

# Let's explore Europe!





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# Let's explore Europe!

## Hello! Welcome to Europe!

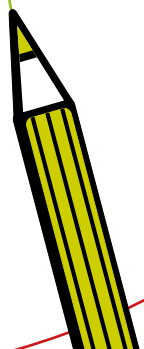
We come from different countries and speak different languages, but this continent is the home we share.

Come with us and let's explore Europe together! It will be an adventurous journey through time and space and you'll find out loads of interesting things.

As we go along, test yourself to see how much you've learnt. Go to our website [europa.eu/kids-corner](http://europa.eu/kids-corner) where you will find the Let's explore Europe! game and many other quizzes and games about Europe.

At school, explore further! Ask your teacher to tell you more about each of the topics in this book. Then do some deeper research in the school library or on the Internet. You could even write your own booklet about what you have discovered.

## Ready? Then let's begin!



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# A continent to discover

Europe is one of the world's seven continents. The others are Africa, North and South America, Antarctica, Asia and Australia/Oceania.

Europe stretches all the way from the Arctic in the north to the Mediterranean Sea in the south, and from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Ural mountains (in Russia) in the east. It has many rivers, lakes and mountain ranges. The map on page 4 tells you the names of some of the biggest ones.

The highest mountain in Europe is Mount Elbrus, in the Caucasus mountains, on the border between Russia and Georgia. Its highest peak is 5 642 metres above sea level.

The highest mountain in western Europe is Mont Blanc, in the Alps, on the border between France and Italy. Its summit is over 4 800 metres above sea level.

Also in the Alps is Lake Geneva – the largest freshwater lake in western Europe. It lies between France and Switzerland, goes as deep as 310 metres and holds about 89 trillion litres of water.

The largest lake in central Europe is Balaton, in Hungary. It is 77 kilometres (km) long and covers an area of about 600 square kilometres (km<sup>2</sup>). Northern Europe has even bigger lakes, including Saimaa in Finland (1 147 km<sup>2</sup>) and Vänern in Sweden (more than 5 500 km<sup>2</sup>). The largest lake in Europe as a whole is Lake Ladoga. It is located in north-western Russia and it is the 14th largest lake in the world. Its surface covers an area of 17 700 km<sup>2</sup>.



© Michael/Pixelio

*Mount Elbrus, the highest mountain in Europe.*



© Pixelio

*Lake Geneva, in the Alps.*



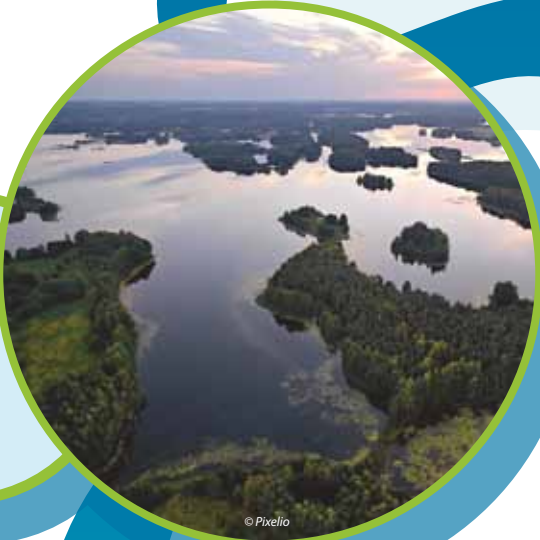
© Kratos May/Flickr

*Lake Saimaa, in Finland.*

# The continent of Europe



*The Danube delta, Romania.*



© Pixelio

One of Europe's longest rivers is the Danube. It rises in the Black Forest region of Germany and flows eastwards through Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine to Romania, where it forms a delta on the Black Sea coast. In all, it covers a distance of about 2850 km.

*The Loire valley is famous for its beautiful castles.*



© Flickr

Other big rivers include the Rhine (about 1320 km long) and the Elbe (about 1170 km), as well as the Loire and the Vistula (both more than 1000 km). Can you find them on the map?

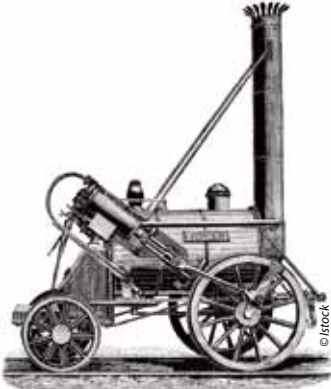
*A cargo barge travels up the Rhine.*



© Fridmar Damn/Corbis

Big rivers are very useful for transporting things. All kinds of goods are loaded onto barges that carry them up and down the rivers, between Europe's sea ports and cities far inland.

# Getting around



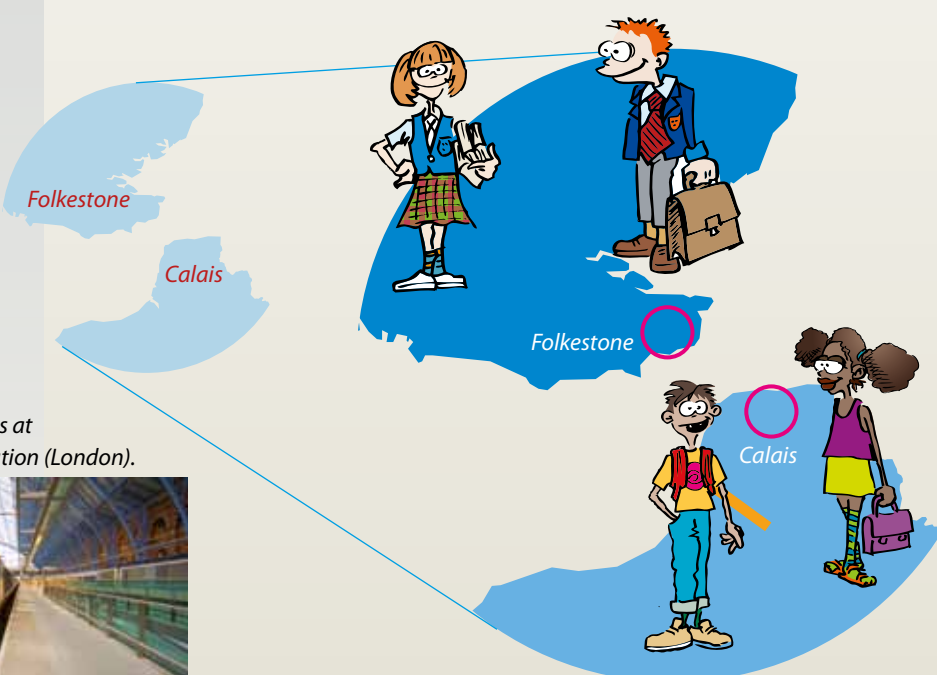
Stephenson's 'Rocket'.

Did you know that railways were invented in Europe? It was in England that George Stephenson introduced the first passenger train in 1825. His most famous locomotive was called 'the Rocket' and it reached speeds of more than 40 kilometres per hour (km/h) – which was really fast for those days.

Today, Europe's high-speed electric trains are very different from those first steam engines. They are very comfortable and they travel at speeds of up to 330 km/h on specially built tracks. More tracks are being built all the time, to allow people to travel quickly between Europe's big cities.

Roads and railways sometimes have to cross mountain ranges, wide rivers or even the sea. So engineers have built some very long bridges and tunnels. The longest road tunnel in Europe is the Laerdal tunnel in Norway, between Bergen and Oslo. It is more than 24 km long and was opened in the year 2000.

