

WHAT IS ANTARCTICA?

THIS ARTICLE IS PART OF THE NASA KNOWS! (GRADES K-4) SERIES



THE SOUTHERNMOST CONTINENT

Antarctica covers Earth's South Pole. It is the coldest, windiest and driest continent. It is Earth's fifth largest continent. Antarctica is covered in ice. It contains 90 percent of all of the ice on Earth.

But the southernmost continent is much more than a big block of ice.

WHAT IS ANTARCTICA LIKE?

Antarctica is the coldest place on Earth. The temperature in the winter is cold enough to freeze water all the time. The temperature in the middle of Antarctica is much colder than the temperature on the coasts.

Antarctica has two seasons: summer and winter. During summer, it is always sunny. In winter, the continent is always dark.

Antarctica is a desert. It does not rain or snow a lot there. When it snows, the snow does not melt and builds up over many years to make large, thick sheets of ice, called ice sheets.

Antarctica is made up of lots of ice in the form of glaciers, ice shelves and icebergs.

Antarctica has no trees or bushes. The only plants that can live in a place that cold are moss and algae.

WHO LIVES IN ANTARCTICA?

Antarctica is too cold for people to live there for a long time. Scientists take turns going there to study the ice. Tourists visit Antarctica in the summers.

The oceans around Antarctica are home to many types of whales. Antarctica is also home to seals and penguins.



WHAT CAN NASA LEARN ABOUT EARTH FROM STUDYING ANTARCTICA?

NASA uses satellites to study Antarctica. NASA wants to know how Antarctica is changing. Scientists want to know what the changes in Earth's climate are doing to Antarctica's ice sheets. They also want to know what changes in Antarctica's ice might do to Earth's climate.