

Antarctica

by David Petersen

A Frozen World

Of Earth's seven continents, only one, Antarctica, has no rivers, no forests, and no native people. Very few creatures of any kind can live in the interior of this continent.

This is because Antarctica is the coldest place on Earth, and it is almost completely covered with ice. In 1983, the world-record low temperature of -128.6 degrees Fahrenheit (-89.2 degrees Celsius) was recorded there.

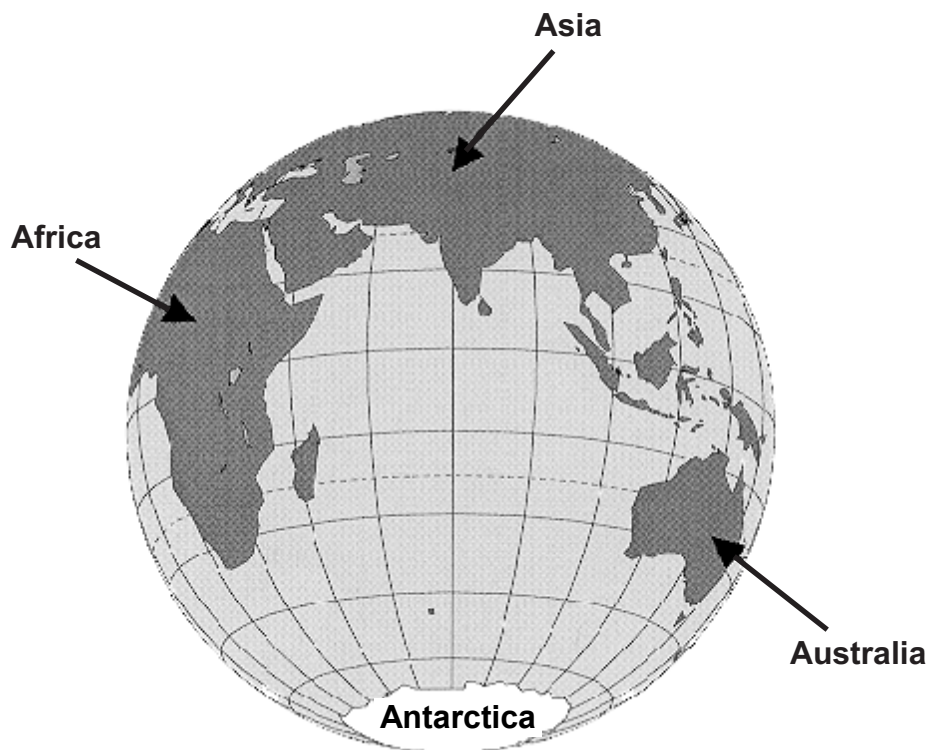
In the permanently frozen Antarctic interior, the temperature reaches the freezing point, which is 32 degrees Fahrenheit (0 degrees C), on only the mildest summer days. Nearer the sea coasts, it gets a little warmer, but it is still bitterly cold most of the year.

Why is this?

Antarctica, hidden at the bottom of the globe, is shaded from the sun's most direct and warmest light. The sunlight it does receive is so weak that it doesn't warm up the continent very much.

The Antarctic winter (May through August) is brutally cold. For much of the winter, the sun never rises over most of Antarctica. In summer (December through March) the sun never sets in these areas. But the sun is so low in the sky that most of its heat is reflected away by the ice.

Antarctica is also one of the windiest places on Earth. Near the coasts, gusts of wind often reach speeds of 120 miles (190 kilometers) per hour.



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