

Where are deserts located?

Few people in the world live in deserts. Most of us live where the weather is wetter and less harsh. But almost every continent has deserts, either hot deserts or cold deserts.

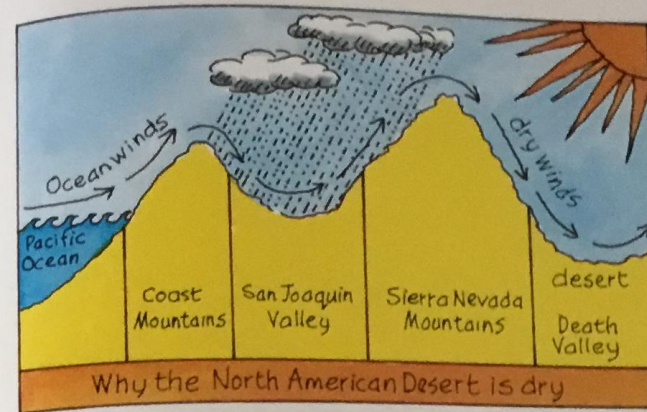
The map shows where the main deserts are located. Notice first that there are no deserts in the far north or far south of the Earth. Nor are there any on the Equator. The Equator is an imaginary line around the centre of the Earth, separating the Northern Hemisphere from the Southern Hemisphere.

Most of the major deserts lie in two bands north and south of the Equator, along lines of latitude called the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.

What causes deserts?

Clouds form when water vapour in the air cools and forms tiny drops of water. When the drops become too heavy to stay in the air, the water falls to the ground as rain.

Usually there is water vapour in the air, but sometimes the winds bring very dry air. These winds have lost their water vapour because they have dropped it already as rain over hills and mountains, as is shown in this diagram of the west coast of the United States.



Other winds are very dry because they are very far from an ocean, or because they are very cold. Very cold winds blowing across very cold ocean currents can't collect much water vapour.

Do you remember?

- Find the answer to each of these questions by looking at the map.
 - Which is the biggest desert in Africa?
 - Name the deserts through which the Tropic of Capricorn passes.
 - What is the name of the desert in the centre of Asia?
 - Are there any major deserts in Europe?
 - Which large island, crossed by one of the tropics, is more than half desert?
- Find the answer to each of these questions by looking at the diagram.
 - Over which ocean do the winds blow?
 - Name the first range of mountains the winds cross.
 - What happens in the San Joaquin Valley?
 - What is the second range of mountains called?
 - When the winds have crossed these mountains, are they wet or dry?

More to think about

Write a sentence to answer each question.

- Most people enjoy sunshine, so why do very few live in the deserts of the world?
- Why aren't there any major deserts in Europe?
- Is there a greater area of desert to the north or south of the Equator?