

Latin America: Physical Characteristics

Major Mountain Ranges:

Andes—west coast of **South America**, from Colombia and Venezuela in the north to Chile and **Argentina** in the south

--Climate can be cold at higher elevations in the Andes even near the Equator

Sierra Madres—north and central **Mexico**

Sierra Madre Occidental—**western** range

Sierra Madre Oriental—**eastern** range

Rainforests

Amazon rainforest in **Brazil**—largest rainforest in the world

--**Deforestation** occurring in Amazon

Rainforests throughout much of Central America

Coastal Desert

Atacama Desert in northwest **Chile**

--Driest desert on Earth because **mountains** block moisture on both sides

--Very high altitude

Reversed seasons south of Equator

The Earth's **tilt** accounts for the reversed seasons

Amazon River Basin

Amazon River contains more water than any river in the world, although the Nile is the longest

Amazon River includes over 1,000 tributaries

Drainage area covers roughly half of South America, the size of the United States

Rainforest climate—very hot and wet

Rains 200 days per year

Grasslands

Pampas grasslands in Argentina

- Fertile lands; agricultural region

Llanos grasslands in Venezuela and Colombia

Predominantly Tropical Climates

Hot weather in most areas

Latitude and altitude impact temperature

Volcanoes and Earthquakes

Occur along the west coast from Mexico to Chile (Ring of Fire)

Plate tectonics and underground pressure cause volcanoes and earthquakes

Archipelagoes

Many islands in the Caribbean Sea and off the coast of South America

Greater Antilles—Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico

Lesser Antilles—smaller islands in eastern Caribbean

Tierra del Fuego (“land of fire”)—southern tip of South America

Galapagos Islands (belongs to Ecuador)

Vertical Zonation

Tierra Caliente (“hot land”)—low altitudes

Tierra Templada (“temperate/mild land”)—middle altitudes

Tierra Fria (“cold land”)—high altitudes

Lands in higher altitudes are colder because of thinner air

Lands high in Andes Mountains can be cool even near the Equator