The longest railway tunnel in Europe is the Channel Tunnel. It carries Eurostar high-speed trains under the sea between Calais in France and Folkestone in England, and it's more than 50 km long.



Eurostar trains at St Pancras station (London).



© Colin Garratt/Corbis



The highest bridge in the world (245 metres tall) is the Millau Viaduct in France, which was opened in 2004.

Two of the longest bridges in Europe are the Oresund road and rail bridge (16 km long) between Denmark and Sweden and the Vasco da Gama road bridge (more than 17 km long) across the river Tagus in Portugal. The Vasco da Gama bridge is named after a famous explorer, and you can read about him in the chapter 'A journey through time'.

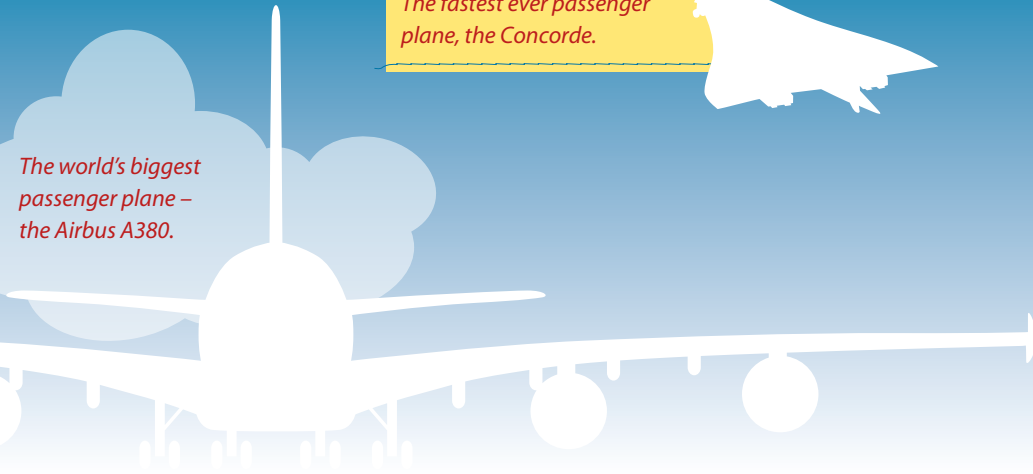


The world's highest bridge – the Millau Viaduct (France).



The fastest ever passenger plane, the Concorde.

The world's biggest passenger plane – the Airbus A380.

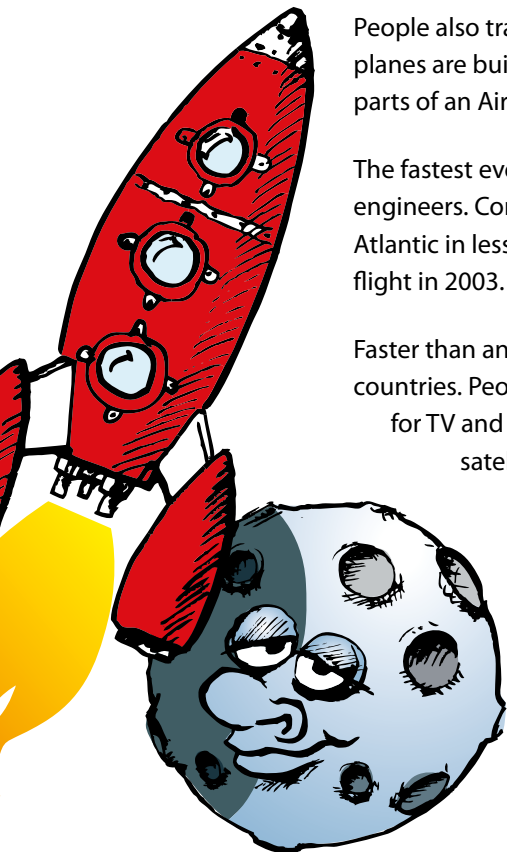


People also travel around Europe by plane, because air travel is quick. Some of the world's best planes are built in Europe – for example, the 'Airbus'. Different European countries make different parts of an Airbus, and then a team of engineers puts the whole plane together.

The fastest ever passenger plane, the Concorde, was designed by a team of French and British engineers. Concorde could fly at 2 160 km/h – twice the speed of sound – and could cross the Atlantic in less than three hours! (Most planes take about eight hours.) Concorde took its final flight in 2003.

Faster than any plane are space rockets, such as Ariane – a joint project between several European countries. People don't travel in the Ariane rocket: it is used to launch satellites, which are needed for TV and mobile phone networks, for scientific research and so on. Most of the world's satellites are now launched using these European rockets.

The success of Concorde, Airbus and Ariane show what can be achieved when European countries work together.



# Languages in Europe

People in Europe speak many different languages. Most of these languages belong to three large groups or 'families': Germanic, Slavic and Romance.

The languages in each group share a family likeness because they are descended from the same ancestors. For example, Romance languages are descended from Latin – the language spoken by the Romans.

Here's how to say 'Good morning' or 'Hello' in just a few of these languages.

## Germanic

Danish	God morgen
Dutch	Goedemorgen
English	Good morning
German	Guten Morgen
Swedish	God morgon

