

# Oceans





Most of Earth is covered by water.

## The Earth's Structure

If you were in space looking at Earth, you would see more water than land. Water covers almost 75 percent of Earth. Most of this water is in four oceans that are joined together. The oceans are really one big mass of water. Water is not all the same, though. It has a variety of areas, from coasts to reefs to the ocean floor.

The seven large land masses that rise above the oceans are called continents. Land masses that are smaller than continents are called islands. Earth has many islands. While oceans and land masses are different in many ways, they are alike in one important way. Beneath all of them oceans, islands, and continents, is a layer of rock.

**Key Notes:**

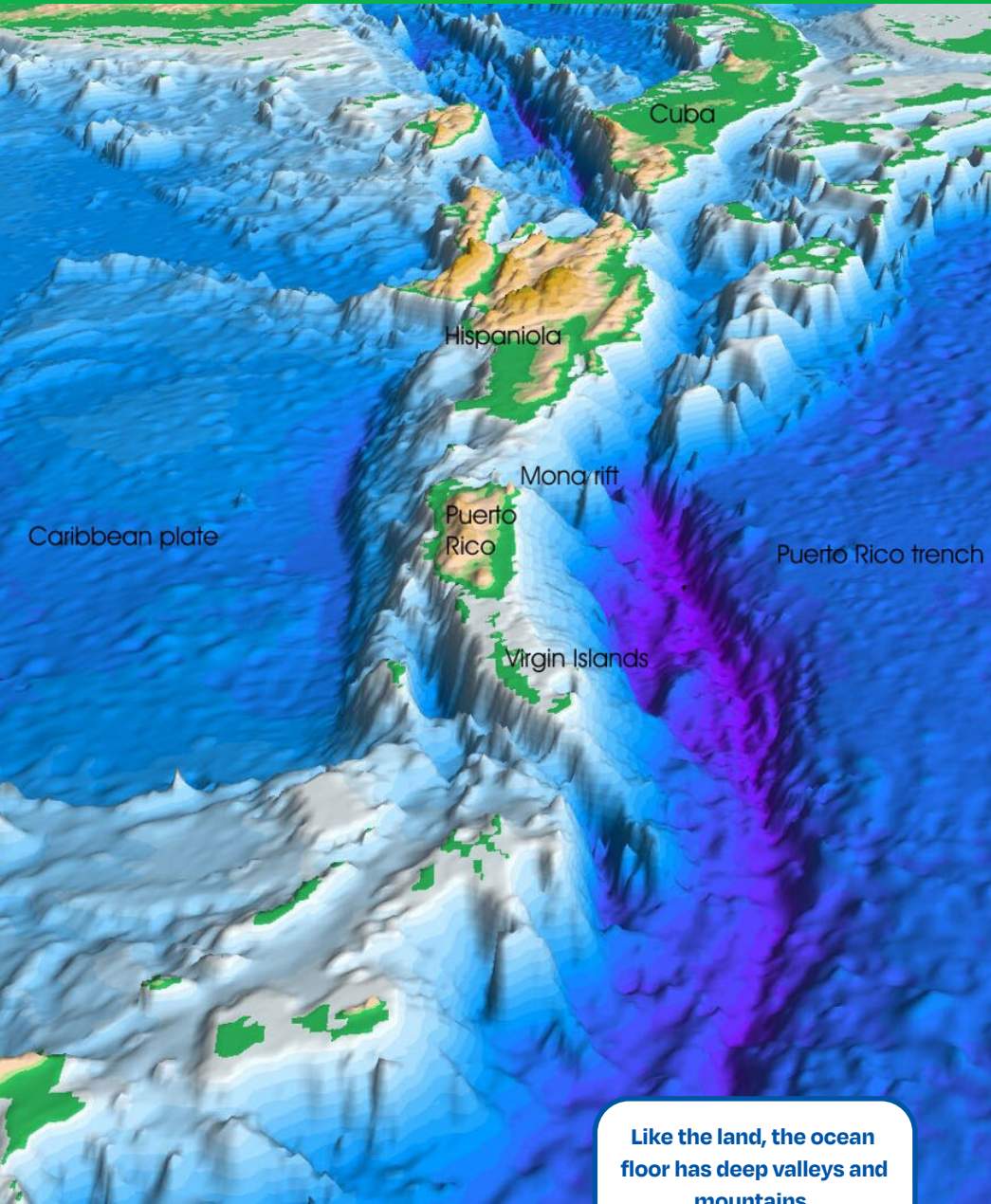
What are the continents?

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## The Ocean Floor

On most maps, the ocean floor looks smooth, but that's far from the truth. After new tools were invented, scientists discovered that the ocean floor is like the land, with high mountains, deep valleys, and wide plains. In fact, the tallest mountain on Earth is on the ocean floor. Maps can now show this hidden world, with mountains, valleys, and plains that look like those that can easily be seen on land.

At a continent's edge, the land slopes into the ocean. This slope of land is called the continental shelf. The ocean is not very deep along the continental shelf. However, the continental shelf ends in a steep cliff. At the edge of this cliff, the ocean is very deep.

### Key Notes:

What happens to the land at the end of the continental shelf?

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Like the land, the ocean floor has deep valleys and mountains.





Many kinds of plants and animals are part of coral reefs.

## Coral Reefs

The ocean has many layers, with different species of animals and plants in each one. In some warm places, the top layer of the ocean is the habitat of little animals called corals. Each coral is about the size of a pen's tip.

Corals live side by side and do not move. When corals die, their hard shells stick together. Then, new corals grow on top of the old shells. Over a long time, piles of coral shells can grow very high, forming a coral reef.

Some coral reefs look like large bushes. These reefs make good habitats for many animals and plant species because they have lots of hiding places. People enjoy visiting coral reefs to see these underwater zoos.

### Key Notes:

What is a coral reef?

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Over many years, ocean waves create sand by breaking stone into tiny pieces.

## Coasts and Beaches

The winds that blow over the oceans make waves that move constantly. When the waves reach the land, they crash into an area of land called a coast.

In some places, the land on the coast is made up of high cliffs. However, if the land on the coast is low, the constant pounding of the waves can wear the land away, forming small rocks. The waves keep pounding these small rocks, breaking them into even smaller rocks.

Over a very long time, the constant pounding of the waves breaks apart the same rocks, making them into tiny rock particles. These particles finally become a wide sandy beach that people can visit to enjoy the sun and ocean waves.

### Key Notes:

What is a coast?

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