

South America



South America is a continent in the southern hemisphere that is made up of 12 countries. Its largest country is Brazil. The smallest country in South America is Suriname, one of the ten most sparsely populated countries in the world. The biggest island is Tierra del Fuego (Land of Fire), at the southern tip of Argentina and Chile. Bolivia and Paraguay are both landlocked countries. Lake Titicaca (shared by Bolivia and Peru) is the continent's biggest lake.

South America is bordered to the north by the continent of North America and the Caribbean Sea; to the west by the Pacific Ocean; to the east by the Atlantic Ocean and to the south by the Southern Ocean.

Diversity

South America has very contrasting environments. South America's rainforests are some of the wettest places on Earth and the Atacama Desert in Chile is considered the driest place on Earth. The Incas were the largest group of indigenous people in South America when the Europeans arrived. The Incan Empire lasted from 1438 until 1533.



Key Vocabulary

- landmass:** a large continuous area of land
- sparsely:** with only a small number of people
- landlocked:** with no access to the sea
- indigenous:** native to a country
- colony:** a country occupied by another country

South America - Population



The population of South America is estimated to be 432 million - about 5.6 per cent of the total world population.

The most populous country in South America is Brazil, with 207.7 million people. The second largest country is Colombia with a population of 48.6 million, followed by Argentina with 43.8 million.

The largest city in South America is São Paulo, Brazil.

The five most populous cities are:

- 1) São Paulo, Brazil - 21.7 million
- 2) Buenos Aires, Argentina - 15.1 million
- 3) Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - 13.4 million
- 4) Bogotá, Colombia - 10.6 million
- 5) Lima, Peru - 10.4 million

Most of the population lives near the continent's western or eastern coasts while the interior and the far south are sparsely populated. The movement of the population from rural to urban areas has sped up the economic growth of the continent's countries. However, on the downside, many of the largest cities of South America are struggling to overcome traffic problems, housing and water shortages, and other high-population related problems.



Key Vocabulary

- median:** the middle value when arranged in order
- populous:** with a large population
- sparsely:** with only a small number of people

South America - Rivers



South America is home to the largest river basin in the world - the Amazon. It is also home to the Angel Falls waterfall, which is the highest in the world at over 900 m (2,950 ft).

A river basin is the area of land drained by a river and its tributaries. South America has three important river basins: the Amazon, Orinoco and Paraná.

- The Amazon River basin has an area of almost 2.7 million square miles, meaning it is the largest river basin in the world. It covers most of northern South America and is fed by tributaries from the glaciers of the Andes. Every second, the Amazon River empties 209,000m³ of fresh water into the Atlantic Ocean.

- The Orinoco River flows north of the Amazon. It flows in a giant arc for more than 1,700 miles, rising in northern Brazil and discharging into the Atlantic Ocean in Venezuela. The Orinoco River basin covers an area of about 366,000 square miles and covers approximately 80 per cent of Venezuela and 25 per cent of Colombia.

- The Paraná River basin covers almost 1.1 million square miles, which is much of south-eastern Brazil and Bolivia, Paraguay and northern Argentina. The Paraná River includes Iguazú Falls, a massive series of waterfalls that extend for 1.7 miles. It discharges into the Río de la Plata estuary between Argentina and Uruguay.



Key Vocabulary

river basin: the portion of land drained by a river

tributary: a river that flows into another river

discharging: flowing into

South America - Mountains



The topographic map on the left shows the mountainous areas of South America. The western coastline is dominated by the Andes mountain chain. This is also the location of a tectonic plate boundary and the mountains are formed through the process of subduction. There is a great deal of seismic activity in this area as it is part of the Pacific Ring of Fire.

The Andes name comes from the Quechua word anti, meaning high crest. The Andes is a 4,300-mile (6,900-km) long mountain range located in South America that straddles seven

countries: Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Chile and Argentina. The Andes have the second highest peak of any mountain range, the tallest being the Himalayas in Asia. The Amazon River has its source in the Andes.



- The Aconcagua in Argentina is the highest peak in the Andes at 6,961 m (22,837 ft)

- The highest active volcano in the Andean Mountains is the Ojos del Salado on the Chile-Argentina border. It also has the highest crater lake (one that has formed in a volcanic crater) in the world.



Key Vocabulary

topographic: relating to the physical features of an area

subduction: the movement of one tectonic plate below another

seismic: relating to earthquakes

citadel: in the past - a place for shelter or safety