

Physical geography and climate

- fourth largest continent in size and the fifth largest in population
- it has large mountains around its periphery and an interior that is relatively flat
- three physical regions: **mountains and highlands, river basins, and coastal plains**
- **Andes** situated on the far western edge of the continent are the **world's longest mountain range**. They cover about 8,850 kilometers. The **highest peak** in the Andes is **Aconcagua**, (6,962 meters) on the Argentina-Chile border. There are also many **high plateaus** in the Andes
- **River basins** - South America has three important river basins: **Amazon, Orinoco, and Paraguay/Paraná**. The **Amazon** River basin is the largest in the world. The basin, which covers most of northern South America, is fed by tributaries from the glaciers of the Andes. The Amazon River is the life force of the equally vast Amazon rain forest. The Amazon is not only the second longest river in the world after the Nile, but also the Amazon carries more water than the world's other 10 biggest rivers combined. The **Paraná River** includes **Iguazu Falls**, a massive series of waterfalls that extend for 2.7 kilometers.
- A **coastal plain** is an area of low, flat land next to a seacoast. South American coastal plains are found on the **northeastern coast of Brazil**, on the **Atlantic Ocean**, and the **western, Pacific coast of Peru and Chile**. The coastal plains are **extremely dry**. The **Atacama Desert** is part of the western coastal plain. The Atacama is considered the driest region in the world. The average rainfall is about 1 millimeter a year, and some parts of the Atacama have never had rain in recorded history.
- South America extends from a broad equatorial zone in the north to a narrow sub-Arctic zone in the south. It can be divided into **four climatic regions: tropical, temperate, arid, and cold**.
- **Tropical climates** cover **more than half of the continent**. Tropical rainy conditions occur in the **Amazon River basin, the northeastern coast, and the Pacific coast of Colombia**. The regions' average daily temperature is 30 degrees with very little temperature variation throughout the year. Many crops thrive in the tropical climates of South America. Two very important cash crops are **coffee** and **cacao**
- The continent's **temperate climates** are located **south of the Tropic of Capricorn**. Temperate climates have a greater temperature range and lower winter temperatures than tropical climates.
- **Arid climates (desert climates)** are found in **deserts, coastal areas, and interior regions** throughout South America. Some of these climates are **extremely cold**, while others are **extremely hot**—but they all receive **very little precipitation**.
- **Cold climates** occur in the **southern ends of Argentina and Chile** and the **highest elevations of the Andes**. Cold climates have an average annual temperature of -10°C. These climates are characterized by **long dry seasons** and **high winds**.



Tourist attractions in South America:

- **Macchu Picchu** in Peru
- **Iguazu Falls** in Argentina/Brazil
- **Angel Falls** in Venezuela
- **Patagonia** in Argentina/Chile



Map of South America



Orinoco

Amazon

Andes

Paraná

Human geography

- South America is home to the citizens of **Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay**.
- Prior to European colonization, the **Incan Civilization** was a dominant force in South America.
- In the 1500's, **Spain colonized the majority of South America** and **Portugal** colonized present-day **Brazil**. Much of South America still speaks Spanish or Portuguese as their primary language.
- The **Carnival of Rio de Janeiro**, Brazil, a festival held every year about 40 days before Easter, is an important event in the calendar and one of the largest revenue generators in Rio.
- Marriages between European colonizers and native populations established the mestizo class. Mestizos are people of mixed indigenous and European ancestry. Today, mestizos make up large parts of the populations of many South American countries.



