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The Continent of North America

by Liana Mahoney

Where in the world would you go to see a polar bear in its natural habitat? Or to listen to a coyote howl at night? Or to enjoy a boat ride on the world's largest freshwater lake, Lake Superior? What's the one place in the world you could go to take in the sight of a wild bison grazing on the grasses of the plains? North America!



North America is the third largest of the world's seven continents. It is entirely within the Northern hemisphere of the globe. Most of North America lies between the Arctic Circle in the north, and the Tropic of Cancer to the south. This continent, along with South America, is part of the Western hemisphere. North America meets South America at a narrow strip of land called the Isthmus of Panama. Collectively, the two continents form a giant landmass that is often referred to as "The New World."

North America is a continent of wonderful variety. It is made up of 23 independent countries, and 25 dependent territories. It is the only continent in the world with all types of climates. This is due to the fact that the northern areas of North America receive much less direct sunlight through the year as the south. With these wide ranges in climate, North America includes many unique habitats as well. Its land regions include grasslands and fertile plains, mountains, dry deserts, tundras, rain forests, and temperate forests. Its water ecosystems range from coral reefs and tropical saltwater, to freshwater lakes and rivers, and ice sheets in the extreme north. The people of North America represent almost every country, race, religion, and culture in the world.

Though it is the third largest continent on the planet, North America is the fourth highest populated continent. Its three largest mainland countries, the United States,

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Mexico, and Canada, are also the most populated on the continent. The United States is the largest in population with an estimated 318 million residents. In total, more than 500 million people live in North America, with English, Spanish, and French being their dominant languages.

North America has the longest coastline of any continent, and is bordered by three of the world's largest oceans: the Pacific, the Atlantic, and the Arctic Oceans. The continent can be divided into three main geographic regions: the Interior Plains, the Eastern Highlands, and the Western Highlands. While the mainland of North America is mostly triangular-shaped, the continent also includes many islands and irregular-shaped strips of land called peninsulas.

North America provides the world with many natural resources. More than half of the world's corn supply comes from the plains of North America. Other grains, such as wheat, are grown here, too. In the tropical areas of the continent, coffee, fruits, cocoa, and sugar cane are grown and shared with the world. Livestock, such as pigs and cattle, are raised on vast farmlands in North America. Other natural resources from North America include tobacco, cotton, coal, minerals, natural gas, oil, freshwater, and precious metals, such as gold. A great deal of timber is harvested from North American forests and used by people all over the world.

What else might you see in this amazing continent? You might see the world's largest island, Greenland, which is not at all green for most of the year because it is covered in a snow and ice! You might see the beautiful tropical beaches of the islands in the Caribbean Sea. You might see Mount McKinley, North America's highest mountain peak. Or the winding Mississippi River, which runs almost 5,000 through the Great Plains. You might get to experience temperatures as high as 134 degrees Fahrenheit in the desert of Death Valley, or temperatures well below freezing at the North Pole in the Arctic Circle. No matter how you look at it, North America is truly a continent of great variety!

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- 1) Choose the best title for the passage.
 - a) North America : the third largest continent of the world.
 - b) North America : the continent with utmost diversity.
 - c) North America : the fourth highest populated continent in the world .
 - d) North America: the land of various temperatures.

- 2) Analyze how the introductory paragraph attracts the reader's attention instantly.

- 3) Name some of the amazing features of the North American continent.

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4) Write short notes.

Isthmus of Panama - _____

The New World - _____

Peninsula - _____

Oceans bordering the continent - _____

5) Which aspect of North America do you find fascinating? Include examples from your knowledge or experience.
