

Natural Wonders Around the World

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Harbor of Rio de Janeiro



Harbor of Rio de Janeiro

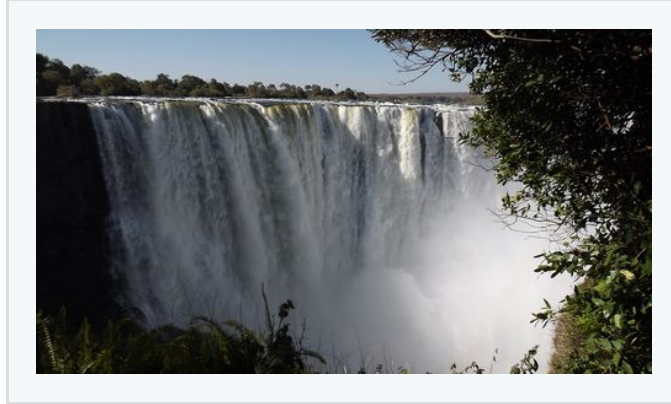
On January 1, 1502, an explorer from Portugal named Goncalo Coelho and his crew sailed into a huge bay by what is now Brazil. A bay is a body of water that is partly surrounded by land. The explorers thought they had found the mouth of a large river. So they named the place “Rio de Janeiro,” or “River of January.” The bay they found is known today as the Harbor of Rio de Janeiro.

The Harbor of Rio de Janeiro is the world’s largest natural bay, containing more water than any other bay in the world! Because of its size, the Harbor of Rio de Janeiro is considered one of the world’s seven natural wonders.

The bay is surrounded by mountains made from granite. The mountains are huge and steep, with odd shapes. One of these mountains was named after a sugar loaf, because it looks like a type of bread made on an island near Portugal. Another one was named Corcovado, or “The Hunchback,” because of its mound-like shape. Together, the water and mountains create a beautiful harbor.

The beauty of the harbor attracts people to this day. Tourists from all over the world come to see the gorgeous harbor and the city of Rio de Janeiro. People have even built cable cars and trains to accommodate tourists and show them around the area.

Victoria Falls: The Smoke That Thunders



Victoria Falls in Africa

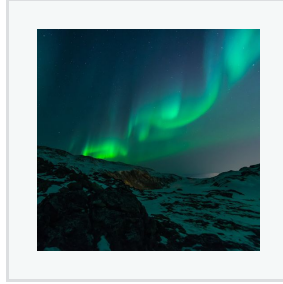
Victoria Falls is one of the most impressive waterfalls on the planet. It is located along the border of Zimbabwe and Zambia, two countries in southern Africa. There, the Zambezi River takes a plunge, forming the giant “sheet” of falling water. Victoria Falls is considered to be the largest waterfall in the world. And no wonder – it’s about one mile wide and 360 feet high!

This amazing sheet of falling water can be heard from miles away. The spray and mist from the waterfall can be seen from many miles away, too. In fact, local tribes first called the waterfall “Mosi- oa- Tunya.” That means “the smoke that thunders.” But the falls received another name in 1855. That year, a Scottish explorer came across the waterfall. His name was David Livingstone. He named it Victoria Falls after Queen Victoria, who was ruling Great Britain at the time.

The mist caused by the falls also supports the surrounding environment. Around the waterfall is a rainforest-like ecosystem. Many species of trees, plants, and animals thrive there. If you travel there, you may catch a glimpse of the many different raptor species nearby, like falcons and black eagles. You may even spot elephants in the national parks on both sides of the river!

Today, the site is one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. Hundreds of thousands of people make the trip to Victoria Falls each year. They hope to see the spectacular “smoke that thunders” in person.

The Northern Lights



Imagine you are somewhere far north on Earth. It's nighttime, but the sky is not dark, like you might expect it to be. Instead, it's filled with colorful lights. Some lights look like moving curtains. Others look like a steady glow, or bands across the sky. The lights are usually green, but you may see other colors, like yellow, red, purple, or blue. The lights are dazzling as they dance far above your head.

What you're imagining is the Aurora Borealis. It's also called the Northern Lights. This natural light display has wowed people for hundreds of years. In fact, it is one of the seven natural wonders of the world.

People can thank the sun for these incredible light shows. During a certain kind of solar storm, energy and small particles from the sun can travel all the way to Earth. They can enter the atmosphere near the North Pole. These particles interact with the gases in our atmosphere. This causes the beautiful lights we see in the sky.

