The Arctic and Antarctica: Are They the Same, or Different?

Have you heard of the Arctic and Antarctica? What do you know about them? Even though they are about the same size, cold, and covered with ice, these two places are very different.

Where are these two places? The Arctic is at the top of the world. It is a large ocean surrounded by land. Sea ice forms over the Arctic Ocean when the temperature is cold enough. There is more sea ice in the winter, and less in the summer.

At the bottom of the world is Antarctica. It is a large continent surrounded by the Southern Ocean. Most of the land is covered by very thick ice. During the winter, water from the Southern Ocean also freezes and forms sea ice.

Both places are cold all year. But Antarctica is much colder than the Arctic. In the winter, the average temperature at the North Pole is 40 degrees below zero. At the South Pole, it is 76 degrees below zero! Summer is warmer, but it isn’t really warm. The average temperature then is 32 degrees at the North Pole. At the South Pole, a summer day might be 18 degrees below zero!

Flat land in the Arctic is called tundra. The tundra is covered with many small plants like shrubs, berries, grasses, and mosses. Antarctica has only a few types of plants like grasses and mosses. Both places are too cold for trees to grow.

Whales, porpoises, and seals live in the Arctic and Southern Oceans. Musk ox, reindeer, caribou, wolves, and foxes live on the Arctic tundra. Polar bears also live in the Arctic. They hunt on the sea ice that covers the Arctic Ocean. There aren’t as many land...
animals in Antarctica. Penguins and other birds live there. The only other living things are very small insects, worms, and tiny animals that live in the soil.

The Arctic includes parts of eight countries. People have lived there for thousands of years. Today, about four million people live in the Arctic! No one actually lives in Antarctica. It does not belong to any country and does not have a government. Scientists work there, but they leave when their work is finished.

Did you know that these two places were so different? How are these places like the place where you live? How is your home different from these places?