WHY DO WE EAT WHAT WE EAT?

HOW GEOGRAPHY SHAPES FOOD AROUND THE WORLD

Why does rice dominate in some places while wheat, potatoes, or maize become staples in others? Why do some cuisines rely heavily on seafood, while others developed around grains, livestock, or crops that thrive at high elevations?

Follow one question around the world and discover how **climate, landforms, water, elevation, soil, and growing seasons** help shape what people grow, raise, catch, preserve, and eat.

8 PLACES • 8 GEOGRAPHIC STORIES

ONE QUESTION. EIGHT PLACES. COUNTLESS CONNECTIONS.

MOUNTAINS & ELEVATION
Create different climates and growing conditions over short distances.

OCEANS & COASTLINES
Provide food, influence climate, and shape trade and traditions.

RAINFALL & MONSOONS
Determine when and what crops can grow—and when rivers rise.

TEMPERATURE & CLIMATE
Affect growing seasons, storage, preservation, and food variety.

SOIL & LAND
Different soils support different crops and livelihoods.

WATER AVAILABILITY
Rivers, snowmelt, irrigation, and rainfall make farming possible.

GROWING SEASONS
Length of seasons shapes harvests, variety, and food preparation.

PEOPLE & TRADITION
Cultures adapt to their land and pass down food knowledge.

DIFFERENT GEOGRAPHY. DIFFERENT POSSIBILITIES.

Explore each place to see how geography shapes the foods, farming, traditions, and daily life of people around the world.

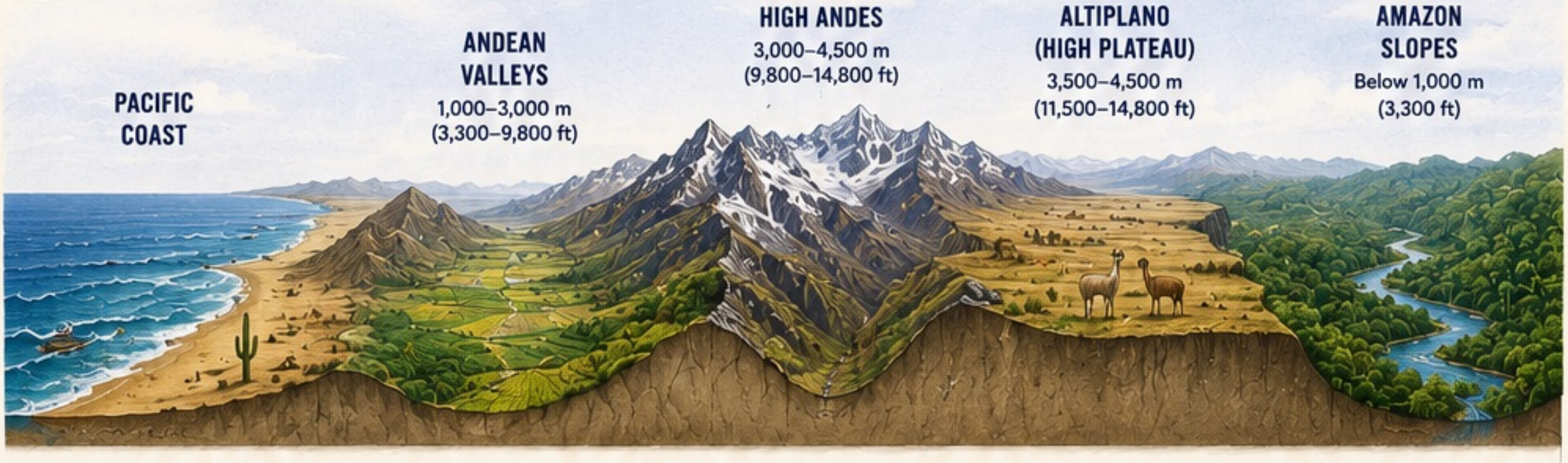
PERU

Farming Up the Mountains

Peru's Andes create enormous changes in elevation over short distances. Different temperatures, rainfall, and soils at different heights allow different crops to thrive—from maize in the valleys to potatoes and quinoa high in the mountains.

