

Africa's Reading

Africa, the second largest continent in the world, is a place with a great variety of landscapes, climates, wildlife, and civilizations. In this lesson, we will learn specifically about the geography of Africa. Where Is Africa? As the second largest continent in the world, Africa is easy to find. More specifically, Africa covers almost 12 million square miles--that is more than three times the size of the entire United States! --and more than 1 billion people call Africa home.

On a map, the continent is south of Europe and west of India, but there is a bit of water between Africa and those neighbors. The Mediterranean Sea laps at the northern coast, the Indian Ocean borders the east coast, and the Atlantic Ocean crashes against the western coast. It's not really bordered by anything on the south; the continent forms a point in South Africa, around the Cape of Good Hope, where the Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean meet.

Life in Africa, as you can probably imagine, a continent as large as Africa has a variety of ecosystems and climates. In the United States, Africa is often portrayed as a third-world country where there are more lions, elephants, giraffes, and hippos than there are nice homes and modern cities. That is not entirely accurate; although Africa does have awe-inspiring wildlife, some booming industries, and unfortunately, a large number of people living in poverty and disease, there's also so much more to this amazing continent.

As far as climate and ecology go, Africa is a remarkably diverse place: if you start in northern Africa and head south, you'll pass through mountains, plains, desert, grasslands, savannah, rainforest, and rolling hills by the time you reach the Cape of Good Hope. This is the route we will take in a quick tour of the geography of

Africa, and our first stop is Egypt. Touring Africa We start in Egypt, the northernmost country in Africa. Up here, the continent bumps up closely to the Middle East, separated only by the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. Egypt is also the eastern edge of the Sahara Desert, and when we turn west and cross the Nile River--the largest river in Africa-- we continue through the massive Sahara Desert, crossing through countries like Libya, Algeria, and Morocco. Now that we are on the west coast of Africa, we can move south down to Mali, and move back east through the Niger River Valley and Nigeria, Chad, South Sudan, and Ethiopia.

As we zigzag back across the continent, we will end up just north of Lake Victoria, Africa's largest lake and the world's largest tropical lake. From Lake Victoria, we head south into Tanzania and see the continent's largest mountain, Mount Kilimanjaro. We will talk more about Kilimanjaro in a minute. As we head west back across the continent, we will go through Kenya, the Congo, and Gabon--all of which are home to beautiful rainforests. South of the rainforest is the terrain you probably think of when you think of Africa: the savannah, with the lions, cheetahs, elephants, and giraffes, covers most of Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and South Africa. The savannah, which covers roughly the bottom third of Africa, is made up of dry, rolling hills, scattered with groves of Joshua trees and brush.

There is also another huge desert--the Kalahari-- along the southwest coast of Africa. Our tour ends at the Cape of Good Hope, the southern tip of South Africa. This is where European settlers first colonized South Africa in the 1600s. For many years, South Africa struggled under apartheid, which was a system that forcibly separated citizens based on the color of their skin. Since apartheid ended in the 1990s, South Africa's economy and status in the world have dramatically increased and will soon match the beauty of its geography

Major Landmarks There are four landmarks, or geographic highlights, in Africa that deserve some special attention when discussing Africa's geography: the Sahara Desert, Mount Kilimanjaro, Victoria Falls, and Lake Victoria. The Sahara Desert reaches all the way across northern Africa, east to west, coast to coast. It is the world's largest hot desert, covering 3.6 million square miles. It is definitely hot--temperatures can regularly get as hot as 118 degrees Fahrenheit--but at night, near the coasts, the temperature can dip down to around 50 degrees.

And it is always sunny, with clear, sunny skies more than 90% of the daytime! Mount Kilimanjaro is impossible to miss for it is the highest mountain in Africa. Located in Tanzania, Kilimanjaro is more than 19,300 feet above sea level. It is the world's largest freestanding mountain, which means it is not part of a mountain range. Kilimanjaro is a major tourist destination, because it is not an extremely difficult climb, if the climber is in pretty good shape. On the other side of the continent, Victoria Falls is another popular tourist spot in Africa. Located on the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe, Victoria Falls crashes down a full 355 feet into the Zambezi River.

Over time, the powerful water from the falls has cut a deep gorge into the landscape. Although Victoria Falls is not the tallest or the widest waterfall in the world, it is considered the largest, because it has the largest volume of water going over the falls at any given time.

Journey Down the Nile River - Amazing Egypt

