. In the first 10 amendments to the Constitution, ratified in 1791 and known as the Bill of Rights, the federal government is denied the power to infringe on rights generally regarded as fundamental to the civil liberties of the people. These amendments prohibit the establishment of a state religion and the abridgment of freedom of speech, press, and the right to assemble. They protect all persons against unreasonable searches and seizures, guarantee trial by jury, and prohibit excessive bail and cruel and unusual punishments. No person may be required to testify against himself, nor may he be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law. The 13th Amendment (1865) banned slavery; the 15th (1870) protected the freed slaves' right to vote; and the 19th (1920) guaranteed the franchise to women. In all, there have been 27 amendments, the last of which, proposed in 1789 but ratified in 1992, denied the variation of the compensation of Senators and Representatives until an election intervened.

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), approved by Congress in 1972, would have mandated equality between the sexes; only 35 of the required 38 states had ratified the ERA by the time the ratification deadline expired on 30 June 1982.

The United States has a federal form of government, with the distribution of powers between the federal government and the states constitutionally defined. The legislative powers of the federal government are vested in Congress, which consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate. There are 435 members of the House of Representatives. Each state is allotted a number of representatives in proportion to its population as determined by the decennial census. Representatives are elected for two-year terms in every even-numbered year. A representative must be at least 25 years old, must be a resident of the state represented, and must have been a citizen of the United States for at least seven years. The

Senate consists of two senators from each state, elected for six-year terms. Senators must be at least 30 years old, must be residents of the states from which they are elected, and must have been citizens of the United States for at least nine years. One-third of the Senate is elected in every even-numbered year. Congress legislates on matters of taxation, borrowing, regulation of international and interstate commerce, formulation of rules of naturalization, bankruptcy, coinage, weights and measures, post offices and post roads, courts inferior to the Supreme Court, provision for the armed forces, among many other matters.

The president must be “a natural born citizen” at least 35 years old, and must have been a resident of the United States for 14 years. Under the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution, adopted in 1951, a president may not be elected more than twice. Each state is allotted a number of electors based on its combined total of US senators and representatives, and, technically, it is these electors who, constituted as the electoral college, cast their vote for president, with all of the state’s electoral votes customarily going to the candidate who won the largest share of the popular vote of the state (the District of Columbia also has three electors, making a total of 538 votes). Thus, the candidate who wins the greatest share of the popular vote throughout the United States may, in rare cases, fail to win a majority of the electoral vote. If no candidate gains a majority in the electoral college, the choice passes to the House of Representatives.

The vice president, elected at the same time and on the same ballot as the president, serves as ex-officio president of the Senate. The vice president assumes the power and duties of the presidency on the president’s removal from office or as a result of the president’s death, resignation, or inability to perform his duties. In the case of a vacancy in the vice presidency, the president nominates a successor, who must be approved by a majority in both houses of Congress. The Congress has the power to determine the line of presidential succession in case of the death or disability of both the president and vice president. Under the Constitution, the president is enjoined to “take care that the laws be faithfully executed.”

ECONOMY

The US economy is the world’s largest. The United States is among the world’s leading exporters of coal, wheat, corn, and soybeans. However, because of its vast economic growth, the United States depends increasingly on foreign sources for a long list of raw materials, including oil. By the middle of the 20th century, the United States was a leading consumer of nearly every important industrial raw material. The industry of the United States produced about 40% of the world’s total output of goods, despite the fact that the country’s population comprised about 6% of the world total and its land area about 7% of the earth’s surface. In absolute terms the United States far exceeds every other nation in the size of its gross domestic product (GDP).

The United States has a capitalist mixed economy, which is fueled by abundant natural resources, a well-developed infrastructure, and high productivity. According to the International Monetary Fund, the U.S. GDP of \$14.4 trillion constitutes 24% of the gross world product at market exchange rates and almost 21% of

the gross world product at purchasing power parity (PPP). It has the largest national GDP in the world, though it is about 5% less than the GDP of the European Union at PPP in 2008. The country ranks seventeenth in the world in nominal GDP per capita and sixth in GDP per capita at PPP.

In 2009, the private sector is estimated to constitute 55.3% of the economy, with federal government activity accounting for 24.1% and state and local government activity (including federal transfers) the remaining 20.6%. The economy is postindustrial, with the service sector contributing 67.8% of GDP, though the United States remains an industrial power. The leading business field by gross business receipts is wholesale and retail trade; by net income it is manufacturing. Chemical products are the leading manufacturing field. The United States is the third largest producer of oil in the world, as well as its largest importer. It is the world's number one producer of electrical and nuclear energy, as well as liquid natural gas, sulfur, phosphates, and salt. While agriculture accounts for just less than 1% of GDP, the United States is the world's top producer of corn and soybeans. The New York Stock Exchange is the world's largest by dollar volume. Coca-Cola and McDonald's are the two most recognized brands in the world.

HOUSING

The housing resources of the United States far exceed those of any other country, with 122,671,734 housing units serving about 109,902,090 households, according to 2004 American Community Survey estimates. About 67% of all occupied units were owner-occupied, with about 10% of the total housing stock standing vacant. The average household had 2.6 people. The median home value was estimated at \$151,366. The median payment for rent and utilities of rental properties was \$694 per month. The average area of single-family housing is about 180 sq m. The median number of rooms per dwelling was estimated at 5.4 in 2004.

HEALTH

The US health care system is among the most advanced in the world. Escalating health care costs resulted in several proposals for a national health care program in the 1970s, early 1980s, and early 1990s. Most reform measures relied either on market-oriented approaches designed to widen insurance coverage through tax subsidies on a federally controlled single-payer plan, or on mandatory employer payments for insurance coverage. The health care industry continues to struggle with continued rising costs, as well as the financial burden of providing care to over 40 million people who were uninsured. The percentage among the nation's poor was much higher.

Life expectancy for someone born in 2009 was 77.71 years. Infant mortality has fallen from 38.3 per 1,000 live births in 1945 to 6.50 per 1,000 live births in 2005. The birth rate in 2005 was 14.1 per 1,000 people. In 1999, 56.5% of US adults were overweight and 21.1% were obese. Although health indicators continued to improve overall 2004, pronounced disparities between different segments of the population remained.

Leading causes of death were: heart disease, cancer, cerebrovascular diseases, chronic lower respiratory diseases, accidents, diabetes mellitus, pneumonia and influenza, Alzheimer's disease, suicide, and homicide.

Cigarette smoking has been linked to heart and lung disease; about 20% of all deaths in the United States were attributed to cigarette smoking. Smoking has decreased overall since the late 1980s.

EDUCATION

Education is the responsibility of state and the local governments. However, federal funds are available to meet special needs at primary, secondary, or higher levels. Each state specifies the age and circumstances for compulsory attendance. The most common program of compulsory education requires attendance for ages 6 to 16; however, most school programs continue through twelve years of study, with students graduating at age 17 or 18. The high school diploma is only granted to students who complete this course of study, no certificates of completion are granted at previous intervals. Those who leave school before completion of grade 12 may choose to take a General Educational Development Test (GED) that is generally considered to be the equivalent to a state approved diploma.

Regular schools, which educate a person toward a diploma or degree, include both public and private schools. Public schools are controlled and supported by the local authorities, as well as state or federal governmental agencies. Private schools are controlled and supported by religious or private organizations. Elementary schooling generally extends from grade one through grade five or six. Junior high or middle school programs may cover grades six through eight, depending on the structure of the particular school district. High schools generally cover grades 9 through 12. At the secondary level, many schools offer choices of general studies or college preparatory studies. Vocational and technical programs are also available. Some schools offer advanced placement programs through which students (after appropriate exams) may earn college credits while still in high school. The school year begins in September and ends in June.

Colleges include junior or community colleges, offering two year associate degrees; regular four-year colleges and universities; and graduate or professional schools. Both public and private institutions are plentiful. Eight of the most prestigious institutions in the country are collectively known as the Ivy League. These schools are some of the oldest in the country and are known for high academic standards and an extremely selective admissions process. Though they are all now independent, nonsectarian organizations, most of them were founded or influenced by religious groups. They include: Yale University (1701, Puritans), University of Pennsylvania (1740, Quaker influence), Princeton University (1746, Presbyterian), Harvard University (1638, Puritan), Dartmouth College (1769, Puritan), Cornell University (1865), Columbia University (1754, Anglican), and Brown University (1764, Baptist).

The cost of college education varies considerably depending on the institution. There are county and state universities that receive government funding and offer reduced tuition for residents of the region. Students attending both public and private institutions may be eligible for federal aid in the form of grants or loans. Institutions generally offer their own scholarship and grant programs as well.

LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS

The American Library Association has reported that, as of 2004, there were an estimated 117,664 libraries in the country, including 9,211 public libraries (with over 16,500 buildings), 3,527 academic libraries, 93,861 school libraries, 9,526 special libraries, 314 armed forces libraries, and 1,225 government libraries.

The largest library in the country and the world is the Library of Congress, with holdings of over 130 million items, including 29 million books and other printed materials, 2.7 million recordings, 12 million photographs, 4.8 million maps, and 58 million manuscripts. The Library of Congress serves as the national library and the site of the US Copyright Office. The government maintains a system of presidential libraries and museums, which serve as archive and research centers that preserve documents and other materials of historical value related to the presidency.

The country's vast public library system is administered primarily by municipalities. The largest of these is the New York Public Library system with 89 branch locations and over 42.7 million items, including

14.9 million bound volumes. Other major public library systems include the Cleveland Public Library (over 9.7 million items), Los Angeles County Public Library (over 9.6 million items, 8.7 million books), the Chicago Public Library (6.5 million), the Boston Public Library system (6.1 million books, including 1.2 million rare books and manuscripts), and the Free Library of Philadelphia (6 million items).

Among the leading university libraries are those of Harvard (with about 15 million volumes in 90 libraries), Yale, Illinois (Urbana- Champaign), Michigan (Ann Arbor), California (Berkeley), Columbia, Stanford, Cornell, California (Los Angeles), Chicago, Wisconsin (Madison), and Washington (Seattle).

There are over 5,000 nonprofit museums in the United States. The most numerous type is the historic building, followed in descending order by college and university museums, museums of science, public museums of history, and public museums of art.

The Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, sponsors 18 national museums and the National Zoo. Sixteen of the Smithsonian national museums are located in the Smithsonian complex of Washington, DC; these include the Natural History Museum, the American History Museum, the Air and Space Museum, American Art Museum, and the American Indian Museum. The American Indian Museum, Heye Center, and the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum are Smithsonian-sponsored museums located in New York.

Other eminent US museums include the American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Collection of American Art, the Frick Collection, and the Brooklyn Museum, all in New York City; the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; the Art Institute of Chicago and the Chicago Museum of Natural History; the Franklin Institute and Philadelphia Museum of Art, both in Philadelphia; and the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco. Also of prominence are the Cleveland Museum of Art, the St. Louis Museum of Art, and the Baltimore Museum of Art.

CULTURE

The development of the Culture of the United States of America has been marked by a tension between two strong sources of inspiration: European ideals, especially British; and domestic originality.

American culture encompasses traditions, ideals, customs, beliefs, values, arts, folklore and innovations developed both domestically and imported via colonization and immigration from the British Isles. Prevalent ideas and ideals which evolved domestically such as important national holidays, uniquely American sports, proud military tradition, and innovations in the arts and entertainment give a strong sense of national pride among the population as a whole.

It includes both conservative and liberal elements, military and scientific competitiveness, political structures, risk taking and free expression, materialist and moral elements.

It also includes elements which evolved from Native Americans, and other ethnic subcultures; most prominently the culture of African American slave descendants and different cultures from Latin America. Many cultural elements, especially popular culture have been exported across the globe through modern mass media where American culture is sometimes resented. A few of the cultural elements have remained rather exclusive to North America.

Music

Music intertwines with aspects of American social and cultural identity, including through social class, race and ethnicity, geography, religion, language, gender and sexuality. The relationship between music and race is perhaps the most potent determiner of musical meaning in the United States. The development of an African American musical identity, out of disparate sources from Africa and Europe, has been a constant

theme in the music history of the United States. Little documentation exists of colonial-era African American music, when styles, songs and instruments from across West Africa commingled in the melting pot of slavery. By the mid-19th century, a distinctly African American folk tradition was well-known and widespread, and African American musical techniques, instruments and images became a part of mainstream American music through spirituals, minstrel shows and slave songs. African American musical styles became an integral part of American popular music through blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, and then rock and roll, soul and hip hop; all of these styles were consumed by Americans of all races, but were created in African American styles and idioms before eventually becoming common in performance and consumption across racial lines. In contrast, country music derives from both African and European, as well as Native American and Hawaiian, traditions and yet has long been perceived as a form of white music.

Economic and social class separates American music through the creation and consumption of music, such as the upper-class patronage of symphony-goers, and the generally poor performers of rural and ethnic folk music. Musical divisions based on class are not absolute, however, and are sometimes as much perceived as actual; popular American country music, for example, is a commercial genre designed to "appeal to a working-class identity, whether or not its listeners are actually working class". Country music is also intertwined with geographic identity, and is specifically rural in origin and function; other genres, like R&B and hip hop, are perceived as inherently urban. For much of American history, music-making has been a "feminized activity". In the 19th century, amateur piano and singing were considered proper for middle- and upper-class women. Women were also a major part of early popular music performance, though recorded traditions quickly become more dominated by men. Most male-dominated genres of popular music include female performers as well, often in a niche appealing primarily to women; these include gangsta rap and heavy metal.

The United States is often said to be a cultural melting pot, taking in influences from across the world and creating distinctively new methods of cultural expression. Though aspects of American music can be traced back to specific origins, claiming any particular original culture for a musical element is inherently problematic, due to the constant evolution of American music through transplanting and hybridizing techniques, instruments and genres. Elements of foreign music arrived in the United States both through the formal sponsorship of educational and outreach events by individuals and groups, and through informal processes, as in the incidental transplantation of West African music through slavery, and Irish music through immigration. The most distinctly American music is a result of cross-cultural hybridization through close contact. Slavery, for example, mixed persons from numerous tribes in tight living quarters, resulting in a shared musical tradition that was enriched through further hybridizing with elements of indigenous, Latin and European music. American ethnic, religious and racial diversity has also produced such intermingled genres as the French-African music of the Louisiana Creoles, the Native, Mexican and European fusion Tejano music and the thoroughly hybridized slack-key guitar and other styles of modern Hawaiian music.

Cinema

The cinema of the United States has had a profound effect on cinema across the world since the early 20th century. Its history is sometimes separated into four main periods: the silent film era, classical Hollywood cinema, New Hollywood, and the contemporary period (after 1980). Since the 1920s, the American film industry has grossed more money every year than that of any other country.

In 1878, Eadweard Muybridge demonstrated the power of photography to capture motion. In 1894, the world's first commercial motion picture exhibition was given in New York City, using Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope. The United States was in the forefront of sound film's development in the following decades. Since the early twentieth century, the U.S. film industry has largely been based in and around Hollywood,

Los Angeles, California. Picture City, FL was also a planned site for a movie picture production center in the 1920s, but due to the 1928 Okeechobee hurricane, the idea collapsed and Picture City was returned back to the original name of Hobe Sound. Director D. W. Griffith was central to the development of film grammar and Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) is frequently cited in critics' polls as the greatest film of all time. American screen actors like John Wayne and Marilyn Monroe have become iconic figures, while producer/entrepreneur Walt Disney was a leader in both animated film and movie merchandising. The major film studios of Hollywood are the primary source of the most commercially successful movies in the world, such as *Star Wars* (1977), *Titanic* (1997), and *Avatar* (2009), and the products of Hollywood today dominate the global film industry.

Fashion

Apart from professional business attire, fashion in the United States is eclectic and predominantly informal. While Americans' diverse cultural roots are reflected in their clothing, particularly those of recent immigrants, cowboy hats and boots and leather motorcycle jackets are emblematic of specifically American styles. Blue jeans were popularized as work clothes in the 1850s by merchant Levi Strauss, a German immigrant in San Francisco, and adopted by many American teenagers a century later. They are now widely worn on every continent by people of all ages and social classes. Along with mass-marketed informal wear in general, blue jeans are arguably U.S. culture's primary contribution to global fashion. The country is also home to the headquarters of many leading designer labels such as Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein. Labels such as Abercrombie & Fitch and Eckō cater to various niche markets. Another type of clothing worn throughout the United States by many types of people is the T-shirt. It can be plain and white, or colored with company logos or funny messages. T-shirts are arguably the most worn type of shirt in the United States.

Dress norms in the United States are generally consistent with those of other post-industrial western nations and has become largely informal since the mid 20th century. Clothing in the United States also depends on a variety of factors including location, venue, and demographic factors such as ethnicity. Blue jeans are a consistent fashion trend among all classes. The western states are commonly noted for being more informal in their manner of dress than those closer to the eastern seaboard. Furthermore, individuals belonging to certain ethnic groups such as some Native American tribal members and individuals of Scottish descent may wear clothing to represent their ethnic identity at certain events. Conspicuous consumption and a desire for quality have also lead to a strong preference for designer label clothing among many in the middle and upper classes.

Fashion norms have changed greatly from decade to decade. The United States has generally followed and in some cases led trends in the history of Western fashion. It has some unique regional clothing styles, such as western wear.

The toleration for body expression that deviates from the mainstream such as complete body tattoos or nudism is strongly linked to the sub-culture and location in which an individual may find him- or herself. Generally speaking the United States tends to be less tolerant towards nudity than Western Europe, even in more tolerant areas such as California. As stated above the tolerance shown for personal expression such as cross-dressing, piercing, etc... varies greatly with location and sub-culture and may be completely appropriate in one venue while being taboo in another.

CUISINE

The United States of America is often called "the melting pot of the world". The US cooking is as diverse as population. The USA cooking pot contains a blend of cuisines from many countries. We

sometimes use the term "American cooking" to loosely define a collection of traditional dishes that have gained popularity across the USA.

Mainstream American culinary arts are similar to those in other Western countries. Wheat is the primary cereal grain. Traditional American cuisine uses ingredients such as turkey, white-tailed deer venison, potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, squash, and maple syrup, indigenous foods employed by Native Americans and early European settlers. Slow-cooked pork and beef barbecue, crab cakes, potato chips, and chocolate chip cookies are distinctively American styles. Soul food, developed by African slaves, is popular around the South and among many African Americans elsewhere. Syncretic cuisines such as Louisiana creole, Cajun, and Tex-Mex are regionally important.

Characteristic dishes such as apple pie, fried chicken, pizza, hamburgers, and hot dogs derive from the recipes of various immigrants. French fries, Mexican dishes such as burritos and tacos, and pasta dishes freely adapted from Italian sources are widely consumed. Americans generally prefer coffee to tea. Marketing by U.S. industries is largely responsible for making orange juice and milk ubiquitous breakfast beverages.

American Cooking is hard to define. Few people in the US could agree on which foods are traditional American cooking. Certain simple dishes like roast beef, fried chicken, grilled steak, stuffed turkey, meatloaf, baked potato, yams, corn on the cob, potato salad, apple pie, clam chowder, hamburgers, hotdogs and hot wings would normally be included on most lists of American cooking. Many restaurants and bars in the US serve hot wings or Nachos as snack food. Try them both, but order mild seasoning the first time unless you are accustomed to eating burning coals.

The cuisine in different parts of the country developed independently. Each regional style of cooking was influenced by the nationality of the colonists that settled in the area and by the types of ingredients locally available. When traveling across the USA, you might enjoy sampling the special dishes popular in each region. Here are brief descriptions of some regional US cuisine.

New England style cooking

The northeastern part of the USA, known as the New England states, are renowned for their hearty dishes imported by British colonists and for their cold-water seafood harvested by the local fishing fleet. This is the land of Brunswick stew, Yankee pot roast and Boston baked beans. Be sure to try the New England clam chowder, which is now popular all states and the Maine lobster, usually available in most fine restaurants. When visiting New England, especially the coastal cities like Boston or Providence, sample the seafood.

Southern cooking and Soul Food

The cuisine of the southeastern states is labeled "southern cooking" or more elaborately, "down home southern cooking". It is characterized by wholesome farm-style cooking with plenty of deep fried foods, heavy sauces and sweet desserts. Elvis Presley loved southern cooking and it certainly reflected in his growing waistline. Deep-fried chicken is commonly known as southern-fried chicken. Chicken-fried steak is a deep-fried beef cutlet. Both are often served with a thick white sauce known as home-style gravy.

Southerners love barbeque, but unlike westerners, they do not favor sweet tomato-based sauces. Eastern barbeque most often means pork; especially pork ribs, well spiced or marinated and slowly cooked over glowing coals. Greens, black-eyed peas and corn bread are common side dishes. Pecan pie, peach cobbler, banana pudding and sweet potato pie are some favorite desserts.

Soul food is the Afro-American version of southern cooking. It includes the same dishes but prepared with the intensity and love of an African-American mother feeding her family. It is southern cooking with soul.

New Orleans Cajun cooking

Although in the heart of the south, New Orleans has a distinctly European culture with its own unique cuisine. This city at the mouth of the great Mississippi River was greatly influenced by Spanish and French colonists and by the many African immigrants. It developed some of the finest cuisine in the USA.

The Creole and Cajun cuisine in New Orleans is a wonderful mixture of Spanish and French cooking spiced with African and West Indian flavors. Blackened fish or steaks are grilled with coatings of pepper and hot spices. Jambalaya and Gumbo are wonderfully flavored stews of meats, sausage and seafood. A lot of the Cajun cooking is highly spiced with hot pepper and chili, but not all the dishes are fiery. Traditional Spanish and French cooking and local variations of them are available in many fine restaurants throughout the city.

Southwestern and Tex-Mex cooking

The cuisine in the southwestern states has been greatly influenced by Native Americans and by early Spanish settlers especially via our Mexican neighbors. It is more than just cowboy food and not quite the same as authentic Mexican food. Southwestern cuisine includes a great variety of dishes prepared with local ingredients and liberally sprinkled with Mexican spices. Southwestern restaurants create some interesting variations of familiar dishes by the creative use of unfamiliar ingredients and exotic spices.

Tex-Mex is a variant of southwestern cooking that is most popular in Texas and along the Mexican border. It includes barbeque and chili. These cowboy inspired dishes are so popular in the southwest and across the USA that many places have annual chili festivals and barbeque cook offs with prizes for the best recipes. It is also the home of salsa, nachos, tacos and burritos.

California Cuisine

California is blessed with a bountiful supply of fresh fruits, vegetables and sea foods in all seasons. It has a diverse ethnic population. Californians have developed a refreshingly healthy cuisine that utilizes fresh ingredients flavored with unusual combinations of spices. Fresh green salads topped with avocados and citrus fruits may be served with Asian spiced peanut sauce. Fish can be lightly grilled in salsa and served with Chinese vegetables and Native American fry bread. Almost any combination of ethnic food styles can be combined in California cooking. This is the home of avant-garde, experimental cuisine.

TOURISM, TRAVEL, AND RECREATION

Among the most striking scenic attractions in the United States are: the Grand Canyon in Arizona; Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico; Yosemite National Park in California; Yellowstone National Park in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming; Niagara Falls, partly in New York; and the Everglades in Florida.

The United States has a total of 49 national parks. Popular coastal resorts include those of Florida, California, and Cape Cod in Massachusetts. Historical attractions include the Liberty Bell and Constitution Hall in Philadelphia; the Statue of Liberty in New York City; the White House, the Capitol, and the monuments to Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln in the District of Columbia; the Williamsburg historical restoration in Virginia; various Revolutionary and Civil War battlefields and monuments in the East and South; the Alamo in San Antonio; and Mt. Rushmore in South Dakota.

Among many other popular tourist attractions are the movie and television studios in Los Angeles; the cable cars in San Francisco; casino gambling in Las Vegas and in Atlantic City, New Jersey; thoroughbred horse racing in Kentucky; the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee; and such amusement parks as Disneyland (Anaheim, California) and Walt Disney World (near Orlando, Florida).

For abundance and diversity of entertainment — theater, movies, music, dance, and sports — New York City has few rivals. In April 1993, Amtrak began the country's first regularly scheduled transcontinental passenger service, from Los Angeles to Miami. Americans' recreational activities range from the major spectator sports — professional baseball, football, basketball, ice hockey, soccer; and horse racing; and collegiate football and basketball — to home gardening. Participant sports are a favorite form of

recreation, including jogging, aerobics, tennis, and golf. Skiing is a popular recreation in New England and the western mountain ranges, while sailing, power boating, rafting, and canoeing are popular water sports.

Foreign visitors to the United States numbered 41.2 million in 2008. Of these visitors, 31% came from Canada and 25% from Mexico. Hotel rooms numbered 4.4 million with an occupancy rate of 61%. With a few exceptions, such as Canadians entering from the Western Hemisphere, all visitors to the United States are required to have passports and visas. The cost of traveling in the United States varies from city to city. According to 2005 US government estimates, daily expenses were approximately \$187 in Chicago, \$272 in New York, \$230 in Washington, DC, and \$174 in Miami. Costs are lower in smaller cities and rural areas.

Boasting a breadth of three thousand miles, spanning all manner of different climates and terrains, US vacations offer some of the greatest variety in the world. One week you could explore the red rocks and desert of Arizona, the next you could be in the wilderness of Alaska, and the next along the coast of Maine.

Alaska

As the largest state in the Union, you will find no greater stretch of wilderness within the United States than in Alaska. While the state does possess a few cities in Juneau and Anchorage, this isn't one of the best vacation spots in the US because of its bustling metropolises. No, Alaska's first, and best, attraction is its great outdoors. If you long to feel part of the natural world and all of its beauty, then Alaska will be sure to delight. From fishing and hiking in the southlands, to the frozen tundra and Mt. McKinley, there's something for every outdoors enthusiast who pick Alaska as one of their US vacation destinations.

Arizona

Arid, warm, and marked by miles and miles of spectacular desert. Arizona may not strike you as one of the better US vacation spots, but don't let that fool you—there's a wealth of fantastic options available. The foremost attraction must be the Grand Canyon. No trip to Arizona is complete without paying a visit to this impressive natural wonder. Once you see the sun reflected in its rocks, and gaze down into its depths, you'll understand why when people travel in USA they make a special trip to Arizona.

However, there's more to the state than the Grand Canyon. A myriad of outdoor attractions, including Arizona sightseeing tours and many popular golf courses can be found. The state also possesses a rich Native American tradition. The Navajo Nation Council makes its home in Arizona and many Navajo historic sites are located throughout the state.

Nevada

There's much more to Nevada than its famous city, Las Vegas. While many do plan their travel in USA based around the city, the rest of the state has much to offer. Possessing a beautiful landscape, hiking is always popular for those taking their US vacation in Nevada. Lake Tahoe and Mount Charles are favorites among hikers. Those interested in more secluded areas will have no difficulty finding trails that are off the beaten path. The adventurous will surely want to explore Nevada's beautiful backcountry. Nevada also has an impressive history, hosting many of the old mining towns that arose during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries — including the famous Eureka. Adding to the state's history are multiple museums and other historic attractions. You can find these from Reno to Las Vegas and make for excellent stops during your US travel.

Texas

The Lone Star State and has many attractive options for those that travel USA. Indeed, Texas has much to offer when it comes to vacations in the US. A large number of cities are located across the state, each offering a different flavor. From San Antonio, to Dallas, to Austin, to Houston — you'll find plenty to do and see.

When you think of Texas, you might think of great open spaces with cattle and cowboys. What you might not think of are the beaches. The Texas coast boasts over 600 miles of sand and surf. Galveston Island

is just an hour from Houston. Meanwhile, Corpus Christi offers naval tours of the USS Lexington in addition to its soft beaches.

Camping is also another popular pastime. Spending a few nights in the Panhandle Plains or Big Bend National Park are excellent ideas for US vacation destinations. Other popular choices are Enchanted Rock State Park, Davis Mountains State Park, and Garner State Park.

Texas food is some of the best you'll find in any of the US vacation destinations. The Barbeque was invented there and has been refined into an art form. Each of the hundreds of places has their own secrets and styles to marinating and spicing the meat. You can't go wrong sampling the fine barbeque in Texas. However, that's not all there is. Chili is always popular and a yearly Chili Cook-Off is held in Terlingua. Tex-Mex is unique to Texas. It blends Mexican dishes with Texas style for a truly tasty experience.

Florida

When Juan Ponce de Leon set foot on the sandy coast in search of the fountain of youth, he named the land "La Florida" after Spain's Easter celebration "Pascua Florida" (Feast of Flowers) and the fact that it was covered in flowers. Florida has changed a bit since Ponce de Leon's day, but it still retains a strong draw for millions of people each year who travel in USA.

Of course, Florida is famous for its beaches: Daytona Beach, South Beach, Miami Beach, Fort De Soto, beach, and so forth. Whether you're on the Atlantic Ocean or the Gulf of Mexico, on your US vacations in Florida, you'll be able to bask in the warm sun and enjoy the gentle surf.

If you enjoy nature then you absolutely must take an eco-tour of the Everglades while you're here on your travel USA. Meanwhile, Orlando is always a draw for those fond of the numerous family-friendly theme parks; from Universal Studios to Walt Disney World to Sea World, there's something for everyone.

Maine

Tucked in the upper right corner of the nation, Maine is easily one of the best vacation spots in the US. Its summers are hot without being unbearable and its autumns are crisp and full of beauty as the leaves turn in color. Maine is most known for its outdoor attractions—featuring skiing, skating, hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, swimming, and many more. If you love the great outdoors, then you'll love Maine.

Many select Maine as part of their US vacations because of its long coastline. Stretching for hundreds of miles, one can find both sandy and rocky beaches. The most popular of these tend, places like Old Orchard Beach, to be crowded during the summer, but if you're willing to do a little walking, you'll be able to reach some beaches that quite secluded.

But there's more to Maine's US vacation spots than the outdoors. There are also plenty of musical and cultural attractions in Maine, including: two symphonies, multiple theater groups, and art and history museums. The Bangor Symphony Orchestra is the oldest continuous orchestra in the nation, having performed since 1986. Shopping is also a popular activity with many going to Portland, Kittery, and Freeport.

New York

As one of the original thirteen colonies, and once hosting the nation's capital, New York has a rich and varied history. Of course, the state is one of the most popular US vacation spots because of New York City. This city is truly like no other on the planet. It's the city that never sleeps, and while you're visiting it's very easy to become caught up in the plethora of things to do and see. Each season offers something different. During the winter, go skating in lovely Central Park. Spring and summer bring the Yankees and multiple parades celebrating all manner of holidays and cultures. In autumn, New York hosts numerous art exhibits, Broadway musicals, as well as even more festive parades.

With the bustle of New York City, it might be easy to forget that the rest of the state has much to offer for US travel. Culinary delights can be found in food and wine festivals located throughout the state. Interested in culture? New York has a rich heritage featuring many museums and celebrations — from the

Underground Railroad to the Iroquois Nation to the French and Indian War. Outdoors activities are also popular with hikes in the Adirondacks.

Washington, DC

Our nation's capital city has much to offer those who travel USA. Washington, DC is vibrant with the imagery of patriotism. There are plenty of free sights to see, and attractions to experience. Many of our most famous historic landmarks reside in Washington: the White House, the Capitol, the Washington Monument, the Library of Congress, and so on.

Beyond the historic buildings like the Jefferson Memorial, there is a wealth of museums to visit. The first and foremost among these are the Smithsonian Museums. You won't be able to visit all fifteen of them in one visit, so it's a wise idea to pick the ones that interest you the most and save the rest for your next US travel. Another museum of interest is the International Spy Museum — featuring the role of espionage in both history and modern times. Those with a love of culture will want to pay a visit to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as well as Ford's Theater.

Las Vegas

When it comes to entertainment Las Vegas is one of the best vacation spots in the US. There's a wide variety of things to do in this Nevada City, nightclubs, restaurants, museums, shopping, and, of course, the casinos.

The Las Vegas Strip is the heart of the city and no US travel here is complete without paying it a visit. It's on the Strip that you'll find many of Vegas' famous shows. The Blue Man Group is often found performing at the Luxor while Elton John can sometimes be seen performing at Caesar's Palace. All manner of adult entertainment can be found too, from events at the Rio to the Planet Hollywood.

Another fantastic part of Las Vegas to visit is Fremont Street. Ten casinos, a free lightshow, and numerous hotels and restaurants make this one of the most popular places to visit in Vegas. Another nearby attraction is the Bellagio Fountains, located outside of the Bellagio Hotel.

The USA Top Attractions

Magical Mecca: Orlando, Florida

Orlando combines such an incredible wealth of great attractions that the entire city made number one on our list. Between Universal Studios, Sea World, Discovery Cove and the home of a particularly famous mouse, Orlando is the Mecca of attractions.

Circus Atmosphere: Cirque du Soleil, Las Vegas, Nevada

A contemporary and hip circus, sans animals, Cirque du Soleil combines highly skilled contortionists, acrobats and trapeze artists to create a one-of-a-kind experience. Hailed by some as the modern circus, new shows are frequently added on the Strip, bringing the crowds back for more.

Hawaii: Hana Highway, Maui, Hawaii

A 60-mile stretch connecting Hana to Maui, Hana Highway stuns with its spectacular views and natural adornments, including magnificent waterfalls, beaches and the “Seven Sacred Pools” - just make sure to keep your eyes on the road.

Grand Plans: Grand Canyon, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona

One of the “Seven Natural Wonders of the World,” the Grand Canyon is perhaps the most famous hiking destination in the U.S., with outstanding hiking trails to the base of the canyon. Theodore Roosevelt summed it up, declaring the Grand Canyon the “one site every American should see.”

Park Place: Central Park, New York City, New York

One of the nation's first landscaped public parks, Central Park covers 843 acres or six percent of Manhattan. Central Park has several interesting attractions and activities, including a zoo, carousel, reservoir, and boathouse, not to mention some of the best people watching in the world.

Rock Show: Alcatraz, San Francisco, California

Notorious for housing some of the country's most infamous criminals, including Al Capone and George "Machine Gun" Kelly, until it was closed in 1963, Alcatraz Island or "The Rock" now exists as an attraction in the middle of San Francisco Bay. For an eerie visit, take the night tour and listen to the sounds of disgruntled inmates banging their cups against cells.

Perch Above the Peacock: Top of the Rock Observation Deck, New York, New York

One of the Big Apple's newest and coolest attractions, the Top of the Rock Observation Deck in Rockefeller Center offers phenomenal views of New York City. With glass partitions, the observation deck offers unobstructed panoramic views, and an amazing vantage point for gazing at the Empire State Building.

Sealing is Believing: Monterey Bay Aquarium, Monterey Bay, California

The largest marine sanctuary in America, Monterey Bay Aquarium is located in a former brewery and sardine cannery. View stunning California Giant Kelp that reside in the first tank in the world to simulate tidal currents on a large scale.

Waterful: Bellagio Fountains, Las Vegas, Nevada

For a peaceful attraction on the Strip, head to the Bellagio Fountains and appreciate the synchronization of the music and the water as it changes color to familiar tunes from musicals and movies. With a vibrant display every 15-30 minutes, the Bellagio Fountains are the most affordable show in Las Vegas.

Animal Kingdom: San Diego Zoo, San Diego, California

Featuring more than 4,000 rare and endangered animals, the San Diego Zoo has the largest collection of Grant Pandas outside of mainland China. To explore the zoo, take a guided bus tour or ride on the overhead gondola, providing an aerial view of the natural and cage-free settings.

TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Florida

When Juan Ponce de Leon set foot on the sandy coast in search of the fountain of youth, he named the land "La Florida" after Spain's Easter celebration "Pascua Florida" (Feast of Flowers) and the fact that it was covered in flowers. Florida has changed a bit since Ponce de Leon's day, but it still retains a strong draw for millions of people each year who travel in USA.

Of course, Florida is famous for its beaches: Daytona Beach, South Beach, Miami Beach, Fort De Soto, beach, and so forth. Whether you're on the Atlantic Ocean or the Gulf of Mexico, on your US vacations in Florida, you'll be able to bask in the warm sun and enjoy the gentle surf.

If you enjoy nature then you absolutely must take an eco-tour of the Everglades while you're here on your travel USA. Meanwhile, Orlando is always a draw for those fond of the numerous family-friendly theme parks; from Universal Studios to Walt Disney World to Sea World, there's something for everyone.

Florida is a bouquet of contrasts. Where, but in Florida, can you see both the Jurassic-era reptiles of the Everglades and the sci-fi futurism of Epcot Center? Once the home to The Old Man and the Sea author Ernest Hemingway, Key West now harbors the world's most glamorous yachts and cruise ships.

Florida architecture ranges from Key West Conch to Miami Art Deco and Orlando Postmodern. But perhaps Florida's greatest contrast is with the rest of America in winter: despite the impact of hurricanes like Wilma, the "Sunshine State" averages 300 full days of sunshine a year.

All that sunshine makes Florida beaches the place to be. From the Atlantic, to the Gulf, to Caribbean Key West, no other state offers more walks along the sand at sunset or sunrise. The shell-strewn beaches of Captiva and Sanibel islands are beachcombers' heaven. Or perhaps you'd rather spy for diamonds and pearls among the bikinied glitterati on Naples Beach along Millionaire's Row. Miami's clothing-optional Haul over Beach also frequently rates as one of the top - or, if you prefer, topless - Florida beaches.

An active Florida vacation might include swimming with Crystal River manatees, jet-boating in the Everglades, or casting for Wahoo off Key Largo. Or simply sit back and root for your favorite among Florida's nine major league sports teams or eighteen MLB teams who visit for Spring Training.

Each year millions make their dream of a Florida vacation come true, whether it is to push the family-fun envelope in Orlando, or to savor la vida loca in Miami.

Orlando is home to America's greatest theme park resorts, and can turn a family Florida vacation into a trip around the world: take a savanna safari in Disney's Animal Kingdom; linger at a Parisian café in Epcot, or get splashed by a whale at Sea World. Add the movie magic of Universal and MGM, mix in the g-force thrills of Busch Gardens, and you get family memories to last a lifetime.

Miami is a world unto itself. Miami's South Beach is home to the supermodel fashion scene and ultra-exclusive nightclubs-within-nightclubs where the in-crowd parties all night and all day. But whether it's the scent of fine cigar tobacco along Calle Ocho in Little Havana, or a hint of Chanel wafting amid the elaborately expensive Bal Harbour Shops, a Florida vacation in Miami can literally take your breath away.

The clean architectural lines of restored mid-century hotels like the Fontainebleu and Eden Roc can be viewed from a convertible cruising up Collins Avenue (A1A). Continuing north, dress way up at the exclusive boutiques of Bar Harbor, or dress way down at the clothing-optional Haulover Beach.

Downtown Miami is home to a number of uniquely Miami Florida attractions, including the blue-and-white mosaic tile tower of the Bacardi Building, and the Miami Art Museum, which showcases the city's artistic multiculturalism. South of downtown in Coconut Grove is the spectacular Renaissance-style estate of the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens.

Miami's significant Cuban community is centered downtown in Little Havana, which radiates from S.W. Eighth Street, or Calle Ocho, as the neighborhood is otherwise known. Challenge an old-timer to a game at Domino Park, then top off a meal at the mirrored Cuban diner Versailles with flan de turrón and café cubanos, and lend an ear as the locals complain about Castro.

Just north of downtown, you'll find the Design District, home to dozens of leading-edge furnishing showrooms like Holly Hunt and Odegard. This 18-block neighborhood of old warehouses was redeveloped in the mid-nineties, and has become the center of hip Miami style. The district comes alive after dark at cool lounges, bars, restaurants, along with gallery events like Art Basel and Art Night events held the second Saturday of each month.

With architectural-revival-themed neighborhoods and the one-of-a-kind Biltmore Hotel, Coral Gables expresses the epitome of Roaring Twenties elegance. Put on your diving cap and pretend you're Esther Williams or Johnny Weissmuller at the grandly opulent Venetian Pool.

Visitors will find a healthy array of things to do in Miami Florida, involving both the great outdoors and the hip trappings of the big city. Miami's South Beach-Miami Beach district continues to be one of the larger draws for this hip and scintillating southern city, offering some of the best Miami hotels and Miami beaches. Miami attractions have something for everyone, from marine activities to exciting shopping and cultural opportunities. Consider these suggestions for things to do in Miami on your upcoming southern Florida vacation.

The Miami area boasts some of the best Florida beaches, with ideal sandy stretches where a myriad of recreational activities can be enjoyed. The Miami Beach-South Beach shores offer up the most trendy Miami

beaches where people watching is at a premium. Along Miami Beach, cafes and other eateries line the strip and each area features different facilities and amenities. You'll also find some of the city's best beaches on Key Biscayne, some ideal for water sports and others offering relaxing seclusion. Miami's beaches have something for everyone and enjoying them is among the top things to do in Miami Florida.

Things to do in Miami:

Miami Metrozoo. Found at 1 Zoo Boulevard, The Miami Metrozoo is quite large, its 81 exhibits set on 740 total acres. The zoo's new "Amazon and Beyond" exhibit itself will top the average American zoo in size. A shoe in for family things to do in Miami FL, this zoo offers wonderful educational programs and is dedicated to the overall conservation of the world's natural wildlife species.

Cape Florida Lighthouse. Part of beautiful Key Biscayne's Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park, this picturesque lighthouse is a welcome visit for maritime enthusiasts looking for things to do in Miami Florida. It was built in 1825, making it the oldest building found in southern Florida.