1 THE GEOGRAPHY

From the Pacific Ocean to the Amazon



HIGH ELEVATION

The Andes rise thousands of feet above surrounding lowlands, creating a huge range of climates.

MANY MICROCLIMATES

Elevation changes bring warmer or cooler air, more or less rain, and different growing seasons.

STEEP SLOPES

Mountains leave little flat land, so people build terraces and use valleys for farming.

WATER FROM THE MOUNTAINS

Rivers, springs, rainfall, and snowmelt provide essential water for crops and communities.

2 FROM GEOGRAPHY TO FOOD

HIGH ANDES

Cold • high elevation
Short growing seasons

POTATOES

Thousands of varieties were domesticated in the Andes. Many types can survive cold nights and strong sun.

HIGH PLATEAUS

Cool • dry • exposed

QUINOA

A hardy grain that thrives in poor soils and high elevations where many crops cannot grow.

MOUNTAIN VALLEYS

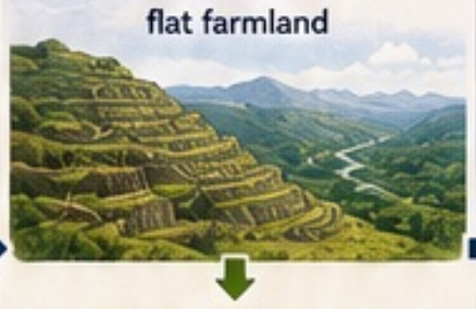
Warmer • fertile soils
More rainfall

MAIZE (CORN)

Lower, warmer elevation valleys support maize and other crops that need a longer growing season.

STEEP TERRAIN

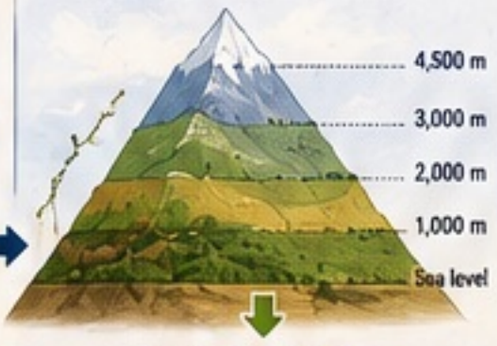
Little naturally flat farmland



TERRACE FARMING

Terraces create flat fields, prevent erosion, capture water, and make farming possible on steep slopes.

DIFFERENT HEIGHTS, DIFFERENT CROPS



MANY FOODS FROM ONE LANDSCAPE

People grow a wide variety of foods by working with the many environments created by elevation.

3 ON THE TABLE

Peru's geography provides the building blocks for many traditional foods.

POTATOES

Boiled, baked, or freeze-dried (chuño) for long-term storage. Over 4,000 native varieties!

QUINOA

Nutritious and versatile. A staple in the Andes for thousands of years.

MAIZE

Used for corn, masa, and drinks like chicha. Central to Andean and coastal diets.

AJÍ PEPPERS

Hundreds of varieties add flavor and heat to dishes across the country.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ancient Andean farmers developed advanced agricultural systems thousands of years ago—including terraces, irrigation channels, and storage techniques—to thrive in challenging mountain environments.

4 THE BIG CONNECTION

PERU'S FOOD STORY

Mountains create different environments at different elevations, allowing an extraordinary variety of crops to grow within one country.

GEOGRAPHY DRIVERS

ELEVATION · TEMPERATURE · WATER · TERRAIN

MEXICO

Where Mountains Meet Deserts and Seas

Mexico's landscapes range from high mountains and dry deserts to tropical coasts and fertile valleys. This variety of climates and soils allows an incredible diversity of crops—and a rich food culture that has been shaped over thousands of years.

