What is geography and what can you do with it?

What is geography?

“Geography is the study of place, space and the environment.

Geographers investigate the character of places, the distribution of phenomena across space, biophysical processes and features, and dynamic relationships between humans and environments.” (ALTC 2010)

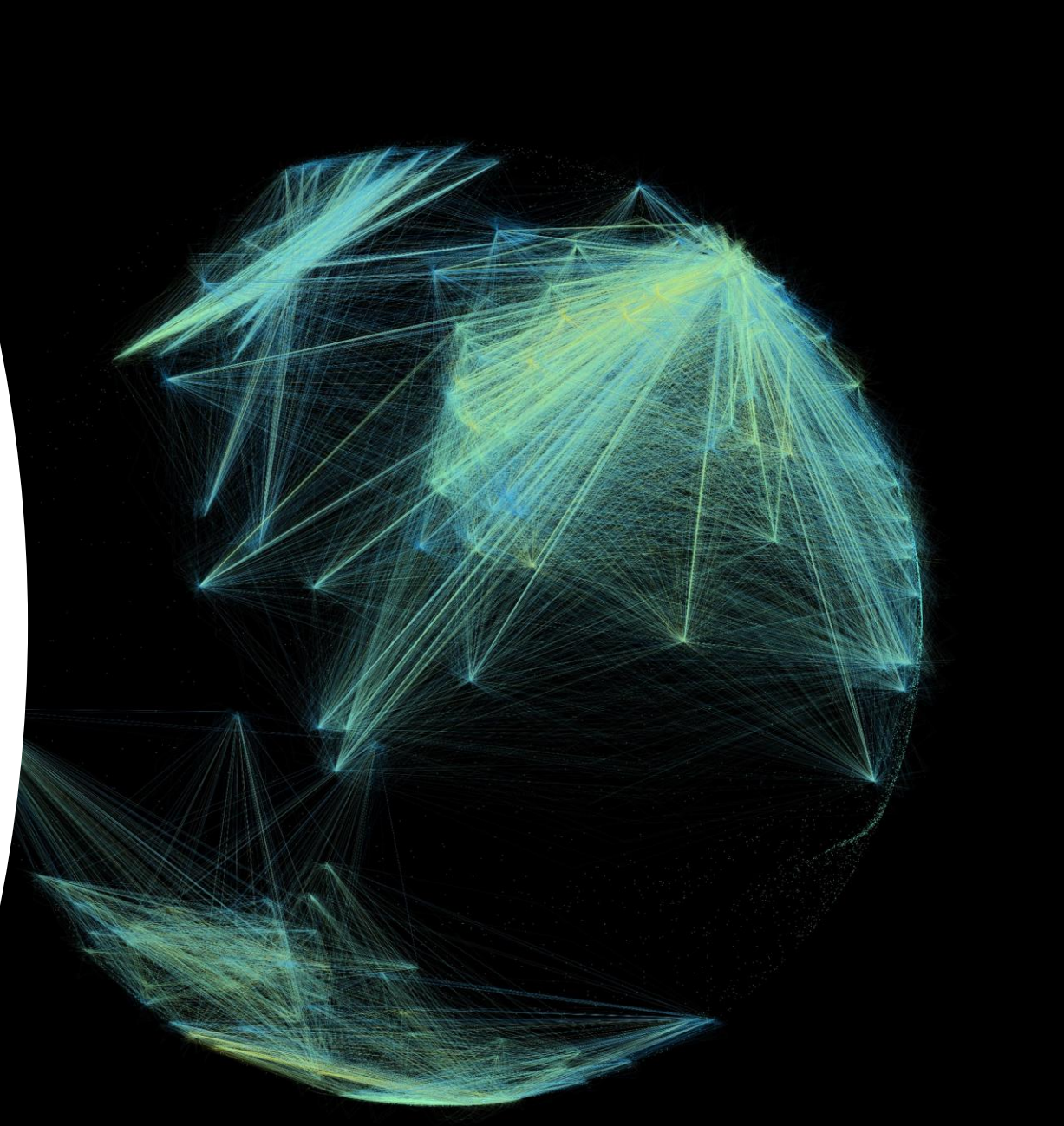
So, if you’re curious about how the world works Geography lets you dive into everything—climate change, urban environments, people, and places—while uncovering connections between them and giving you the skills to tackle real-world challenges and shape a better future.