Hollywood Beach Boardwalk. One of the most popular things to do in Miami FL for visitors is hang out at the Hollywood Beach Boardwalk, where miles of beaches and walking trails allow for relaxing strolls, bike rides and hours of people watching. Find a mix of cafes and bars, and dine at one of the boardwalk's restaurants. There is a thriving beach theatre at the Hollywood Beach Boardwalk, featuring the "Theatre under the Stars" concert series on Monday nights. Hollywood is located between North Miami Beach and Fort Lauderdale along Highway 1.

Recreational Possibilities at Tropical Park. Conveniently located at 7900 SW 40th Street, just off the Palmetto Parkway and minutes from the Miami airport, Tropical Park is one of the city's largest parks and offers a wealth of things to do in Miami. You will find a number of athletic facilities and fields where you can enjoy just about every sport, and anglers can spend hours freshwater fishing. If you are looking for a great spot to celebrate a birthday party or lay out an afternoon picnic spread, Tropical Park offers the ideal settings. The park has four lakes where you can swim, canoe or go paddle boating. View native wildlife like lizards, birds, iguanas, squirrels, ducks and alligators, among others.

Miami's Nightlife. South Beach is the undisputed king of Miami nightlife, offering some of the hippest bars and clubs anywhere on the planet. Nightlife revelers will also find exciting Miami nightlife in the Design District and in Downtown Miami, where new hot spots continue to emerge. You can also find plenty of evening adventure in Coconut Grove, and nearby Coral Gables boasts a more relaxed overall scene. Enjoy the sophistication of a downtown jazz and blues bar, or seek out the sultry Afro-Cuban rhythms in Little Havana. For a change of pace, head to dinner and follow up with a flamenco dancing performance, or head to a cabaret show. Get your fill of laughs at Miami's comedy clubs or duck into a sports bar for the big game. Any way you slice it, going out on the town is a top draw among things to do in Miami.

Vizcaya Museum and Gardens. The Vizcaya Museum and Gardens was formerly a vacation estate built in 1916 by the wealthy agricultural industrialist, John Deering. The main house was designed to mimic an Italian villa that had been lived in for generations. Its interior rivals that of the finest European castles and housed inside its walls are an extraordinary assembly of fine art and luxurious furnishings.

Orlando. When it comes to things to do in Orlando, one might be better off trying to find the things you can't do in Orlando. There is so much going on here that you might need to schedule repeat vacations just to begin to fulfill the list of things to do in Orlando.

If you like to golf, then try playing on the same courses as Tiger Woods and the numerous other PGA professionals who have taken up residence in the area. It should not be under-stressed how big golf is in Orlando. For golf aficionados, the opportunities here move to the top of your list of things to do see in Orlando. There may be nowhere else in the world where golf is as prolific as it is here, and in Orlando you'll

get to choose from a ton of great Florida golf courses with some designed by legends of the game, including Palmer, Watson, Nicklaus and Norman. You can even get help with your swing from Annika Sorenstam's coach at the Annika Academy at the Ginn Reunion Resort. Or get into a different swing with lessons from top tennis instructors and return home with a killer serve that will have your friends begging for a lesson from you.

If you want that rush associated with trying something new and totally different, take an airboat trip through the headwaters of the Florida everglades, or take a look down from above in Orlando hot air balloon ride or helicopter trip.

You can even take to the skies on your first hangliding experience at Wallaby Ranch Hang Gliding Flight Park. Museum buffs can enjoy the fine exhibits at the Orlando Art Museum. Try some of the free things to do in Orlando Florida as well and give that wallet a bit of a rest.

Between Universal Studios Resort, Walt Disney World Resort and Sea World, the whole family will find non-stop entertainment and attractions you'd be hard pressed to find anywhere else. Everyone is a kid when it comes to these theme-parks, and trying to figure out which ride to ride next, or which show to take in later becomes your only worry. That is unless you eat too much before taking to some of the roller coasters. And at Orlando's famed theme parks you can see fireworks every night, making for the perfect culmination of another day of family fun. Also, if you are ever in need of some cooling off while wearing a permanent smile, then add one of the area waterparks to your things to do in Orlando list. Try picking up discounted Universal tickets where you'll get unlimited access to 2 theme parks for just \$85.99.

Dining is one of the top things to do in Orlando, and for good reason. Here, you can have great eats for every meal of the day, and in-between. Families can relax at theme restaurants and dine in the company of princesses or animated TV stars. Parents, and family alike, can upscale it a bit for a luxury meal at one of the various celebrity chef restaurants. In Orlando you can try foods from all over the world and stop for an array of treats between meals. And, when you decide you need to take a break from all the action and area attractions, be sure to relax both body and mind at one of Orlando's 16 destination spas. It's a good way to make sure you return from your vacation even that much fresher.

Some 40 years ago, if you planned a family trip to Florida your main Orlando vacation choices were Gatorland and Cypress Gardens. But in 1971, the 47-square mile *Walt Disney World* complex opened, and now on any trip to Florida Orlando tops the must-do list.

To get a grip on all Orlando offers, you can group attractions into amusement parks (Disney's Magic Kingdom, Universal Islands of Adventure), movie parks (Disneyworld-MGM Studios, Universal Studios), animal parks (Disney's Animal Kingdom, SeaWorld), and water parks (Typhoon Lagoon, Blizzard Beach, and Wet'N'Wild). Defying categorization is the ongoing world's fair of Epcot.

Disney's Magic Kingdom. The centerpiece of Walt Disney World is the Magic Kingdom. The first of many global spin-offs of California's Disneyland, it is home to the childhood memories of generations, from Snow White to the Lion King, and everyone's favorite rides, like Space Mountain and Pirates of the Caribbean.

Epcot. Future World, dominated by the geodesic Spaceship Earth, offers popular edutainment rides like the interactive Mission:Space and Soarin'. Postcard pavilions from China, Mexico, and Morocco surround the World Showcase lagoon, where you can also enjoy a glass of wine in France or a stein of beer in Germany.

Disney Animal Kingdom. The best time to encounter the lions, elephants, zebras, and giraffes of the free-roaming Kilimanjaro Safaris is in the cool of the morning or at the late-afternoon feeding by the Lodge. In between, chill out on the Kali River Rapids, and then head indoors for the 3-D show Its Tough to Be a Bug.

Disney-MGM Studios. Originally planned as a working film studio, thrill rides are now the draw at MGM, including the Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular, Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, and the Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring Aerosmith. During annual Star Wars Weekends, wookies pack the Star Tours ride.

Universal Studios. Discover a world beyond Disney at Universal Studios. The toddlers can spend A Day in the Park with Barney, while bigger kids play action star on blockbuster interactive rides like Jaws, E.T., Terminator, and Shrek.

Universal Islands of Adventure. Now we're talking thrill rides: Dueling Dragons suspends you beneath one roller coaster track as you hurtle into near misses with riders on a dual track. The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man's astounding 3-D effects makes it the best attraction in the world according to Theme Park Insider.

SeaWorld. Shamu at SeaWorld welcomes you with a splash to this natural wonderland of belugas, penguins, manatees, and stingrays – the world's largest zoological park. Take a thrill-dive on the Kraken roller coaster, or arrange to swim with real dolphins at Discovery Cove.

While kids (and the kid at heart) generally rule Orlando travel it can also be a grown-up Florida vacation hot spot. Explore the shops, restaurants, and nightclubs of Universal Studios' City Walk, SeaWorld's Waterfront, or Disney's Boardwalk. Downtown Disney's Pleasure Island hosts a House of Blues and Cirque du Soliel's La Nouba. Walt Disney World even offers theme-park ships to cruise Florida and the Bahamas.

Things to do and see in Orlando can start to add up money-wise, but there are some free things to do in Orlando Florida as well. Take a family stroll at Disney's Boardwalk and enjoy the water views and street entertainers, or go hiking in Ocala National Forest. The terrain is easy and you'll get a real sense of natural Florida.

One of the free things to do in Orlando Florida is to visit the Harry P. Leu Gardens Mondays from 9 a.m. to noon.

Lake Eola Park is another welcome refuge set on 43 acres where you'll find a walking path, fountains, and a playground. Kids will enjoy feeding the swans and there are excellent views of the city.

Finally, head to the Disney town of Celebration where you'll find picturesque homes, an interactive fountain where kids can play, and a lagoon where you can look for alligators and turtles.

California

California has nearly endless possibilities for a vacation. If you're considering or planning a trip to the state of California, you will very likely be trying to figure out all the different things you want to do. From the amusement parks and sunny beaches of Southern California to the rugged cliffs and deserted beaches on the Northern Coast and everything in between, there is no end to all the things you can experience on a California tour, and the California map illustrates the many geographical possibilities.

Since the early days of the California Gold Rush, people have been coming to the Golden State from all parts of the country. Nowadays, California is known for being the closest thing to a perfect place, whether it is for the sunny vineyards of Napa, the charming small-towns on the Central Coast, or Southern California's miles of flawless, endless beaches.

The State of California is the most populated in the entire country, due to its immense size and its major metropolitan areas of Los Angeles and San Francisco. This is also the third largest state in terms of size, so you could spend weeks exploring the attractions on a California tour.

If you want to visit Southern California, there are a few places you should visit. Los Angeles is the second largest city in the country besides the Big Apple, so there is no lack of things to do and see in this area, and there are plenty of California resorts centered around theme parks so you can enjoy a hassle free

experience, since everything is easy to find. Disneyland and SeaWorld are family friendly places to enjoy a California vacation. Neighborhoods in LA are so outstanding that many have their own reputation that overshadows that fact that they are within a larger city. Hollywood, for example, has the Walk of Fame, and is home to the big movie studios.

With hundreds of miles of lovely beaches empty except for the wildlife, there is no lack of coastline for you to enjoy on a *California Beach* vacation. Half the state and the most scenic drive facing the Pacific run the length of its western coast, and a lovely California beach can be the setting for an unforgettable trip.

If you enjoy wholesome fun and family friendly entertainment, the beaches at Santa Cruz and San Diego have excellent parks right on the water, and are the setting for an unforgettable part of your California beach vacation, with lots of fun amusement rides.

There are a few areas just north of Los Angeles that have all sandy shores you could expect in Southern California beaches.

If you enjoy a more outdoorsy experience, you can enjoy the Pacific in luxury, as the Northern Coast is quickly becoming a place where a California Beach rental is gaining a great deal of popularity. Up north, relaxing outdoor activities like fishing and hiking can be enjoyed. You'll feel like you really fit into the scenery when you book a California beach rental, be it on the sunny beaches of Southern California or right here on the windswept northern part of the scenic Highway 1 drive down the coast.

Lovely nature preserves are off the coast of Monterey, and also south of Carmel just past the 17 mile drive, which is a scenic drive past a lovely California Beach that is part of the Point Lobos nature preserve. If you visit the world class Aquarium, you can add an education aspect that is fun as well to your California beach vacation. Spend a weekend in a California Beach Hotel, and take your time exploring the cannery, the Wharf and the Marina.

Whether you prefer the solitude and proximity to thousands or square miles of Pacific in front of you, there is something magical about staying in a California beach hotel. If you've at a rustic cabin or the Northern California Beach or nestled in a luxurious bed and breakfast on the Central Coast, you'll love being close to the shores.

Southern California lives up to its reputation of being a water lover's heaven, home to fun water sports like snorkeling and scuba diving at La Jolla beach, or windsurfing on a breezy California beach, you'll love. All the way up and down the coast, from the remote rocky beach far below the Highway 1 route and its scenic drive on the Northern Coast, to the small Oceanside communities of Pismo Beach, a California beach vacation is the most relaxing way to experience the state and its incredible views, which in themselves are California vacations.

Whether you like the serene coasts of the north or the sunny, fun filled beaches of Los Angeles, you can get to a California beach easily, and there are as plentiful and varied as the attractive people sunning themselves on a busy Southern California beach.

With its 360 inches of snow and 300 days of sunshine, snow-sliders will be in heaven at the **Heavenly Ski Resort Lake Tahoe**. This splendidly versatile resort is located in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range at Monument Peak. Straddling the state line between California and Nevada, a vacation at the Heavenly Ski Resort Lake Tahoe gives you the exciting experience of skiing from one state to the other. Heavenly has 17 lifts in California and 12 lifts in Nevada.

Even with an average of 360 inches of snow, the Heavenly Ski Resort Lake Tahoe still has one of the most extensive snowmaking systems in the United States. With 4,800 acres of terrain, Heavenly is one of North America's largest ski areas.

While Heavenly is, well heavenly, as long as you are in the Lake Tahoe area, you may as well visit another ski resort in Lake Tahoe. Beginner and intermediate skiers and riders who are looking for a ski resort in Lake Tahoe should consider Squaw Valley. Seventy percent of the Squaw Valley terrain consists of wide open groomed runs that are suitable for cruising. However, there is also a good deal of ungroomed advanced terrain. If you hate lift lines, Squaw Valley might be the best ski resort in Lake Tahoe to visit, since Squaw has the most extensive network of lifts in the world!

If you have a good tolerance for altitude, at 7,800 feet, Kirkwood has a higher base elevation than any ski resort in Lake Tahoe. The 2,000 foot vertical drop will be a thrill for all skiers and riders, and the 529 inches of snow is sure to please all of its visitors. Kirkwood has 12 lifts and 2,300 acres of skiable terrain.

If you have already skied or rode the Lake Tahoe ski resorts, and are looking for a different experience, plan a trip to the Mammoth Mountain Ski Resort in the Sierra Nevada. Not only does this mountain have California's highest elevation, Mammoth Mountain Ski Resort also has the longest ski season. This is a mountain where you will never get bored. Mammoth has 3500 skiable acres, 3100 vertical feet and 150 trails. The Mammoth Mountain Ski resort has 31 lifts, which include four high speed quads, four quads, seven triples, 12 doubles, two gondolas, one T-Bar and one Poma. Snowboarders will love the Olympic-size Super Pipe. If you are looking for a mammoth skiing or riding experience, visit the Mammoth Mountain Ski resort.

Channel Islands National Park is located off Ventura on the coast of California, not far from Santa Barbara, and includes five of the eight islands in the archipelago, as well as an extensive swath of undersea territory. The Channel Islands National Park is made up of Santa Rosa, San Miguel, Anacapa, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz Island. The territory preserved by the Channel Islands National Park is an important sanctuary for land and marine wildlife — the Channel Islands Marine Sanctuary extends six nautical miles off the coast of certain islands — as well as many species of plants. It is also a relatively remote place for tourists to visit and provides a great break from the hustle and bustle of the more developed Southern California coast.

Channel Islands California has sometimes been referred to as Southern California's Galápagos due to the great diversity of species found there. There are more than 2,000 species found in the park, with several of them endemic to the islands, meaning they are found nowhere else on earth. Among the rare species here is the largest mammal in the world, the blue whale, which can be seen in the waters of Channel Islands National Park in the summer, when the collision of warm and cold waters prompt the proliferation of plankton, the staple food of many whale species.

Other whales such as the humpback and the gray whale can also be seen in these waters, as well as dolphins, all of which make this the best national park in California for whale watching. Tourists can potentially see these whales by boat, and tours are available through several companies in Ventura harbor.

The largest island at Channel Islands California is Santa Cruz Island. It contains many unique species of land and marine life, including the Island Scrub Jay, which is found only on the island. Santa Cruz Island is also very popular among kayak enthusiasts, as it is home to the Painted Cave, the biggest and deepest sea cave in the world. Kayakers can explore the cave, which in the spring is curtained by a waterfall at the entrance, through kayak tours arranged with major tour companies such as the officially licensed Island Packers. Other attractions at Santa Cruz include a breathtaking coastline, with tidal pools that contain sea urchins, starfish, and many other coastal creatures. You can also go scuba diving, hiking, and swimming in the waters around Santa Cruz.

If you want to find a remote beach at Channel Islands California, look no further than Santa Rosa Island. Santa Rosa has beautiful white sand beaches and excellent hiking trails for those who want to explore nature at their leisure. There are also some picnic areas and a hundred-year-old cattle ranch, though the latter is no longer in operation.

You can gain access to the Channel Islands through chartered boat companies at Ventura harbor. Tourists should remember that the Channel Islands are not only a national park, but also an important center for biodiversity. Therefore, it's important to stay only on the marked trails and to bring any garbage you create back out of the park when you leave.

Hawaii

The Hawaiian Islands are a haven of tropical beauty presenting some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. The islands teem with picture perfect beaches, colorful sunsets, a myriad of cascading waterfalls and greener-than-green rainforests brimming with exotic plants and fascinating wildlife. The islands' coral reefs reveal a hidden realm awash with fascinating sea creatures, schools of colorful, lively fish and the ever-loved curious green sea turtles. Each island has its own unique traits accommodating many kinds of travelers and a multitude of interests.

The Hawaii comprises more than 100 distinct islands although there are only six main island tourists visit, two being much less popular yet equally beautiful. The main islands most popular for Hawaii vacations include Kauai, Maui, Oahu, the Big Island. Lanai and Molokai sit on many people's vacation agenda's but they are most often visited during a day trip rather than an entire vacation. Situated thousands of miles from the continental US and surrounded entirely by the ocean, there is literally no place like Hawaii. Hawaii is a unique holiday destination teeming with Hawaiian history and many fascinating traditions that make it a rare place.

Hawaii travel to the Big Island showcases the largest land mass in the island series double that of all the islands combined. From snow-capped mountains to the beautiful shores of Big Island beaches, numerous different climate are found on the Big Island. Adventurers flock to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, hiking black lava beds surrounding Mount Kilauea. The west coast houses the most frequented coasts of Kona and Kohala where there are many things to do in Big Island. From cheap Hawaii hotels to the most luxurious vacation rentals available, Big Island ups the ante for Hawaii travel.

Neighboring Oahu is only a short interisland flight away from the Big Island. It offers samples of the best of Hawaii making it one of the most popular islands for Hawaii vacations. Honolulu and Waikiki Beach are world famous, exhibiting a modern atmosphere amid plenty of Hawaiian history. From the towering peak of Diamond Head to sobering Pearl Harbor and the Punchbowl Memorial, there are many things to do in Honolulu. Oahu has some of the most spectacular natural landscapes of all the Hawaii islands with the most impressive example being the North Shore. Some of the best approaches to Oahu's striking geography include hiking, diving and enjoying captivating Oahu nature tours.

Taking an exciting Hawaii trip throughout the islands is another prospect travelers strive toward. An interisland cruise offers an incredible way to burrow into the best of each of the Hawaii islands, taking away a heavy sense of fulfillment. The many eye-opening things to do on Maui present many excellent reasons to stop and take a look around. Anglers relish in the opportunity for an exotic catch aboard a Maui fishing charter. A favorite for romance and passion, Maui weddings take place in many of the most beautiful outdoor locations on the island. A Maui Hawaii trip wouldn't be complete without a journey to Haleakala, a hike through the Iao Valley and a jaunt throughout the lovely coastal areas of Kaanapali and Lahaina.

Though consistently rising in popular, Kauai is the least visited of all the Hawaii islands. It's the oldest and most luscious island, often referred to as the Garden Isle, and is considered the most stunning of all by many. Kauai hiking on the Kalalau Trail is a gratifying way to see the breathtaking northern beauty. The abundance of Kauai tours afford many more ways to witness the impressive natural allure during Hawaii vacations. Kauai beaches, waterfalls, canyons, and rainforests are reminders of the captivating powers of vivid island topography.

During a Hawaii trip there is no worry in finding accommodations suited to your budget. Each island abounds with vacation rentals, discount hotels, luxurious resorts and the most charming island bed and breakfasts. An incredible array of travel packages are also available to help lessen the burden of vacation costs. Whether you enjoy Hawaii vacations by way of an interisland cruise or choose to explore only one island in its entirety, the magic of Polynesia exhibits grace, tranquility, wonder and adventure all rolled into one.

The Hawaii attractions cover a wide spectrum, and while some visitors will be interested in little more than some time on an idyllic beach, others will want to tackle as many different activities as possible. There are activities in Hawaii to fit every taste and preference, and if surfing the big waves on Oahu's North Shore isn't for you, you might treat yourself to an unforgettable kayaking tour along Kauai's stunning Na Pali Coast. When looking for attractions in Hawaii to add to your vacation itinerary, you won't run out of options. In fact, you'll need more than one Hawaii vacation to enjoy all of the activities and attractions that this unique state has to offer.

Understandably so, spending time on the beach is one of the top activities in Hawaii. Some will argue that the Kauai beaches are the best beaches in Hawaii, while others might find favor with the sandy stretches that can be found on the island's of Maui and Oahu. Truth be told, all of the main Hawaiian Islands boast some spectacular beaches, and thanks to the island's volcanic history, some of these beaches even feature black sand. Speaking of volcanoes, Hawaii is the state to visit if you are interested in them. Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, which can be found on the Big Island, is easily one of the top Hawaii tourist attractions, and you won't want to miss it if you want to learn more about the state's geology.

When you're not hanging out at the beach or taking in the volcanoes on the Big Island during your Hawaii vacation, a trip to a Hawaii plantation can make for a welcome addition to the agenda. The Kona coffee plantations, which can be found on the Big Island's western side, are the most renowned coffee plantations in Hawaii, though they're not the only ones that you can tour. The largest coffee plantation in Hawaii can actually be found on the island of Kauai. Visit the Kauai Coffee Company, and you can learn about the entire coffee making process, not to mention sample some premium coffee. Other Hawaii plantations that figure among the top overall Hawaii attractions include the Dole Plantation, which specializes in pineapples, and the Maui Tropical Plantation, which grows coffee, nuts, and a variety of exotic fruit.

Sightseeing is one of the most rewarding activities in Hawaii, and there will be great sights to see virtually everywhere you go in this tropical archipelago. One of the best ways to take in the countryside on the different Hawaiian Islands is by driving. Scenic drives on roads like Maui's Hana Highway or the Big Island's Saddle Road can definitely be a highlight of your trip, and if you get the chance, touring the small island of Lanai in a 4x4 vehicle is a real treat. Lanai is an island that many Hawaii visitors leave out when planning their trips, but that doesn't mean that you shouldn't venture over for a look at some point. In addition to two upscale resorts, Lanai is also home to some home rentals, a bed and breakfast inn, and a small hotel. The relatively deserted beaches might be the top attractions, however, unless you prefer the crowds of sunbathers that can be found on Waikiki Beach.

Waikiki Beach is one of the most famous Hawaii tourist attractions, partly because of the fact that it is an excellent place to sunbathe and enjoy water sports like surfing and swimming. Waikiki Beach is also a great place to people watch, and lining the beach are numerous resorts and hotels, some of which figure among the best in the state. Waikiki is part of Honolulu, which is the state capital of Hawaii, and it can be found on the island of Oahu. Honolulu is an excellent city to explore, thanks to renowned Hawaii attractions like the Punchbowl Memorial, the Waikiki Aquarium, and Chinatown, and it's definitely the city of choice if you want to enjoy some urban exposure in the Aloha State.

Museums, national parks, sacred sites, and waterfalls figure among the most popular Hawaii tourist attractions, and you will have numerous opportunities to enjoy attractions like these on all of the main

islands. What one island lacks, another one has, which is why interisland travel is big in Hawaii. Interisland cruises and interisland flights are your transportation options when it comes to island hopping in the 50th state, and flying isn't only limited to planes. Helicopter tours are wildly popular in Hawaii, thanks the breathtaking scenery that can be found across the land.

Hawaii is a great place to visit any time of year, though some activities have their seasons, which might affect your decision concerning when to go. Whale watching and surfing, for example, which are two of the most popular activities in Hawaii, are best enjoyed in the winter months, while snorkeling and swimming are usually at a premium during the summer months. You're bound to have fun on a Hawaii vacation regardless of when you decide to visit, so start planning yours today and see why so many Hawaii visitors choose to return to the islands time and again.

MAIN CITIES

Washington, DC

There is perhaps no city more exciting than the capital city of the United States of America. Its rhythms are the heartbeat of the entire nation, and its work is always in the public eye. Don't expect to see it all on your first Washington DC trip. Rather, plan to make occasional small trips to town. Then you will know what makes the city special: its commitment to change.

Washington DC tourism thrives on the change perpetuated by constant election shake-ups and their effects on the city populace. Washington DC vacations are always different, therefore, with something new to see on each Washington DC trip. For example, in the last two years, the city has seen the long overdue opening of the National Museum of the American Indian, the creation of the Marian Koshland Science Museum, and the dedication of the National World War II Memorial. The US Capitol has a brand new Visitors Center opening this year, and the Kennedy Center is expanding dramatically.

Washington DC tourism flagged a little in recent years, immediately following the September 11th attacks. But the added attention to security in the nation's capital has laid many fears to rest. Washington DC vacations are as safe - and as exciting - as they ever were. You may need to allow more time between destinations, however, as security checks are common all over Washington DC, now, and many involve metal detectors. Driving and parking have both become more challenging, as roads are closed around federal buildings to increase their perimeters for security. It is much better, where possible, to rely on Metrorail and taxis for your Washington DC trip.

This town was born from diversity, and thrives in it today. There are many parts of town to enjoy, each with its appeal to different segments of the Washington DC tourism market. Washington DC vacations should include jaunts to the various distinct neighborhoods that define the culture here. Check out the U Street clubs in the streets where Duke Ellington grew up. Go to Chinatown, admire the Friendship Arch, and eat authentic Asian cuisines late at night. You may spend an evening barhopping in Adams Morgan, or dining al fresco at one of the many trendy and international restaurants in the area. Or spend a more traditional afternoon shopping and searching rare antiques in historic Georgetown along the canal, where you can also watch crew boats and kayakers take on the Potomac on misty mornings. Washington DC vacations are fun, energetic, and informative, and often inspirational on many levels.

Washington DC attractions offer something for every interest. In this exciting place, you'll find a world-class collection of museums, thriving theaters, and a unique grouping of national monuments and memorials. If you're planning a vacation around the Washington DC major attractions, be prepared to see some amazing sights and connect with American history along the way.

When you're talking about the Washington DC major attractions, you can't go wrong starting with the monuments and memorials clustered around the National Mall. This collection of monuments honors America's presidents and soldiers, who made major sacrifices for their country. Surely the tallest and arguably the most famous of the Washington DC attractions is the Washington Monument, which offers some amazing views from high above Washington. A short walk along the Tidal Basin will lead you to the Lincoln Memorial, where you can climb the stairs and see the statue of a seated and thoughtful president up close.

Several other popular Washington DC tourist attractions can be reached within a few more minutes of walking, including the National War II Memorial and the Jefferson Memorial. All of these monuments are free to visit and you don't have to plan ahead to visit. The only exception is the Washington Monument — it's still free, but you do need to pick up tickets if you want to see the views from the top.

The list of Washington DC tourist attractions also includes the many museums (and a zoo) of the Smithsonian Institution. This collection of amazing museums has been nicknamed America's Attic, and for good reason. The various museums display a tiny percentage of the collection that numbers in the billions. As you visit the various museums—also free to visit—you'll have the chance to see the actual Star-Spangled Banner, learn just how big the space shuttle really is, and view treasured works of art.

If you're wondering where to get started or you want to formulate a plan for visiting these Washington DC attractions, you should make your way to the Smithsonian Castle. A visitor center and attraction in its own right, the castle offers an array of details about the various museums as well as a video narrated by Ben Stiller, of *Night at the Museum* fame. You also can find out about the various tours that depart throughout the day, a fun way to see the attractions in a whole new light.

Other top attractions are connected to the Federal Government. The Library of Congress and National Archives both have intriguing exhibits honoring the heritage of the country. The Capitol Visitor Center, which opened in 2008, quickly became one of the most popular attractions in town. Here, you'll have the chance to watch the House of Representatives at work, meander through the exhibits, and grab a meal. The White House is also open to tours, as long as advance reservations have been made through your Congressperson. You also can drop by the visitor center without notice, which is a great way to learn more about the president's home at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Beyond the museums and monuments, the city supports a thriving theater scene. The Kennedy Center, one of the most visited Washington DC tourist attractions, hosts a full schedule of shows and special events. Throughout the year, people flock to this elegant theater to watch Broadway-style shows, operas, and other stage shows. The theater scene also includes edgy, experimental theaters and family-friendly matinees, meaning no matter your age or taste, you'll have the chance to see something amazing on stage.

If sports are more your scene, you'll find Washington DC major attractions that fit the bill. The Verizon Center welcomes sports fans throughout the year for NBA, WNBA, and NHL games, as well as Georgetown Hoyas college basketball. The Redskins play football at RFK Stadium in the fall and winter. When the weather's warm, you can join with others fans to watch the Nationals play baseball in America's capital city.

New York

New York City, New York is one of the world's major global cities, leading the world in almost every category including a wide variety of New York City hotels. New York City is the center of global commerce; with numerous international corporations and the most important stock exchanges in the world. It is one of the four major cities London, Paris, and Tokyo that control international finance. New York City New York is a preeminent international political center and home to the United Nations global headquarters.

New York is the leading city for mass media in the United States, and its film industry is second only to Hollywood. New York City events are around every corner. With almost limitless cultural attractions including museums, galleries, sporting arenas, and performance events, New York is a magnet to both tourists and immigrants from around the world who come to see the city's iconic attractions, such as the New York City skyline at night.

New York City New York has an area of approximately 321 square miles and consists of five boroughs: The Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island. Each borough contains several neighborhoods that each has their own unique New York style.

When visiting, it's a good idea to purchase a good New York City guide, as a New York City trip offers a number of choices; the places to visit, events to see, and urban life to experience can be overwhelming, especially for the first-time traveler. Major attractions include the Statue of Liberty, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Empire State Building, Central Park, shopping on Fifth Avenue, and Times Square.

Prominent New York City events include professional sports games (with more than one team in each of the four major sports-baseball, basketball, hockey and football-there are no shortage of games in the New York metro area), Broadway theater productions (New York is the center of American theater with 39 large-scale theaters), numerous music, dance, and comedy performances scattered throughout the city.

New York City attractions are abundant, meaning that you'll never run out of things to do while exploring one of the most vibrant cities in America. Including cultured natural settings, a wealth of museums, and famous landmarks such as Times Square, New York City sightseeing is endlessly entertaining. With such an array of tourist attractions in New York City, sufficient planning is essential to ensure that your favorite sights be included on your vacation itinerary.

Five boroughs — Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island — make up the entirety of New York City, and each one offers a unique set of NYC attractions. Stroll through Central Park in Manhattan, one of the largest parks in the country, or walk across the Brooklyn Bridge, which connects Manhattan and Brooklyn. Witness some of the most beautiful and artistic graffiti ever done at 5 Points in Queens, tour the new Yankee Stadium in the Bronx before you take in a baseball game, or visit the living Historic Richmond Village on Staten Island. Depending on your personal interests, any or all of these boroughs can create the perfect vacation among the many New York City attractions.

Tourist attractions in New York City come in a great variety of types, such as landmarks, museums, and parks, meaning that there is something for every traveler, whether you'd rather learn about history or spend time wandering through the city parks. Many of the landmarks are buildings or monuments, including such well known attractions as the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, Times Square, Rockefeller Plaza, and the World Trade Center site.

Covering a variety of interests, the array of museums in New York City is unparalleled. These are among the most informative attractions and they run the gamut from art museums to scientific exhibits. Popular spots include the Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Cloisters, a medieval extension of the Metropolitan; the Guggenheim, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright; the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology; the New York Hall of Science; and the American Museum of Natural History. There are a quite a few parks located throughout the city, but the largest and most popular of all is Central Park, offering a large selection of outdoor activities and sights.

Main attractions of New York City include:

Times Square

The bright lights of the big city. Even at 4 am, this giant square is the epicenter of New York City, the skyscrapers, ads and giant televisions all combining to block out the darkness of early morning. The busiest intersection in the city, the combination of art and corporate presence is another of the square's defining

features, and no matter what time you come by, it's one of the most popular New York City tourist attractions, day or night.

Empire State Building

Getting to the top of this building is one of the most well-known things to do in New York City. Located on the fabled Fifth Avenue, it rises almost a quarter mile into the air and is one of the most recognizable landmarks of the city, especially when it's on display in the New York City skyline at night. The best views of New York are from the observation decks here, and almost no one comes home from the city without pictures of one of the most famous New York City attractions.

The Met (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Located on the Eastern edge of Central Park, taking a tour of the Metropolitan Museum of Art is an absolute must when it comes to things to do in New York City. The home of America's most important art collection, the admittance fee is cheap and the artistic wonders plentiful. Combined with a stroll through Central Park, this is a great way to spend an afternoon in the big city.

Greenwich Village

The Village - as it is colloquially known - is one of the best New York City tourist attractions. During the day, it has a long stretch of popular hangouts like Washington Square and quiet brownstone-lined streets, while at night; it is transformed into one of the best centers of nightlife in the city. And that's really saying something.

Central Park

This enormous park is another of New York City's enduring landmarks. Outside of it being completely free, there are a number of other reasons a walk through Central Park is one of the top things to do in New York City. There's a zoo, a sprawling reservoir, mile after mile of expertly crafted lawns and there's always some kind of gathering going on.

Rockefeller Center

A collection of skyscrapers stretching from 48th to 51st, every building in Rockefeller Center is famous for something - probably none more so than the Radio City Music Hall. During the winter, the adjacent ice skating rink is the biggest New York City tourist attraction in Rockefeller Center.

Broadway Theater District

Thirty nine theaters make up Broadway, the New York City attraction that is synonymous with the best that American theater has to offer, or, at least, the most well-known. At any time of the year, the America's most talented and well-respected performers take up residence in one of the theaters, bringing to life plays and musicals for tourists from all across the world. Tickets are not always easy to come by, so make sure you do some research ahead of time before heading off to Broadway.

Statue of Liberty

The essential symbol of everything America stands for, this is certainly the most patriotic of New York City attractions. Take a ferry to Ellis Island and see Lady Liberty for yourself.

Visitors can do their New York City sightseeing in a number of ways, including several discount vacation passes or just going on a self-guided tour of the city and visiting their favorite spots along the way. City Pass is offered in a number of cities around the US, and the version created for the Big Apple provides guests with discounted access to six tourist attractions in New York City; all coupons in the pass are valid for nine days from the first use of the pass. Explorer Pass presents the option to choose seven, five, or three favorite attractions at varied prices, with an extended period of use: 30 days. Providing access to more than 50 New York City attractions, the New York Pass is purchased by time periods, such as one day, two day, or up to seven days. This pass also allows visitors the privilege of line skipping — it's a great option for New York City sightseeing if you don't have a lot of time to lose waiting in line during your trip.

Historically significant, fascinating, intriguing, and an incredible experience, New York City sightseeing allows visitors to walk through the pages of history straight into the present, creating some of the most unique and memorable vacations, desirable for every visitor. New York is one of the most iconic destinations on the planet, and it is well worth a visit.

Shopping in New York begins and ends in Manhattan! New York shopping is a beloved pastime of both residents and visitors, and there are enough stores in New York City to keep even the most ardent and veteran of shoppers busy for the season.

Many of the well-known department stores in New York City are located on Fifth Avenue in midtown Manhattan, and are collectively referred to as the Fifth Avenue Shopping District. Here, you will find stores and merchandise to fit every need and whim on any budget. It should be noted, however, that a Fifth Avenue New York shopping spree could make a bit of a dent in the pocketbook!

New York shopping is so reliably popular, and has been since the mid-19th Century with the humble beginnings of Macy's Department Store, that one of the country's-and perhaps the world's most-recognized parades has been sponsored by one of New York City's department stores for decades: the Annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade that, since 1924, has followed its same route, in part, along Central Park, Broadway, and 34th Street.

Aside from the traditional department stores in New York City, there are other, smaller shops in New York that cater to all manner of shopping needs---from trendy boutiques to specialty shops that stock hard-to-find items. Toy stores in New York City often boast not only bigger inventory and most up-to-date stock, but also can include charming public displays such as a giant stuffed teddy bear, or an impressive animatronic Tyrannosaurus rex. Shopping in New York seems to offer something for every one of all ages.

Furniture, electronics, and camping/recreational equipment stores are also found in Manhattan, along with familiar national names in bookstores and theme stores. Standard shopping malls are found not only in Manhattan, but in all other boroughs of New York City as well, including Brooklyn, Staten Island, Queens, and The Bronx.

Shopping in New York is a vibrant industry and favorite activity that also contributes to the thriving nature of big-city commerce and trend setting.

Los Angeles

Second in size only to New York, Los Angeles is a large, bustling metropolitan area in Southern California. Everything is on the grand scale in Los Angeles and there are so many things to do. This county and sprawling city is situated in an area that has worldwide for its entertainment industry, high-end shopping areas, and theme parks, making this area the setting of the best highlights of a Southern California vacation.

LA is one of 88 cities in Los Angeles County. There are neighborhoods like Beverly Hills and Hollywood that only add to the reputation of this big city. Hollywood, in Northeast Los Angeles is known for Hollywood Boulevard and the famous bronze stars with the name of famous Hollywood actors on them on the Walk of Fame.

Also on Hollywood Boulevard is the Mann's Chinese Theatre. This is an impressive Asian-styled theatre that has elaborate decorations on its front. The plaza in front of the Chinese Theatre also bears the marks of Hollywood stars. Many of them have their handprints in the cement, similar to ceremonies of the Hollywood Boulevard Walk of Fame. Outside, there are actors dressed in interesting costumes from a movie, or as a star like Superman or Marilyn Monroe. They're happy to take a picture with you, and they appreciate the tips they get from tourists on a Los Angeles Vacation.

Southern California is home to mega-attractions and theme parks such as Disneyland and Universal Studios Hollywood. The largest movie studio in the world is Universal Studios, and you can come close to the excitement of movie making when you visit here on a Los Angeles Vacation. Most of the movie theatres are in the Westwood part of Los Angeles, and this is also where major movie premieres are often held.

At night, the near by Universal City Walk comes to life. The bright lights of this glittering promenade advertise the cool stores, nightclubs, eateries and movie theatres. This is an entertaining place to spend a weekend while you visit on your next Southern California Vacation.

If you include the large nearby ocean side cities such as San Diego, and the miles of California Beaches, one can easily understand why a Los Angeles vacation is a fun and family friendly way to spend a week or two.

With a diverse population, there is a whole side of the city besides the lure of the big Los Angeles attractions. West Hollywood has a hot nightlife and is home to gay and lesbian clubs. You might also catch some actors in the area enjoying VIP treatment at the most exclusive Los Angeles nightclubs.

Anyone who knows about Los Angeles has heard of neighborhoods such as Beverly Hills and Bel Air, which are affluent communities, as are the private areas on Malibu Beach, which are closed to the public. Adding to the unique environment you can enjoy on a Southern California Vacation, these posh, manicured neighborhoods are home to some of the biggest Hollywood stars.

Downtown Los Angeles is the center of it all, and there are a lot of hotels in the area within walking distance to nearby attractions and Southern California Beaches .

A comfortable and conveniently located Los Angeles hotel is the Westin Bonaventure. There are 1,350 rooms, each with the plush Heavenly Bed that is a Westin trademark that you can expect to find when you stay at these hotels. The 35-story Westin Bonaventure is centrally located, so you can access the nearby Los Angeles attractions.

When you factor in the elegant façade and its enormous size covering a whole city block, this recently renovated Los Angeles hotel is spacious and fresh. To accommodate guests, there is an excellent spa onsite, and over 20 bars and restaurants to enjoy. Enjoy the unmatched views from L.A. Prime Steakhouse, which is on the roof level, or the rotating Bona Vista Lounge. If you're looking for something more Hollywood the Four Seasons Beverly Hills fits the bills. Celebrities frequent this posh Los Angeles hotel that is site of a hot late night scene and a-list gatherings.

From star-studded movie premieres to the famous neighborhoods where celebrities have made their mark, Los Angeles is a place unlike any other. Experience perfect weather, see beautiful people and enjoy the world-famous places in Los Angeles California.

Other than New York City, this is the most symbolic city of America – from Hollywood to the urban sprawl to huge nearby attractions like Disneyland, there are so many fun things to do in Los Angeles:

- Stroll the Hollywood Walk of Fame

The most emblematic section of the most heavily romanticized section of any American city, the bronze stars that lead up and down Hollywood Boulevard speak to both legends of the past and present. Finding free things to do in Los Angeles is also a real luxury, so take advantage when you can.

- Get a drink at the Beauty Bar

Not as imposing or exclusive as the name would suggest, one of the hippest bars is a converted salon, and makes for some of city's best nightlife. So grab some friends, or make some new ones, while taking part in one of the many fun things to do in Los Angeles.

- Shop on Rodeo Drive

Sure, it's packed with tourists, but just like New York's Park Avenue, it's still something that needs to be done. Even if you are not interested in making lavish purchases, window shopping here is a pleasant way to spend an afternoon, and is another of the few free things to do in Los Angeles.

- Check out the crowds at Venice Beach

One of the most visited beaches in America, a stop here can be one of the most fun things to do in Los Angeles. An extensive stretch of sand, Venice Beach is a microcosm of the city – glamour, tourist traps and pleasant bars and restaurants all converge here, and taking a walk down the boardwalk will keep you entertained for hours, and if you feel like getting a tan, you won't be alone.

- Sunset Boulevard

Another of the best free things to do in Los Angeles is exploring the renowned Sunset Boulevard, where some of the city's first high rises were built, and is now home to some of the city's most famous architecture, from towering hotels to historic buildings.

- Get into Koi

If you are not rich or part of the Hollywood set, it might be difficult to gain entrance into Koi. But if you do, it will definitely be a highlight of your Los Angeles trip. One of the places that best exemplifies why so many people are so single-minded in their infatuation or loathing of Hollywood, this is one of the top places to see and be seen in the city, and you will pay dearly for the chance. But it's about the atmosphere when you step into Koi, and nothing shows off Hollywood elegance and excess like this hotspot.

