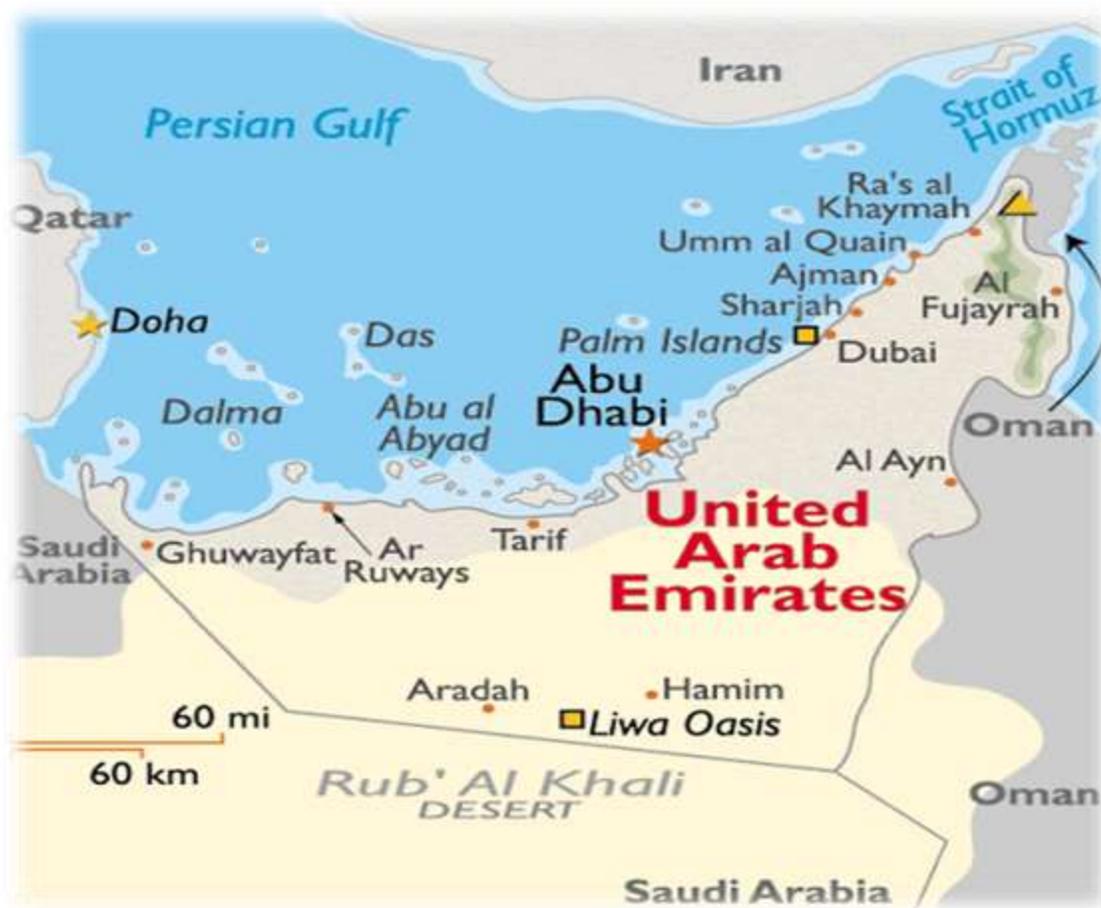


# Geography of unites Arab emirates



## Geography of United Arab Emirates

### Area and land boundaries

#### Area:

Total: 83,600 km<sup>2</sup>

Land: 83,600 km<sup>2</sup>

Water: 0 km<sup>2</sup>

#### Land boundaries:

Total: 867 km

Border countries: Oman 410 km, Saudi Arabia 457 km

#### Coastline:

1,318 km

#### Maritime claims:

Contiguous zone: 24 nmi (27.6 mi; 44.4 km)

Continental shelf: 200 nmi (230.2 mi; 370.4 km) or to the edge of the continental margin

Exclusive economic zone: 58,218 km<sup>2</sup> (22,478 sq mi) with 200 nmi (230.2 mi; 370.4 km)

Territorial sea: 12 nmi (13.8 mi; 22.2 km)

#### Elevation extremes:

Lowest point: Persian Gulf 0 m

Highest point: Jabal Yibir 1,527 m

#### Land use:

Land use: arable land: 0.77%

Permanent crops: 2.27%

Other: 96.96% (2005)

Irrigated land: 2,300 km<sup>2</sup> (2003)

Total renewable water resources: 0.2 km<sup>2</sup>

### Geography and Climate

The UAE has a total surface area of 83,600 square kilometers, comparable to that of Austria or Azerbaijan. The UAE can be divided into three geographical zones: a flat, low-lying, barren coastal plain; rolling sand dunes that stretch from the coast into the expanse of a vast desert wasteland that blends into the Empty Quarter (al-Rub al-

Khali), the world's largest sand desert; and a rugged mountain range, shared with Oman, in the north and east. While parts of these mountains are bare, other parts, such as the Jabal al-Akhdar, have vegetation. The UAE's highest point is the top of Jabal Yibir, at 1,527 metres.

