

Where Do People Live?

SECTION

1

**BEFORE
YOU
READ**

Reach Into Your Background

Would you like to live in a city or in the country? List some

interesting things you could do if you lived far from a city. List the things you would enjoy most about city life.

Questions to Explore

1. Where do most of the world's people live?
2. What factors affect population density?

Key Terms

population
population distribution
demographer
population density

Key Places

Nile River valley

Imagine that you go to school in Tokyo, the capital of Japan. Every day you ride the train to school. What is it like? You probably must stand up for your two-hour ride. Every day more and more people jam the train. Often the car is so crowded that special station guards push people inside so the doors can close behind them.

This is not an exaggeration. The country of Japan is smaller than California. But it is home for over 126 million people. Over 34 million of them live in Tokyo and its suburbs. Public transportation, roads, and living space are extremely crowded.

What Is Population Distribution?

The world's **population**, or total number of people, is spread unevenly over the Earth's surface. Some places have large numbers of people. In other places, the population is very small. **Population distribution** describes the way the population is spread out over the Earth.



▲ At rush hour in Tokyo, white-gloved guards jam two more passengers onto an already full train.

LINKS TO SCIENCE

Rising Ocean Levels

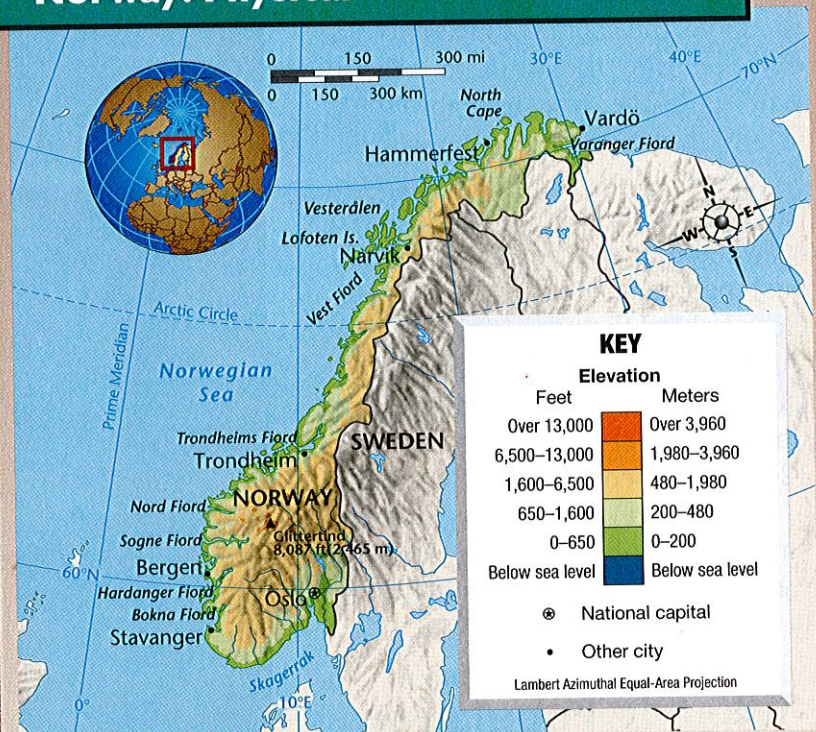
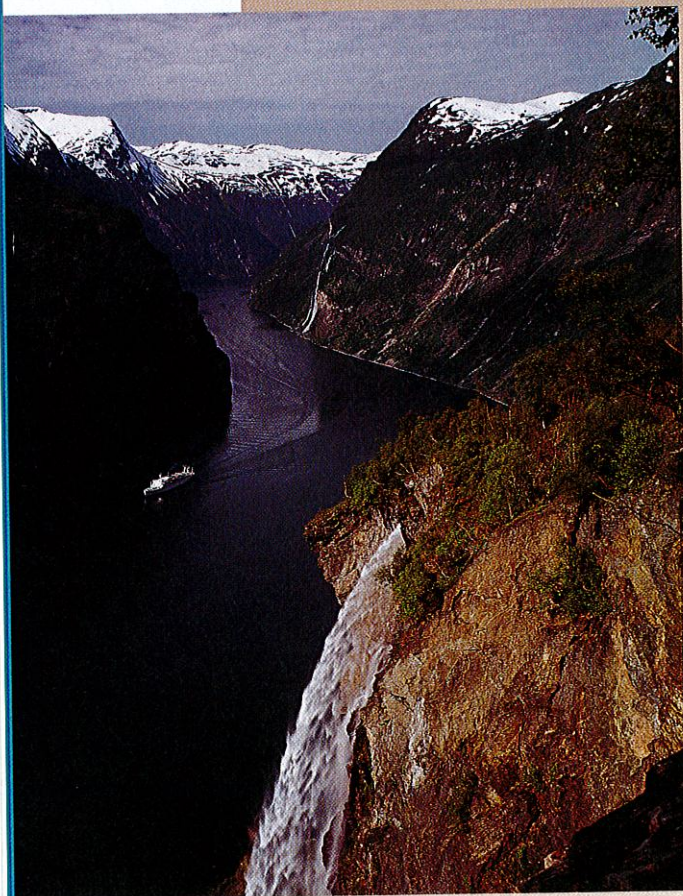
Suppose world temperatures rose enough to melt Earth's glaciers and polar ice caps. A recent government report said the oceans are rising, although this may be only temporary. However, some scientists say ocean levels may rise $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet by 2100. Cities like San Francisco, Sydney, and Rio de Janeiro, which lie along ocean coastlines, would flood.

