

South America : Climate, Natural Vegetation, Wildlife; Mineral & Power Resources

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The climate of South America is influenced by its location, presence of the Andes Mountains, prevailing winds, nearness to seas and oceans, and the impact of ocean currents.
- The vast continent of South America has a climate that varies from the equatorial climate in most of Brazil, to the desert climate of the Atacama and Patagonian Deserts.
- Some areas of Venezuela, Guyana, and Brazil also experience tropical climate. There is a small stretch of central Chile which experiences Mediterranean climate. Southern Chile has a maritime climate.
- Different climates have influenced the natural vegetation found in South America. Forests exist in areas that receive heavy rainfall throughout the year such as the equatorial forests of the Amazon Basin. Grasslands predominate in regions that record maximum rainfall during the summers such as the grasslands in Guyana and Brazil. Deserts exist in areas that receive hardly any rainfall such as the Atacama and Patagonian Deserts. Mountain vegetation grows in the Andes and Mediterranean vegetation is found in central Chile.
- The wildlife of South America includes several unusual species such as the anaconda, birds such as the egret, rhea, and condor, and animals such as the guanaco, vicuna, and llama.
- Hardwood trees like mahogany, rosewood, and rubber are found in the selvas. Brazil nuts, balsa, cinchona for quinine, gum, resins, and dyes are other products obtained from these forests. Yerba mate is an important tree that grows in the Eastern Highlands.
- Rivers like the Amazon, Orinoco, and Parana provide inland water transport. Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Venezuela have developed hydroelectric power projects.
- South America is rich in minerals ranging from crude oil, copper, diamond, gold to silver. This is what attracted the Europeans to settle in this continent.

IMPORTANT TERMS

Campos : the tropical grasslands in central Brazil.

Gran Chaco : lowland alluvial plain in interior south-central South America.

Armadillo : an animal found in South America with a hard shell made of pieces-Of bone.

Lguana : a large tropical lizard found in South America.

EXERCISES

A. Fill in the blanks.

1. The tropical grasslands of Guyana are called **llanos**.
2. The coca tree is a native **peruvian** tree.
3. The **quebracho** tree grows in the Gran Chaco.
4. The **pampas vegetation** in Argentina consists of short, soft and nutritious grasses.
5. The **galapagos** Islands are inhabited by giant turtles.
6. Wax obtained from **caranauba** palm trees are used for making **shoe polish, furniture poolish, lipstickand candles**.
7. Quinine is obtained from the bark of **cinchona** trees.
8. **Chile** leads in the production of copper.

B. Find the odd one out in each of the following groups and say why.

1. Llanos, pampas, campos, selvas
2. Rubber, cinchona, pine, ebony
3. Tapir, piranha, sloth, puma
4. Jaguar, vicuna, llama, alpaca
5. Cactus, pine, scrub, prickly pear

Answer:

1. Selvas – As all other are grass
2. Pine
3. Tapir, pranha – piranha is a reptile
4. Jaguar – These three belong to camel family
5. Pine

C. Match the columns.

A

1. pampas
2. mixed forests
3. campos
4. selvas
5. Gran Chaco

B

- (i) quebracho tree
- (ii) temperate grasslands of Argentina and Uruguay
- (iii) equatorial rainforests of Amazon Basin
- (iv) tropical grasslands of Brazil
- (v) deciduous and coniferous vegetation

Answer:

A

1. pampas
2. mixed forests
3. campos
4. selvas
5. Gran Chaco

B

- (ii) temperate grasslands of Argentina and Uruguay
- (v) deciduous and coniferous vegetation
- (iv) tropical grasslands of Brazil
- (iii) equatorial rainforests of Amazon Basin
- (i) quebracho tree

D. Answer the following questions in brief.

Question 1.

How does the shape of the continent affect the climate of the southern part of South America ?

Answer:

Due to its tapering size or shape, the southern part of South America gets the moderating influence of the oceans and thus has mild climate.

Question 2.

Mention some of the factors that affect the climate of South America.

Answer:

A large part of South America lies within the tropical zone and is, therefore, hot. The apparent movement of the sun has an impact on the climate of South America. The climate is, however, also influenced by a number of other factors such as the presence of the Andes Mountains, the height of a place above sea level, prevailing winds, nearness to seas and oceans, and the impact of ocean currents such as the warm Brazilian Current and the cold Peru Current.

