

1. **Antarctica:** (5.4 million sq. mi.) Because it is covered with (solid) water, it is somewhat surprising that this desert is considered a desert, but it is classified as such due to its lack of precipitation. Players should be familiar with its tallest mountain (Vinson Massif, in the Ellsworth Mountains), its active volcano Mount Erebus, the surrounding Ross and Weddell Seas, and the Ross Ice Shelf. Norwegian Roald Amundsen was the first to reach the South Pole (1911), while Englishman Robert Scott died trying to reach it. Ernest Shackleton had to abandon his ship, the *Endurance*, during an attempt to cross this desert on foot.
2. **Atacama Desert:** (Chile; 70,000 sq. mi.) This desert's chief claim to fame is the rain shadow of the Andes which makes it the driest (hot) desert in the world. The desert was the primary bone of contention in the War of the Pacific (1879-1883, Chile defeats Peru and Bolivia) that sought to control its nitrate resources (which were necessary for the production of explosives).
3. **Gobi Desert:** (China and Mongolia; 500,000 sq. mi.) This desert, Asia's second largest desert (after the Arabian Desert), is bounded on the north by the Altai Mountains. It is known for its role in the Silk Road trading route and the Nemegt Basin, where fossilized dinosaur eggs and human artifacts have been found.
4. **Great Sandy Desert:** (Western Australia; 140,000 sq. mi.) Part of the Western Desert, and the ninth largest in the world.
5. **Kalahari Desert:** (Botswana, Namibia, South Africa; 360,000 sq. mi.) This desert is a large region, not all of which is arid enough to qualify as a desert. It is known for its red sand, large game reserves (meerkats, gemsbok, springbok, steenbok), and mineral deposits (notably uranium). Most famous are its San Bushmen and their click language.
6. **Mojave Desert:** (U.S.; 25,000 sq. mi.) This desert is bounded by the San Gabriel and San Bernardino mountain ranges along the San Andreas and Garlock Faults. It lies between the Great Basin and the Sonoran Desert and it contains the lowest and driest point of North America, Death Valley. It is most strongly associated with the Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*).
7. **Namib Desert:** (Namibia and Angola; 30,000 sq. mi.) This desert, a coastal desert, is known for its bizarre *Welwitschia* and medicinal *Hoodia* plants. It is thought to be the oldest desert in the world.
8. **Negev Desert:** (Israel; 4,700 sq. mi.) This triangular desert covers the southern half of Israel.
9. **Painted Desert:** (Northern Arizona) This desert, which is shared by Grand Canyon and Petrified Forest National Parks, is known for its colorful, banded rock formations.
10. **Rub' al-Khali:** (Arabian Peninsula; 250,000 sq. mi.) Its name means "Empty Quarter" in English and this desert can be considered the most inhospitable place on earth. It is known for the world's largest oil field, the Ghawar, and for once being part of the frankincense trade.
11. **Sahara Desert:** (Northern Africa; 3.5 million sq. mi.) This desert is the world's second largest desert, but its largest hot desert. Players should know the Atlas Mountains (which bound the western Sahara on the north) and the Sahel, a savannah-like strip that bounds it on the south. It is dominated by rocky regions (hamada), sand seas (ergs), and salt flats (shatt) and dry river valleys (wadi) that are subject to flash floods. Its most asked-about inhabitants are the Berbers and Tuaregs.
12. **Taklamakan Desert:** (China; 105,000 sq. mi.) This desert is an extremely cold, sandy desert known for splitting the Silk Road into branches running north and south of it. It is bounded by the Kunlun, Pamir, and Tian Shan mountain ranges.