The color of the lights partly depends on the gas that interacts with the particles from the sun. Oxygen gives off green light or red light. Purples and blues come from nitrogen in the atmosphere.

The same kind of light show can happen near the South Pole, as well. That display is called the Aurora Australis.

It's usually easiest to see the Northern Lights in a place where it is dark. It also helps to be far north on Earth, in places such as Canada, Iceland, Alaska, and Greenland. And, of course, you're most likely to see the lights after there's a big solar storm!

Mexico's Natural Wonder: Paricutin Volcano



U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Paricutin Volcano erupting

The Paricutin Volcano in Mexico earned its title as one of the seven natural wonders of the world in an explosive way.

In 1943, this volcano emerged from a cornfield in a village about 200 miles west of Mexico City. People living in the area had been feeling the ground shake and hearing it rumble for weeks. Then one day, the earth in the cornfield rose up about six feet! Ash and vapor exploded from the ground. By later that day, a small cone shape had formed. The volcano had begun erupting, sending lava and pieces of molten rock into the air. As these rock pieces landed around the new volcano, the cone shape grew bigger and bigger.

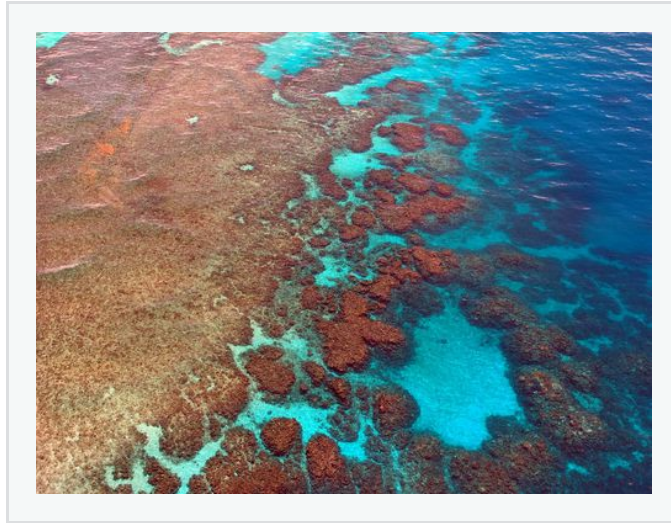
As Paricutin continued erupting, the surrounding area was covered in smoke and ash. People were forced to leave.

The eruption was most intense during the first year. By then end of the first year, the volcano was over 1000 feet high! Within two years, only the top of a church was visible above all the lava.

Paricutin continued exploding for about nine years before stopping. It is now about 1,391 feet high!

Now, Paricutin is considered extinct. But during the nine years it was active, scientists studied the volcano closely. Paricutin is the first volcano that scientists were able to study and document from birth to death. Thanks to this natural wonder, scientists learned a lot about volcanoes.

Australia's Natural Wonder: The Great Barrier Reef



The Great Barrier Reef

In the Coral Sea in Australia, there is a reef. A reef is a ridge of rock, coral, or sand near the surface of a sea. But this reef isn't just any old reef. It's the Great Barrier Reef, the world's largest coral reef system. It covers over 2300 kilometers, reaching from shallow areas to deep ocean waters. It is so big that it can be seen from outer space!

The Great Barrier Reef is home to many types of living things. It has thousands of types of mollusks and over 1500 kinds of fish. It's also home to many species of sharks and dolphins, not to mention sea turtles, sea cows, and other creatures. Humpback whales even find their way to the reef to breed!

Although it's home to many creatures, the reef might be best known for its coral. The Great Barrier Reef has over 400 different kinds of coral. It includes both soft and hard coral. The reef's corals are many different colors, shape, and sizes. This is partly what makes the reef so beautiful.

The Great Barrier Reef is known as one of the most diverse and beautiful places in the world. But today, warmer ocean temperatures are putting great stress on the coral. Large areas of the reef have died or are in danger because of the warmer seawater. Pollution also affects the reef, as sediments or litter often find their way into the water. This is bad for the health of the reef and its plants and animals. People are working hard to protect the Great Barrier Reef and the species that

live there.

The Grand Canyon



Manjula Raman

The Grand Canyon

What is the Grand Canyon? Grand means great or important. And a canyon is a very deep valley. It has steep sides. The sides are almost straight up and down.

This is a good way to describe the Grand Canyon. It is a huge canyon. It is in the southwest part of the United States. It is more than 200 miles long. And it is a mile deep!

At the bottom of the canyon is a river. This is the Colorado River. The river helped make the canyon. It cut into the rocky land for millions of years.