

## Desert regions

Deserts are places which receive little or no rainfall for long periods of time. They can be hot or cold and are found throughout the world. Hot deserts are often found in the lee of large mountain ranges, such as the Andes or the Rockies, as winds have dropped their rain over the mountains and so the lower lands that follow only receive dry winds.

Hot deserts are characterised by:

- High daytime temperatures and cold nights
- Less than 250mm of rainfall per year (although sometimes there is no rainfall at all)
- Infrequent, but heavy, thunderstorms which can cause flash flooding, and sandstorms
- Landscapes which can be rocky, stony or sandy in nature

Deserts are sculpted by rains (when they occur), high winds which blast the rocks with small sand grains and pebbles, and rapidly changing daily temperatures. Rocks heat up quickly in the day and cool rapidly at night, particularly where there is little or no vegetation to hold the heat. This rapid heating and cooling results in rocks cracking and splintering and hastens the process of erosion.

People, animals and plants can, and do, live in deserts but they have all had to adapt to the very harsh living conditions found there. Plants often store water in fleshy leaves or stalks and reduce water loss by having small leaves with shiny surfaces, as well as storing seeds in the ground until rain does come to allow them to germinate. Animals such as camels also store water, and some desert creatures are nocturnal, only coming out at night when the temperature is much cooler. People in the desert often live near oases or wells which draw water from deep underground. Many who live in deserts are nomadic, constantly moving to find water and food for their animals as well as themselves.

Deserts vary around the world but always present a harsh environment to live in. If water can be found though, it is possible to develop settlements. For example, Alice Springs, in the dry heart of Australia, often goes for years without a proper rainfall, but the town survives due to water tapped from underground **aquifers**

In the past, deserts were important sources for minerals and salt. These days, exploration for oil, gas and precious stones can lead to the temporary development of desert areas where everything needed for living is brought into the community for as long as it is needed. Another modern development for desert areas is tourism as people from around the world want to experience the beauty and harshness of the desert environment, if only for a very short while.

Useful websites:

[http://images.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/images/dry\\_desert.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/desert.htm&h=216&w=324&sz=9&tbid=Vk97SC4by3TLaM:&tbnh=76&tbnw=114&hl=en&start=5&prev=/images%3Fq%3Ddesert%2Bpicture%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Den%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG](http://images.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/images/dry_desert.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/desert.htm&h=216&w=324&sz=9&tbid=Vk97SC4by3TLaM:&tbnh=76&tbnw=114&hl=en&start=5&prev=/images%3Fq%3Ddesert%2Bpicture%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Den%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG)

is a desert information page suitable for pupils.

<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0212/feature3/index.html?fs=plasma.nationalgeographic.com>

has an article on surviving in the Sahara. It may be useful to read extracts out to pupils to set the scene.

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/mammals/camel/Camelcoloring.shtml>

has information about camels.

<http://images.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://mishami.image.pbase.com/u29/slowpokebill/large/17677154.LasVegasParis3.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.pbase.com/slowpokebill/image/17677154&h=581&w=800&sz=82&tbid=pPmrNv8q8dMCNM:&tbnh=103&tbnw=142&hl=en&start=12&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dpictures%2Bof%2BLas%2BVegas%26svnum%3D10%26hl%3Den%26lr%3D%26sa%3DG>

has images of Las Vegas – a city in the desert.