

Geography of Iran



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Iran is a country in southwestern Asia, located on the eastern side of the Persian Gulf. It lies at the easternmost edge of the geographic and cultural region known as the Middle East. To begin to know the geography of Iran better, let us start with the neighbors of this country:

The neighbors of Iran are Armenia and Azerbaijan on the northwest, Turkmenistan on the northeast, Iraq, and Turkey on the west, Afghanistan, and Pakistan on the east.

Iran is the second largest country in the Middle East, after Saudi Arabia. It extends over a total area of 1,648,000 sq km. The country is almost triangle-shaped with its longest side extending from the border with Turkey in the northwest to the border with Pakistan in the southeast as long as 2,500 km.

More than half of Iran's international border of 4,430 km is coastline, including 740 km along the Caspian Sea in the north and 1,700 km along the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea in the south. Bandar-e-Abbas is the largest harbor in the south of Iran located on the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow passage separating the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea through which tens of oil tankers are heading for various destinations in different corners of the world every day.

Area and boundaries

Area:

total: 1,648,195 km² (636,372 sq. mi)

land: 1,531,595 km² (591,352 sq. mi)

water: 116,600 km² (45,000 sq. mi)

Land boundaries:

total: 5,894 kilometers (3,662 mi)

border countries: Afghanistan 921 kilometers (572 mi), Armenia 44 kilometers (27 mi), Azerbaijan-proper 432 kilometers (268 mi), Azerbaijan-Nakhichevan exclave 179 kilometers (111 mi), Iraq 1,599 kilometers (994 mi), Pakistan 959 kilometers (596 mi), Turkey 534 kilometers (332 mi), Turkmenistan 1,148 kilometers (713 mi).

Maritime boundaries: Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman

Coastline: 2,815 kilometers (1,749 mi)

note: Iran also borders the Caspian Sea, for 740 kilometers (460 mi)

Maritime claims:

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

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

exclusive economic zone: 168,718 km² (65,142 sq. mi) with bilateral agreements, or median lines in the Persian Gulf

continental shelf: natural prolongation

Elevation extremes:

lowest point: Caspian Sea -28 metres (-92 ft.)

Highest point: Mount Damavand 5,610 metres (18,410 ft.)

Natural Regions in Iran

As one of the world's most mountainous countries, Iran contains two major ranges of mountains, the Alborz with the highest peak in Asia west of the Himalayas, Damavand (5671 m above sea level) and the Zagros that cuts across the country for more than 1,600 km extending from northwest to the southeast of the country. The peaks exceeding 2,300 m in these two ranges capture a considerable amount of moisture coming either from the Caspian Sea southward or the Mediterranean eastward.

There are also some other local ranges. Within these mountainous rims lies a series of basins known collectively as the central plateau. They include Dasht-e-Kavir, a huge salt-encrusted desert in north central Iran and Kavir-e-Lut, a sand-and-pebble desert in the southeast.

There are several fertile oases in these regions that are living examples of ancient Iranians' determination to survive and bestow life to the arid areas.

There are numerous rivers in Iran, but nearly all of them are relatively short, shallow streams unsuitable for navigation. The country's only navigable river, the Karun, flows through the city of Ahvaz in the southwest and empties to the Persian Gulf. Most rivers originate from the mountains and drain into the interior basins.

Although around 1/3 of Iran's total territory is arable, only %10.4 is under cultivation. An additional %6 of the total land is used for pasture. Forested areas have declined slightly in recent decades and account for %4.5 of the total territory.

Plants & Animals in Iran

More than 10,000 plant species have been identified in Iran. The natural vegetation in most of the country has been devastated and used for cultivating crops or feeding cattle. Natural forests at the Alborz consist of various trees like beech, oak, deciduous trees and conifers. There are wooded areas in some regions of higher elevation in the Zagros Mountains consisting primarily of oak.

Wild fruit trees grow in both the Alborz and Zagros mountains. They include almond, pear, pomegranate, and walnut. In the more arid central part of the country, wild pistachio and other resistant trees grow in areas that have not been disturbed by human activities. Tamarisk and other salt-tolerant bushes grow along the margins of the Dasht-e-Kavir.

A wide variety of native mammals, reptiles, birds, and insects live in Iran. Many species of mammals-including wolves, foxes, bears, mountain goats, red mountain sheep, rabbits, and gerbils continue to thrive. Some species of birds inhabit Iran and a large number of the species are migratory birds that spend part of the year in other countries.

Iran's Topography

Iran covers such a large area of land (approximately 636,369 square miles) that the country contains a vast variety of landscapes and terrains. Much of Iran is made up of the Iranian Plateau, with the exception of the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf coastlines where the only large plains are found. Iran is also one of the most mountainous

countries in the world. These large mountain ranges cut through the landscape and divide the numerous basins and plateaus. The western side of the country possesses the largest mountain ranges such as the Caucasus, Alborz, and Zagros Mountains. The Alborz contains Iran's highest point on Mount Damavand. The northern part of the country is marked by dense rainforests and jungles, whereas eastern Iran is mostly desert basins which also contain some salt lakes formed due to the mountain ranges that interfere with rain clouds.

Iran's Climate

Iran has what is considered a variable climate that ranges from semi-arid to subtropical. In the northwest, winters are cold with heavy snowfall and subfreezing temperatures during December and January. Spring and fall are relatively mild, while summers are dry and hot. In the south, however, winters are mild and the summers are very hot, with average daily temperatures in July exceeding 100 degrees (38°C). On the Khuzestan plain, the extreme summer heat is accompanied by high humidity.

In general, Iran has an arid climate in which most of the relatively scant annual precipitation falls from October through April. In most of the country, yearly precipitation averages only 9.84 inches (25 cm) or less. The major exceptions to this semiarid and arid climate are the higher mountain valleys of the Zagros and the Caspian coastal plain, where precipitation averages at least 19.68 inches (50 cm) annually. In the western part of the Caspian, Iran sees the greatest rainfall in the country where it exceeds 39.37 inches (100 cm) annually and is distributed relatively evenly throughout the year rather than being confined to a rainy season. This climate contrasts greatly with some basins of the Central Plateau that receive 3.93 inches (10 cm) or less of precipitation annually where it has been said that "water scarcity poses the most severe human security challenge in Iran today" (UN Resident Coordinator for Iran, Gary Lewis).

Sources:

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