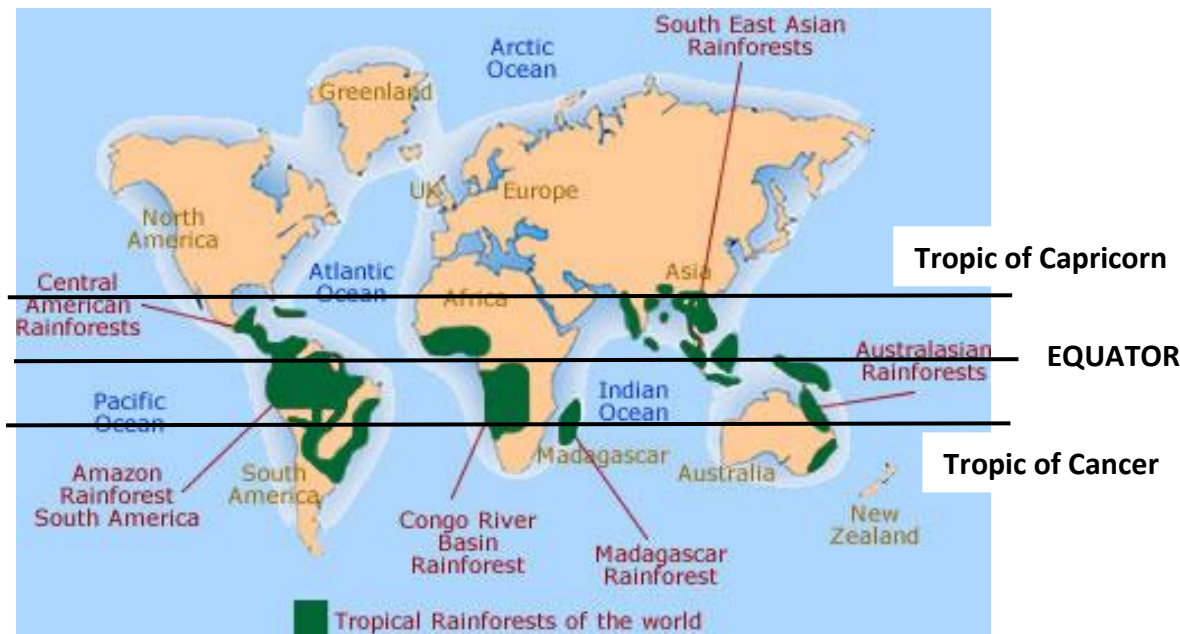


# South America

## Why is the Amazon rainforest important?

Rainforests are the oldest ecosystems on Earth and they are home to millions of people, plants and animals.

**Tropical Rainforests** are found near the **Equator** between the **Tropics of Cancer** and **Capricorn**. The enormous amount of rain and tropical heat means that the conditions in the rainforest are humid and damp. These rainforests only cover 6% of the surface of the Earth but scientists believe that about 50% of the plant and animal species in the world live in them.



### Rainforest Layers

Tropical rainforests are made up of four layers.

The diagram shows a cross-section of a rainforest with four distinct layers, each separated by a dashed line. From top to bottom, the layers are: Emergent Layer (tallest trees), Canopy (dense layer of tree tops), Understorey (shorter trees and shrubs), and Forest Floor (ground level with fallen leaves and small plants).

The **emergent layer** consists of tree tops that poke up above the canopy. It receives plenty of sunlight but it is also windy and rainy. The layer is inhabited by birds, bats, butterflies and other insects, as well as some small monkeys, such as the Capuchin.

In the **canopy**, the leaves of the trees provide a 'roof' for the rainforest, blocking sunlight from reaching the layers below. There is a plentiful supply of nuts and fruit so many different animals live here (e.g. sloths which have a layer of green algae to act as camouflage).

The **understorey** is warm and humid, and young trees and shrubs are found here. Insects thrive in this layer and many popular house plants, such as ferns, come from the understorey. Animals in this layer include jaguars, lizards, frogs and snakes.

The **forest floor** is very dark and hot. Decomposition takes place in this layer, with fungi and insects breaking down the decaying plants. Larger animals (e.g. giant anteater) live in this layer, as well as rodents and pigs.



## Vocabulary

Word	Definition
<b>Climate</b>	The weather and temperature usually found in an area.
<b>Deforestation</b>	The destruction of trees over large areas.
<b>Environment</b>	Everything in the world around us, which can affect our lives.
<b>Equator</b>	An imaginary circle around Earth. It runs east and west halfway between the North and South poles.
<b>Humid</b>	Having a high level of moisture in the air.
<b>Indigenous</b>	A living thing that belongs naturally to an area.
<b>Logging</b>	Felling and cutting trees.
<b>Species</b>	A group of living things that the same main features and can breed with one another.
<b>Threat</b>	Something that can cause harm to an animal, plant or habitat.
<b>Vegetation</b>	The plant life growing in a certain area.

### **The Amazon Rainforest:**

The Amazon Rainforest is the largest tropical rainforest in the world with more than half located in Brazil. It is full of wildlife.

### **The Amazon River:**

The River is approximately 4000 miles long, mostly flowing through rainforest.

It has around 200 tributaries.

It begins in the Andes Mountains and is the second longest river in the world.

No bridges cross the river at any point.



### **Indigenous People:**

There are millions of people living in the rainforests of the world. These tribal people live a traditional way of life that has stayed relatively unchanged for hundreds of years. These tribes understand the rainforest and live in harmony with it. One of the largest tribes of the Amazon is the Yanomami.



### **Threats to the Rainforest:**

Deforestation:

1. To clear space for farming: growing crops (soya beans and palm oil) and grazing land for beef cattle.
2. Chopping down trees for wood.
3. To build roads to mine for metal, gold and diamonds.
4. To dig for oil.
5. To flood areas to make dams and generate electricity.

