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Please don’t contact us with complaints such as
“I went on vacation to Belize in June, and it rained hard every day. My husband wants to know why that isn’t in *The Book of Everything*.”
Also, we should tell you right now that there’s nothing about packing your suitcase or backpack, or prospecting for gold in Brazil, or surviving in the Antarctic, or climbing Mount Everest, or dancing at Carnevale, or anything at all about Mombasa, Mumbai or Montevideo, or about tattooing, or about those flaps on an aircraft’s wings and what they do.
(Although we could explain that last one: it’s just not very interesting.)
Anyway, if you are looking for any of that information, and have read this far but haven’t bought the book yet, then don’t buy it—it’s not right for you.

But everything else is within these pages, so read on. It’ll be fun. You’ll see.

Nigel Holmes, July 2012
UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD

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A different world
What's a travel book without a map of the world? And why do we always look at it the same way? This view might help you to see countries in a new light. (Then again it might just be totally annoying.)

Is it really upside down?
Our custom of orienting maps with north at the top is arbitrary. The Greek cartographer and astronomer Ptolomy drew his maps that way around the year AD 150, and most mapmakers have followed his example.

Some people think that north-oriented maps have an implicit bias toward the northern hemisphere. And many classic (and still used) world projections do favour the northern hemisphere. This is because at the time these maps were made, most of the developed world was in the north and more room was needed to show the detail in this area.

When the famous photo of Earth taken from space (on board Apollo 17) was first published in 1972, it showed the South Pole like this:

Publications quickly turned the map round to fit the established convention.
Around the world: the equator

The first person to sail around the globe was Juan Sebastián del Cano, who took credit after his captain, Ferdinand Magellan, was killed en route. The voyage lasted almost 3 years, from 1519 to 1522.

You can set foot on only about 8,000km (5,000 miles; 20% of the Earth's length) in the places shown in red.

The Pacific Ocean alone accounts for 18,000km (about 11,000 miles) of water around the middle of the Earth.

In 1961, Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin was the first to make the trip into space. It took 1 hour and 48 minutes.

Time it takes light to travel around the equator: 0.13 of a second.

Time it would take a baseball travelling at 160km/h (100mph): 10 days.

Time it would take running non-stop at 10.5km/h (6.5mph): 160 days.

40,075km (24,902 miles)

Global climate change has special urgency in the Maldives. If the sea level continues rising at current rates, most of the 1,200 islands and atolls will be under water by 2100, according to the UN.

Why it's so close to sea level?
It's not almost everywhere on the equator because the sun's rays hit the Earth there straight on, heating the ground and the air above it. Elsewhere, the rays hit the atmosphere at an angle because the Earth is curved. This dissipates some of the sun's energy.