

Module: Russia and Central Asia
Topic Content: Physical Features of Russia and Central Asia

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Location



Russia and Central Asia are located on the northern part of Eurasia. Eurasia is a landmass formed by the continents of Europe and Asia. Russia and Central Asia form a massive region that spans both of these continents: Europe in the west and Asia in the east. It extends from the Baltic and Black Seas in the west, and stretches east across northern Asia to the Pacific Ocean. The Arctic Ocean borders the region in the north.

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Caspian Sea



The Caspian Sea is a large inland body of water located east of the Black Sea. The Caspian Sea is technically a lake, not a sea. In fact, it is the largest lake in the world. The Caspian Sea contains saltwater rather than freshwater. For this reason, as well as its enormous size, people refer to it as a sea.

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Aral Sea



The Aral Sea is located east of the Caspian Sea. The Aral Sea is also a saltwater lake. It used to be the fourth-largest lake in the world, but it has shrunk dramatically. Major rivers that fed the Aral Sea were diverted for Soviet irrigation projects in the 1960s. This has decreased the lake to one-tenth of its previous size.

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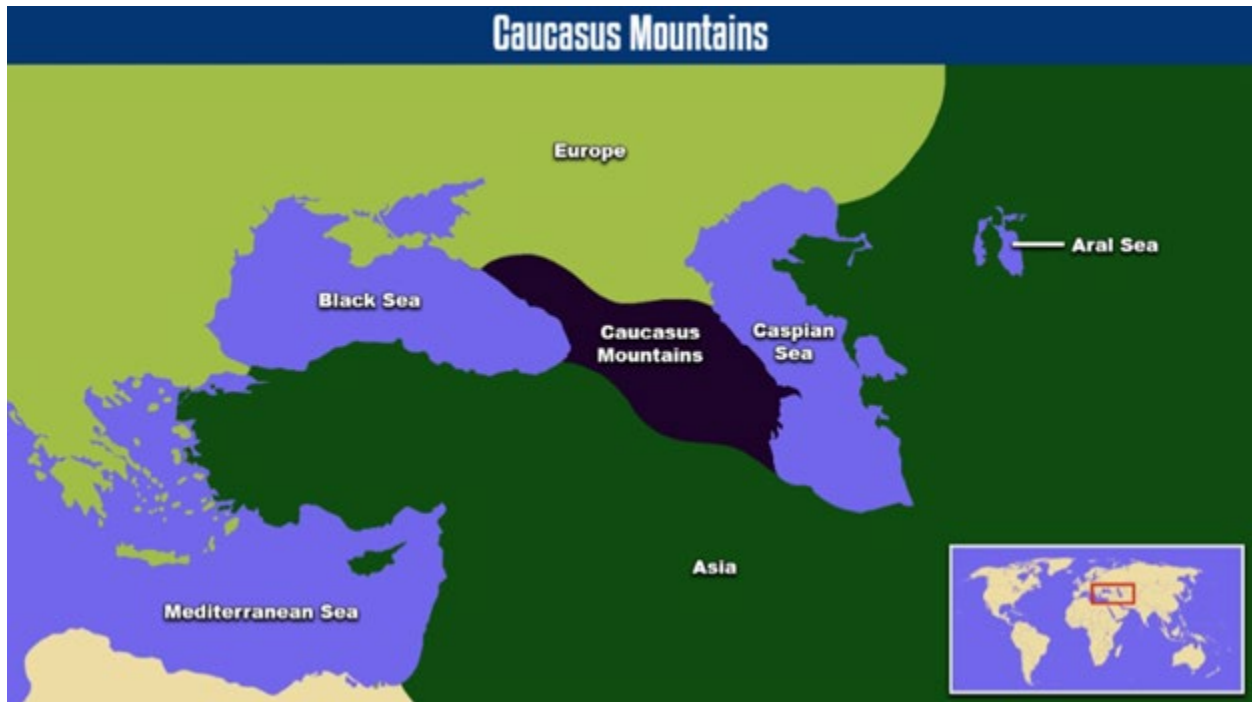
Ural Mountains



The Ural Mountains are located in the western part of Russia and Central Asia. They extend from the Arctic Ocean in the north toward the Caspian Sea in the south. The Urals divide the continents of Europe and Asia. Europe is west of the mountains and Asia is east of the mountains. The Urals have a relatively low elevation compared to other major mountain ranges. The highest peak is just over 6,200 feet. In contrast, the Alps' highest peak is over 15,700 feet.

