

Geography of Africa



Africa is an enormous continent. It has almost every type of climate and geography. The northern coast of Africa runs from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea. Several hundred miles inland is the **Atlas Mountain Range**, a group of mountains that separate the coastal regions from the great Sahara Desert.

The **Sahara Desert** runs across the entire width of northern Africa. This is the largest desert in the world. It is covered with sand dunes, rolling rocky hills, and wide stretches of gravel that go on for miles and miles. Few people live in the Sahara; however, traders who travel by everything from camel caravan to jeeps and trucks cross its barren miles regularly.



South of the Sahara is a region called the **Sahel**, a dry and semi-arid region that is slowly turning into desert. There is little rain in this region. Generations of people have tried to live there, cutting down trees and allowing animals to overgraze. As the plants have disappeared, the soil has become drier and has begun to blow away.

In the middle of the continent, close to the equator, is the savanna region of Africa. It is a vast area of grassland and more tropical habitats. In this part of the continent, one finds many of the animals associated with Africa. The grasslands support lions, elephants, and many other species of animals. Farming is good here when the rains come. However, lack of rainfall can cause difficulties for farmers.

The African **tropical rainforests** are located along the central coast. These are areas with hot and humid climates and dense forests with trees hundreds of feet tall. Many animals and birds live in the African rainforests. The biggest threat to this ecosystem is the rapid population growth in most African nations located in the area. The need for fuel is driving people to cut down the trees faster than they can be replanted.



Africa's other great desert, the **Kalahari Desert**, is located in the southern part of Africa. Like the Sahara in the north, the Kalahari Desert is surrounded by semi-arid areas that are also becoming drier.



Africa also has spectacular rivers. The longest river in the world, the **Nile River**, is found in Africa. The Nile River begins in the central mountains of Africa as the White Nile and the Blue Nile, along with other tributaries. The river flows northward over 4,000 miles until it reaches the Mediterranean Sea at Alexandria, Egypt. The White Nile, the longest tributary of the Nile, begins in Lake Victoria. Lake Victoria is the largest lake in Africa.

The **Congo River** flows through central and west Africa, through the largest rainforest in Africa and second largest rainforest in the world. Only the Amazon rainforest in South America is larger. The Congo River begins in central Africa near Lake Tanganyika and flows almost 3,000 miles before it reaches the Atlantic Ocean. **Lake Tanganyika** is one of the largest freshwater lakes in the world. It is also one of the deepest lakes in the world.

The **Niger River** is the third largest river in Africa, flowing from Guinea over 2600 miles to the African coast. The mouth of the Niger is a vast delta, sometimes called the "Oil Delta," because of the petroleum industry centered there.

The **Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire)** is a large country in central Africa with a coastline on the Atlantic Ocean. This country is rich in natural resources and has the added advantage of the Congo River as a route for transportation and commerce. In addition to rainforests, the country is also rich in mineral resources, including copper, cobalt, and diamonds. The Congo has had a troubled history, both with European colonialism and later civil war. The political situation in the Congo remains unstable, which hinders the country's economic development.

Egypt is a large North African country located along the banks of the Red Sea and the Mediterranean coast. The Nile River runs the length of Egypt and empties into the Mediterranean Sea near the Egyptian city of Alexandria. Cairo, Egypt's capital, is a large city located on the Nile River. Most of Egypt is desert, and almost all of the Egyptian people live along the length of the narrow Nile River Valley.

The country of **Kenya** is located along the eastern coast of Africa bordering the Indian Ocean. Kenya is a beautiful country known the world over for its magnificent animal parks and rich savanna grasslands. Kenya was colonized by the British in the 1800s but gained freedom in the 1960s. Since that time Kenya has had a relatively stable government, though there have been disputes in recent years. The country's national slogan is "Harambee," which is a Swahili word that means people need to "work together."

Nigeria is a large nation on the coast of West Africa that has nearly every kind of habitat found in Africa. The northern part of the country is close to the Sahara and is rocky and sparsely covered with short, brush-like vegetation. This dry land gradually gives way to grasslands and finally to tropical rainforests. The Nigerian coastland is rich in oil, though problems and corruption in the government have meant the Nigerian people enjoy few benefits from their country's oil wealth.

South Africa is located at the very southern tip of the African continent. Most of the country is a broad plateau with large stretches of grasslands in the interior. These grasslands are home to many of the animals one thinks of in Africa: lions, elephants, giraffes, and leopards. The Kalahari Desert is to the north of South Africa.

The Republic of **Sudan** is located just south of Egypt in southeastern Africa. Sudan is the largest country in Africa and the largest among the countries that make up the Arab world. The Nile River flows through Sudan, linking that country to Egypt. Political and ethnic problems in recent years have made Sudan one of the most unstable countries in Africa. Many Sudanese have been made refugees because of the fighting between Sudan and South Sudan.

South Sudan, officially known as the Republic of South Sudan, is a landlocked country in East-Central Africa. It gained independence from the Republic of the Sudan in 2011, making it the most recent sovereign state with widespread recognition. Its capital and largest city is Juba.

Create a memory clue or provide a description of the relative location of each of the physical features. This is a study guide for the map quiz on Friday.

Niger River	Sahara Desert	Lake Victoria	Sahel (climate)
Congo River	Kalahari Desert	Lake Tanganyika	Savanna (climate)
Nile River	Atlas Mountains	Sahara (climate)	Tropical Rain Forest

Use the article to answer the questions.

1. What is the largest desert in the world? _____
2. Why has the Sahel been steadily turning into a desert? _____

3. What is the longest river in the world? _____
4. What is the largest lake in Africa? _____
5. What natural resource is located along the Niger River? _____
6. What is the biggest threat to the rainforests in Africa? _____

Reviewing Political Features

7. Sudan is _____ of Egypt and _____
of the Democratic Republic of Congo.
8. Nigeria is _____ of Sudan and northwest of
_____.
9. Kenya is southeast of _____ and east of
_____.
10. The Democratic Republic of Congo is north of _____
and _____ of Kenya.
11. South Africa is _____ of Kenya and
the Democratic Republic of Congo.
12. Egypt is _____ of _____.