

Sightseeing: Big and Old Vocabulary

On vacation, we like to visit things that are very big or very old. Many people will visit the biggest church in Germany, or the oldest castle in France. Making something big almost guarantees there will be tourists there.

But the problem is that things start to get *so* big that the word 'big' doesn't seem big enough anymore. Or things get *so* old that the word 'old' isn't old *enough*. Today, we're going to learn some vocabulary for when you want to emphasize—or, make very clear—that something is *very* big or *very* old.

And, because each of these words has a slightly different meaning when you talk about people, I'll include that meaning, too.

“The Empire State Building is a **huge** skyscraper in New York City. . .”

If you have ever stood in front of the Empire State Building, you know how **incredible** it is to look up and see the building stretching up into the sky. It's big. It's *very* big. It's huge. 'Huge' describes something that is *very* big. The Eiffel Tower is huge and the Great Wall of China is huge, too. If you call a person huge, though, it normally means that he is fat.

“The pyramids in Egypt are **massive** graves built for the Pharaohs. . .”

Do you remember Physics class? Can you remember the idea that everything has 'mass.' That's where the word 'massive' comes from: something with a lot of mass, or matter. For example, the Eiffel Tower is **huge**, but it's not massive, because it's mostly empty space! The Alps, though, are massive: they're made of billions and billions of tons of rock. A massive building is seldom very high, instead, it's often wide or long. . . and made of stone or bricks. A massive person is a person with a lot of muscles: a body-builder. Or, a massive person can be a *very* fat person.

“Sparta was a city in **ancient** Greece. . .”

The word ancient means 'very old.' In fact, it means that something is *so* old, it probably came from a different civilization. In Greece and Rome you can find ancient ruins and the pyramids in Egypt are ancient, too. When you use ancient for people, though, it's normally an insult! To say “my English teacher is an ancient American . . .” means that your English teacher is old and probably not up-to-date.

“There is a museum with artifacts from **prehistoric** civilizations. . .”

The only reason we have history is because we can write. If we couldn't write things down, how would they be recorded as history? We can only guess at what things were like before people started keeping written records. Anything that comes from this time 'before history' is prehistoric. There are prehistoric civilizations, prehistoric art, and there are even prehistoric cities. When you say a person is prehistoric, it's normally an insult! It's like calling him a dinosaur!