

Saudi Arabia

Country name	Saudi Arabia ¹
State title	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Name of citizen	Saudi
Official language	Arabic [ara] ²
Country name in official language	السعودية (As Su'ūdīyah)
State title in official language	المملكة العربية السعودية (Al Mamlakah al 'Arabīyah as Su'ūdīyah) ³
Script	Arabic
Romanization System	BGN/PCGN Romanization system for Arabic 1956 ⁴
ISO-3166⁵ country code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	SA/SAU ⁶
Capital (conventional name)	Riyadh
Capital in official language	الرياض (Ar Riyāḍ)

Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932 by King Abdul-Aziz Bin Sa'ud (known as Ibn Sa'ud) and was named by Ibn Sa'ud for himself and his family; Arabia means land of the Arabs. With an area of approximately 2,149,690 km², Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula. It shares a land border with Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen and is bounded by the Red Sea to the west and the Persian Gulf to the north-east. It is linked to the island Kingdom of Bahrain by a road bridge known as the King Fahd Causeway (Arabic: Jisr al Malik Fahd). Saudi Arabia is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world, being mostly desert. The Empty Quarter (Arabic: Ar Rub' al Khālī), located in the south-east of the country, is the world's largest sand desert.

Geographical names policy

Geographical names in Saudi Arabia are found written in Arabic, which is the country's official language. Where possible, Arabic-script names should be taken from official Saudi sources and romanized using the

¹ In English the country is often informally referred to as Saudi but the full name Saudi Arabia should be used on UK government products. It is also known by the epithet 'The Land of the Two Holy Mosques' (Arabic: Arḍ al Ḥaramayn ash Sharīfayn), as the two holiest mosques in Islam are located in Saudi Arabia (in the cities of Mecca and Medina). The country's ruler is known as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for the same reason.

² Language codes in this Factfile are ISO 639-3 codes.

³ Although in English the name of the country is Saudi Arabia and its ruler's name is consistently written in English as Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the romanized Arabic country name used in NGA's GeoNames Database (<http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/>) and by the UN is as Su'ūdīyah, and not as Sa'ūdīyah as one might expect, although both the Hans Wehr *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* and *Al-Mawrid* dictionary give the vocalisation as Sa'ūdīyah.

⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/320079/Arabic_Romanization.pdf

⁵ <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/>

⁶ The acronym KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), the IOC (International Olympic Committee code may also be encountered.

BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic⁷. It should be noted that Roman-script forms may be encountered which differ from those arising from the application of the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic. Several major cities have conventional English-language names which can be used in English-language text and should be shown in brackets after the romanized Arabic name on cartographic products (see references below in lists showing administrative divisions and other significant locations).

Language

The official language of Saudi Arabia is Arabic, which is a Semitic language, written from right to left in Arabic script. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is used for official written purposes and there are three main dialects of Arabic spoken in Saudi Arabia:

1. Hijazi Arabic (acw), sometimes called Hejazi, is spoken in Western Saudi Arabia, on the west coast in Jeddah, Taif, Mecca and Medina
2. Najdi Arabic (ars) is spoken in North-Central Saudi Arabia, in and around Riyadh. This dialect is the closest to Classical Arabic
3. Gulf Arabic (afb) is spoken in the Eastern region and is sometimes called Sharqi/Shargi, or Eastern dialect within Saudi Arabia.

