

# Welcome to the *Natural Inquirer* Tropical Forest Edition

This edition of the *Natural Inquirer* describes forest and environmental research conducted in the tropical region of the Western Hemisphere (See Figure 1). The tropics is a region near the equator, between 23.5° north latitude, and 23.5° south latitude.

Latitude is measured by parallel imaginary lines ringing the Earth. The tropical region gets a lot of sunshine and is warm all year around, except in the high mountain regions (See Figure 2). The tropics are the home of a variety of biomes (bi\_oms), or regions with dif-

ferent kinds of vegetation and other life. Tropical biomes are largely defined by the amount of rainfall they get. In the tropics, you might find rain forests, dry forests, shrub lands, tropical plains called savannahs (sä van uhs), and deserts.

The research in this *Natural Inquirer* was conducted by scientists working in the International (in tür na sha nul) Institute of Tropical Forestry, or IITF (Figure 3). IITF is located in Puerto Rico, a tropical island in the Caribbean Sea. The IITF conducts research to help keep tropical forests healthy now and into the future, to help protect the animals that live in the forests, and to take care of streams and rivers and the forests around them. IITF is a part of the Forest Service. You can learn about the Forest Service on the back cover of the *Natural Inquirer*, or by visiting <http://www.naturalinquirer.usda.gov> and clicking on "About the Forest Service."



Figure 1. This issue presents research conducted in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil.

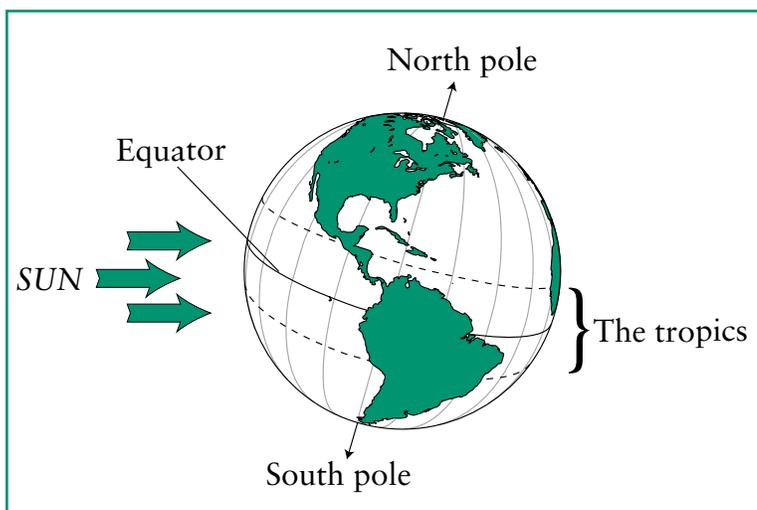


Figure 2. Illustration of the location of the sun in relation to the tropics.



Figure 3. International Institute of Tropical Forestry.