

Topic Page: [Mediterranean Sea](#)

Definition: **Mediterranean Sea** from *Collins English Dictionary*

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1 a large inland sea between S Europe, N Africa, and SW Asia: linked with the Atlantic by the Strait of Gibraltar, with the Red Sea by the Suez Canal, and with the Black Sea by the Dardanelles, Sea of Marmara, and Bosphorus; many ancient civilizations developed around its shores. Greatest depth: 4770 m (15 900 ft). Length: (west to east) over 3700 km (2300 miles). Greatest width: about 1370 km (850 miles). Area: (excluding the Black Sea) 2 512 300 sq km (970 000 sq miles) Ancient name: **Mare Internum**



Image from: [Tropical lowland rainforests contain the highest... in Encyclopedia of Environment and Society](#)

Summary Article: **Mediterranean Sea**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Inland sea separating Europe from north Africa, with Asia to the east; extreme length 3,860 km/2,400 mi; area 2,966,000 sq km/1,145,000 sq mi. It is linked to the Atlantic Ocean (at the Strait of Gibraltar), Red Sea and Indian Ocean (by the Suez Canal), and the Black Sea (at the Dardanelles and Sea of Marmara). The main subdivisions are the Adriatic, Aegean, Ionian, and Tyrrhenian seas; its coastline extends 46,000 km/28,580 mi, running through 22 countries. It is highly polluted.

Role in history Known as the cradle of civilization, the Mediterranean was opened as a highway for commerce by merchants trading from Phoenicia.

Over succeeding centuries Carthage, Greece, Sicily, and Rome were rivals competing for dominance of its shores and trade. It was later dominated by the Byzantine Empire and the Arabs; between the 11th and 14th centuries, Barcelona and the Italian city trading states, such as Venice and Genoa, dominated the Mediterranean. Control of its islands, coasts, and trade routes was vital during both World Wars, leading to important campaigns. Since World War II the region has been of great strategic importance to the USA and Western European countries (NATO).

Physical The Mediterranean is almost tideless, and is saltier and warmer than the Atlantic, with a constant deep-water temperature of 12°C/54°F; shallows from Sicily to Cape Bon in Africa divide it into an east and a west basin, which reach depths of 3,400 m/11,155 ft and 4,200 m/13,780 ft respectively. Dense salt water forms a permanent deep current out into the Atlantic. The main rivers draining into the sea are the Ebro, Rhône, Po, Arno, Tiber, and Nile. The chief islands are Sicily and Malta in the centre; Cyprus, Crete, and the Ionian Islands in the east; and Sardinia, Corsica, and the Balearic Islands in the west. The shores are chiefly mountainous; earthquakes and volcanic disturbances are frequent.

Pollution The Mediterranean is severely endangered by human and industrial waste pollution. In 2001, 82 million people were living in coastal cities; by 2025 there will be an estimated 150–170 million. Another 100 million tourists visit each summer, and this number is expected to double by 2025. Pollution also reaches the Mediterranean through its major river systems (the Po, the Ebro, the Nile, and the Rhone) which carry substantial amounts of agricultural and industrial waste. As the Mediterranean is

almost entirely landlocked, its waters have a very low renewal rate (80 to 90 years), making them excessively sensitive to pollution. Pollution sources include agricultural effluent, industrial toxins, and sewage. The population explosion, particularly in the southern and eastern basin, has caused all three to increase well beyond sustainable levels.

The Barcelona Convention of 1976 to clean up the Mediterranean was signed by 17 countries and led to a ban on dumping of mercury, cadmium, persistent plastics, DDT, crude oil, and hydrocarbons. At the 12th meeting of the Barcelona Convention in 2001, the Mediterranean states committed to implement fully all the necessary restrictive measures to eliminate pollution at sea from land-based sources in the Mediterranean, and to reduce the emissions of persistent organic pollutants (POP) by 50% by 2005.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has estimated that 650 million tonnes of sewage, 129,000 tonnes of mineral oil, 60,000 tonnes of mercury, 3,800 tonnes of lead and 36,000 tonnes of phosphates are dumped into the Mediterranean each year. Meanwhile, 70% of the wastewater dumped into the Mediterranean is untreated. The sea is also a major oil transportation route and up to 1 million tons of crude oil are discharged annually from accidental spills, illegal bunkering, and tank cleaning practices.

Marine life under threat There is little deep-water marine life, but there are tuna, anchovies, pilchards, and mackerel. Coral, sponges, and ambergris are also exploited, and since the opening of the Suez Canal, pearl oysters and other molluscs have migrated from the Red Sea. Overfishing and pollution have resulted in serious declines in fish stocks and damage to marine ecosystems. Some of the world's most endangered species, such as the monk seal, can be found in the Mediterranean. Fish stocks are down to 20% of natural levels in some areas, and the Mediterranean is now a net importer of fish. Some of the more enclosed areas, such as the Adriatic, are seriously threatened by oil and industrial pollution and eutrophication (reduction in dissolved oxygen levels caused by excessive algae growth).

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