

The polar bear, more than any other animal, symbolises the Arctic. People all around the world who will never see one know what it looks like. Like the vastness of the polar sea ice it lives on, the sheer size of an adult polar bear is impressive. Its whiteness matches the backdrop of snow and ice that we all associate with the Arctic.

The Arctic is not a forgotten wasteland to a polar bear; it is home, and a comfortable home at that. For thousands of years, the climate, the ice, and the seals upon which it feeds have shaped the evolution of this predator. While it's easy to understand why the polar bear became such a powerful icon, it is difficult even now to comprehend its vulnerability to a changing environment.

The polar bear is a true marine mammal in the sense that it depends on the ocean for existence. For example, in the United States, the polar bear is considered a marine mammal for legal purposes. In Canada it is a land mammal. Ecologically, however, the polar bear is clearly an integral part of the marine ecosystem, and that's the context I will treat it in.

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I have just returned from a long weekend break in Lisbon, to enjoy the southern European weather. From a base in the old town which forms the heart of the city, I tested my calves on long uphill walks to districts that qualify the Portuguese capital as Europe's 'in' city, according to the people who write travel reviews on the internet. I ate poorly in tourist traps and exquisitely at the hands of genius chefs. I took in the central monuments and the hidden wonders in the industrial part of the Lisbon shoreline. I covered a good few kilometres, I can tell you, as you would in most large cultural towns.

Lisbon is a great city that is really open to tourists, and I like it enough to return soon. I felt refreshed and pleased not to have to think about work. But did I learn much or emerge an improved person? No. On my travels, I rarely do, and I am not sure that anyone does. The more of the world I see, the less confident I am that there is anything innately educational about travel. It is worth doing because it is fun. Travel is for the senses, not the character. Fun is a good enough reason to do anything, as long as we do not kid ourselves that something more profound is at work.

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Early humans probably looked at their reflection in rivers or streams, so you could say the very first mirrors were made of water. The earliest *man-made* mirrors were cut from stone, and I went to look at some of these at the Ancient Treasures Museum, which was a really exciting way to begin my project. Some ancient mirrors were made using a very shiny volcanic glass, which was black, but I didn't see any of those.

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The museum has a room filled with Ancient Egyptian objects, including a collection of mirrors. They were flat, round discs and I had to pick them up wearing gloves to keep them free from scratches. They were made of polished copper and attached to handles, which would have made them easier to use. Despite being 4,900 years old, I could sort of see my face reflected.

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Mirrors made from glass didn't become widespread till the Middle Ages, from the 5th to the 15th centuries. They still weren't all that large, the glass had a slight colouring and was also curved, rather than flat like our mirrors today. This was a result of the manufacturing process, and the glass was backed with a sheet of metal.

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The value of research into risk taking and the people who take part in extreme sports has been questioned by some. Given the limited funds available, is it really worth spending time and money investigating this particular aspect of human nature? I think this is a fair question, and it also seems to me that extreme sports tend to attract those with less concern than most not only for their own safety, but also for that of others. When things go wrong, rescuers are frequently put at risk because someone else was deliberately putting themselves in danger. Thrill-seeking and a wish to escape from everyday routine hardly excuses an outcome such as this. Even relatively well-established sports, such as snowboarding and paragliding, involve a level of risk-taking that many would consider unacceptable.

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TESTO IN LINGUA INGLESE  
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Today, tea is one of the most popular drinks in the world, and I found out loads about its history online. There are millions of internet articles on tea and I didn't know where to begin, but luckily I came across a documentary that covered everything I wanted to know about tea's origins. There are books about tea for sale, but I didn't buy any of those.

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Tea grows best in mountain areas, at least 1,000 metres above sea level, though there are exceptions. For example, the Portuguese Azores Islands, an island off the coast of South Carolina USA, and the far South-west of the UK. Wherever it's cultivated, it's true to say there must be a lot of rainfall for the plants to grow well. Rich soil and sunshine are much less important.

There are four main types of tea plant: green, black, white and what's known as oolong. But the huge variety of aromas, flavours, and colours that tea comes in is determined by how it's processed. However, it's probably true to say the leaves have to be hand picked in order to obtain the highest quality product.