

The Amazon Rainforest

Where is It?

The Amazon rainforest is located in South America and covers 5.5 million square kilometres of land across nine countries. Brazil has 60%, Peru has 13%, and Colombia has 10%, while other countries have very small parts of the rainforest within their borders.

The Amazon River flows through the Amazon rainforest.

How Old Is It?

The Amazon rainforest has existed for at least 55 million years.

Why is it Important?

The Amazon rainforest is home to lots of plants and animals, many of which are not found elsewhere in the world. There are over 40 000 different plant species and approximately 2.5 million insect species in the Amazon rainforest. The Amazon rainforest is also referred to as the 'Lungs of the Planet' because it produces more than 20% of the world's oxygen. There are approximately 3000 fruits that grow in the rainforest that are edible.

Many plants around the world have medicinal qualities. Of the plants known to have anti-cancer properties, 70% are found in the rainforest. Amazon natives use rainforest plants regularly but 90% of the ones they use have not been studied by modern science.

Who Lives There?

In the year 1500 there were between 6 and 9 million Amazon natives. Today there are only an estimated 250 000 left. There are approximately 170 different languages spoken by the Amazon natives.

It is believed that there may still be as many as 50 Amazon native tribes living in the rainforest that have never been in contact with the rest of the world.