Big Pacific

Deepest. Widest. Largest. The Pacific attracts an ocean of superlatives – yet none of them really capture its unassailable immensity, startling diversity or sheer poetry of its ever-shifting nature. It defies definition.

Mere facts can describe its physical attributes. At 166 million square kilometers (64 million square miles), it covers one-third of the Earth’s total surface area and accounts for nearly half of the planet’s water surface – larger than all of the Earth’s land area combined. We are all inhabitants of planet Pacific.

Hidden beneath its darkest waters is the deepest point on the planet, nearly 11 kilometers (7 miles) down. Even the Pacific’s average depth – 4,280 meters (14,040 feet) – is astounding, putting estimates of its total water volume at more than 700 million cubic kilometers (168 million cubic miles). It is perhaps the closest thing to boundless that we know.

Yet limits it has. Touching most of the world’s continents, and dotted by archipelagoes, the Pacific has enticed people to brave its expanse for millennia. It has been a frontier to explore, a space to conquer, a resource to plunder – and a place of infinite wonder.

No doubt it had many names before the one it bears now, gifted to it in 1520 by Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan and belied ever since by both its volatile nature and violent history. For even on its calmest day the Pacific is anything but a peaceful ocean.

Passionate, mysterious, violent and voracious, the Pacific is the world’s largest stage for nature’s unending drama – one in which we humans play an increasingly major part.