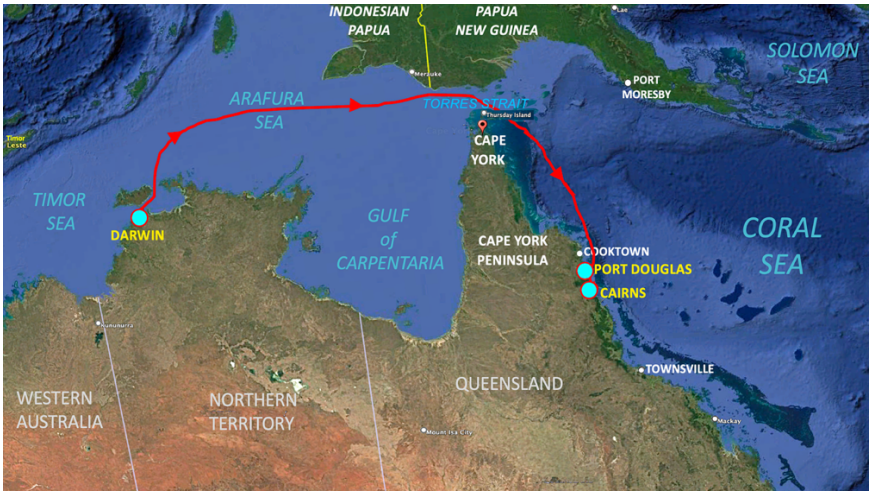
AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHY and DEMOGRAPHICS HANDOUT Dr. John Freedman 2025

Map of our voyage on *The World* Dec 2-9, 2025:

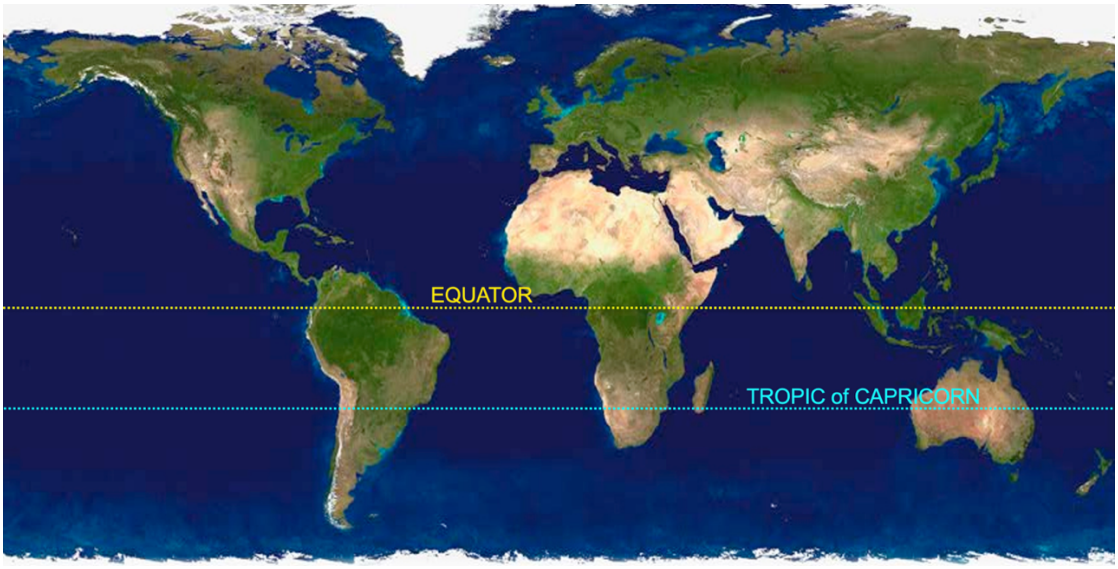




Charles Darwin never visited the Northern Territory. Both the city of Darwin and the Beagle Gulf were named by Captain John Wickham on the HMS *Beagle*'s 3rd voyage in 1839, 3 years after the completion of the 2nd voyage (1831-36) on which Charles Darwin's had served as Naturalist.

