Savanna regions

Areas a few degrees north and south of the Equator have a climate which is usually very dry. At certain times of the year, though, they become very hot and have torrential rain. These areas of the world are called the savanna regions. They are named after the Savanna in Africa, which is the largest region with this type of climate.

When the rain comes

The savanna regions are within the Tropics, where the Sun is directly overhead twice each year. It is hotter at these times of the year so more water evaporates* and this causes heavy rain. In areas of savanna closest to the Equator, the Sun is directly overhead at opposite times of the year (around March and September) so the rainy seasons are several months apart. In areas of savanna furthest from the Equator, both rainy seasons are so close together that they merge into one.

What grows in the savanna?

Conditions in the savanna are harsh. The soil contains few nutrients, dries out during the dry season and becomes bogggy during the wet season. Also, there are often fires at the end of the dry season.

Grasses are very tough and can grow easily in savanna conditions. Thousands of different types grow there. For trees to survive, though, they need certain features to protect them against drought and fire.

One type of tree, called the baobab tree, has developed a thick, fireproof trunk, which stores water like a sponge. Its long roots draw water from deep underground. Other trees, such as acacia trees, have broad, flat crowns to shade the lower leaves and prevent them from drying out.

*Evaporation, 26.
Characteristics of the Savanna

- Grasses and trees - The savanna is a rolling grassland with scattered trees and shrubs.
- Rainy and dry seasons - Savannas have two distinct seasons in regards to precipitation. There is a rainy season in the summer with around 15 to 25 inches of rain and a dry season in the winter when only a couple of inches of rain may fall.
- Large herds of animals - There are often large herds of grazing animals on the savanna that thrive on the abundance of grass and trees.
- Warm - The savanna stays pretty warm all year. It cools down some during the dry season, but stays warm and humid during the rainy season. The temperatures range from 20 to 30°C.

Where are the major savanna biomes?
Savannas are generally found between the desert biome and the rainforest biome. They are mostly located near the equator. The largest savanna is located in Africa. Nearly half of the continent of Africa is covered with savanna grasslands. Other major savannas are located in South America, India, and northern Australia.

Fires in the Savanna
Fires are an important part of the savanna. During the dry season fires clear out old dead grass and make way for new growth. Most of the plants will survive because they have extensive root systems that allow them to grow back quickly after a fire. The trees have thick bark which helps them to survive. The animals generally can run to escape the fire. Some animals burrow deep into the ground to survive. Insects generally die by the millions in a fire, but this provides a feast to many birds and animals.
Introduction
The African Savanna grasslands are expansive areas with scattered trees that lie between the continents rainforests and deserts and run along the equator. This African landform is where the great cats such as lions stalk their prey and where the African elephants roam. On this page are lists of interesting facts, written for kids and adults, about the African Savanna. This information includes what animals live there and where the Savanna is located.

African Savanna Seasons
There are two seasons dry (winter) and wet (summer) on the African Savanna. The dry season is long, lasting from October through March. This season is very dry and only about four inches of rain falls during the entire season. It is during this season that water holes dry up and you see animals sneaking in to get a sip of water while trying to avoid crocodiles waiting to attack them. The wet season (summer) is very different from the dry season. Between fifteen and twenty five inches of rain fall on the savannas during this time. It can rain for many hours non-stop. It gets very hot and humid on the grasslands during this season and as this hot air rises it hits cooler air causing rain.

Plants found on the African Savanna
There are many different types of plants found on the African savanna all of which have to be able to withstand long periods of drought in order to survive the long dry season. Below is a list of the most common plants found on these African landforms.

- River bushwillow - This shrub has leaves that change colors with the change in the seasons. It blossoms a yellowish flower that has a poisonous fruit.
- Okra - This plant has yellow or white flowers and can grow over six feet tall. The okra produces fruit that can be eaten.
- Bermuda Grass - This grass makes a thick mat on the ground and can survive through droughts.
- Thorny Trees - These trees include the senegal gum acacia, umbrella thorn acacia and the whistling thorn acacia.
- Other trees - The non-thorny trees, baobab, manketti, candelabra, and the Jackalberry tree are also found on the African grasslands.

Animals found on the African Savanna
There are an abundance of animals found on the grasslands that are all well equipped to withstand the extreme conditions. These animals are dependent on each other to keep the environment in balance. Savanna animals are all in a constant search for food and water. Some of these animals are listed below.

- Lions - can grow up to ten feet long. They live in groups called prides. The males are larger than the females and have a shaggy mane.
- African elephants - are the largest land mammals on earth and can weigh up to twenty thousand pounds.
- Cheetahs- are the fastest land animals in the world. In short spurts they can reach a speed of seventy miles per hour.
- Zebras - roam the savanna in large herds eating grass. Their senses are very keen which helps them avoid being caught by predators.
- Cape buffalo - This aggressive large bovine is very unpredictable and dangerous. They kill over two hundred people on average every year. It is a popular target for hunting safaris.
- Giraffes - are the tallest animals in the world reaching up to twenty feet tall. Their long necks help them reach the leaves at the tops of trees where other animals cannot reach. One of their favorite trees to eat leaves from is the acacia.