- See a movie at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

For being the annual home of the Oscars, the adjoining theater is not as hard to get a ticket to as one would expect. Other than that, the halls are carefully adorned with decades of movie memorabilia and other behind the scenes looks at the history of American cinema.

- Tour NBC Studios

Everyone who travels to Los Angeles makes a stop here, where so many of the cornerstones of television history were filmed. You can see the Tonight Show Theater, sets of some of your favorite shows, and likely a wide array of notable actors and actresses. For over an hour, lose yourself in the glamour of television production – it is no surprise that this tour is one of the most popular things to do in Los Angeles.

Answer the questions:

1. What is the total area of the USA?
2. What mountains are located in the USA?
3. What are major US rivers and lakes?
4. What is the climate of the country?
5. Describe the US flora and fauna.
6. What are the largest cities of the country?
7. Characterize the US English.
8. What examples of common American English loanwords do you know?
9. What are the main religions in the country?
10. What are the major governmental institutions of the USA?
11. Characterize the US economy.
12. What types of schools are there in the USA?
13. What US universities are the most popular?
14. What is the largest library in the country and world?
15. What are the most eminent museums in the USA?
16. When and where did the world's first commercial motion picture exhibition take place?
17. What are the most commercially successful US movies?
18. What music styles are popular in the USA?

19. What US designer labels do you know?
20. Where do tourists usually go for shopping?
21. Give brief description of some regional US cuisine.
22. What US attractions are the most popular among tourists?
23. What are the most popular coastal resorts of the country?
24. How many national parks are there in the USA?
25. What sights do historical attractions include?
26. What is Florida famous for?
27. What activities can tourists enjoy in California?
28. What sights and things to do would you recommend tourists while in Hawaii?
29. What are the most exciting attractions of New York? Los Angeles? Washington?
30. Why do you think the USA is a popular tourist destination?

Write a short summary of American culture.

Make a presentation on:

- a) US Top Destinations;
- b) Popular Resorts of the USA;
- c) US Cuisine;
- d) Attractions and Things To Do in the USA.

Promote the USA as a tourist Destination.

CANADA

CAPITAL: Ottawa

AREA: 9,976,140 sq km (3,851,809 sq mi)

POPULATION: around 33 mln

ANTHEM: Since 1 July 1980, *O Canada* has been the official anthem.

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES: The metric system is the legal standard.

HOLIDAYS: New Year's Day, 1 January; Good Friday; Easter Monday; Victoria Day, the Monday preceding 25 May; Canada Day, 1 July; Labor Day, 1st Monday in September; Thanksgiving Day, 2nd Monday in October; Remembrance Day, 11 November; Christmas Day, 25 December; Boxing Day, 26 December. Other holidays are observed in some provinces.

TIME: Newfoundland, 8:30 am = noon GMT; New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec, 8 am = noon GMT; Ontario east of 90° and western Quebec, 7 am = noon GMT; western Ontario and Manitoba, 6 am = noon GMT; Alberta and Saskatchewan, 5 am = noon GMT; British Columbia and Yukon Territory, 4 am = noon GMT.

LOCATION, SIZE, AND EXTENT

Canada consists of the entire North American continent north of the United States except Alaska and the small French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. Its total land area of 9,976,140 sq km (3,851,809 sq mi) makes it the second-largest country in the world (slightly larger than China and the United States), extending 5,187 km (3,223 mi) e–w from Cape Spear, Newfoundland, to Mt. St. Elias in the Yukon Territory and 4,627 km (2,875 mi) n–s from Cape Columbia on Ellesmere Island to Pelee Island in Lake Erie.

Canada is bounded on the n by the Arctic Ocean, on the e by Kennedy Channel, Nares Strait, Baffin Bay, Davis Strait, and the Atlantic Ocean, on the s by the United States, and on the w by the Pacific Ocean and the US state of Alaska. The coastal waters of Canada also include the Hudson Strait and Hudson Bay. The country's total land boundary length is 8,893 km (5,526 mi). Its total coastline length is 202,080 km (125,566 miles) Canada's capital city, Ottawa, is located in the southeastern part of the country.

TOPOGRAPHY

Canada's topography is dominated by the Canadian Shield, an ice scoured area of Precambrian rocks surrounding Hudson Bay and covering half the country. This vast region, with its store of forests, waterpower, and mineral resources, is being increasingly developed.

East of the Shield is the maritime area, separated from the rest of Canada by low mountain ranges pierced by plains and river valleys, and including the island of Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island. South and southeast of the Shield are the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence lowlands, a fertile plain in the triangle bounded by the St. Lawrence River, Lake Ontario, and Georgian Bay.

West of the Shield are the farmlands and ranching areas of the great central plains, some 1,300 km (800 mi) wide along the US border and tapering to about 160 km (100 mi) at the mouth of the Mackenzie River. Toward the north of this section is a series of rich mining areas, and still farther north is the Mackenzie lowland, traversed by many lakes and rivers.

The westernmost region of Canada, extending from western Alberta to the Pacific Ocean, includes the Rocky Mountains, a plateau region, the coastal mountain range, and an inner sea passage separating the outer island groups from the fjord-lined coast. Mt. Logan, the highest peak in Canada, in the St. Elias Range near the Alaska border, is 5,959 m (19,551 ft) high. The Arctic islands constitute a large group extending north of the Canadian mainland to within 885 km (550 mi) of the North Pole. They vary greatly in size and topography, with mountains, plateaus, fjords, and low coastal plains.

The central Canadian Shield area is drained by the Nelson-Saskatchewan, Churchill, Severn, and Albany rivers flowing into the Hudson Bay. The 4,241-km (2,635-mi) Mackenzie River — with its tributaries and three large lakes (Great Bear, Great Slave, and Athabasca) — drains an area of almost 2.6 million sq km (1 million sq mi) into the Arctic Ocean. The Columbia, Fraser, and Yukon rivers are the principal drainage systems of British Columbia and the Yukon Territory. The Great Lakes drain into the broad St. Lawrence River, which flows into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Other rivers flow laterally from the interior into Hudson Bay or the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean.

CLIMATE

Most of northern Canada has subarctic or arctic climates, with long cold winters lasting 8 to 11 months, short sunny summers, and little precipitation. In contrast, the populated south has a variety of climatological landscapes. The greatest temperature range is in the Northwest Territories, where the average temperature at Fort Good Hope ranges from -31°C (-24°F) in January to 16°C (61°F) in July.

Cool summers and mild winters prevail only along the Pacific coast of British Columbia. There the mean temperatures range from about 4°C (39°F) in January to 16°C (61°F) in July, the least range in the country. On the prairies there are extreme differences in temperature between day and night and summer and winter. In Ontario and Quebec, especially near the Great Lakes and along the St. Lawrence River, the climate is less severe than in western Canada. This region has abundant precipitation that is highly uniform from season to season.

The growing season is short, even in the south. Much of the interior plains area does not get enough rain for diversified crops.

East of the Rockies across the flat prairie lies the meeting ground for air from the Arctic, Pacific, and American interior. The mixing of air masses leads to a turbulent atmosphere and the emergence of cyclonic storms, producing most of the rain and snow in the country. The northwest and the prairies, having fewer or weaker storms, are the driest areas, although the prairies are the site of some heavy blizzards and dramatic thunderstorms. The windward mountain slopes are exceptionally wet; the protected slopes are very dry. Thus, the west coast gets about 150–300 cm (60–120 in) of rain annually; the central prairie area, less than 50 cm (20 in); the flat area east of Winnipeg, 50–100 cm (20–40 in); and the maritime provinces, 115–150 cm (45–60 in). The annual average number of days of precipitation ranges from 252 along coastal British Columbia to 100 in the interior of the province.

FLORA AND FAUNA

A great range of plant and animal life characterizes the vast area of Canada, with its varied geographic and climatic zones. The flora of the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence region resembles that of the adjacent US

section, with white pine, hemlock, sugar and red maples, yellow birch, and beech trees. Coniferous trees — particularly red spruce — predominate in the Maritime region, black spruce in the eastern Laurentian zone, white spruce in the western. In the east are also found the balsam fir, white cedar, tamarack, white birch, and aspen, with jack pine in the drier areas. From the prairie grassland to the Arctic tundra there are aspen, bur oak, balm of Gilead, cottonwood, balsam poplar, white birch, and other deciduous trees. Conifers dominate the northern section.

Many types of grasses grow on the interior plains. The wet area along the west coast is famous for its tall, hard conifers: western hemlock and red cedar, Douglas fir, Sitka spruce, and western white pine. Subalpine forests cover the Rocky Mountain area, where there are such conifers as alpine fir, Engelmann spruce, lodgepole pine and aspen, and mountain hemlock. The great Arctic region is covered with low-growing grasses, mosses, and bushes.

The fauna of the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence region includes deer, black bear, opossum, gray and red squirrels, otter, beaver, and skunk; birds include eastern bluebird, red-winged blackbird, robin, wood thrush, woodpecker, oriole, bobolink, crow, hawk, bittern, heron, black duck, and loon. In the boreal forest area there are moose, caribou, black bear, lynx, timber wolf, marten, beaver, porcupine, snowshoe rabbit, red squirrel, and chipmunk.

Typical mammals of the Rocky Mountain area are grizzly bear, mountain goat, moose, wapiti, cougar, and alpine flying squirrel. In the plains are rabbits, gophers, prairie birds, and waterfowl. Abundant on the west coast are deer, Cascade mountain goat, red squirrel, mountain beaver, various species of mice, and Puget striped skunk; common birds include northern Pigmy-owl, band-tailed pigeon, black swift, northern flicker, crow, and rufous-sided towhee.

Over the stretches of the Arctic are the musk ox and reindeer, polar bear, caribou, white and blue fox, arctic hare, and lemming, as well as the snowy owl, ptarmigan, snow bunting, arctic tern, and other birds. Walrus, seals, and whales inhabit Canada's coastal waters.

POPULATION

The population of Canada in 2005 was estimated by the United Nations (UN) at 32,225,000, which placed it at number 36 in population among the 193 nations of the world. In 2005, approximately 13% of the population was over 65 years of age, with another 18% of the population under 15 years of age. There were 98 males for every 100 females in the country.

The UN estimated that 79% of the population lived in urban areas in 2005, and that urban areas were growing at an annual rate of 1.05%. The capital city, Ottawa, had a population of 1,093,000 in that year. The Toronto metropolitan area had an estimated population of 5,060,000; Montreal, 3,511,000; Vancouver, 2,125,000; Edmonton, 1,005,000; and Calgary, 1,074,000. Other large cities and their estimated populations include Winnipeg, 706,900; Quebec, 670,000; Hamilton, 662,401; Kitchener, 450,100; London, 432,451; St. Catherines-Niagara, 377,009; Halifax, 375,000; Victoria, 335,000; Windsor, 307,877; Oshawa, 296,298; and Saskatoon, 236,000. Ontario, with 81.8% of its population classed as urban, was the most urbanized province, followed by British Columbia (80.4%), Alberta (79.8%), and Quebec (77.6%). Only New Brunswick (47.7%), Prince Edward Island (39.9%), and the Northwest Territories (36.7%) have less than half their population in urban areas.

The population is unevenly distributed, ranging from 0.045 per sq km (0.02 per sq mi) in the Northwest Territories to 59 per sq km (22.8 per sq mi) on Prince Edward Island. Nearly 85% of the people live within 150 km (93 mi) of the US boundary. All except the Maritime provinces have large areas virtually uninhabited.

ETHNIC GROUPS

More than 80% of the population is Canadian-born. In general, the percentage of the population born outside Canada increases as one goes westward from Newfoundland to British Columbia. Persons of whole or partial British (including Irish) origin make up about 28% of the total population; those of whole or partial French origin (centered mainly in Quebec, where they constitute some 80% of the population) make up 23%. Other European groups account for 15% of the total populace. About 26% of the population are from mixed backgrounds. Others, mostly Asian, African, and Arab, make up about 6% of the population. Amerindians constituted about 2%. These Amerindians were classified into ten major ethnolinguistic groups; the metis, of mixed European and Indian extraction, were recognized as an aboriginal people in the Constitution Act of 1982. Most of the Inuit (Eskimos) live in the Northwest Territories, with smaller numbers in northern Quebec and northern Newfoundland (Labrador).

LANGUAGES

English and French are the official languages of Canada and have equal status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all governmental institutions. The federal constitution also gives the English and French minorities the right to publicly funded education in their own language at the primary and secondary levels, wherever the number of children warrants it.

The constitution provides for bilingualism in the legislature and courts of Quebec, New Brunswick, and Manitoba. Although there are no similarly entrenched constitutional rights in Ontario and Saskatchewan, these provinces have made English and French the official languages of the courts. In 1984, the Northwest Territories Council adopted an ordinance providing for the use of aboriginal languages and establishing English and French as official languages.

English was proclaimed the sole official language of Manitoba in 1890, and French was made the official language of Quebec in 1974. However, the 1890 Manitoba legislation was declared unconstitutional in 1979, as was a Quebec law passed in 1977 declaring French to be the sole language of the legislature and the courts.

Although Canada is frequently referred to as a bilingual country, only a minority are able to speak both English and French. In Quebec, more than 80% of the people speak French as a native language; in the other provinces, most of the people speak only English, although there are sizable proportions of people able to speak French in New Brunswick and parts of Ontario and Manitoba.

Some 60% of Canadians report that their only mother tongue is English, and only about 24% say that is French. About 15% report a single mother tongue other than English or French. Italian, German, Chinese, Ukrainian, Portuguese, and Polish are spoken by small numbers of people. There are at least 58 different Indian languages and dialects, in 10 major language groups. Cree is the most common Indian language.

In many respects, the spelling of Canadian English is intermediate between British English and American English. However, the spoken language is much closer to American English than British English. It is also influenced by Canadian French, as Canada has both English and French as official languages.

Spelling

There is no universally accepted standard of Canadian spelling. In general, Canadians agree with British usage as to *-our* (*honour, colour, endeavour*) as well as the usage of *-re* (*centre, theatre*) along with many other classes of British/American spelling distinctions. In most cases, *-ize* (*plagiarize, dramatize, realize*) is preferred to *-ise* in words where either ending is possible, but the British *-yse* (*analyse*) is usual.

American spellings prevalent in Canada include *aluminum*, *artifact*, *jail*, *curb*, *program*, *specialty*, *tire*, and *carburetor*. (See American and British English differences.) (There are occasional exceptions: One of the main jails in Toronto, Ontario is officially called the 'Don Gaol'.)

Also, several lexical items come from British English or even archaic British English, such as *lieutenant* (/lɛf/-) and *light standard* (lamp-post). Several political terms are uniquely Canadian, including *riding* (electoral district) and *win by acclamation* (to win uncontested).

A plausible contemporary reference for formal Canadian spelling is the spelling used for Hansard transcripts of the Canadian Parliament.

Accent

The primary aspect is a feature called "Canadian raising", in which diphthongs are raised before voiceless consonants. For example, whereas many American dialects pronounce the first diphthongs in the words *writer* and *rider* the same, a Canadian will pronounce them (approximately) as /rVjd@r/ and /rajd@r/ (in SAMPA transcription). That is, the first part of the diphthong in both words in American English is *ahh* as in *father*; the first part of the diphthong in *writer* in Canadian English is *uhh* as in *cut*, a higher vowel than the American usage. However, some American English accents, particularly those near Ontario, speak like this. Note also that Canadian English shares with American English the phenomenon where /t/ becomes /d/ between two vowels. Canadian raising preserves the voicelessness of /t/ and the voicedness of /d/ where it is etymologically appropriate, even where the contrast is lost in the consonant itself.

Similarly, *about* will be raised from /abawt/, as it is in American "Atlantic" dialect, to /abVwt/ ("abuhwt"), or nearly even /abowt/ ("aboat") in some dialects.

Anecdotally, the "abuhwt" or even "a-beh-oot" vowels are heard in Ontario and further east, and the "aboat" vowels are heard in the Western provinces. Also heard are: "can't", in Ontario, almost "kayant", whereas in the west, it becomes more "kahnt."

Canadian English also pronounces the short "a" of "bat" slightly further back than American English. There is a tendency to monophthongize the long "a" and "o" sounds, resulting in /be:t/ for "bait" and /bo:t/ for "boat" (though this occurs usually in rapid speech). "Cot" and "caught" merge into /kAt/ as in Californian English.

Americans sometimes claim to be able to recognize some Canadians instantly by their use of the word *eh*. However, only a certain usage of *eh* (detailed in the article) is peculiar to Canada, and it is more common in southern Ontario and the Maritimes than elsewhere in the country.

(It should be noted that, in some parts of the United States, American English exhibits features of Canadian English, including Canadian Raising and the use of *eh*. Canadian accents are sometimes detected among Michiganders and their northern fellows.)

Vocabulary

Canadian English also has its own words not found in other variants of English. Like other dialects of English that exist in proximity to francophones, French loanwords have entered Canadian English, such as:

serviette, meaning "napkin";

poutine, a dish made with home-made french fries and melted cheese curd topped with gravy;

dépanneur, a corner store (convenience store), shortened to "dep" (Quebec only);

cegep, a two- or three-year pre-university or professional college (Quebec only);

allophone, someone who speaks a first language other than English or French;

anglophone, someone whose first language is English;
francophone, someone whose first language is French;
tuque, a close-fitting woolen winter hat (the spelling *toque* is assimilated from a different kind of hat);
historical and political terms such as **voyageur**, **Automatiste**, **Quiet Revolution**, **bloquiste**.

In 1998 Oxford University Press produced a Canadian English Dictionary after 5 years of lexicographical research. It listed uniquely Canadian words, words borrowed from other languages and was able to survey whether *colour* or *color* was the most popular choice in common use.

Uniquely Canadian English words include:

Loonie: The unofficial name for Canada's one-dollar gold-coloured coin carrying an image of a Loon on one side

Toonie: The unofficial name for Canada's two-dollar coin, the name obviously referring to the number two and the Loonie that pre-dated it

Garburator: The garbage disposal unit located beneath the drain of a kitchen sink - a rare appliance in Canada, in contrast with the United States.

Parkade: Parking garage

Eavestrough: gutter

Chesterfield: A sofa, couch or loveseat

Also, when pronouncing letters of the alphabet, Canadians will often use the Anglo-European "zed" rather than the American "zee" for the letter Z.

RELIGION

About 74.6% of the Canadian population belong to Christian denominations. Roman Catholics constitute the largest single group, with 43% of the population. Other Catholic groups include Eastern Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholics. Protestants make up 29% of the populace; the largest denominational groups include the United Church; Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, and Pentecostals. Members of other religions include Jews (1.1% of the population), Muslims (2%), Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs. There are a number of parareligious faiths, including Scientology, Kabalarianism, and Rastafarianism. Shintoism and Taoism are also represented within the country. Approximately 16% of the population has no religious affiliation.

Freedom of religion has been specifically protected by the constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The right has generally been respected in practice. Certain Christian holidays are observed as public holidays. In 2003, a group of Muslims in Ontario established an Islamic Court of Civil Justice, designed to rule on civil disputes between Muslims using the tenets of Shariah law.

GOVERNMENT

Canada is a federation of 10 provinces and three northern territories (including the Nunavut territory formed in 1999). Under the British North America Act of 1867, which united the four original provinces of Quebec, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick into one dominion under the name of Canada, the federation was provided with a powerful central government, which, besides its areas of exclusive authority,

held residual authority in matters beyond the powers of local or private concern specifically assigned to the provincial legislatures.

The British North America Act — which effectively served, together with a series of subsequent British statutes, as Canada's constitution — could be amended only by the British Parliament. In 1982, the British North America Act was superseded by the Constitution Act (or Canada Act), the principal innovations of which are the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the provision for amendment. For passage, an amendment requires approval by the federal parliament and the legislative assemblies of at least two-thirds of the provinces, which must hold an aggregate of at least half the population of all the provinces. However, when an amendment derogates from provincial rights, it will not apply in any province in which the legislative assembly dissented by majority vote. When such an amendment deals with education or other cultural matters, the federal government must pay compensation to any dissenting province, to make up for the funds that would have been transferred had the province accepted the amendment.

Under the Constitution Act, the British sovereign remains sovereign of Canada and head of state; for the most part, the personal participation of Queen Elizabeth II in the function of the crown for Canada is reserved to such occasions as a royal visit.

The queen's personal representative in the federal government is the governor-general, appointed by the crown on the advice of the prime minister of Canada; the governor-general is usually appointed for a term of five years. Active executive authority resides in the cabinet, or ministry, headed by the prime minister.

The federal parliament is made up of the House of Commons and the Senate. The leader of the party that wins the largest number of seats in a newly elected House of Commons is asked to form the government.

The governor-in-council (cabinet), responsible for determining all important government policies and for securing the passage of legislation, financial measures, and administrative provisions, is chosen by the prime minister.

The 105 members of the Senate, or upper house, are appointed for life, or until age 75, by the governor-general on the nomination of the prime minister, with equality of representation for regional divisions. There are roughly equal proportions of senators from the Maritime Provinces, Ontario, Quebec, and the western provinces. In October 1992, Canadian voters declined a constitutional amendment that would have made the Senate an elected body.

ECONOMY

The Canadian economy is the eighth-largest in the world (measured in US dollars at market exchange rates), behind the United States, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, China, and Italy. The postwar period saw a steady shift from the production of agricultural goods toward increased emphasis on manufacturing and services.

Canada is one of the few developed nations that are net exporters of energy. Atlantic Canada has vast offshore deposits of natural gas, and Alberta has large oil and gas resources. The immense Athabasca Oil Sands give Canada the world's second-largest oil reserves, behind Saudi Arabia.

Canada is one of the world's largest suppliers of agricultural products; the Canadian Prairies are one of the most important producers of wheat, canola, and other grains. Canada is the largest producer of zinc and uranium, and is a global source of many other natural resources, such as gold, nickel, aluminium, and lead. Many towns in northern Canada, where agriculture is difficult, are sustainable because of nearby mines or sources of timber. Canada also has a sizable manufacturing sector centred in southern Ontario and Quebec, with automobiles and aeronautics representing particularly important industries.

Canada is a world leader in the production and export of asbestos, nickel, silver, zinc, uranium, cadmium, cobalt, magnesium, gypsum, molybdenum, potash, aluminum, gold, iron ore, copper, fluorspar,

and lead. Although no longer the foremost sector of the economy, agriculture is of major importance to the economy as a whole and still is basic in many areas; Canada is the world's second-largest wheat exporter, after the United States. Canada is also the world's leading producer of newsprint and ranks among the leaders in other forestry products.

Canada in the postwar period changed from a country producing and exporting mainly primary products to one that increasingly produced and exported manufactured goods. Natural resources, and particularly energy, account for more than 60% of Canada's exports.

The Canadian economy is highly integrated with the US economy, which absorbed nearly 85% of Canada's exports and was the source of 64% of its imports in 2004. Most Canadians live in a narrow strip north of the US border, which makes them vulnerable to potential US economic and cultural domination.

HEALTH

Canada adopted a national health insurance scheme in 1971. It is administered regionally; each province runs a public insurance plan with the government contributing about 40% of the cost (mostly from taxes). Government regulations ensure that private insurers can only offer particular types of health care provision. Drug prices are low. Most hospitals and doctors operate privately. Hospitals are paid by allocated budgets and doctors receive fees per treatment. The system offers considerable choice, but there is little competition and the government has used rationing measures to limit health care expenditures. Access to health care and cost containment are good, but there are strains on the budget, increased by an aging population.

Major health planning is carried on by provincial governments, most of which offer substantial free care for patients suffering from tuberculosis (7 cases reported per 100,000 people in 1999), poliomyelitis, venereal diseases, and certain types of cancer. They also assume responsibility for mental health treatment. Municipalities are responsible for sanitation; communicable disease control; child, maternal, and school health care; public health nursing; health education; and vital statistics. In some cases, they supply hospital care and medical service to the poor. The federal government provides consultant and specialist services to the provinces, assists in the financing of provincial programs, provides services to veterans and Indians, exercises control over the standard and distribution of food and drugs, maintains quarantine measures, and is responsible for carrying out certain international health obligations.

The federal Department of National Health and Welfare provides financial assistance for provincial health and hospital services through the National Health Program and for provincial hospital insurance programs through the Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Services Act of 1957, under which the federal government shares the provinces' costs (since 1977, by means of tax transfers and cash payments).

The Canadian death rate of 7.5 per 1,000 people in 1999, the maternal death rate (1998) of 6 per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate (2009) of 5 per 1,000 live births are among the lowest in the world. Life expectancy at birth was estimated at 80 years. Canada had a birth rate of 11.9 per 1,000.

EDUCATION

The age limits of compulsory school attendance are roughly from age 6 to age 16. Primary schools lasts for six to eight years and secondary or high school another six years. Each province is responsible for its own system of education. While the systems differ in some details, the general plan is the same for all provinces except Quebec, which has two parallel systems: one mainly for Roman Catholics and speakers of French, the other primarily for non-Catholics and speakers of English. Quebec, Newfoundland, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and, to a lesser extent, Ontario provide for public support of church-affiliated schools.

Primary and secondary education is generally free, although nominal fees are charged for secondary education in some schools or provinces. Public elementary and secondary schools are administered by the provinces and Yukon Territory.

Canadian higher education began with the founding of the College des Jesuites in Quebec City in 1635. The Seminaire de Quebec, another Jesuit institution, established in 1663, became Laval University in 1852. Other early institutions on the French collegiate model were the College St. Boniface in Manitoba (1827), the University of Ottawa (1848), and St. Joseph's University in New Brunswick (1864). Although many French institutions survive — most notably the University of Montreal, which separated itself from Laval in 1920 — most university-level instruction is conducted in English on the Scottish, British, or US model.

The first English-language College in Canada was King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia (1789). Two private universities on the Scottish model are Dalhousie University in Halifax (1818) and McGill University in Montreal (1821).

The first state-supported institution, founded in 1827 on the principles of Anglicanism and loyalty to the British crown, was King's College at York in Upper Canada, which became the University of Toronto, the largest and one of the most distinguished of Canadian institutions. Universities in each of the four western provinces — Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia — founded in the late 19th century, represent a Canadian adaptation of the US state land-grant universities.

Canada also has numerous community colleges, teachers' colleges, technical institutes, nursing schools, and art schools. Adult education is sponsored by universities, colleges, school boards, government departments, and voluntary associations, each of which has some other primary function. The Canadian Broadcasting Corp., the National Film Board, and many museums, art galleries, and libraries engage in adult education as part of their work. Instructors are represented by the Canadian Association of University Teachers, and students by the Canadian Federation of Students.

LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS

Municipal public libraries serve the large cities and many small towns and rural areas; regional units supply library service to scattered population areas. Traveling libraries, operated by provincial governments or university extension departments, also provide mail services for more isolated individuals and communities. Although public libraries are organized and financed by municipalities, in most provinces the provincial government supervises library services and makes grants to the municipal units. Special libraries of various kinds and at various levels serve limited groups.

In 2004, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) was established through a government act which essentially merged the services of the National Library of Canada with the National Archives of Canada. The massive collection of the new LAC includes over 300,000 hours of film archives; over 2.5 million architectural drawings, plans, and maps; 21.3 million photographic images; 343,000 works of arts; 200,000 music recordings; the Canadian Postal Archives; and millions of books, among other materials.

Canada also has a number of major academic libraries, most notably at the University of Toronto, which itself has over 14 million volumes. In 2002, Canada had a total of 3,932 libraries, including 1,673 public libraries, 484 academic libraries, 380 government libraries, and a variety of special libraries.

There are about 2,000 museums, art galleries, and related institutions in Canada. Major museums located in Ottawa include the National Arts Center, the National Gallery of Canada (including the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography), the Canadian Museum of Nature, and the National Museum of Science and Technology (including the National Aviation Museum and the Agriculture Museum). Other notable Canadian museums include the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto and the Fine Arts Museum in Montreal.

The major museums and art galleries, located in the principal cities, provide valuable educational services to adults and children; many supply traveling exhibitions for their surrounding areas or regions. The National Gallery conducts extension work throughout the country and sends many exhibitions on tour.

CULTURE

Canadian culture has historically been influenced by British, French, and aboriginal cultures and traditions. There are distinctive Aboriginal cultures, languages, art, and music spread across Canada. Many North American Indigenous words, inventions and games have become an everyday part of Canadian language and use. The canoe, snowshoes, the toboggan, lacrosse, tug of war, maple syrup and tobacco are examples of products, inventions and games. Some of the words include the barbecue, caribou, chipmunk, woodchuck, hammock, skunk, mahogany, hurricane and moose. Numerous areas, towns, cities and rivers of the Americas have names of Indigenous origin. The province of Saskatchewan derives its name from the Cree language name of the Saskatchewan River, "Kisiskatchewanipi". Canada's capital city Ottawa comes from the Algonquin language term "adawe" meaning "to trade." National Aboriginal Day recognises the cultures and contributions of Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

Canadian culture has been greatly influenced by immigration from all over the world. Many Canadians value multiculturalism and see Canada as being inherently multicultural. However, the country's culture has been heavily influenced by American culture because of its proximity and the high rate of migration between the two countries. The great majority of English-speaking immigrants to Canada between 1755 and 1815 were Americans from the Thirteen Colonies; during and immediately after the American Revolutionary War, 46,000 Americans loyal to the British crown came to Canada. Between 1785 and 1812, more Americans immigrated to Canada in response to promises of land.

American media and entertainment are popular, if not dominant, in English Canada; conversely, many Canadian cultural products and entertainers are successful in the United States and worldwide. Many cultural products are marketed toward a unified "North American" or global market. The creation and preservation of distinctly Canadian culture are supported by federal government programs, laws, and institutions such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), the National Film Board of Canada, and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

Canadian visual art has been dominated by Tom Thomson — Canada's most famous painter — and by the Group of Seven. Thomson's brief career painting Canadian landscapes spanned just a decade up to his death in 1917 at age 39. The Group were painters with a nationalistic and idealistic focus, who first exhibited their distinctive works in May 1920. Though referred to as having seven members, five artists — Lawren Harris, A. Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, J. E. H. MacDonald, and Frederick Varley — were responsible for articulating the Group's ideas. They were joined briefly by Frank Johnston, and by commercial artist Franklin Carmichael. A. J. Casson became part of the Group in 1926. Associated with the Group was another prominent Canadian artist, Emily Carr, known for her landscapes and portrayals of the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast.

Canada has developed a music infrastructure and industry, with broadcasting regulated by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. The Canadian music industry has produced internationally renowned composers, musicians and ensembles, such as Portia White, Guy Lombardo, Murray Adaskin, Rush, Joni Mitchell and Neil Young. Canadian winners of multiple Grammy Awards have included Celine Dion, k.d. lang, Sarah McLachlan, Alanis Morissette and Shania Twain. The Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences administers Canada's music industry awards, the Juno Awards, which commenced in 1970.

Canada's National symbols are influenced by natural, historical, and Aboriginal sources. The use of the maple leaf as a Canadian symbol dates to the early 18th century. The maple leaf is depicted on Canada's current and previous flags, on the penny, and on the Coat of Arms. Other prominent symbols include the beaver, Canada Goose, Common Loon, the Crown, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and more recently, the totem pole and Inukshuk.

Canada's official national sports are hockey in the winter and lacrosse in the summer. Hockey is a national pastime and the most popular spectator sport in the country. It is also the sport most played by Canadians, with 1.65 million participants in 2004. Canada's six largest metropolitan areas — Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa, Calgary, and Edmonton — have franchises in the National Hockey League (NHL), and there are more Canadian players in the NHL than from all other countries combined. Other popular spectator sports include curling and football; the latter is played professionally in the Canadian Football League (CFL). Golf, baseball, skiing, soccer, volleyball, and basketball are widely played at youth and amateur levels, but professional leagues and franchises are not widespread.

Events and holidays

Canada might not be known for its holidays and festivals, but it does hold its fair share of not-to-be-missed events. Some holidays in Canada are similar to those in the U.S., but holidays that are exclusively Canadian truly show the Canadian spirit. The following are some of the best examples of celebrations in Canada:

Canada Day

On July 1, 1868 Canadians were called upon by the Governor General to celebrate the anniversary of the formation of the union of the British North American provinces (aka Canada). In 1879, the Canadian holiday called “Dominion Day” was established to commemorate this great event. It wasn't until 1982 that the name “Dominion Day” was changed to “Canada Day”. Today, Canada Day is celebrated throughout Canada, most visibly in Montreal and Ottawa, with fireworks and patriotic events.

Saint Jean Baptiste Day (Quebec)

To experience one of the most significant of the culture events in Canada, come see the festivities of Saint Jean- Baptiste Day. French Canadians across Canada celebrate Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day (also called La Fete Nationale) on June 24th. Nowhere is this truer than in the province of Quebec. In 1975 Quebec declared St-Jean-Baptiste Day as the official nation holiday of their province. French Canadians celebrate with parades and parties, honoring their patron saint. Along the St. Lawrence River it was a custom of those who lived there to take the first swim of the year on St. Jean Baptiste Day. Even today many pools open for the first time on this day.

Remembrance Day

On November 11 Canadians remember those who have served their country in times of war and peace. A moment of silence is observed to remember those who fell during World War I, World War II and the Korean War. Canadians wear a red poppy over their heart — a symbol taken from a poem written about the poppies that grew over the graves of the fallen soldiers of World War I. One of the more solemn holidays in Canada, Remembrance Day is an important one to peace-loving Canadians.

Great Northern Arts Festival (Inuvik, Northwest Territories)

Every summer in remote Inuvik, artists from all over Canada gather to show their work, meet each other, and learn new techniques. These artists are Inuit, Gwich'in, Inuvialuit, Dene, Metis and many other Canadian First Nations, as well as non-Native artists from the Artic Archipelago, Gjoa Haven, Fort Smith and the Yukon Territories. In its 13th year, the Great Northern Arts Festival hosted 92 artists, 14 musicians and

performers. Travelers from Europe, Asia, the U.S. and Canada come to this, one of the great culture events in Canada, for the range and variety of artistic talent in one setting.

Caribana (Toronto)

Created in 1967, Caribana is the largest Caribbean festival in North America. This two-week festival takes place every summer in Toronto. The city comes alive with the music, food, dance and costumes of Trinidad, the Bahamas, Guyana, and Jamaica. This is one of the culture events in Canada that really celebrates the diversity and beauty of the people who make of the mosaic of the country.

Calgary Stampede

The Calgary Stampede takes place in early July and attracts visitors from all over the world. This is one of the major events in Canada worth taking several days to enjoy. The Stampede celebrates “Western Canadian heritage with dynamic contemporary entertainment”. Highlights of this event are the afternoon rodeo, chuck wagon races, grandstand show and live entertainment acts.

CUISINE

Canadian cuisine varies widely from region to region. Generally, the traditional cuisine of English Canada is closely related to British and American cuisine, while the traditional cuisine of French Canada has evolved from French cuisine and the winter provisions of fur traders.

The basis of both groups is seasonal, fresh ingredients and preserves. The cuisine includes baked foods, wild game, and gathered foods.

The cuisine of the western provinces is heavily influenced by Italian, British, German, Ukrainian, Polish, and Scandinavian cuisine. Noteworthy is the cuisine of the Doukhobors, Russian-descended vegetarians. The Waterloo, Ontario, region has a tradition of Mennonite and Germanic cookery.

Canadian Chinese cuisine is widespread across the country, with variation from place to place. The Chinese buffet, although found in the U.S. and other parts of Canada, had its origins in early Gastown, Vancouver, c.1870 and came out of the practice of the many Scandinavians' working in the woods and mills around the shantytown getting the Chinese cook to put out a steam table on a sideboard, so they could "load up" and leave room on the dining table (presumably for "drink"). Ginger beef is a popular Chinese food purportedly originating in Western Canada.

The traditional cuisine of the Arctic and the Canadian Territories is based on wild game and Inuit and First Nations cooking methods; conversely bannock, which is popular across First Nations and Native American communities throughout the continent, is a method for making pan-fried bread introduced to their culture by Scottish fur traders. The cuisines of Newfoundland and the Maritime provinces derive mainly from British and Irish cooking, with a preference for salt-cured fish, beef, and pork. Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia also maintain strong British cuisine traditions.

Modern Canadian cooking represents these diverse origins, as well as the many other immigrant cultures that have made the country their home. As such, most home cooks in Canada have assimilated new ingredients and recipes from around the world into the more traditional favourites.

At the forefront of Canadian cuisine is the fusion of modern culinary techniques and uniquely Canadian ingredients, such as wild blueberries and Saskatoon berries, fiddleheads (fiddlehead ferns, fiddlehead greens), mussels, caribou, bison, salmon, wild rice, maple syrup, and locally produced wine and ice wine, beer, and cheeses.

SHOPPING

From haute couture to beaver pelts and gold nuggets, the variety of shopping in Canada will suite anyone's taste.

Robson Street in downtown Vancouver, BC has a long tradition of shopping history. Named after John Robson, B.C. Premier from 1889-1892, Robson Street shops started to spring up after the train tracks were laid along it in 1895. Post World War II, Robson Street became known as “Robsonsstrasse”, as a result of the many European pastry shops, delis and boutiques that opened.

Today, Robson hosts some of the hippest shopping in Canada, from top-end vintage to fresh-off-the-runway. A large number of international students now populate the surrounding areas, and the influences are easily seen. Korean barbeques and Japanese noodle shops are numerous on the street, even more so as one walks west towards English Bay.

Perhaps the most famous of Canadian shopping is in West Edmonton Mall in Edmonton, Alberta. Much more than just a mall, West Edmonton Mall is also an amusement park, ice skating rink, movie theatre, concert hall and much more. There are over 800 stores and services, 100 choices for getting a bite to eat, plus eight top-notch attractions. This is arguably the most impressive of Canada shopping, spanning the equivalent of 48 city blocks. When it's cold out in Edmonton, the West Edmonton Mall is a warm mini-city of fun and shopping.

You may be surprised to know that the world's largest and longest underground shopping complex is in Toronto, Ontario. Famed for entertainment, the Toronto Entertainment District is also famous for spectacular shopping in Canada. Called PATH, this underground shopping complex holds more than 1,200 shops and services. It's even in the Guinness Book of World Records! PATH stretches out 10 kilometers (6.5 miles) and holds a hotel, one-of-a-kind shops, games, restaurants and entertainment. Canada shopping all in one long, underground stretch, this is what PATH offers.

For very unique Canadian shopping, head up to the Yukon to the Log Skyscraper Trading Post. Located in Whitehorse, Yukon, the Log Skyscraper is a four-storey log building located in the downtown district. The actual trading post is a two-storey log structure, right in front of the Skyscraper. Martin Berrigan, a Yukon pioneer in the 1940's built both structures. They are now designated as a Municipal Historic Site and are the most photographed building in the Yukon Territory.

At the Trading Post, shoppers can buy anything from a Klondike gold nugget to a lynx fur. Local handicrafts, Northern books and candy can also be purchased.

TOURISM, TRAVEL, AND RECREATION

One of Canada's principal attractions for tourists is its extraordinary geographic variety: from the polar ice cap to the mountains, fjords, and rain forests of the west coast, from the lakes, forests, and ranchlands of the interior to the rugged shores and fine beaches of the east,

Canada offers a remarkable range of scenic wonders. The excavation of L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, with its Norse artifacts and reconstructed dwellings, has been designated a world heritage site by UNESCO, as have Nahanni National Park in the Northwest Territories and Dinosaur Park in Alberta's Red Deer Badlands. Among the most spectacular parks are the Kluane National Park in the Yukon and the Banff (with Lake Louise) and Jasper national parks in the mountains of Alberta. Other attractions include the Cabot Trail in Nova Scotia; the Bay of Fundy, between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia; and the Laurentians and the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec.

The arts and crafts of the Dene Indians and the Inuit may be seen in cooperative workshops in Inuvik in the Northwest Territories; and of the North West Coast Indians, at the reconstructed Indian village Ksan in British Columbia. Quebec City is the only walled city in North America; picturesque old fishing villages are to be found in the Atlantic Provinces. Fishing and hunting attract many sportsmen to Canada, and ice hockey

attracts many sports fans, particularly to the Forum in Montreal. In 1992, the Toronto major league baseball team, the Blue Jays, became the first non-American team to both play in and win the World Series. In 2004, the Montreal Expos played their final major league baseball season in Canada; the team relocated to Washington, D.C., where they opened the 2005 baseball season as the Washington Nationals.

One of the world's foremost summer theatrical events is the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford, Ontario. Toronto is known for its many theaters, the CN Tower, and a fine zoo; Montreal, the second-largest French-speaking city in the world (after Paris), is famous for its fine French cuisine, night life, vast underground shopping and entertainment network, and its excellent subway system.

In 2003, Canada was the third most popular tourist destination in the Americas after the United States and Mexico. In 2005, the US Department of State estimated the daily cost of staying in Vancouver at us \$207 from the months of May through October. That same year, the daily cost of a visit to Toronto was estimated at us \$295.

Exactly what makes Canada the world's second-largest country in the world has more to do with its people than the 8,000 kilometers (500 miles) of red and white-blooded land separating the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. They are equally as appreciative of the thousands of manmade and natural attractions that draw millions of visitors each year and will stop on a dime to tell you about the best poutine joint in Quebec, lobster restaurant in Nova Scotia or sushi bar in Vancouver.