Although Saudi dialects are relatively close to Classical Arabic and MSA⁸, some elements of the spoken dialects, in particular differing pronunciations, may influence the non-standard Roman-script spellings of toponyms which may be encountered. For example, the *qāf* (ق), which is romanized as Q in the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic, is sometimes pronounced like 'g' in the English word get, and consequently may be seen romanized as a 'g', e.g. Hareeg for Al Ḥarīq, and Thadeg for Thādiq. The Arabic letter Jīm (ج), may also sometimes be romanized in non-standard forms as 'g', e.g. Kharg for Al Kharj.⁹

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings¹⁰):

The **BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic** contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

‘ (U+2018/02BB)	ī (U+012A)
’ (U+2019/02BC)	î (U+012B)
Á (U+00C1)	Ş (U+015E)
á (U+00E1)	ş (U+015F)
Ã (U+0100)	ı (U+0162)
ā (U+0101)	ı̇ (U+0163)
Ḍ (U+1E10)	Ū (U+016A)
ḍ (U+1E11)	ū (U+016B)
Ḥ (U+1E28)	Ẓ (U+005A+0327)*
ḥ (U+1E29)	ẓ (U+007A+0327)*

* NB the z+cedilla is not available as a single encoding

⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/320079/Arabic_Romanization.pdf

⁸ The Arabic language spread from Arabia along with the religion of Islam, which began in what is now Saudi Arabia. Consequently, some of Islam's most holy places are located in Saudi Arabia (see note 1).

⁹ For further information on Arabic language, dialects and romanization see PCGN's *Brief Guide to Understanding Toponyms in the Arab World*.

¹⁰ See www.unicode.org

Territorial and Toponymic Issues

1. Persian Gulf: PCGN recommends using the name Persian Gulf on UK products, as this has long been considered the English-language conventional name for this body of water, which is a high seas feature, extending beyond the territorial limits of any recognised sovereignty. This description should always be used with Iranians and may be used with others when there might otherwise be confusion about which Gulf is meant, but it should not be used with Arabs. The Arabian Gulf¹¹ is an English-language version of the Arabic name applied by Arabs to this body of water and should not be used on official UK products or in official communications. In English, this feature is often referred to as The Gulf, a term which is generally acceptable to all parties. In general, this term may be used, except in communications with Iranian firms or government organisations or in circumstances where use of 'The Gulf' might be interpreted as a change of policy, or might be ambiguous. In that case, use 'The Persian Gulf' for the first mention and 'The Gulf' thereafter.

2. Islands: Saudi Arabia possesses several islands in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea.

- The Farasan Islands (Arabic: Juzur Farasān) is a large coral island group in the Red Sea, located approximately 40 km offshore from Jizan.
- The island of Arabi (Arabic: Jazīrat al 'Arabī) was once the subject of a territorial dispute between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but the two countries came to an agreement in the 1960s, in which Iran ceded sovereignty of Arabi to Saudi Arabia.
- The islands of Tīrān and Ṣanāfir in the Red Sea were for a long time leased to Egypt. An agreement between Egypt and Saudi Arabia in April 2016 recognised Saudi Arabia's historical claim to the islands. The agreement provoked extensive criticism in Egypt and the Egyptian Supreme Administrative Court nullified the agreement on the basis that there was insufficient evidence of the Saudi claims. In December 2016, Egypt's government officially approved the agreement and sent it to Parliament. Parliament ratified the agreement in June 2017, approving the transfer of Tīrān and Ṣanāfir islands to Saudi Arabia and President al-Sisi ratified the agreement later that month. The Egyptian Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) is due to issue a ruling on the matter in March 2018.¹²

¹¹ The Arabic language name for this body of water is Al Khalīj al 'Arabī (الخليج العربي) and the Persian language name is Khalīj-e Fārs (خلیج فارس).

¹² <http://www.egyptindependent.com/egypt-supreme-court-to-issue-ruling-on-tiran-sanafir-case-march-3/>

Administrative structure

At first-order administrative level (ADM1) Saudi Arabia is divided into 13 regions (Arabic: Miṅṭaqah or Miṅṭaqat). These are further sub-divided into governorates (Arabic: Muḥāfaẓah or Muḥāfaẓat) at second-order level (ADM2). The long form names for the regions are given below with the generic Miṅṭaqah, however as the regions are known as Emirates or principalities (Imārah in Arabic), and are ruled/headed by an Amīr (Prince), who is a member of the Saudi royal family, the administration is known as Imārat Miṅṭaqah; so Imārat Miṅṭaqat Makkah (the administration) and Miṅṭaqat Makkah (the region). The regional centres are known administratively as municipalities (Amānah in Arabic), headed by mayor (Amīn).

