

Five of the World's Deserts

When we think of deserts, we think of a huge, hot, lonely space. We even use the word “deserted” to describe a hopeless feeling. It might surprise you to learn that not all deserts are hot, and some of them are very small! We are going to learn about five of the world's deserts in this article.

Antarctica

Let's start with the most surprising fact. The biggest desert on earth has no sand. It's also the coldest place in the world, reaching temperatures as low as minus 89 degrees Celsius, or minus 128 degrees Fahrenheit. This is the vast, icy expanse of Antarctica, the South Pole. Amazingly, this harsh place boasts a wide range of wildlife, including whales, seals and a variety of birds. Scientists have even discovered microscopic life deep below the surface of Antarctica's dark, frozen lakes.

Memory questions:

Is there any life in Antarctica?

Yes, there are whales, seals, birds and microscopic life forms.

What is another name for Antarctica?

The South Pole

Language questions:

Find two adjectives in the superlative form.

Any two of the following: most surprising, biggest, coldest.

Find a synonym for “cold”.

Icy

If something is “microscopic” is it very big or very small?

Very small.

The Sahara Desert

This one is closer to what we think of when we hear the word “desert”. The Sahara takes up a huge chunk of North Africa. Its name means “desert” in the Arabic language. This is a region of massive sand dunes dotted by oases. An oasis is a spot in a desert where underground water breaks through to the surface. This makes it possible for plants to grow. Of course, it also helps lonely travelers and their camels refresh themselves on a long, hot journey!

Memory questions:

From which language do we get the name “Sahara”?

Arabic

In your own words, what is an oasis?

A place in a desert that has water.

Language questions:

In this paragraph there are two synonyms for “big”. What are they?

Huge and massive.

The Kalahari Desert

Far to the south, we have the great Kalahari. In the Tswana language, its name means “big thirst”. However, this is technically a semi-desert. The prefix “semi” means “half”. This is because the Kalahari isn’t as dry as a true desert, like its neighbor, the Namib desert, which is almost completely barren. The Kalahari is the ancestral homeland of the San people. It also boasts a wide range of animals including the beautiful oryx and the mischievous meerkat.

Memory questions:

What does “Kalahari” mean?

Big thirst.

Is the Kalahari a true desert?

No, it is a semi-desert.

Which group of people has lived here for a long time?

The San people.

Language questions:

What is the meaning of the prefix “semi”?

It means “half”.

The writer describes the meerkat as “mischievous”. What does this mean?

It means that they are intelligent and naughty.

The Mojave Desert

North America’s driest spot is the Mojave, located in the south western region of the continent. This desert contains places with names like “Death Valley” and “Furnace Creek”, so you can imagine what the weather is like. Scientists have recorded temperatures as high as 56 degrees Celsius, or 134 degrees Fahrenheit. If you visit, take your camera for the breathtaking skies and rocky ridges. But also take your sunscreen.

Memory questions:

Whereabouts is the Mojave?

In the southwest of North America.

Give the name of one of the locations in the Mojave.

One of the following: Death Valley or Furnace Creek.

Language questions:

Find an adjective that means “spectacular”.

Breathtaking

What is a furnace?

An oven.

The Judean Desert

This is a thin, sandy strip on the western side of the Jordan Valley. It’s full of white, sun-baked hills and deep, dry ravines. Nowadays, most tourists pass right through it to get to the more popular Dead Sea. But this desert is famous in its own right; it’s the place where Jesus went in order to fast for 40 days.

Memory questions:

Is this statement true or false: The Judean Desert is a very large desert.

False

Name a popular tourist destination nearby.

The Dead Sea.

Language questions:

Find an adjective that tells us the hills are dry.

Sun-baked

The word “fast” is a homograph, which means it has two very different meanings that are written and pronounced the same way. Give two of its meanings.

Fast” as an adverb means “quickly”. “Fast” as a verb means to not eat for a period of time.

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