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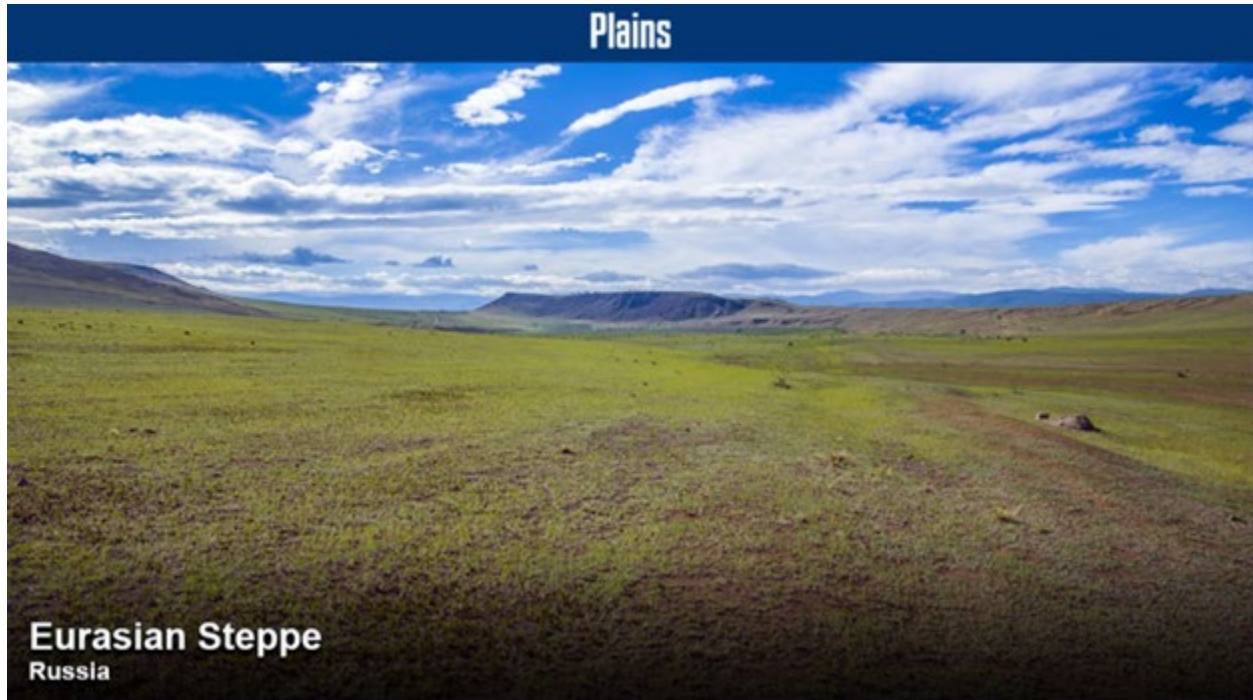
Caucasus Mountains



The Caucasus Mountains extend from the Black Sea in the east to the Caspian Sea in the west. The Caucasus region is considered part of Asia, but also marks the border between the Asian and European continents. Europe is located north of the mountain range and Asia is south. The highest peak of the Caucasus Mountains is Mount Elbrus at 18,500 feet. Mount Elbrus has two summits, each of which is a dormant volcano.