Satisfying your appetite for all things Canadian goes deeper than anything served on a plate. The CN Tower in Toronto is the world's second tallest free-standing structure and commands presence in Canada's busiest city. Of course, it has nothing on the Rockies which separates the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia in Canada's far west. If a picture is worth a thousands words, the Rockies are an encyclopedia of nature's brilliance and beauty.

Between Alberta and Ontario, are Manitoba and Saskatchewan, better known as Canada's prairies. These long, flat stretches of land have supported families for some 200 years with wheat and farming industries. They're quite possibly Canada's most untouched, habited, area.

Predominantly French-speaking Quebec is almost a country in itself. In fact, they've tried to separate on a number of occasions but to no avail. The French culture remains however, embroidered in the walls of Old Quebec, while the city of Montreal is full of life, fashion, fun and adventure. It's definitely the center of Canada's party scene.

Out East, as the Canadians say, are the maritime provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador. Each offers a unique take on Canada's easygoing, friendly nature, not to mention its scenic beauty. Atlantic Canada rivals the Rockies as Canada's picturesque destination.

Top Canadian Attractions

Niagara Falls

A flood of powerful water rushes over the falls with such brute force it drenches the boatful of onlookers waiting in the Maid of the Mist below. Getting this close to the falls means getting wet. But that doesn't deter the armies of sightseers who flock to Niagara Falls every day. More than 6 million cubic feet of water pass over the three falls - American, Horseshoe and Bridal - during peak tourist hours. In winter, the frigid water stiffens, forming an ice bridge that further unites the Canadian and American borders.

Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis)

Emotions overwhelm spectators witnessing yet another colorful aerial ballet in Canada's Northern Hemisphere. The spectacular phenomenon is best viewed during fall and autumn, when the days are longest.

Watch as earth's deepest colors seemingly dance graciously to music heard by only Mother Nature. The high is natural, the memories lifelong.

CN Tower

Sizing up the world's second tallest building is a pain in the neck. Plenty of time is given to work out those kinks once the crystal clear elevator located on the tower's north side shoots 447 meters up to the observation deck, 342 meters for the revolving restaurant. Glass-bottomed floors present a surreal feeling of weightlessness on par with only Toronto's skyline, which seems distant atop this engineering marvel.

Cabot Trail

Whittled along the outside of Cape Breton's rolling hills, just off the Atlantic coast, is 950 square kilometers of rugged coastline and raw splendor. Named after explorer John Cabot, the Cabot Trail is an escape of camping, hiking trails, kayaking, golfing and wilderness nestled on Nova Scotia's northern tip.

Old Quebec City

Footsteps on cobblestone streets reverberate off the stone walls now housing converted souvenir shops and restaurants in the heart of Old Quebec. There was a time when these walls, built by the French and British armies, protected the city. The oldest fortified city north of Mexico now warms up to the idea of English, French and Spanish visitors entering its gates.

Banff National Park

Banff's deviant chain of mountains dares every alpine and outdoor enthusiast at first glimpse to tackle the sleeping giant. Characterized by three major areas - Lake Louise, Sunshine Village and Norquay - Banff National Park puts heads on swivels, emotions on edge and awe in the heart of millions of visitors every year.

Peggy's Cove

For more than a century the amber warning has protected the livelihood of Nova's jagged east coast, including the 50 or so people who call Peggy's Cove home. Among the world's most recognizable lighthouses, the red and white tower is a photographer's paradise, not to mention a reminder of the ocean's awesome power.

Bay of Fundy

Acting as mediator between the provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick takes command, power and the world's highest tides. Luckily, the Bay of Fundy encompasses all three. Even its schools of humpback whales, miles of hiking trails, beachfront caves or massive freestanding rocks can't tame this beast. The Bay Fundy simply won't allow it.

Stanley Park

Every city needs a playground and Stanley Park is Vancouver's. The 1,000 acre hunk of bike trails and woodland features statues commemorating Lord Stanley, native totem poles and towering red cedars, some of which reach heights of 250 feet. One cedar in particular is believed to be the world's biggest, measuring 30 meters in diameter alone.

Parliament Hill

This symbol of Canadian democracy is popularized by its accessibility and sheer design. Tours of the historic Peace Tower, which overlooks the Ottawa River, and legislative assembly, when not in session, are given on a daily basis. Shoot the breeze with a politician in the hallway for a real perspective on who governs Canada's democratic government.

Top things to do in Canada

In such a vast and diverse country, it is difficult to narrow down the attractions to only ten "must sees". However, there are some stand-out sights and activities that shouldn't be missed. The following top ten list covers Canada from west to east, north and south. These ten attractions highlight Canada in all its glory.

Take a Train Ride through the Canadian Rockies

One of the Canada vacation packages that allow visitors to see a lot while sitting back and relaxing is the Rocky Mountain train. VIA Rail offers service from Toronto, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Edmonton and Vancouver to Jasper. The Rocky Mountain Rail Tour Company will take you from Vancouver to Banff and on to Calgary. The latter company offers a service called the “Canadian Rockies Highlights” which consists of 5 nights and 6 days on the train. Highlights include some of the most popular tourist attractions in Canada, such as: tours of Yoho National Park and Banff Townsite, accommodation at the amazing Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, and admission to Vancouver Observation Deck at Harbour Centre and Calgary Tower.

Catch a Chinook on the Campbell River

Fishing in Canada is an experience like no other. Imagine snagging a 70lb. King Salmon on your line! If you've dreamt of bragging to your friends about catching “the big one,” the Campbell River is the place where your dream could be realized. Set on the east coast of central Vancouver Island, the Campbell River has long been known as the “Salmon Capital of the World” and boasts some of the best fishing in Canada. Some fishing tour companies in this area cater to wealthy corporate clientele, but there are also many options for the budget-minded fisherperson. Fishing is not the only highlight of the Campbell River. Tours, day trips, workshops and family events also focus on species of wildlife such as bears, eagles, and of course, salmon

Live It Up at the Carnaval de Quebec

You don't have to buy expensive Canada vacation packages to have a good time in Quebec. One of the greatest tourist attractions in Canada, the Quebec Winter Carnival, is very affordable. The world's biggest winter celebration and third largest carnival, the Carnaval de Quebec in Quebec City, is an attraction not to be missed. This two and a half week party is held annually beginning in late January. People from all over the world come for the unique winter attractions. Ice fishing, concerts, dogsled rides, slide runs, snow baths, parades, Ice Tower, skating, snow sculptures and horse-drawn sleigh rides are some of the highlights. For a truly one-of-a-kind winter experience, spend a night at the famous Ice Hotel.

Be a Whistler Ski Bunny

The term "skiing in Canada" has become synonymous with the words "Whistler Blackcomb", one of the sites of the 2010 Winter Olympics. Whistler Blackcomb is one of the largest ski and snowboard resorts in the world with around 8,000 acres of terrain. Skiers and snowboarders alike flock to Whistler, British Columbia for world-class snow conditions. Whistler Blackcomb is skiing in Canada at its best. Even those who don't care for snow sports will enjoy Whistler Village's charm. Top-notch hotels, restaurants, spas and shopping make it a place worth visiting any time of year.

Take a Wine Tour in the Okanagan

The Okanagan Valley put Canada on the vintner's map by producing outstanding wines with authentic British Columbian flavor. B.C. is gaining a reputation as being the “California of the north” in its production of outstanding vintages. The arid climate and terraced landscape of the Okanagan Valley make it an ideal region for wine production. During the spring summer and fall, wine festivals and tasting abound in this region. The public is welcome at most wineries for tours and tasting. You may be able to see the entire process of winemaking, from crushing to labeling. Set in a picturesque mountain setting, the Okanagan Valley vineyards and wineries are at their best when weather is warm.

Play Anne of Green Gables

If you are a fan of Lucy Maud Montgomery's classic novel, Anne of Green Gables, seeing the inspiration for the book will be an unforgettable experience. On Prince Edward Island, part of the P.E.I. National Park, Green Gables has been named an historic site. In real life, Montgomery's cousins called Green Gables home. A monument and plaque were erected in 1948 to honor Lucy Maud Montgomery at the Green Gables farm. Perhaps it is not the most common of tourist attractions in Canada, but for all of those Anne lovers, it is an important one.

Watch a Hockey Game

To experience something authentically Canadian (and to make some easy friends) the formula is simple: try out the sport that Canada loves. You don't have to strap on skates and try your luck at shooting the puck. You don't even have to shell out big bucks for game tickets (but if you can, go for it!). All you need is a sports bar and a game schedule. Hockey games are on from fall through spring, so it's easy to find a time that works into your travel schedule. Sit back, sip a Kokanee, and enjoy.

Admire Haida Totem Poles

Named a World Heritage site, the Haida totem poles on S'Gaang Gwaii are a piece of Canadian history. S'Gaang Gwaii, also known as Anthony Island, is located off the west coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands in British Columbia. You'll find the poles in the village of Ninstints (Nans Dins). Carved mortuary and memorial poles along with remains of houses reflect the Haida people's way of life. The Haida people, who still inhabit the area, have a close relationship to the land and sea, which is commemorated at this site.

Spot a Polar Bear in Manitoba

It's not difficult to figure out why the tiny town of Churchill, Manitoba is known as the "polar bear capital of the world". Every year around September, residents greet some very special visitors: polar bears. Polar Bear watching tours catch a glimpse of the bears as they move between the ice and the land at this time of year. If you aren't lucky enough to make it to Churchill in September, try passing by from late June until late August. Churchill is also known as the "beluga whale capital of the world" during these months. Stay and enjoy the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights), one of the most spectacular tourist attractions in Canada.

Skate Through Town on the Rideau Canal Skateway

From late December until late February, the Rideau Canal freezes and the result is the longest ice-skating in the world. Enjoy 7.8km (4.5 miles) of uninterrupted skating on this "roadway" of ice in Ottawa, Ontario. The Rideau Canal Skateway is ideal for people of all ages who want to skate, walk or sled through the capital city.

TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Banff National Park

Banff National Park covers 6,641 sq. km (2,590 sq. miles) of some of Canada's most dramatic and beautiful scenery. The Canadian Rockies that run through the park are home to an incredible amount of wildlife (very commonly seen in the park) as well as glaciers, lakes and rivers. Banff is the first national park of Canada, founded by the first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald in 1885. When you arrive in the park on your Banff vacation, you'll quickly see why Banff Canada was the first park area in the country to be set aside.

The two towns of Banff National Park, Banff and Lake Louise, are just as enjoyable as the wilderness around them. World-class hotels and restaurants in these towns make an excellent setting for some R&R after a day exploring the great outdoors.

Lake Louise is one of the most stunning parts of Banff Canada, and the top location for Banff skiing. If you want to ski Banff, Lake Louise is the place to do it. Lake Louise is the largest ski area in Canada with 4200 skiable acres. And what a setting for Banff skiing! Not only is the scenery fantastic, the unique layout of the ski area allows skiers of all levels and abilities to ski together.

When Banff skiing is closed, Lake Louise opens up to a number of different outdoor possibilities. The main attraction is the lake itself, shimmering with a deep green color, reflecting the snow-capped mountains. Take the Lakeshore Trail around the lake, to take a look at the lake from all angles. If you're looking for a bit more exercise, the Plain of Six Glaciers Trail is a 5km (3 mile) hike up to a panoramic viewpoint.

While on your Banff vacation in Lake Louise, it is impossible to miss seeing the famous Chateau Lake Louise. This Chateau is one of the most famous hotels in Canada, in an unparalleled location. Even if you aren't lucky enough to stay at the Chateau Lake Louise on your Banff vacation, at least take a look around inside at the variety of shopping, dining and recreational options.

Banff National Park has a huge range of outdoor activities to enjoy in a spectacular setting. Though the summer months draw crowds, there is enough wilderness to go around. Hiking, biking, walking, horseback riding, swimming, bird watching, rock climbing, camping, canoeing, boating, backpacking, fishing, even scuba diving are some of the many summer activities. Many of these activities can also be enjoyed during the winter months as well as typical winter sports like skiing, snowshoeing and snowboarding.

To soothe away the day, the Banff Upper Hot Springs offer the more relaxing side of Banff Canada. Open year-round, the hot springs are located in a 1930's heritage bathhouse and provide awesome views of Mount Rundle while you soak.

Mont Tremblant Quebec

An easy 1.5-hour drive from Montreal will land you among the many ski centers of the Laurentian Mountains. The hills, lovely scenery, and relaxed atmosphere make the Laurentians one of the most popular skiing destinations in eastern Canada. There is something for every level of skier here, from novice to hard-core expert. The mother of all of Laurentian ski resorts is Mont Tremblant Quebec, with the highest vertical drop of the Laurentian Mountains. You can ski Mont Tremblant on one side for half of the day, then follow the sun to the other side of the mountain for the second half. Mont Tremblant Quebec has become a world-class ski resort, bringing in locals and visitors from around the world for an unforgettable skiing experience.

For first-time visitors, it can be a bit confusing as to what exactly the name Mont Tremblant refers to. This is because the name Mont Tremblant refers to a mountain, a village, and a provincial park. Mont Tremblant (or Mount Tremblant), the ski mountain and resort, is located just outside of Mont Tremblant Provincial Park. The village of Mont Tremblant Quebec is located at the foot of the mountain and has a chair lift to the peak of the mountain in summer and winter.

Mont Tremblant Quebec, having the highest peak in the Laurentians, provides some challenging runs for adventurous skiers. If you want to ski Mont Tremblant, but are not so keen on huge vertical drops, there are also over 150 km of cross-country trails around the provincial park. But you don't have to ski Mont Tremblant to enjoy its beauty. In the summer when snow is gone, Mont Tremblant Provincial Park is a playground of over 1500 sq. km of lakes, hills, woods and rivers. There are plenty of camp grounds available, picnic areas to lunch in, and canoes to rent. You're likely to see some impressive Canadian wildlife, especially off of the beaten paths.

If you'd like a little t.l.c.(tender, love, and care) after a long day on the slopes, or a week camping in the wilderness, spend a day at a Mont Tremblant spa. One notable Mont Tremblant Spa is the Spa Scandinave Tremblant, a Scandinavian-style spa that offers a variety of soothing treatments. Come alone or bring your friends to soak in a Norwegian steam bath or a Finnish sauna. Lay back and let a Swedish massage ease your sore muscles or go for a swim in the river! The Mont Tremblant spa experience is one that you'll be pining for long after your vacation is over.

If you've come to ski Mont Tremblant, the best bet for accommodation is renting a chalet Mont Tremblant. Tremblant Sunstar offers a number of cozy, upscale chalets that are a great alternative to the ordinary hotel room. Chalets Hermida, Isabelle, Bondu, Bonhomme and Le Diable are each unique in style and location. All of the chalets are close to the mountain, the La Diable River and/or near Mont Tremblant National Park. Housing up to 12 people, the chalets are ideal for families or groups of friends who want to enjoy great company in a cozy and homey setting.

Lake Huron

Lake Huron Canada forms the border between Ontario and Michigan. The second largest of the Great Lakes stretches from Sarnia in the south up toward Manitoulin Island and scenic Northern Ontario. When you add in the islands, this glacier-carved lake has the longest shoreline of the five Great Lakes. It's also home to the biggest bays in the entire Great Lakes system — Georgian Bay in Canada and Saginaw Bay in Michigan. Along the shores, you'll find many things to do and experience, including beautiful sunsets, outdoor adventure, and chances to connect with culture.

Home to both scenic wonders and rich First Nations culture, Manitoulin Island offers a retreat far away from the every day. With its rugged coastline, welcoming accommodations, and a wide array of things to do, the island is a unique place to enjoy Great Lakes vacations. Whether you're seeking adventure, a quiet retreat, or a mix of the two, you will find many activities to enjoy on the island. After the ice has melted in the spring, a ferry crosses Lake Huron Canada, linking Tobermory and South Baymouth on the mainland to island, a journey that takes a little less than two hours. The island is also accessible by land, via Highway 6 and a bridge, as well as by air and charter boats.

However you arrive Manitoulin Island, you'll enjoy fantastic views of Lake Huron. For a closer look, you could step aboard one of the boat cruises, whether you want to get in some Great Lakes fishing or a sunset sail. Away from the shore, you'll find hiking trails meandering through some amazing scenery and several golf courses. Along the Great Spirit Circle Trail, you'll find many opportunities to experience Native culture through tours, interactive activities, and memorable meals along the shores of Lake Huron Canada.

Like the land of Manitoulin Island, many tales and legends have been told about Georgian Bay Lake Huron. This bay is so large, it's about the same size as Lake Ontario to the east. Along the shores of its islands and mainland communities, you'll find nearly endless options for enjoying all that Lake Huron Canada has to offer. In all four seasons, you'll find plenty that you'd expect for shoreline vacations, as well as some unexpected treasures.

When soaking on the spectacular scenery of Georgian Bay Lake Huron, a visit to a national park is one best places to begin. Only accessible by boat, Georgian Bay Islands National Park is home to hiking trails and interpretive programs, as well a scenic campground on Beausoleil Island. You'll also find many of the same things to do at Bruce Peninsula National Park. Its rugged landscapes of towering cedar trees, shoreline, and rocky cliffs is so important, this park is part of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Several of the Lake Huron resorts overlook the gorgeous scenery of Georgian Bay Lake Huron. Whether you're looking for a luxury getaway fit for royalty or budget accommodations, you'll find along the shores of the bay. When you choose to stay so close to water, you'll enjoy easy access to whatever you want to do for a day. You can easily return to your room to rest up for another day exploring the big lake.

MAIN CITIES

Ottawa

It may be said that Ottawa has been underappreciated as the capital of Canada, ever since it was designated its title in 1858. Queen Victoria named Ottawa capital at a time when the two provinces of Canada, Upper and Lower Canada (Ontario and Quebec), were feuding. Likely as a way to appease both sides, the queen selected Ottawa because of its location on the Ontario-Quebec border. Since then, people have been skeptical about the choice for Canada's national capital. Today, you will find that Ottawa is a lovely place to visit and deserves much more credit as a capital city. Ottawa Canada is brimming with green

parks, awesome Gothic architecture, shops, beautiful Victorian homes and delicious restaurants. Framing Ottawa Canada are the Gatineau Hills, an easy skiing getaway in the winter time. Running through the city is the Rideau Canal, which provides leisure activities all year round.

Ottawa tourism is very common, so it will be easy for you to find a guide to assist you on your Ottawa vacation. The central core of the city is fairly compact, which makes it possible to get around to all of the attractions in less time. There are many Ottawa flights that will take you directly to the capital city from numerous destinations in the world. The flight to Ottawa can be quite short, especially for those departing from the eastern U.S. states. Not having to make a lot of stops in-between will make your flight to Ottawa much more pleasant. Take a direct flight to Ottawa Canada, so you will be refreshed and ready to explore upon arrival!

If you speak with any Ottawa tourism expert, they're sure to tell you that Parliament Hill is the place to start your tour of the city. The most prominent building is the Parliament Building, with its clock and Peace tower. Sandstone and limestone carvings fill the Inside the Parliament Building, where the Commons and Senate sessions can be observed. Free tours are available of the building, which include an elevator ride up the Peace Tower to see the view. The East and West blocks on Parliament Hill are impressive to see with their copper roofs and Gothic styling. If your Ottawa vacation takes place during the summertime, you can see a free light and sound show on Parliament Hill during summer evenings. There are two shows nightly, the first being in English, and the second in French.

To enjoy the sights of the city on your Ottawa vacation, a trip down the Rideau Canal is a must. When the canal is not frozen, boats depart from the Locks about every two hours, allowing you to relax and enjoy the city views. Boat rides are also available on the Ottawa River. When the Rideau Canal freezes in the winter, a whole new mode of transportation opens up: ice skating through town! This is a well-known activity in Ottawa tourism. It is possible to skate for five kilometers straight — the longest ice skating course in the world. If you need a break from the cold, there are donuts and hot chocolate for sale along the way. Or, try out one of the many ethnic food choices at an Ottawa restaurant.

Toronto

Toronto's old reputation as "Toronto the Good", a stoic and bland city, has long since been forgotten. The culture and flavor that the wave of immigrants in the 1970's brought has turned Toronto Canada into a mosaic of color and diversity. Greeks, Italians, Somalians, Jamaicans, Chinese, Vietnamese and others make of this mosaic, much to Toronto's benefit.

The more than 5,000 restaurants have become one of the tasty Toronto attractions, allowing visitors to sample from a variety of ethnic foods. Festivals such as Caribana and Caravan bring a huge influx of guests to the city who want to celebrate the culture and music of Toronto immigrants. Another of the Toronto attractions is the Toronto Film Festival. Taking place in September, this festival draws talent and admirers internationally.

Toronto Canada is a place where you just might want to stay! It is named as one of the top places in the world to live. Though tourism in Toronto may not have a long list of Toronto attractions, the city itself is endearing.

The winters in Toronto have a reputation of being cold and long, but don't let this scare you away. On top of all of the winter sports that are available, there are also plenty of museums, operas, theatres and symphonies for you to enjoy indoors. During the summertime, tourism in Toronto increases with more visitors coming to enjoy the many events and festivals. Summers are warm, sometimes quite humid, especially during July and August.

A good option might be to book one of the Toronto vacation packages in order to see all of the highlights of tourism in Toronto. When looking online for your flight to Toronto, see if you can find any deals that include some of the great Toronto vacation packages.

There are many Toronto attractions to enjoy. Sip a coffee in Little Italy, one of the trendiest areas for cafes and wine bars. Enjoy the exhibits and cultural events at Harbourfront Centre. See Niagara Falls from the Roof Bar at the Park Hyatt. Watch the Maple Leafs (Toronto Canada at its best!) play hockey at the Air Canada Centre. Visit the Kensington Market for some vintage clothing shopping fun. Listen to a concert in the beautiful setting of the Toronto Music Garden. Discover the bohemian side of Toronto in the shops and galleries of Yorkville. Laugh yourself silly at one of the many comedy clubs, and maybe you'll see the next Mike Meyers, Jim Carrey, Dan Aykroyd or John Candy (all from Toronto). With all that Toronto Canada has to offer, you'll see why the largest city in Canada is such a popular place to live and visit.

Toronto attractions draw tourists from around the world to explore the city's best and most significant attributes, but each point of interest also plays a role in everyday urban life for the locals. Whether it's a dominant position in Toronto's skyline or a center for city events, tourist attractions in Toronto are more than just tourist magnets, which makes each of them an important component of every distinct Toronto community.

Many downtown Toronto attractions are linked by PATH, the downtown districts underground walkway. The subterranean hollow offers pedestrians a choice in shopping, entertainment, and a wealth of services, all along one 27-kilometer, weatherproof stretch said to be one of the largest underground systems of its kind in the world. PATH is also used for transit connections, facilitating more than 100,000 commuters and tourists each day heading to and from work, to sports events, and to cultural occasions. It is especially beloved during the cold of the winter.

A deluge of art galleries and museums, some of the greatest Toronto attractions, can be a great starting point for tourists exploring the city. The Art Gallery of Ontario and the Royal Ontario Museum are choice examples of both, and feature such incredible showcases as the famous King Tut exhibit and endless cultural and historical exhibits respectively. Toronto's Textile Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Hockey Hall of Fame are also within the vicinity.

Sports enthusiasts need not go much farther than the Rogers Center, a hub for local sports events and one of the biggest tourist attractions in Toronto. The massive stadium, with its open-air capabilities and excellent visitor services, is a great way to take in a hockey game or see an exciting ball game. The Rogers Center is host to countless other downtown Toronto attractions including family shows, seasonal city events, trade shows, and concerts. Also in the main core, and one of the most prominent tourist attractions in Toronto, is the CN Tower, a nationally recognized landmark and arguably the tallest building in the world. The CN Tower offers a glass observation deck with the best views of Toronto, a revolving restaurant for sky-view dining, and several other key family attractions.

The Ontario Science Center is one of the most appealing of all Toronto family attractions and is a fascinating place for young toddlers to adults. A widespread and beautifully designed kids level offers even the smallest children a fun, hands-on experience. The many exhibits, demonstrations, and models throughout the facility explain science in a fascinating and comprehensive way.

The Toronto Islands are also a wonderful family-friendly attraction and the perfect place to beat the city rush and explore the nearby Harbourfront. The islands comprise the largest car-free urbanscape in North America with favored transportation options including canoes, bicycles, quadracycles, and foot. Centreville Amusement Park, several swimming beaches, and the annual Toronto International Dragon Boat Race Festival are top draws.

Downtown Toronto attractions also include nearby historic Casa Loma and Fort York as well as High Park, a massive open park filled with animals, vendors, and plenty of outdoor fun. For a more urban

experience, head to the Toronto Eaton Center and hit the streets afterward to continue an amazing retail experience. Discover a flood of downtown restaurants featuring a global array of cuisine, and take a walk through Chinatown and delve into a heady array of fresh foods, specialty merchandise, and handmade goods.

Toronto Beaches contrast with the rhythm of the rest of the city with a casual, family-friendly vibe and a number of pleasant, white-sand beaches. Akin to many sunny destinations around Ontario, The Beaches area in Toronto offers visitors and locals plenty of amenities, scenic walking areas, and beautiful Lake Ontario. Situated south of Kingston Road and between Coxwell and Victoria Park Avenues, this lakeside Toronto community offers a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere.

The heart of the Toronto Beaches has flourished around Queen Street East, a popular shopping, dining, and nightlife venue. Queen Street East is a well-known retail destination with a more unique spin than city malls and retail outlets. Shop after shop offers a host of specialty goods along with an old-meets-new blend of Edwardian, Victorian-era, and modern houses. South of Queen there are plenty of parks to choose between. The Toronto Boardwalk is a focal point of The Beaches, winding alongside the lake and playing host to rollerbladers, cyclists, and those out for a walk.

The area puts on numerous Toronto Beaches events, most notably the Toronto International Jazz Festival, an annual event that draws thousands of people into the city of Toronto, flooding Toronto hotels, and streets, for several days. Woodbine Park, Queen Street East, and Kew Gardens in The Beaches area in Toronto each host an assembly of live bands, performances, and special events. Sugarbush Maple Syrup Festival in March, Canada Day celebrations, the Annual Taste of Danforth, live opera, free film nights, and holiday parades create a colorful contrast of occasions.

In June, Toronto Beaches events include the free Waterfront Blues Festival entertaining crowds for three solid days. The festival features a crew of national and international performers, a huge array of cuisine, and plenty of family-friendly activities. The Beaches Arts and Crafts Sale at Kew Gardens is another of the popular Toronto Beaches events showcasing the strong talent of more than 150 area artists. Vendors offer handicrafts including pottery, wood, glass, jewelry, clothing, leather and more.

The Beaches area in Toronto brims with dining choices. Coffee houses, bistros, bars, cafes, diners, and delis come together forming a diverse amalgam of Canadian and international food. Caribbean, Thai, Italian, Southwest Spanish, Japanese, and Mediterranean food is all readily available. Hotels come in an equally appealing array of inns, bed and breakfasts, guesthouses, and internationally recognized Toronto hotels. The ideal location of hotels in the Beaches area of Toronto means quick access to downtown Toronto via a 30-minute streetcar ride to famous Yonge Street.

The sandy shores in The Beaches are a favorite part of visits, especially during Ontario's sometimes scorching hot summers. Woodbine Beach and Kew-Balmy Beach are two popular bathing areas in The Beaches and are only two of the eleven city beaches. The first North American community to be awarded the Blue Flag — a distinct accolade awarded to beach areas with high standards for waterfront management and water quality — even of Toronto's eleven beaches now enjoy the award offering a clean and safe environment for beach activities. Even still, the majority of Beaches visitors don't swim in the lake, but instead enjoy boardwalk strolls, cold pints at nearby pubs, beach volleyball, and other lakeside activities.

Vancouver

Vancouver, British Columbia is a rare blend of big-city lifestyle and outdoor adventure. Where else can a person ski, sail, and dance the night away, all in one single day? Not to mention all the Vancouver hotels readily available for your vacation. Vancouver Canada attractions are set in a blessed location with mountains, ocean, islands and even farmland within short reach. A new city in many ways, Vancouver is still

changing and growing. Being such a desirable place to live, this will inevitably continue as more people discover the gem of Western Canada.

Vancouver is a city of immigrants. It's rare to find someone who was actually born in the city. Walking on Vancouver streets, dozens of languages can be heard. Not only are non-Canadians moving to Vancouver, many Canadians from other provinces come to Vancouver for its laid-back lifestyle.

Because of its mild climate, Vancouver tourism is up and running year round. Spring through fall is the most appealing times to visit, when the rain has tapered off a bit.

The best way to learn about Vancouver is through its many attractions. Vancouver travel presents a limitless number of options for outdoor exploration and cultural discovery. It is difficult to narrow down the attractions, so finding a Vancouver tourism book may help you in creating an itinerary.

One activity that is very Vancouver Canada is walking (or biking, rollerblading, running) along the seawall in Stanley Park. Stanley Park is one of the largest urban parks in the world, and offers some magnificent ocean views. While in Stanley Park, you can also see First Nations totem poles, a rose garden, or take a carriage ride.

During July and August the HSBC Celebration of Light festival brings out the whole city for a magnificent fireworks competition. A float is set up in the middle of English Bay where the fireworks are shot off and can be seen from the beaches of English Bay all the way to Jericho Beach.

For a bit of history and culture, make a visit to Chinatown. Markets full of fresh produce, seafood and barbeque pork line the streets. Famous Chinese Vancouver BC restaurants are located here, a great way to fill up after shopping in the many quaint and unusual Chinese shops.

Vancouver travel is not complete without visiting Granville Island. Located on False Creek, this marketplace delivers some of the best produce, European meats and cheeses that Vancouver has to offer. There are also dozens of artsy shops and galleries to peruse, as well as some Vancouver BC restaurants, with beautiful water views.

Vancouver tourism will often point you to Gastown, one of the oldest and most historical parts of town. The cobblestone streets and brick buildings of Gastown will remind you that Vancouver is not as new as the other parts of the city would lead you to believe. There are plenty more shops and restaurants here in which to pass the time. A bonus: panoramic views of the North Shore Mountains and Coal Harbor.

Speaking of the North Shore, this is another highlight of Vancouver that is not always mentioned in your Vancouver Tourism book. Just cross a bridge and you're in the wilderness (or close to it, anyway!). There are hundreds of trails in the North Shore for hiking and walking. With the great outdoors being so close to Vancouver, it's easy to surround yourself with trees for an afternoon.

Another great highlight are the Vancouver BC restaurants. Take your pick of ethnicity and atmosphere, and you've got a meal to remember. Watch the sunset over the bay in your choice of Kitsilano, Yaletown, Cole Harbour or English Bay restaurants. Try a trendy bistro on South Granville or Robson Street. Take a quick drive to Richmond and sample some of the best Chinese cuisine in the world. Or, pack a picnic lunch and enjoy the view at Lighthouse Park on the North Shore.

Vancouver attractions run the gamut from widely respected museums and theater companies to hundreds of acres of parkland, as well as miles of coastline, and three major skiing areas within twenty minutes of the city. Vancouver is a large urban center surrounded by a range of geographical attractions. It is not in every city that you can enjoy skiing, mountain biking, and boating in the ocean. Some of the best attractions in Vancouver are the city's natural wonders, from the 1,000-acre Stanley Park to Mount Seymour to Kitsilano Beach. There are some truly amazing cities in Canada, from Toronto to Quebec to Ottawa, but the range of attractions and geographical diversity may make Vancouver the most enviable destination. The list of Vancouver tourist attractions gets even more interesting when you head downtown.

The Vancouver Aquarium (located in Stanley Park) is among the most popular of all Vancouver attractions. Adults and children alike will have hours of fun at this amazing facility that features over 70,000 different kinds of marine creatures. There are some awesome interactive exhibits in the newly expanded kid's area and the 4D Experience Theater is a must-see. You will have the opportunity to see exhibits with Beluga whales, sea otters, and dolphins, to name just a few. The Aquarium is certainly one of the best Vancouver tourist attractions for families.

Science World at the Telus World of Science is also one of the best attractions in Vancouver. It is particularly geared toward people of all ages with inquisitive minds. It appeals to both adults and kids with interactive exhibits and breathtaking displays on several stages and in several theaters. The OMNIMAX and Science theaters regularly have shows, and there are areas where the kids can enjoy interactive games and exhibits that allow them to make their own inventions and learn about science in a fun and engaging way. Science World is not only one of the top Vancouver tourist attractions, but it is also considered one of the best museums in the city.

The Vancouver Lookout provides unbelievable, panoramic views of the city. It is one of the best attractions in Vancouver, not only because of the views, but also because of the exciting ride up to the 50-story observation deck. You will be carried up in a glass elevator, 50 stories above the ground in less than 50 seconds. This thrilling ride is a great way to get any vacation to Vancouver kicked off in the right way. You will be able to take in the awe-inspiring views of the North Shore Mountains, Vancouver Island, and the impressive Vancouver skyline.

The list of Vancouver attractions includes many more alluring destinations and activities. From Gastown to Kitsilano, Burnaby to Squamish, there is truly something for everyone to enjoy. Other notable attractions in the heart of Vancouver that you should strongly consider visiting are the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden, the Burnaby Village Museum, the Minter Gardens, Hell's Gate Airtram, and Stanley Park. There are a wide range of hotels, restaurants, and bars in downtown Vancouver as well as the surrounding neighborhoods. The city is also well connected with a variety of options for public transport, making it easy to get from one place to the next as you explore the city.

Vancouver beaches are some of the most lovely on the coast of British Columbia. Most of them feature fine white sand and excellent vistas both of the surrounding mountains and the city's skyline. The best beaches in Vancouver BC are destinations where residents and tourists go to enjoy a range of water sports and activities as well as relaxation. If you are looking for a Vancouver beach nearby for your next vacation, it is a good idea to have a handle on where some of the most popular are located.

Kitsilano Beach is one of the most desirable of all the Vancouver beaches. The "Kits" is a trendy and glamorous area of Vancouver where you can regularly see beautiful people walking the streets. It is no different at Kitsilano Beach located in this district. People watching, sun bathing, and relaxing in the sun are the order of the day. The waves are generally calm and there is a pool and recreational area designated just for children, making this an ideal Vancouver beach for families with small kids, but still trendy and fun enough for all.

English Bay Beach is situated on the West End at the very edge of popular Stanley Park. It is a perfect destination for enjoying the best of the city and the beach. You will be treated to fine sand and gentle surf while you relax on the beach, but will also have all the advantages of restaurants, cafes, and bars that run along the opposite side of the street of the seawall. The Celebration of Light International Fireworks Competition takes place at English Bay, another reason why many people consider this to be one of the best beaches in Vancouver BC.

Jericho Beach is another enviable destination for people looking to have some fun in the sun. As with most of the best beaches in Vancouver BC, Jericho Beach features soft sand and manageable surf. The views of the mountains, False Creek, and the city in the distance create what will be a memorable experience at this

Vancouver beach. It is a great location to enjoy an affordable lunch at a casual restaurant in between hanging out at the beach, working on your tan, and enjoying the good life.

Wreck Beach is for adults only but largely considered to be one of the best, and certainly one of the most beautiful, beaches in all of Vancouver. It is a nude beach known for its relaxed and laid back atmosphere. If this kind of thing is not too foreign to you, you should consider going to the beach. You are welcome to leave your clothing on, and you will be treated to some of the most beautiful beach views in the city.

Spanish Banks is one of the most popular beaches among residents of Vancouver BC. It is a sprawling beach set outside the city where families and friends can enjoy sports, laying out, boating, and much more. It is an ideal setting for having picnics and barbecues and there are plenty of public facilities to cover things like restrooms, barbecue grills, and showers. Spanish Banks is another of the finest Vancouver beaches and one should certainly consider visiting on your next trip.

While you might not think of Vancouver or its climate as a beach destination, you may be surprised at the number and quality of beaches located in this northwest town.

Bowen Island is located in Howe Sound with its closest point to Vancouver proper being a little over a mile. This island has long been a popular vacation choice for residents of the city of Vancouver and has become increasingly popular as a tourist attraction. Many people head to Bowen Island as a daytrip from Vancouver and end up discovering the magic and enchantment of this island in Howe Sound. There are virtually unlimited things to do on Bowen Island, from a wide range of water and land sports and activities, shopping, dining, and much more. There is also a range of options for lodging on Bowen Island BC.

There is Bowen Island ferry service that runs regularly from Horseshoe Bay, making it easy for anyone staying in or around the Downtown core to access the island with the greatest of ease. There are three main operators that provide Bowen Island ferry service. B.C. Ferries carries passengers from Horseshoe Bay in West Vancouver to Snug Cove on Bowen. You can also take a late night Bowen Island ferry using the Cormorant Marie that also operates between Horseshoe Bay and Snug Cove. The English Bay Launch has a twelve-person ferry that distributes passengers between Snug Cove, Granville Island, and Downtown Vancouver. It is only about a twenty-minute ferry ride to Bowen Island from Horseshoe Bay. This is one of the truly great things about the city of Vancouver. Even through there are so many things to do and attractions to explore, they are all relatively easy to access. Bowen Island is certainly no exception.

When you are looking for potential things to do on Bowen Island, you should keep in mind that there is a whole lot more going on that just water sports, hiking, and mountain biking. This is not to say that many people do not go to Bowen Island with the express intent of enjoying just such activities. The beaches, trails, and interior are amazing, and provide excellent opportunities for everything from kayaking to hiking. But for those people who like to stay indoors and enjoy shopping and entertainment, you will not be forced to stay in the city while the rest of the group heads out for a day of outdoor excitement on Bowen Island. There are plenty of restaurants and bars, boutiques and stores, as well as theaters and places to take part in arts and crafts. Take a stroll through the town and check out the art galleries and quaint shops while you witness the beautiful vistas of Howe Sound in the background.

The real wonder of this island is the wide variety of things to do on Bowen Island in the water, and on the island itself. You can rent kayaks, take mountain biking expeditions, go swimming, boating, water skiing, and just about anything else that you can imagine. Bowen Island is a perfect place to get away from the rigor of city life for a day or two and commune with nature in all of its beauty on this treasure near the city of Vancouver.

The Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Centre, located in beautiful Stanley Park, is one of Western Canada's most popular tourist attractions. The Vancouver Aquarium is Canada's largest with 600 species of almost 9000 creatures of the sea. At one point there was also a zoo at this location, but it has since

closed, making the aquarium Stanley Park's most popular destination. Animal rights activists have been protesting the aquarium, just as they did the zoo. The main complaint for protesters has been the containment of whales and the small quarters for other large sea animals. As such a popular attraction, it isn't likely that protesting will have an effect any time soon.

The Vancouver BC Aquarium has several distinct sections that are all worth seeing. One of the most popular areas is the Arctic Canada exhibit. In this section you can watch beluga whales swimming playfully through the water and have a chance to listen to the sounds of whales, seals, walrus, and other arctic creatures. The beluga whales are definitely a highlight of the Vancouver Aquarium animals. In the Amazon Rainforest Gallery you can experience the steamy (and stinky) jungle in the atrium, home to tree frogs, three-toed sloths, piranhas, iguanas and more. Every hour there is a tropical rainstorm in the atrium. Also in the Amazon Gallery are a number of colorful tropical fish. There is a recreation of Indonesia's Bunaken National Park coral reef where angelfish glide gracefully. The BC Waters exhibit holds all types of creatures living in the Canadian waters, like Pacific salmon and the enormous Pacific octopus.

Other popular Vancouver Aquarium animals are found on the Marine Mammal Deck. Adorable sea otters, sea lions and dolphins are a treat to see. Along with beluga whales, the Vancouver BC Aquarium staff does scheduled shows for the public to learn more about these interesting animals.

If you want to get more up-close and personal with the Vancouver Aquarium animals, you may want to participate in the Beluga Encounter. The Beluga Encounter allows you to go behind-the-scenes to feed the belugas and to participate in their daily training session. The cost for the Beluga Encounter is around \$150CAN. For a much smaller price, it is also possible to take a tour with the trainers to help prepare and feed the sea otter, seals and sea lions. Children must be 8 years old or older to participate.

The VanDusen Botanical Gardens are among the top attractions in Vancouver and are visited by hundreds of thousands of tourists each and every year. Often simply referred to as the Vancouver Botanical Gardens by residents, this gorgeous 55-acre green space is named for Whitford Julian Van Dusen, a philanthropist from Vancouver. It opened in August of 1975 and is maintained by a large staff of volunteer workers. Although when you are inside the lush confines of the beautiful gardens, it feels as though you are a million miles away from the city, the grounds are actually easily accessible from any point in the Downtown core. The VanDusen Botanical Gardens are located in Shaughnessy at the intersection of Oak Street and 37th. This attraction is also perhaps best known as annually playing host to the VanDusen Botanical Garden Festival of Lights.

The gardens are open to the public every day of the year excluding Christmas. There is a modest fee to get in, but it is well worth it. There is no limit on how much time you can spend enjoying the expansive grounds. The Vancouver Botanical Gardens display a vast array of plants from every corner of the globe. There is an herbarium, a garden shop, and a book and seed library where visitors can learn about plants of interest. The layout of the gardens is such that people of any age can get a lot out of touring the grounds.

You have the option of taking tours on your own or with one of the expertly trained staff members or volunteers who are actively engaged with the maintenance of the gardens. Many of the trees and flowers are labeled and give explanations of their origins. The VanDusen Botanical Gardens provide an awesome destination for family vacations in Vancouver, or anyone who wants to break away from the fast pace of the city and just relax together. It is also an educational experience in the process. Besides the wide variety of plants from all over the world, there is an impressive Korean pavilion that serves as the focal point for the collection of Asian plants on the grounds. There are also several stone sculptures and totem poles that accentuate various portions of the plot.

