



# Amazon Basin

## Background Information

The Amazon Basin is the part of South America drained by the Amazon River and its tributaries. The Amazon drainage basin covers an area of about 6,300,000 km<sup>2</sup> (2,400,000 sq mi), or about 35.5 percent of the South American continent. It is located in the countries of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana (France), Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela. Most of the basin is covered by the Amazon rainforest, also known as Amazonia. With a 5.5 million km<sup>2</sup> (2.1 million sq mi) area of dense tropical forest, this is the largest rainforest in the world. Amazonia is sparsely populated. There are scattered settlements inland, but most of the population lives in a few larger cities on the banks of the Amazon and other major rivers, such as in Iquitos - Loreto in Peru, Manaus-Amazonas State, and Belém, Pará.

## In this unit the children will discover:

- The location of The Amazon and its significance.
- The importance of the Amazon Basin and Rainforest.
- What the threats to the Amazon are.
- The human and physical features of Manaus.
- Similarities and differences between the Amazon Basin, south east Brazil and where we live.



## The landscape contains:

- One in ten known species on Earth
- 1.4 billion acres of dense forests, half of the planet's remaining tropical forests
- 4,100 miles of winding rivers
- 2.6 million square miles in the Amazon basin, about 40% of South America



## Geographical skills

- Locational knowledge
- Place knowledge
- Human and physical geography
- Map work

**Key facts**

- South America's biggest country is Brazil. Here you will find the Amazon Rainforest, home to a huge number of animals, plants and insects.
- Deforestation is a threat to the Amazon Rainforest. A lot of forest has been destroyed, for example to make space for cattle ranches, from which beef is exported worldwide.
- Manaus is a city in the heart of the Amazon Rainforest region and sits on the Rio Negro, one of two major rivers that flow into the River Amazon.
- The Amazon is home to a whole host of fascinating – and deadly! – creatures, including electric eels, flesh eating piranhas, poison dart frogs, jaguars and some seriously venomous snakes.
- One fascinating fish found in the Amazon is the Pirarucu (also known as the arapaima or paiche). A menacing meat-eater, the pirarucu guzzles up other fish and can grow to nearly 3m long! And what makes it super deadly? It has teeth on the roof of its mouth *and* on its tongue!
- This area of immense natural beauty plays an important role in limiting climate change. This is because the rich vegetation takes carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas) out of the air and releases oxygen. You can learn more about this in our feature on the lifecycle of plants!
- Due to the thickness of the canopy (the top branches and leaves of the trees), the Amazon floor is in permanent darkness. In fact, it's so thick that when it rains, it takes around ten minutes for the water to reach the ground!

**Glossary**

**Agriculture:** The art and science of cultivating the soil, growing crops and raising livestock. It includes the preparation of plant and animal products for people to use and their distribution to markets.

**Drainage:** how water flows away from an area through rivers and streams.

**Equatorial:** the hot, wet climate in areas close to the Equator.

**River basin:** the area of land drained by a river and all its tributaries.

**Equatorial:** relating to, or located at the equator.

**International Date Line:** The International Date Line is an imaginary line of demarcation on the surface of Earth that runs from the North Pole to the South Pole and demarcates the boundary between one calendar day and the next.

**Longitude:** The measurement east or west of the prime meridian. Longitude is measured by imaginary lines that run around the Earth vertically (up and down) and meet at the North and South Poles.

**Prime Meridian:** is the line of 0° longitude, the starting point for measuring distance both east and west around the Earth.