

Brazil

Lesson 1: Physical Geography of Brazil

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does geography influence the way people live?

Terms to Know

tributary small river that flows into a larger river

basin an area into which a river and its tributaries drain

rain forest dense stand of trees and other growth that receives high amounts of precipitation

canopy umbrella-like covering formed by the tops of trees in a rain forest

plateau an area of high, flat land

escarpment steep cliff at the edge of a plateau with a lowland area below

pampas treeless grassland

Tropics area between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, which has generally warm temperatures because it receives the direct rays of the sun for much of the year

temperate zone area between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Antarctic Circle and between the Tropic of Cancer and the Arctic Circle

Where in the World: Colonies in Brazil



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Waterways and Landforms

Guiding Question *What are Brazil's physical features?*

The Amazon River starts in the Andes of Peru and flows east to the Atlantic Ocean. The Amazon is the world's second longest river. However, it is the largest river in the world in terms of how much freshwater it carries. One reason it carries so much water is that it has more than 1,000 smaller rivers that flow into it. These smaller rivers are called **tributaries**.

The Amazon and its tributaries empty into the Amazon Basin. A **basin** is an area into which a river and its tributaries drain. The Amazon Basin covers more than 2 million square miles (5.2 million sq. km). Much of the Amazon Basin is covered by the world's largest **rain forest**, or warm woodland with a high yearly rainfall.

In the rain forest, tall evergreen trees form a **canopy**, or an umbrella-like covering. Called the Selva, this rain forest is the world's richest biological resource. It is home to several million kinds of plants, insects, birds, and other animals.

South and east of the Amazon River are the Brazilian Highlands. This is mainly a region of rolling hills and areas of high, flat land called **plateaus**. The highlands are divided into western and eastern parts. The western part of the highlands is made up of grassland. Farming and ranching are the main activities here.

The eastern part contains low mountain ranges. In other places, highland plateaus plunge to the Atlantic coast where the land forms **escarpments**. These are steep cliffs at the edge of a plateau with a lowland area below. Farther south are grassy, treeless plains called **pampas**. Farmers and ranchers make good use of the fertile soil here. Two of Brazil's largest cities are in the highlands.

Brasilia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third-largest city in Brazil • Population of 3.5 million people • Capital city
São Paulo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest city in Southern Hemisphere • Population of 17 million people • Important industrial city

Brazil has one of the longest strips of coastal plains in South America. It is wedged between the Brazilian Highlands and the Atlantic Ocean. This narrow plains region is called the Atlantic lowlands. The coastal lowlands cover a small part of Brazil's territory but most of the population lives there. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's second-largest city, lies on these lowlands.

Defining

1. In the text, find the definitions of *tributary* and *basin*. Highlight them in different colors.

Drawing Conclusions

2. Why do you think the Amazon rain forest is the world's richest biological resource?

Determining Word Meaning

3. What is an escarpment?

Reading Progress Check

4. Why do many Brazilians live in the Brazilian Highlands?

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Contrasting

5. What is the difference in location between the Tropics and the temperate zone?



Marking the Text

6. How many different climates does Brazil experience? Circle each one and write the total here.



Reading Progress Check

7. What factors make farming in the northeastern part of Brazil difficult?



Describing

8. List the two areas in Brazil where natural resources are mined.

A Tropical Climate

Guiding Question *What are Brazil's climate and weather like?*

Most of Brazil is located in the **Tropics**. This is the zone along Earth's Equator that lies between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. The area along the Equator in northern Brazil has a tropical rain forest climate. Every day is warm and wet.

The area along the Amazon River also has a tropical rain forest climate. Winds called monsoons bring a huge amount of rain. In monsoon season, flooding swells the Amazon River. During dry season, forest fires are a danger.

Most of the northern and central Brazilian Highlands have a tropical wet/dry climate. As the name implies, there are two seasons—a wet summer with lots of rain and a dry winter with very little rain. Daily average temperatures are around 70°F (21°C) in the summer and 60°F (16°C) in the winter.

The northeastern part of the Brazilian Highlands is the hottest and driest part of the country. It has a semiarid climate where summer temperatures reach 100°F (37.8°C). Droughts are frequent and severe.

Southeastern Brazil is located in the **temperate zone**. This is the region between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Antarctic Circle. It has a humid subtropical climate. Summers are warm and winters are mild. Rainfall occurs year-round.

Natural Resources

Guiding Question *What resources are most plentiful and important in Brazil?*

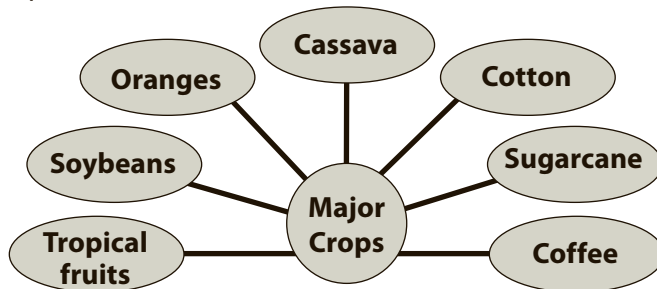
Brazil has some of the world's most plentiful natural resources, especially in the south and southeast. Forests cover about 60 percent of Brazil. Heavy logging occurs in the Atlantic lowlands. However, logging in the Amazon Basin is increasing as more roads are built and settlement grows. The Amazon Basin contains mahogany and other hardwoods. It also houses natural rubber, nuts, and medicinal plants.

Brazil is rich in mineral resources that are only partly developed. They include iron ore, tin, copper, bauxite, gold, and manganese. At one time, most mining was done in the Brazilian Highlands, but recently, major deposits of minerals have been found in the Amazon. Brazil also has huge potential reserves of petroleum and natural gas. These reserves are found under the ocean floor off the coast.

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Brazilian farms produce food for Brazil’s people as well as goods to be exported.



Brazil grows more coffee than any other place in the world. It is grown mostly in the eastern Brazilian Highlands and the Atlantic lowlands. Coffee used to be Brazil’s main export, but today it is soybeans. These are grown mostly in the south, but also in the Brazilian Highlands.

Brazil grows one-third of the world’s oranges, and the country is the world’s leading supplier of citrus fruit. It is also the largest beef exporter in the world. Most of the country’s grazing land is in the south and southeast.

Brazil is also a world leader in sugarcane, which can be used to make ethanol. Ethanol is mixed with gasoline and used as fuel in cars and trucks. Cars in Brazil use ethanol as fuel.



Marking the Text

9. In the text, underline the products of which Brazil is the number one provider in the world.



Reading Progress Check

10. Which two regions are Brazil’s most important agricultural areas?

Writing

Check for Understanding

1. Informative/Explanatory What resources are important to Brazilian exports?

2. Argument In which of Brazil’s physical regions would you most like to live? Why?