1 THE GEOGRAPHY

Different places, different conditions

COASTS

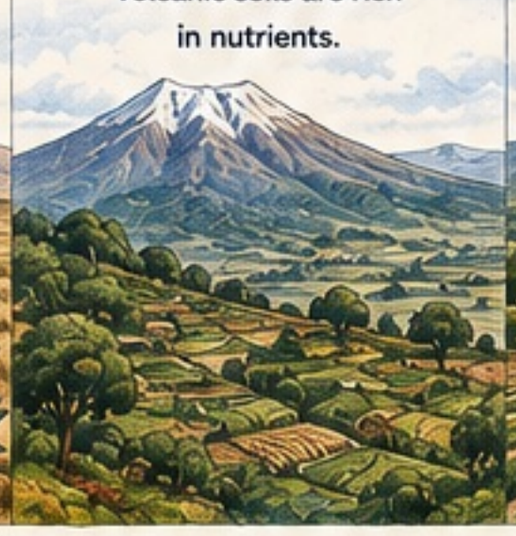
Long coastlines on two oceans bring fish, shellfish, and warm, humid air.

DRY NORTH

Deserts and semi-arid plains have hot days, cool nights, and limited rainfall.

HIGH MOUNTAINS AND PLATEAUS

High elevations have milder temperatures and unique growing conditions. Volcanic soils are rich in nutrients.



FERTILE VALLEYS

Rivers and ancient lakebeds create flat, fertile land where many crops can thrive.

TROPICAL SOUTHEAST

Hot, humid climate with abundant rainfall supports tropical fruits and diverse crops.

MOUNTAINS

The Sierra Madre ranges shape the climate and create different growing conditions by elevation.

DRY CLIMATE

Large areas receive little rain, especially in the north.

WATER SOURCES

Rivers, springs, and rainfall are essential for farming and communities.

VOLCANIC SOILS

Ancient volcanic activity left behind soils that are some of the most fertile in the world.

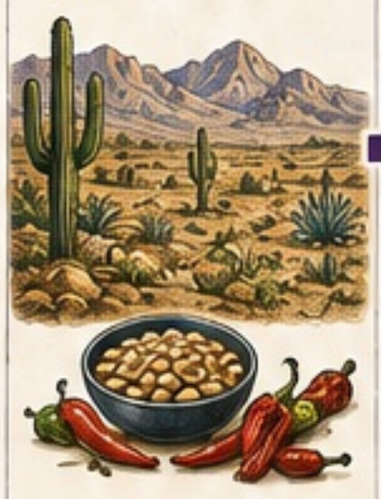
BIODIVERSITY

From deserts to jungles, Mexico is home to an amazing variety of plants, animals, and foods.

2 FROM GEOGRAPHY TO FOOD

The land provides the ingredients.

DRY NORTH



Beans, chiles, and squash thrive in dry conditions and have ancient roots in this region.

HIGH PLATEAUS

Maize (corn) was domesticated here more than 9,000 years ago. It is the foundation of the Mexican diet.

FERTILE VALLEYS

Flat, fertile land fed by rivers and former lakebeds grows a wide variety of vegetables and herbs.

COASTS

Oceans provide fish, shrimp, and shellfish that are staples along coastal communities.

TROPICAL SOUTHEAST

Warm, rainy climate supports tropical fruits like cacao, vanilla, papaya, and more.

RICH FOOD CULTURE

Indigenous traditions, Spanish influences, and local ingredients blended over time to create the vibrant cuisine of Mexico enjoyed around the world.

3 ON THE TABLE

Key ingredients grown in Mexico

MAIZE (CORN)

The heart of Mexican food for thousands of years.

BEANS

Grown with corn in the "three sisters" method, they add protein and nourishment.

CHILES

From mild to fiery, chiles grow in many regions and add flavor, color, and heat.

SQUASH

Native to the Americas and grown in dry and warm conditions.

AVOCADOS

Thrives in Mexico's warm, highland regions.

TOMATOES

Domesticated in Mexico and now a kitchen staple worldwide.

CACAO

Grown in tropical southeast Mexico; origin of chocolate!