1. Al Bāḥah (20° 00' 00" N 041° 30' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	الباحة
Long form name	Miṅṭaqat al Bāḥah
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة الباحة
Variant Name(s)	Baha; Al-Baha
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-11
Centre	Al Bāḥah (20° 00' 46" N 041° 28' 04" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	الباحة
Website	https://www.albaha.gov.sa/ar-sa/Pages/main.aspx

2. Al Ḥudūd ash Shamālīyah (30° 00' 00" N 042° 40' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	الحدود الشمالية
Long form name	Miṅṭaqat al Ḥudūd ash Shamālīyah
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة الحدود الشمالية
Variant Name(s)	Northern Border Region
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-08
Centre	'Ar'ar (30° 58' 31" N 041° 02' 17" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	عرعر
Variant Name(s) of Centre	Arar; Ara'ar
Website	-

3. Al Jawf (29° 30' 00" N 038° 45' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	الجوف
Long form name	Al Jawf
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة الجوف
Variant Name(s)	Al-Jouf; al Juf; Jowf; Al-Jof; Aljouf; Al-Jowf
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-12
Centre	Sakākā (29° 58' 11" N 040° 12' 23" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	سكاكا
Variant names of Centre	Sikākā; Skaka, Sakākah
Website	-

4. Al Madīnah (Medina) (25° 40' 00" N 039° 40' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	المدينة
Long form name	Minṭaqat al Madīnah
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة المدينة
Variant Name(s)	Medina; Madina; El-Medina; Al-Madinah; Al Madinah Al Monawara
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-03
Centre	Al Madīnah (Medina) (24° 28' 07" N 039° 36' 51" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	المدينة
Epithet of City and Region	Al Madīnah al Munawwarah
Epithet in Arabic script	المدينة المنورة
Website	-

5. Al Qaṣīm (27° 05' 00" N 043° 28' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	القصيم
Long form name	Minṭaqat al Qaṣīm
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة القصيم
Variant Name(s)	Qasim; al-Qaseem; Al-Qassim; Qaseem; Kasim, Kaseem
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-05
Centre	Buraydah (26° 19' 34" N 043° 58' 30" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	بريدة
Variant Name(s) of Centre	Buraida; Buraidah; Baridah; Al Qasim City
Website	http://www.alqassim.gov.sa

6. Ar Riyāḍ (Riyadh) (23° 20' 00" N DMS 045° 20' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	الرياض
Long form name	Minṭaqat ar Riyāḍ
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة الرياض
Variant Name(s)	Riyad; Riyadh; Riad
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-01
Centre	Ar Riyāḍ (24° 39' 13" N 046° 42' 55" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	الرياض
Website	https://www.alriyadh.gov.sa/ar

7. Ash Sharqīyah (22° 30' 00" N 051° 00' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	الشرقية
Long form name	Al Minṭaqah ash Sharqīyah
Long form name in Arabic Script	المنطقة الشرقية
Variant Name(s)	Eastern Region; Eastern Province; Hasa; El Hasa
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-04
Centre	Ad Dammām (26° 26' 04" N 050° 06' 12" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	الدمام
Variant Name(s) of Centre	Dammam; Eastern City
Website	-

8. 'Asīr (19° 10' 00" N 043° 10' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	عسير
Long form name	Minṭaqat 'Asīr
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة عسير
Variant Name(s)	Aseer
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-14
Centre	Abhā (18° 12' 59" N 042° 30' 19" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	ابها
Variant Name(s) of Centre	Ebha
Website	http://www.aseer.gov.sa/

9. Ḥā'il (27° 30' 00" N 042° 30' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	حائل
Long form name	Minṭaqat Ḥā'il
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة حائل
Variant Name(s)	Hail; Hayil; Hael; Hayel
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-06
Centre	Ḥā'il (27° 31' 19" N 041° 41' 27" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	حائل
Website	http://www.hail.gov.sa/ar/Pages/default.aspx

10. Jāzān (Jizan) ¹³ (17° 20' 00" N 042° 40' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	جازان
Long form name	Minṭaqat Jāzān
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة جازان
Variant Name(s)	Jizan; Jīzān; Jazan; Djayzan; Djezan; جيزان; Jāzān
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-09
Centre	Jāzān (Jizan) (16° 53' 21" N 042° 33' 04" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	جازان
Website	www.jazan.gov.sa

¹³ Although the name of the city and the region can be found written as جيزان (Jīzān), most official Saudi sources show this name spelt in Arabic as جازان (Jāzān). The spelling Jizan is the more usual Roman-script spelling so PCGN recommends including this variant spelling in brackets after the official spelling: Jāzān (Jizan).

11. Makkah (20° 40' 00" N 041° 20' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	مكة
Long form name	Minṭaqat Makkah
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة مكة
Variant Name(s)	Mekka
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-02
Centre	Makkah (Mecca ¹⁴) (21° 25' 36" N 039° 49' 34" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	مكة
Epithet of City and Region	Makkah al Makramah
Epithet in Arabic script	مكة المكرمة
Website	www.makkah.gov.sa

12. Najrān (18° 00' 00" N 045° 40' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	نجران
Long form name	Minṭaqat Najrān
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة نجران
Variant Name(s)	Nejran
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-10
Centre	Najrān (17° 29' 33" N 044° 07' 40" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	نجران
Website	www.najran.gov.sa

13. Tabūk (27° 30' 00" N 037° 20' 00" E)	
Name in Arabic Script	تبوك
Long form name	Minṭaqat Tabūk
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة تبوك
Variant Name(s)	Tabouk; Tebuk
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-07
Centre	Tabūk (28° 23' 59" N 036° 34' 17" E)
Centre in Arabic Script	تبوك
Website	http://www.tabuk.gov.sa/Arabic/Pages/Home.aspx

¹⁴ FCO guidance states that either Mecca or Makkah is acceptable but **Makkah** must be used in official correspondence with Saudi Arabia

Other Significant Locations

Romanized Arabic Name	Name in Arabic Script	Conventional Name ¹⁵	Variant Names or Spellings	Location	Feature Type
Ar Rub' al Khālī	الربع الخالي	The Empty Quarter*	Rub Khali	21° 00' 00" N 051° 00' 00" E	Desert area
Al Baḥr al Aḥmar	البحر الاحمر	Red Sea*	-	13° 34' 22" N 042° 45' 00" E	Sea
Shibh al Jazīrat al 'Arabīyah	شبه الجزيرة العربية	Arabian Peninsula*	Jazīrat al 'Arab (جزيرة العرب); Shibh Jazīrat al 'Arab (شبه جزيرة العرب); Al Jazīrah; Al Jazeera; Al Jazeera al Arabiyya	25° 00' 00" N 045° 00' 00" E	Peninsula
Jisr al Malik Fahd	جسر الملك فهد	King Fahd Causeway		26° 13' 05" N 050° 13' 30" E	Man-made causeway (linking Saudi Arabia to Bahrain)
Jiddah	جدة	Jeddah	Jiddah; Jidda; Jedda; Djidda	21° 31' 01" N 039° 13' 09" E	PPL
Al Ḥijāz	الحجاز	Hejaz	Hijaz; Al-Hidjaz	24° 29' 51" N 038° 30' 24" E	Desert area
An Nafūd	النفود	-	Nefud; Al-Nafud, Nafud	28° 30' 00" N 041° 00' 00" E	Desert area
Yanbu'	ينبع	-	Yanbu; Yanbu' al Baḥr (ينبع البحر)	24° 05' 21" N 038° 03' 49" E	PPL
Aṭ Ṭā'if	الطائف	-	Taif; Tayif, Al-Ta'if	21° 16' 13" N 040° 24' 57" E	PPL
Al Jubayl	الجبيل	-	Jubayl; Jubail	27° 00' 40" N 049° 39' 30" E	PPL
Mīnā' al Malik 'Abd al 'Azīz	ميناء الملك عبد العزيز	-	King Abdul Aziz Port	26° 29' 40" N 050° 12' 00" E	Port
Mīnā' al Malik Fahd Yanbu'	ميناء الملك فهد ينبع	-	Madinat Yanbu al Sinaiyah Port	23° 57' 03" N 038° 13' 21" E	Port
Al Khubar	الخبر	Khobar	al-Khubar; al-Khobar	26° 16' 46" N 050° 12' 30" E	PPL
Juzur Farasān	جزر فرسان	Farasan Islands	Jazā'ir Farasān (جزائر فرسان)	16° 49' 54" N 041° 48' 38" E	Island group

¹⁵ The names marked with an asterisk are classed as international features, consequently the English-language conventional name should be used. For features within Saudi Arabia the conventional name should be shown in brackets after the romanized Arabic name.

Romanized Arabic Name	Name in Arabic Script	Conventional Name	Variant Names or Spellings	Location	Feature Type
Jazīrat al ‘Arabī	جزيرة العربي	-	Arabi; Jazīrat al ‘Arabiyyah; Jazīreh-ye ‘Arabī	27° 46' 43" N 050° 10' 34" E	Island
Jazīrat Tārūt	جزيرة تاروت	-	Tarut Island; Tarout	26° 34' 15" N 050° 03' 32" E	Island
Al Qatīf	القطيف	-	Qatif; Catif; Katif; El-Katif	26° 31' 15" N 050° 01' 28" E	PPL
Mīnā’ al Malik ‘Abd Allāh	ميناء الملك عبدالله	King Abdullah Port	KAP Port	22° 24' 0" N, 39° 5' 0" E	Port
Madīnat al Malik ‘Abd Allāh al Iqtisādīyah	مدينة الملك عبدالله الاقتصادية	King Abdullah Economic City	KAEC	22° 24' 0" N, 39° 5' 0" E	PPL
Ẓahrān	ظهران	-	Dhahran	17° 40' 20" N 043° 31' 25" E	PPL
Ḥaql	حقل	-	Al-Haql; El Haql; Hagul; Hakul; Hagl	29° 17' 11" N 034° 56' 49" E	PPL
Al Masjid al Ḥarām	المسجد الحرام	The Sacred Mosque	Masjid al-Haram	21° 25' 19" N, 39° 49' 33.6" E	Mosque (in Mecca)
Al Masjid al Nabawī	المسجد النبوي	Prophet's Mosque	Masjid al-Nabawi	24° 28' 6" N, 39° 36' 39" E	Mosque (in Medina)
Tihāmah	تهامة	Tihama	At Tihama; El Tihama; Tehama	22° 00' 00" N 040° 00' 00" E	Plain

Useful references

- US Board on Geographic Names GONet Names Server: <http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html>
- www.unicode.org
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org
- Languages: www.ethnologue.com, www.omniglot.com
- Administrative divisions: <http://www.statoids.com>
- US Library of Congress Country Study :<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/satoc.html>
- BBC Country Profile :<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702705>
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html>
- Saudi Arabia Interior Ministry: www.moi.gov.sa
- Saudi Geographical Society: <http://www.saudigs.org/english/index.php>
- Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Investment: <http://mci.gov.sa/AboutKingdom/Pages/KingdomRegions.aspx>
- Saudi General Authority for Statistics: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/ar/>
- General Commission for Survey: <http://www.gcs.gov.sa/En/ProductsAndServices/Products/PublicMaps/Pages/Official-Map-Of-The-Kingdom-Of-Saudi-Arabia.aspx>