

The Five Major Regions of Africa

Africa is the world's second-largest and second-most populous continent. Only Asia is bigger and has more people. The United Nations divides Africa into five major regions: North, West, Central, Eastern, and Southern.

Vocabulary



- equatorial
- savanna
- fissionable
- irrigate
- faction
- polygamy
- griot
- ethno-linguistic group
- sub-Saharan Africa
- linguist
- indigenous



A topographical map of Africa



A political map of Africa

North Africa

This designation covers Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Western Sahara. These countries are all waterfront properties, with seacoast along the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, or the Red Sea. Parts of the region are quite mountainous. The Atlas Mountains follow Africa’s northwestern “shoulder.” But if you think of the area as a whole as largely desert, you’d be correct, too.

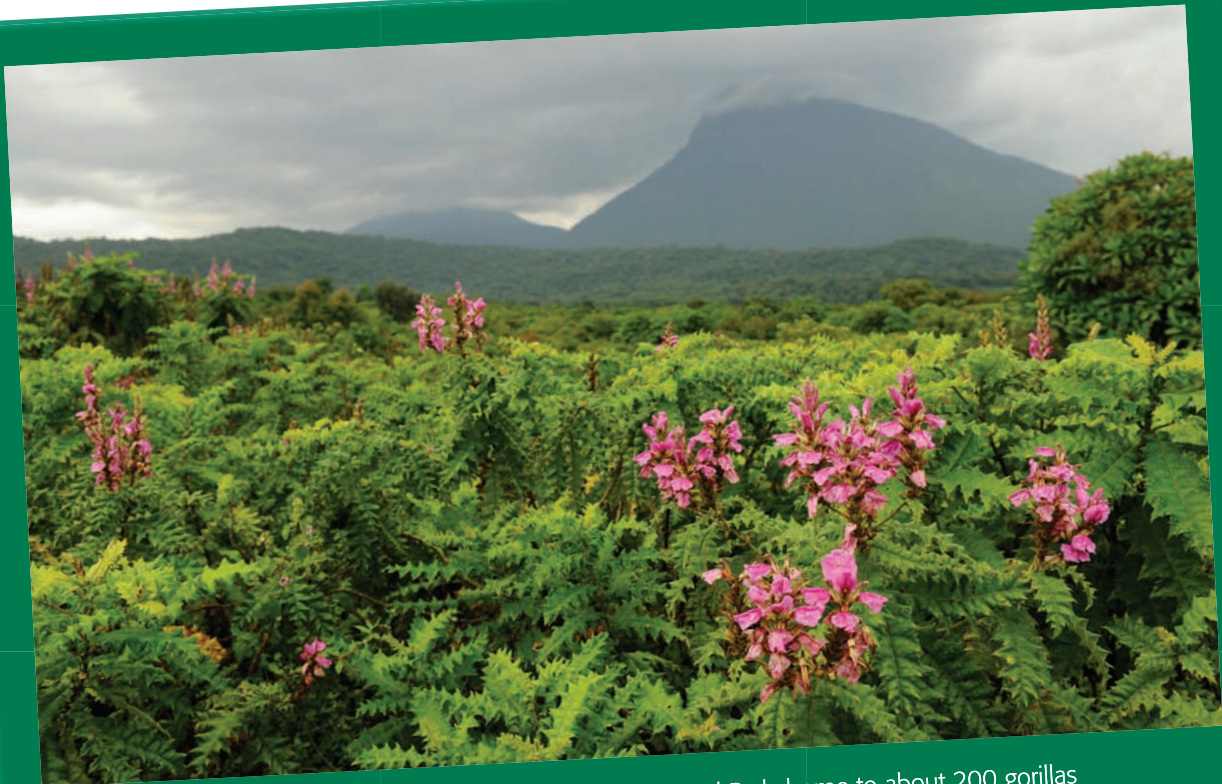
Except for areas right on the coasts, almost all of North Africa is desert: the Sahara Desert is the largest hot desert in the world.

West Africa

West Africa consists of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo, plus the island nation of Cape Verde. These countries are largely **equatorial** jungle. Equatorial means *set along the equator*. The Senegal and the Niger are this area's important rivers.

Central Africa

Equatorial jungle also describes the countries of Central Africa. They are Angola, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Gabon. Two other island nations belong to Central Africa: Equatorial Guinea plus Sao Tome and Principe. The latter are two islands in the Gulf of Guinea. Together they make up one country. The Congo is Central Africa's main river.



Mikeno Mountain (on the right) looks out over Virunga National Park, home to about 200 gorillas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Photo by Mary Knox Merrill / © 2009 The Christian Science Monitor

Jungles flourish in West Africa, Central Africa, and Eastern Africa.

Eastern Africa

The countries of the Eastern African mainland are Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The big island of Madagascar is also part of Eastern Africa, as are two island chains, the Comoros and Seychelles.

Much of Eastern Africa is highlands. This area is also Africa's "Great Lakes" region. Lake Victoria, Lake Tanganyika, and Lake Nyasa are all here. The mighty Nile has its source in Eastern Africa. It flows north from here to Egypt and the Mediterranean. The Zambezi River, in Mozambique, is another important river of this region. Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest peak at 19,330 feet, is in Tanzania. This region's lowlands are largely jungle.

Southern Africa

Southern Africa consists of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland. Its typical landscape is the **savanna**—*a flat grassland of tropical or subtropical regions*. The region has some mountain ranges and is also home to the Kalahari Desert.

The Natural Resources of Africa

Africa has many significant minerals. But sometimes, as you will read below, they have led to conflict rather than wealth. African farmers, meanwhile, face enormous challenges. Experts believe that better farming practices will lead to more prosperity in Africa.

Mineral Resources

Africa accounted for 53 percent of the world's diamond production in 2006. Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Africa, and Angola were the top four producers.

Africa is also a big gold producer. It accounted for 21 percent of world production in 2006. South Africa was far and away the leader, followed by Ghana, Mali, and Tanzania.

Africa is a leading producer of other minerals as well. These glitter less than gold and diamonds but are critical to today's high-tech industries:

- **Chromite** is used to produce steel, copper, glass, and cement. People use chromium, mined from chromite, in pigments (paints), photography, and plating (a process used to coat something in a thin metal layer). South Africa is the world's leading producer.



Workers do hot strip molding at a steel works in South Africa.

Photo by Neal J. Menschel / © 1990 The Christian Science Monitor

The African continent is rich with natural resources, including manganese used in steelmaking.

- **Cobalt** is used to make industrial alloys (a mixture of metals) and high-performance cutting tools. People also use it to color porcelain and other substances. It has medical uses as well. Africa—mostly the DRC and Zambia—accounted for nearly 60 percent of the world's cobalt production in 2006.
- **Manganese** is used in steelmaking. South Africa and Gabon are Africa's leading producers of this metal. The world gets about a third of its manganese from Africa.
- **Uranium** is **fissionable**. That is, its atoms *can be split to make nuclear explosions*. People around the world use controlled nuclear explosions to create electricity. They also use uranium to build nuclear bombs. Africa accounts for about one-fifth of the world's uranium production. Almost all of that is from Nigeria and Niger.

Three big African countries also have significant oil resources: Nigeria, Angola, and Sudan.