

## Biomes of Brazil

Brazil is the world's fifth largest country. It encompasses half of the continent of South America and is amongst the most biodiverse in the world. Whilst the Amazon Rainforest is often considered the jewel in this country's crown (and with good reason), it is one of six terrestrial biomes. Each has its own climate and terrain and particular vegetation and wildlife. Many of the species are endemic meaning that they can only be found in that single region. As such, each biome holds treasures which, if lost, cannot be replaced.

### *The Amazon*

The Amazon basin is a tropical rainforest biome. It stretches across northern Brazil and into neighbouring countries including Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia. The region straddles the equator and is hot and humid year round. The lush forest has frequent rains which peak from March to July causing the river to swell and flood the surrounding forest. The Amazon is home to an enormous variety of life including many species as of yet, undiscovered.

### *The Pantanal*

In the southern interior of Brazil and extending into Paraguay and Bolivia, this tropical wetland is one of the largest of its kind in the world. Like the Amazon it boasts an enormous wealth of life but is sadly threatened by human activity. The grasslands, forests and savanna flood during the rainy season creating swamps and marshes with only islands of higher ground left exposed.

### *The Mata Atlantica (or Atlantic Forest)*

Cooler than the Amazon rainforest, these forests are situated on rounded hills and are home to unique species of plant and animal. However, the forests have been largely destroyed and many species have gone extinct. This region was the first to be exploited by the Portuguese settlers. Coffee and sugar plantations as well as logging to extract valuable hardwood, were the secret to Brazil's early economic growth but came at a great cost to the environment. The growth of the country's biggest cities including São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro has added to the problem.

### *The Caatinga*

In the heat of north-east Brazil lies this arid scrubland. It has stunted, thorny trees and bushes which are perfectly adapted to survive through the long dry spells and then burst into life when the rains finally come. The landscape is of plateaus with cliffs, canyons and



flat-topped mountains as highlighted in the beauty of the Chapada Diamantina National Park. This is one of the most economically poor regions of Brazil and droughts make farming difficult. Consequently, many people have migrated south in the hope of a better life elsewhere.

### *The Cerrado*

This is the largest savanna biome in South America consisting of open woodland and grassland. It has a distinct dry and wet season. Plants are adapted to dry conditions and also to the fires which break out naturally in the shrubs and grasses. However, fires are becoming more common because intensive farming of products such as soya have resulted in more droughts. Whilst international eyes have been on preserving the Amazon, this biome is quietly being destroyed to make way for agriculture.

### *The Pampa*

In the far south of Brazil and into Uruguay and Argentina, this fertile grassland is mostly flat or with gently rolling hills. The climate is wet subtropical with the greatest temperature variation in Brazil: hot summers and cold winters which can even result in snow. What does not vary is the rainfall which falls consistently throughout the year.

## RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. When is the Amazon's wet season?
2. What reasons are given for the decline of the Atlantic Forest?
3. Why do people migrate away from the Caatinga?
4. Fires are a feature of which biome?
5. Which biome has no dry season?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**V**

Which word in the introduction is closest in meaning to 'includes'?

**V**

What is meant by the phrase 'straddles the equator'?

**V**

Find a synonym for 'dry' in the text.

**E**

What is the writer's view on the treatment of the Cerrado?

**P**

In addition to the six terrestrial biomes, Brazil has a seventh. What could this be?