The UAE lies within the northern desert belt of the Arabian Peninsula known for its scarce and unpredictable rainfall, high temperatures and humidities, and prolonged periods of sunshine (about eight hours per day in winter and 11 hours in summer). The UAE has a harsh desert climate, generally hot and humid in the summer but cooler in the mountainous regions, such as the Hajar al-Gharbi Mountains. July and August are the hottest months, when average maximum temperatures can exceed 48 °C on the coastal plain. During the late summer months, a humid southeast wind called sharqi ('easterly') makes the summers too humid for comfort, but there is usually a slight drop in temperature in the evening.

### Temperatures and Rainfall

In January and February, the average minimum temperature ranges between 10 °C and 14 °C. From December to March, it is mostly warm and sunny. Winter typically brings very little or no rain, except for occasional showers and downpours that can cause flash floods in wadi beds. The average annual rainfall in the UAE is 100 millimeters, though this varies from year to year and between regions.

Like the broader region, the UAE is prone to occasional violent sand and dust storms. These are caused by strong northerly and northwesterly winds known as shamal ('north wind'). Shamals can be very hazardous and disruptive, affecting health and reducing visibility.

### Biodiversity

The UAE has four main ecosystems: desert, maritime, freshwater, and montane. The desert habitat falls within the arid tropical zone and supports varying amounts of sparse seasonal vegetation, with less of it in the south, which encompasses the north-western tip of the Empty Quarter, the world's largest sand desert. The desert environment is undergoing significant changes due to the country's massive forestation projects and the spread of desert farms.

The maritime habitats are part of the Gulf and Arabian Sea zones, both of which have important ecosystems, including islands, coral reefs, sea grasses, intertidal areas, salt marshes, khors (tidal inlets) and mangroves. Permanent freshwater sources are scarce and are found mostly in the gorges of wadis (valleys) in the mountains and in sabkhas (salt flats) and artificial lakes, which form wetland ecosystems.

The Hajar Mountains, located in the eastern UAE, act as rain catchers. The precipitation replenishes groundwater and feeds freshwater habitats of pools, wadis, and springs, where wildlife such as dragonflies, toads, and fish can be found. The mountains themselves attract endangered wildlife such as the Arabian leopard and the Arabian tahr (an ungulate related to goats).

### Dubai Creek

The main cities of the UAE are favoured with creeks (khors), which are deep saltwater inlets that run from sea into the city. The creeks of UAE coastal cities served as the basis for the fishing and pearling industries that defined the local economy until modern times.

The most famous of these is Dubai Creek (Khor Dubai), which, in ancient times, extended all the way to the city of al-Ain and was called by the Greeks the River Zara. The creek divides the city into its two older sections: Deira and Bur Dubai (the place where a branch of the Bani Yas tribe, migrating from Abu Dhabi, settled in 1833, to become later the Al Maktoum dynasty, the ruling family of Dubai). Dredging in the 1950s was critical to the emergence of Dubai as a major modern port and trade centre (Sharja's creek silted up at about the same time and became a backwater).

The creek served as a waterway and sheltered port for trade, fishing, pearling, and piracy, helping Dubai to grow into a major shipping and commercial centre. The distinctive local sailboats, known as dhows, crisscrossed the waters of the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean all the way to India and the East African coast, carrying goods and merchandise back and forth. After the collapse of pearling and with the increased strategic importance of the country, the creek was transformed into a modern waterway. This was inaugurated in 1955 by construction and dredging projects to widen and deepen the creek to accommodate larger sea-going vessels and to build breakwaters and docks to facilitate the loading and unloading of ships. Several bridges over the creek now connect the two parts of Dubai, the first of which, Al Maktoum Bridge, was built in 1963. The creek continues to play an important economic role through trade and tourism, while most shipping activities now take place at much larger ports, such as Port Rashid and Jebel Ali Port.

### Land Fertility

Given the desert climate of the country, the arable land in the UAE is estimated at 0.8 percent, of which 27 percent is irrigated. The area used for permanent crops is 2.4 percent, most of it artificially irrigated (Worldbank data). The UAE has been working to develop its agricultural potential, with research in new irrigation and fertilization technologies.

Approximately 16 percent of the UAE's people (in 2010) live rural and semi-nomadic lives and support themselves through various agricultural activities. Despite the high aridity, the country has developed a thriving agriculture, leading to year-round self-sufficiency in some vegetable crops. There are also growing meat and dairy industries, with many camels and cattle. The UAE has 42 million date palm trees, the largest concentration of palm trees in the world.

The UAE has several oases in the desert south-west and south-east of Abu Dhabi, which offer adequate sources of underground water for human settlement and limited agriculture. The largest of these is the Liwa Oasis, located at the edge of the Empty Quarter, near the border with Saudi Arabia.

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