What are Biomes?

Biomes are a way to divide the Earth's surface. These divisions are based on climate patterns, soil types, and the animals and plants that inhabit an area. There are biomes on dry land and in water. Every inch of the Earth's surface is a part of one or more biomes.

There are a couple of different ways to look at the number of biomes. Some like to divide biomes into five basic types: aquatic, forest, desert, tundra, and grassland. These five types of biomes can be further divided by differences in seasons or animal and plant species.

Aquatic Biome
The aquatic biome consists of any part of Earth that is covered with water. This includes freshwater and salt water. The aquatic biome can be further divided into freshwater biomes, marine biomes, wetland biomes, coral reef biomes, and estuaries. These subdivisions are based on the salt content of the water, the aquatic plants that live there, and the aquatic animals that thrive there.

Forest Biome
The forest biome is the largest and has a wide variety of plants, trees, animals, insects, and microscopic organisms. The major characteristic of the forest biome is its trees. About 30% of the Earth is considered a part of the forest biome. The forest biome is subdivided by its climate and types of trees present. These subdivisions are: the rainforest biome, temperate biome, chaparral biome, alpine biome, and taiga biome.

Desert Biome
The desert biome has one major, distinguishing characteristic, the fact that it has very little vegetation. The climate is rather extreme depending on its location. The deserts of Africa are extremely hot during the winters and warm throughout the rest of the year. There are also cold deserts such as those in Antarctica. These deserts are extremely cold during the winter and cold during the other seasons.

Tundra Biome
Tundra biomes are the coldest places on Earth. They are similar to a cold desert except they receive less rainfall and contain different animals and plants. Even though the conditions are harsh, the tundra biome does have plant and animal habitats.

Grassland Biome
The grassland biome is made of rolling hills of various grasses. They receive just enough rain to sustain grass but not enough to grow many trees. There are a few trees that will grow in grasslands but sporadic wildfires keep them under control. There are two types of grassland, the savannas and temperate grasslands.

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