Why does geography matter more than ever?

Geography education is more important than ever because it provides critical thinking and practical skills needed to understand and address the complex, interconnected global issues of the 21st century.

- **Sustainable Development:** Managing resources for future generations.
- **Climate Change:** Understanding global patterns and local impacts.
- **Globalisation & Interconnectedness:** Navigating a complex world.
- **Cultural Understanding:** Appreciating diverse societies and landscapes.
- **Problem Solving:** Geography provides frameworks/methods for tackling global challenges.

Geographers see the world as a dynamic system where human actions and environmental processes are constantly influencing each other.



What can you study if you choose geography?

Whether you're passionate about the natural environment, people and cultures, or cutting-edge technology, there's a geography course for you. You can delve into areas including:

- **Physical Geography:** Study mountains, rivers, and climate systems to understand the natural forces that shape our planet.
- **Human Geography:** Discover how people and places interact and connect to solve social, urban, and global challenges.
- **Environmental Geography:** Learn how humans and nature interact to address climate change, resource management, and natural hazards.
- **Geospatial Technology**: Use tools like GIS and remote sensing to map, analyse, and respond to challenges like disasters and urban planning.

What skills do geographers have?

- Geography is one of the few disciplines that encompass different ways of knowing, from the natural and social sciences to the humanities. Geographers are therefore uniquely equipped – methodologically and conceptually – to understand and address emerging and complex problems facing the world.

- Geography graduates are skilled in a range of research techniques, which can include fieldwork, survey design, statistical analysis, spatial data analysis including Geographic Information Systems, and other forms of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method analysis. They are proficient at retrieving, synthesising, and communicating information, as well as managing data and drawing on different sources of knowledge. They think critically and creatively and work effectively in teams and on their own initiative.

What kinds of jobs use geography?

Geographers find work in jobs that:

1. Understand What Places Are Like and How They Came to Be the Way They Are.

These roles focus on the study of landscapes, environments, and social structures as they evolve over time.

- **conservation, heritage and land management**: This involves managing and protecting natural and cultural landscapes and resources.
- **geomorphology**: The scientific study of landforms and the processes that shape them.
- **planning (including urban, regional, environmental, social and transport planning)**: Understanding the historical context of a place is crucial for future planning.
- **real estate and land development**: Professionals in this field analyse land use and environmental factors to assess property value and development potential.
- **research**: Geographers often conduct research to understand the historical and physical evolution of places.

New York City (1876-2013)

2. Communicate the Unique Characteristics of Places.

These roles involve presenting information about a place's features through various media, such as maps and reports.

- **education**: Educators communicate the unique characteristics of different places to students.
- **Geographic information systems** (GIS): A system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyse, manage, and present all types of geographical data.
- **mapping and cartography**: The art and science of creating maps.
- **market research**: Understanding the unique characteristics of a place helps businesses tailor their products and services to a specific location.
- **remote sensing**: Acquiring information about an object or phenomenon without making physical contact with it, often used to create detailed imagery and data.
- tourism management: Professionals in this field market and present the unique features and cultural heritage of a location to visitors.

3. Understand the Relationships Between Places, Lives, and Livelihoods.

These roles focuses on analysing the socio-economic impacts of location and environment.

- **community development**: Working to improve the lives of people within a community by addressing issues related to housing, infrastructure, and access to resources.
- **environmental and social impact assessment**: Evaluating how proposed projects or policies might affect local communities and their livelihoods.
- **epidemiology and public health**: Analysing spatial patterns of disease outbreaks, identifying geographic factors that influence disease spread. This helps public health officials plan interventions and allocate resources.
- **population analysis**: Studying population distribution and change helps understand how places affect demographic trends and resource needs.
- **social services and welfare**: Geographers analyse the spatial distribution of social needs to help deliver services more effectively.