The reasons population is distributed as it is may seem unclear. Scientists called demographers try to figure it out. **Demographers** study the populations of the world. They examine such things as rates of birth, marriage, and death. And they look at the reasons why people choose to live in certain areas.

Why Is Population Distribution Uneven? To answer this question, demographers start with the idea that people are choosy. Recall an important fact about the Earth's surface. Many of the Earth's landforms are rugged mountains, hot deserts, and dry land with little vegetation. Few people can live in these places.

Many factors make a location a good place for people to live. Most major civilizations of world history began along bodies of water. Rivers and lakes form natural "roads" for trade and travel. Also, rivers and lakes supply fresh water for drinking and farming. People also prefer areas of flat, fertile soil. There they can grow food and build easily. Therefore, plains and valleys are easy to settle. Flat coastal areas make it easy for people to trade by ship with other countries. Look at the maps on this page and the opposite page to see how landforms affect where people live.

Norway: Physical



Map Study Norway is a very mountainous country. Notice that much of Norway's western coastal area has elevations as high as 1,600 feet (480 m). In places, these high coastal areas are cut by narrow inlets called fiords. **Place** Look at the picture of the fiord. What would you expect to be the population density of such an area? Why?

Other factors affect where people live. People prefer areas where the climate is not too hot or too cold, and where there is adequate rainfall. These places make it easier to raise food crops and animals. People also prefer places with natural resources to build houses and make products. For instance, few trees grew on the American Great Plains. Few people settled there at first. They went on to other regions.

Continents Populous and Not Populous These reasons explain why more than 81 percent of the Earth's people—about 4.9 billion—live in Asia, Europe, and North America. These continents total only about 53 percent of the world's land. However, they have fertile soil, plains, valleys, and other favorable landforms. They also have fresh water, rich natural resources, and good climates.

Other continents have smaller populations partly because it is harder to live there. For example, Australia is about three million square miles, about as large as the continental United States. Only about 19 million people live in Australia, however. About the same number of people live in just the state of New York. Australia's environment is mostly desert or dry grassland. There are few rivers and little rainfall. As a result, most people live along the coasts, where conditions are better.

In Africa, too, landforms and climates limit population. Africa has about 20 percent of the world's land. But it has only about 13 percent of the world's population. Africa has two of the world's largest deserts, one

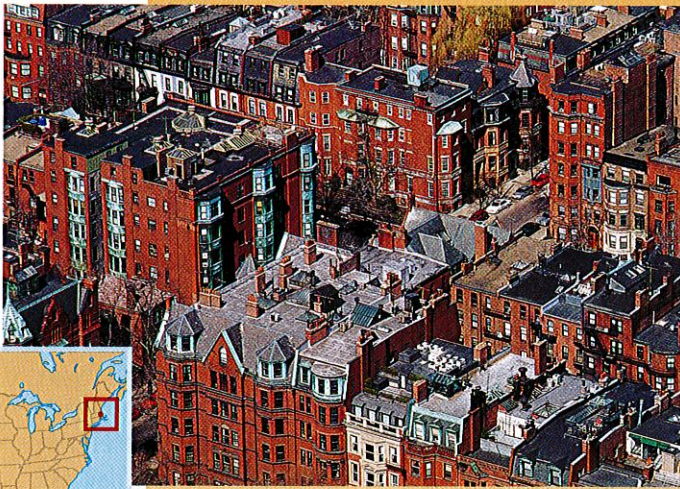
Japan: Contour Map

Map Study The contour lines, or isolines, on this map of Japan show areas that have the same elevation. Notice that a narrow coastal plain surrounds Japan's islands. Three quarters of the country's population live on this narrow coastal plain between the cities of Tokyo and Hiroshima.