DID YOU KNOW?

Mexicans farmed many of these ingredients thousands of years before they spread around the world.

4 THE BIG CONNECTION

MEXICO'S FOOD STORY

Mountains, deserts, valleys, and seas create many climates and soils. People have learned to grow, gather, and cook with the gifts of the land for thousands of years—creating a food culture that is diverse, sustainable, and full of tradition.

GEOGRAPHY DRIVERS

ELEVATION · CLIMATE VARIETY · WATER · VOLCANIC SOILS · OCEANS · BIODIVERSITY

INDONESIA

Food from Tropical Islands

Indonesia is made up of more than 17,000 islands formed by volcanoes along the Equator. Warm temperatures, abundant rainfall, fertile volcanic soils, and surrounding seas create ideal conditions for a wide variety of crops, spices, coconuts, and seafood.

1 THE GEOGRAPHY

Islands, volcanoes, and abundant water

VOLCANIC ISLANDS

Indonesia sits on the "Ring of Fire." Volcanic activity created rich, fertile soils perfect for growing crops.

TROPICAL CLIMATE

Warm temperatures year-round and high humidity support growth of tropical plants and spices.

ABUNDANT RAINFALL

Heavy rains, especially during the monsoon season, keep the landscape lush and water plentiful.

THOUSANDS OF ISLANDS

Different islands have different soils, elevations, and traditions—creating incredible variety.

SURROUNDED BY SEAS

Coastlines and warm waters provide fish, seaweed, shellfish, and sea-related trade and ideas.

VOLCANIC SOILS

Ash from volcanoes creates some of the most fertile soils in the world.

ABUNDANT RAINFALL

Year-round rain supports rice paddies, forests, and many tropical crops.

TROPICAL HEAT

Heat and humidity help crops like rice, spices, and coconuts thrive.

SURROUNDING SEAS

The ocean provides food, transportation, and connection to the world.

BIODIVERSITY

Indonesia has one of the highest levels of plant and animal diversity on Earth.

2 FROM GEOGRAPHY TO FOOD

Geography provides what people need to grow, raise, and catch.

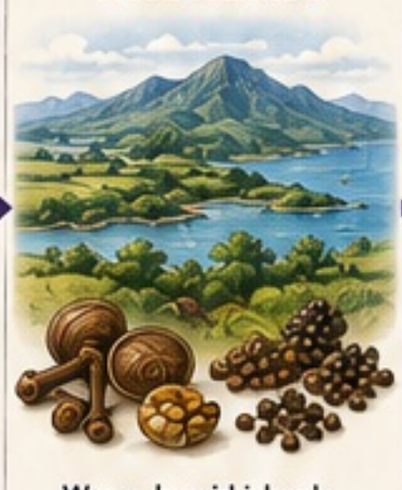
VOLCANIC SOILS

Fertile soils support a wide variety of crops.

RICE PADDIES

Rain and irrigation create perfect conditions for rice—the staple food for much of Indonesia.

SPICE ISLANDS



Warm, humid islands produce spices like cloves, nutmeg, vanilla, and pepper.

COCONUT PALMS

Coconuts provide food, oil, milk, sugar, and materials for homes and crafts.

FISH & SEAFOOD

Rich seas provide fish, shellfish, seaweed, and salt—important foods and resources.

DIVERSE CUISINES

Local ingredients and cooking traditions create thousands of delicious dishes.

3 ON THE TABLE

Ingredients and foods shaped by Indonesia's geography

RICE

Grown in paddies across many islands—at the heart of daily meals.

SPICES

Cloves, nutmeg, pepper, cinnamon, and more grow in Indonesia's tropical climate.

COCONUTS

Used for milk, oil, sugar, and water. Every part of the coconut is valuable.

TROPICAL FRUITS

Abundant fruits like mango, papaya, pineapple, banana, and durian grow in the tropical heat.

SEAFOOD

Fresh fish, prawns, squid, and seaweed are enjoyed in coastal communities across the islands.

