

Module: Latin America and the Caribbean
Topic Content: Major Regions of South America

Major Regions of South America



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Introduction



South America is bordered by the Pacific Ocean in the west, the Atlantic Ocean in the east, and the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean in the north. Twelve independent nations and one dependent territory are located on South America. The continent can be organized into four sub-regions: the Northern Tropics, the Andean countries, the Southern Grasslands, and Brazil.

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The Northern Tropics



The Northern Tropics are located on the northern part of the South American continent, in the low latitudes north of the equator. This area contains Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana. The climate of this sub-region is mostly tropical, with a mixture of rainforest and savanna vegetation. Click each point to learn more.


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Colombia

Click each point on the map to learn more

Colombia



- Population mostly lives in the northwest by the coast
- Llanos grasslands make up the southeast
- Major exports include oil, petroleum products, and coal
- One of the largest exporters of coffee and cut flowers
- Limited by poor infrastructure, poverty, and conflict
- High rate of out-migration

Close

Colombia is in northwestern South America, near the Isthmus of Panama. Most of Colombia's population lives in the northwestern half of the country, by the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. The sparsely populated Llanos grasslands make up the southeastern half of the country.

Colombia has access to valuable natural resources. This has helped shape the nation's economy. In the energy industry, Colombia is a major exporter of oil and petroleum products. It is also the fourth largest producer of coal in the world. In the agricultural industry, Colombia is the third largest exporter of coffee and the second largest exporter of cut flowers. Despite this, Colombia's economic growth is limited by poor infrastructure, poverty, and drug trafficking. These factors have also increased out-migration.

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Venezuela

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Venezuela

Member of OPEC

Largest reserves of oil in the world

Oil and petroleum products account for 80% of exports

Political corruption has caused severe problems

High rate of violent crime

Caracas is the country's largest city and capital

Caracas

Close

Venezuela is located on the northern coast of South America. This nation is a member of OPEC, and has access to the largest reserves of oil in the world. The Venezuelan economy is dominated by the energy industry. Oil and petroleum products account for more than 80% of all exports.

Major political corruption in Venezuela has resulted in widespread poverty, high inflation, and severe shortages of basic goods. This has led to a dramatic increase in violent crime, particularly in cities. Caracas is the largest city in Venezuela and the capital of the country. In 2017, Caracas had the second highest murder rate in the world outside of a warzone.

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The Guianas

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The Guianas

French Guiana

- Guyana and Suriname are independent countries
- French Guiana is a dependent territory
- English is the official language in Guyana
- Dutch is the official language in Suriname
- French is the official language in French Guiana
- Similar culture to Caribbean

Close

The Guianas are located on the northeastern coast of South America. They include two independent countries named Guyana and Suriname. They also contain one dependent territory named French Guiana. As Guyana is a former British colony, English is its official language. Dutch is the official language in Suriname, which is a former colony of the Netherlands. French Guiana remains a part of France, and French is its official language. Although the Guianas are in South America, they are often considered a part of the Caribbean sub-region. This is because of shared cultural influences.

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The Andean Countries




The Andean countries span the western coast of South America, and include Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile. This region is named for its most prominent physical feature, the Andes Mountains. The terrain consists of mountainous highlands with a narrow strip of coastal plain near the Pacific Ocean. Click each point to learn more.

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Ecuador

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Ecuador



- Named for its location on the equator
- Member of OPEC
- Petroleum products account for one-third of exports
- Suffers from poverty and income inequality
- Reforms have begun to improve poverty rates

Close

Ecuador is located on the northwestern coast of South America. The country was actually named Ecuador because of its location on the equator. Ecuador is a member of OPEC, and petroleum products account for roughly one-third of the nation's exports. Ecuador has historically suffered from extreme poverty and income inequality. This is particularly true for the country's indigenous and rural populations. Poverty rates have gradually improved in recent years due to economic and political reforms.

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Peru

Click each point on the map to learn more

Peru



Lima

- Served as the heart of the Inca Empire
- Contains Inca ruins like Machu Picchu
- 60% of Peruvians are mestizo
- Indigenous people are 25% of the population
- Most people live in the Andean highlands or Lima
- Lima is the capital

Close

Peru is located on the Pacific coast of South America, south of Ecuador and north of Chile. Peru was once the heart of the Inca Empire, before Spanish conquistadors conquered the region in the sixteenth century. Inca ruins can be found throughout the country. The most famous ruins are those at Machu Picchu.

Roughly 60% of Peruvians identify as mestizo, while indigenous people make up about 25% of the population. More than half of the population resides in the rural Andean highlands, and practices subsistence agriculture. The rest of the population primarily lives in and around the city of Lima, which is located on the Pacific coast. Lima is also the capital of Peru.

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Bolivia

Click each point on the map to learn more

Bolivia



- Landlocked nation
- Most of the population lives on the Altiplano
- Has strong indigenous roots
- Native Americans make up 20% of the population
- 68% of Bolivians are mestizo

Close

Bolivia is a landlocked nation. It is centrally located on the South American continent. Most of the Bolivian population lives on the Altiplano, which spans the southwestern part of the country. Bolivia's indigenous roots are reflected in the nation's demographics. Native Americans account for approximately 20% of the population. 68% of the population is mestizo, with mixed indigenous and European ancestry.


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Chile

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Chile



Between the Andes and the Pacific Ocean

The south has dense forest

The north contains the Atacama Desert

90% of the population lives in the central region

Santiago is the capital and most populous city

Highly developed economy that relies on copper

Close

Chile is located along the western coast of South America, between the Andes Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. The southern part of Chile has a marine west coast climate with dense forest vegetation. The northern part of the country contains the Atacama Desert, which is the driest desert on Earth. It extends north to the border of Peru. The Atacama Desert also contains valuable deposits of copper.