As much of a good time it is to simply walk through the park, the excitement of the VanDusen Botanical Garden Festival of Lights cannot be matched throughout the year. This beautiful winter festival includes more than 1.5 million Christmas lights and is held annually in December and early January.

Thousands of visitors come for the Vancouver botanical gardens to take in this amazing event, and it is one of the most popular annual events in the city. If you're planning a trip to British Columbia around the holiday season, be sure not to miss the enthralling VanDusen Botanical Garden Festival of Lights.

Victoria

In contrast to the newness of Vancouver, a stunning ferry ride across the Strait of Georgia, Victoria, British Columbia is a city that has preserved its heritage. Victoria BC Canada has long presented itself as a quaint, English-influenced town to the very responsive American market. But the afternoon tea and elaborate rose gardens are not just part of the tourist trap. Residents of the capital city of Victoria have incorporated this 'Englishness' into their lifestyle and identity.

Though it may be influenced by English style, a Victoria vacation is like no other in the world. Perhaps in part because of its island location, Victoria BC Canada is a much slower paced city than Vancouver. The spectacular scenery in and around the city is a Victoria attraction that draws in tourists and retirees. The getting there is part of the experience. Taking the 90-minute ferry from the mainland, it's not uncommon to see orcas, porpoises, seals, and bald eagles along the way. Even if you don't, the splendor of the Canadian Gulf Islands and the Straight of Georgia are enough of an eyeful for the journey.

In order to see every Victoria attraction out there, it may help to find a Victoria vacation package to pack it all in. This way, you can maximize your time in Victoria, while seeing the best of the attractions.

A Victoria vacation package is sure to include the famous Butchart Gardens, around for over 100 years. These world-class gardens are one of attractions that Victoria is known for. Every Saturday during the summer there is a fireworks show, making it an even more of an unforgettable experience.

For an attraction suited for a family vacation Victoria, nothing beats whale-watching. Victoria is an ideal place for orca (killer whale) spotting because of the orca's traveling habits. Only orcas in BC travel in large pods, so it is easy to see a large group of them traveling together.

Don't conclude your Victoria vacation without seeing the Royal BC Museum. Even if you aren't generally interested in museums, this is one that you are sure to enjoy. The Royal BC Museum is a Victoria attraction that will best explain the history and people of BC. There are art displays, sections on geology and wildlife, models, exhibits and a fantastic section dedicated to BC First Nations. Every display is accompanied by informative and concise descriptions.

On your Victoria vacation make sure to taste the English side of the city. Take part in the afternoon tea ritual, and then make your way through the English village. The English village holds some re-created English Tudor-style buildings and is decorated with authentic 16th century antiques. A highlight: the replica of Shakespeare's birthplace and cottage of his wife, Anne Hathaway.

For a bit of exercise and to see the true beauty of Victoria BC Canada, climb up Mount Douglas to see the panoramic view of the Saanich Peninsula. If you aren't ambitious enough to climb, go ahead and drive.

Edmonton

Edmonton is Alberta's capital city with the largest urban population in the province. Known for an enormous mall and the hockey team where Wayne Gretzky played in his glory days, Edmonton Canada is a truly Canadian city.

The population of Edmonton Canada skyrocketed with the oil boom beginning in the late 1940's. The first oil well was drilled about 25 miles southwest of Edmonton, with 10,000 more wells popping up shortly after. The oil brought the city millions of dollars of revenue, and city development took off. Within twenty years Edmonton's population had quadrupled and it took on the characteristics of a big city — replete with

skyscrapers and a Light Rail Transit. Today Edmonton remains the oil capital of Canada. It is no wonder then that their hockey team is called the Edmonton Oilers! Spend a winter in Edmonton and you'll understand why the Edmonton Eskimos is an appropriate name for their football team!

When looking into Edmonton tourism, there's no doubt that the West Edmonton Mall will be the first Edmonton attraction that you discover. This is perhaps the most famous of the Canadian shopping malls. Much more than just a mall, West Edmonton Mall is also an amusement park, ice skating rink, movie theatre, concert hall, hotel and much more. There are over 800 stores and services, 100 choices for getting a bite to eat, plus eight top-notch attractions. This Edmonton attraction spans the equivalent of 48 city blocks and feels more like a theme park than a mall. When it's cold out in Edmonton Canada, the West Edmonton Mall is a warm mini-city of fun and shopping.

If you'd like to see the more outdoorsy side of Edmonton tourism, take a drive an hour out of the city to Elk Island National Park. There are more than 250 species of birds living in the forests, meadows and wetlands of the park, not to mention large herds of elk, bison, moose and deer. The park features picnic areas, golf and 90 kilometers of trails. If you'd like to camp, the Sandy Beach campground has 80 sites to choose from.

For Edmonton tourism with an historical twist, try out life as a pioneer at Fort Edmonton Park, the largest living history park in Canada. Each street gives a sampling of life from four different eras. 1846 Street lets you experience life as it was in Hudson Bay. On 1885 Street you can visit the blacksmith or taste some pioneer food at the Jasper House Hotel. Ride the streetcar on 1920 Street or find something sweet at Bill's confectionary. This Edmonton attraction is a fun way to understand Canada's history.

Winnipeg

Winnipeg, Manitoba is the big city that is situated smack dab in the center of Canada. Despite its central location, the city of Winnipeg is decidedly Western in feel. In fact, it is said to be the most "American" of the Canadian cities. With its grain elevators and mid-western feel, Winnipeg Manitoba has often been compared to Chicago.

Despite appearances, Winnipeg is far from just another Midwestern town. There is a blossoming arts scene that has flourished in the city, and the rich historical highlights of the city are drawing in tourism in Winnipeg. Your Winnipeg vacation is sure to be full of uniquely Canadian flavor.

The most popular Winnipeg attraction is the Forks National Historic Site. For over 5,000 years this has been a trade and meeting place for Natives, fur traders and settlers. Perhaps you could say that tourism in Winnipeg began here! In the 1980's the Canadian National rail yard was converted into the Forks Market, which is another great Winnipeg attraction. Fresh food and cheap restaurants have even more appeal in the setting of the historic rail warehouses. There are also quaint shops and boutiques to peruse through to the tunes of street performers and musicians. Walking tours are available in the Forks, as are canoe rentals. From the river you can appreciate the sites of Winnipeg Manitoba like the St. Boniface Basilica. If your Winnipeg vacation falls on a winter month, you can ice skate on the river or cross-country ski on a river-side trail.

Another intriguing Winnipeg attraction is the Exchange District. Made up of thirty blocks of turn-of-the-century buildings, this national historic site has been well preserved. The former commercial buildings and warehouses now house restaurants, businesses and living quarters. This area has become a popular backdrop for movies from both Canada and the U.S.A. There is always something going on in the Exchange District. From flea markets to night clubs, there is something to do day and night. This is a great spot for tourism in Winnipeg because it also holds two great art galleries: the Plug in Gallery and the Gallery. Both galleries are definitely worth checking out. Tours of the historical sites in the Exchange District are offered from spring through fall, weather permitting.

Answer the questions:

1. Where is Canada located?
2. What are the main rivers and lakes of Canada?
3. What is the climate of the country?
4. Characterize the flora and fauna of Canada.
5. What is the population density in the country?
6. What ethnic groups are there in Canada?
7. Where is French mostly spoken?
8. What are the main features of Canadian spelling?
9. What are the primary aspects of Canadian accent?
10. What words may be found in Canadian English only?
11. Name the major religion in the Country.
12. How many provinces are there in Canada? Name them.
13. Characterize the government of the country.
14. How would you characterize the economy of Canada?
15. How does the national insurance scheme work in the country?
16. What are the most popular Universities in Canada?
17. Name main libraries and museums in Canada.
18. What events and holidays are celebrated in the country?
19. What are the main characteristics of Canadian cuisine?
20. What are the most recommended places for shopping in Canada?
21. What Canadian attractions would you recommend for tourists?
22. What are the most popular things to do in Canada?
23. What Canadian tourist destinations are among the most attractive spots in the world?
24. What sights and attractions can be found in Ottawa?
25. What makes Vancouver such a popular tourist destination?
26. What is Toronto famous for?
27. What are the most spectacular sights and attractions of Victoria?
28. What would you recommend to see while in Edmonton? Winnipeg?
29. What scenic wonders does Canada offer to see?
30. Where are the most spectacular parks located?

Write a short summary of Top Canadian Attractions.

Make a presentation on:

- a) Canadian Cuisine;
- b) Popular Tourist Destinations of Canada;
- c) Toronto City Tour;
- d) Top Attractions and Things to Do in Canada.

Promote Canada as a tourist destination.

AUSTRALIA

CAPITAL: Canberra

AREA: 7,686,850 sq km (2,967,909 sq mi)

POPULATION: around 21 mln

ANTHEM: *God Save the Queen* is reserved for regal and state occasions and whenever singing is appropriate; the national tune is *Advance Australia Fair*.

HOLIDAYS: New Year's Day, 1 January; Australia Day, last Monday in January; Anzac Day, 25 April; Queen's Birthday, second Monday in June; Christmas, 25 December; Boxing Day, 26 December. Numerous state holidays also are observed. Movable religious holidays include Good Friday, Easter Saturday, and Easter Monday.

TIME: Western Australia, 8 pm = noon GMT; South Australia and Northern Territory, 9:30 pm; Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, and Tasmania, 10 pm. Summer time is 1 hour later in all states except Western Australia, Queensland, and the Northern Territory.

LOCATION, SIZE, AND EXTENT

Lying southeast of Asia, between the Pacific and Indian oceans, Australia, the world's smallest continent, is almost completely surrounded by ocean expanses. Australia is slightly smaller than the United States, with a total area of 7,686,850 sq km (2,967,909 sq mi). The five mainland states are New South Wales, 801,600 sq km (309,500 sq mi); Queensland, 1,727,200 sq km (666,900 sq mi); South Australia, 984,000 sq km (379,900 sq mi); Victoria, 227,600 sq km (87,900 sq mi); and Western Australia, 2,525,500 sq km (975,100 sq mi). The island state of Tasmania has an area of 67,800 sq km (26,200 sq mi); the Northern Territory, 1,346,200 sq (519,800 sq mi); and the Australian Capital Territory, 2,400 sq km (900 sq mi). The country, including Tasmania, extends about 4,000 km (2,500 mi) e–w and 3,180 km (1,980 mi) n–s.

Australia is bounded on the n by the Timor and Arafura seas, on the ne by the Coral Sea, on the e by the Pacific Ocean, on the se by the Tasman Sea, and on the s and w by the Indian Ocean, with a total coastline of 25,760 km (16,007 mi). Neighboring areas include Irian Jaya (part of Indonesia) and Papua New Guinea to the north, New Zealand to the southeast, and Indonesia to the northwest. Australia's capital city, Canberra, is located in the southeastern part of the country.

TOPOGRAPHY

The continent of Australia is divided into four general topographic regions: (1) a low, sandy eastern coastal plain; (2) the eastern highlands, ranging from 300 to more than 2,100 m (1,000–7,000 ft) in altitude and extending from Cape York Peninsula in northern Queensland southward to Tasmania; (3) the central plains, consisting largely of a north-south series of drainage basins, including the Great Artesian Basin, which underlies about 1,751,480 sq km (676,250 sq mi) of territory and is the most extensive area of internal drainage in the world; and (4) the western plateau, covered with great deserts and “bigger plains” (regularly

spaced sand ridges and rocky wastes), rising 300 to 600 m (1,000–2,000 ft) high and constituting most of the western half of the continent.

Australian mountains have eroded over recent geological periods, and only about 6% of the continent is above 600 m (2,000 ft); the average elevation is less than 300 m (1,000 ft). The highest point is Mt. Kosciusko, 2,228 m (7,310 ft), in the Australian Alps of the southeastern corner of New South Wales; the lowest point is Lake Eyre in South Australia, 15 m (49 ft) below sea level. In 1983, grains of rock from Western Australia were dated at 4.1–4.2 billion years old, making them the oldest ever found on earth.

The most important river system, and the only one with a permanent, year-round flow, is formed by the Murray, Darling, and Murrumbidgee rivers in the southeast. The Murray River, Australia's largest, rises in the Australian Alps of New South Wales and flows some 2,600 km (1,600 mi) west and southwest to empty into the sea below Adelaide, South Australia. Several other rivers are important, but for the most part they carry great amounts of water in the wet season and are dry for the rest of the year. The largest lakes have no outlet and are usually dry.

The coastline is smooth, with few bays or capes. The two largest sea inlets are the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north, between Arnhem Land and the Cape York Peninsula, and the Great Australian Bight in the south. The Great Barrier Reef, the longest coral reef in the world, extends for about 2,000 km (1,243 mi) off the east coast of Queensland.

CLIMATE

Although it has a wide diversity of climatic conditions, Australia is generally warm and dry, with no extreme cold and little frost, its temperatures ranging from comfortably mild in the south to hot in the central interior and north. July mean temperatures average 9°C (48°F) in Melbourne in the southeast and 25°C (77°F) in Darwin in the north. January mean temperatures average 20°C (68°F) in Melbourne and 30°C (86°F) in Darwin. Summer readings often reach 38°C (100°F) or more in almost any area of the continent and may exceed 46°C (115°F) in interior regions. Winds are light to moderate, except along the coasts, where severe cyclones have occurred.

The continent is subject to great variations in rainfall, but except for a few areas rainfall is insufficient, and the rate of evaporation is high. Mean annual rainfall is 42 cm (17 in), much less than the world mean of 66 cm (26 in). About 18% of the land area is desert. Only about 20% has more than 76 cm (30 in) of rain annually, but these areas suffer from a long dry season, while others have too much rain. Only Tasmania, Victoria, and parts of New South Wales have enough rainfall all year round. Droughts and floods occur irregularly but frequently over large areas. Drought conditions became very severe in the early 1980s, leading to dust storms, fires, and multibillion-dollar crop losses.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Many distinctive forms of plant and animal life are found, especially in the coastal and tropical areas. There are some 500 species of eucalyptus and 600 species of acacia (wattle). Other outstanding trees are the baobab, blackwood, red cedar, coachwood, jarrah, Queensland maple, silky oak, and walnut. Native trees shed bark instead of leaves.

Numerous types of wild flowers grow in the bush country, including boronia, Christmas bush, desert pea, flanner flower, Geraldton wax plant, kangaroo paw, pomaderris, and waratah.

There are 470 varieties of orchids. About 200 kinds of mammals, 200 kinds of lizards, and 350 kinds of birds are indigenous. Apart from marsupials (bandicoots, kangaroos, koalas, possums, Tasmanian devils, tree kangaroos, and wallabies), the most unusual animals are the dingo, echidna, flying fox (fruit bat),

platypus, and wombat. Birds include the anhinga, bellbird, bowerbird, cassowary, emu, galah, kookaburra (laughing jackass), lyrebird, fairy penguin, rosella, and many types of cockatoos, parrots, hawks, and eagles.

Many species of trees, plants, and domestic animals have been imported, often thriving at the expense of indigenous types. Herds of wild buffalo, camels, donkeys, horses, and pigs, descendants of stock that strayed from herds imported by pioneers, roam the sparsely settled areas.

POPULATION

The population of Australia in 2005 was estimated by the United Nations (UN) at 20,351,000, which placed it at number 52 in population among the 193 nations of the world. In 2005, approximately 13% of the population was over 65 years of age, with another 20% of the population under 15 years of age. There were 98 males for every 100 females in the country.

The population density was 3 per sq km (7 per sq mi). The UN estimated that 91% of the population lived in urban areas in 2005, and that urban areas were growing at an annual rate of 1.11%. The capital city, Canberra, had a population of 373,000 in that year.

One-third of Australia is virtually uninhabited; another third is sparsely populated. The total population is quite small compared to the large land mass. Most of the cities are located in the east and southeast, with many inhabitants living on the coast.

ETHNIC GROUPS

Most Australians are of British or Irish ancestry. In 2005, approximately 92% of the population was Caucasian. The Asian-born population tally stood at 7% while aboriginal and other groups comprised only 1% of the population.

After the coming of the Europeans, the aboriginal population declined drastically, from about 300,000–1,000,000 to some 60,000 by the early 1920s. By the 1950s, however, the decline was reversed.

In the 1991 census 265,492 people identified themselves as being of aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, or 1.5% of the population. (Of these, the latter numbered 26,902.) Many of them live in tribal conditions on government reservations in the north and northwest. Their social organization is among the most complex known to anthropologists. They do not cultivate the soil but are nomadic hunters and food gatherers, without settled communities. Anthropologists believe the aboriginals, also known as Australoids, are relatively homogeneous, although they display a wide range of physical types. Their serological, or blood group, pattern is unique, except for a faint affinity with the Paniyan of southern India and the Veddas of Sri Lanka. The aboriginals probably originated from a small isolated group subject to chance mutation but not to hybridization. There seems to be a sprinkling of Australoid groups in India, Sri Lanka, Sumatra, Timor, and New Guinea. In 1963, aboriginals were given full citizenship rights.

LANGUAGES

According to a 2001 census, about 79% of the population speaks English. Chinese is spoken by about 2% of the population and Italian is spoken by another 2%. About 11% listed other languages and nearly 6% of respondents were unspecified.

Many languages or dialects are spoken by the aboriginal tribes, but phonetically they are markedly uniform. There is no written aboriginal language, but the markings on “letter sticks,” sometimes carried by messengers from one tribe to another, are readily understood by tribal headmen. Aboriginal languages are in use in certain schools in the Northern Territories and, to a lesser extent, in schools of other states.

Differences with other variations of English

Australian English is similar in many respects to British English but it also borrows from American English. (For example, it uses *truck* instead of *lorry*, and *freeway* rather than *motorway*.) It is most similar to New Zealand English, although the difference is immediately obvious to a speaker from either country.

Australian English is sometimes called "*Strine*" and New Zealand English "*Newzild*" - "strine" being the way "Australian" is pronounced with a heavy Australian accent, and "Newzild" the equivalent for New Zealand - which embodies the essential pronunciation differences. Where Australian English has the lax vowel notated in SAMPA as /ɪ/, New Zealand usually has the unstressed vowel of Standard English *about*, even in stressed positions, hence the frequent joke among Australians that New Zealand speakers like "sux butts of fush and chups".

Many Americans struggle to distinguish an Australian English speaker from a New Zealand English speaker, or even a British speaker (just as Canadian and other North American English speakers are often indistinguishable to Australasian ears and are only identified as American).

Due to the predominance of foreign mass media products in the country, Australians are familiar with at least some of the variants of modern British English and American English, and many have adopted some of the distinctive vocabulary and idioms of those languages. The exposure to the different spellings of British and American English leads to a certain amount of spelling confusion — for instance, "organize" as opposed to "organise", or "behavior" as opposed to "behaviour". Generally, either variant is accepted.

In 1981 the Macquarie Dictionary of Australian English was published after 10 years of research and planning. Editions have been published ever since. There is also an Oxford dictionary of Australian English.

Unique Australian traits

Australian English also incorporates several uniquely Australian terms, such as *outback* to refer to remote regional areas, *walkabout* to refer to a long journey of uncertain length and *bush* to refer to native forested areas, but also to regional areas as well. *Fair dinkum* can mean *are you telling me the truth?*, or *this is the truth!*, or even *this is ridiculous!* depending on context.

The disputed origin dates back to the gold rush in the 1850s, "dinkum" being derived from the Chinese word for "gold": "fair dinkum" is the genuine article. *G'day* is well known as a stereotypical Australian greeting. (It is worth noting that "G'day" is not quite synonymous with "good day", and is never used as an expression for "farewell".) Many of these terms have been adopted into British English via popular culture and family links.

Some elements of Aboriginal languages have been incorporated into Australian English, mainly as names for places, flora and fauna (e.g. Dingo, kangaroo). Beyond that, very few terms have been adopted into the wider language. A notable exception is *Cooee* (a musical call which travels long distances in the bush and is used to say 'is there anyone there?'). Though often thought of as an Aboriginal word, *Didgeridoo/Didjeridu* (a well known wooden musical instrument) is actually an onomatopoeic term coined by an English settler.

Australian English has a unique set of diminutives formed by adding *-o* or *-ie* to the ends of (often abbreviated words). There does not appear to be any particular pattern to which of these suffixes is used. Examples with the *-o* ending include *abo* (aborigine - now considered very offensive), *arvo* (afternoon), *servo* (service station) and *ambo* (ambulance officer). Examples of the *-ie* ending include *barbie* (barbeque), *bikkie* (biscuit) and *blowie* (blowfly). Occasionally, a *-za* diminutive is used, usually for personal names. Barry becomes *Bazza*, Karen becomes *Kazza* and Sharon becomes *Shazza*.

Phonetics of Australian English

The "cultivated" and "general" accents use 24 consonants, 11 vowels and 8 diphthongs. (The "broad" accents employ a myriad of different vowels and diphthongs). IPA symbols of the sounds are as follows (where similar or no characters can be provided in Unicode, names of the symbols are included for clarification):

Consonants:

plosives/stops: p, b, t, d, k, g
fricatives: f, v, θ, s, z, ʃ (esh), ʒ (yogh), h
affricates: tʃ (tee-esh), dʒ (dee-yogh)
nasals: m, n, ŋ
semivowels: j, w
liquids: l, r

Vowels:

short vowels: ɪ (small capital i), ɛ, ʌ (inverted v), ʊ, (turned cursive a)
long vowels: i, a, u, ɜ (reversed epsilon), ɔ (open o)
special status: ə

The symbols /e/ and /o/ are also used, but only in diphthongs.

Diphthongs:

aɪ, eɪ, ɪə, aʊ, oʊ, Iə, ɛə, ʊə

Note: /ə/ is the only short vowel that appears at the end of a word

Allophones:

There are many allophones in Australian English. Here are some examples:

"Noeline's notes"
/oʊ/ -> [ʊ], [əʊ]

Vocabulary

abo - derogatory term for Aborigine

Anglo-Celtic - Australian of British or Irish descent

banana bender - Queenslander

Asian - usually East Asian rather than South Asian

dob - to tell on

dole bludger - workshy person living on welfare

crow eater - South Australia (seen on car number plates)

footy - football, Rugby League in New South Wales or Queensland, Australian Rules in other states, but not soccer

New Australian - 1950s term for immigrant, usually from continental Europe

Pom- (also **pommy**) mildly derogatory word for English person. Origin uncertain; possibly from "pompous".

Premier - elected head of a state government
rort - scam
sandgroper - Western Australian
'tothersider - someone from eastern Australia (used by Western Australians, now obsolete)
tall poppy - someone who gets ideas above his station
wog - derogatory term for Italian, Greek or other southern European

Many distinctive Australian words have been driven into extinction or near extinction in recent decades, under the homogenising influence of mass media and imported culture. For example, no-one under 50 now addresses a friend as "cobber." This process is widely regretted but seems to be irreversible.

Some examples:

bloke - generic term for a man (driven out by the ubiquitous "guy")
bloody - the "great Australian adjective" (survives, but increasingly replaced by stronger expletives such as "fucken/fucking", particularly among young men)
bonzer - really good (almost extinct)
chunder - to vomit (ridiculed to death by Barry Humphries, now replaced by "puke/puked/puking")
cobber - friend, mate (almost extinct)
digger - ex-soldier, term of address to an older man (nearly extinct)
drongo - a fool (survives, but in decline)
dinkum - genuine (still used but in decline)
poofter - homosexual man (replaced in polite use by "gay" and as a term of abuse by "fag")
sheila - young woman (driven out by "chick")
smoko - break from work (smoking is banned in most workplaces)
struth! - expression of shock or dismay (replaced by stronger expletives such as "fuck!" or "shit!")

Spoken Australian English

According to stereotype, spoken Australian English is thought to be highly colloquial, possibly more so than other spoken variants. Various publishers have produced "phrase books" to assist visitors. These phrasebooks reflect a highly exaggerated and outdated style of Australian colloquialisms and they should be regarded as amusements rather than accurate usage guides. Perception has it that a common trait is the frequent use of long-winded similes, such as "Slow as a wet weekend", "Built like a brick shit-house", "mad as a cut snake" or "flat out like a lizard drinking". Whether this perception is based in reality or has been produced by popular culture items of fiction such as television series *Neighbours* and the films of Paul Hogan remains in question.

A substantial collection of unique or unusual words are in common spoken usage - e.g. "dacks" (trousers), "dag" (unfashionable person), "bludge" (to shirk), "ute" (a utility vehicle or pickup truck). Another well-known Australianism, "wowsers" (a killjoy), has now fallen out of use. An even larger vocabulary is derived from recognisable words with entirely new meanings - "to bag" (to criticise), "blue" (either a fight or heated argument, or an embarrassing mistake), "crook" (unwell, also unfair), "to wag" (to play truant), "cactus" (non-functional), "cut" (angry) and especially "root" (a euphemism for sexual intercourse, which has caused social embarrassment for American women who innocently declare that they "root" for a particular sports team). Note that the slang term "root" was common in the 1970s but is not heard as much today although it is still used. Also, the term Australians use for "fanny pack" is "bum bag" since in Australia *fanny* is a slang term for a vagina.

Spoken Australian English is also generally far more tolerant of expletives than other variants: the former Prime Minister Paul Keating would openly refer to his parliamentary opponents as "mangy maggot piss ants".

Australians are known for their directness or "why call a spade a spade, when you can call it a bloody shovel!", which can lead to misunderstanding and offence on the part of Australia's Asian neighbours. Prime Minister Keating's description of the Prime Minister of Malaysia as "recalcitrant" in 1993 caused considerable offence in that country.

Another notable trait of Australian English usage, inherited from Britain, is the use of deadpan humour, in which the joker will make an outrageous or ridiculous statement without explicitly indicating they are joking. Americans visiting Australia have gained themselves a reputation for gullibility and a lack of a sense of humour by not recognising that tales of kangaroos hopping across the Sydney Harbour Bridge are examples of this propensity.

Talking about food

With foodstuffs Australian English tends to be more closely related to the British vocabulary, e.g. *biscuit* for the American *cookie*. However in a few cases such as *zucchini*, *snow pea* and *eggplant* Australian English uses the same terms as the Americans, whereas the British use the equivalent French terms *courgette*, *mange-tout* and do not care whether *eggplant* or *aubergine* is used. This is possibly due to a fashion that emerged in mid-19th Century Britain of adopting French nouns for foodstuffs, and hence the usage changed in Britain while the original terms were preserved in the (ex-) colonies. For some uncertain reason, Australia uses the botanical name *capsicum* for what both the British and the Americans would call (red or green) peppers.

Regional variation

It is sometimes claimed that regional variations in pronunciation and accent exist, but if present at all they are very small compared to those of British and American English - sufficiently so that linguists are divided on the question.

However, there used to be a significant regional variation in Australian English vocabulary between different states. For example, Queenslanders say "port" while New South Welsh and Victorians say "school bag". "Football" refers to the most popular code in the state. Western and South Australians start a game of Australian rules football with a "bounce down", New South Welsh and Queenslanders start a game of Rugby League with a "ball up". The steadily increasing affect of centralised film, TV and even radio production, however, is rapidly blurring these distinctions.

Regional Phonetic Variation

Studies have shown that there are limited regional variations in Australian English. This chart shows the percentage of speakers from different capital cities who pronounce words in a certain way, concentrating on the usage of /æ/ vs. /a/.

	<i>Hobart</i>	<i>Melbourne</i>	<i>Brisbane</i>	<i>Sydney</i>	<i>Adelaide</i>
graph	græf (100%)	græf (70%)	graf (56%)	graf (70%)	graf (86%)
chance	tSæns (100%)	tSans (60%)	tSæns (75%)	tSans (80%)	tSans (86%)

demand	dəmənd (90%)	dəmand (78%)	dəmand (78%)	dəmand (90%)	dəmand (100%)
dance	dæns (90%)	dæns (65%)	dæns (89%)	dæns (60%)	dans (86%)
castle	kasl (60%)	kæsl (70%)	kæsl (67%)	kasl (100%)	kasl (86%)
grasp	grasp (90%)	grasp (89%)	grasp (89%)	grasp (95%)	grasp (100%)
contrast	kəntɹast (100%)	kəntɹast (100%)	kəntɹast (100%)	kəntɹast (100%)	kəntɹast (71%)

RELIGIONS

According to the 2001 census, 67% of citizens were nominally Christians, including 26% Roman Catholic and 20% Anglican. About 15% of Australians consider themselves to have no religion, an increase of over 35% from 1991. About 2% of the population were Buddhist, 1.5% Muslim, and less than 1% were Hindu and Jewish. A 1996 census indicated that almost 72% of Aborigines practiced some form of Christianity with indigenous beliefs. Constitutionally, there can be no state religion or state aid to any religion; the exercise of any religion cannot be prohibited, and a religious test as qualification for public office is forbidden.

GOVERNMENT

The Commonwealth of Australia, an independent, self-governing nation within the Commonwealth of Nations, has a federal parliamentary government. The federation was formed on 1 January 1901 from six former British colonies, which thereupon became states.

The constitution combines the traditions of British parliamentary practice with important elements of the US federal system. Powers of the federal government are enumerated and limited.

The government consists of the British sovereign, represented by a governor-general, and the Australian Parliament. Nominally, executive power is vested in the governor-general and an executive council, which gives legal form to cabinet decisions; in practice, however, it is normally exercised by a cabinet chosen and presided over by a prime minister, representing the political party or coalition with a majority in the House of Representatives. The number of cabinet ministers is variable.

Legislative power is vested in the Parliament, which is composed of a 76-member Senate, representing the states and territories, and a 150-member House of Representatives, representing electoral districts. Members must be Australian citizens of full age, possess electoral qualification, and have resided for three years in Australia. Twelve senators are elected by proportional representation from each state voting as a single electorate, and two senators each from the Northern Territory and Capital Territory. They are elected for six years, with half the members retiring at the end of every third year.

ECONOMY

Australia has a prosperous Western-style capitalist economy with a high per capita gross domestic product (GDP), on par with the four dominant Western European nations of Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy. Economic activity is focused on the country's eastern seaboard, where most of the population lives. New South Wales generates about 35% of Australia's GDP, while Victoria generates 26% and Queensland 17%.

There is a clear divide in economic performance between the states: typically, growth in South Australia and Tasmania is considerably below the overall national rate, and Western Australia is heavily dependent upon the volatile mining industry.

Since the late 1980s, the government has been engaged in a program to transform the economy's orientation from import substitution industrialization (ISI) to export-driven, high-tech globalization.

As in most developed countries, the service sector accounts for the largest portion of GDP. The largest service industry is finance, property, and business services. Other major service industries include retail and wholesale trade, transportation and communications, and construction.

The largest segment of the manufacturing sector is production of machinery and equipment. Mining and agriculture account for most exports.

Australia's flexible exchange rate regime has helped the economy rapidly adjust to the vicissitudes of international commodity markets. It is the world's largest wool-producing country. The country is one of the great wheat exporters, and also exports large quantities of dairy and meat products. In minerals, Australia is a major world supplier of iron ore, bauxite, lead, zinc, and copper; coal, beach sand minerals, and nickel have become major industries as well. Since the 1960s manufactured goods have provided an ever-increasing share of the country's exports, with elaborately transformed manufactures (ETMs), like automobiles, high-speed ferries, and telecommunications equipment, making up a significant percentage of exports (approximately 20%).

HEALTH

Australia is one of the healthiest countries in the world. The common cold and other respiratory infections are the most prevalent forms of illness; arteriosclerosis is the most common cause of death. Water in most cities is good and safe for household purposes and garbage and trash are collected in cities and towns.

All levels of government are concerned with public health, with the municipalities functioning largely as agents for the administration of state policies. State health departments are responsible for infant welfare, school medical and dental services (provided free of charge), treatment and eradication of infectious and contagious diseases and tuberculosis, industrial hygiene programs, maintenance of food and drug standards, public and mental hospitals, and the regulation of private hospitals.

The Commonwealth government makes grants for medical research, coordinates state health programs, and maintains specialist medical research institutions and laboratories. Public sector funding accounts for over two-thirds of health care expenditure in Australia; some is allocated via the central government and some via local authorities. Under the Medicare system, all Australians have access to free care at public hospitals. The plan also meets three-fourths of the bill for private hospital treatment, while patients pay the remainder (and can take out private health insurance to cover this, although comprehensive private medical insurance was abolished in the 1984 act). All patients other than pensioners must pay a set amount for every prescription supplied under the scheme; the remainder is met by the government. For those not eligible for free public health care and who have basic medical insurance, the government pays 30% of the scheduled benefit fee for each medical service. Such insurance, including the government contribution, covers 85% of scheduled fees. The federal government provides grants to the states and aboriginal organizations for the development of special health services for aboriginals.

Health services are efficient. Hospitals are generally modern and well equipped, but space often is at a premium. The estimated life expectancy in 2005 was 80.39 years, the eighth-highest in the world.

EDUCATION

Education is compulsory for children from the age of 6 to 15 (16 in Tasmania). Most children attend pre-school or kindergarten programs. Primary education generally begins at six years of age and lasts for six or seven years, depending on the state. Secondary schools have programs of four to six years. Free education is provided in municipal kindergartens and in state primary, secondary, and technical schools. There are also state-regulated private schools, which are attended by approximately one-third of Australian children. Correspondence courses and educational broadcasts are given for children living in the remote “outback” areas and unable to attend school because of distance or physical handicap. One-teacher schools also satisfy these needs. Although most aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students use the regular school system, there are special programs to help them continue on to higher education.

Australia has approximately 20 universities in addition to more than 200 technical institutes. There is a state university in each capital city and each provincial area; a national postgraduate research institute in Canberra and a university of technology in Sydney with a branch at Newcastle. There are also a number of privately funded higher-education institutions including theological and teacher training colleges. Adult education includes both vocational and non-vocational courses. Most universities offer education programs for interested persons. In 2008, it was estimated that about 74% of the tertiary age population were enrolled in higher education programs; 67% men and 82% women.

LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS

The National Library of Australia traces its origins back to 1902, but it was not until 1961 that it was legislatively separated from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library and made a distinct entity. The National Library is now housed in modern facilities in Canberra and has over 4.7 million volumes. Three other libraries in Australia of comparable size are the library of the University of Sydney (over three million volumes), founded in 1852; the State Library of New South Wales (over 1.9 million volumes), founded in 1826; the State Library of Victoria (over 1.5 million), founded in 1854, and the Library Information Service of Western Australia (2.7 million).

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Library Service oversees nine public library branches and the ACT Government and Assembly Library. The state capital cities have large noncirculating reference libraries, as well as municipal public circulating libraries. The university libraries of Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne, Monash, New South Wales, and Queensland all have sizable collections. Recent years have seen programs with increased cooperation between libraries, which has resulted in increased service. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Acton has a specialized collection of 15,000 volumes, and dozens of museums and cultural centers house other specialized collections.

There are about 2,000 museums in Australia, of which over 200 are art museums. A national art collection has been assembled in the Australian National Gallery at Canberra, which was opened to the public in October 1982. The National Museum of Australia, founded 1980 in Canberra, exhibits Australian history and social history. In 2001 the museum opened new facilities in a stunning architectural structure on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin. There are eight other major museums, two each in Sydney and Melbourne and one in each of the other state capitals. Of note in Melbourne are a Performing Arts Museum (1978); the Ancient Times House (1954); and the Jewish Museum of Australia.

The Melbourne Museum, completed in 2000, became the largest museum in the southern hemisphere. Sydney houses the Australian National Maritime Museum (1985), the Museum of Contemporary Art (1979) and the Nicholson Museum of Antiquities (1860). Some of the smaller cities also have museums. The National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne has a fine collection of paintings and other artworks, and the South

Australian Museum in Adelaide has excellent collections relating to Australian entomology, zoology, and ethnology. Botanical gardens are found in every capital city.

CULTURE

The demographics of Australia show it to be one of the most urbanized populations in the world, with the majority of Australians living in cities on the coast. Australia's cities are melting pots of different cultures. The indigenous Aboriginal culture survived the first influx of immigrants of Anglo-Irish heritage, who are still the most pervasive immigrant group. The great post-World War II influx of both English and non English-speaking migrants from Britain, Ireland, Italy, Greece, the Netherlands, Malta and Eastern Europe, and later from the Middle East, East and South-East Asia, and the Indian sub-continent have been significant additions. Lesser numbers of immigrants have also come from the African and American continents.

The arts in Australia — film, music, painting, theatre, dance and crafts — have achieved international recognition. However, in practice, it has often been difficult for observers to discern anything distinctly Australian by looking at much of its artistic output in music, dance, film or literature.

Traditional "high culture" gains small attention from much of the population, in contrast to popular culture. High culture thrives in the form with a few art galleries, a rich tradition in ballet, enlivened by the legacy of Edouard Borovansky and Sir Robert Helpmann, and continuing with the national ballet company The Australian Ballet, and choreographer/dancers such as Graeme Murphy and Meryl Tankard; a national opera company based in Sydney; and symphony orchestras in all capital cities, particularly the Melbourne and Sydney symphony orchestras. However, outside of the main centres artists struggle and high culture is only sporadically seen.

Independent culture thrives in all capital cities and exists in most large regional towns. The independent arts of music, film, art and street art, are the most extensive. Melbourne's independent music scene is one of the largest in the world, whilst another can be found in the multitude of international street artists visiting Melbourne and, to a lesser extent, other major cities, to work for a period of time.

Architecture

Contemporary Australian architecture includes a number of iconic structures, including the Sydney Opera House, the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne and Parliament House, Canberra. Significant architects include Harry Seidler and Francis Greenway.

In the period before European settlement of Australia in 1788, evidence of permanent structures built by indigenous Australians in Australia is limited. Much of what they built was temporary, and was used for housing and other needs. As a British colony, the first European buildings were derivative of the European fashions of the time. Tents and wattle and daub huts preceded more substantial structures. Georgian architecture is seen in early government buildings of Sydney and Tasmania and the homes of the wealthy. While the major Australian cities enjoyed the boom of the Victorian Era, the Australian gold rushes of the mid-19th century brought major construction works and exuberant Victorian architecture to the major cities, particularly Melbourne, and major provincials such as Ballarat and Bendigo. Other significant architectural movements in Australian architecture include the Federation style of the turn of the 20th century and the modern styles of the late 20th century which also saw many older buildings demolished.

Significant concern was raised during the 1960s, with developers threatening the destruction of historical buildings, especially in Sydney. Heritage concerns led to union-initiated green bans, which saved significant examples of Australia's architectural past. Green bans helped to protect historic 18th century

buildings in The Rocks from being demolished to make way for office towers, and prevented the Royal Botanic Gardens from being turned into a car park for the Sydney Opera House.

Cinema

Australia has a long history of film production. The world's first feature-length film was the Australian production *The Story of the Kelly Gang*. However, the purchase of virtually all cinemas by U.S. distribution companies saw an almost total disappearance of Australian films from the screens. A notable exception was Charles Chauvel's classic *Jedda* (1955). During the late 1960s and 1970s an influx of government funding saw the development of a new generation of directors and actors telling distinctively Australian stories. Films such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Sunday Too Far Away* had an immediate international impact. The 1980s is regarded as perhaps a golden age of Australian cinema, with many very successful films, from the dark science fiction of *Mad Max* to the comedy of *Crocodile Dundee*, a film that defined Australia in the eyes of many foreigners despite having remarkably little to do with the lifestyle of most Australians.

A major theme of Australian cinema has been survival in the harsh Australian landscape. A number of thrillers and horror films dubbed 'Outback Gothic' have been created, including *Wake in Fright*, *Walkabout*, *The Cars that Ate Paris* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* in the 70s, *Razorback* and *Shame* in the 80s, and *Japanese Story*, *The Proposition* and the world-renown *Wolf Creek* in the 21st century. These films depict the Australian bush and its creatures as deadly, and its people as outcasts and psychopaths. These are combined with futuristic post-apocalyptic themes in the *Mad Max* series.

The 1990s saw a run of successful comedies such as *Muriel's Wedding*, *The Castle* and *Strictly Ballroom*, which helped launch the careers of Toni Collette, P. J. Hogan, Eric Bana and Baz Luhrmann. The indigenous film industry continues to produce a reasonable number of films each year; also, many U.S. producers have moved productions to Australia following the decision by Fox head Rupert Murdoch to utilise new studios in Melbourne and Sydney where filming could be completed well below U.S. costs. Notable productions include *The Matrix*, *Star Wars* episodes II and III, and *Australia* starring Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman.

Music

Aboriginal song was an integral part of Aboriginal culture. The most famous feature of their music is the didgeridoo. This wooden instrument, used amongst the Aboriginal tribes of northern Australia, makes a distinctive droning sound and its use has been adopted by a wide variety of non-Aboriginal performers.

Aboriginal musicians have turned their hand to Western popular musical forms, often to considerable commercial success. Some notable examples include Archie Roach, the Warumpi Band, NoKTuRNL and Yothu Yindi.

Amongst young Australian aborigines, African-American and Aboriginal hip hop music and clothing is popular. Aboriginal boxing champion and former rugby league player Anthony Mundine identified US rapper Tupac Shakur as a personal inspiration, after Mundine's release of his 2007 single, *Platinum Ryder*.

The earliest Western musical influences in Australia can be traced back to two distinct sources: the first free settlers who brought with them the European classical music tradition; and the large body of convicts and sailors, who brought the traditional folk music of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The practicalities of building a colony mean that there is very little music extant from this early period although there are samples of music originating from Hobart and Sydney that date back to the early 1800s.

