

Saudi Arabia,^[e] officially the **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)**,^[f] is a country in [West Asia](#). It covers the bulk of the [Arabian Peninsula](#) and has a land area of about 2150000 km² (830000 sq mi), making it the [fifth-largest country](#) in [Asia](#) and the largest in the [Middle East](#). It is bordered by the [Red Sea](#) to the west; [Jordan](#), [Iraq](#), and [Kuwait](#) to the north; the [Persian Gulf](#), [Qatar](#) and the [United Arab Emirates](#) to the east; [Oman](#) to the southeast; and [Yemen](#) to the south. [Bahrain](#) is an island country off its east coast. The [Gulf of Aqaba](#) in the northwest separates Saudi Arabia from [Egypt](#) and [Israel](#). Saudi Arabia is the only country with a coastline along both the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and most of [its terrain](#) consists of [arid desert](#), lowland, steppe, and [mountains](#). Saudi Arabia's capital and [largest city](#) is [Riyadh](#); the kingdom also is the location of Islam's two [holiest cities](#) of [Mecca](#) and [Medina](#).

[Pre-Islamic Arabia](#), the territory that constitutes modern-day Saudi Arabia, was the site of several ancient cultures and civilizations; the [prehistory of Saudi Arabia](#) shows some of the earliest traces of human activity in the world.^[17] The world's second-largest religion,^[18] [Islam](#), emerged in what is now Saudi Arabia. In the early 7th century, the Islamic prophet [Muhammad](#) united the population of the [Arabian Peninsula](#) and created a single Islamic religious polity.^[19] Following his death in 632, his followers rapidly expanded the territory under Muslim rule beyond Arabia, [conquering huge and unprecedented swathes of territory](#) (from the [Iberian Peninsula](#) in the west to parts of [Central](#) and [South Asia](#) in the east) in a matter of decades. Arab dynasties originating from modern-day Saudi Arabia founded the [Rashidun](#) (632–661), [Umayyad](#) (661–750), [Abbasid](#) (750–1517), and [Fatimid](#) (909–1171) caliphates, as well as [numerous other dynasties](#) in Asia, [Africa](#), and [Europe](#).