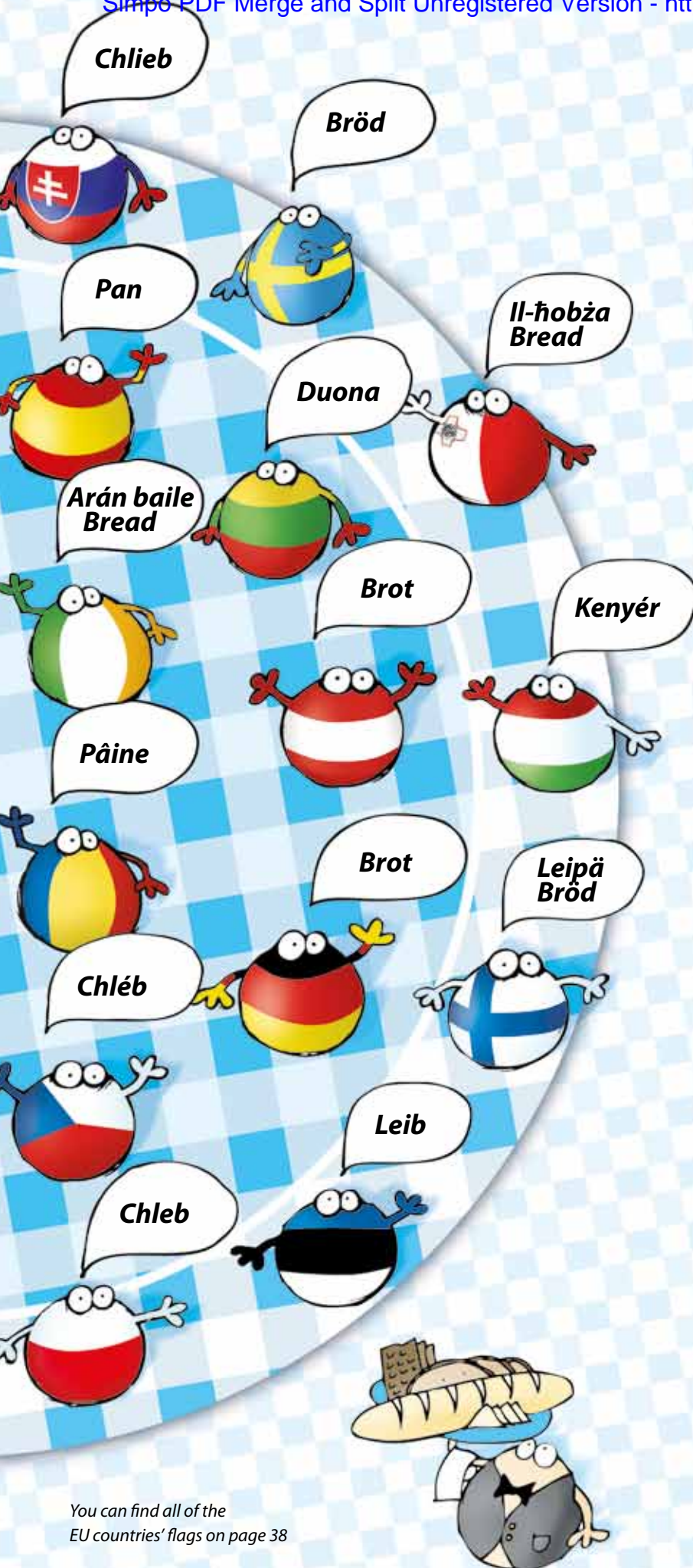
## Romance

French	Bonjour
Italian	Buongiorno
Portuguese	Bom dia
Romanian	Bună dimineața
Spanish	Buenos días

## Slavic

Bulgarian	Dobro útro
Czech	Dobré ráno
Polish	Dzień dobry
Slovak	Dobré ráno
Slovene	Dobro jutro





It's not hard to see the family likeness in these examples. But there are other European languages that are less closely related, or not at all related, to one another.

Here's how to say 'Good morning' or 'Hello' in several of these languages.

Basque	Egun on
Breton	Demat
Catalan	Bon dia
Estonian	Tere hommikust
Finnish	Hyvää huomenta
Gaelic (Scottish)	Madainn mhath
Greek	Kalimera
Hungarian	Jó reggelt
Irish	Dia dhuit
Latvian	Labrit
Lithuanian	Labas rytas
Maltese	L-Għodwa t-Tajba
Welsh	Bore da

In the language of the Roma people, who live in many parts of Europe, 'Good morning' is *Lasho dyes*.

Learning languages can be great fun – and it's important on a continent like ours. Many of us enjoy going on holiday to other European countries, and getting to know the people there. That's a great opportunity to practise the phrases we know in different languages.



The Arctic fox ...

# Climate and nature



... and snowy owl are well camouflaged.

Most of Europe has a 'temperate' climate – neither too hot nor too cold. The coldest places are in the far north and in the high mountains. The warmest places are in the far south and south-east.

The weather is warmest and driest in summer (roughly June to September) and coldest in winter (roughly December to March).

Europe had record-breaking hot summers in 2003 and 2006. Is this a sign that the climate is changing? Climate change is a worldwide problem that can only be solved if all countries work together.

## Coping with the winter

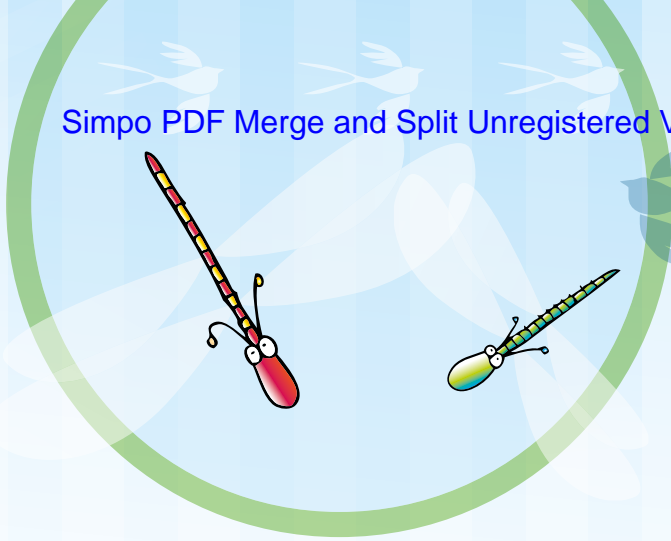
Wild animals in cold regions usually have thick fur or feathers to keep them warm, and their coats may be white to camouflage them in the snow. Some spend the winter sleeping to save energy. This is called hibernating.



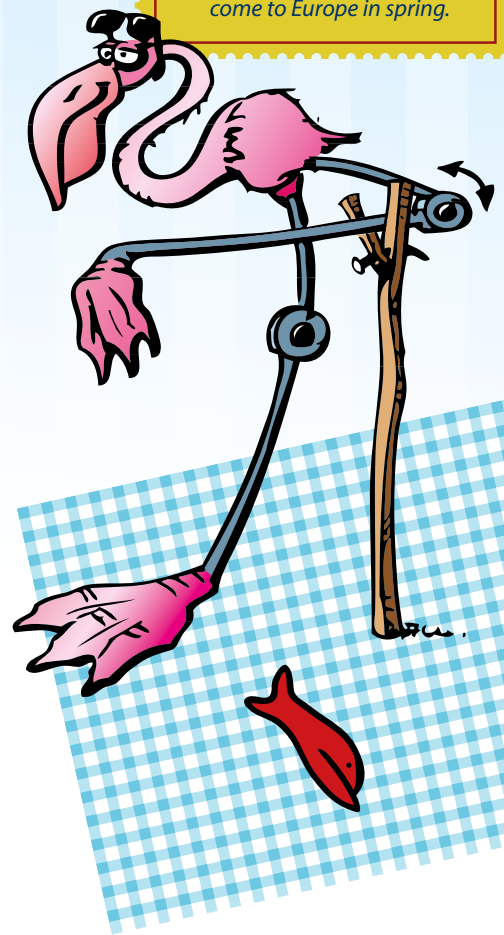
© Klaus Hackenberg/Corbis



European brown bears live in the mountains, where they spend the winter sleeping.



Even flamingos come to Europe in spring.

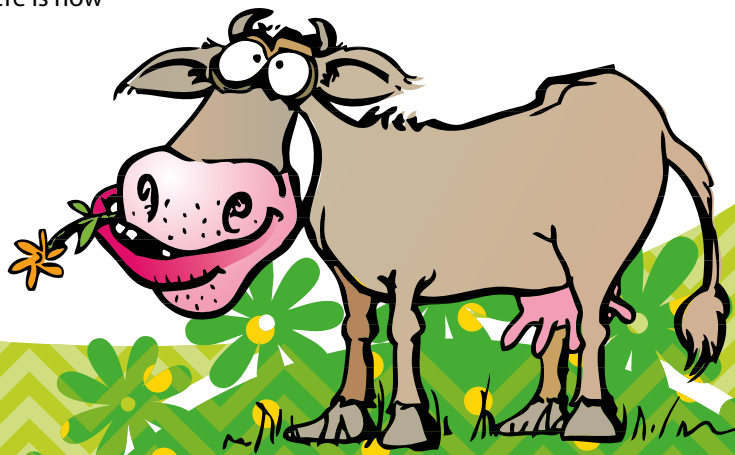


Many species of birds live on insects, small water creatures or other food that cannot easily be found during cold winter months. So they fly south in the autumn and don't return until spring. Some travel thousands of kilometres, across the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara Desert, to spend the winter in Africa. This seasonal travelling is called migrating.