Our first leg from **Darwin to Port Douglas** via the Arafura Sea and through the Torres Strait into the Coral Sea is approximately 1200 nautical miles (nm). The **Torres Strait** which separates Australia and New Guinea (once connected) is roughly 100 mi wide. There are over 270 islands in the Strait, so navigable passages are much narrower. It is one of the shallower and more complex straits globally, with depths mostly under 66 ft/20m. We will sail past **Cape York**, which is at the north tip of the **Cape York Peninsula**. The Peninsula has no universally agreed-upon southern boundary but many consider Cooktown 'the gateway to the Peninsula'. **Distance from Cooktown to the tip of the peninsula at Cape York is 340 mi/550 km** as the crow flies. **Distance from Port Douglas to Cairns** by sea as we will do is about 70 nm (and just half that as the crow flies - since sea transit involves avoiding many islets and reef formations). From **Cairns to the tip of the Peninsula** at Cape York is 440mi/700 km as the crow flies.

We will be in the tropics - note that the **Tropic of Capricorn** very roughly bisects Australia, running through the eastern coastal area at the city of Rockhampton, about 450 mi/725 km south of Cairns.



Our voyage begins in Australia's **Northern Territory**, one of 3 'internal' mainland territories along with the Capital Territory around Canberra and the nearby Jervis Bay Territory port area. We will end in **Queensland**, the 2nd largest by area of Australia's **6 states** (after Western Australia). New South Wales, home to Sydney, is the largest state by population (8.5M of Australia's total 28M.). Tasmania is the smallest state in both area and population (570,000).





Australia also has **7 'External Territories'** overseas:



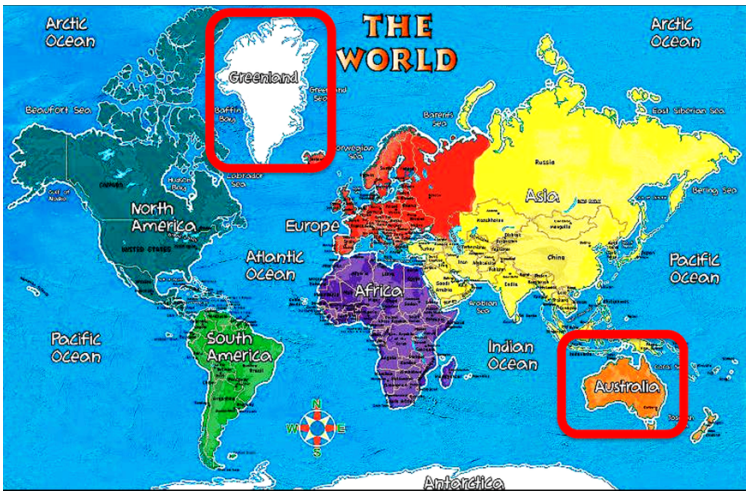
Note: The Coral Sea Islands, Heard & McDonald, and Ashmore & Cartier are uninhabited.

Australia is a big country - much bigger than it looks on world maps which are distorted mercator projections. It **ranks #6 in the world in size**:

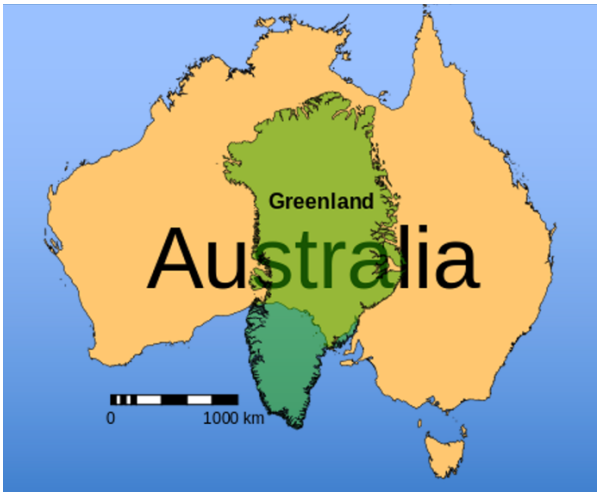
10 LARGEST COUNTRIES BY AREA		
	SQ MI	SQ KM
1. Russia	3,972,400 sq mi	10,290,810 km²
2. Canada	3,855,100 sq mi	9,984,670 km²
3. China	3,705,407 sq mi	9,596,961 km²
4. USA	3,678,190 sq mi	9,525,067 km²
5. Brazil	3,287,956 sq mi	8,515,767 km²
6. Australia	2,969,907 sq mi	7,692,024 km²
7. India	1,269,219 sq mi	3,287,263 km²
8. Argentina	1,073,500 sq mi	2,780,400 km²
9. Kazakhstan	1,049,150 sq mi	2,724,900 km²
10. Algeria	919,595 sq mi	2,381,741 km²

