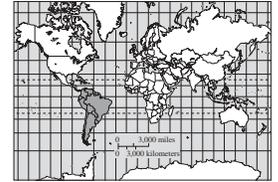


Physical Geography of South America

Location: South America is located south of North America and north of Antarctica. It is bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the west, the Caribbean Sea to the north, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. All of South America is located in the western hemisphere. About 20% of the continent lies above the equator in the northern hemisphere. The remaining 80% is in the southern hemisphere.



Area: South America is the fourth continent in area with approximately 6,900,000 square miles (17,800,000 km²) of land. It is, therefore, about twice the area of the United States. The greatest distance from north to south is 4,750 miles (7,645 km). The greatest distance from east to west is 3,200 miles (5,150 km). The highest point on the continent is the summit of Mount Aconcagua, 22,831 feet (6,959 m). The lowest point is on Valdes Peninsula 131 feet (40 m) below sea level.

Climate: For the most part, South America is warm to hot around the year. The high Andes is the only area that is cold all year. In the part of the continent that is south of the equator, January is a warmer month than July. In lands of the southern hemisphere, winter is in July and August and summer in January and February.

Precipitation in most of South America is medium to heavy. Medium precipitation is 40 to 80 inches (100 to 200 cm) per year, and heavy is more than 80 inches (200 cm). One area in the northern part of the continent receives more than 350 inches (890 cm) of rain each year. The other extreme is in the Atacama Desert where less than one-half inch (1.25 cm) of rain falls in a typical year.

Landforms: South America has many dramatic and impressive physical features. Among them are deserts, mountains, rivers, rain forests, and waterfalls.

Along the narrow band of western lowlands and in the southeast region are two very dry areas, the Atacama Desert and Patagonia. These are interesting regions partly because their dryness is caused by the Andes even though they are on opposite sides of these mountains. In the part of South America where the Andes is located, rain clouds come from the east and are intercepted by the Andes. Just south of the Atacama, rain clouds come from the west and are intercepted by the Andes before they can deposit any rain on Patagonia.

Running along the spine of South America are the Andes Mountains, the longest continuous mountain range on land. All ten of the western hemisphere's tallest mountains are located in this range, including Aconcagua, the highest peak.

The longest and most famous river in South America is the Amazon. With its tributaries, this river drains a huge amount of the continent. It is valuable as a transportation route and as the site of the world's largest rain forest.

Many spectacular waterfalls are located throughout South America. The waterfall with the greatest drop in the world, Angel Falls, is located in northern South America.

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Rivers of South America

Use the clues to help you match the letters on the map to the correct names.

- Amazon River**—This river's source is in the Andes. It flows eastward 4,000 miles (6,400 km) to its mouth at the Atlantic Ocean. It is the longest river in South America and the second longest in the world.
- Iguacu River**—This river flows westward from the Great Escarpment in southeast Brazil until it reaches the Parana River. It is famous for Iguacu Falls.
- Madeira River**—The Madeira begins near the border between Brazil and Bolivia. It flows northeast 2,000 miles (3,200 km) through the Amazon Basin until it joins the Amazon River.
- Orinoco River**—This river's sources are located near the border between Venezuela and Brazil. During its 1,300 mile (2,080 km) journey it flows northwest, north, and east before reaching the Atlantic Ocean.
- Paraguay River**—Beginning in Brazil, this river flows southward 1,584 miles (2,534.4 km) through Brazil, Paraguay, and between Paraguay and Argentina. It empties into the Parana River.
- Parana River**—This is the second-longest river in South America. Its source is in southern Brazil, and its mouth is at the Rio de la Plata. It is fed by the Paraguay and Iguacu Rivers.
- Colorado River**—This river is in the far south and begins in the Andes. On its eastward journey to the Atlantic Ocean it passes between the Patagonia and Pampas regions of Argentina.
- Purus River**—This is the third-longest river in South America. Its source is in the Andes Mountains within Peru. It flows northwest of the Madeira River and empties into the Amazon.
- Rio São Francisco**—Flowing northeast from its source in eastern Brazil, this river bends to the southeast as it approaches its mouth in the Atlantic. It is famous for Paulo Afonso Falls.
- Uruguay River**—Before it empties into the Rio de la Plata, this river flows 1,000 miles (1,600 km) from its source in southeast Brazil. It begins by flowing westward but gradually bends to the south.



Answer Key: 1.B, 2.G, 3.D, 4.A, 5.F, 6.H, 7.J, 8.C, 9.E, 10.I

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Cities of South America

This map of South America is labeled with letters that mark the locations of important cities. Match these letters with the correct names. Use the information provided below to help.

- Asunción
- Bogota
- Brasília
- Buenos Aires
- Caracas
- La Paz
- Lima
- Montevideo
- Quito
- Rio de Janeiro
- Santiago
- São Paulo
- Sucre



- This city is the capital, largest city, and chief port of Paraguay.
- This city is the capital and largest city of Colombia.
- Located about 600 miles (960 km) from Rio de Janeiro is this city, the capital of Brazil.
- This city is the capital, largest city, and chief port of Argentina.
- This city is the capital and largest city of Venezuela.
- This is the largest city of Bolivia. It is about 12,000 feet (3,600 m) above sea level.
- This city is the capital and largest city of Peru.
- This city is the capital, largest city, and chief port of Uruguay.
- This capital of Ecuador is located in the Andes Mountains.
- Famous for the annual carnival, this is the second-largest city of Brazil.
- This city is the capital and largest city of Chile.
- This is the largest city in Brazil and South America.
- This is the official capital of Bolivia.

Answer Key: 1.F, 2.I, 3.A, 4.H, 5.K, 6.M, 7.C, 8.L, 9.D, 10.J, 11.E, 12.G, 13.B

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