### Enjoying the spring and summer

When spring comes to Europe (March to May), the weather gets warmer. Snow and ice melt. Baby fish and insect larvae swarm in the streams and ponds. Migrating birds return to make their nests and raise their families. Flowers open, and bees carry pollen from one plant to another.

Trees put out new leaves which catch the sunlight and use its energy to make the tree grow. In mountain regions, farmers move their cows up into the high meadows, where there is now plenty of fresh grass.



Summer is good in the mountain meadows.

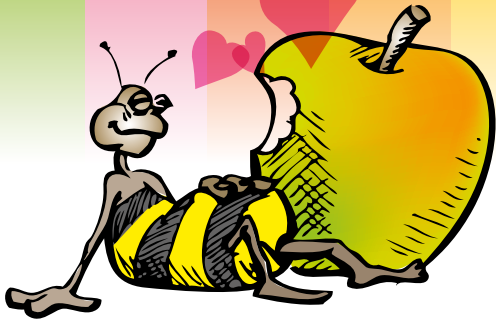
© Alamy



Cold-blooded animals such as reptiles also need the sun to give them energy. In summer, especially in southern Europe, you will often see lizards basking in the sunshine and hear the chirping of grasshoppers and cicadas.



*Lizards love warm weather.*



*Wasps love fruit too!*

## Autumn: a time of change

In late summer and autumn, the days grow shorter and the nights cooler. Many delicious fruits ripen at this time of year, and farmers are kept busy harvesting them. Nuts too ripen in autumn, and squirrels will gather and store heaps of them ready for the winter.



*Squirrels store nuts for their winter food.*

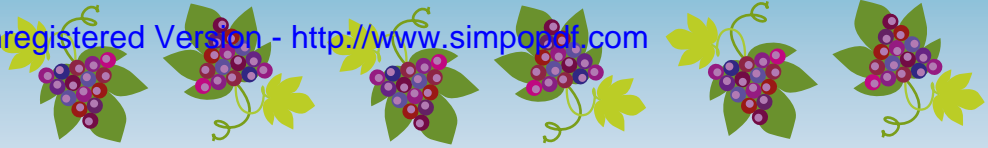
Many trees shed their leaves in autumn because there is no longer enough sunshine for the leaves to be useful. They gradually change from green to shades of yellow, red, gold and brown. Then they fall, carpeting the ground with colour. The fallen leaves decay, enriching the soil and providing food for future generations of plant life.

This yearly cycle of the seasons, and the changes it brings, make the European countryside what it is – beautiful, and very varied.

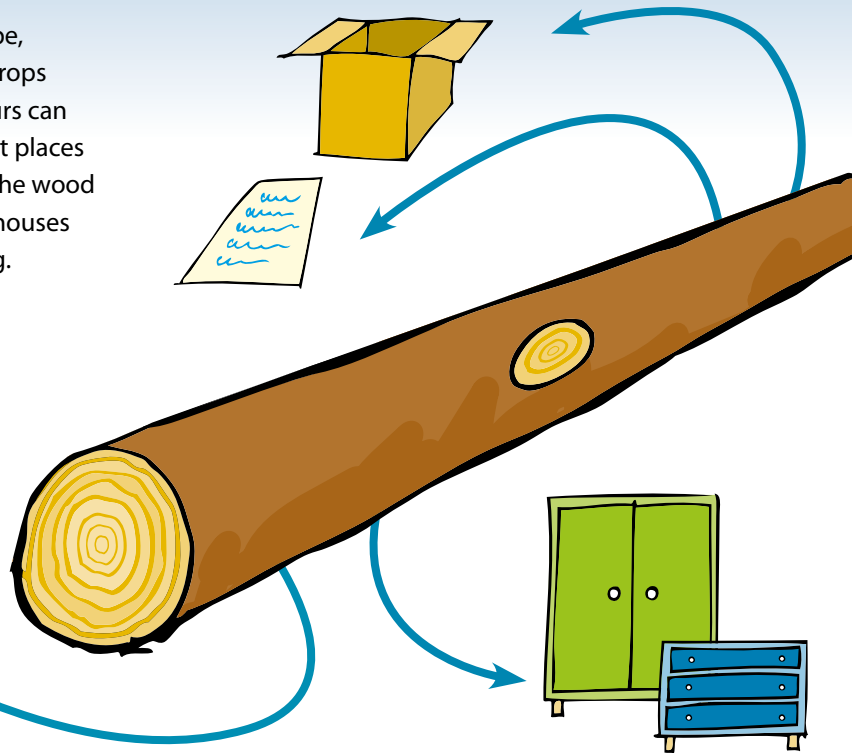
*Autumn carpets the woods with colour.*



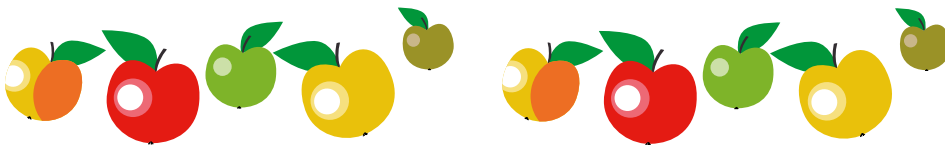
# Farming



On high mountains and in the far north of Europe, farming is impossible because it is too cold for crops to grow. But evergreen trees such as pines and firs can survive cold winters. That is why Europe's coldest places are covered with evergreen forests. People use the wood from these forests to make many things – from houses and furniture to paper and cardboard packaging.



Further south, most of the land is suitable for farming. It produces a wide variety of crops including wheat, maize, sugar beet, potatoes and all sorts of fruit and vegetables.



Where there is plenty of sunshine and hardly any frost (near the Mediterranean, for example), farmers can grow fruit such as oranges and lemons, grapes and olives. Olives contain oil which can be squeezed out of the fruit and used in preparing food. Grapes are squeezed to get the juice, which can be turned into wine. Europe is famous for its very good wines, which are sold all over the world.

*These grapes will be made into red wine.*



Mediterranean farmers also grow lots of other fruit and vegetables. Tomatoes, for example, ripen well in the southern sunshine. But vegetables need plenty of water, so farmers in hot, dry regions will often have to irrigate their crops. That means giving them water from rivers or from under the ground.

*Crops in dry regions need irrigating.*



Sheep grazing on grasslands.

Chickens provide eggs, which contain lots of protein and help us stay healthy.



Grass grows easily where there is enough rain, even if the soil is shallow or not very fertile. Many European farmers keep animals that eat grass – such as cows, sheep or goats. They provide milk, meat and other useful products like wool and leather.

Many farmers also keep pigs or chickens. These animals can be raised almost anywhere because they can be kept indoors and given specially prepared feed. Chickens provide not only meat but eggs too, and some farms produce thousands of eggs every day.

Farms in Europe range from very big to very small. Some have large fields – which makes it easy to harvest crops using big machines. Others, for example in hilly areas, may have small fields. Walls or hedgerows between fields help stop the wind and rain from carrying away soil, and they can be good for wildlife too.

Many city people like to spend weekends and holidays in the European countryside, enjoying the scenery, the peace and quiet and the fresh air. We all need to do what we can to look after the countryside and keep it beautiful.



The countryside is for everyone to enjoy.



