

## Reading Comprehension

### Welcome to Death Valley

If you think we've been having a hot summer here in Europe, you should take a drive through Death Valley. The heat hits you like a blast from a furnace when you get out of your car. After a few minutes under the scorching sun and a couple of souvenir photos taken on the baking sand, most people have had enough. Death Valley is officially the hottest place in America. The highest temperature ever was recorded in 1913 at 57.7°C. The first impression you get of Death Valley is sand and heat. Sand everywhere, as far as the eye can see, shimmering in the heat. Death Valley, with its 3.3 million acres, is the largest national park outside of Alaska. It is the land of mountain-size sand dunes, below-sea-level salt flats, and colorful sandstone canyons. Visitors often underestimate how hot and dry Death Valley can be, no matter what time of year. Even short easy walks can be fatal if temperatures soar above 38°C. The valley's extreme climate and inhospitable sand and mountains attract not only movie-makers, but also tourists. Every year 1.3 million tourists come to Death Valley. While Americans tend to avoid the scorching summers, Europeans often decide to go at the hottest time, just to see what extreme heat is like: they're "weather tourists". Hotels are packed in the hottest months, between May and October. There is even a golf course in Furnace Creek, and a 135-mile ultramarathon that starts in Badwater, the lowest point in North America, and continues through Death Valley to the Sierra Nevada.

The people who gave the valley its name were not there to play golf or go running: they were looking for a way across California, where gold had been discovered in 1849. One group of pioneers thought they had found a shortcut across the desert, but their trip ended up taking months. When they finally left, one of the group is said to have declared: "Goodbye Death Valley" and the name stuck.

Despite the name, there is a lot of life in Death Valley. More than 1,000 species of plants live there. In spring, if the conditions are right – enough sun and rain, not too much wind – the desert flowers bloom – a spectacular sight. The flower show lasts only a few weeks before Death Valley's scorching heat returns and the flowers wither and die. Animals have also adapted to the harsh environment, especially smaller species like mice and bats, but also coyotes. And for reptiles the

conditions are ideal. There are also some species you would prefer not to meet, like rattlesnakes and scorpions.

35 There have always been human inhabitants, too. The Timbisha Shoshone Native Americans lived off the land here for centuries before the first Europeans arrived, and some families still live at Furnace Creek. The discovery of gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc and borax, which is used in laundry and cleaning products, brought miners and mining companies to Death Valley. When the mines stopped making money, often after only a few years, the towns that had sprung up became deserted, creating another of Death Valley's attractions: ghost towns. Rhyolite, the "Queen  
40 City", was the largest town in Death Valley. Today, only ruins are left, protected by high wire fences.

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### Finding headings

***Read the text. Match the headings (A – F) with the paragraphs (1 – 4). There are two more headings than you need.***

- A) Early inhabitants and past populations
- B) Interaction between wildlife and climate
- C) Origin of the term "Death Valley"
- D) Population rise after industrialization
- E) The foundation of a gold mine
- F) The influence of climate and landscape on tourism

Paragraph 1 (lines 1 to 19)	Paragraph 2 (lines 20 to 24)	Paragraph 3 (lines 25 to 32)	Paragraph 4 (lines 33 to 41)

## Questions on the text

**Answer the following questions in one to six words or in numbers.**

1 How is the landscape of Death Valley described? (*Name three facts.*)

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2 Who does not usually go to Death Valley in summer?

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3 Why is it so difficult to find accommodation in Death Valley in summer?

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4 How long did the journey of some settlers last in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

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5 How have living beings survived in Death Valley?

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6 Why did people settle in Death Valley? (*Name one fact.*)

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7 Why did ghost towns develop? (*Name one fact.*)

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**A closer look at the text**

**a) Which words from the text are paraphrased here?**

- 1 long deep valleys with very steep sides  
made of rock \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 film directors who have full control over  
the films they produce \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 a running activity that takes a long time to  
complete and that needs a lot of energy \_\_\_\_\_

**b) Paraphrase the following words.**

- 1 hotel \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2 tourists \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3 flower \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**c) Copy the sentence from the text that tells you that ...**

- 1 some moments in the blazing sun and on hot ground make a lot of people  
leave.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2 people who visit Death Valley throughout the year often misjudge the climatic  
conditions.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_