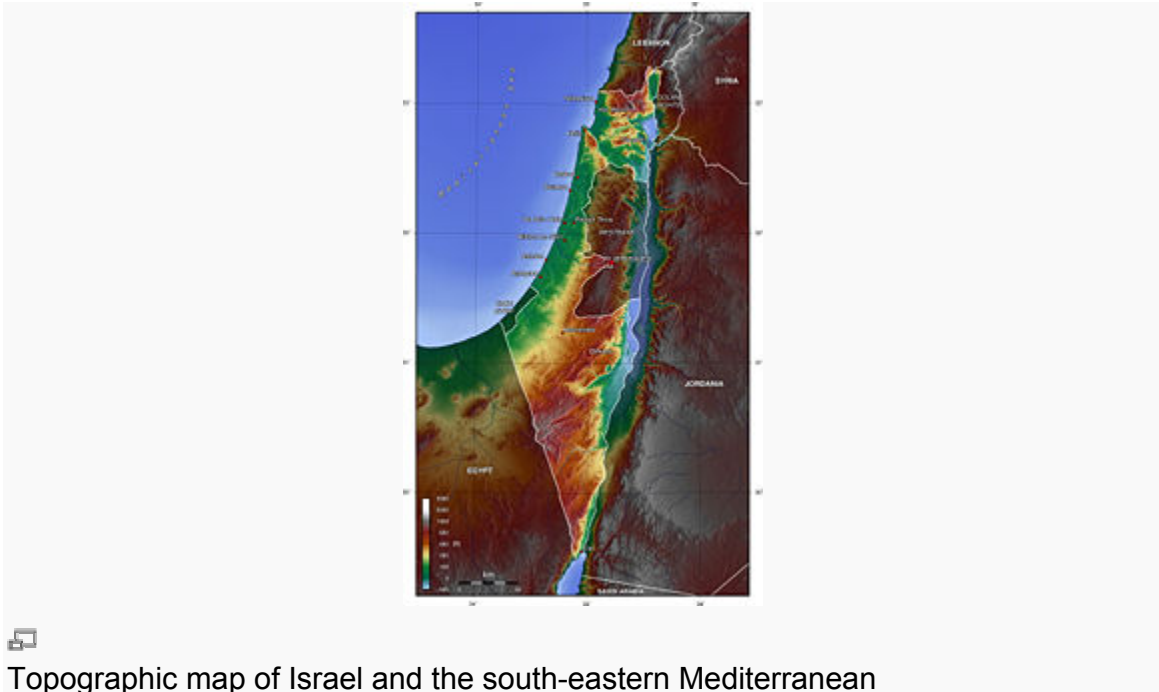



Geography of Israel

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Topographic map of Israel and the south-eastern Mediterranean

Israel is a country located at  $31^{\circ}30'N$, $34^{\circ}45'E$ at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea in the west of the continent of Asia. It is bounded to the north by Lebanon, the northeast by Syria, the east and southeast by Jordan, the southwest by Egypt, and to the west by the Mediterranean Sea. Before June 1967, the area composing Israel (resulting from the armistice lines of 1949 and 1950) was about 20 700 km² (8,000 mi²), which included 445 km² (172 mi²) of inland waters. Thus Israel was roughly the size of the state of New Jersey, stretching 424 km (263 mi) from north to south. Its width ranged from 114 km (71 mi) to, at its narrowest point, 15 km (9 mi). In the June 1967 Six-Day War, Israel captured territories totaling an additional 7 099 km² (2,743 mi²). These territories include the West Bank, 5 879 km² (2,270 mi²); East Jerusalem (annexed, according Israeli law), 70 km² (27 mi²); and the Golan Heights (de facto annexation), 1 150 km² (444 mi²).



Israel on the world map

Physical geography

Geology



Hills of the Judean Desert

Israel is divided east-west by a mountain range running north to south along the coast. Jerusalem sits on the top of this ridge, east of which lies the Dead Sea graben (an elongated, relatively depressed crustal unit bounded by faults on both sides).

The numerous limestone and sandstone layers of the Israeli mountains allow the water to pour from the west flank to the east. Several springs have formed along the Dead Sea, each an oasis, most notably the oases at Ein Gedi and Ein Bokek (Neve Zohar) where settlements have now developed.

Israel also has a number of large limestone karsts. The temperature in these caves is a comfortable 20°C or thereabouts, although only one is open to the public.

Very common all around the country are small natural caves and abris. These have been used for thousands of years historically as shelter, housing, storage rooms, barns and as places of public gatherings.

[edit] **Rivers and lakes**

Israel's border with Jordan is marked by the Jordan River which eventually empties into the Dead Sea, the lowest point on Earth and its saltiest body of water. Israel also has the Sea of Galilee.

[edit] **Artificial waterways**



The view of Haifa's coastline from the Bahai World Center on Mt. Carmel

There are no navigable artificial waterways in Israel. The National Water Carrier, a conduit for drinking water, may be considered to be an artificial waterway. The idea of a channel connecting the Mediterranean and Dead Seas or the Red and Dead Seas has been discussed and dismissed.