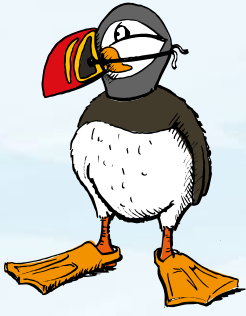
Pigs can be kept indoors.



A patchwork of fields in Europe.



# The sea



*The puffin nests on cliffs, and dives to catch fish.*

Europe has thousands and thousands of kilometres of coastline, which nature has shaped in various ways. There are tall rocky cliffs and beaches of sand or colourful pebbles formed by the sea as it pounds away at the rocks, century after century.

In Norway, glaciers have carved the coast into steep-sided valleys called fjords. In some other countries, the sea and wind pile up the sand into dunes. The highest dune in Europe (117 metres tall) is the Dune du Pyla, near Arcachon in France.

Many kinds of fish and other animals live in the sea around Europe's coasts. They provide food for sea birds, and for marine mammals such as seals. Where rivers flow into the sea, flocks of waders come to feed, at low tide, on creatures that live in the mud.



*The sea shaped these chalk cliffs.*

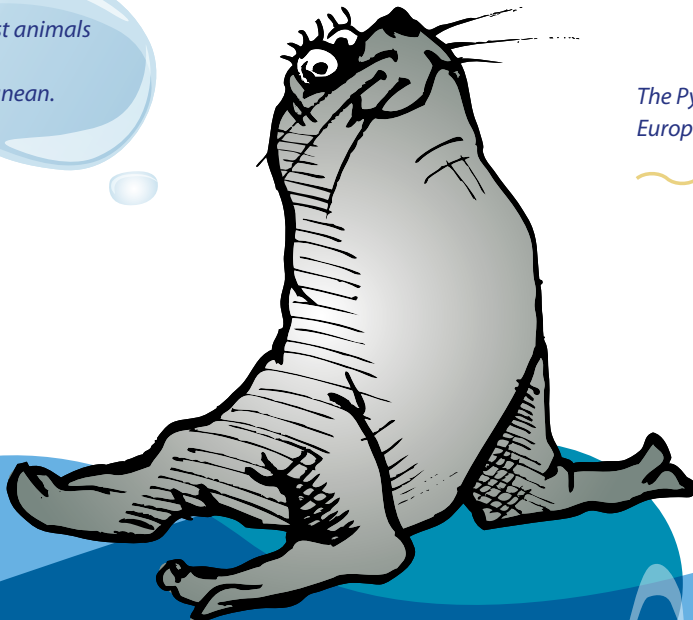


*A glacier carved this fjord.*



*The Pyla sand dune – Europe's tallest.*

*One of Europe's rarest animals – the monk seal – lives in the Mediterranean.*



*Flocks of waders find food in river estuaries.*

## People and the sea

The sea is important for people too. The Mediterranean was so important to the Romans that they called it Mare nostrum: 'our sea'. Down through the centuries, Europeans have sailed the world's oceans, discovered the other continents, explored them, traded with them and made their homes there. In the chapter 'A journey through time' you can find out more about these great voyages of discovery.

Cargo boats from around the world bring all kinds of goods (often packed in containers) to Europe's busy ports. Here they are unloaded on to trains, lorries and barges. Then the ships load up with goods that have been produced here and which are going to be sold on other continents.



*Container ships carry goods to and from Europe.*

Some of the world's finest ships have been built in Europe. They include Queen Mary 2 – one of the biggest passenger liners in the world. She made her first transatlantic voyage in January 2004.



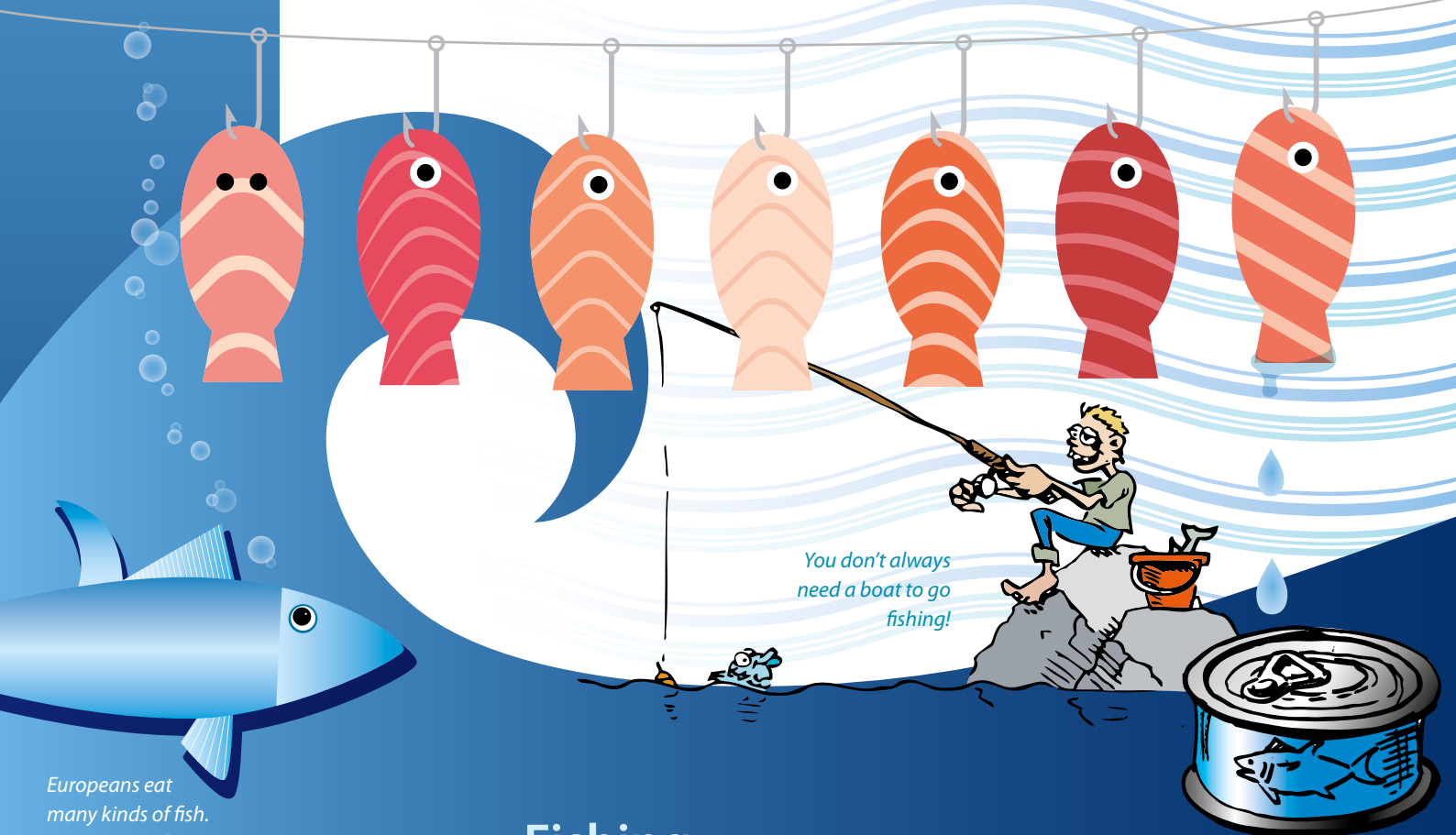
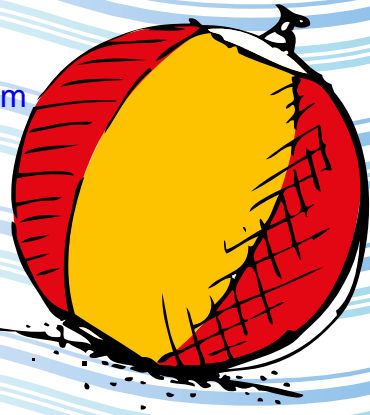
*One of the world's biggest passenger ships – Queen Mary 2.*



Scuba diving in the Mediterranean.

