

Encyclopedic Entry

tropics

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The **tropics** are regions of the **Earth** that lie roughly in the middle of the **globe**. The tropics between the **latitude** lines of the **Tropic of Cancer** and the **Tropic of Capricorn**. The tropics include the **Equator** and parts of North America, South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia. The tropics account for 36 percent of the Earth's **landmass** and are home to about a third of the world's people.

The tropics are warm all year, averaging 25 to 28 degrees Celsius (77 to 82 degrees Fahrenheit). This is because the tropics get more exposure to the sun. Because of all that sun, the tropics don't experience the kind of seasons the rest of the Earth does. The tropical seasons are broken up into just two: the wet season and the dry season.

The amount of rain can vary greatly from one area of the tropics to another. Some areas, like parts of the Amazon Basin in South America, get almost 3 meters (9 feet) of rain per year. Other areas in the tropics have a drier **climate**. The Sahara Desert in northern Africa only gets 2-10 centimeters (.793.9 inches) of rain per year.

The amount of rain a region gets in the tropics directly affects which plant and animal species live there. The **baobab** tree thrives in the **arid** tropics of Africa, for instance. The baobab stores water in its huge **trunk**. On the other extreme is the rainy island of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka gets enough **precipitation** to support 250 species of frogs.

VOCABULARY

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
arid	<i>adjective</i>	dry.
baobab	<i>noun</i>	tree native to Africa, Australia, and Madagascar.
climate	<i>noun</i>	all weather conditions for a given location over a period of time.
Earth	<i>noun</i>	our planet, the third from the Sun. The Earth is the only place in the known universe that supports life.
Equator	<i>noun</i>	imaginary line around the Earth, another planet, or star running east-west, 0 degrees latitude.
glacier	<i>noun</i>	mass of ice that moves slowly over land.
globe	<i>noun</i>	scale model of the Earth, or sometimes used to mean the Earth itself.
landmass	<i>noun</i>	large area of land.
latitude	<i>noun</i>	distance north or south of the Equator, measured in degrees.
precipitation	<i>noun</i>	all forms in which water falls to Earth from the atmosphere.

Tropic of Cancer	<i>noun</i>	line of latitude 23.5 degrees north of the Equator.
Tropic of Capricorn	<i>noun</i>	line of latitude 23.5 degrees south of the Equator.
tropics	<i>plural noun</i>	region generally located between the Tropic of Cancer (23 1/2 degrees north of the Equator) and the Tropic of Capricorn (23 1/2 degrees south of the Equator).
trunk	<i>noun</i>	main shaft or stem of a tree.

For Further Exploration

Articles & Profiles

- National Geographic News: Climate Change Pushing Tropics Farther, Faster
- National Geographic News: Do Fish Use Cold Current to Cross Tropics?

Websites

- Weather Underground: Tropical Weather



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