Latin America Physical Geography

Use this key to check answers and read the explanations.

1. Which mountain system extends along the western side of South America?
   A. Andes
   B. Rockies
   C. Atlas
   D. Alps
   Correct answer: A. Andes
   The Andes follow the western margin of South America from the northern tropics to Patagonia.

2. Which desert occupies part of northern Chile’s arid Pacific region?
   A. Gobi Desert
   B. Sonoran Desert
   C. Atacama Desert
   D. Namib Desert
   Correct answer: C. Atacama Desert
   The Atacama lies in northern Chile. Large parts of the region receive very little rain.

3. Which broad basin takes up much of tropical South America east of the Andes?
   A. Congo Basin
   B. Amazon Basin
   C. Murray–Darling Basin
   D. Mekong Basin
   Correct answer: B. Amazon Basin
   Rain and rivers from much of northern South America drain into the Amazon system.

4. Which sea lies directly east of much of the Central American coast, from Belize to Panama?
   A. Bering Sea
   B. Arabian Sea
   C. Coral Sea
   D. Caribbean Sea
   Correct answer: D. Caribbean Sea
   The Caribbean Sea borders the eastern side of Central America. The Pacific Ocean borders its western side.

5. Which volcanic island group lies in the Pacific Ocean west of mainland Ecuador?
   A. Bahamas
   B. Galápagos Islands
   C. Falkland Islands
   D. Lesser Antilles
   Correct answer: B. Galápagos Islands
   The Galápagos archipelago lies about 1,000 kilometers from mainland Ecuador in the Pacific.

6. Which large lake spans part of the border between Peru and Bolivia?
   A. Lake Titicaca
   B. Lake Nicaragua
   C. Lake Maracaibo
   D. Lake Chapala
   Correct answer: A. Lake Titicaca
   Lake Titicaca lies high on the Andean Altiplano and is shared by Peru and Bolivia.

7. What landform in Panama connects the continents of North and South America?
   A. A volcanic caldera
   B. An atoll
   C. A river delta
   D. An isthmus
   Correct answer: D. An isthmus
   The Isthmus of Panama is a narrow stretch of land between the Caribbean and Pacific that joins the two larger land masses.

8. Which vast seasonal wetland lies partly in Brazil’s upper Paraguay River basin?
   A. Atacama
   B. Pampas
   C. Pantanal
   D. Altiplano
   Correct answer: C. Pantanal
   The Pantanal includes broad floodplains in the upper Paraguay basin. Seasonal floods change the extent of its wetlands.

9. What feature in the limestone of the Yucatán Peninsula is locally called a cenote?
   A. A natural sinkhole that can expose groundwater
   B. A shallow reef built by coral
   C. A glacier-fed lake between two moraines
   D. A sand ridge deposited by persistent winds
   Correct answer: A. A natural sinkhole that can expose groundwater
   A cenote forms in soluble rock. Many open through the limestone to the groundwater beneath it.

10. Which landform is the Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia?

A. A coral lagoon
B. A lava plateau
C. A barrier island
D. A salt flat

Correct answer: D. A salt flat
The Salar de Uyuni is a large, flat expanse of salt in the Andean highlands.

11. Which term names the high plateau lying between two major ranges of the Andes in Bolivia and Peru?

A. Llanos
B. Pampas
C. Altiplano
D. Gran Chaco

Correct answer: C. Altiplano
The Altiplano is an elevated basin system bounded by high Andean ranges on its east and west.

12. Which general landscape would you expect at Argentina’s Los Glaciares National Park in Patagonia?

A. Mangrove islands and warm tidal creeks
B. High peaks and outlet glaciers
C. Low coral banks and atolls
D. Dry gullies in a lowland desert

Correct answer: B. High peaks and outlet glaciers
Patagonia’s Southern Andes contain a large ice field. Several glaciers run from the ice field toward the park’s lakes.

13. Why can a salt crust accumulate at the Salar de Atacama after water flows in?

A. Glaciers repeatedly scrape away the salt
B. Ocean tides flood the basin every day
C. Freshwater springs wash all salts out to sea
D. Evaporation leaves dissolved salts behind in an enclosed basin

Correct answer: D. Evaporation leaves dissolved salts behind in an enclosed basin
Water cannot readily drain out of this basin. As the water evaporates, salts remain and can build up in a crust.

14. Which two bodies of water flank the Yucatán Peninsula on the northwest and east, respectively?

A. Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea
B. Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean
C. Gulf of California and Gulf of Mexico
D. Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of California

Correct answer: A. Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea
The peninsula projects between the Gulf of Mexico and the western Caribbean.

15. Which process contributes to mountain building and volcanism along the western edge of South America?

A. Two continental plates move apart beneath the Caribbean
B. The South American Plate descends beneath the African Plate
C. The Nazca Plate descends beneath the South American Plate
D. The Pacific and Antarctic plates collide beneath the Amazon Basin

Correct answer: C. The Nazca Plate descends beneath the South American Plate
The oceanic Nazca Plate converges with and descends beneath South America, contributing to uplift and volcanism in the Andes.