The Geography of Europe

Europe is a small continent, larger only than the smallest continent in the world, Australia. Technically Europe is not a distinct continent like South America or Australia because it is broadly connected to the continent of Asia. The entire landmass of Europe and Asia together is named Eurasia. What geographers call the continent of Europe is in reality a huge peninsula at the western edge of Eurasia. However, the cultures of Europe and Asia evolved as very different from each other and, in general, historians consider them as separate continents even though geographers might prefer to look at just one combined continent.

Europe is bordered to the north by the Arctic Ocean; to the west by the Atlantic Ocean; to the south by the Mediterranean Sea, a subdivision of the Atlantic Ocean; and to the east by Asia. The line between Europe and Asia is generally defined at the Ural Mountains of Russia, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus Mountains which run between the Black and Caspian Seas. The Black Sea is an inland saltwater sea that connects through narrow channels to the Aegean Sea. The Aegean Sea is part of the Mediterranean Sea near the Greek peninsula. The Caspian Sea is a large saltwater lake, the largest lake in the world, second only to Lake Superior in North America. Europe is the location of many famous rivers including Volga (the longest river in Europe), Danube, Don, Rhine, and Seine.

Europe is home to numerous peninsulas where people developed unique cultures over the centuries. Major peninsulas include Iberian, Italian, Greek and Scandinavian. Europe includes all the islands in the Mediterranean Sea such as Sicily and Corsica plus islands in the Atlantic Ocean. Islands in the Atlantic Ocean that are part of Europe are the British Isles and Iceland. In modern times the countries of Europe are uniting the form the EU or European Union in order to compete more aggressively in the world economy.

Europe is home to numerous mountain ranges. Perhaps the most famous mountains of Europe are the Alps which are primarily found in the countries of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The Pyrenees Mountains are located between France and Spain while the Apennines are located in Italy.