The establishment of choral societies (c. 1850) and symphony orchestras (c. 1890) led to increased compositional activity, although many Australian classical composers attempted to work entirely within

European models. A lot of works leading up to the first part of the 20th century were heavily influenced by the folk music of other countries (Percy Grainger's *Country Gardens* of 1918 being a good example of this) and a very conservative British orchestral tradition.

In the war and post-war eras, as pressure built to assert a national identity in the face of the looming superpower of the United States and the "motherland" Britain, composers looked to their surroundings for inspiration. John Antill and Peter Sculthorpe began to incorporate elements of Aboriginal music, and Richard Meale drew influence from south-east Asia (notably using the harmonic properties of the Balinese Gamelan; as had Percy Grainger in an earlier generation).

By the beginning of the 1960s, Australian classical music erupted with influences, with composers incorporating disparate elements into their work, ranging from Aboriginal and south-east Asian music and instruments, to American jazz and blues, to the belated discovery of European atonality and the avant-garde. Composers like Don Banks, Don Kay, Malcolm Williamson and Colin Brumby epitomise this period. In recent times composers including Liza Lim, Nigel Westlake, Ross Edwards, Graeme Koehne, Elena Kats-Chernin, Richard Mills, Brett Dean and Constantine Koukias have embodied the pinnacle of established Australian composers.

Australia has produced a large variety of popular music. Some notable examples include the 1960s successes of The Easybeats and the folk-pop group The Seekers, through the heavy rock of AC/DC, Cold Chisel and the slick pop of INXS, Men at Work and Kylie Minogue, Natalie Imbruglia, Savage Garden and Silverchair. Bands such as Jet, Wolfmother, Eskimo Joe, Grinspoon, The Vines, The Living End, Short Stack, Pendulum and others are currently enjoying success internationally. Solo artist Delta Goodrem from Sydney is currently enjoying success worldwide.

The arrival of the 1961 underground movement into the mainstream in the early 1970s changed Australian music permanently. Skyhooks were far from the first people to write songs in Australia by Australians about Australia, but they were the first ones to make good money doing it. The two best-selling Australian albums made up to that time put Australian music on the map. Within a few years, the novelty had worn off and it became commonplace to hear distinctively Australian lyrics and sounds side-by-side with imports.

Events and Holidays

The culture of Australia is rich in both Indigenous and European tradition. Australians love to celebrate their heritage, and most major cities hold unique arts festivals with dance, outdoor music, cinema, food, and wine, at various points throughout the year. Generally, these festivals are completely free of charge, and offer an exciting way to experience the culture of Australia. The country also commemorates a set of national Australian holidays, many with their own celebrations.

National Australian Holidays

One holiday in Australia, observed June 8th to allow a break before winter, is the Queen's Birthday. Generally, schools and government offices will be closed on this day. Another day on which government buildings will likely be closed is January 26th, Australia Day. Australia Day commemorates the first British settlement in Australia, in 1788. Today, major cities throughout the country celebrate Australia day with moderate parades, free food, and locally organized events. Sydney hosts a surf board paddle race beneath the Harbor Bridge, in which both amateurs and pros are equally welcome to participate.

One holiday in Australia celebrated both by Australian's, and their New Zealand neighbors alike is ANZAC Day, on April 25th. ANZAC Day honors those who have died in wars, and most specifically troops who died fighting during the First World War ANZAC stands for the Australian and New Zealand Army

Corps, and travelers will find parades and ceremonies memorializing the Army Corps in most of Australia's major cities.

The modern culture of Australia combines both European tradition and Aboriginal legacy. While the impact of European settlers on the indigenous population of Australia was, for the most part, catastrophic, there are remaining arts and festivals celebrating Aboriginal life and culture. European settlers brought with them many food and lifestyle traditions, and the Australia of today is a combination of these influences, as well as current American influences. Australian holidays tend to reflect this mixture.

There are a myriad of culture and art festivals throughout Australia. Most of these festivals are totally free of charge, and offer an international visitor the chance to experience some of the celebrations that are unique to Australia. The Sydney Festival features music, dance, and visual arts each January. The Perth International Arts Festival takes place every February, and offers a comprehensive mix of traditional dance performances and outdoor theatre. If you are looking to relax indoors, check out the Melbourne International Film Festival between July and August. More than 300 films are brought in each year from around the world, and it is one of the most celebrated events in Australia.

CUISINE

Australian food traditions have been influenced by those that have settled in Australia. There are a few foods which can be considered uniquely Australian. Macadamia nuts are an Australian food that has become popular worldwide, and more recently kangaroo meat has become more mainstream. Local beers and wines are popular and internationally renowned. Vegemite is a well-known spread originating from Australia, though currently produced by the US-owned food company Kraft Foods. It is not popular among immigrants, but is exported to foreign countries, such as the UK and the USA. Iconic Australian desserts include pavlova and lamingtons.

Fresh produce is readily available and thus used extensively, and the trend (urged by long-term government health initiatives) is towards low-salt, low-fat healthy cookery incorporating lean meat and lightly cooked, colourful, steamed or stir-fried vegetables. With most of the Australian population residing in coastal areas, fish and seafood is popular.

Australia's climate makes barbecues commonplace. Barbecue stalls selling sausages and fried onion on white bread with tomato or barbecue sauce are common in fund raising for schools or community groups. These stalls are called "Sausage Sizzles".

Some English trends persist in the domestic cooking of many Australians of Anglo-Celtic descent. Among these is the tradition of having roast turkey, chicken, and ham with trimmings followed by a plum pudding on Christmas day, despite the fact that Christmas is at the height of the Southern Hemisphere summer.

The typical breakfast of Australians strongly resembles breakfast in many Western countries. Owing to the warm weather in some parts of Australia breakfast is generally light but in the colder regions porridge or meals similar to the full English breakfast may be consumed. The light breakfast commonly consists of cereals, toast (with a spread) and fruit. A heavier cooked breakfast will frequently include fried bacon, egg, mushroom, baked beans, sausages, tomatoes, toast with spread. Beverages taken at breakfast include tea, coffee, flavoured milk or juice.

A popular breakfast food in Australia is Vegemite, a black, salty spread similar to Marmite, applied to toast or bread.

The evening meal is the main meal of the day for most Australians. Most of the time it is consumed at home, and often eaten with members of the immediate family or household. The dishes served will vary

widely according to the tastes and/or background of the family. Common choices would be roast meat and vegetables, pasta, pizza, casseroles, barbecued meat, vegetables, salad, soup and stir-fries.

A standard cafe or restaurant in Australia not adhering to any particular ethnic cuisine might offer sandwiches and focaccias, a range of pasta, risotto, salad or curry dishes, steak, chicken or other meat-based dishes, cakes or other desserts, and juices, red and white wine, soft drink, beer, and coffee.

Similar to any other Western nation, in Australia there is a wide variety of takeaway food available from other cultures. The meat pie and sausage rolls are examples of traditional take-away foods. These come in varying grades, ranging from the mass-produced factory outputs of Four-and-Twenty, Mrs Macs, Balfours, Villis, J. R. Pinders and Big Ben, through to gourmet pies sold by specialist pie shops. There is an annual competition to find the 'Great Australian Meat Pie'.

American-style chain stores are common; including, Subway, Pizza Hut, KFC, Hungry Jack's (the local Burger King franchise name), Domino's Pizza, and McDonald's. An alternative to the US imports is offered by the Australian chicken fast food chains Red Rooster and Chicken Treat, pizza chains Eagle Boys and Pizza Haven, the Portuguese chicken franchises Nando's and Oporto, and by the corner pizza shops, charcoal or fried chicken stores, stores selling items such as kebabs and yeeros (gyros), and fish and chip shops.

Many of these sell high-quality food for reasonable prices. Typically found in many takeaway shops is the 'Australian Hamburger'. This is mainly distinguished from other hamburgers by the range of fillings available. An order with all fillings is known as "The Lot" or "The Works". The fillings include lettuce, tomato, cheese, pickled beetroot, fried onion, bacon, a fried egg and pineapple.

A very wide variety of Chinese, Indian, and various Asian restaurants provide eat-in and take-away services, and are very popular in the cities. With the high levels of immigration from the Middle East, South and South East Asia, Korea, China and other countries from all over the world to Australia, many authentic and high-quality restaurants are run by first and second generation immigrants from these areas.

Chinese cuisine ranges from a long established Australian-Chinese style based on the cooking of the Chinese community established during the gold rushes of the late 1800s, to quite different cuisine more recently imported from different regions of China. Asian bakery stores are also a source of fast food, for example savoury rolls. Examples of these include cheese and bacon, cheese and pineapple, which are toppings over a thick piece of bread, and the pork/chicken roll (Banh Mi Thit), which is a crusty baguette, cut with sliced pork or chicken, carrot, spring onion, soy sauce, pâté, coriander, cucumber and often chilli.

An iconic Australian foodstuff is Vegemite (owned by the American Kraft Foods). Other unique or iconic national foods include Macadamia nuts; Violet Crumble, a honeycomb chocolate bar; Cherry Ripe; Jaffas, chocolate with an orange-flavoured confectionery shell; the Chiko Roll, a deep-fried savoury roll similar to a spring roll; and the Dim sim, a Chinese-inspired dumpling. Other popular Australian foods include Tim Tams, a chocolate biscuit; Musk sticks; Fairy bread; Lamingtons; the Boston bun; the Vanilla slice; and the commercial breakfast cereal Weet-Bix.

ANZAC biscuits and the pavlova are considered by some to be Australian national foods, although the oldest known written recipes for these items are from New Zealand.

The meat pies is a well known take away item. In South Australia pies are sometimes served inverted in pea soup and covered in tomato sauce, a dish named the Pie floater. Kangaroo meat is readily available in Australia although it is not a commonly eaten meat. It is available in various cuts, and sausages.

Damper is a simple and traditional type of bread, traditionally made by placing the dough in the coals of a fire. It is not very popular now.

SHOPPING

Shopping in Australia can encompass high end labels as well as indigenous and local markets. All of Australia's major cities offer shopping centers with one popular Australia store after another. One of the most popular Australia store groups for international travelers is Melbourne Central, a large center with over 200 shops. Other cities have main shopping centers, as well, such as the Queen Victoria Building in Sydney. The Queen Victoria Building is a beautiful landmark, and offers shopping with popular labels and high end fashion. Another popular Australian store group can be found at Rundle Mall in the city of Adelaide. Within each of these shopping centers, travelers will find Australia gift shops, where you'll be sure to find something unique to bring home for family and friends.

Australia Local Shopping

Australia local shopping can include many of the high end malls listed above, as well as Australia local shopping markets. One of the loveliest Australia local shopping markets is the Rainforest Market in Cairns. After a day spent touring the Daintree Rainforest, a stop at this local market is a beautiful way to pick up a unique souvenir to remember your experience. If it is a farmer's market you seek, the Country Fair on the Mornington Peninsula is the perfect place to shop locally grown food and household items.

For a more modern flair, the Paddington Market on Oxford Street offers an eclectic mix of organic foods, massage, jewelry, clothing, and art. The Paddington Market is truly an outdoor Australia gift shop. For yet another unique outdoor Australia gift shop area, stop by the Hobart Salamanca Market. Located in Tasmania, and hosted every Saturday, this market showcases some of the unique art, wildflowers, and plant life that can only be found on an island as unique as Tasmania.

TOURISM, TRAVEL, AND RECREATION

Among Australia's natural tourist attractions are the Great Barrier Reef, a mecca for scuba divers; the varied and unusual flora and fauna; and the sparsely inhabited outback regions, which in some areas may be toured by camel. Other attractions include Ballarat and other historic gold-rush towns near Melbourne; wineries, particularly in the Barossa Valley, 55 km (34 mi) northeast of Adelaide; Old Sydney Town, a recreation of the Sydney Cove Settlement north of Sydney as it was in the early 19th century; and the arts festivals held in Perth every year and in Adelaide every two years, featuring foreign as well as Australian artists. The sports that lure tourists are surfing, sailing, fishing, golf, tennis, cricket, and rugby. Melbourne is famous for its horse racing (Australia's most celebrated race is the Melbourne Cup) and for its 120,000-capacity cricket ground, reputedly the biggest in the world.

Except for nationals of New Zealand, visitors must have a valid visa. Immunizations are required only of tourists coming from an infected area. The government actively promotes tourism. Typically, most visitors come from East Asia and the Pacific region. The average length of stay was two nights.

Although Australia is the world's driest inhabited continent, Australia travel is anything but boring. Australia's first colonial contact with Europe brought scores of convicts from London and various parts of England, however in later years settlers came to farm and start a new life. Modern Australia has evolved greatly since those early colonial days, and still boasts a thriving Indigenous culture. Offering everything from fine dining and shopping, to rainforest tours and outback adventures, travel in Australia has something for everyone. When traveling, a good Australia travel guide can be a useful source for consultation and advice.

A typical Australia travel guide will handily split the nation into six main sections. Queensland, Victoria, West Australia, New South Wales, the Northern Territory, and the island of Tasmania make up the country, and travel in Australia can be most easily managed by researching an Australia travel guide using these divisions.

Due to the fact that Australia has developed as an isolated continent, the country offers the most diverse group of life forms to be found anywhere on the planet. From sites such as the Daintree Rainforest, touted as the world's safest rainforest, to Ayers Rock, the world's largest monolith, travel in Australia offers a special opportunity for travelers to a unique group of sites. In addition to coral wonders, eucalyptus, and one-of-a-kind animals, to visit Australia travelers should also leave time to enjoy the nightlife and cultural adventure in Australia. An exciting mix of European and Indigenous traditions comprises a wide range of festivals and events, and must be included when tourists visit Australia. The world famous Sydney Opera House hosts an arts festival each January and of course offers a schedule of various plays and performances throughout the year. Even if you aren't able to make it to Sydney, you'll find that Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide, and Canberra all boast major arts festivals, showcasing music, theatre, dance, and more.

Top Australia attractions

Fraser Island

This, the largest sand island on the planet became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1992. Lush rainforests, impressive sand cliffs and memorable freshwater lakes leave a lasting impression on the thousands who visit the island each year. Apart from its long beaches of white, glistening sand, Fraser Island also draws people hoping to catch a glimpse of its famous dingo population. The island covers over four hundred acres and lies off the east coast of Australia within the jurisdiction of Queensland. Some visitors opt to take day trips, but most choose to spend a night or two on the island. One of the more unusual tourist attractions is ship that ran aground during the cyclone of 1935.

Sydney Harbour Bridge

Known locally as 'The Coat-hanger', Sydney Harbour Bridge is instantly recognisable to many people around the world. Of the 1,400 men who constructed the bridge, 16 were killed before completion in 1932. The braver amongst you can do the 'Bridge-climb', an escorted walk to the top. As you ascend, the cars below become smaller and smaller. 'The Rocks', regarded as Sydney's birthplace, is situated at the foot of the bridge. Today it is bustling with restaurants, shops, galleries and cafes, a far cry from the scene which would have met those arriving from Plymouth in 1788.

Great Barrier Reef

Another UNESCO World Heritage site, The Great Barrier Reef is probably the most well known protected marine site in the world. It covers a staggering 86 million acres along the coast of North East Australia. At 1,429 miles long, the reef is home to 1,500 species of fish. Its area is actually larger than the combined size of Tasmania and Victoria. Apart from the natural beauty found here, there are 30 shipwrecks which are regarded as being of historical significance.

Scenic World Blue Mountains

The Jamison Valley is home to the steepest railway journey in the world. In the valley floor, you'll find over two kilometres of boardwalk through woodland and rain forest. You can return via the scenic cable car, which incidentally, is the steepest cable car journey in the southern hemisphere, and if that's not enough, you can journey across the valley in the only switching, glass floored cable car in the world and enjoy views of the valley, Katoomba Falls and the famous Three Sisters rock formation.

Kakadu National Park

Rock paintings and archaeological sites are testament to 40,000 years of continuous habitation. The Kakadu National Park, a World Heritage site, covers almost five million acres in Australia's Northern Territory. Today, around 300 Aboriginals live amongst the savannah woodlands and tidal wetlands.

Sydney Opera House

Since its opening in 1973, The Sydney Opera House has been an Australian icon. Danish architect, Jorn Utzon, created one of the twentieth century's greatest edifices. Standing on the Bennelong Point, the building receives more than four and a half million visitors each year. Tours including backstage and front of house are available.

Port Arthur

Formerly a timber station, Port Arthur became one of the most notorious penal colonies in Australia. Regarded as 'Hell on Earth', the prison housed inmates as young as nine. The life of the prison stretched from 1833 to 1877 when it was renamed Carnarvon in an attempt to shake off its murky history. However, in 1927, it regained its title of Port Arthur. These days, the prison doors are passable in both directions, with guided tours and harbour cruises available.

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park

Uluru, formerly known as Ayres Rock, stretches over 2 miles in the otherwise anonymous scrubland of the park. At 1,142 feet high, it is the largest rock monolith in the world. Uluru is revered amongst the Aboriginal people who believe its origins date back to the creation of the Earth.

Amp Tower Centrepoint

At just over 1,000 feet high, the Sydney Tower is the highest building in the city. Spectacular views across the harbour are afforded from the observation deck and the revolving restaurant.

National Gallery of Australia

Many of Australia's finest art collections are housed in the National Gallery. A permanent collection of more than 100,000 works shares the building with international art and photography exhibitions.

TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Australia beaches

So many Australia beaches of this island nation line the several thousand miles of coastline and its nearly 10,000 islands that it is probably impossible to list them all. Some areas of the country are extremely remote, and you can find deserted and unnamed Australian beaches that may never have seen a tourist. The short list would probably start with Bondi Beach (pronounced BON-dye), one of the many Sydney beaches and one of the most famous in the country. Like legendary Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, it is also one of the most beautiful urban beaches in the world, and is set only about four miles from the heart of the inner city. Other urban beaches in Australia around Sydney include Manly Beach, just across the harbor from Bondi Beach, and Palm Beach in the far northern suburbs. You will find that it is possible to have extremely enriching Australia beach vacations without ever leaving the largest city in all of Australia.

The eastern coast of the country is the most developed, with the most sophisticated tourist infrastructures. There are high-rise deluxe beach resorts, charming bed and breakfast inns, and budget motels clustered around the best Australia beaches up and down this part of the coastline. North of Brisbane, are the Australian beaches of the beautiful Whitsunday Islands off the coast close to Airlie Beach. Each of these islands boasts several beaches, many of which are part of a national park and virtually deserted. South of Brisbane, you will find the popular Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast, which offer some of the country's best surfing.

A bit further north, are the Australia beaches that are protected by the more than 1,600-mile-long Great Barrier Reef, which is blessed with its own pristine beaches in Australia that are sometimes submerged at high tides. Here is some of the best reef scuba diving in the world. The Great Barrier Reef gateway towns of Cairns (pronounced CAN) and Port Douglas also boast numerous popular beaches, including Palm Cove, Clifton Beach, Trinity Beach, Holloway Beach, and many more. This region is also known both for its

indigenous Aboriginal people and the rainforests they call home. These rainforests, like Daintree Rainforest, stretch from the interior hinterland right up to the ocean, and many holidays on Australian beaches in this region include visits to see the rainforest wildlife as well as enjoy cultural interactions with the Aboriginal people.

In the south off the coast of Adelaide, is Kangaroo Island, which is about the same size as lovely Nantucket Island off the coast of Massachusetts. This beautiful island has a small population about the same size as that of Nantucket and protects its pristine beaches, historic lighthouses, and incredible unique wildlife with the same vigilant zealousness. Here you can see kangaroos and wallabies foraging along the sands just as you can on Hyams Beach in Jervis Bay south of Sydney.

If you want Australian beaches that are truly remote, head for the west coast where you will find Ningaloo Reef, where the desert Outback quite literally meets the sea. Here on Australia's largest fringing reef, you can swim with the world's largest fish — the gentle whale shark that can reach lengths of 60 feet and weigh as much as 50 tons. Head north to Darwin and Kakadu National Park, you will find even more remote, unspoiled beaches.

Visiting the **Sunshine Coast** may require lessons in pronouncing some of the many of the more colorful Aboriginal place names to be found in the region. The Aboriginal history of this region stretches back for millennia before settlers from Europe arrived in the late eighteenth century, and their names for wildlife, flora, and natural formations remain to this day.

Many of the names for the Sunshine Coast beaches as well as the region's many national parks and forests are Aboriginal in origin. For instance, one popular surfing beach on the Sunshine Coast is called Marouchydore meaning "red bill," which is the Yugerra word for the red-billed black swan found here. Sunshine Coast vacations will not only reveal stunning coastline and beautiful beaches, but also allows you to interact closely with the local Aborigine tribes. There are authentic tribal dances and feasts you can attend, and you can book an Aborigine guide for a bushwalk in one of the national parks. Another of the Sunshine Coast beaches that is popular with surfers is called Caloundra Beach, which comes from the Aboriginal word for the beech trees that are still found in the area.

Many Sunshine Coast vacations are excellent for surfing, and the beaches here are superb for the sport. Unlike Airlie Beach to the north, the Sunshine Coast beaches are not protected by the Great Barrier Reef. This makes them much better for surfing. And, although the beaches of the Gold Coast to the south have excellent surfing, the Sunshine Coast is much less developed, which is great for those who want less frenetic and crowded holidays.

In addition to surfing, there is superb Sunshine Coast scuba diving only twenty minutes out to sea. This is a fairly rocky section of coast, and the rocks extend out into the ocean, providing good dive spots. Many divers are also sailors, and sailing in this region is very popular. There are several sailing and yachts clubs in the region, and some of the Sunshine Coast hotels have their own marinas.

There are also national parks protecting both inland and coastal regions, and some of the things to do in the area involve backpacking in the wilderness that is never far away. Here also is the Australia Zoo made famous by the Crocodile Hunter Steve Irwin, which cares for more than 2,000 rare and unusual indigenous animals from crocodiles and koalas to the little frilly lizard and the dingo. This Sunshine Coast attraction is near the Glass Mountains National Park with its unusual volcanic peaks, a wonderful area for backpacking and camping. There is also Underwater World, a marine park on Mooloolaba Beach where some of the best beach resorts and luxury hotels are located.

Sunshine Coast vacations also give you access to many other things to do. There are numerous golf courses, some right on the beaches. There is an excellent highway system to get here from Brisbane if you've

obtained car rentals, as well as an airport with direct flights from Sydney and Melbourne. Once you're here, you can get from place to place on a public ferry system that operates up and down the coast.

Gold Coast Australia is located about twenty miles south of Brisbane (capital and largest city in Queensland) and is the state's second largest city. The sunny subtropical weather and beaches on the Gold Coast are famous, making this one of the most visited regions in the country. In addition to the beautiful beaches, which are excellent for surfing, the city boasts an extensive waterway and canal system, a lively nightlife, beautiful and accessible rainforest, and many other attractions.

The naming of Gold Coast Australia has nothing to do with the mining of gold. There is indeed gold in Australia (it is the country's second largest export earner), and there were nineteenth-century Gold Rushes similar to those in California and other areas of the western United States. But gold is found primarily in New South Wales around the Melbourne region and in Western Australia around Perth.

Originally settled as a timber and cattle region, it was tourism and surfing on the magnificent Gold Coast beaches that led to the naming of the city. In 1925, legendary local Jim Cavil built the Surfers Paradise Hotel on Main Beach Australia and the rest is history. While the original Surfers Paradise Hotel is long gone, today you will find that the greatest concentration of Gold Coast hotels and beach resorts are found along this beach and the area is still known as Surfers Paradise. It was the boom in tourism that led to the renaming of the town in 1958.

While Main Beach Australia is the most well known, there are several other beautiful beaches on the Gold Coast that offer surfing and scuba diving, great restaurants and chic boutiques, and miles and miles of sand and sun. The city boasts about 50 stunning miles of beaches. Broadbeach is known for its shopping; Budds Beach is a favorite for families with children; Runaway Beach is a favorite for sailing; and Surfers Paradise is the center for fun, with great restaurants, theme parks, and plenty of special events.

Main Beach Australia is actually its own unique neighborhood, and the most "elite" of the tourist areas. This is where the most deluxe luxury hotels are located, including the incredibly sumptuous Palazzo Versace. There are theme parks here as well, most notably Sea World that is similar to the one in San Diego, California.

At the far northern tip of Gold Coast Australia are North and South Stradbroke Islands, coastal islands largely consisting of a large conservation park. South Stradbroke boasts hundreds of wild wallabies, and both islands have lovely beaches and secluded coves protected by rocky outcroppings. Tiring of the beaches on the Gold Coast is not easy, but if you ever want a different experience, there are numerous tours available into the rainforest of the hinterland national parks to the west. Many of these include cultural exchange with the Aboriginal peoples who have called this place home for millennia. Transportation for these is often by four-wheel drive vehicle, and most tours include a qualified bush guide naturalist.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is located in Townsville, Queensland. Tourism accounts for the majority of the area's revenue stream, and as such the area is definitely well prepared for both local and international travelers. Great Barrier Reef diving, snorkeling, fishing, yachting, and surfing are just a few of the fun ways to enjoy Marine Park.

The reef itself is the world's largest coral reef, made up of about 900 islands and 3000 coral reefs, stretching along an area more than 2000 kilometers long. In 1770 James Cook became the first European to encounter the natural wonder, which is believed to have been growing for the past 18,000 years. In more recent years, international guests have been enjoying the beauty of the reef right along side the locals through a variety of activities.

Great Barrier Reef diving is incredibly popular, and the area is one of the most diverse underwater systems to explore in the world. Equipment for both diving and snorkeling can be rented at a number of spots near Marine Park, and patrons are of course welcome to bring their own gear if they have it. There are even scuba diving classes available for beginners. When diving around the Australia Great Barrier Reef, it is especially important to take all possible precautions to avoid damaging the reef. Taking coral from the reef as a souvenir is in fact a legal offense, as is deliberately damaging the coral in any way. Be sure to study up on how to avoid trespassing while enjoying Great Barrier Reef diving.

Another popular activity the Great Barrier Reef is boating. Private yachts are available for day trips, as are fishing trawlers. Both of these activities tend to be more expensive ways to enjoy the Great Barrier Reef, and boaters of all types are encouraged to pay close attention to guidelines regarding private boats. The area is high traffic for commercial vehicles. Small cruising ships also run day trips, as well as overnight and extended trips. There are a variety of reef destinations to choose from, depending on the amount of time you'd like to spend on the water. There is a limit to the number of vessels allowed on the water at any given time, so it's a good idea to book your trip well in advance.

Motorized sports, such as jet-skiing and water-skiing vehicles, are allowed, but only in designated areas. You may not use these vehicles as transport to or from any other areas in the park. Facts on the Great Barrier Reef are available through many different sources. Local citizens, as well as surf and diving instructors, are also great sources for facts on the Great Barrier Reef.

The Australia Great Barrier Reef is truly one of the most gorgeous sites in the world. If your travel plans take you anywhere near the area, it will be well worth your time to make a stop. Whether you choose to go Great Barrier Reef diving, snorkeling, fishing, hang out on the beach, or just get some facts on the Great Barrier Reef, the Australia Great Barrier Reef will be a memorable experience.

Whitsunday Islands

The Whitsunday Islands are a group of 74 tropical islands off the Queensland coast and the resort town of Airlie Beach located about 250 miles south of Cairns and 560 miles north of Brisbane. Only eight of these islands are inhabited, and a substantial percentage of their area makes up one of the country's many national parks. Things to do in the Whitsunday Islands include numerous activities, both on the pristine uninhabited islands and around the beautiful resorts of those islands with populations. Whitehaven Beach on the largest of the islands, Whitsunday Island, is one of the finest beaches in this country that is known for its long stretches of beautiful beaches.

Hamilton Island is the country's largest island resort. It boasts an airport with direct flights from Brisbane, Melbourne, and Sydney, as well as from Cairns, Prosepine, Airlie Beach, and Mackay. Other transportation is by boat. There is high-speed catamaran service from Airlie Beach as well as numerous day trips from the mainland for visitors not staying in the islands. Since sailing and yacht charts are popular all along the Australia coast, there are also marinas for those who arrive in their own vessel. The most deluxe of the Whitsunday Island accommodation is located here. There is even a world-class golf course here.

Other Australia beach resorts and beach hotels are located on the other seven inhabited islands. The *Daydream Island Resort* boasts a full-service spa, a manmade natural aquarium made of a network of reef lagoons, mini-golf, and a scenic open-air movie theater, even a wedding chapel. The *Hayman Island Resort* is famous for its internationally respected chefs who ply their art in six restaurants. The *Hook Island Wilderness Resort* has its own underwater observatory. *Lindeman Island* is home to the country's only Club Med, and Paradise Bay on Long Island boasts an intimate and deluxe eco-lodge. There is even Whitsunday Island accommodation for backpackers and budget travelers at the *Koala Adventure Island Resort* on South Molle Island. Here you can book charming bungalows for two as well as dormitory-style bunk rooms. One of the

things to do in the Whitsunday Islands is get in some hiking on the trails of the tropical forests of the national park.

Daintree Rainforest

The Daintree Rainforest is located north of the city of Cairns, Australia, in Queensland. Daintree is the most diverse Australian rainforest, as well as the most diverse in the world. With thousands of different plants, animals, birds, and reptiles, the Daintree is truly the most unique rainforest in Australia. More plant and animal species that are rare, or threatened with extinction, can be found within the 1200 square kilometers that make up this beautiful rainforest in Australia.

The history of the Daintree is long. This Australian rainforest is believed to be over 135 million years old. Evidence of violent volcanoes, incredibly harsh storms, devastating fires, and global climate changes can be found throughout the Daintree Rainforest. The forest however, has survived and even thrived. Today the Daintree is one of the last protected areas of rainforest with so much wide diversity. Human interaction is carefully monitored to ensure the safety and success of the Daintree Rainforest for years to come.

One great way to experience this thrilling Australian rainforest is through hiking. There are strict guidelines for hikers to follow for the protection of the forest and the safety of hikers. Trash should not be left in the forest, and hikers are encouraged to travel in a group or with another person. Also, it is requested that you do not leave the marked trails. Not only is this a quick way to become lost, you run the risk of damaging the forest itself. Be sure to bring plenty of water and snacks, and of course appropriate clothing and gear.

When choosing your desired hike, take ability and time into consideration. The shortest hike along the Mardja Botanical Walk is about a half an hour, ranging up to the longest hike up to Mount Sorrow Ridge, which is about a six hour trip. For the longer hike, be sure that you know what you are in for. It is generally a good idea to start walking as soon as it becomes light, to avoid any chance of getting stuck in the dark. In addition to using caution along the walk, you'll want to be sure not to take anything from the forest. The Daintree Rainforest is a balanced environment, and the least amount of human impact will keep the forest open for years to come.

Ningaloo Reef

Ningaloo Reef is located off the northwest coast of Australia, and is the country's largest fringing reef. While some of the individual Great Barrier Reef formations are fringing reefs, there is a basic difference between the two. The depth of the lagoon behind a true fringing reef (the water between the shore and reef) is generally less than 35 feet. Fringing reefs are also generally close to shore, and this is the country's largest reef that is very close to the mainland. Ningaloo Reef diving allows you to virtually step off the beaches and walk onto the reef. It is the whale sharks at Ningaloo Reef and the incredible scuba diving with this largest fish in the world that are the draws of this very rare place.

Hugging the shoreline and virtually untouched for millennia, the protected marine park of Ningaloo Reef is more than 160 miles long. It is blessed with more than 500 tropical fish species and is made up of thousands of species of coral. Endangered loggerhead, green, and hawksbill sea turtles nest on the beaches, and you can wade up to your knees in the shallow waters of the lagoon between the shore and reef with a dazzling rainbow of colorful tropical fish tickling your toes and darting between your legs. This means that although scuba diving with whale sharks at Ningaloo Reef is out of the reach of most young children, they can enjoy this fairy tale marine wonderland quite safely.

However, it is the sea life beyond the reef that is world famous. Here is where the gentle giants of the sea — the whale sharks at Ningaloo Reef — gather to feed. If you want to know when to go for this

remarkable experience, the seasonal shark feeding occurs from March to June. During the winter months, this is a migratory route for humpback whales, dugongs, manta rays, and dolphins. Superb sailing on whale watching tours is possible during this time.

Ningaloo Reef diving is more than a Perth day trip, as the region is about 750 miles north of the fourth largest city in Australia. This is an extremely undeveloped region, and there have been international efforts to prevent developers from building extensive beach resorts here. One in particular was planned for Maud's Landing, an important loggerhead nesting ground, in the early 2000s, and was prevented largely due to the efforts of prize-winning local author Tim Winton. Other things to do at Ningaloo Reef include snorkeling, trips on semi-submersibles for those who want to view the underwater wonders without getting too wet, sea kayaking, and fishing.

MAIN CITIES

Canberra

Canberra, Australia's capital city, is located in the Australian Capital Territory 280km south west of Sydney and 660km north east of Melbourne. Built in the early 1900s, Canberra was planned by American architect, Walter Burley Griffin, who won an international competition to design the city. His plan focused on geometrical, circular patterns and incorporating Australia's natural landscape.

Canberra is known as Australia's bush capital due to the large amount of natural vegetation in and around the city. One of Canberra's main natural attractions is the Floriade festival, Australia's biggest flower festival, a colourful celebration of flowers held each spring.

The Australian federal capital also holds several important historical and cultural institutions. Canberra visitors and locals relish in spectacular exhibitions held at Canberra's National Gallery of Australia, the National Museum of Australia and the National Library of Australia.

There are many free events and festivals through out the year. Two major are the National Multicultural Festival celebrates Australia's cultural diversity with music, dance, theatre and food and the National Folk festival embraces the history of music in Australia with plenty of entertainment and singing.

But Canberra is most known as the political centre of Australia. Both the Parliament and Old Parliament House are located in Canberra, and it's not surprising that the federal government is Canberra's largest single employer. For more significant buildings to visit in Canberra, the Commonwealth government buildings, such as the High Court of Australia and the Royal Australian Mint, are there for you to see.

Other places in Canberra worth a peek are the National Dinosaur Museum, Australian National Botanic Gardens and the Telstra Tower.

Sidney

Sydney, known as the Harbor City, has both a unique landscape, as well as a unique history. The sheltered harbor of Sydney Australia made Sydney an excellent home for indigenous peoples, and later a useful port for Europeans. On January 26th, 1788, 11 ships from Britain arrived in Sydney Cove. Called the "First Fleet", these ships carried British soldiers, along with British prisoners, sent to establish a new colony. Modern Sydney still bears the mark of these early settlers. Some of Sydney's main streets run along the original trails carved out by European settlers.

Today, Sydney is known for its beautiful harbor, along with the Harbour Bridge that graces its waters. The Sydney Opera House is also a famous landmark for Australians and tourists alike, and an excellent stop on your Australia sightseeing journey. The Opera House is open year round, and features some of the best in

world dance, music, and theatre. Travel in Sydney is not complete without touring the house, or maybe even seeing a show. You may even purchase tickets online when planning your trip. For travelers who are patrons of the arts, the Sydney Arts Festival is also a great option. Held each January during Australia's summer, this event is completely free of charge. The arts festival is an exciting way to experience both European and Indigenous tradition, along with music, dance, and arts from around the world.

Art from around the world can also be found in local shopping centers throughout Sydney. One of the most popular is the Queen Victoria Building. The Queen Victoria Building is a landmark in its own right, as well as being one of Sydney's premier shopping centers, both for personal and gift shopping.

Another of the more popular Sydney attractions, and a great stop as you continue Australia sightseeing in Sydney, is the beautiful stretch of beaches along the city's coast. Tourists come to Sydney from around the world to surf, sun bathe, and scuba dive in and around the waters of Sydney. Another popular activity as you travel in Sydney is a Harbour Cruise. Cruises are available for both lunch and dinner, and guests will have a chance to stroll and dine as they sail around the beautiful harbor.

While taking your walking tour as part of your Australia sightseeing, you might happen to stroll by The Rocks, a section of Sydney once known for its squalid and disease ridden condition. Things have changed since the days of the prison settlements, and modern day tourists will see none of the destitute buildings of the past. In the early 1970's, The Rocks was completely renovated, to create one of the most charming neighborhoods for shopping and enjoying local cafes. The history alone makes this an interesting stop when visiting Sydney Australia.

Melbourne

Melbourne has little in common with some of Australia's other major cities, which started as prison settlements. A group of European settlers formed Melbourne when they broke away from New South Wales to start their own city. Rather than the hackneyed trails slashed through the brush, as in Sydney, the city of Melbourne Australia was carefully planned from the beginning. Travelers will find the Melbourne of today well organized, with plenty of room for parks and aptly named roads. In fact, the original grid for the city was laid out in 1837, and, while Melbourne has certainly expanded since that time, the general blueprint remains consistent.

Melbourne is a fully modern city, with plenty to see and do. Melbourne tourist attractions include scores of both quaint and classy bars, as well as tasty restaurants with cuisine from around the world. One of the most popular places to visit in Melbourne is Melbourne Central. Melbourne Central is an expansive group of over 200 shops and cafes, with restaurants and great shopping. This is an ideal place to pick up souvenir, or even do some personal shopping, and is certainly the premier shopping center in Melbourne and one of the top Melbourne tourist attractions. If you plan to shop and eat, you'll likely need some form of transportation. As a city, Melbourne Australia is currently working to move toward relying more heavily on public transportation, as well as biking, and encourages local citizens as well as tourists to use a bus or a train whenever possible. Commuter trains, rental bikes, and bus service is available throughout the city and is often more convenient than a car, especially as a tourist.

Traveling through Melbourne, a walking or bus tour is also a great idea. Melbourne is home to quite a range of historical Victorian architecture, as well as the St James Old Cathedral, which is a popular Melbourne tourist attraction worth touring if you are in the area.

Another of the popular places to visit in Melbourne is the Melbourne International Film Festival, held each year between July and August, during the Australian winter. Touted as one of the most comprehensive international film festivals in the world, the Melbourne Film Festival brings in a diverse group of

international films each year. Passes to the film festival can be purchased for a single day, or a week of movie viewing.

One of the most famous places to visit in Melbourne is the Melbourne Cricket Ground, home to cricket matches and Australian Rules Football. The Melbourne Cricket Ground is a great place to see your favorite sports live, or possibly experience Australian Rules Football for the first time. In 2006, the Melbourne Cricket Ground hosted the Commonwealth Games, much to the pride of Melbourne inhabitants. Sometimes referred to as the, "G", the Melbourne Cricket Ground also holds the world record for the world's tallest light towers.

No matter how much time you have to spend in Melbourne Australia, the city is one of Australia's finest, and offers a great chance to tour, relax, or take in some great entertainment.

Brisbane

Brisbane is arguably one of the country's most exciting cities. The capital and largest city of the state of Queensland, Brisbane is also Australia's fastest-growing city.

Inhabited for tens of thousands of years by indigenous Aborigines, Brisbane was first discovered by Europeans in 1823, and in 1824 New South Wales declared it a penal colony until 1838, when non-convict European settlement began. Brisbane became the capital city of the newly-formed state of Queensland in 1859, and was officially incorporated as a city in 1902.

Brisbane is popular with both locals and visitors alike, and with good reason. Brisbane is home to Story Bridge, one of the few legally climbable bridges in the world. Likewise for the climbing crowd, Kangaroo Point, just south of the Story Bridge, boasts rock-climbing cliffs and great views of the city. Kangaroo Point also includes miles of bicycle pathways.

Another popular Brisbane destination is its South Bank Parklands, which were host to the World Expo 88. Here, too, visitors will be treated to famous Brisbane fireworks displays and various arts and music festivals.

Opportunity abounds for those looking to take advantage of Brisbane tours, as the city and surrounding area is abundant with things to do and see. One of the most popular among Brisbane tours is one that includes a visit to Lone Pine Sanctuary, where visitors can "hold a koala" and hand-feed kangaroos. Other Brisbane tours include highlights such as South Bank Parklands, scuba diving and snorkeling adventures, and hot air balloon rides over the city.

Brisbane is also home to plenty of shopping opportunities. In Brisbane's central business district, the Queen Street Mall offers countless restaurants, boutiques, and shops, and the Brunswick Street Mall in the neighboring suburb of Fortitude Valley is host to popular Saturday and Sunday morning open-air markets. "The Valley" is also where one will find Brisbane's Chinatown District.

Answer the questions:

1. What general topographic regions is Australia divided into?
2. What is the highest mount of Australia?
3. What is the country's most important river system?
4. Describe the climate conditions of Australia.
5. What diversity of flora and fauna is Australia famous for?
6. What is the population density of the country?
7. What are the main differences of Australian English with other variations of English?
8. Characterize the spoken Australian English.

9. What are the main religions in the country?
10. What are the main governmental institutions of Australia?
11. Characterize the economy of the country.
12. Why is Australia considered to be one of the healthiest countries in the world?
13. What types of schools are there in Australia? Is education compulsory?
14. Name the largest libraries of the country.
15. What museums are worth visiting while in Australia?
16. Describe the Australian culture.
17. What holidays and events are celebrated in Australia?
18. What foods can be considered uniquely Australian?
19. What do they usually serve for breakfast / dinner?
20. What shopping centres would you recommend to visit?
21. What Australia's attractions are the most popular among tourists?
22. What Australia's beaches are among the world's most exciting?
23. Why is the Great Barrier Reef such an attractive destination for tourists?
24. What is Whitesunday Islands famous for?
25. What activities do tourists visit Australia for?
26. What events and festivals take place in Canberra?
27. Do you think Sidney is worth visiting? Why or why not?
28. Would you recommend Melbourn to explore? Why or why not?
29. Why is Brisbane one of the country's most exciting cities?
30. Would you recommend visit Australia? Why or why not?