TEMPEH & TOFU

Soybeans thrive in the climate and are a staple source of plant-based protein.

DID YOU KNOW?

Indonesia is one of the world's largest producers of nutmeg, cloves, palm oil, and seaweed—and home to more than 1,300 ethnic groups with unique food traditions.

4 THE BIG CONNECTION

INDONESIA'S FOOD STORY

Volcanoes gave Indonesia rich soil. Warm rain feeds the land. Oceans surround the islands. Together, these natural gifts create incredible diversity—providing the ingredients and inspiration for food, culture, and trade across the world.

GEOGRAPHY DRIVERS

VOLCANOES · RAINFALL · TROPICAL CLIMATE · OCEANS · BIODIVERSITY · ISLANDS

ETHIOPIA

Farming the Highlands

Ethiopia's highlands rise above deep valleys and lowlands, creating a range of climates in a relatively small area. Elevation, volcanic soils, and seasonal rains make the highlands one of the world's most important places for crops and coffee.

1 THE GEOGRAPHY

Highlands, valleys, and ancient landscapes

HIGHLANDS
(Above 2,000 m)
Cooler temperatures. Great for grains, coffee, and root crops.

MIDLANDS
(1,000–2,000 m)
Mild climate and fertile volcanic soils. Ideal for coffee, fruits, and pulses.

LOWLANDS
(Below 1,000 m)
Hotter temperatures. Good for sorghum, maize, and oilseeds.

A LAND SHAPED BY NATURE

The Ethiopian Highlands are among the oldest landscapes on Earth.

Volcanic activity created deep, fertile soils rich in nutrients.

Seasonal rains—mainly from June to September—bring life to crops and communities.

Rivers begin in the highlands and flow to the Nile, Rift Valley lakes, and surrounding lowlands.

HIGH ELEVATION
Many farms are above 2,000 meters, where crops behave differently than in lowlands.

VOLCANIC SOILS
Ash from ancient volcanoes creates some of the richest soils for farming in the world.

SEASONAL RAINS
Reliable rainy season supports agriculture; dry sesaon is cool and sunny.

STEPPED FIELDS
Farmers use terraces on hillsides to hold soil and water and create flat growing space.

DEEP TRADITIONS
Farming has shaped Ethiopian culture, foods, and communities for thousands of years.

2 FROM GEOGRAPHY TO FOOD

Elevation, soil, and climate shape what grows.

COOL HIGHLANDS

TEFF
This tiny grain thrives in cool high-altitude fields and is the base of injera, a traditional flatbread.

HIGHLAND SLOPES

COFFEE
Ethiopia is the birthplace of coffee. Cool, shaded highlands produce high-quality arabica beans.

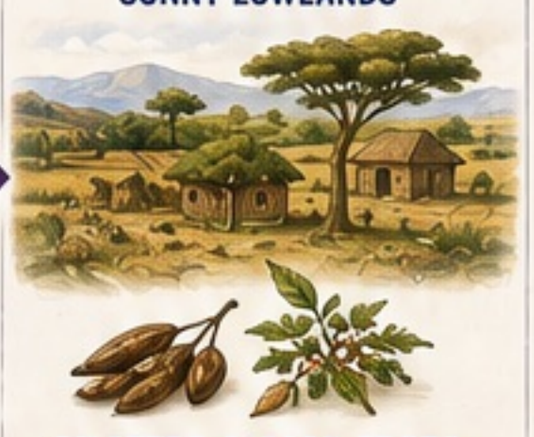
MIDLANDS & VALLEYS

PULSES
Lentils, chickpeas, fava beans, and split peas grow well in mid-elevation fields and valleys.

VARIABLE ELEVATIONS

GRAINS
Barley, wheat, and sorghum are grown at different elevations depending on temperature and rain.

SUNNY LOWLANDS



OILSEEDS & CASH CROPS
Niger (noug), sesame, cotton, and chat grow in the warmer lowlands and dryer areas.

