

RUSSIA: THE GEOGRAPHY

Covering 17 million square kilometres, Russia is the largest country in the world. It is 70 times the size of the UK and twice the size of the USA, spanning 11 different time zones and bordering 14 nations.

The climate in Russia is very cold during winter. Some Russian ports in the Arctic Circle are frozen for several months each year, so ships can't go in or out.

The Ural Mountains mark the boundary between Europe and Asia. The European side makes up a quarter of Russia's land, but more than three quarters of the population live here.

Siberia and the Russian Far East have lots of natural resources, such as oil and gas, but not many people. The landscape is harsh and cold, with many forests and swamps.

RUSSIA'S SIZE
In terms of land, Russia is nearly twice the size of China. In terms of people, it is smaller (it has a population of only 144 million, while China has more than a billion).



Ivan IV (1530-1584), known as Ivan the Terrible, ruled from Moscow in the 1500s. He conquered many lands, so Russia grew much larger.

The longest river in Europe, the Volga, is very important to Russia. It is 3,530 kilometres long and nearly half of Russia's largest cities are found along its route.

Russia is so huge that it's hard to move people, food and supplies around the country. It takes about six nights and seven days to travel the 9,258 kilometres from Vladivostok to Moscow on the Trans-Siberian Railway.



In summer, when the sea ice melts, ships can make the journey through these northern waters, carrying goods to and from Russia.

Yakutsk is one of the world's coldest cities: in winter the temperature is about -40°C, although it has dropped as low as -64°C.

In winter Lake Baikal, the world's deepest lake, freezes over. The ice can be over a metre thick - solid enough to drive across!

Bad weather and poor soil make farming difficult in large parts of the country. Winter crops often have to be abandoned.



THE ROUTE INTO RUSSIA
To the west of Russia lies a flat area called the North European Plain. It forms a narrow corridor through Poland, with mountains on one side and sea on the other. But as it reaches Russia's border the plain widens out, making a shape that looks a bit like a pizza wedge. It's harder to defend this wide expanse than the narrow gap in Poland, so throughout Russia's history its leaders have tried to control the thin end of the wedge to protect this weak point in its defences.