Write a short summary of top Australia's sights and things to do.

Make a presentation on:

- a) Popular Tourist Destinations of Australia;
- b) Australian Beaches;
- c) Sidney City Tour;
- d) Australian Cuisine.

Promote Australia as a tourist destination.

NEW ZEALAND

CAPITAL: Wellington

AREA: 268,680 sq km (103,738 sq mi)

POPULATION: around 4 mln

ANTHEM: *God Save the Queen* and *God Defend New Zealand* have, since 1977, enjoyed equal status.

HOLIDAYS: New Year's Day, 1 January; Waitangi Day, 6 February; Anzac Day, 25 April; Queen's Birthday, 1st Monday in June; Labor Day, 4th Monday in October; Christmas Day, 25 December; Boxing Day, 26 December. Movable holidays are Good Friday and Easter Monday. Each province has a holiday on its own anniversary day.

TIME: 12 midnight = noon GMT.

LOCATION, SIZE, AND EXTENT

Situated in the southwest Pacific Ocean, New Zealand proper, with a total area of 268,680 sq km (103,738 sq mi), consists of the North Island, covering 114,669 sq km (44,274 sq mi) including small islands nearby; the South Island, 149,883 sq km (57,870 sq mi); Stewart Island, 1,746 sq km (674 sq mi); and various minor, outlying islands. Comparatively, the area occupied by New Zealand is about the size of the state of Colorado. The Chatham Islands, lying 850 km (528 mi) e of Lyttelton, on South Island, have a land area of 963 sq km (372 sq mi). Other outlying islands have a combined area of 778 sq km (about 300 sq mi). New Zealand extends 1,600 km (994 mi) nne–ssw and 450 km (280 mi) ese–wnw. It has a total coastline of 15,134 km (9,404 mi).

New Zealand's capital city, Wellington, is located on the southern tip of North Island.

TOPOGRAPHY

Less than one-fourth of the land surface of New Zealand lies below the 200-m (656 ft) contour. The mountain ranges in the North Island do not exceed 1,800 m (6,000 ft) in height, with the exception of the volcanic peaks of Egmont, or Taranaki (2,518 m/8,261 ft), Ruapehu (2,797 m/9,176 ft), Ngauruhoe (2,290 m/7,513 ft), and Tongariro (1,968 m/6,457 ft), the last three of which are still active. This volcanic system gives rise to many hot springs and geysers.

The South Island is significantly more mountainous than the North Island, but is without recent volcanic activity. The Southern Alps, running almost the entire length of the South Island from north to south, contain 19 peaks of 3,000 m (9,800 ft) or above, of which the highest is Mt. Cook or Aorangi, 3,764 m (12,349 ft).

There are also several glaciers in the Southern Alps, the largest being the Tasman Glacier, 29 km (18 mi) long and 1 km (0.6 mi) wide. The rivers are mostly swift-flowing and shallow, few of them navigable. There are many lakes, those in the South Island being particularly noted for their magnificent mountain scenery.

Seismic activity in New Zealand causes frequent earthquakes. Though most of these are moderate or light in magnitude (at 5.0 or lower on the Richter scale), there are periodic earthquakes of higher magnitudes.

CLIMATE

New Zealand has a temperate, moist ocean climate without marked seasonal variations in temperature or rainfall. The prevailing winds are westerly, with a concentration of strong winds in the Cook Strait area. The generally mountainous nature of the country, however, causes considerable variation in rainfall (e.g., between the eastern and western sides of the Southern Alps), and, by preventing stratification of air into layers of different density, results in an absence of extensive cloud sheets and a consequent high percentage of sunshine. Mean annual temperatures at sea level range from about 15°C (59°F) in the northern part of the North Island to 12°C (54°F) in the southern part of the South Island. Mean annual rainfall ranges from around 30 cm (12 in) near Dunedin to more than 800 cm (315 in) in the Southern Alps.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Like other regions separated from the rest of the world for a long period, New Zealand has developed a distinct flora. About 75% of the native flora is unique, and it includes some of the world's oldest plant forms. However, the flowering plants, conifers, ferns, and other vascular tracheophytes that constitute much of the land vegetation do show affinities with plants of the Malayan region, supporting the theory of an ancient land bridge between the two regions.

More than 250 species are common to both Australia and New Zealand. The Antarctic element, comprising more than 70 species related to forms in the flora of South America and the Southern Ocean islands, is of great interest to botanists. The kauri pine, now found only in parts of the North Island, for more than a century has been world famous for its timber. The rimu and the totara also are timber trees. Other handsome trees include the pohutukawa and other species of rata and kowhai.

New Zealand flax, formerly of great importance in the Maori economy, is found in swampy places. Undergrowth in the damp forests consists largely of ferns, of which there are 145 species; they clothe most of the tree trunks and branches, and tree ferns form part of the foliage. Tussock grass occurs on all mountains above the scrub line and over large areas in the South Island.

Apart from seals and two species of bats, New Zealand has no indigenous land mammals. Some of the land mammals introduced to New Zealand have become pests, such as the rabbit, the deer, the pig (now wild), and the Australian possum. Sea mammals include whales and dolphins.

There is a great diversity of birds, some 250 species in all, including breeding and migratory species. Among the flightless birds the most interesting is the kiwi, New Zealand's national symbol and the only known bird with nostrils at the tip of the bill instead of at the base. Other characteristic birds are the kea, a mountain parrot, and the tui, a beautiful songbird. All but one of the genera of penguins is represented in New Zealand. Several species of birds, the most famous being the Pacific godwit, migrate from breeding grounds in the Arctic Circle to spend spring and summer in New Zealand. There are many flightless insects and a diversity of small life forms.

POPULATION

The population of New Zealand in 2009 was estimated by the United Nations (UN) at 4,107,000, which placed it at number 123 in population among the 193 nations of the world. In 2005, approximately 12% of the population was over 65 years of age, with another 22% of the population under 15 years of age.

There were 97 males for every 100 females in the country. The overall population density was 15 per sq km (39 per sq mi), with nearly 75% of the population living on the North Island. The UN estimated that 86% of the population live in urban areas.

On the North Island, the capital city, Wellington, had a population of 343,000 in that year. The largest urban area, also on the North Island, is Auckland (1,152,000). Other large cities on the North Island include Hamilton (148,625), Palmerston North (70,951), and Tauranga (70,803). On the South Island, the largest cities include Christchurch (307,179) and Dunedin (109,503).

ETHNIC GROUPS

About 75% of the population is classified as New Zealand European; 15% are Maori and 6.5% are Pacific Islander. Less than 5% are Asia. The most significant minority group, the indigenous Maori people, is a Polynesian group with a distinctive culture and a well-ordered social system. Although the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) guaranteed to the Maori people all the rights and privileges of British subjects and full and undisturbed possession of their lands, these guarantees were often overlooked. As a result of war and disease, the Maori population declined to fewer than 42,000 by 1896. At the turn of the century, however, a group calling itself the Young Maori Party began to devote itself to the promotion of Maori welfare and status. Although Maori acquisition and development of land have been promoted, there is not enough land to afford a livelihood to more than about 25% of the Maori population. Thus, many Maoris leave their tribal villages to seek job opportunities in the towns and cities. By 1981, four-fifths of all Maoris lived in urban areas.

Increasing numbers of migrants from New Zealand's former colonies and from other Pacific islands have come to New Zealand. Many of these, especially the Cook Islanders, are Polynesians having ethnic and linguistic ties with the Maoris.

LANGUAGES

English is the universal language, although Maori, a language of the Polynesian group, still is spoken among the Maori population and is taught in Maori schools. It is the first language of about 50,000 Maori New Zealanders and became an official language (with English) in 1987, with the right of use in courts of law and before a number of tribunals. There are Maori-language preschools, immersion primary schools, and many radio stations.

In most respects, New Zealand English is very similar to Australian English. Both favour British spelling and choices between words given differences between American and British English. Many local words, largely borrowed from the indigenous Maori population, have arisen to describe the local flora, fauna, and the natural environment, and some other Maori words have made their way into the language.

In 1998 Oxford University Press produced a *Dictionary of New Zealand English* that it claimed was based on over 40 years of research. This research started with Harry Orsman's 1951 thesis and continued with his publishing this dictionary as the editor. To assist with and maintain this work, the New Zealand Dictionary Centre was founded in 1997.

Vocabulary

Most of the names for native flora and fauna come directly from the Maori names. Examples of native birds are of course the kiwi, as well as the kea, kakapo, tui and pukeko, the extinct giant moa, and the kotuku or white heron. There are also fish such as hoki, kahawai and terakihi, and shellfish like toheroa and paua.

Most of the native trees also have names from Maori, such as the kauri, rimu, totara, kowhai, matagouri and pohutukawa. Other vegetation with Maori names includes the kumara, a type of sweet potato.

The word *kiwi* has acquired other meanings, most commonly as an informal term for *New Zealander*, or as an adjective instead of *New Zealand*. The use of *kiwi* to refer to kiwifruit is not part of New Zealand English and will irritate many New Zealanders.

Many Maori words or phrases that describe Maori culture have become part of New Zealand English. Some of these are:

haka: a chant and (war) dance of challenge, popularised by the All Blacks rugby team, who use it to put off the opposition

hangi: a method of cooking food in a pit; or the occasion at which food is cooked this way

iwi: tribe, or peoples

mana: a combination of authority, integrity, power and prestige

marae: ceremonial meeting area in front of the meeting house; or, the entire complex surrounding this, including eating and sleeping areas

pakeha: people of non-Maori origin, especially those of European origin

whanau: extended family

Other Maori words may be recognised by most New Zealanders, but generally not used in everyday speech:

aroha: love, affection

haere mai: welcome

ka pai: good; well done

kai: food

kia ora: hello

korero: to chat; to speak in Maori

puku: belly

tangi: to mourn; or, a funeral at a marae

taniwha: legendary sea monster

tapu: sacred, taboo; to be avoided because of this

te reo: *the* tongue; the Maori language

tohunga: priest, shaman

turangawaewae: one's own turf

wairua: spirit

whakapapa: genealogy, to genealogise

There are also many non-Maori words that are unique to New Zealand English, or shared with Australia.

bach: A small holiday home, often with only one or two rooms and of simple construction. Pronounced "batch".

chip, punnet or pottle: Depending on the region, the unit by which strawberries and certain other fruit are sold.

crib: Another word for bach, more commonly used in the south of the South Island.

eh!: Used for emphasis at the end of a sentence.

electorate Parliamentary constituency

flatting sharing a flat (apartment)

footpath: Pavement or sidewalk.

footy: Football (usually Rugby Union or League, never soccer).

OE or Big OE: Overseas Experience; time spent travelling and working overseas, usually in Europe.

pavlova: A favourite meringue-like dessert made from egg whites, frequently served with cream and kiwifruit.

pom: English person (mildly derogatory).

super: old age pension scheme (from superannuation)

WOF: Warrant of Fitness test on car (similar to British MoT).

Differences from British English

The most noticeable difference in pronunciation is probably the flat "i", so that "six" is pronounced in a way sounding like "sucks". This is a part of the vowel shift that has occurred in New Zealand.

Below; the latter word is how the former word sounds-like to the ears of a non-New Zealander:

pan --> pen

pen --> pin

pin --> pun

peek --> peck

Note that many of the differences listed in this section are avoided by New Zealanders speaking "properly," as in public speaking for example, in which case the main differences are the shifted vowel sounds listed in the following section.

Additional Schwa

Typically, a New Zealander will insert the schwa to words such as *grown*, *thrown* and *mown*, resulting in *grow-en*, *throw-en* and *mo-wen*. However, *groan*, *throne* and *moan* are all unaffected meaning these word pairs can be distinguished by ear, unlike in British English.

Dropped L

The *L* sound is often dropped or pronounced as a *W* at the end of a word, or before a consonant, as in *milk* or *mill*; but the *L* would be pronounced in *milller*.

No distinction between /eə/ and /iə/

"Chair" and "cheer" (/tʃeə/, /tʃiə/) are pronounced the same way (/tʃiə/, i.e. as "cheer" in British, American or Australian English). The same occurs with "shared" and "sheared"; both are pronounced /ʃiəd/. (SAMPA used for phonetic transcriptions.)

Differences from Australian English

Although foreigners can find it hard to distinguish the New Zealand dialect from the Australian, there are differences in the pronunciation of vowel sounds, which are considerably more clipped in New Zealand English. (Canadians face a similar problem, frequently being mistaken for U.S. Americans by non-North Americans.) The main distinguishing sounds are the short 'i' and 'e', as well as words like "chance", as described below.

Short i

The short 'i' in New Zealand English is pronounced as a schwa (IPA [ə]). In Australian English, the short 'u' is the vowel closest to the New Zealand pronunciation, so an Australian hears "fush and chups" when

a New Zealander is saying "fish and chips". Conversely, the closest sound in New Zealand English to the Australian short 'i' (IPA [ɪ]) is 'ee' (IPA [i]), so New Zealanders may hear Australians talking about the "Seedney Harbour Breedge".

Recent linguistic research has suggested that this trait is sourced from dialects of English spoken by lower-class English people in the late 19th century, though why it persisted in New Zealand whilst disappearing from Australia is a mystery.

Short e

The short 'e' in New Zealand English has moved to fill in the space left by 'i', and sounds like a short 'i' itself to other English speakers. For example, you may hear New Zealanders talk about having "iggs for brickfast".

Chance, dance, etc.

The New Zealand pronunciation of words like "dance" uses the same vowel sound as the "a" in "car", i.e. [dɑnts], resembling the broad A of British English. The common Australian pronunciation rhymes with "ants", i.e. [dænts]. However, either form may be used in Australia, with the former usually used in South Australia, and common in New South Wales.

More/sure

"More" and "sure" are pronounced *mua* and *shua*, whereas in Australia they would be pronounced as *maw-a* and *shaw-a*.

Dialects within New Zealand English

Most Kiwis speak *Newzild* "as she is spoke": geographical variations appear slight, and mainly confined to individual special local words. One group of speakers, however, hold a recognised place as "talking differently": the South of the South Island (*Murihiku*) harbours a "Celtic fringe" of people speaking with a "Southland burr" in which a back-trilled "R" appears prominently. The area formed a traditional repository of immigration from Scotland.

RELIGIONS

About 55% of the total population are nominally Christian. Anglicans are the largest denomination with about 15% of the population. About 13% are Roman Catholic, 11% Presbyterians, 3% Methodists, 1% Baptist, 1% Mormon, and 1% Ratana, a Maori Christian group. Ringatu and Ratana are small Christian sects that are indigenous to New Zealand.

About 26% of the population claimed no religion. There are also small numbers of Sikhs, Taoists, Muslims, Hindus, and Rastafarians.

GOVERNMENT

New Zealand is an independent member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Like the United Kingdom, it is a constitutional monarchy, the head of state being the representative of the crown, the governor-general, who is appointed for a five-year term.

The government is democratic and modeled on that of the United Kingdom. The single-chamber legislature, the House of Representatives, has 120 members, elected by universal adult suffrage for a term of

three years. Adult male suffrage dates from 1879; adult women received the right to vote in 1893. The voting age was lowered to 18 in November 1974. Elections result in coalition governments, a two-party system usually operates. The party with a majority of members elects to the House of Representatives forms the government; the other party becomes the opposition. On his appointment, the prime minister, leader of the governing party, chooses 20 other ministers to form the cabinet. Each minister usually controls several government departments, for which he is responsible to the House of Representatives. Although the cabinet is the de facto governing body, it has no legal status. Members of the cabinet and the governor-general form the Executive Council, the highest executive body.

ECONOMY

New Zealand's economy has traditionally been based on pastoral farming. The last decades, however, have seen the beginnings of heavy industry, and there has been a large expansion in light industries such as plastics, textiles, and footwear, mostly to supply the home market. There has been a trend toward the development of resource-based industries, and the forest industry has greatly expanded. Pulp, log, and paper products are a major earner of overseas exchange.

For financing imports both of raw materials and of a high proportion of manufactured goods, New Zealand has traditionally relied on the receipts from the export of its restricted range of primary products (mainly wool, meat, and dairy products). This dependence on the income from so few commodities makes the economy vulnerable to fluctuations in their world prices, and sharp drops in these prices, as have occurred periodically, inevitably result in the restriction of imports or a substantial trade deficit.

HEALTH

For over 50 years, comprehensive health services, most of them supported by the state, have been available to all New Zealanders. About 80% of all health care costs are met by the public sector. Treatment at public hospitals is free for people ordinarily resident in New Zealand. In private hospitals, medical care is subsidized; a full range of maternity services is paid for by the Department of Health. The Health Service provides hospital treatment, maternity services from a general practitioner, most prescribed drugs, laboratory diagnostic services, dental care, and routine immunizations for children under 16, and some health appliances free of charge.

Partial benefits are paid for private hospitalization, X-ray services, physiotherapy, and hearing aids. Care is free for infants and preschool children. Most children are immunized free by their family doctors, but the Department of Health also has immunization clinics.

Public hospitals are managed under the supervision of the Minister of Health by local hospital boards, whose members are elected; all costs are borne by the state. Private hospital costs are partly paid for by the state; additional fees may be claimed from patients. Voluntary welfare organizations make valuable contributions to public health and are assisted by grants from public funds. Life expectancy at birth is 78.66 years. The principal causes of death are heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and lung and colorectal cancer.

EDUCATION

Education in New Zealand is compulsory for 10 years for children between ages 6 and 16, although most children attend school from the age of five. Public primary and secondary schools are administered by district education boards (or boards of governors) and school committees (the latter elected by householders),

under the authority of the Department of Education. Kindergartens are run either by private persons or by voluntary organizations with partial state subsidies. Primary education lasts for eight years and is given at primary and intermediate schools (the latter giving the last two years of primary education). Secondary education covers five years of study and is offered through general secondary schools, technical high schools, or consolidated schools for pupils who live in rural areas. Evening classes are given by technical and secondary schools, and adult education classes are offered by the universities. Most state schools are coeducational, but some private schools are not. The academic year runs from February to November.

There are six universities, all operating under the aegis of the University Grants Committee and the Universities Entrance Board: the University of Auckland, University of Waikato (at Hamilton), Massey University (at Palmerston North), Victoria University of Wellington, University of Canterbury (at Christchurch), and University of Otago (at Dunedin). All universities offer courses in the arts, social sciences, commerce, and science. An agricultural institution, Lincoln College, is associated with the University of Canterbury. Law is offered at Auckland, Waikato, Victoria, Canterbury, and Otago, and medicine at Auckland and Otago. The Central Institute of Technology, near Wellington, is the leading institution in a network of 24 polytechnic institutions. There are evening classes for adults interested in continuing their education at secondary schools, institutes and community centers. University tuition fees are low, and financial assistance is given to applicants who have passed special qualifying examinations. In 2008, about 74% of the tertiary age population were enrolled in some type of higher education program; 59% for men and 90% for women. The adult literacy rate has been estimated at about 99%.

LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS

The Alexander Turnbull National Library of New Zealand was founded in 1966 by the amalgamation of three state libraries and service divisions. It contains a general lending collection of over 530,000 volumes, plus a large number of materials in special collections. Its Extension Division provides services to public and school libraries throughout the country, and the Library School offers courses for the training and certification of librarians. The two largest university libraries are at the University of Auckland (1.6 million volumes) and the University of Canterbury at Christchurch (571,000). The largest public library systems are in Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin, and Wellington.

Outstanding art galleries and museums are the Auckland City Art Gallery (European and New Zealand paintings); the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch (ornithology, anthropology, and history); the Dunedin Public Art Gallery (paintings, period furniture, and china); the Otago Museum, Dunedin (ethnography, classical antiquities, ceramics); and the National Museum, Wellington (botany, ethnology, history). The nation's largest collection of Maori and Polynesian artifacts is found in the War Memorial Museum in Auckland. The Auckland Museum, founded in 1852, also has a fine collection of Maori artifacts. There is also a Museum of Puppets in Auckland and a Melanesian Mission House highlighting the Christian conversion of the indigenous peoples. There are hundreds of other historical and anthropological museums and sites throughout the country.

CULTURE

The culture of New Zealand has developed from the nation's distinct demographics, its unique geography and ecology, and Māori and colonial history.

Māori voyagers reached the islands of New Zealand some time before 1300, though exact dates are uncertain. Over the ensuing centuries of Māori expansion and settlement, Māori culture diverged from its Polynesian roots. Māori established separate tribes, built fortified villages (Pā), hunted and fished, traded

commodities, developed agriculture, arts and weaponry, and kept a detailed oral history. Regular European contact began approximately 200 years ago, and British immigration proceeded rapidly during the nineteenth century.

The colonists had a dramatic effect on the indigenous Maori, bringing religion, technology, and the English language. In 1840 Māori leaders signed the Treaty of Waitangi, intended to enable the tribes to live peacefully with the colonists. However after several incidents, the treaty was ignored and the New Zealand land wars broke out from 1845, with Māori suffering a loss of land and identity, while also increasingly becoming a minority group over the following century. Despite such setbacks, Māori culture has regained much of its lost influence in recent decades.

European New Zealanders (Pākehā), despite their location far from Europe, retained strong cultural ties to "Mother England". These ties were weakened by the demise of the British Empire, ANZAC battles in Gallipoli and Egypt, and loss of special access to British meat and dairy markets. Pākehā began to forge a separate identity influenced by their pioneering history, a rural lifestyle and New Zealand's unique environment. Pākehā culture became prevalent after the land wars, but after sustained political efforts, biculturalism and the Treaty of Waitangi became part of the school curriculum in the late 20th century, to promote understanding between Māori and Pākehā.

More recently, New Zealand culture has been broadened by globalization and immigration from the Pacific Islands, East Asia and South Asia. European and Māori remain the two largest ethnicities, but the large Polynesian population in Auckland has prompted the observation that Auckland is now the largest Polynesian city in the world. However, the country outside of Auckland is still much less heterogeneous, with big parts of the South Island remaining predominantly of European descent.

New Zealand marks two national days of remembrance, Waitangi Day and ANZAC Day, and also celebrates holidays during or close to the anniversaries of the founding dates of each province. The national anthem, "God Defend New Zealand" is often sung with alternating Māori and English verses. Many citizens prefer to minimise ethnic divisions, simply calling themselves New Zealanders or Kiwis.

The *Māori* are the indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand (Aotearoa). They probably arrived in south-western Polynesia in several waves at some time before 1300, although dates of up to 2000 years ago still attract some support. The Māori settled the islands and developed a distinct culture.

Maori oral history tells of a long voyage from Hawaiki (the mythical homeland in tropical Polynesia) in large ocean-going canoes (waka). Māori mythology is a distinctive corpus of gods and heroes, sharing some Polynesian motifs. Some notable figures are Rangi and Papa, Māui, and Kupe.

Central to many cultural events is the marae, where families and tribes gather for special occasions, such as pōwhiri or tangi. Māori often call themselves "tāngata whenua" (people of the land), placing particular importance on a lifestyle connected to land and sea. Communal living, sharing, and living off the land are strong traditional values.

The distinct values, history, and worldview of Maori are expressed through traditional arts and skills such as haka, tā moko, waiata, carving, weaving, and poi. The concept of tapu (meaning taboo or sacred) is also a strong force in Māori culture, applied to objects, people, or even mountains.

Europeans migrated to New Zealand in increasing numbers from the late 18th century, and the weapon technologies and diseases they introduced destabilised Māori society. After 1840 and the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori lost much of their land and mana (prestige and authority), entering a period of cultural and numerical decline. However their population began to increase again from the late 19th century, and a cultural revival began in the 1960s, sometimes known as the Maori Renaissance.

Pākehā culture (usually synonymous with *New Zealand European*) derives mainly from that of the British settlers who colonised New Zealand in the nineteenth century. Although it is recognisably related to British culture, it has always had distinct differences, and these have increased as time has gone on. Things which distinguish Pākehā culture from British culture include higher levels of egalitarianism, anti-intellectualism, and the idea that most people can do most things if they put their minds to it. Within Pākehā culture are sub-cultures derived from Irish, Italian and other European groups, as well as various non-ethnic subcultures.

It has been claimed that Pākehā do not actually have a culture, or if they do it is not a distinct one. Part of the problem is that high culture is often mistaken for culture in general, and the lack of recognition historically given to New Zealand's artists, writers and composers is seen as evidence of a lack of culture. In contrast, Pākehā pop culture is generally highly visible and often valued. This is observable in the common belief that kiwiana, a category of kitsch 1950s-style artifacts, is a defining cultural touchstone.

Others argue that belief in the 'absence' of culture in NZ is a symptom of white privilege, allowing members of a dominant group to see their culture as 'normal' or 'default', rather than as a specific position of relative advantage. One of the goals of Pākehā anti-racist groups of the 1980s was to enable Pākehā to see their own culture as such, rather than thinking what they did was normal and what other people did was 'ethnic' and strange.

Events and Holidays

If you're looking to add some extra substance and character to your New Zealand vacation, you can always try to schedule your trip around one or more of the fun and exciting New Zealand festivals, events, and holidays. There are so many different ones to choose from throughout the year, so you shouldn't find it hard to include at least one. Many New Zealand holidays are celebrated across the land, so you can experience them no matter where you find yourself here. The more specific New Zealand events or festivals that are celebrated in the different towns and cities might be so tempting that you find yourself hopping around to enjoy a few. Taking in one of the New Zealand festivals, events, or holidays is a good way to learn more about the country and its different regions. Many times, local culinary achievements are highlighted, so you can sample some of the delicious New Zealand food and wines. While you can plan your upcoming trip around a festival, event, or holiday, you might just be lucky enough to catch one or more by chance, which is always a wonderful surprise. So keep your mind, ears, and eyes open for your chance to celebrate something special in New Zealand.

Should you want to enjoy a fun festival in Auckland, the Pasifika Festival is sure to please. So popular a festival in New Zealand this is, that it spawned a month-long celebration of events in Auckland known as the Celebrate Pasifika program. Auckland has the largest Polynesian population of any city in the world, and every year in March, their rich culture is on display in Auckland for all the world to enjoy. The main 2-day Pasifika Festival celebrates music, food and culture, and it is surely something you won't want to miss if you're in Auckland at the time. Winter enthusiasts who are mourning the ending of their favorite season in the Northern Hemisphere can always head to Queenstown, New Zealand in late June. This is when this dazzling city is celebrating the 10-day long Queenstown Winterfestival. It's quite the bash, with live music, food, fireworks, frisbee golf tournaments, and icy lake swimming among the festivities.

In the capital city of Wellington, one of the more peculiar New Zealand events takes place in mid-September. The Montana World of WearableArt Awards is certainly something to behold. This is not your average fashion show, and you never know quite what you might see next. Some of the most outrageous outfits known to man either disgust or dazzle patrons during this event, so prepare to let your jaw hit the floor. Film buffs can include a New Zealand Film Festival on their lists of New Zealand events. The New

Zealand Film Festival visits some 16 different cities, so you'll have the chance to make up for one you might have missed with another. Auckland is a top place to enjoy the New Zealand Film Festival on the North Island. On the South Island, the charming city of Dunedin might be where you will head. Both start in July, the Dunedin International Film Festival most often seeing some days extend into August.

If culinary pursuits are something you enjoy, the New Zealand food and wine scene won't let you down. New Zealand's food is inspired by a mix of cultures, from Polynesian to Scottish, and its wine is some of the best in the world. Food and/or wine festivals are among the most plentiful New Zealand festivals, which are good news to most peoples' ears, palates, and stomachs. One of the more renowned New Zealand food and wine festivals is the February Marlborough Food and Wine Festival. The Marlborough region is found on the northeast side of the South Island, and as pretty much everywhere else in New Zealand, the scenery here is quite splendid. Marlborough is a big part of the modern-day wine industry in New Zealand, producing its famed Sauvignon Blanc beginning in the late 1970's. Great wines, savory food, and live entertainment combine to make this one of the premier New Zealand events around. Other New Zealand festivals celebrate sports, arts and culture, Nature and the outdoors, and music.

In addition to the many great New Zealand festivals, the New Zealand holidays can be joy to take part in. February 6 is the national day of New Zealand, and it's known as Waitangi Day. This main entry among the New Zealand holidays marks one of the more important dates in New Zealand history. The Treaty of Waitangi was officially signed on February 6, 1840, and it's heralded as the country's founding document. Waitangi Day is celebrated all over the country, so you don't necessarily have to head somewhere special to enjoy it. New Zealand events can range from sporting matches, to theatrical performances. Catching a concert at Eden Park in Mount Eden can be just as exciting as taking in a rugby match. Cricket is just as big as rugby here, and if you've never caught a cricket match before, doing so in New Zealand is quite an experience. One thing is for sure in New Zealand, and that is the fact that you should never get bored. The New Zealand festivals, events, and holidays only help to make New Zealand a most complete travel destination.

CUISINE

New Zealand cuisine is characterised by its freshness and diversity. Diversity is owed to its relative youth, in world terms, which brings a willingness to experiment with food. Freshness is owed to its surrounding ocean and fertile lands. Its distinctiveness is more in the way New Zealanders eat - generally preferring as relaxed and unaffected as possible.

New Zealand's cuisine has been described as Pacific Rim, drawing inspiration from Europe, Asia, Polynesia and its indigenous people, the Maori. For dishes that have a distinctly New Zealand style, there's lamb, pork and cervena (venison), salmon, crayfish (lobster), Bluff oysters, paua (abalone), mussels, scallops, pipis and tuatua (both are types of New Zealand shellfish); kumara (sweet potato); tamarillo and feijoa; and pavlova, the national dessert.

Casual Kiwi cuisine

The New Zealand summer sees many eat outdoors, often in a barbecue setting. Kiwi barbecues - featuring New Zealand beef, lamb and seafood - are a big part of the culture, and typify the laid-back nature of the New Zealand people.

A Maori specialty is the hangi (pronounced hung-ee), a pit in which meats or fish are cooked with vegetables. A deep hole is dug in the ground, lined with red-hot stones and covered with vegetation. The food is then placed on top. The whole oven is sprinkled with water and sealed with more vegetation. The hole is then filled with earth and left to steam for several hours. Traditionally, men dig and prepare the hole, and

women prepare the food to go in it. All members of an extended family (whanau) help out for such a feast. The occasion is relaxed, friendly and fun, with people often eating the meal under a marquee.

New Zealand cuisine experience is incomplete without enjoying traditional fish and chips served wrapped in paper.

New Zealand dishes include: fish and chips, Colonial Goose (a surprisingly effective preparation of roast leg of lamb); desserts: Pavlova (a light and fluffy meringue dessert named after the ballet dancer, Anna Pavlova), Lamingtons (a type of sponge cake (or more traditionally, butter cake) squares, coated in a layer of chocolate icing or strawberry jam, then desiccated coconut), Anzac biscuits.

Perhaps even better known than New Zealand lamb, mussels and other foods are the country's wines. There are 10 major wine-producing areas in New Zealand, with Marlborough famed for its Sauvignon Blanc, Gisborne for its Chardonnay, and Central Otago and Martinborough building a reputation for Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. Hawke's Bay is known for its bold Cabernets and Auckland's Waiheke Island is home to one of the top 20 Cabernet blends in the world. Marlborough and Hawke's Bay are New Zealand's two premium wine-growing regions.

New Zealand wine tours

Maybe it's the climate and soil that makes the New Zealand wines so good. Perhaps it's the dedication to quality that helps to produce splendid bottle after splendid bottle. Of all the New Zealand wines, Sauvignon Blanc is the frontrunner, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't treat yourself to the other varietals. From the Pinot Noir, to the Riesling, the New Zealand wines are done right. The contrasting settings found in the different regions of New Zealand help the country to produce the variety of wine that it does, and most of the varietals enjoy a slow ripening period. This helps to give them a distinctive bouquet all their own.

New Zealand wine tours are up there with some of the best in the world. If you are the kind of wine lover who dreams of trips to destinations like Napa or Tuscany, then you might as well add New Zealand to your list of hopefuls. If you've already been to other great worldly wine destinations and have yet to savor the New Zealand wines, then it's high time you plan a few New Zealand wine tours. Since most of New Zealand's top wineries are found near the coast, you can imagine the range of views and area activities that can be enjoyed on the side. The Auckland area is a top New Zealand wine-producing region. You'll also find Waiheke Island to have quite a bit of merit itself. The wines here that earn the highest praises are Chardonnay, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon. Waiheke Island is known to produce some wonderful red wines, such as Cabernet Franc and Merlot. The first vines to ever be planted in New Zealand were in the Northland region. Found north of Auckland, the Northland has producing New Zealand wines for almost 200 years. The Bay of Islands and Kaitaia are wonderful places to visit, if not only for the wines, then also for the beaches and area activities.

The best known New Zealand wine region is Marlborough, which is found on the northeast coast of the South Island. The first vines here weren't planted until 1973, but it only took some 20 years for the region to move its way to the top. The Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough is some of the best produced anywhere in the world, and you can enjoy it firsthand at the Marlborough Food and Wine Festival. It's one of the top New Zealand festivals, highlighting a number of gastronomical delights. For those who like Pinot Noir, head to the southeast coast of the North Island. It's here that you will find Martinborough, where every bottle of Pinot Noir seems to be amazing. There are more wonderful New Zealand wine regions to explore, and all of them are prime destinations for New Zealand wine tours. New Zealand Garden and wine tours are becoming more and more popular, and for good reason. You can book New Zealand garden and wine tours for a half or full

day, or enjoy extended tours where your personal guide will escort you to some of the best regions and wineries.

SHOPPING

New Zealand shopping might or might not be the main focus of your New Zealand vacation, but either way, it's a joy to discover. Sure, most of the New Zealand travel brochures highlight the country's natural beauty and its wealth of outdoor activities, and for good purpose, but the New Zealand shopping also deserves a nod. The best shopping in New Zealand can be had in its major cities and tourist destinations. From high-quality glass art works, to a special book that you thought you'd never find, New Zealand shopping can unveil a range of delights. If you want it, you can probably find it while shopping in New Zealand, so save up some extra shopping funds before your New Zealand trip, and help yourself to a few choice goods along the way.

Before you do any shopping in New Zealand, you'll have to familiarize yourself with the New Zealand currency. The New Zealand dollar is the New Zealand currency, and it comes in 100 cent denominations. You can exchange any foreign currency you might have at the Bank of New Zealand. You'll find a 24-hour branch at the Auckland Airport, and it's conveniently located in the arrivals area. Other banks and various hotels can also change your money into New Zealand currency. Banks tend to offer the best exchange rates, and should you use your credit card, you'll also get a good rate. You can also get some New Zealand currency from the numerous ATM machines found around the country and at all the major tourist areas.

The largest city in New Zealand is Auckland, and if New Zealand shopping is on your itinerary here, you'll enjoy a myriad of great shops and shopping areas. High Street is the place to go for high-culture fashionables, and you'll find a nice array of upscale boutiques in the suburb of Parnell. In downtown Auckland and at the Auckland Airport, you can hit the DFS Galleria for duty free shopping that is sure to put a smile on your face. Designer boutiques, luxury accessories, and fine jewelry are just some of what makes shopping at the DFS Galleria such a joy. If you want to do some Auckland, New Zealand shopping at a nice, big mall, you can always head to St. Luke's Shopping Centre. In east Auckland, the Botany Town Centre is a shopper's haven, boasting not only more than 150 stores, but award-winning architecture as well. If you are having a good time in the capital city of Wellington, you can enjoy an experience that is certainly on par with Auckland. The Lambton Quay shopping area is not only one of the top shopping places in Wellington; it's one of the best in the country. A myriad of interesting shops await you here, and they are involved in just about every business or industry, from fashion to literature. Willis Street also offers some great shops in Wellington, and the Cuba Mall is the place to head if you are up for some more risqué stores.

If shopping in New Zealand is your goal and you have a nice budget to work with, Queenstown just might offer the most elitist kinds of shops. Though you are paying high prices here for a lot of the goods, they are top notch. As the saying goes, "you get what you pay for". Sometimes you just have to shell a little extra out to get something that is actually worth buying. Anyways, if your South Island trip doesn't take you to Queenstown, but to Christchurch instead, worry not, the shopping here is worthy of satisfying even the most seasoned shoppers. Fans of the arts will surely not want to miss the Christchurch Arts Centre Galleria. On the weekends in Christchurch, the Arts Centre Market offers an eclectic mix of goods, to say the least. You can find a bunch of nice boutique shops in Christchurch, some of the best of which are found on Victoria Street, at Merivale Mall, and at Cashel Mall. Further north on the South Island, the popular vacation destination of Nelson is consistently recognized for its arts and crafts shopping. Many artists live in the area, and you'll find plenty of pottery studios here. A nifty arts and crafts item from Nelson, New Zealand is not only bound to spruce up your home. It will also probably make for a most interesting conversation pick.

The Maori culture of New Zealand is a part of the country's greater culture, and if you're up for a unique New Zealand shopping experience, you can always head to the geothermic, tourist-satisfying city of Rotorua. You'll find the greatest concentration of Maori people here, and if you can't make one of the Maori art festivals or events, worry not, as you can pick up their hand-made wares any time of the year. Shopping in New Zealand certainly is a joy, and as you can see, there are some wonderful places to spend your newfound New Zealand currency. Keeping your eyes out always for good deals and interesting items can add excitement to your New Zealand vacation, even if you're just perusing one of the shops at one of the many great New Zealand museums.

TOURISM, TRAVEL, AND RECREATION

New Zealand draws many thousands of tourists to its shores because of the beauty, diversity, and compactness of its natural attractions and its varied sporting facilities. There are 14 national parks; of these, Fiordland is the largest, with some portions still unexplored.

Te Urewera, noted for its forests and bird life, is the park in which early Maori culture is most strongly preserved; Tongariro includes two active volcanoes and is an important ski resort; and Mount Cook National Park includes Tasman Glacier, the largest glacier outside the polar regions. New Zealand has numerous thermal spas, particularly in the Rotorua area, which also offers

Traditional arts and crafts may be observed in Maori villages. The Waitomo Cave, on the North Island, is lit by millions of glowworms and may be toured all year. Lake Taupo and its streams form one of the world's richest trout fishing areas; Christchurch is home to one of the world's finest botanical gardens. Skiing is available on both the North and South Islands, and good deep-sea fishing along the North Island coast. New Zealand has first-class golf courses. Spectator sports include horse racing, football (soccer), cricket, and rugby.

All overseas visitors need passports valid for at least three months beyond their intended stay in New Zealand. Visas are not required for Australian citizens with Australian passports or nationals of the 50 countries who hold visa waivers. There are no vaccination requirements. Travelers stayed an average of two nights.

Found some 1,000 miles southeast of Australia, New Zealand is a world unto itself. This place is dynamic and intriguing, majestic and beautiful. You could employ any and every positive adjective when trying to describe New Zealand, but ultimately, you'll find that no words can do it justice. New Zealand is the kind of destination that you have to see to believe, and even then, you'll still find yourself rubbing your eyes from time to time in disbelief. Oh, yes, to say that New Zealand has it all would be an understatement. There are so many possible things to do here that it seems you could take one-hundred New Zealand vacations and still have plenty left on your plate. New Zealand travel offers stunning mountain views, golden sand beaches, savory and delectable food and wine, a vibrant culture to explore, and so much more. Treat yourself to a New Zealand trip soon, and see just why so many people who visit here end up coming back again. It's almost hard to believe that anyone could ever leave.

As pretty as New Zealand's natural landscape is, it's hard to think that its cities and towns could manage to steal visitor attention, but they manage to do it by offering plenty of great New Zealand attractions themselves. In cities like Auckland, Wellington, and Queenstown, you can shop until you drop, dine until you don't have room, find adventure around every turn, and so much more. On a New Zealand trip, you'll also want to learn all you can about the native Maori people, who were the first to settle this privileged land. One of the best places to experience Maori culture is at the Tamaki Maori Village in Rotorua. Not only can you tour the village, but you can also see a traditional Maori performance and enjoy a just-as-traditional Maori

"hangi", or meal. In New Zealand, you can learn all about the country and its people at one of the great New Zealand museums. In Wellington, the Museum of New Zealand -Te Papa Tongarewa is an excellent place to do just that, as is the Auckland Museum, which is strangely enough found in Auckland. Should you be hanging out in Dunedin, the Otago Settlers Museum gives insight into the days when Scottish settlers first set up camp here.

New Zealand travel certainly benefits from the beauty of the country's Great Outdoors. From top to bottom and side to side, New Zealand's landscape is both captivating and inspiring. Along the coasts, countless beaches beckon scores of people looking to enjoy a full list of water-related activities. The North Island has among its rolling and sometimes mountainous landscape volcanic expanses where bubbling pits of mud and quirky geysers are nothing unusual. Well, at least here they are not unusual. On the South Island, the Southern Alps that stretch along the west coast not only offer some of the best postcard views you'll find anywhere, they also present some of the best terrain on the planet for skiing, mountain climbing, hiking, and mountain biking. In the South Island city of Christchurch, the nearby mountains are also taken advantage of for a number of reasons, and as if Christchurch couldn't already claim enough wonderful attractions, it also often serves as a base for whale watching trips at nearby Kaikoura.