3 ON THE TABLE

Foods that come from Ethiopia's land and traditions.

INJERA

Made from teff flour, tangy and spongy—served with many stews and dishes.

DORO WAT

A rich chicken stew with berbere spices—a perfect example of Ethiopia's flavors.

KITFO

Finely minced beef seasoned with spices and mitmita, often enjoyed together.

SHIRO

A creamy chickpea stew seasoned with spices—simple, healthy, and filling.

COFFEE CEREMONY

Coffee is more than a drink—it's a tradition of hospitality, respect, and connection.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ethiopia is home to thousands of indigenous crop varieties not found anywhere else in the world—including teff, enset (false banana), coffee, and many unique pulses.

4 THE BIG CONNECTION

ETHIOPIA'S FOOD STORY

Highlands, volcanic soils, seasonal rains, and deep farming traditions create incredible diversity of crops and flavors—nourishing people and cultures for generations.

GEOGRAPHY DRIVERS

ELEVATION · VOLCANIC SOILS · SEASONAL RAINS · RIVERS & WATER · CLIMATE VARIETY · TERRAIN & TRADITION

INDIA

Following the Monsoon

India's diverse climate is shaped by the monsoon winds, towering mountains, long coastlines, and vast plains. These natural forces bring rain, heat, and rich soils—creating the perfect conditions for an incredible variety of crops and the flavors people enjoy every day.

1 THE GEOGRAPHY

Big patterns shape what grows where.

THE HIMALAYAS

Block cold winds from the north and help cause the monsoon rains.

THE MONSOON

Seasonal winds bring rain from the ocean (land June–September), refilling rivers, lakes, and soil.

THE NORTHERN PLAINS

Wide, flat, and fertile. Fed by rivers like the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra—ideal for grains.

LONG COASTLINES

Surrounded by the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and Indian Ocean. Fisheries and sea trade have shaped food and cuisine for centuries.

VARIED CLIMATES

From tropical in the south to dry in the west and cool in the mountains—India can grow many different foods.

MONSOON RAINS

Bring life-giving water but vary by region and season.

RICH SOILS

Rivers deposit silt, creating some of the world's most fertile farmland.

LONG GROWING SEASON

Warm temperatures allow for multiple harvests in many parts of India.

RIVERS & WATER

Rivers and canals support irrigation and make farming possible.

ELEVATION & TERRAIN

Mountains, plateaus, and coastal plains create many micro-climates.

2 FROM GEOGRAPHY TO FOOD

Different places, different conditions, different crops.

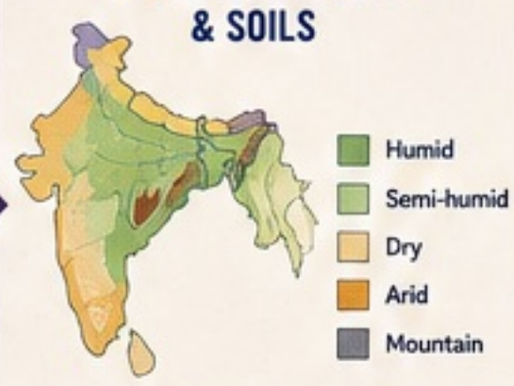
MONSOON ARRIVES

Rainfall brings water to the land.

IRRIGATED FIELDS

Water is stored in lakes, rivers, and canals to grow crops.

REGIONS, CLIMATES & SOILS



Varied regions grow what suits the local climate and soil.

DIVERSE CROPS

Rice, wheat, pulses, spices, sugarcane, tea, and more thrive across India.

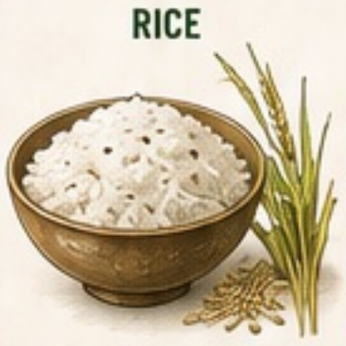
RICH FOOD CULTURES

Regional ingredients create a variety of traditional dishes.

