

Note: Some geographers consider the entire island of New Guinea as a part of Oceania.



Continent Close-up

Australia and Oceania do not cover much land.

Together, they are smaller than any other continent. However, they span a huge part of the globe, with islands spread throughout much of the Pacific Ocean. Some of these islands, such as Australia, are very large, while others are quite small.



New Zealand

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Land area | 3,291,903 square miles (8,525,990 sq km) |
| Number of independent countries | 14 |
| Estimated population (2018) | 41,183,198 |
| Main languages | English, French, Maori (New Zealand), Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea), and hundreds of other native languages of islanders and Aboriginal people |
| Largest country | Australia |
| Smallest country | Nauru |
| Fast fact | Australia and Oceania take up 5.3 percent of Earth's land. |



Tonga

Land and Climate

Australia and Oceania contain some of the oldest land on Earth—and some of the newest. Australia has surface land that is 4.4 billion years old. New land on volcanic islands, such as New Zealand and Vanuatu, is formed with every eruption. In the Pacific Ocean, rings of coral islands called atolls rise above the ocean's surface. Ocean waves break down the coral to form new islands.

Atolls such as Caroline Island are rings of coral with a lagoon in the center.

Oceania is a large ocean region that contains thousands of islands

THE BIG TRUTH!

Ocean Acidification

Due to a process called acidification, the ocean waters of Oceania and Australia are in danger. Human activities such as operating cars, running factories, and burning coal release carbon dioxide. When carbon dioxide mixes with water, it creates carbonic acid. This acid threatens ocean life. Some animals, such as snails and clams, cannot grow the protective shells they need to survive in this acidic environment. Coral can no longer get chemicals it needs to grow strong reef support. In turn, animals that feed on shelled animals and coral can die from lack of food.

Healthy coral

What happens?

- The ocean becomes more acidic.
- Shellfish cannot form shells.
- As coral reefs die, algae and jellyfish grow rapidly in numbers.
- The ocean food chain is thrown out of balance.



Dying coral at the Great Barrier Reef



Power plants that burn fossil fuels release dangerous chemicals into the air.

What is the cause?

- Human activities produce carbon dioxide.
- Oceans absorb carbon dioxide from the air. The carbon dioxide dissolves in the water, forming carbonic acid.
- This process is happening about 100 times faster than the average rate over the past 55 million years.

What can we do?

- Reduce fossil fuel use.
- Spread the word about pollution and acidification