



Machu Picchu, Peru



Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Continent Close-up

South America is the fourth-largest of Earth's seven continents. It stretches from Point Gallinas on the northern coast of Colombia down to icy Cook Island near Antarctica. South America's wide variety of **climates** and **biomes** provides the continent with some of the greatest diversity on Earth. The continent includes 12 independent countries. It also contains French Guiana, a region of France, and the Falkland Islands, which are governed by the United Kingdom.

Land area	6.8 million square miles (17.6 million square kilometers)
Number of independent countries	12
Estimated population (2017)	422.5 million
Main languages	Portuguese, Spanish, Quechua
Largest country	Brazil
Smallest country	Suriname
Fast fact	South America has two fully landlocked countries. Neither Paraguay nor Bolivia has access to an ocean.

Land and Climate

South America contains a diverse and beautiful landscape. The western part is occupied by the Andes Mountains. These peaks run along the Pacific Coast like a gigantic backbone. The eastern part of South America contains lowlands. Here, huge rivers such as the Amazon snake through deserts, hills, forests, and fields.

More than half the people who visit Torres del Paine National Park are foreign tourists.

The mountains of Chile's Torres del Paine National Park offer breathtaking views to hikers.

THE BIG TRUTH!

Amazon in Danger

The trees in the massive Amazon rain forest are very important to the health of the planet. We need trees to keep our air clean and breathable. But there is a problem. In the last 40 years, the Amazon has lost 18 percent of its trees. The area these trees once covered was almost as big as the entire state of California! The trees have been lost to illegal logging and cleared away to make room for soybean farms and cattle ranches.



Timeline

In the 1970s, deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon began to increase when highways opened deep into the forest.

1970

Between 2001 and 2012, 3.5 million acres (1.4 million hectares) of the Amazon rain forest were lost, mostly in Brazil and Peru.

2001–2012

In 2015, demand for products like palm oil and soybeans led to an increase in illegal deforestation.

2015

The World Wide Fund for Nature estimates that more than a quarter of the Amazon rain forest will be without trees by 2030.

2030

Deforestation also contributes to global climate change. This major environmental issue is causing problems for many plant and animal species around the world, such as Spix's night monkey.