3 ON THE TABLE

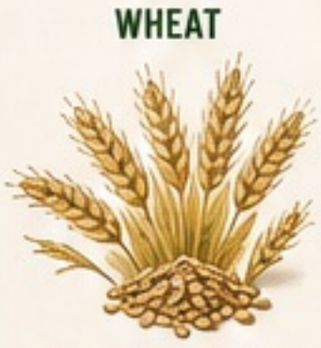
Staple foods grown across India.

RICE



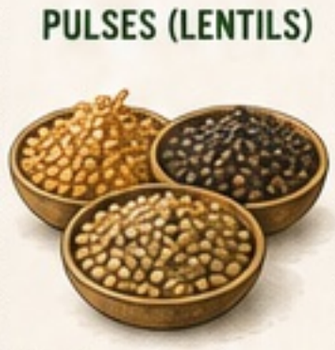
Grown in wet, warm regions with plenty of rain or irrigation.

WHEAT



Thrives in cooler, drier northern plains with irrigation.

PULSES (LENTILS)



Nutrient-rich and grown in many regions—an essential protein source.

SPICES

Warm climate and diverse soils support spices like turmeric, cumin, cardamom, and chilies.

SUGARCANE

Needs heat, sunlight, and plenty of water—grown in tropical and subtropical areas.

TEA

Grown on hillsides with cool, moist conditions like in Assam and the Western Ghats.

DID YOU KNOW?

India grows more than 300 types of pulses and is one of the world's largest producers of spices!

4 THE BIG CONNECTION

INDIA'S FOOD STORY

The monsoon, varied climates, and rich soils allow India to grow a wide range of foods. People have adapted these natural gifts for thousands of years—creating a vibrant food heritage that is as diverse as the land itself.

GEOGRAPHY DRIVERS

MONSOON RAINS · MOUNTAINS · RIVERS & WATER · CLIMATE VARIETY · SOILS · COASTLINES

Different geography. Different possibilities. Nourishing people for generations.

MOROCCO

Between Mountains, Sea & Desert

Morocco's location between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara Desert creates incredible diversity in climate and landscapes. The Atlas Mountains, coastal breezes, rivers, and ancient irrigation systems all shape what grows, what is raised, and what people eat.

1 THE GEOGRAPHY

Many landscapes. Many ways to grow food.

MEDITERRANEAN COAST

Mild, wet winters and warm, dry summers. Sea breezes bring moisture and support fertile plains and citrus groves.

ATLAS MOUNTAINS

High elevations bring cooler temperatures and more rainfall. Terraces and valleys support farming and villages.

INTERIOR PLAINS

Semi-arid to arid. Open plains are ideal for grazing livestock and growing hardy grains like wheat and barley.

SAHARA DESERT

Hot, dry, and very low rainfall. Oases and ancient irrigation systems (like foggaras) bring water to where it's needed most.

RAIN & RIVERS

Winter rains and rivers from the Atlas feed farms and orchards.

ATLAS BARRIER

Mountains block winds from the north and create rain on slopes.

DRY SUMMERS

Long, hot summers mean crops must be drought-tolerant.

ANCIENT IRRIGATION

People have engineered systems for centuries to guide precious water.

PASTORAL TRADITIONS

Sheep, goats, and camels thrive in drier inland regions.

2 FROM GEOGRAPHY TO FOOD

MEDITERRANEAN COAST

Mild climate, sea breezes, fertile coastal plains

OLIVES & CITRUS

Olive trees thrive in the mild climate. Citrus grows well near the coast.

ATLAS MOUNTAINS

Cooler, wetter elevations, terraced slopes

WALNUTS & ALMONDS

Tree crops grow on terraces where rainfall is higher and soils are richer.

INTERIOR PLAINS

Dry climate, open grasslands and fields

WHEAT & BARLEY

Hardy grains grow in drier areas and have been staples for centuries.