[edit] **Coastline**

Israel's main coastline runs north to south from the border of Lebanon to the Gaza Strip very smoothly with spectacular beaches along the way along the Mediterranean Sea. The smooth coastline is only interrupted in Haifa where Mount Carmel puts a curve in it. The region neighboring this coast is referred to as the Israeli Coastal Plain.

Israel has a few miles of coastline at the north-western tip of the Red Sea (Gulf of Aqaba).

[edit] **Topography**



Annotated satellite image of Israel and the southeastern Mediterranean region

Israel is divided into four main geographical regions: the Mediterranean coastal plain, the Central Hills, the Jordan Rift Valley, and the Negev Desert.

[edit] **Mediterranean Coastal Plain**

Main article: Israeli Coastal Plain

The Coastal Plain stretches from the Lebanese border in the north to Gaza in the south, interrupted only by Cape Carmel at Haifa Bay. It is about forty kilometers wide at Gaza and narrows toward the north to about five kilometers at the Lebanese border. The region is fertile and humid (historically malarial) and is known for its citrus orchards and viniculture. The plain is traversed by several short streams, of which only three, the Alexander, Yarkon and Kishon, have permanent water flows.

[edit] **The Central Hills**

East of the coastal plain lies the central highland region. In the north of this region lie the mountains and hills of Upper Galilee and Lower Galilee; farther to the south are the Samarian Hills with numerous small, fertile valleys; and south of Jerusalem are the mainly barren hills of Judea,

including Mount Hebron. The central highlands average 610 meters (2,000 ft) in height and reach their highest elevation at Har Meron, at 1,208 meters (3,963 ft), in Galilee near Tzfat (Safed). Several valleys cut across the highlands roughly from east to west; the largest is the Yizreel or Jezreel Valley (also known as the Plain of Esdraelon), which stretches forty-eight kilometers (30 mi) from Haifa southeast to the valley of the Jordan River, and is nineteen kilometers across at its widest point.

[edit] **Jordan Rift Valley**

Main article: Jordan Rift Valley

East of the central highlands lies the Jordan Rift Valley, which is a small part of the 6,500-kilometer-long (4,040 mi) Syrian-East African Rift. In Israel the Rift Valley is dominated by the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee (an important freshwater source also known as Lake Tiberias and to Israelis as Lake Kinneret), and the Dead Sea. The Jordan, Israel's largest river (322 km/200 mi), originates in the Dan, Baniyas, and Hasbani rivers near Mount Hermon in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains and flows south through the drained Hula Basin into the freshwater Lake Tiberias. Lake Tiberias is 165 square kilometers (63.7 mi²) in size and, depending on the season and rainfall, is at about 213 meters (700 ft) below sea level. With a water capacity estimated at 3 cubic kilometers (106 billion cubic feet), it serves as the principal reservoir of the National Water Carrier (also known as the Kinneret-Negev Conduit). The Jordan River continues its course from the southern end of Lake Tiberias (forming the boundary between the West Bank and Jordan) to its terminus in the highly saline Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is 1,020 square kilometers (393 mi²) in size and, at 420 meters (1,339 ft) below sea level, is the lowest point in the world. South of the Dead Sea, the Rift Valley continues in the Nahal HaArava (Wadi al Arabah in Arabic), which has no permanent water flow, for 170 kilometers (106 mi) to the Gulf of Aqaba.

[edit] **Negev Desert**

Main article: Negev

The Negev Desert comprises approximately 12,000 square kilometers (4,600 sq. miles), more than half of Israel's total land area. Geographically it is an extension of the Sinai Desert, forming a rough triangle with its base in the north near Beersheba (aka Beersheva), the Dead Sea, and the southern Judean Hills, and it has its apex in the southern tip of the country at Eilat. Topographically, it parallels the other regions of the country, with lowlands in the west, hills in the central portion, and the Nahal HaArava as its eastern border.

[edit] **Elevation extremes**

- Lowest point is at the Dead Sea -408 m (-1,339 ft). This is also the lowest point on land on the Earth.
- Highest point is at Mount Hermon at 2236m (approximately 7330 ft), in the Golan Heights.

[edit] **Climate**

Israel has a Mediterranean climate characterized by long, hot, rainless summers and relatively short, cool, rainy winters. The climate is determined by Israel's location between the subtropical aridity of the Sahara and the Arabian deserts, and the subtropical humidity of the Levant or eastern Mediterranean. The climate conditions are highly variable within the state and modified locally by altitude, latitude, and the proximity to the Mediterranean sea.

