

# Deserts of the World



*Many of us think of deserts as hot, dry, sandy places, but that isn't always true. Deserts are all different. Some are very hot, while others are very cold. They all have one thing in common though. They get very little rain.*

Look at the map above. You can see the lush lands of the tropics as a green belt, right across the middle of the planet. The brown areas on either side of the tropics are the deserts. They are vast! Surprisingly, people live in these barren lands.

We don't usually think of **Antarctica** as a desert, but it has very little rainfall. It's the largest cold desert in the world. Imagine a place that can get down to  $-90^{\circ}\text{C}$  in winter! The only people living in Antarctica are on scientific research stations. They do experiments that aren't possible anywhere else.

The **Gobi** Desert in Asia is another cold desert. Winter temperatures can drop to  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ . In summer it can reach  $50^{\circ}\text{C}$ ! The Gobi is north-east of the Himalayas, the highest mountain range in the world. The Himalayas stop rain from reaching the Gobi. That's why the Gobi is so dry! Most of the people living there are Mongolian animal herders.



*A Mongolian family outside their home in the Gobi desert*



*Tuareg nomads in North Africa*

You couldn't miss the vast desert of North Africa! The **Sahara** Desert is the largest hot desert in the world. People called the Tuareg live there. They are nomads. They don't stay long in one place, but travel to find food and water.

The **Mojave** Desert in North America is the world's hottest desert. Native American peoples have lived there for thousands of years. The Mojave, Hopi, Navajo and Chemehuevi still live there

today. Europeans started settling there about 500 years ago. These days, tourists flock to Death Valley in California, and to the city of Las Vegas.

The **Atacama** Desert in South America is the driest of the world's deserts. Some parts of the Atacama have never had rain! Sometimes, though, it rains during spring and wildflowers burst out of the ground. The indigenous Atacameno people have lived there for 1500 years.

Australia is a dry continent. There are ten deserts in Australia, including the **Great Sandy** Desert. Only the coastal areas get much rainfall. Aboriginal people have lived there for at least 50,000 years. They traditionally lived as hunter-gatherers. That means they lived off what the land provided. Some still live this way today.

In the south of Africa is the **Kalahari** Desert. The Kalahari gets more rain than most deserts. It is home to the San people, once known as the Bushmen. The San were traditionally hunter-gatherers, but now many of them are farmers.

Life in the desert is hard. Plants and animals have adapted to the challenges of the desert. So, too, have humans!

*San children living in the Kalahari Desert*

