

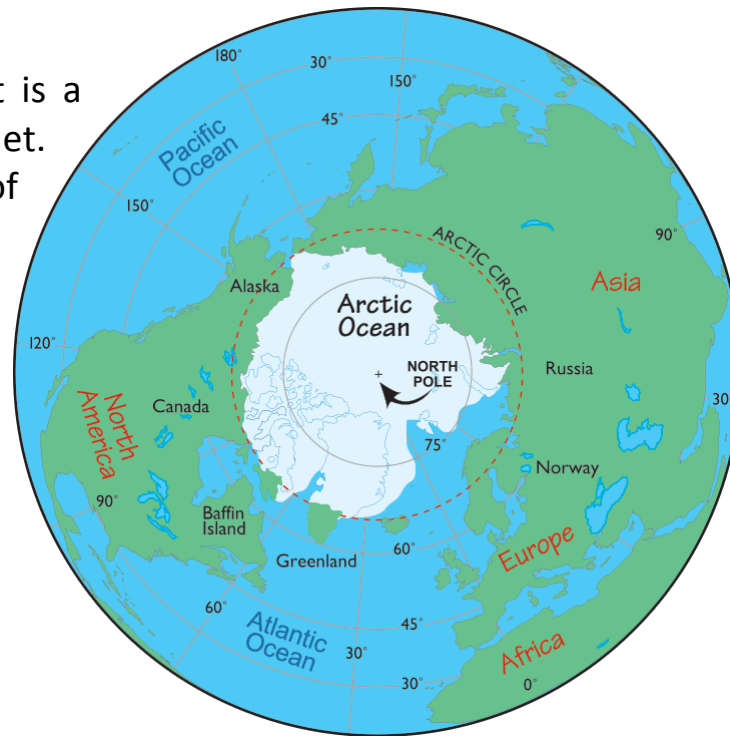


## Did you know...? The Arctic

### The Arctic

The Arctic is not a country or continent. It is a huge area at the extreme north of our planet. Much of the Arctic is a large, frozen body of water. It is made up of:

- the Arctic Ocean and its surrounding seas (the Chukchi, East Siberian, Laptev, Kara, Barents, White, Greenland, and Beaufort Seas);
- part, or all, of the land of eight countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Canada, Russia and the United States;
- Greenland (the world's largest island).



### The Arctic Circle

The Arctic Circle is **the region, which sits above the imaginary line of latitude wrapping around the globe at approximately 66° 34' N**. Above this imaginary line, the sun does not always set in summer – ‘the Midnight Sun’ (see Box 1).

Other ways to describe the Arctic Circle are:

- **The area north of the Arctic tree line** where the landscape is frozen and dotted with shrubs and lichens.
- Based on temperature - the Arctic includes any locations in high latitudes where the **average daily summer temperature does not rise above 10 °C (50 °F)**.

*(Source – National Snow and Ice Data Centre – nsidc.org)*

## Box 1: The Midnight Sun

In the UK, the sun sets at the end of each day, disappearing over the horizon and bringing darkness. In the Arctic, in summer, this does not always happen. On some days, the sun does not sink below the horizon, but dips towards it, then rises again. On these days, it never gets completely dark at night. There is at least one day every year with 24 hours of daylight. The nearer to the North Pole you are, the more days there are with a 'midnight sun'.

It is for this reason that places within the Arctic Circle are often referred to as 'The land of the Midnight Sun'.

## The North Pole

The northernmost point of the Arctic is called the North Pole. Did you know there are **four** North Poles?

- **The Geographic (or True) North Pole:** The northernmost point on the Earth's surface.
- **The Magnetic North Pole:** The northern point of the Earth where the geomagnetic field points vertically. This moves over time due to magnetic changes in the Earth's core. This is the place to which compass needles point.
- **The Geomagnetic North Pole:** This is calculated using mathematics based on an imaginary line running through the geomagnetic centre of the Earth. Over the past century, the geomagnetic North Pole has shifted from Greenland to Canada.
- **North Pole, Alaska.** Actually nothing to do with the North Pole! This is a place in the Fairbanks suburb of Alaska and is hundreds of miles south of the other three North Poles.

The North Pole remains frozen throughout the year, but, during the Arctic winter, the size of the ice cap increases. It is possible to go all the way underneath the Arctic ice by submarine! During the summer, the ice breaks up, creating many ice floes and icebergs.

## The Arctic Ocean and its inhabitants

The Arctic Ocean is the world's smallest ocean. During the summer, the Arctic Ocean fills with plankton and fish, making it an excellent feeding ground for birds and mammals. Millions of birds migrate northwards to the Arctic, so that they can nest and rear their young. Seals and whales also eat this big supply of food. Polar bears and Arctic foxes make good use of this time to hunt and scavenge before the winter comes.

## People of the Arctic

Almost **four million people** live in the Arctic, including many indigenous groups, people who live in cities, as well as hunters and herders. People have lived in some parts of the region for more than 20 000 years, shaping and being influenced by the environment that they live in. Indigenous people make up about 10% of the population and keep traditional ways of living alive, while also adapting to the modern world. The Inuit and Sami peoples have been able to survive here; the Inuit by hunting and the Sami by tending large herds of reindeer.

In the 20th century (1900s), immigration to the Arctic increased. People were drawn to the region by new opportunities in industry. While many aspects of life in the Arctic have changed for the better (for example, life expectancy and access to food), the increase in population has led to conflict in some places as modern and traditional ways of life clash and there is greater pressure on the limited resources.