Sante Fe, Mexico City c. 2018

4. Make Places Better.

These roles involves applying geographic knowledge to aid development, planning, sustainability, and conservation to improve communities.

- **consulting and project management**: Geographers apply their expertise to a wide range of projects aimed at improving places.
- **local and regional development**: Improving economic and social conditions of specific areas.
- **international development and aid**: Planning and implementing projects to improve living standards and infrastructure in developing countries.
- **natural resource management and agriculture**: Managing land and water resources sustainably for both human use and environmental benefit.
- **planning (including urban, regional, environmental, social and transport planning)**: Direct application of geographic principles to create more efficient and liveable spaces.
- **sustainability**: Creating sustainable systems and practices that minimize environmental harm and ensure long-term well-being.

5. Understand and Support Relationships Between Places.

These roles involve examining how different places are connected and influence one another.

- **international development and aid**: Understanding global interconnectedness to address issues like poverty and food security.
- **international diplomacy**: Geographers contribute to discussions on issues like cross-border resource management and climate agreements.
- **logistics and supply chain management:** Geographers use their understanding of spatial relationships and GIS to optimise transport routes, warehouse locations, and delivery networks for maximum efficiency in a field that is critical for e-commerce and traditional goods distribution.
- **market research**: Analysing supply chains and consumer behaviour across different locations.
- **public policy**: Studying how policies in one place can have ripple effects globally or regionally.

6. Understand How and Why Things Work Differently from Place to Place.

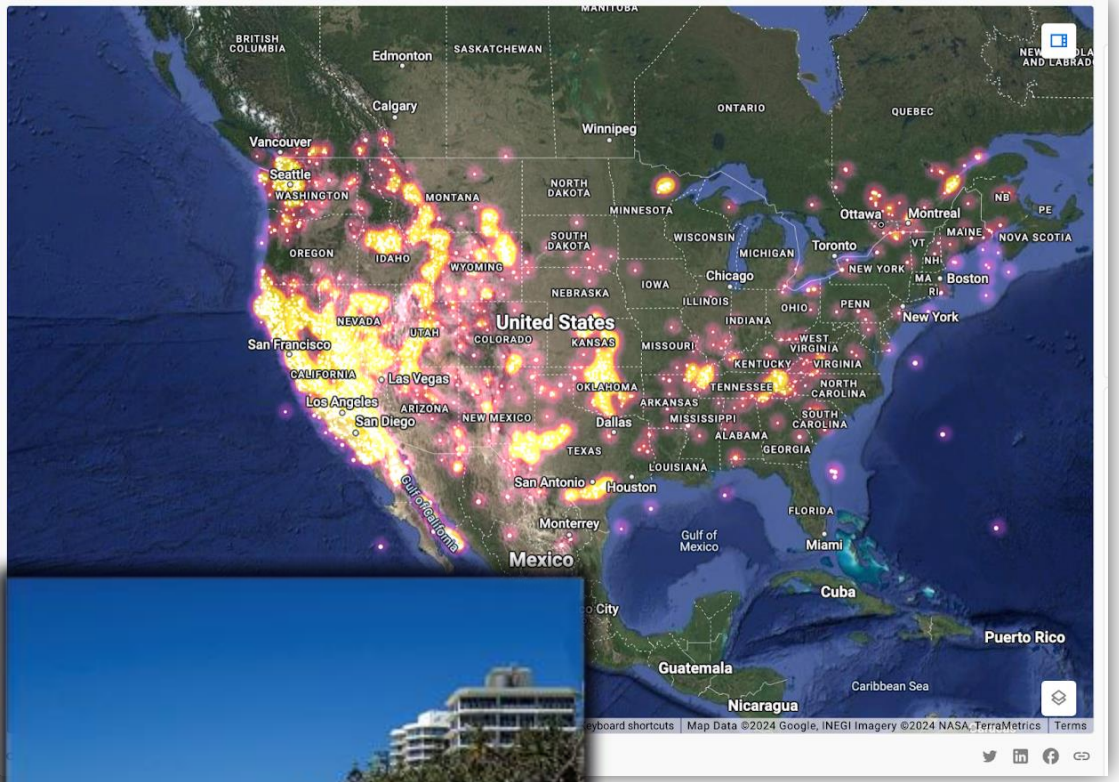
These roles centre on comparative analysis of different regions.