A large majority of geographers and virtually all geologists consider Australia ***a continent*** and ***not an island***, based on its having **its own tectonic plate** and continental shelf (unlike Greenland, for example, which is on the North American tectonic plate). Australia in fact is 3.5X as large as Greenland, the world's largest island -despite Greenland's distorted enlargement on standard (mercator projection) world maps:

ON TYPICAL MERCATOR WORLD MAPS:



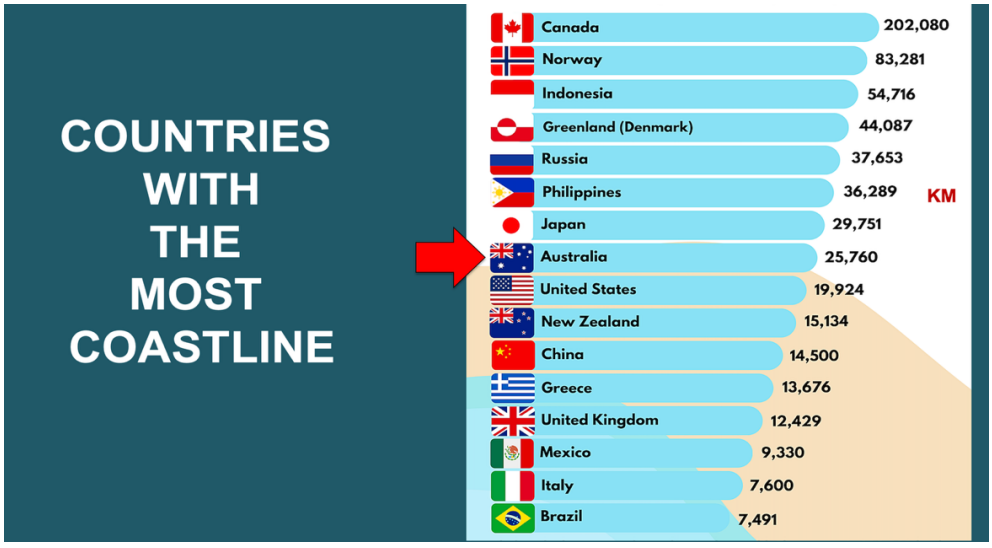
IN REALITY:



As big as Australia is, however, it is the **smallest of the 7 continents**:

CONTINENT (SMALLEST TO LARGEST):	Area (mi²)	Area (km²)
Australia	2,969,907	7,692,024
Europe	3,931,000	10,180,000
Antarctica	5,405,000	14,000,000
South America	6,888,000	17,840,000
North America	9,365,000	24,709,000
Africa	11,730,000	30,370,000
Asia	17,212,000	44,579,000

Australia has about 16,000 miles (>25,000 km) of **coastline, ranking #8 in the world**:



Australia has a surprisingly large number of islands - over 8000:

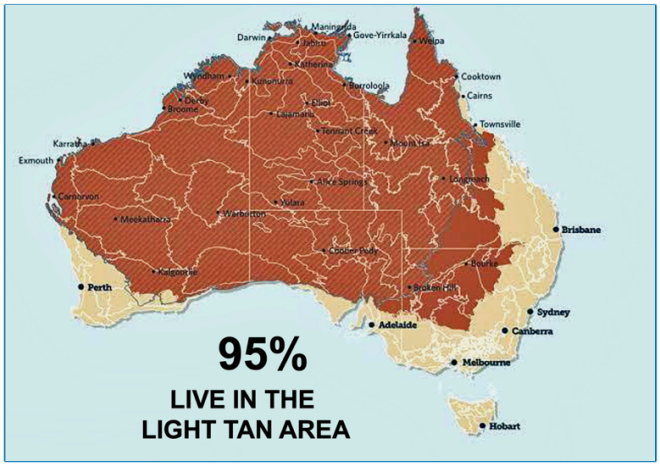


The 'neighborhood' around northeastern Australia is a geographically interesting one with a long and fascinating history including major battle zones in WWII: the Coral Sea, New Guinea and the Bismarcks, the Solomons, and the infamous **bombing of Darwin on February 19, 1942** with over 250 fatalities and over 300 wounded. The **Battle of the Coral Sea May 4-8, 1942**, one month before Midway, was a major turning point battle in WWII with a lasting legacy. It thwarted the Japanese invasion of Port Moresby which in turn prevented a Japanese blockade and/or invasion of Australia. I will cover the outsized importance of this early Pacific sea battle in detail in my lecture program.



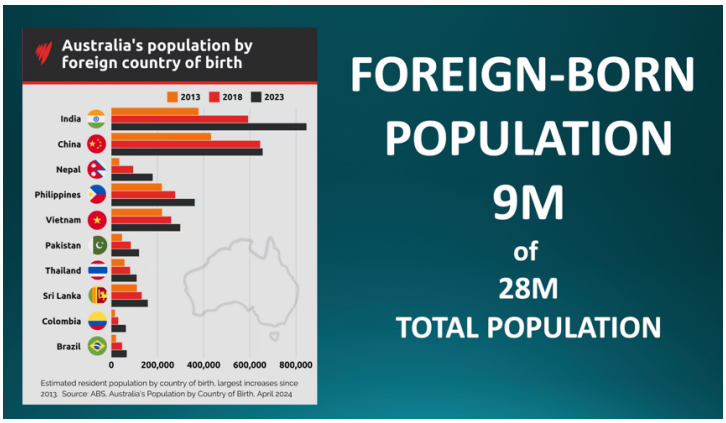
Australia and New Guinea were connected (as the **paleo-continent of Sahul**, along with Tasmania) until about 8000 years ago when rising seas from glacial melting flooded the Torres Strait in the north and the Bass Strait in the south. Australia and New Guinea were also once connected to South America and also to Antarctica (which was tropical!) as part of the paleo-continent of Gondwana. In fact **all Australian marsupials are descended from a stem ancestor that migrated from South America** through Antarctica to Australia about 50 million years ago. We will cover the fascinating biogeography of Australian fauna in my lecture series.

A final note on **Australian demographics**: Australia has a population of approximately **28 million** with almost 90% living within 50 miles of the coast and a heavy concentration in urban centers:



Rank	Biggest Cities in Australia	Metro Population
1	Sydney	4,920,970
2	Melbourne	4,529,496
3	Brisbane	2,308,720
4	Perth	2,039,193
5	Adelaide	1,316,779
6	Gold Coast	624,918
7	Newcastle–Maitland	434,454
8	Canberra	424,666
9	Sunshine Coast	302,122
10	Wollongong	292,388

Almost one third of Australia's population is foreign-born today, with origins as noted below. This puts Australia at #9 in the world. For comparison, the USA has about 15-16% foreign-born, the UK about 17-18%, and Japan about 3%.



Rank	Country	Foreign-Born (%)
1	United Arab Emirates	88.5
2	Qatar	77.0
3	Kuwait	73.0
4	Bahrain	64.0
5	Luxembourg	47.0
6	Singapore	43.0
7	Jordan	40.0
8	Switzerland	31.0
9	Australia	30.0
10	Oman	29.0

Roughly **1 million of Australia's 28 million residents (3.6%) are considered to be indigenous,** which includes both Australian Aboriginal People (also called First Nations People) and Torres Strait Islanders.