

# Summary: Central and South America

## Central America

Central America has seven countries. They are all part of North America. Central America is long and narrow. The isthmus of Panama, at the southern end, is only about 50 miles wide. The United States took the land in 1903 and built a canal so ships could go from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. The Panama Canal opened in 1914.

Mountains run down the middle of Central America. Central America is tropical. There are rain forests with many kinds of plants and animals. American Indians, such as the Maya, have lived there for thousands of years. Then European countries, such as Spain and England, took land for colonies. Today there are people of Spanish, American Indian, and mixed background.

Agriculture is an important industry in Central America. Major crops are bananas, sugar, and coffee. Many people are poor and only grow enough to live.

## South America

South America has twelve countries. It is just south of Central America. A major landform is the Andes Mountains. There are high peaks and some volcanoes. The Amazon River flows through the world's largest rain forest. Much of South America is tropical, with a wet, hot climate. But in the mountains, temperatures can be cold. The southern part of the continent almost reaches the frozen continent of Antarctica.

American Indians have lived in South America for thousands of years. In the 1500s, Spain and Portugal took over most of South America. They forced the Indians to work for them and also brought enslaved Africans. Later, immigrants from Europe and Asia came to live in South America.

South America is rich in minerals, oil, and metals. Industry is growing, but most people farm. Other resources are the plants in the forest. South Americans are working hard to protect the rain forest. Industry is growing, but most people live by farming.

### Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

**isthmus** *noun*, a narrow strip of land that connects two larger land areas

**rain forest** *noun*, dense forest that gets large amounts of rainfall every year

### After You Read

**REVIEW** What made Panama a good place to build a canal? Draw a box around the sentence that tells how wide Panama is.

**REVIEW** Name two major physical features of the South American continent. Circle the names of a major landform and a river in South America.