January is the coldest month with average temperatures ranging from 6°C to 15°C (43°F to 59°F), and July and August are the hottest months at 22°C to 33°C (72°F to 91°F) on average across the state. Summers are very humid along the Mediterranean coast but dry in the central highlands, the Rift Valley, and the Negev Desert. In Eilat, the desert city, summer daytime-temperatures are often the highest in the state, at times reaching 44°C to 46°C (111°F to 115°F). More than 70 percent of the average rainfall in Israel falls between November and March; June through September are usually rainless. Rainfall is unevenly distributed, decreasing sharply as one moves

southward. In the extreme south, rainfall averages near 30 millimeters (1.2 in) annually; in the north, average annual rainfall exceeds 900 millimeters (35.5 in). Rainfall varies from season to season and from year to year, particularly in the Negev Desert. Precipitation is often concentrated in violent storms, causing erosion and flooding. In winter, it may take the form of snow at the higher elevations of the central highlands, including Jerusalem. Mount Hermon has seasonal snow which covers all three of its peaks for most of the year in winter and spring. The areas of the country most cultivated are those that receive more than 300 millimeters (12 in) of rainfall annually; about one-third of the country is cultivable.

Thunderstorms and hail are common throughout the rainy season and waterspouts occasionally hit the Mediterranean coast, capable of causing only minor damage. However, supercell thunderstorms and a true F2 tornado hit the Western Galilee April 4 2006, causing significant damage and 75 injuries.^[citation needed]

[edit] **Environmental concerns**

- Natural hazards:
 - Sandstorms may occur during spring
 - Droughts
 - Flash Floods
 - Regular earthquakes
- Current Environmental Issues
 - Limited arable land and natural fresh water resources pose serious constraints
 - Desertification
 - Air Pollution from industrial and vehicle emissions
 - Groundwater Pollution from industrial and domestic waste, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides
- International Environmental Agreements:
 - Party to:

Convention on Biological Diversity
UNFCCC - Climate Change
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
Convention on the International Trade in Endangered
Species of Wild Flora and Fauna
Hazardous Wastes
Nuclear Test Ban
Montreal Protocol - Ozone Layer Protection
MARPOL 73/78 - Ship Pollution
Convention on Wetlands of International Importance
Especially As Waterfowl Habitat

- Signed, but not ratified:
 - Kyoto Protocol
 - Marine Life Conservation

[edit] Human geography

In 2006 the total population of the Israeli inhabited places is estimated at 7.1 million. Depending on the definitions applied, there were three to five metropolises, which included some of Israel's 71 cities and hundreds of towns.

Among Israel's villages, the kibbutzim and moshavim are unique types of settlement to Israel. There are 242 Israeli settlements and civilian land use sites in the West Bank, 42 in the Golan Heights, and 29 in East Jerusalem (February 2002 est.);



Panorama of Kibbutz Barkai in the Wadi Ara region

[edit] Demographics

Further information: Demographics of Israel

Israel is an incredibly diverse society made up predominantly of Jews and Arab ethnic groups.

[edit] **Urban geography**

Israeli metropolises are Tel Aviv, Haifa and Beer Sheva and possibly also Jerusalem [1] and Nazareth [2].

In 2005 there were 71 Israeli cities, including 3 Israeli cities in the West Bank (see list of cities in Israel). The status of city is awarded by the Israeli minister of internal affairs to settlements that apply for this status and usually pass a threshold of 20,000, although the minister can, and in some cases does, give out the status beforehand.

Israeli towns of 5,000 residents and more are incorporated as local councils. Most towns between 2,000 and 5,000 residents are local committees within regional councils, although exceptions exist.



Panorama showing north Tel Aviv (right) and Ramat Gan (left) taken from Tel Aviv University

See also: List of regional councils in Israel



Closeup of Israel showing cities and towns

[edit] **Rural geography**

Israel's rural space includes several unique kinds of settlements, notably the moshav and the kibbutz. Originally these were collective and cooperative settlements respectively. Over time, the degree of cooperation in these settlements has decreased and in several of them the cooperative structure has been dismantled altogether. All rural settlements and many small towns (some of which are dubbed "rurban settlements") are incorporated in regional councils.

[edit] **Political geography**

Further information: Politics of Israel

- Area:
 - Total: 20,770 km² (8,019 mi²)
 - Land: 28,023 km² (10,820 mi²)
 - Water: 440 km² (170 mi²)
- Land boundaries:
 - Total: 28,023 km² (10,820 mi²)
 - Border countries:
 - Egypt 266 km (165 mi)
 - Jordan 238 km (148 mi)
 - Lebanon 79 km (49 mi)
 - Syria 76 km (47 mi)
 - 273 km (170 mi)
- Maritime claims:
 - Continental shelf: to depth of exploitation
 - Territorial sea: 12 nm (22.2 km)
- Northernmost point - the tripoint with Syria and Lebanon, Golan Heights ¹
- Easternmost point - an unnamed location on the border with Syria ²
- Southernmost point - the point at which the Israel-Egypt border enters the Gulf of Aqaba, east of Taba, Egypt
- Westernmost point - the Egypt-Israel-Gaza tripoint, is Israel's westernmost point.



Beaches along the shores of Israel

[edit] **Economic geography**

Further information: Economy of Israel

Natural resources

Copper, phosphates, bromide, potash, clay, sand, sulfur, asphalt, manganese, small amounts of natural gas and crude oil

Land use

Arable land: 17.02%

Permanent crops: 4.17%

Other: 78.81% (1998 est.)

Irrigated land

1,990 km² or 768 mi² (1998 est.)