ARID INTERIOR

Sparsely vegetated lands, pastoral traditions

LIVESTOCK & DAIRY

Goats, sheep, and camels provide meat, milk, and wool across dry regions.

OASES & IRRIGATED AREAS

Water sources in deserts create life and abundance

DATES & VEGETABLES

Oases produce dates, vegetables, and herbs through irrigation.

3 ON THE TABLE

Traditional foods inspired by Morocco's geography

OLIVE OIL

Olives have been grown in Morocco for thousands of years. Olive oil is a kitchen staple.

TAGINE

Slow-cooked stews often combine meat, vegetables, dried fruit, and spices—using local ingredients.

COUSCOUS

Made from durum wheat grown in the plains and served with vegetables, meat, or chickpeas.

PRESERVED LEMONS

Salt-preserved lemons add bright flavor to many dishes—using citrus from the coastal regions.

MINT TEA

Mint grows well in many regions and is blended with green tea—Morocco's national tradition.

DID YOU KNOW?

Morocco has one of the world's oldest irrigation systems, some over 1,000 years old. These innovations turned dry lands into productive farms and oases.

4 THE BIG CONNECTION

MOROCCO'S FOOD STORY

Between the sea and the desert, Morocco's mountains, climate, and water shape a rich diversity of foods, farming traditions, and flavors that have nourished people for generations.

GEOGRAPHY DRIVERS

LOCATION · MOUNTAINS · RAIN & WATER · CLIMATE · IRRIGATION · PASTORALISM

JAPAN

Mountains Meet the Sea

Japan is a chain of mountainous islands surrounded by rich seas. Steep terrain and limited flat land have shaped how people farm, the foods they grow, and the important role seafood plays in daily meals.

1 THE GEOGRAPHY

Mountains, islands, and surrounding seas

MOUNTAINS COVER MOST OF THE LAND

About 75% of Japan is mountainous, leaving little flat land.

LIMITED FLAT LAND

Narrow coastal plains and river valleys are where most farming happens.

SURROUNDED BY RICH SEAS

Warm and cold ocean currents bring nutrient-rich waters, supporting abundant seafood.

MOUNTAINOUS ISLANDS

Steep slopes and short rivers make large-scale farming difficult.

SHORT GROWING SEASON

Cool winters and hot, humid summers limit the length of the growing season.

TERRACED & SMALL FIELDS

Farmers shape the land into terraces and use small plots to grow food.

CLOSE TO THE OCEAN

The ocean provides food, jobs, and a long tradition of fishing and seafood culture.

2 FROM GEOGRAPHY TO FOOD

MOUNTAINS AND STEEP LAND

Little flat land for large farms.

NARROW PLAINS AND VALLEYS

Small areas of flat land near rivers and coasts are used for farming.

WARM, WET SUMMERS COOL WINTERS

Perfect for rice, but the season is too short or too cold for many crops.

SURROUNDING SEAS AND RICH WATERS

Easy access to seafood has always been a reliable food source.

THE RESULT

Rice is the heart of the diet, and seafood is eaten in many delicious ways.

3 ON THE TABLE

Foods that thrive in Japan's geography

RICE

Grown in paddies in warm, wet summers. A staple for thousands of years.

SEAFOOD

Fish, shellfish, and seaweed are abundant and have sustained coastal communities for generations.

SOBA (BUCKWHEAT)

Buckwheat grows well in cooler mountain areas where rice cannot.

VEGETABLES & SOY

A variety of vegetables, soybeans, and tofu are grown in small fields across the country.

DID YOU KNOW?

Seaweed farms in Japan's clear coastal waters produce nori, wakame, and kombu—important foods that also support healthy oceans.

4 THE BIG CONNECTION

JAPAN'S FOOD STORY

Mountains, short growing seasons, and the surrounding seas shaped a culture where rice fields and fishing boats work together to feed the people.

GEOGRAPHY DRIVERS

MOUNTAINS · OCEANS · CLIMATE · WATER · LIMITED LAND