- **education**: Educators teach about the diverse political and cultural systems around the world.
- **international diplomacy**: Understanding cultural, political, and economic differences is crucial for effective negotiation and international relations.
- **public policy**: Policymakers study different regions to understand which policies are most effective in different contexts.
- **research**: Conducting comparative studies is a fundamental part of geographic research.

7. Predict and Manage Change in Places.

These roles utilises technology and data analysis to forecast and manage change.

- **climate change assessment and planning**: Using models to predict the impacts of climate change and develop strategies to adapt.
- **climatology and meteorology**: Predicting weather patterns and long-term climate trends.
- **geographic information systems (GIS)**: Used to model and visualise future changes in landscapes, populations, and environments.
- **hazard assessment, mitigation and disaster management**: Forecasting natural disasters and planning for emergency response.
- **public safety, defence and national security**: Using spatial analysis to predict threats and plan for security.
- **remote sensing**: Providing up-to-date data for monitoring and predicting change in a range of human and biophysical environments.



Heatmap, US earthquakes

Coastal erosion

8. Protect Places from Environmental and Social Harm.

These roles involve minimising threats to both natural and human environments.

- **coastal, marine and hydrographic analysis**: Protecting coastlines and marine ecosystems from erosion, pollution, and climate change impacts.
- **conservation, heritage and land management**: Protecting natural resources and cultural sites from development and destruction.
- **environmental monitoring and management**: Tracking pollution levels, deforestation, and other environmental threats to manage and mitigate them.
- **environmental science**: Protecting the environment through scientific analysis.
- **Geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT)**: Geographers with skills in GIS and remote sensing analyse imagery and data to provide actionable intelligence for public safety, defence, and military and national security.
- **hazard assessment, mitigation and disaster management**: This is a core function of protecting places from natural harm.
- **public safety, defence and national security**: Protecting people and infrastructure from threats, both natural and man-made.
- **sustainability**: Implementing practices that prevent environmental degradation and social inequality.

Want to know more?

Click on these useful resources to find out more about why geography matters, why you should study it, and what career opportunities exist.

I am a Geographer – an Australian series of videos and written profiles providing insights to diverse career options available when you study Geography.

Why study Geography – a terrific YouTube video explaining the importance of studying Geography by passionate Australian teacher Haysey. *"This is a video I created for my High School students as an introduction to the importance of studying Geography. Feel free to use in your classrooms."*

Choose Geography – a range of resources prepared by the Royal Geographical Society with IBG.

Understand the world and shape the future – Stories from New Zealand-based geography students and professionals sharing what excites them about geography and how they are creating real-world solutions that shape the future.

And now, kick start your geography career! Join the Royal Geographical Society of South Australia.

Geography students unlock great opportunities with a special heavily-discounted student membership.

What's in it for you?

- Networking and career opportunities
- Academic and research support
- Engagement and enrichment (e.g. field trips, public lectures. awards)

Click here for more details and to join.

Get connected.

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References.

- ALTC (Australian Learning and Teaching Council), 2010, *Geography Standards. Learning and Academic Standards Project. Geography Academic Standards Statement*. Strawberry Hills, NSW, Australia: Australian Learning and Teaching Council. ISBN 978-1-921856-32-7.
- New Zealand Geographical Society, 2025, *Understand the world and shape the future*, Available: https://www.nzgs.co.nz/choose-geography/ (1 October 2025).