Europe's seaside resorts are great places for a holiday. You can enjoy all kinds of water sports, from surfing and boating to waterskiing and scuba diving.

Or you can just relax – sunbathing on the beach and cooling off in the sea.



You don't always need a boat to go fishing!

Europeans eat many kinds of fish. Tuna is one of the biggest!

## Fishing

Fishing has always been important for people in Europe. Whole towns have grown up around fishing harbours, and thousands of people earn their living by catching and selling fish or doing things for the fishermen and their families.

Modern fishing boats, such as factory trawlers, can catch huge numbers of fish. To make sure that enough are left in the sea, European countries have agreed rules about how many fish can be caught and about using nets that let young fish escape.

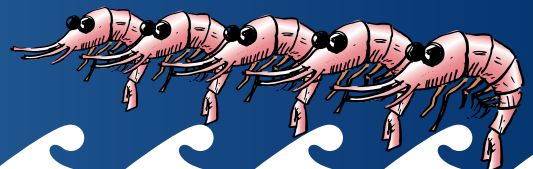
Another way to make sure we have enough fish is to farm them. On the coasts of northern Europe, salmon are reared in large cages in the sea. Shellfish such as mussels, oysters and clams can be farmed in the same way.



A trawler docked in Skye, Scotland.



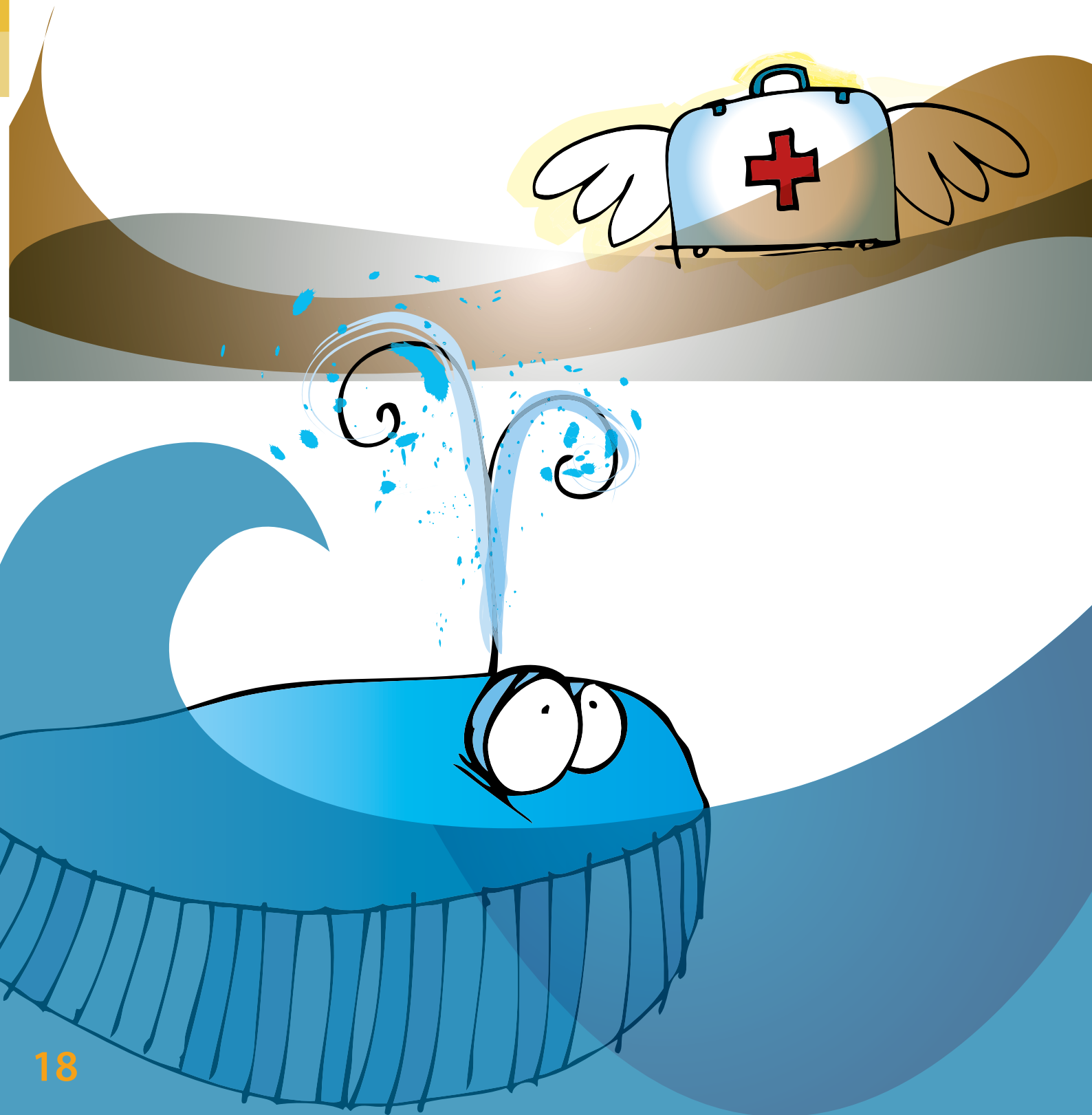
Farming salmon.



## Protecting Europe's coasts

Europe's coasts and the sea are important to wildlife and to people. So we need to look after them. We have to prevent them from becoming polluted by waste from factories and towns. Oil tankers sometimes have accidents, spilling huge amounts of oil into the sea. This can turn beaches black and kill thousands of seabirds.

European countries are working together to try to prevent these things from happening again and to make sure that our coastline will remain beautiful for future generations to enjoy.



# A journey through time

Over thousands of years, Europe has changed enormously.  
It's a fascinating story! But it's a long one, so here are just some of the highlights.

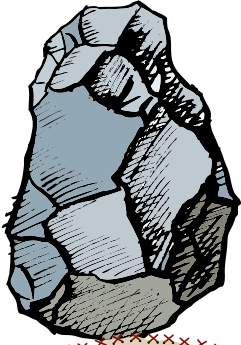


Prehistoric cave paintings at Lascaux, France.

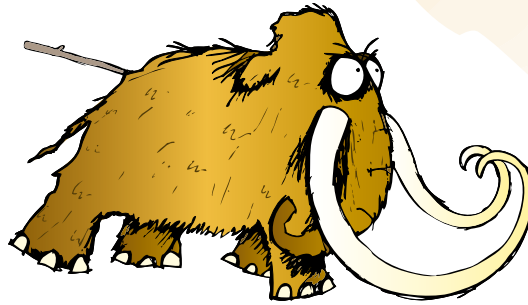
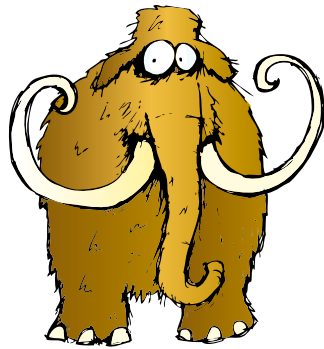
## The Stone Age

The earliest Europeans were hunters and gatherers. On the walls of some caves they made wonderful paintings of hunting scenes. Eventually, they learnt farming and began breeding animals, growing crops and living in villages.

