

## North America's Readings

### A Diverse Continent

North America is the third largest continent in the world, after only Africa and Asia. However, it has plenty of diversity in geography. From high mountains to long rivers, Great Plains and even rainforests, North America has it all. In this lesson, we are going to look at the geography of North America, seeing just how much geography one continent can fit!

### Major Bodies of Water

First, let us start by looking at the bodies of water that border North America. Far to the north of the continent is the **Arctic Ocean**. It is mostly frozen for much of the year, but there is still plenty of water for seals and polar bears. Further south and to the east of North America is the **Atlantic Ocean**, while on the western side of the continent is the **Pacific Ocean**. At the southeastern tip are the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico.

However, those are only the saltwater bodies. North America also has plenty of freshwater, too. The biggest river system in North America is the **Missouri-Mississippi River system**, which is more than 2,300 miles long. Other important rivers in North America include the **St. Lawrence River** and the **Rio Grande**. North America also has several impressive lakes, such as the **Great Lakes** that stretch westward from the St. Lawrence River.

### Hot and Cold

Many of those bodies of water change temperatures throughout their courses. For example, the Mississippi River starts from snow and ice melting in the Midwest

and ends up in hot and humid Louisiana. Generally, the further north you go in North America, the colder it gets, while the further south you are, the hotter it gets. However, there are exceptions, as some parts of the Southwest have snow throughout the year.

## **Mountains and Plains**

In the east, the **Appalachian Mountains** stretch from Canada to Alabama, while in the west, the **Rocky Mountains** stretch from Canada to New Mexico. To the south, the **Peninsular Ranges** cover much of north and western Mexico. That said, the tallest mountain in North America, Denali, is part of the Alaska Range.

At the other end of the spectrum, North America has one of the largest plains in the world, the **Great Plains**. Stretching from central Canada to northern Mexico, it provides millions of tons of food for people of the continent and beyond.

## **Deserts and Rainforests**

Finally, North America also has deserts and rainforests. Deserts cover much of the western central parts of the continent, especially the American southwest and the northern part of Mexico. After all, this is where cacti grow.

But, alongside those deserts are a few rain forests. Tropical jungles exist in the southernmost parts of Mexico and into Central America, while subtropical swamps cover much of Louisiana and parts of Florida. However, what is especially interesting are the temperate rain forests of the Pacific Northwest, where temperatures are lower, but the same amount of rain falls here as does in the Amazon or other big rain forests.

## Rocky Mountain's Virtual Field Trip