Question 3.

Name the summer and winter months in large parts of South America.

Answer:

As it is mainly located in the southern hemisphere, a very large part of South America experiences summer in December and early January and winter in June-July.

Question 4.

Which winds bring heavy rainfall to the Guiana Highlands and Brazil ?

Answer:

The North-east and South-east Trade Winds bring heavy rain to the Guiana Highlands and Brazil.

Question 5.

Why is the Atacama a desert ? Is it a tropical desert or a temperate desert ?

Answer:

The Northern and central Andes block North East and South East Trade Winds which bring rain from the Atlantic Ocean to the Guiana Highlands and Brazil. Therefore, the regions west of the Andes do not receive any rain and are very dry and hot and the Atacama Desert is located here. The Atacama is a tropical desert.

Question 6.

Name some of the forest resources from the selvas of South America.

Answer:

The selvas or equatorial forests are important for hardwood trees such as mahogany, rosewood, and rubber. The camaiiba palm tree yields wax, which is used for making shoe polish, furniture polish, lipstick, and candles. The bark of the cinchona tree yields quinine, a medicine used for treating malaria. Balsa, which is a lightweight wood, Brazil nut, gum, resins, and dyes are other products obtained from selvas.

E. Answer the following questions in one or two paragraphs.

Question 1.

Quito is located near the equator yet it has a cool pleasant climate throughout the year. Explain.

Answer:

Quito is the capital of Ecuador. It is situated close to the equator. In spite of its equatorial location, it has a pleasant climate throughout the year as it is situated high in the Andes.

Question 2.

Briefly describe the vegetation and wildlife of the selvas.

Answer:

The selvas or equatorial forests are important for hardwood trees such as mahogany, rosewood, and rubber. The camauba palm tree yields wax, which is used for making shoe polish, furniture polish, lipstick, and candles. The bark of the cinchona tree yields quinine, a medicine used for treating malaria. Balsa, which is a lightweight wood, Brazil nuts, gum, resins, and dyes are other products obtained from selvas.

Yerba mate is an important tree of the Eastern Highlands. The leaves of this tree are used to make a tea-like beverage. The Gran Chaco region grows quebracho (the word 'quebracho' means 'axe-breaker'), a hardwood tree which is a source of tannic acid used in leather tanning. The eastern slopes of the Andes and the coniferous forests of Chile have softwood trees, which are important sources of Wood pulp for the paper industry.

Colourful birds, monkeys, insects and snakes such as the python and anaconda, reptiles such as crocodiles and alligators and fishes including the piranha are found in the Amazon forests.

Question 3.

What do you know about the tropical grasslands of South America.

Answer:

These grasslands have long grasses and are known as the llanos in Guyana and the campos in Brazil. There are scattered trees between the grasses of varying heights.

Question 4.

Describe the temperate grasslands of South America.

Answer:

These are called the pampas in north-eastern and central Argentina and Uruguay. The vegetation consists of short, soft, and nutritious grasses. This is a fertile tree-less area which is well suited to cattle grazing, dairying, and wheat cultivation. Vast amounts of wheat are grown here for export.

Question 5.

What kind of wildlife can be found in the Amazon forests?

Answer:

Colourful birds, monkeys, insects and snakes such as the python and anaconda, reptiles such as crocodiles and alligators and fishes including the piranha are found in the Amazon forests.

Question 6.

South America has rich mineral reserves. Write a brief description of the chief mineral deposits.

Answer:

Brazil has one of the world's largest deposits of iron ore and also has some coal and vast oil reserves. Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela has rich deposits of mineral oil. This makes up for the lack of coal. About 15 per cent of the world's crude oil comes from this region of South America. Venezuela is the biggest exporter of oil in South America and is next only to the Arab countries. It is a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Chile is the world's leading producer of copper. The largest copper mine in the world is at Chuquibambilla in northern Chile. Peru is another important copper producer in South America. The Atacama Desert is still rich in nitrates, which are important for making fertilizers. Bolivia is one of the leading countries in tin production in the world. Gold is found in Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru. Bolivia and Peru have silver mines. Reserves of two rare minerals—platinum and vanadium—are found in the Andes. Bauxite is mined in Guyana and Suriname.

South America is rich in minerals ranging from crude oil, copper, diamond, gold to silver. This is what attracted the Europeans to settle in this continent.