

About Antarctica

Continent located at the South Pole and surrounded by the Southern Ocean.

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General characteristics



The Antarctic is the continent located at the South Pole and surrounded by the

Southern Ocean. Its surface area is about 12.5 million km², exposed rock representing only 2% of this surface. This is a continent covered by an ice sheet itself extending 14 million km² in summer, about 26 times that of metropolitan France.

With an average altitude of around 2.3 km, it is Earth's highest continent. The ice sheet extends in certain sectors as immense ice shelves, spreading and floating on the Southern Ocean. The combined surface areas of these exceed 1.5 million km². The greatest diameter of the Antarctic is about 5500 km. The complete coastline amounts to a length of around 24 000 km, including the ice-shelves. **The Transantarctic chain**, a mountain range about 3000 km long, is a natural separation between the West and East of the ice sheet.

The East part of the continent, facing the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, is called the **Eastern Antarctic**. It takes the form of an immense dome of ice of about 10 million km² which culminates at over 4000 m for an average altitude of 2600 m.

The West part, the **Western Antarctic**, constitutes only 5% of the continent's total surface area and culminates at about 2500 m; it is prolonged by the Antarctic Peninsula and 2 large ice-shelves, the Ross and Ronne.

The average ice-sheet thickness is 1300 m in the west and 2200 m in the east. The maximum thickness is nearly 5000 m. Most of the continent's non-iced zones are found in the Antarctic Peninsula. **It is the northernmost area of the Antarctic continent and almost the only part extending beyond the Antarctic Circle.** It is a mountainous region, positioned along the continuation of the Andes range of South America.

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