

Saudi-Arabia

Last updated: 31-01-2004

Location and area

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy of the Middle East, occupying most of the Arabian Peninsula, and bordered on the north by Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait, on the east by the Persian Gulf and Qatar, on the southeast by the United Arab Emirates and Oman, on the south by the Republic of Yemen and on the west by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. Boundaries in the southeast are not precisely defined. Saudi Arabia has an area of about 2,240,000 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

Considerably more than half the area of Saudi Arabia is desert. Rub' al Khali, known as the Great Sandy Desert and as the "Empty Quarter", extends over much of the south-east and beyond the southern frontier. Largely unexplored, Rub' al Khali has an estimated area of about 777,000 km². An extension of the Syrian Desert projects into northern Saudi Arabia, and extending southeast from this region is An Nafud, an upland desert of red sand covering an area of about 57,000 km². Ad Dahna', a narrow extension of this desert, links An Nafud and Rub' al Khali. A central plateau region, broken in the east by a series of uplifts, extends south from An Nafud. Several wadis (watercourses), dry except in the rainy season, traverse the plateau region. The western limits of the latter are delineated by a mountain range extending generally northwest and southeast along the eastern edge of Al hijāz and Asir regions. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

The highest point in Saudi Arabia, Jabal Sawda' 3,133 m, is located in the southwestern portion of the country. Between the range, which has an average elevation of about 1,200 m, and the Red Sea is a narrow coastal plain. In the east, along the Persian Gulf, is a low-lying region known as Al Hasa. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

Extreme heat and aridity are characteristic of most of Saudi Arabia. The average temperatures for the months of January and July in Riyadh are 14° C and 42° C. The average temperatures in Jiddah for the same months are 23° C and 31° C. Average annual precipitation in Riyadh and Jiddah is 80 mm and 60 mm, respectively. Because of the overall aridity, Saudi Arabia has no permanent rivers or lakes. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

Fertile oases, many of which are the sites of towns and villages, are scattered through the Saudi Arabian deserts north of Rub' al Khali, and larger tracts of pasturage are in Ad Dahna' and the plateau region. The lack of water has made less than 1 per cent of the land area useful for farming. Irrigated lands near oases have been virtually the only sites of cultivation. Around 0.7 % of Saudi Arabia is forested. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

With the exception of artificial water bodies, wetlands are under severe threat in Saudi Arabia. Coastal zones are now subject to high pressure from expanding commercial and industrial fisheries, and many former fish nurseries have been lost to coastal reclamation from industrial, residential and recreational facilities. The Gulf has lost over 40% of its inter-tidal area to development, and the Red Sea 8% (Sambas & Symens 1993 *cited in* Scott 1995). (Spiers 1999)

Peatlands

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) no histosols nor gley soils exist in Saudi-Arabia.