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Ch: THE DESERT REGION

The Hot Desert – Sahara

Sahara is the world's largest desert. It has an area of around 8.54 million sq. km. The Sahara desert touches eleven countries – Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Sudan, Tunisia and Western Sahara. In the Sahara desert, there are gravel plains and elevated plateaus with bare rocky surface. These rocky surfaces may be more than 2500m high at some places.

Climate

Sahara desert climate is extreme, scorching hot and parched dry. It has a short rainy season. The sky is cloudless and clear. Here, the moisture evaporates faster than it accumulates. The temperatures during the day may soar as high as 50°C, heating up the sand and the bare rocks, which in turn, radiates heat making everything around hot. The nights may be freezing cold with temperatures nearing zero degrees.

Flora and Fauna

In the Sahara desert vegetation includes cactus, date palms and acacia. In some places, there are oasis – green islands with date palms surrounding them. Camels, hyenas, jackals, foxes, scorpions, many varieties of snakes and lizards are the prominent animal species living there.

People

The Sahara desert has been inhabited by various groups of people, who pursue different activities. Among them are the Bedouins and Tuaregs who are nomadic tribes rearing livestock such as goats, sheep, camels and horses. These animals provide them with milk, hides from which they make leather for belts, slippers, water bottles; hair is used for mats, carpets, clothes and blankets. They wear heavy robes as protection against dust storms and hot winds.

The oasis in the Sahara and the Nile Valley in Egypt supports settled population. Since water is available, the people grow date palms. Crops such as rice, wheat, barley and beans are also grown. Egyptian cotton, famous worldwide, is grown in Egypt. The discovery of oil is constantly transforming the Sahara desert. Other minerals found in the area include iron, phosphorus, manganese and uranium.

The cultural landscape of the Sahara is undergoing change. Gleaming glass cased office buildings tower over mosques and superhighways crisscross the ancient camel paths. Trucks are replacing camels in the salt trade. Tuaregs are seen acting as guides to foreign tourists. More and more nomadic herdsmen are taking to city life finding jobs in oil and gas operations.