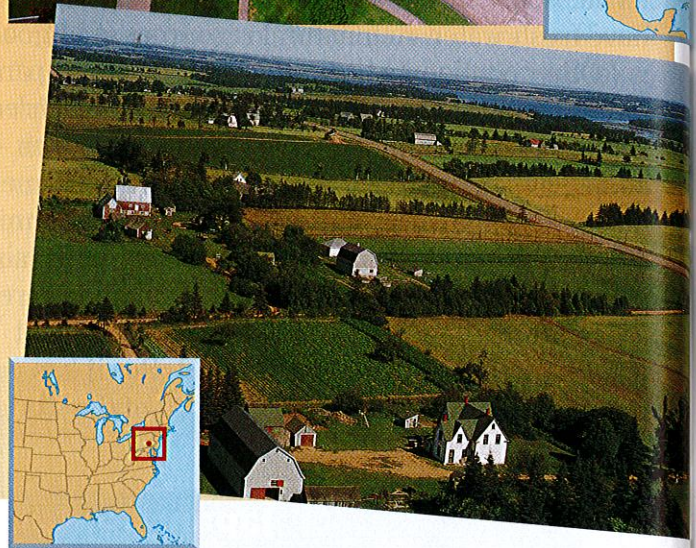
Place Why do you think most of Japan's population lives in this area?



City, Suburb, Countryside



In many countries, people can choose to live in very different places. For example, these photographs show apartments in Boston's Back Bay (above), houses in a Texas suburb (above right), and farms dotting the rich land near Lancaster, Pennsylvania (right). **Critical Thinking** What factors might cause people to choose homes in the city, the suburbs, or the country?



in the north and one in the south. Then there are broad bands of land that get little rain. In the center of the continent, along the Equator, there is a vast rain forest. Therefore, many people in Africa live along its narrow coasts.

Landforms and climates also limit South America's population. About 340 million people live there. Most live along the continent's Atlantic coast. Other regions have soaring mountains, vast dry plains, and thick rain forests. Fewer people live in these areas.

What Is Population Density?

How many people live on your street or in your neighborhood? The average number of people who live in a square mile (or square kilometer) is called **population density**. In every city and country, population density varies from one area to another. In a country with a high density, people are crowded together. Japan has one of the highest population densities in the world. Almost all of its 126 million people live on only 16 percent of the land. In Tokyo alone, there are more than 25,000 people per square mile (9,664 people per sq km).

In contrast, Canada has a low population density. It is almost 9 persons per square mile (three persons per sq km). Canada is bigger than the United States. But only about 31 million live there. Many

factors affect Canada's population. For instance, its cool climate has a short growing season. This limits farming.

Studying Population Density How do demographers measure population density? They divide the number of people living in a place by the number of square miles (or sq km) of that place. For example, California's population is 33,871,648 people. Its land area is 155,973 square miles (403,970 sq km). Therefore, California's average population density is 217.2 persons per square mile (83.8 persons per sq km).

Remember that population density is an *average*. People are not evenly distributed over the land. New York City has a very dense population. However, New York state has many fewer people per square mile. Even in the city, some areas are more densely populated than others.

On a world population density map, different colors show how world population is distributed. Darker colors show areas with heavy population. Find the world population density map in the Activity Atlas. Find the most densely populated areas of each continent. Now, find these places on the world physical map in the Activity Atlas. Compare the landforms to the population density. Notice that people tend to live on level areas near bodies of water.

Find the Nile River valley in Egypt. This region is very densely populated. In some areas the population density is about 5,000 people per square mile (1,930 per sq km). This is one of the highest population densities in the world. Why do so many people live here? If you think it is because the Nile is a great source of water and the land around it is flat and fertile, you are right. The land beyond the river is desert. Life there is difficult.

Some people do live in areas most of us would find uncomfortable. The Inuit and the Sami people live in frozen Arctic regions. Herders in desert regions of Africa and Asia survive in places that would challenge most people. Over many generations, these people have developed ways of life suited to their environments.



Connect Would you rather live in a place where the population density is high or low? Explain why.

SECTION 1 REVIEW

- 1. Define** (a) population, (b) population distribution, (c) demographer, (d) population density.
- 2. Identify** Nile River valley.
- 3.** How do the physical characteristics of a country tend to affect its population distribution?

- 4.** Why is it important to understand that population density is an average?

Critical Thinking

5. Making Comparisons

A large percentage of the world's population lives on a small percentage of the world's land. How do the population distributions in Japan and Canada reflect this fact?

Activity

- 6. Writing to Learn** You are a demographer studying your community. Make a list of questions to ask and possible sources for answers. Include in your list some population issues that are important to your community.