They made their weapons and tools from stone – by sharpening pieces of flint, for example.



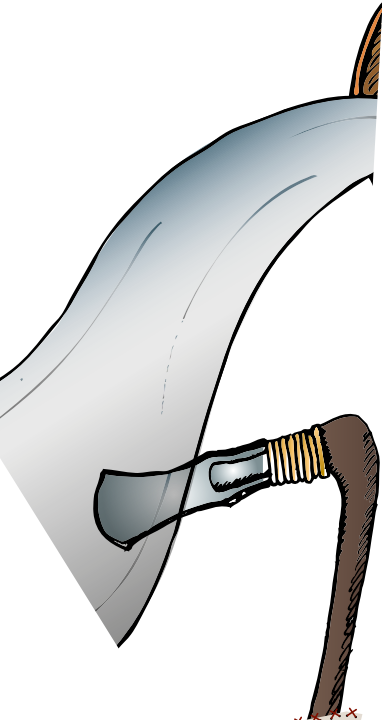
A flint tool from the Stone Age.



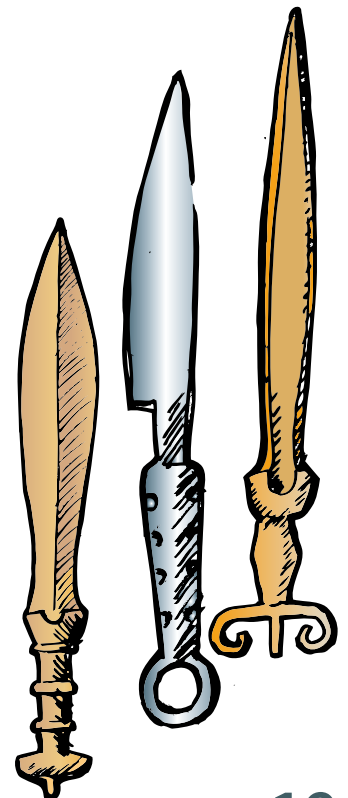
## The Bronze and Iron Ages – Learning to use metal

Several thousand years BC (before the birth of Christ), people discovered how to get different metals by heating different kinds of rock in a very hot fire. Bronze – a mixture of copper and tin – was hard enough for making tools and weapons. Gold and silver were soft but very beautiful and could be shaped into ornaments.

Later, an even harder metal was discovered: iron. The best kind of metal was steel, which was strong and didn't easily break, so it made good swords. But making steel was very tricky, so good swords were rare and valuable!



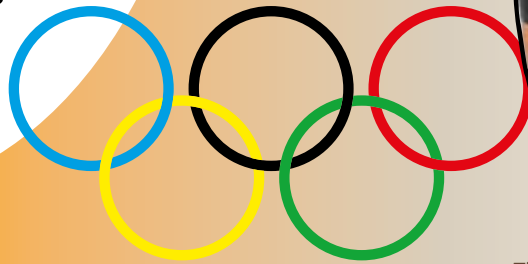
A bronze axe head.



# Ancient Greece

roughly 2000 to 200 BC –  
BC means before the birth of Christ

In Greece about 4 000 years ago, people began to build cities. At first they were ruled by kings. Later, around 500 BC, the city of Athens introduced 'democracy' – which means 'government by the people'. (Instead of having a king, the men of Athens took decisions by voting.) Democracy is an important European invention that has spread around the world.

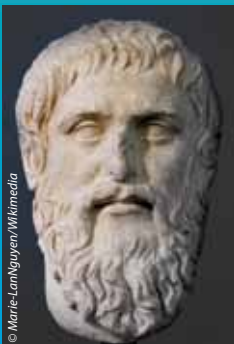


*This Greek vase with red-figure painting dates back to around 530 BC.*



## Some of the other things the ancient Greeks gave us include:

- > wonderful stories about gods and heroes, wars and adventures;
- > elegant temples, marble statues and beautiful pottery;
- > the Olympic Games;
- > well-designed theatres, and great writers whose plays are still performed today;
- > teachers like Socrates and Plato, who taught people how to think logically;
- > mathematicians like Euclid and Pythagoras, who worked out the patterns and rules in maths;
- > scientists like Aristotle (who studied plants and animals) and Eratosthenes (who proved that the Earth is a sphere and worked out how big it is).



*Plato, one of the world's great thinkers.*



## The Roman Empire

roughly 500 BC to 500 AD – AD means after the birth of Christ

Rome started out as just a village in Italy. But the Romans were very well organised, their army was very good at fighting and they gradually conquered all the lands around the Mediterranean. Eventually the Roman empire stretched all the way from northern England to the Sahara Desert and from the Atlantic to Asia.

### Here are some of the things the Romans gave us:

- > good, straight roads connecting all parts of the empire;
- > beautiful houses with courtyards and mosaic tiled floors;
- > strong bridges and aqueducts (for carrying water long distances);
- > round-topped arches – which made their buildings solid and long-lasting;
- > new building materials, such as cement and concrete;
- > new weapons such as catapults;
- > great writers like Cicero and Virgil;
- > the Roman system of law, which many European countries still use today.



A Roman aqueduct still standing today: the Pont du Gard in France.

Mosaics are made using tiny pieces of stone, enamel, glass or ceramic and are used to decorate buildings.



# The Middle Ages

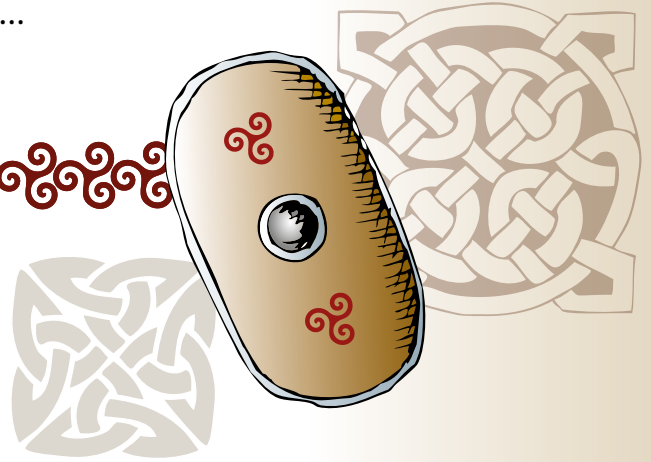
roughly 500 to 1500 AD

When the Roman empire collapsed, different parts of Europe were taken over by different peoples. For example...



## The Celts

Before Roman times, Celtic peoples lived in many parts of Europe. Their descendants today live mainly in Brittany (France), Cornwall (England), Galicia (Spain), Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In these parts of Europe, Celtic languages and culture are very much alive.



## The Germanic peoples

Not all of them settled in Germany:

- > **The Angles and Saxons** moved to England and ruled it until 1066.
- > **The Franks** conquered a large part of Europe, including France, between about 500 and 800 AD. Their most famous king was Charlemagne.
- > **The Goths** (Visigoths and Ostrogoths) set up kingdoms in Spain and Italy.
- > **The Vikings** lived in Scandinavia. In the 800s and 900s they sailed to other countries, stealing treasure, trading and settling where there was good farmland.