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Plains

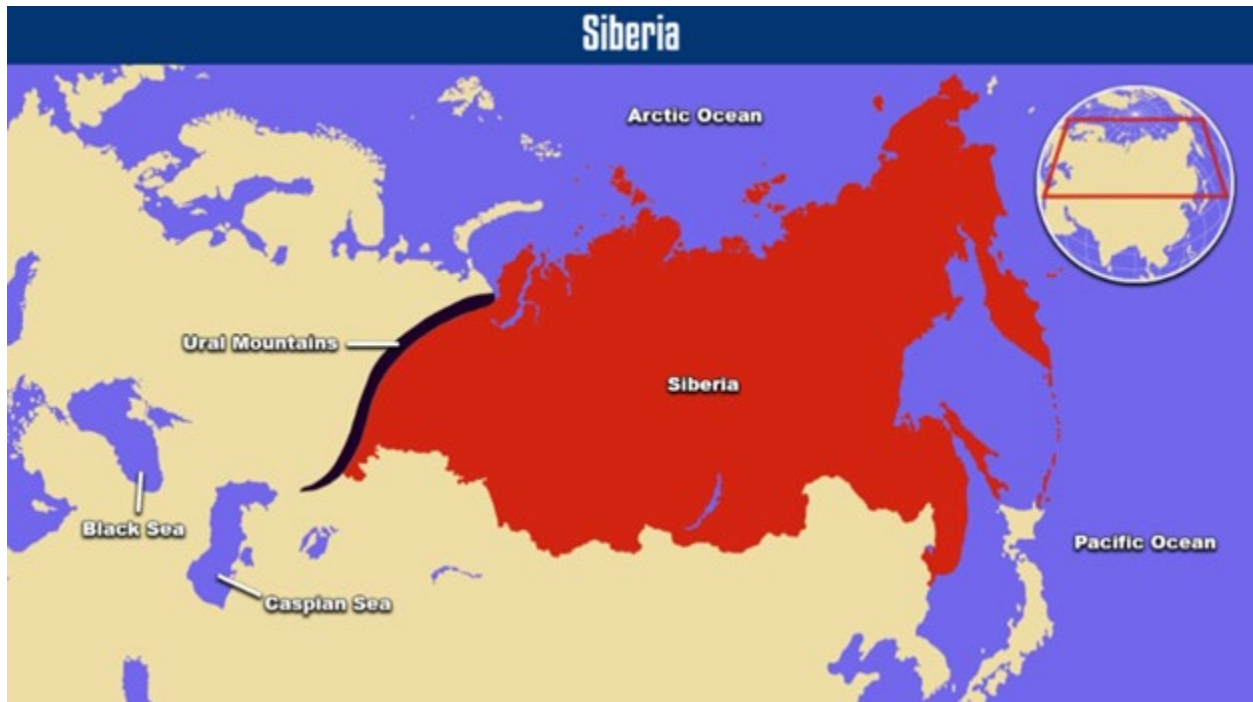


Much of the terrain in Russia and Central Asia consists of large expanses of flat plains. The East European Plain, also called the Russian Plain, is a large flat region located west of the Ural Mountains. It extends into Europe toward the Baltic Sea and forms part of the Great European Plain. The East European Plain is excellent for farming due to its rich chernozem soil. Chernozem, which means black earth in Russian, is a fertile soil that is able to produce high crop yields.

The southern grasslands of the East European Plain form part of the Eurasian Steppe. The Eurasian Steppe is an enormous grassland region that spans Southern Russia and Central Asia. This vast region extends from the Black Sea to Northern China, almost reaching the Pacific Ocean.

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Siberia



Siberia is a massive physical region in Russia. It extends from the Ural Mountains in the east to the Pacific Ocean in the west. The name Siberia is believed to come from an indigenous Tatar word that means “the sleeping land.” Vast areas of taiga and tundra dominate this region. Taiga is coniferous forest vegetation found in subarctic climates. Tundra consists of frozen soil called permafrost, which prevents trees from growing.

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Siberia (continued)



Siberia can be divided into three sub-regions. The West Siberian Plain is a lowland region, located in Western Siberia near the Ural Mountains. The Central Siberian Plateau is an upland region. It is centrally located in the region. The Russian Far East is a mountainous region. It is located along the Pacific Coast.

Siberia also contains the world's deepest lake, called Lake Baikal. Lake Baikal is a freshwater lake with depths that reach over one mile. It is considered one of the clearest lakes in the world, and contains about one-fifth of the world's freshwater supply. It also supports thousands of plant and animal species, many of which cannot be found anywhere else.

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Major Rivers



There are several major rivers located within Russia and Central Asia. The Volga River is located west of the Ural Mountains, in European Russia. It is the longest river in Europe and one of the most important rivers in Russia. The Volga begins northwest of Moscow and flows toward the Caspian Sea.

There are three great Siberian rivers located east of the Ural Mountains. The Ob River is the westernmost of the three rivers. It is located in the West Siberian Plain. The Yenisei River is the central river, located between the West Siberian Plain and the Central Siberian Plateau. The Lena River is the easternmost river. It is located east of the Central Siberian Plateau. All three Siberian rivers flow northward and empty into the Arctic Ocean.

The Amur River is located in the Russian Far East between Russia and China. This river forms much of the Russian-Chinese border. The Amur River begins in the mountainous region of Northeastern China and empties into the Pacific Ocean.