Top New Zealand Attractions

There are so many possible things to do in New Zealand that it's almost more about what you're going to have to leave out versus what you can include. The New Zealand sights are plentiful, whether you like snow-capped mountain ranges or golden sand beaches. The New Zealand attractions are just as plentiful, and there are more than enough to keep you busy during your visit. New Zealand tours are popular with tourists, and they can be both guided or non-guided. Whatever you think you might want to experience in New Zealand, there is probably a tour for it as New Zealand tours are just so darn numerous. There aren't many destinations in the world like New Zealand. Here, you can have it all and then some, or as the saying goes, "you can have your cake and eat it too." The following are suggestions for some of the most popular things to do in New Zealand, and hopefully you'll get to include one or more of them in your New Zealand vacation.

The Museum of New Zealand - Te Papa Tongarewa

There are a bunch of great New Zealand museums to choose from, and if you had to pick a best, you'd probably have to go with the Museum of New Zealand - Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington. More commonly known just as the National Museum of New Zealand, this might just be one of the world's best museums. If you can, you should visit this museum before you do anything else in New Zealand, as it tells the entire tale of the country. Some of the best Maori artifacts on the face of the Earth can be found here, and overall, it's just a great place to explore.

Milford Sound cruise

You could do a million lists of things to do in New Zealand and include this experience every time, it's that magical. The Milford Sound is a coastal inlet that is found in New Zealand's Fiordland region, and the views here are enough to make you think about pushing your flight home back an extra day or year. Cruises on the Milford Sound afford some of the most amazing views of some of the best that the Fiordland region has to offer. Keep in mind that these can fill up fast during the peak season, so you might book ahead. For some of the best natural New Zealand sights, you can't beat this one.

New Zealand Wine Tour

The New Zealand wines have been gaining international acclaim for years now, and there seems little reason to believe that the country won't continue on its route to establishing itself as one of the world's best wine-producing nations. There are nice New Zealand wineries found all over the country, with some of the best regions including the Auckland region, the Northland Region, and the Marlborough region. Since most

of the best New Zealand wineries can be found near the coast, the surrounding views are often almost too much to bear. Wine tours are certainly among the more popular and easy to arrange New Zealand tours around.

Whale Watching in Kaikoura

Seeing whales surface off the coast of Kaikoura is one of those truly magnificent New Zealand sights. Kaikoura is about a 2 to 3 hour drive from Christchurch, and it's worth everything you can do to get down here to enjoy one of the whale watching tours. Like the wine tours, these are also some of the most popular New Zealand tours. You can observe orcas (killer whales), humpback whales, sperm whales, and even the occasional blue whale from either a boat or a helicopter, and it's not something you'll soon forget.

Pasifika Festival

There are tons of great New Zealand festivals and events that you can possibly enjoy during your visit, and the Pasifika Festival in Auckland is easily among the best. Talk about experiencing some of the most invigorating New Zealand sights, sounds, and smells. This rocking event spans two days, and it is held every year in March. Celebrating all things Polynesian, it's all about the culture, the music, and of course, the food. Should you be lucky enough to attend this bash, it's like going to the Polynesian islands without having to board a plane or boat. Brilliant!

Tamaki Maori Village

Probably the best place in New Zealand to experience Maori culture is Rotorua. Found on the North Island, Rotorua is known also for its geothermic activity, and not far off is Lake Taupo, where some of the best trout fishing in the world can be found. The Tamaki Maori Village is a re-creation of an ancient Maori Village, and it's been highly-praised for years. Throw this one on your New Zealand tours list, and you'll surely thank yourself. You'll gain insight into Maori life both past and present, learn all about their myths and history, tour the village, and then take in an intriguing and impressive traditional performance. The culmination of the affair is what's known as a "hangi". A hangi is a traditional Maori meal where meat and vegetables are cooked underground with hot rocks.

Kelly Tarltons Antarctic Encounter and Underwater World

The brainchild of the late, great explorer, diver, and treasure hunter, Kelly Tarlton, this is without question one of the top New Zealand attractions. Found on the waterfront in Auckland, this awesome place will dazzle visitors of all ages. At the Antarctic Encounter, you'll enter a frozen, underground world where real, live penguins actually live. At the Underwater World, thousands of gallons of marine-creature-infested water surround a clear tunnel from which guests can observe animals like sharks, eels, and stingrays swimming over and around them. It's pretty much like scuba diving without having to get wet.

TOURIST DESTINATIONS

New Zealand's Bay of Islands

Bird watching enthusiasts, beach revelers, fishing fanatics, and scuba diving devotees will all enjoy a trip to New Zealand's Bay of Islands. Bay of Islands trips are all about fun and relaxation, and though it gets pretty busy up here in December and January, there really isn't a bad time to visit. Bay of Islands New Zealand is found in the country's most northern region, which is known appropriately as Northland, and you can expect to find some of the best beaches in New Zealand here. In fact, this area boasts what seems like an uncountable number of beaches. The Bay of Islands is just 145 miles north of Auckland, and there are roughly 144 islands that are found here, hence the name. There are three main Bay of Islands townships, and they are Russel, Kerikeri, and Paihia (Waitangi). While there is more than plenty to keep you busy on Bay of

Islands trips, if you have some extra time to spare, you might consider heading further north for a day or more to Cape Reinga.

The famous American author, Zane Grey, helped to bring notoriety to the Bay of Islands. Grey wrote many adventure novels, and was quite the accomplished fisherman. After sailing around Cape Brett, Grey entered the Bay of Islands to find a destination that he would revere for the rest of his life. Zane Grey would return to the islands here to enjoy world-class game fishing, which he also helped to establish in New South Wales, Australia. Grey first visited Bay of Islands New Zealand over 80 years ago, and though it is busier here than it was then, you'll still find it to be pretty quiet for most of the year. As mentioned, December and January are the peak months for Bay of Islands trips, and so it's a good idea to book your accommodations in advance. Some of the many Bay of Islands tours also fill up quickly during these months, so you might also choose to arrange those in advance as well, especially if you have your heart set on one or more.

If you want to enjoy some of the best fishing in New Zealand, the town of Russell is an ideal Bay of Islands destination. It has the area's most charter boats, and you can easily hop on a ferry to get here from Paihia (Waitangi). Paihia and Waitangi make up one settlement, really, and this is the main travel hub for the area. Most of the Bay of Islands tours start in Paihia and Waitangi, as do the various bay cruises. The Bay of Islands New Zealand waters are home to dolphins that can often be seen playing in the waves of the warm, blue waters. If you'd like to swim with them, you can arrange a tour to do so. Various charter yachts can be hired for Bay of Islands tours that can include lunch on an island. Scenic cruises are among the favorite activities that visitors enjoy on Bay of Islands trips, and the views are nothing short of fantastic. Scuba diving charters are in good supply here, and if you like diving, you'll love New Zealand diving. It's hailed by some to be the best in the world, among its biggest fans, the late, great Jacques Cousteau. Bay of Islands tours not only include the immediate area, but other Northland destinations as well.

If you're interested in enjoying some fun events and festivals in New Zealand, the Bay of Islands has its fair share to offer. For a few days in August, the Bay of Islands Jazz Festival is in full swing. There are some great New Zealand wineries found in Northland, and you can sample them on a wine tour, or at the September Taste Bay of Islands festival. This is only a one-day affair, so if you miss it, you'll have a wonderful excuse to return again, not that you'll need one. Between the towns of Russell, Paihia, and Kerikeri, there are certainly enough attractions to enjoy year round, so whenever you schedule Bay of Islands trips, you're sure to find enough to keep you busy. Kerikeri is the largest of the towns found here, and it's where you can visit the oldest stone house in the country. At some point during your Bay of Islands vacation, you might consider hopping aboard a steamship for a 1-hour cruise, or heading to the Kerikeri wineries. The smaller town of Russell is full of historic sites that are prime for interesting Bay of Islands tours, and perhaps no trip to Russell is complete without a visit to the Russell Museum. After learning all about the history of Maori and European relations at the Russell Museum, you can pick up a brochure that highlights the town's best historic sites.

New Zealand beaches

The New Zealand beaches are many, and the good news for beach lovers is that you are never more than 80 miles from the coast wherever you might find yourself in this beautiful country. A quick glance at the map of New Zealand shows that both the North and South Islands are surrounded by water, meaning there are thousands of miles of New Zealand coastline. The New Zealand coastline is wrought with natural harbors and a variety of bays that help to make it even longer still. From black sand beaches, to quiet, soft and sandy stretches, the beaches in New Zealand have it all. You can book New Zealand vacation packages that feature visits to some of the best beaches in New Zealand, or you can choose to visit a few of them on your own. Just remember that since New Zealand is located in the Southern Hemisphere, the New Zealand summer occurs

during the Northern Hemisphere's winter. In other words, the warmest months in New Zealand are December, January, and February.

On both the North Island and the South Island, the best New Zealand beaches for swimming are generally found on the east coast. There are some nice spots to take a dip on the west coast, but it tends to be more rocky and rugged. Surfers might prefer the west coast to the east for the rougher waters. If you want to experience a black sand beach, the North Island's west coast is home to a few that are the result of volcanic eruptions. For those who want to try surfing, there are beaches on both islands that feature some good breaks, and you can book a New Zealand vacation package that features surfing if you want the best waves.

The small beachtown of Raglan is most often hailed as the best surfing spot in New Zealand. It's found just west of the city of Hamilton, which is just an hour's drive south from Auckland.

Auckland is full of great attractions, such as the Auckland Zoo, and it is also a great destination for those looking to enjoy some nice New Zealand beaches. There are some 100 beaches that are within an hour's drive of Auckland, and those found near the city are referred to by their location. You have the East, West, and North Auckland beaches, with the closest ones to the city being found along Tamaki Drive. Coincidentally, Kelly Tarlton's Antarctic Encounter and Underwater World are also found on Tamaki Drive, should you be interested in a side visit near the Auckland city beaches. In Auckland, you can take a ferry to Waiheke Island to enjoy one of the best beaches in New Zealand. Here at Onetangi Bay, you can see miles out to sea, and if it's clear, you can make out Little Barrier Island and Great Barrier Island. North of Auckland, you'll find some of the best beaches in New Zealand at the Bay of Islands, and should you head further north, you'll be rewarded with great beach after great beach.

In the Far North region of New Zealand's North Island, the Karikari Peninsula has some of the most uncrowded New Zealand beaches, and the soft, white sand and clear, blue waters make for a most agreeable setting. At spots like Tokerau Beach and Matai Bay, you can pretty much have a fair strip of beach to yourself. Sunbathing and seashell hunting are among the favorite things to do in this relaxing paradise. Also found in the northern Northland region is Coopers Beach, which is known for the pohutukawa trees that shade part of the beach. Coopers Beach is close enough to Matai Bay to include both in your New Zealand vacation, and the great beaches in New Zealand that are found on the aforementioned Karikari Peninsula are close enough to at least visit here and there. Should you venture to the northernmost tip of New Zealand, Cape Reinga will likely be your destination. Here, the Tasman Sea meets the Pacific Ocean, resulting in some pretty interesting tidal activity. As is true at any beach, be it in Hawaii, Jamaica, or New Zealand, you'll want to take care when swimming, especially if you are not familiar with the conditions at hand. When visiting Cape Reinga, you'll certainly want to check out Ninety Mile Beach, which is one of the most unique beaches in New Zealand. The large dunes here present a very different landscape, and they are often used for bodyboarding. Those interested in quirky and fun New Zealand tours might book a 90 Mile Beach bus tour, where you actually drive on the beach.

If you had to name a frontrunner among the best beaches in New Zealand, you would have to consider the sandy stretches at Abel Tasman National Park. The smallest of New Zealand's national parks, Abel Tasman offers soft, gold sand beaches, scenic bays and clear waters. It is located on the northern top of the South Island, and you can only get here by water-related forms of transportation. Kayaking and trekking are popular activities to be enjoyed at these unspoiled beaches, or you can simply relax and do nothing while you enjoy the sun and sand. Abel Tasman National Park is just west of Nelson, a popular New Zealand vacation spot that boasts its own great beaches. You'll find accommodations options of all kinds near or at the best beaches in New Zealand, including some great choices for New Zealand lodges and resorts. Adding great New Zealand tours to your beach vacations is always an option. Cruises, kayaking excursions, and visits to historical sites are just some of the tour options you're bound to encounter at some of the more popular New Zealand beaches.

The Great Barrier Island

The Great Barrier Island is the fourth largest island of New Zealand and sits approximately sixty miles from Auckland, New Zealand's largest city. Great Barrier Island New Zealand was named by Captain Cook because of the natural barrier that the island forms between the Gulf and the Pacific Ocean. The New Zealand Island has a population of 850 people who make their living by farming or working in the tourism industry, by conducting tours of the Great Barrier Island and working in hotels and bed and breakfasts.

The New Zealand Island is full of fun attractions and activities, including hiking, bird watching, and soaking in hot springs. Great Barrier Island has dozens of hot springs that occur naturally due to the earth's thermal activity. One popular activity is hiking along the easy-grade walking trail that extends across the Kaitoke Stream and follows the edge of the Kaitoke Swamp, leading to the Kaitoke Hot Springs. Taking an outdoor bath in the sulphurous Kaitoke Hot Springs on Great Barrier Island is a good way to soothe your muscles after the hike. The trail is also wheelchair accessible. Even though the hike isn't as long and famous as Milford Track, it provides a great workout as well as interesting scenery.

You won't want to miss Mount Hobson, the highest point on the Great Barrier Island New Zealand. Walking on the boardwalks and trails will reveal views of the Hauraki Gulf and the Mercury Islands. Mount Hobson is also a primary nesting site of a rare bird called the black petrel. The trails are wide and well groomed, making the walk accessible for hikers of all ability levels.

Biking is a very popular activity on Great Barrier Island. The two main bike routes designated by the Department of Conservation are the Whangaparapara on the west coast and Harataonga Road on the east coast. Both of these trails weave through carefully preserved land with an abundance of wildlife and beautiful water views. Another popular option for more advanced bikers is the two hour White Cliffs loop and the forty-five minute Medlands Beach Track.

For people who love hiking and nature activities, the Great Barrier Island is a must-see on any New Zealand vacation.

Lake Taupo

Doubling its population in the New Zealand summer, the North Island town of Taupo is a favorite New Zealand tourist destination, primarily for the fact that it lies on the shores of beautiful Lake Taupo. Lake Taupo vacations can see you enjoying an array of activities, like fishing and boating, and there are certainly enough accommodations options here to choose from. The friendly local appeal of Lake Taupo helps to make it a top destination and the geothermic goings on here are also curious enough to draw many visitors in. Lake Taupo New Zealand is located some 180 miles southeast of Auckland, in the heart of the country's volcanic region.

The city of Rotorua is just over 50 miles to the north, and it's another one of New Zealand's top vacation destinations. You can add a trip to some great, nearby New Zealand beaches at the Bay of Plenty when vacationing at Lake Taupo, and if you want to sample some of the country's best wines, the Hawkes Bay wine region is within reach. Come winter, you can head to Tongariro National Park to enjoy the ski fields found here.

The sparkling waters of Lake Taupo are the main calling card for the Lake Taupo region. Lake Taupo fishing is some of the best fishing in New Zealand, especially when it comes to trout. Hailed as one of the world's last, true wild trout fisheries, you can be sure the experience is as authentic as you could want. There are plenty of local guides who can help you enjoy the best that Lake Taupo fishing has to offer, and should

you snare something, which you probably will, many of the Lake Taupo restaurants will be happy to prepare it for you. The trout fishing here is all season, so you can enjoy it no matter when you choose to go.

If Lake Taupo fishing isn't your main interest, there is a list of other activities to enjoy here. In under an hour's trip, you can find a handful of great New Zealand golf courses, or perhaps you'll be up for hiking the Lake Taupo volcano. If trekking is something you enjoy, you won't want to miss the chance to enjoy the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, which is often recognized as the country's best one-day walk. Heli hiking is a top activity for the Lake Taupo area, and it involves having a helicopter drop you off at an otherwise hard to reach destination. It's a lot like heli skiing, which you can also do in New Zealand.

Kayaking, and river rafting are just a couple of other fun activities to enjoy at Lake Taupo New Zealand. Perhaps you'll be up for a scenic cruise, or maybe the famed Huka Falls will tempt you. Huka Falls is easily one of the most visited natural attractions in New Zealand, and you can choose to get here in 5 minutes by driving or in about half an hour if you want to enjoy the riverside walk. There are some 47 rivers that feed into Lake Taupo, and the Waikato River, New Zealand's longest, is the lake's only outlet. It seems everywhere you look on the horizon, you see volcanoes. Lake Taupo volcano eruptions have done much to shape the landscape. Lake Taupo itself is the result of a volcanic eruption, and story has it that the eruption was so significant that it caused a hazy sky as far away as China. For Lake Taupo volcano information, you'll want to head to the Volcanic Activity Center on Huka Falls Road. Simply put, it's the best place to learn all about the country's geothermal goings-ons.

You can view actual mud pools, geysers and geothermal activity at the Wairakei Natural Thermal Valley. Geothermal power possibilities are among the highlights of this experience, as is the chance you'll get to learn a little bit about the native Maori people. You can even tour a Maori village. One of the interesting Lake Taupo New Zealand attractions is the Prawn Farm, where you can actually feed the prawn. Afterwards, you can enjoy a savory prawn meal at the Prawn Farm restaurant, if that doesn't bother you.

MAIN CITIES

Wellington

Wellington New Zealand is far more than the journey-inspiring backdrop to epic motion pictures. Voted the twelfth-best place in the world to live by the Mercer Quality of Living Survey in 2009, Wellington New Zealand combines stunning landscapes and vibrant culture to create what is also one of the world's most popular travel destinations.

The city of Wellington is nestled safely inside the highly-protected Wellington Harbor at the southern tip of New Zealand's North Island. Its being situated on Cook Strait between New Zealand's two major islands makes it a very convenient addition to any New Zealand itinerary. The city center is surrounded by a string of suburb towns as well as a rugged coastline of hills and mountains, formed by the many earthquakes that have shook the shifting region throughout the past centuries. The view from Mount Victoria, only an hour's walk from Courtenay Place, provides arguably the best 360-degree vista in the area. The surrounding South Coast hides many stunning bays, beaches, and tide pools, perfect for hikers and backpackers. Non-hikers can take advantage of one of the most popular Wellington attractions: the Wellington Cable Car. This funicular carries riders high above the city to the Botanic Garden, and at the top you can enjoy several other Wellington attractions, including a stunning lookout of the harbor, a walk in the gardens or a trip through the Cable Car Museum.

Named after the Duke of Wellington, Arthur Wellesley, Wellington is the capital and the political center of the small island nation of New Zealand. Additionally, the city is the best place to experience the art and culture of the Maori and Kiwis. Art galleries, museums and theaters abound in Wellington, including the

renowned Te Papa National Museum of New Zealand. Considered one of the most important Wellington attractions to the native New Zealanders, the Maori, the exhibits in the Te Papa teach visitors of the rich and colorful history of this beautiful land. Epicurian culture is also alive in Wellington, where it is said there are more cafes, bars and restaurants per person than New York City. Popular pedestrian areas like the waterfront, Cuba Street and Courteney Place offer a plethora of hotels, shops, cafes, and restaurants while providing an opportunity to see New Zealand's creative artistic side as well.

Wellington New Zealand has some of the most unique wildlife on the planet. Experience animal-friendly Wellington travel at the Wellington Zoo and the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, where a predator-proof fence protects tuatara, weta, kiwi birds, and other indigenous flora and fauna. Finally, for those travelers that make the journey specifically to see the home of the hobbits, there are several private Wellington travel companies that coordinate guided tours of local film sets, or what locals have come to lovingly refer to as Wellywood.

Temperate weather makes Wellington travel easy, but beware of the wind. Wellington's position on the Cook Strait has earned it the nickname of Windy Wellington or The Windy City. Strong gales can have a strong effect on aircraft and boats, but the wind speed and direction can easily be monitored by the flag flying on the Beehive Parliament building in the city center.

Getting around the compact, pedestrian-friendly city center of Wellington on foot is easy. For longer journeys, Wellington's comprehensive public transportation system called Metlink. Buses, trains, trolley and trams guide you around greater Wellington, while trains will carry you to other New Zealand cities, such as Auckland and Christchurch. To make the most of your transportation cost within Wellington, consider getting a Snapper Card or one of several day passes for specified days and zones to save money. There are plenty of Wellington hotels to choose from, and the many tours and vacation packages around New Zealand are also helpful in saving money during your trip.

Auckland

By far the largest city in New Zealand, Auckland has some 1.3 million inhabitants, compared to just fewer than 400,000 people in the second-largest city of Wellington. Auckland New Zealand is nicknamed the "City of Sails", due to its maritime roots and yachting merit. This vibrant city is found at the northern side of New Zealand's North Island, and it enjoys easy access to both the Pacific Ocean and the Tasman Sea. The Viaduct Basin is a village in Auckland that is dedicated to all things sailing, and it has served as the host for recent America's Cup challenges. Getting out and doing a bit of sailing of your own surely isn't the only thing you can enjoy on an Auckland vacation. There are spectacular beaches close by, you can enjoy a wide range of culinary delights, seek adrenaline-pumping thrills, and so much more!

Auckland New Zealand boasts the largest Polynesian population of any city in the world, and is known for its rich Maori presence and heritage. If you can get here for the Pasifika Festival, you're in for an awesome party that is everything Polynesian. More and more Asian cultures are taking up residence in Auckland, and with the quality of life here, it's easy to think that more and more immigrants will arrive in the future. Set on an isthmus, with the Waitemata Harbor on one side and the Manukau on the other, Auckland first attracted the Maori some 800 years ago. The story has it that the Maori arrived to New Zealand in wakas (canoes) from other Polynesian islands. In and around present-day Auckland, the Polynesian societies certainly depended on fishing to survive, as well as agriculture. The volcanic-rich soil did well to support agricultural efforts, and as such, Maori villages began to spring up on the isthmus. In the 17th century, tribal warfare would help to lessen the Maori numbers, and when European settlers arrived around the year 1840, they found a largely depleted Maori presence. Previous hunting and forest-clearing endeavors helped to contribute to the low Maori numbers, as did disease. The new English Governor of New Zealand, former

Royal Navy Commander, William Hobson, convinced the British government to arrange the purchase of lands from the Maori, including the isthmus where Auckland is found. As such, Auckland was more or less born.

Auckland New Zealand was one of the sites where the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840, which is a most important date in New Zealand history. This treaty is generally considered the country's founding document, as it resulted in British sovereignty in New Zealand. The Maori chiefs who signed the treaty agreed to grant the British sovereignty in exchange for the promise that some of their lands be protected. The Maori and the European settlers at Auckland seemed to hit it off at first, the Maori even supplying their new "friends" with food supplies. Over time, though, the Maori would grow tired of the settlers encroaching on their lands and fighting would ensue. This resulted in significant losses on both sides. In time, the European New Zealanders would maintain the bulk of control, and cities like Auckland and Wellington began to grow. William Hobson would choose Auckland as the capital of the new British colony of New Zealand in 1840. Eventually, however, it was deemed that Wellington would serve as a better location for the government seat, and in 1865, Auckland lost its capital city title.

Eventually, as New Zealanders began to spread out in the main urban centers, suburbs would be built, which is where many Auckland area residents prefer to live to this day. Locals in this wonderful city enjoy a warm and temperate climate, and though it rains here more than it does in other parts of the country, it's also one of the sunnier spots. The Auckland region offers up a very intriguing landscape, with dozens of dormant volcanic cones found throughout. The hills that surround the Auckland New Zealand isthmus are partly covered in rainforest, and nearby islands can be found resting in the Hauraki Gulf. Auckland travel rewards visitors with a wealth of possibilities. Perhaps you will skip out on the city for a nice getaway at Great Barrier Island. Waiheke Island is another island getaway worth considering, though with all the great nightlife and restaurants in Auckland, you might find it hard to ever leave. The Auckland hotels certainly make Auckland travel more pleasing, as there are accommodations choices here for any budget. Should you be looking to go out on the town, you'll not want for clubs, casinos and bars, and the restaurants here almost seem to be one on top of the other.

Auckland travel is certainly kind to shoppers. In suburbs like Parnell and Newmarket, you'll find some nice upscale shopping areas, while the flea market in the suburb of Avondale offers a different, yet equally rewarding experience. Rugby is certainly among the top national sports in New Zealand, with Cricket being another, and at Auckland's Eden Park, catching a cricket or rugby match is something you might consider. This is especially true if the national rugby team, the All Blacks, is in town. You can add an All Blacks game to your list of New Zealand events if you want to experience something special. Auckland tours are a good way to experience some of the Auckland attractions, whether you want to sightsee around the city, or are looking to get out and enjoy Nature. Nature tours are among the top pursuits for those on an Auckland vacation, as are Auckland tours that feature the Maori culture. Perhaps a winery tour will be a perfect fit for you, or maybe you'll be interested in a mountain biking excursion.

Families will certainly enjoy the Auckland Zoo, or a trip to Kelly Tarltons Antarctic Encounter and Underground World. An Auckland vacation offers too much to cover here, so ready yourself for fun that never seems to end. One thing's for certain. An Auckland vacation won't be a boring one, unless that's what you're after.

The Auckland Zoo is calling all visitors to New Zealand who want to see an amazing collection of animals. Certainly among the top attractions in Auckland, the Auckland Zoo is an environmentally-conscious place that is known to be among the most progressive zoos on the planet. It's certainly among the best zoos found in the Australasian world, and it offers the largest collection of native species found in New Zealand.

Found just a few minutes from downtown Auckland, you can get here in no time, and if you don't have a rental car, you can always hop on the city's Explorer Bus.

Found close to the Auckland Zoo is the Museum of Transport and Technology, and the Western Springs Reserve. You can easily make a day out of it in the suburb of Western Springs, and you'll even find a tram here that can transport you between the zoo and the museum. For those looking to add some neat tours to their New Zealand vacation, a behind the scenes tour at the Auckland Zoo is worth considering.

The Auckland Zoo first opened in 1922, and though the early years were difficult, by 1930, a zoological society was formed, and a fairly sizeable collection of animals was achieved. The first "zoo" to open in Auckland New Zealand did so in 1912, though it was more of a private collection of animals than it was a real zoo. The area for the zoo, which was found in the suburb of Onehunga, was owned by John James Boyd, and his collection of animals included some monkeys, a hyena, a half-dozen lions, and a tiger and panther. For various reasons, Onehunga natives found issue with this new Auckland zoo of sorts, citing crowds, animal smells and noise as their primary complaints. In 1922, the Auckland City Council decided to appease the Onehunga locals by buying up all the animals. They then relocated them to the site where the Auckland Zoo now stands.

In 1956, the Auckland Zoo looked to position itself among the top attractions in Auckland by adding an exhibit known as the "Chimp's Tea Party". Such an exhibit was already popular at the London Zoo, and though it helped bring in more visitors, the Auckland Zoo eventually decided to stop the exhibit. Some other significant years in the history of the Auckland New Zealand Zoo include 1923, when the first elephant was acquired, 1981, which saw the first animal hospital opening here, and the year 2000, when the Auckland Zoo Conservation Fund was established. 2010 is set to be another significant year for the zoo, as it prepares to open its new "Te Wao Nui" exhibit. It's the most important, large-scale project that the Auckland Zoo has ever undertaken, and it will center on the culture, flora, and fauna of New Zealand.

Some of the best current exhibits at this top New Zealand zoo include the "Animal Planet Elephant Clearing", the "Sealion and Penguin Shores", and the "Bank of New Zealand Kiwi and Tuatara House". The Animal Planet Elephant Clearing is where you can watch the antics of the country's only Asian elephants. Sometimes the elephant trainers take the elephants for a stroll around the zoo, which is quite a sight to see. The Sealion and Penguin Shores exhibit features sealions from California, fur seals from New Zealand, and even some little blue penguins. The flora found in this exhibit is native to New Zealand, and you'll likely appreciate the landscaping done here. There is a beach you can walk where various shore birds can be observed, or you can head to the underwater viewing window to watch the fur seals and sea lions swim. The Bank of New Zealand Kiwi and Tuatara House is special, as it is here that you can check out the country's national bird and symbol, the Kiwi. Tuataras are lizard-like creatures that are often referred to as living fossils. You won't want to miss these intriguing creatures.

Bird watching enthusiasts will want to include the Auckland Zoo's Australian bird aviary on their lists of attractions in Auckland, where you can feed nectar to rainbow lorikeets. The Aussie Walkabout exhibit is surely interesting as well, allowing visitors to this great New Zealand zoo the chance to get up close to animals like emus and kangaroos. Lions, giraffes, hippos and more than one rhinoceros help to add to the collection of animals at the Auckland Zoo, so you'll have more to take in than you may have imagined. Checking out the events calendar for the Auckland Zoo is a good idea before you go, and you might want to look into the Auckland Zoo concerts that are held here. The zoo's WildBean Café hosts live music acts from time to time, which helps to make the zoo one of the best all-around attractions in Auckland. Families with kids might be interested in the Safari Night sleep-over and barbecue events, which are offered on different dates throughout the year.

Once a fortified hill where various Maori tribes set up villages, *Mount Eden* is now an Auckland, New Zealand tourist attraction that affords great views of the city. Mount Eden New Zealand is also a suburb of Auckland, and it is where Mount Eden the mountain is located. Mount Eden the mountain, is the highest non-manmade point in Auckland at some 655 feet, which helps to make it a tourism magnet, and it is effectively a dormant volcano. The volcano is more or less the central focus of Mount Eden New Zealand, and its crater is some 165 feet deep. The last eruption of the Mount Eden volcano occurred around 60,000 years ago, so it's been dormant for quite some time. A visit to Mount Eden New Zealand can add substance to an Auckland getaway, and there are plenty of neat attractions here worth checking out. Should there be a cricket or rugby match going on in Auckland, you'll likely find it taking place at Mount Eden Park (Eden Park), which is the city's premier sports venue.

As mentioned, the volcanic hill at Mount Eden first served humans as a fortified hill. The Maori most certainly valued it as a vantage point, as you can see far and wide from atop its summit. Maori tribal wars were common when the Europeans arrived, and the last Maori tribe to occupy Mount Eden was the Tamaki, who relinquished their stronghold around 1700 AD. At the base of Mount Eden, the Maori had stripped away most of the trees for various uses, so when the Europeans arrived, they cleared the rest of the land and set up property boundaries that were reminiscent of those found back home in Scotland or Ireland. The walled fences they built can still be seen today. The rich soil in and around the Mount Eden volcano lent itself to farming pursuits for the early British settlers, and by the 1870's, suburban plots had been laid. In 1877, the mountain at Mount Eden New Zealand was designated as a public reserve, and as such, would be protected. There are new trees here now, and the gardens do quite well, which helps to give the suburb of Mount Eden a "leafy" appeal. Interestingly enough, Mount Eden New Zealand is known as Auckland's "Home of Arts", as there is a very large artist community in the suburb. This goes back to the 1950's, when it was quite the bohemian destination.

Of all the destinations and tourist attractions in New Zealand, Mount Eden is one of the most renowned, and New Zealanders across the land tend to link the Mt Eden Prison to the name. The original Mt Eden Prison was built between the years of 1882 and 1917. It resembles a castle, though you might imagine it's not exactly a privileged address. The Mt Eden Prison is one of what is known as the Mount Eden Prisons, the other two being the Mount Eden Women's Prison and the Auckland Central Remand Prison. The Mt Eden Prison and the other two prisons make up a large complex where the architectural styles differ, and "The Prisons" complex often serves as the site for protests. The Prisons aside, Mount Eden is also home to a list of more positively-associated tourist attractions in New Zealand, such as the three War Memorials and the Auckland Museum. The Auckland Museum is one of the more notable museums in New Zealand, due largely in part to the fact that it has the world's biggest collection of Polynesian artifacts. During your Mount Eden visit, you might choose to take a leisurely stroll in the Auckland Domain, which is a large park that is close to the city's center.

Christchurch

The third-largest city in New Zealand, Christchurch makes for an excellent travel base on the country's South Island. Located about halfway down the South Island's eastern coast, it is the main city of the Canterbury region. This picturesque region holds many delights for those who appreciate the outdoors, whether you explore the Southern Alps to the west, or hit the Pacific Ocean to the east. The airport in Christchurch New Zealand is the primary gateway for those planning South Island trips, and you'll find a new international terminal here that accepts direct flights from a number of countries. Like New Zealand's other main cities, Christchurch offers a healthy list of things to do, so you might drop in on the city's visitor center to pick up a monthly copy of the *Tourist Times*. When you're looking to get out of the city here, you'll want

to consider renting a car. From stunning nearby beaches and amazing area wineries, to wildlife refuges and mountain landscapes, Christchurch travel pretty much has it all. Back in the city, dining is a pleasure, as gobs of restaurants stand ready to please palate after palate.

Christchurch New Zealand first saw European visitors around the year 1815, and as was customary, soon the native Maori would find themselves involved in a number of land transactions. The Ngai Tahu tribe had been the last Maori group to control the Christchurch region, and when English settlers arrived, they were certainly going through rough times. Diseases brought by Europeans helped to weaken the native Maori tribes all over the country, with tribal warfare also accounting for major loss of life. The English settlers would eventually encroach on Maori lands that were supposed to be protected by the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, including the disputed land where Christchurch city sits today. In 1999, Ngai Tahu descendants finally settled a claim that was based on some of these "stolen" lands.

The English would make early attempts to farm the land in and around present-day Christchurch New Zealand, setting up communities in the area in the latter half of the 1830's. Plans to establish the city of Christchurch began in 1847, with the name being adopted in 1848. The Canterbury Association was formed in England with the intent of colonizing the Canterbury region in New Zealand, and ships were soon chartered to bring new settlers in. The Canterbury Pilgrims landed at the port at Lyttelton Harbor, and they arrived with the intentions of building a city that would have a central cathedral and college as its focal point. The idea was to mimic the layout of the famous Christ Church in Oxford, hence the name for the city. The English would build Victorian homes along the Avon River, as well as churches, schools and shops. Christchurch still exhibits an English feel, and as such, it is commonly labeled as the country's most English city.

The surviving Cathedral Square is a good place to start exploring town during your Christchurch vacation. It is here that you will find the Christchurch Cathedral. Started in 1864 and finished in 1904, it's one of the main attractions that visitors add to their Christchurch travel itineraries. The 120-foot tower is a joy to climb, awarding remarkable views of the square. To learn more about Christchurch New Zealand and its history, you might schedule a stop at the Canterbury Museum. It's found close to the Arts Center and the city's Botanic Gardens, so you can easily spend the better part of a day hanging out in the area. A Christchurch tourism favorite involves complimenting the Canterbury Museum's Antarctic display with a trip to the city's International Antarctic Center. All the best Christchurch city attractions can be reached by foot from the Cathedral Square, and if you're interested, you can arrange a 2-hour walking tour of the city at one of the main square's Personal Guiding Service kiosks. A Christchurch vacation could be complete even if you never left the city, but with so many great natural attractions within reach, you're bound to want to get out and explore a bit.

Many Christchurch travel plans include a getaway at the nearby seaside town of Kaikoura. Soaring mountains take up where the rugged coast leaves off, and you can enjoy all kinds of fun activities here, like wilderness walks and whale-watching tours. Perhaps you will be interested in adding a tour that highlights the native Maori and their ancient sites, or maybe a little sea kayaking will be the ideal fit for your Christchurch vacation. There's so much to do at Kaikoura that you can easily "get stuck" here longer than you might have originally planned. November through April is the high season for Christchurch travel, but with a good amount of yearly festivals to offer, you might decide to visit any time of year.

During the New Zealand summer, which coincides with winter in the Northern Hemisphere, Christchurch tourism involves plenty of beach time. Sumner is the most popular beach suburb, offering an array of bars and eateries. Some visitors will prefer to take their Christchurch vacation during the colder months, as several great ski areas can be found within a 2-hour drive. Dolphin-watching, golf, mountain biking, climbing and skydiving are just some of the other activities that help to make Christchurch travel so rewarding.

Queenstown

If you're looking for a resort town where you can lose yourself in a number of exciting activities, Queenstown New Zealand is a good pick. Known as one of the world's top adventure capitals, Queenstown is where those looking for adrenaline rushes will feel right at home. The city's cafes, restaurants, and clubs do well to keep visitors occupied when they are not off enjoying an area tour or excursion, and you can also do some great shopping here. Though Queenstown New Zealand is famous first for its excellent winter skiing, it's also a wonderful destination come spring, summer and fall. New Queenstown hotels are popping up all the time as New Zealand tourism increases, and the town is seeing its fair share of recent immigrants. You can find a healthy list of flights servicing Queenstown, and it's a pretty easy drive or bus ride from other South Island cities like Christchurch and Dunedin.

The Maori seemed to have a limited presence in the Queenstown New Zealand area when European settlers first arrived in the mid-1850's. Sheep farmers were among the first settlers to the area, and in 1862, two such farmers found gold at the Shotover River. Prospectors soon came from all around, and the new mining town soon began adding streets and buildings. By 1900, however, most of the gold had been mined, and the town soon saw a sort of mass exodus of its citizens. Queenstown rests on the banks of beautiful Lake Wakatipu, and it is surrounded by mountains. In other words, the setting is pretty spectacular. This helped encourage the city to become a tourist destination. The first nearby ski area to become popular was Coronet Peak, which started seeing year round visitors in the early 1950's. By the early 1970's, Queenstown began to firmly position itself as the country's premier adventure capital, offering such activities as bungee jumping and jetboating. The Queenstown airport would be upgraded in the 1990's to better facilitate Queenstown travel, and there seems little reason to think that the new millennium will see tourism decrease here.

Helping to make Queenstown travel even more popular was the use of the city and the surrounding area for scenes in the highly-acclaimed "The Lord of the Rings" movie trilogy. A good way to begin your Queenstown vacation is to take a ride to the top of the Skyline Gondola. From Bob's Peak, you can enjoy stunning views of the city and surrounding area. You can grab lunch or dinner at the gondola restaurant and cafe, and before or after your ride, you might take some time to enjoy the Kiwi & Birdlife Park, which is found just at the base of the gondola on Brecon Street. Family four-wheel-drive excursions are fun for those traveling with the kids, and couples might first choose the area wineries for their Queenstown tours. New Zealand wine is making a name for itself in the international community, and a wine tour here can be just as rewarding as you might expect in France or Italy. For those who prefer white-knuckle, breath-stealing activities, your Queenstown vacation can be full of them. The nearby village of Glenorchy is one of the South Island's top tourism destinations, offering glacial lakes and rugged mountains. You can arrange a number of Queenstown tours for activities at Glenorchy, such as hiking, mountain biking, climbing and white water rafting. If the budget allows, maybe you'll even consider a nice champagne lunch in the mountains, being dropped off and a picked up by helicopter.

Some Queenstown tours allow visitors to combine a few different activities. You can combine area helicopter rides with rafting trips or luge rides, for example, and some of these packages can help you save some money on the side as well. Many a Queenstown vacation is centered around enjoying the great outdoors, and come nighttime, the town's nightlife presents a nice variety to be enjoyed as well. There are a couple casinos found here, and they can surely add extra excitement to your Queenstown travel itinerary. The bars are certainly busiest come mid-winter, but you can find plenty of late-night revelry the rest of the year as well. The Queenstown dining and shopping guide can help you choose from the many wonderful Queenstown shops and restaurants. You can buy all kinds of neat New Zealand-made goods at the

Queenstown shops, and the city's restaurants and cafes certainly have something for everyone. There is a general theme to New Zealand's major cities and tourist destinations.

Answer the questions:

1. What is the total area of New Zealand?
2. Describe the climate of the country.
3. Why is the country's flora and fauna unique?
4. What is the population density of the country?
5. What ethnic groups live in New Zealand?
6. What are the main differences of New Zealand English from British English?
7. Name some words that are unique to New Zealand English.
8. What are the main religions in the country?
9. What are the major governmental institutions of New Zealand?
10. What is New Zealand's economy based on?
11. What does the country export?
12. Characterize the health service in New Zealand.
13. What is the system of education in the country?
14. Name the most popular Universities of New Zealand.
15. What museums are worth visiting while in the country?
16. Describe the culture of New Zealand.
17. Who are Maori?
18. What is Pakeha culture?
19. What events and holidays are celebrated in New Zealand?
20. What is New Zealand's cuisine characterized by?
21. Describe casual Kiwi cuisine.
22. What are the most popular shopping places in New Zealand?
23. What tourist destinations and activities is New Zealand famous for?
24. Name the country's top attractions.
25. What are the top things to do for tourists in New Zealand's Bay of Islands?
26. What are the best New Zealand's beaches?
27. Why do you think Taupo is one of the favourite tourist destinations?
28. What activities would you recommend a tourist visiting the Great Barrier Island?
29. Do you think Auckland is worth visiting? Why? / Why not?
30. What are the most spectacular sights of Wellington? Christchurch? Queenstown?

Write a short summary of New Zealand culture.

Make a presentation on:

- a) New Zealand's Best Resorts;
- b) New Zealand Cuisine;
- c) Popular Tourist Destinations of New Zealand;
- d) Main Attractions and Things To Do in New Zealand.

Promote New Zealand as a tourist destination.

SOURCE MATERIAL

Encyclopedia Britannica (CD-ROM)

David Crystal. Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language. – Cambridge. UP. – 1995.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Encyclopedia. – Springfield. Massachusetts. USA, 2000. – 1792 p.

<http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

<http://www.destination360.com>

<http://www.hotelmarketing.com>

<http://www.ustourist.com>