How are landscapes different?

There are many different landscapes across the Earth, and similarities can be observed within regions. Variations in landscapes are influenced by factors such as climate; geographical features, including mountains and rivers; latitude; the impact of humans; and where the landscapes are located.

1 Mountains
Mountains rise above the surrounding landscape. They often have steep sides and high peaks and are the result of processes operating deep inside the Earth. Some reach high into the atmosphere where it is so cold that snow is found on their peaks.

2 Deserts
Deserts are areas of low rainfall; they are an arid or dry environment. They can experience temperature extremes: hot by day and freezing at night. However, not all deserts are hot. Antarctica is the world’s largest desert, and the Gobi Desert, located on a high plateau in Asia, is also a cold desert.

3 Rainforests
Rainforests are the most diverse landscapes on Earth. They are found in a variety of climates, ranging from the hot wet tropics to the cooler temperate areas. The lush vegetation found in these regions depends on a high level of rainfall. Over 50 per cent of all known plant and animal species are found within them. In addition, many of our foods and medicines come from rainforests.

4 Grasslands
Grasslands, or savanna, are sometimes seen as a transitional landscape found between forests and deserts. They contain grasses of varying heights and coarseness, and small or widely spaced trees. They are often inhabited by grazing animals.
5 Polar regions
Polar regions and tundra can be found in polar and alpine regions. Characterised by permafrost, they are too cold for trees to grow. Vegetation such as dwarf shrubs, grasses and lichens have adapted to the extreme cold and short growing season. Glaciers often carve spectacular landscape features.

6 Karst landscapes
Karst landscapes form when mildly acidic water flows over soluble rock such as limestone. Small fractures form, which increase in size over time and lead to underground drainage systems developing. Common landforms include limestone pavements, disappearing rivers, reappearing springs, sinkholes, caves and karst mountains. Around 25 per cent of the world’s population obtains water from karst aquifers.

7 Aquatic landscapes
Aquatic landscapes cover around three-quarters of the Earth and can be classified as freshwater or marine. Marine landscapes are the saltwater regions of the world, and include oceans and coral reefs. Freshwater landscapes are found on land, and include lakes, rivers and wetlands.

8 Islands
Islands are areas of land that are completely surrounded by water. They can be continental or oceanic. Continental islands lie on a continental shelf — an extension of a continent that is submerged beneath the sea. Oceanic islands rise from the ocean floor and are generally volcanic in origin. A group or chain of islands is known as an archipelago.

9 Built landscapes
Human or built landscapes are those that have been altered or created by humans.