

Polar regions

These extreme environments are found in Antarctica and the Arctic regions. No one actually owns Antarctica although many nations have scientific stations there. Eight countries have some claim to Arctic waters although Canada has laid claim to the North Pole itself.

Typical characteristics of polar regions include:

- Harsh environments covered in snow and ice
- Long winters and short summers
- Snow storms and cold winds for much of the year
- Difficult terrain and environments for plants, animals and people to live in
- A threat from global warming. The melting of ice at both polar icecaps is causing a rise in sea levels around the world
- The possibility of underground rich mineral resources
- Fragile environments that need numbers of tourists to be controlled in order to preserve the very places they go to see

Differences include:

- Antarctica is a continental land mass, including an active volcano, Mt Erebus whilst the Arctic is a frozen area of sea
- Antarctica is colder than the Arctic and contains the largest amount of ice in the world
- Wildlife found in each area. Penguins are found in Antarctica while polar bears are limited to the Arctic regions. Polar bears are particularly under threat as the melting of the ice early in spring means that their main food source, the seal, can escape more easily through the melted ice.

Antarctica is becoming a very popular destination for tourists and there is some concern that too many people will change the nature of the area for ever. Not only do they visit in cruise ships but some tours offer the possibility of skiing to the South Pole!

Useful websites:

http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/About_Antarctica/tourism.html

is the British Antarctic site

<http://www.asoc.org/>

the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition – featuring news and information

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/xq.html#Geo>

has an Arctic Ocean fact file

<http://www.churchillmb.net/~cnsc/ab-attrac-bears.html>

focuses on the polar bears of Hudson Bay, Canada

<http://www.chem.ucla.edu/~alice/explorations/churchill/baars.htm>

is a good information site on polar bears

http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/newsid_4210000/newsid_4212200/4212229.stm

has a downhill ski game for pupils

http://www.ecokids.ca/pub/eco_info/topics/climate/quiz/quiz2.cfm

has information and games for pupils about climate change, polar bears, etc