The Geography of South America

South America is the fourth largest of the seven continents. South America is roughly triangular in shape with the tip of the triangle at the southernmost point of South America. The northern one-third of South America lies on the equator making the climate hot. The continent is almost completely surrounded by ocean except for its narrow connection in the north with the continent of North America. The Pacific Ocean lies to the west of South America and the Atlantic Ocean makes the eastern border of the continent. The Caribbean Sea, a subdivision of the Atlantic Ocean, makes the northern border.

Cape Horn is considered to be the southernmost point of South America. The Atlantic and Pacific Oceans meet off the coast of Cape Horn causing some of the roughest sea conditions on earth. Many sailing ships never completed their journey around Cape Horn but modern vessels are better equipped to handle the challenge. The Scotia Sea which lies between Cape Horn and the continent of Antarctica is considered to be partly in the Atlantic Ocean and partly in the Southern Ocean.

The mighty Amazon River of South America is the second longest river in the world, slightly shorter than the Nile, but the Amazon is the largest river in the world in terms of the size of its drainage basin and the volume of water it carries. The Amazon River, which runs roughly west to east, is an important part of the rainforest ecosystem that dominates the northern areas of South America.

The Andes Mountains extend for about 4,300 north and south across nearly the entire length of the eastern edge of South America, making the Andes the longest mountain chain on any continent. The Andes are second only to the Himalaya Mountains of Asia in height. Cerro Aconcagua is the highest mountain in the Andes, with a height of 22,841 feet. The Andes are a relatively wide chain of mountains, over 400 miles across at their widest point. However, some the mountains of the Andes are active volcanoes. The areas where tectonic plates meet under the Andes are subject to earthquakes, some of which can be severe.