

A Few Facts about Antarctica

Antarctica is the continent that surrounds the South Pole, the southernmost point at the bottom of the earth. Antarctica is a continent because it is land that is covered by a thick layer of ice. The area surrounding the North Pole at the northernmost point or top of the earth is called the Arctic. The Arctic is not a continent; this area of the earth is mostly ocean, the Arctic Ocean, which is covered with ice. Antarctica is a giant island that is surrounded by the Southern Ocean. The Southern Ocean is made up of the southern portions of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans.

The Arctic is the home of polar bears and Antarctica has several species of penguins. Made-up stories and cartoons have penguin characters at the North Pole or polar bears at the South Pole but these tales are not correct in real life. There are species of penguins that live outside of Antarctica but none that live in the Arctic. Humboldt penguins of South America live on the Pacific Ocean side of the continent from the southern tip almost up to the equator. A species called little penguins live on the southern coast of Australia near the Southern Ocean but no penguins live north of the equator.

Antarctica is the world's coldest continent where the average winter temperature is -74° F and the average summer temperature remains below zero at -26° F. The Antarctic Peninsula stretches away from the main part of the continent and the tip of the peninsula is just 600 miles from South America. This part of Antarctica is warmer with an average winter temperature of 7° F and a summer temperature of 30° F.

Antarctica is the windiest place in the world and is the windiest continent. During severe storms the wind speed can reach 200 miles per hour, windier than the worst hurricane that the United States has ever seen. Antarctica is the world's highest continent. Parts of the U.S. Midwest have an elevation of just 600 feet and Mount Mitchell is the highest of the Appalachian Mountains at an elevation of 6,684 feet. Antarctica has an average elevation of 7,500 feet that is then covered by a thick layer of ice.