

Geography of China

Situated in the south-eastern part of the Asian Continent, the People's Republic of China has a coastline of 18,000 kilometres, a international land borders of more than 20,000 kilometres, and a total land area of 9.6 million square kilometres, third only in size to Russia and Canada. Its territory extends over 50of latitude from north to south, embracing the equatorial belt, the tropics, the subtropics, the moderate temperate zone and the cold temperate zone. From east to west, China extends over 62of longitude with land covered by forests, grasslands, deserts, plains, hills and mountains.

China shares land borders with Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), India, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Mongolia and North Korea.

The country can be divided into 8 regions:

The plateau of Tibet and Qinghai in the southwest. The Tibetan Highlands average 4500m above sea level, and are often referred to as the 'Roof of the World'. At the southern rim of the plateau is the Himalayan mountain range, with peaks averaging 6000m, among which Mount Everest, known to the Chinese as Qomolangma Peak, reaches more than 8000m.

The Xinjiang-Inner Mongolian Uplands include the eastern Ordos Desert, the southern part of the Gobi Desert and the Turpan depression - 150 metres below sea level. This region also boasts the largest inland basin in the world, the Tarim Basin, where the Taklamakan Desert (the largest in China) and China's largest shifting salt lake are situated.

The Inner Mongolian Border Uplands include the Gobi and eastern lowlands and are distinguished by a rugged terrain with little agriculture, though the southern area has fertile loess soil which has been deposited by the wind.

The Eastern Highlands includes the Shandong Peninsula and the northeast coastal region. The region is hilly and with rich deposits of coal.



The Eastern Lowlands provide the best farming land in the country. There are three main plains in this region: the Manchurian Plain, which also has large coal and iron deposits; the North China plain which produces wheat, although the area is subject to flooding; and the Yangtze River valley which has flat land with good rainfall and a fertile delta where the cities of Nanjing, Shanghai and Hangzhou are to be found.

The Central Uplands, located between the eastern lowlands and the Tibetan plateau, are less than 1000m above sea level.

The Sichuan Basin, with a mild climate and long growing season, is a good area for agriculture.

The Southern Uplands cover Southeast China and Hainan Island. The only level area here is the Pearl River delta where the city of Guangzhou is located.

China has 14 of the world's highest peaks , each of these mountains is more than 8,000 meters above sea level.

Most of China's rivers flow from west to east into the Pacific Ocean except for a few in southwest China that flow to the south. Melting snow and ice from the mountains of western China and the Qinghai -Tibet Plateau are the main sources of the headwaters for the country's largest rivers: the Yangtze (Chang Jiang), Yellow (Huang He), Mekong (Lancang Jiang) and Salween (Nu Jiang) rivers.

The Yangtze River, the nation's largest river and the third longest in the world, after the Nile and the Amazon, originates on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, has a length of 6,300 kilometres, and runs through spectacular gorges.

The Yellow River, about 5460km long and the second longest river in China, is described as the birthplace of Chinese civilization.

The Salween River (Nu Jiang) runs from eastern Tibet into Yunnan province and then into Myanmar.

The Grand Canal, is another great waterway of China and is the longest artificial canal in the world. Originally it stretched for 1800km from Hangzhou in the south to Beijing in the north. Now most of it is no longer in use.