Around 90% of the population lives in the central region. This is also where the capital, Santiago, is located. Santiago is the country's most populous city, and the center of Chilean culture and trade. Chile's economy is one of the most developed in Latin America. It relies heavily on copper and other minerals, which makes up more than half of all exports.

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Southern Grasslands



The Southern Grasslands are located on the southernmost area of the continent, and include Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay. This region is defined by two major physical features: the Pampas grasslands and the Rio de la Plata river system. Click each point to learn more.

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Argentina

Click each point on the map to learn more



Argentina

Andes Mountains provide mineral deposits

Pampas provides arable land for crops and livestock

Gauchos are a national symbol

Diverse secondary sector

Large service sector and popular tourist destination

Buenos Aires is the capital and most populous city

Close

Argentina is located on the southern part of the continent, west of the Atlantic Ocean and east of Chile. The Andes Mountains run along the western border of Argentina, and provide rich mineral deposits. In the northern part of the country, the Pampas offers large areas of arable land for crops and grazing livestock. Cattle ranchers, known as gauchos, have become a national symbol in Argentina.

In addition to a strong primary sector, Argentina has a diverse secondary sector. It manufactures a variety of goods including vehicles, textiles, and chemicals. Argentina also has a large service sector, and is a popular tourist destination. Buenos Aires is Argentina's capital and most populous city. It is also functions as a major center for culture and trade.

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Paraguay

Click each point on the map to learn more

Paraguay



Itaipu Dam

- Surrounded by Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil
- Has access to the Atlantic via the Paraguay River
- Economy largely based on agriculture
- Major producer of hydroelectric power
- Sells surplus electricity
- Most power comes from the Itaipu Dam

Close


Paraguay is centrally located on the South American continent. It is surrounded by Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil. Although Paraguay is landlocked with no coastline, the country does have access to the Atlantic Ocean via the Paraguay River. Paraguay's economy is largely based on agriculture. However, the nation is also a major producer of hydroelectric power. Paraguay's hydroelectric dams generate more power than the country needs. Thus, it regularly sells the surplus electricity to other nations. Most of Paraguay's power comes from the Itaipu Dam, which it shares with neighboring Brazil.

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Uruguay

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Uruguay



Guachos on a cattle ranch

- Terrain is mostly rolling grassland
- 85% of the land is used for agriculture
- Most agricultural land is devoted to cattle ranches
- Gauchos are a national symbol
- Population is mostly of Spanish and Italian descent

[Close](#)

Uruguay is located on the southeastern coast of South America, between Argentina and Brazil. The terrain is mostly rolling grassland, and around 85% of the land is used for agriculture. Most of the agricultural land in Uruguay is devoted to ranches that raise cattle and other grazing livestock. Similar to nearby Argentina, gauchos are a national symbol in Uruguay. Spanish is the official language of Uruguay. Most of the population is of Spanish or Italian descent.

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Brazil




Brazil is located on the eastern coast of South America. It is the largest and most populous country on the continent. The vast majority of the population lives along the coast. Brazil is also the only nation in Latin America where Portuguese is the official language. Click each point to learn more.

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Amazon River Basin

Click each point on the map to learn more

Amazon River Basin



- World's largest rainforest
- Contains 12% of the world's freshwater
- Produces over 20% of the world's oxygen
- Home to a variety of species and indigenous tribes
- Deforestation is a threat
- Slash-and-burn agriculture clears natural vegetation to create farmland

Close

The Amazon River Basin spans most of northwestern Brazil, and contains the largest area of tropical rainforest in the world. This region contains 12% of the world's fresh water, and produces more than 20% of the world's oxygen. It is estimated that more than half of the species on Earth are found in the Amazon. Additionally, multiple uncontacted indigenous tribes live in the rainforest.

Deforestation is a serious issue in the rainforest. Commercial logging and slash-and-burn agriculture are common practices. Slash-and-burn agriculture involves cutting down and burning areas of natural vegetation to create farmland.


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São Paulo

Click each point on the map to learn more

São Paulo



Favelas in São Paulo

- Near the southeastern coast
- Most populous city in Brazil and the Americas
- Rapid population growth in the twentieth century
- Financial capital of Brazil
- Population of metropolitan area is over 21.5 million
- 10% of the population lives in squatter settlements

Close

São Paulo is located near the southeastern coast of Brazil. This megacity is the most populous city in Brazil, and the most populous city in the Americas. During the twentieth century, São Paulo industrialized. It experienced rapid population growth as Brazilians and immigrants came to the city.

Today, the city functions as the financial capital of Brazil. As of 2019, more than 21.5 million people live in the greater metropolitan area of São Paulo. The poorest members of the population live in squatter settlements around the city, called favelas. Roughly 10% of São Paulo's population lives in these favelas.

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Rio de Janeiro

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Rio de Janeiro



Christ the Redeemer statue

- On the southeastern coast
- Second most populous city in Brazil
- Sixth most populous city in the Americas
- Former national capital
- State capital and center for culture, trade, and tourism
- Christ the Redeemer statue is a famous landmark

Close

Rio de Janeiro is located on the southeastern coast of Brazil. It is the second most populous city in Brazil, and the sixth most populous city in the Americas. Rio de Janeiro used to be the national capital of Brazil; however, the capital was moved to the newly constructed city of Brasília in 1960. Rio de Janeiro now functions as a state capital, and remains important center for Brazilian culture, trade, and tourism. One of Rio's most iconic landmarks is its Christ the Redeemer statue, which overlooks the city.