

PRINCIPAL RIVERS:

AMU DARYA^A
 AMUR^B
 BRAHMAPUTRA^C
 EUPHRATES^D
 GANGES^E
 HUANG HE (YELLOW)^F
 INDUS^G
 IRRAWADDY^H
 IRTYSH^I
 LENA^J
 MEKONG^K
 OB^L
 SALWEEN^M
 TIGRIS^N
 XI JIANG (PEARL)^O
 YANGTZE^P
 YENISEY^Q

PRINCIPAL MOUNTAIN RANGES:

ALTAI^R
 ELBURZ^S
 HIMALAYAS^T
 HINDU KUSH^U
 KUNLUN^V
 PAMIRS^W
 TIAN SHAN^X
 URALS^Y

LAND REGIONS:

DESERT^Z
 RAIN FOREST¹
 LOWLANDS²
 MOUNTAINS³
 PLATEAU⁴
 HIGHLANDS⁵
 TUNDRA⁶



ASIA: THE PHYSICAL LAND

The highest and lowest places on the planet (Mt. Everest and the Dead Sea) are in Asia, the continent with the tallest mountains, the largest and highest plateaus, the largest deserts, most of the longest rivers, the deepest lake, the largest forest region, the largest flat plains, the most active volcanoes, the most earthquakes, and the hottest, coldest, driest, and wettest climates. These geographical extremes characterize most of Asia—a vast, inhospitable environment where relatively few people live.

The most northerly part of Asia is the Arctic portion of Siberia (Asian Russia). South of this tundra is a huge highlands region containing the world's largest coniferous forest. To the west is the world's largest, flattest lowlands, the West Siberian Plain. South of these regions, and spanning the mid-section of Asia from Saudi Arabia to southern Mongolia, is a succession of large deserts, barren plateaus, and rugged mountains. Unlike the mountains of North and South America and Europe, Asia's massive ranges are located in the center of the continent. In this region, surrounded by some of the tallest peaks, is the Plateau of Tibet, the "Roof of the World" (15,000 ft., 4,573 m) and the world's highest inhabited plateau. Along Tibet's southern border are the Himalayas, the world's tallest mountains, including the tallest peak, Mt. Everest (29,028 ft., 8,848 m). These geologically young mountains continue to grow as the tectonic plate carrying the subcontinent of India grinds under the Eurasian plate (p. 2). The Asian subcontinent (the Indian Peninsula) is a triangular plateau that is subject to heavy monsoonal rainfall. Southeast Asia includes the rainforests of the Indochina Peninsula, the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, and the Philippine Islands. Earthquake-prone regions (the Malay Archipelago, the Philippines, and the islands of Japan) are the peaks of seismically active, sunken mountain ranges. The Indonesian island of Java has the greatest concentration of active volcanoes in the world. The mountains of Central Asia contain the headwaters for most of the world's longest rivers. The Yangtze (3,915 mi., 6,265 km) is the third longest (after the Nile and Amazon) and is China's most important river for transportation, commerce, irrigation, and hydroelectric power.

Because Asia is so vast, the interior is far from the moderating influence of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, allowing the region to experience the earth's greatest temperature fluctuations—although the Polar regions are consistently colder, they are never warm. Central Asia has the kind of weather that only nomadic herders can endure. Southwest Asia (the Middle East) is parched and scorched—summer temperatures exceed 120° F (49° C). Southern and Southeast Asia are not nearly as hot, but high humidity and torrential rainfall (summer monsoons) create another form of discomfort. Heat and rain sustain the principal agriculture of the region: rice production.

MOUNTAIN PEAKS:

