pcgn The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Saudi Arabia

Country name	Saudi Arabia[1]
State title	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Name of citizen	Saudi Arabian (often also '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-3166[5] country code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	SA/SAU[6]
Capital (conventional name)	Riyadh
Capital in official language	الرياض (Ar Riyāḑ)
Population	37 million (UN data)

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 km^2, 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 sparsely populated, 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.

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[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.

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 Arabian sources and romanized using the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic[7]. The General Authority for Survey and Geospatial Information is the authority for surveying, map production and geographical information. It also oversees Saudi Arabia's National Committee on Geographical Names. 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 can 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 MSA[8], 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 Ḩarīq, 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 encodings[10]):

The BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script[11]:

Romanization (Upper case)	Unicode encoding	Romanization (Lower case)	Unicode encoding
'	2018 or 02BB	'	2019 or 02BC
Á	00C1	á	00E1

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[7] See footnote 4.

[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 footnote 1).

[9] For further information on Arabic language, dialects and romanization see PCGN's *Brief Guide to Understanding Toponyms in the Arab World* (available on request),

[10] See www.unicode.org

[11] Characters can be manually input into Microsoft Word documents by typing in these character codes and then holding down the ALT key and pressing /x/. The code will change to the required character. The letter can be copied and pasted into other programmes if required. Alternatively, the 'Insert – Symbol' command can be used; the code can be entered into the 'Character code' box which will show the corresponding letter.
A GeoNames Soft-Copy Keyboard can be downloaded from the NGA website and used to enter the required letter-diacritic combinations for a particular region: http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/gns_services.html

Romanization (Upper case)	Unicode encoding	Romanization (Lower case)	Unicode encoding
Ā	0100	ā	0101
Ḍ	1E10	ḍ	1E11
Ḥ	1E28	ḥ	1E29
Ī	012A	ī	012B
Ş	015E	ş	015F
Ţ	0162	ţ	0163
Ẕ	005A+0327*	ẕ	007A+0327*

*Note, the z + cedilla is not available as a single encoding.

Map of Saudi Arabia

Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status

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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. The Arabian Gulf[12] is an English-language version of the Arabic name applied by Arabs to this body of water, which 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.

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 Thīrān and Şanāfīr 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 Arabian 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 Thīrān and Şanāfīr islands to Saudi Arabia and President al-Sisi ratified the agreement later that month. Despite protests from Egyptians and legal appeals, in March 2018 the Egyptian Supreme Court upheld the agreement. One of the islands was known as Tīrān, the Egyptian name. It should now be labelled with the Saudi name Jazīrat Thīrān. The name of Jazīrat Şanāfīr has not changed[13]

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[12] 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 (خليج فارس).
[13] 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: Minţaqah or Minţaqat). These are further sub-divided into governorates (Arabic: Muḩāfaẕah or Muḩāfaẕat) at second-order level (ADM2). The long form names for the regions are given below with the generic Minţaqah, 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 Minţaqah; so Imārat Minţaqat Makkah (the administration) and Minţaqat Makkah (the region). The regional centres are known administratively as municipalities (Amānah in Arabic), headed by a mayor (Amīn).

1. Al Bāḩah (20° 00' 00" N 041° 30' 00" E)

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

2. Al Ḩudūd ash Shamālīyah (30° 00' 00" N 042° 40' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	الحدود الشمالية
Long form name	Minţaqat al Ḩudūd 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	Minţaqat 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 Qaşīm (27° 05' 00" N 043° 28' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	القصيم
Long form name	Minţaqat al Qaşīm
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	Minţaqat 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 Minţaqah 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	https://www.sharqiah.gov.sa/

8. 'Asīr (19° 10' 00" N 043° 10' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	عسير
Long form name	Minţaqat '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. Ḩā'il (27° 30' 00" N 042° 30' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	حائل
Long form name	Minţaqat Ḩā'il
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة حائل
Variant Name(s)	Hail; Hayil; Hael; Hayel
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-06
Centre	Ḩā'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)[14] (17° 20' 00" N 042° 40' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	جازان
Long form name	Minţaqat Jāzān
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة جازان
Variant Name(s)	Jizan; Jīzān; Jezan; 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	https://jazan.sa/ar/

11. Makkah (Mecca) (20° 40' 00" N 041° 20' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	مكة
Long form name	Minţaqat Makkah
Long form name in Arabic Script	منطقة مكة
Variant Name(s)	Mekka
ISO 3166-2 subdivision code	SA-02
Centre	Makkah (Mecca[15]) (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

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[14] 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).
[15] Mecca is the usual English-language conventional name. FCDO guidance states that either Mecca or Makkah is acceptable but **Makkah** must be used in official correspondence with Saudi Arabia.

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12. Najrān (18° 00' 00" N 045° 40' 00" E)

Name in Arabic Script	نجران
Long form name	Minţaqat 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	Minţaqat 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

Other Significant Locations

Romanized Arabic Name	Name in Arabic Script	Conventional Name[16]	Variant Names or Spellings	Location	Feature Type
Ar Rubʻ al Khālī	الربع الخالي	The Empty Quarter*	Rub Khali	21° 00' 00" N 051° 00' 00" E	Desert area
Al Baḩr al Aḩmar	البحر الاحمر	Red Sea*	-	13° 34' 22" N 042° 45' 00" E	Sea
Shibh al Jazīrat al ʻArabīyah	شبه الجزيرة العربية	Arabian Peninsula*	Jazīrat al ʻArab (جزيرة العرب); Shibh Jazīrat al ʻArab (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

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[16] 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 can be shown in brackets after the romanized Arabic name.

Romanized Arabic Name	Name in Arabic Script	Conventional Name[16]	Variant Names or Spellings	Location	Feature Type
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
Jazīrat al 'Arabī	جزيرة العربي	-	Arabi; Jazīrat al 'Arabiyah; 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 Iqtiṣādīyah	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

- *Achievements of The National Committee on Geographical Names in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (UNGEGN 2023): https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/3rd_session_2023/documents/GEGN.2_2023_103_CRP103.pdf
- BBC Country Profile: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702705
- BGN Geographic Names Standardization Policy for Saudi Arabia: https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSSearch/GNSDocs/policies/Saudi_Arabia_Country_Policy_webversion_Latest.pdf
- BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/320079/Arabic_Romanization.pdf
- CIA World Factbook: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/saudi-arabia/
- Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com,
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): https://www.iso.org/obp/ui
- Omniglot: www.omniglot.com
- PCGN Country Names: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names
- Saudi Arabia Interior Ministry: www.moi.gov.sa
- Saudi Arabia General Authority for Statistics: https://www.stats.gov.sa/ar/
- Saudi Arabia General Authority for Survey and Geospatial Information (GEOSA): https://www.geosa.gov.sa/en/pages/default.aspx
- Saudi Geographical Society: https://sgs.ksu.edu.sa/en
- Saudi Arabia Geoportal: https://www.geoportal.sa/portal/apps/experiencebuilder/experience/?id=56c2e4ab96c0491d95aacaefa4db6d59&page=Arabic&locale=ar
- Unicode Consortium: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names Geographic Names Server: https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/welcome.html
- US Library of Congress Country Study: https://www.loc.gov/item/93028506/

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