*The Vikings were such good sailors they even reached America (but didn't tell anyone!)*



## The Normans

or 'Northmen', were Vikings who settled in France (in the area we call Normandy) and then conquered England in 1066. A famous Norman tapestry shows scenes from this conquest. It is kept in a museum in the town of Bayeux.







Medieval castles were built to keep out enemies.

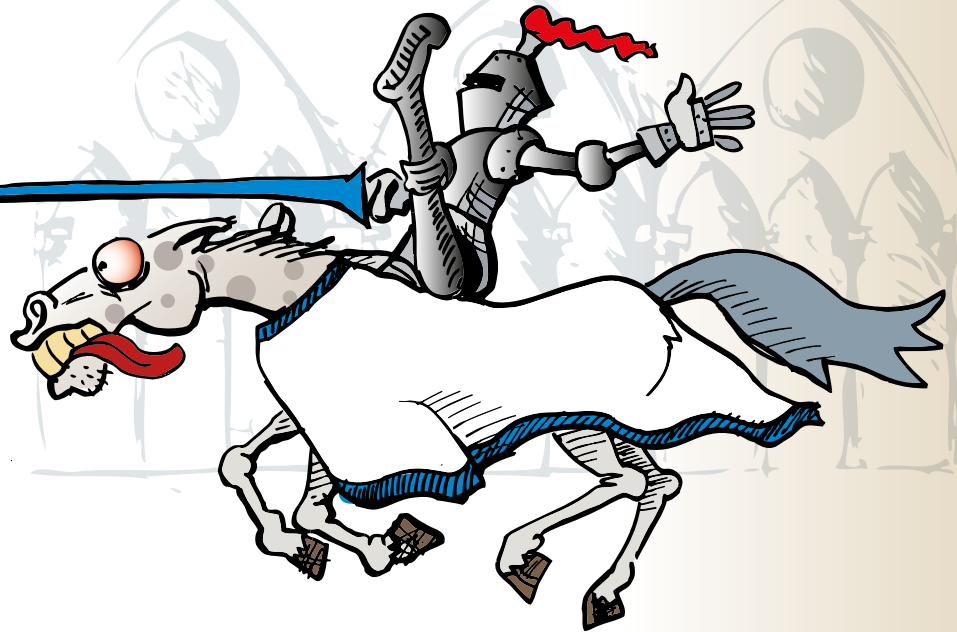
The **Slavs** settled in many parts of eastern Europe and became the ancestors of today's Slavic-speaking peoples, including Belorussians, Bulgarians, Croatians, Czechs, Poles, Russians, Serbs, Slovaks, Slovenes and Ukrainians.

After the **Magyars** settled in the Carpathian Basin in the 9th and 10th centuries, they founded the Kingdom of Hungary in the year 1000. Their descendants today live in Hungary and other neighbouring countries.

During the Middle Ages, kings and nobles in Europe often quarrelled and there were many wars. (This was the time when knights in armour fought on horseback). To defend themselves from attack, kings and nobles often lived in strong castles, with thick stone walls. Some castles were so strong they have lasted until today.



'Gothic' architecture was a great invention of the Middle Ages. This is a 'gargoyle' on Milan Cathedral.



Christianity became the main religion in Europe during the Middle Ages, and churches were built almost everywhere. Some of them are very impressive – especially the great cathedrals, with their tall towers and colourful stained-glass windows.

Monks were involved in farming and helped develop agriculture all over Europe. They also set up schools and wrote books. Their monasteries often had libraries where important books from ancient times were preserved.

In southern Spain, where Islam was the main religion, the rulers built beautiful mosques and minarets. The most famous ones left today are the mosque in Cordoba and the Giralda minaret in Seville.



View of the huge medieval mosque in Cordoba (Spain).



# The Renaissance

roughly 1300 to 1600 AD

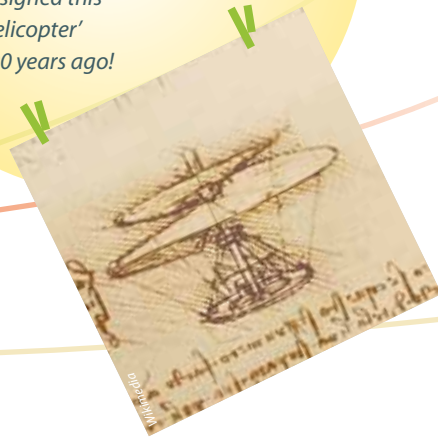
During the Middle Ages, most people could not read or write and they knew only what they learnt in church. Only monasteries and universities had copies of the books the ancient Greeks and Romans had written. But in the 1300s and 1400s, students began rediscovering the ancient books. They were amazed at the great ideas and knowledge they found there and the news began to spread.

Wealthy and educated people, for example in Florence (Italy), became very interested. They could afford to buy books – especially once printing was invented in Europe (1445) – and they fell in love with ancient Greece and Rome. They had their homes modelled on Roman palaces, and they paid talented artists and sculptors to decorate them with scenes from Greek and Roman stories, and with statues of gods, heroes and emperors.



One of the world's most famous statues:  
David by Michelangelo.

Leonardo da Vinci designed this 'helicopter' 500 years ago!



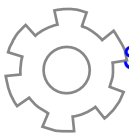
One of the great Renaissance paintings:  
Venus by Botticelli.

It was as if a lost world of beauty and wisdom had been reborn. That is why we call this period the 'Renaissance' (meaning 'rebirth').

It gave the world:

- > great painters and sculptors such as Michelangelo and Botticelli;
- > talented architects like Brunelleschi;
- > the amazing inventor and artist Leonardo da Vinci;
- > great thinkers such as Thomas More, Erasmus and Montaigne;
- > scientists such as Copernicus and Galileo (who discovered that the Earth and other planets move around the sun);
- > beautiful buildings such as the castles in the Loire valley;
- > a new interest in what human beings can achieve.





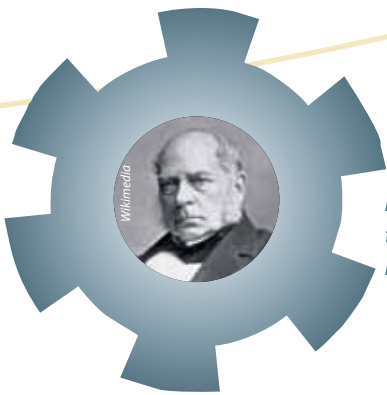
# The Industrial Revolution

roughly 1750 to 1880 AD

A new revolution started in Europe about 250 years ago – in the world of ‘industry’. It all began with an energy crisis. For thousands of years, people had been burning wood and charcoal. But now, parts of Europe were running out of forests! What else could we use as fuel?

The answer was coal. There was plenty of it in Europe, and miners began digging for it. Coal powered the newly invented steam engines. It could also be roasted and turned into ‘coke’, which is a much cleaner fuel – ideal for making iron and steel.

About 150 years ago, an Englishman called Henry Bessemer invented a ‘blast furnace’ that could produce large amounts of steel quite cheaply. Soon Europe was producing huge quantities of it, and it changed the world! Cheap steel made it possible to build skyscrapers, huge bridges, ocean liners, cars, fridges... Powerful guns and bombs too.



*Henry Bessemer –  
the inventor of  
modern steelmaking.*

