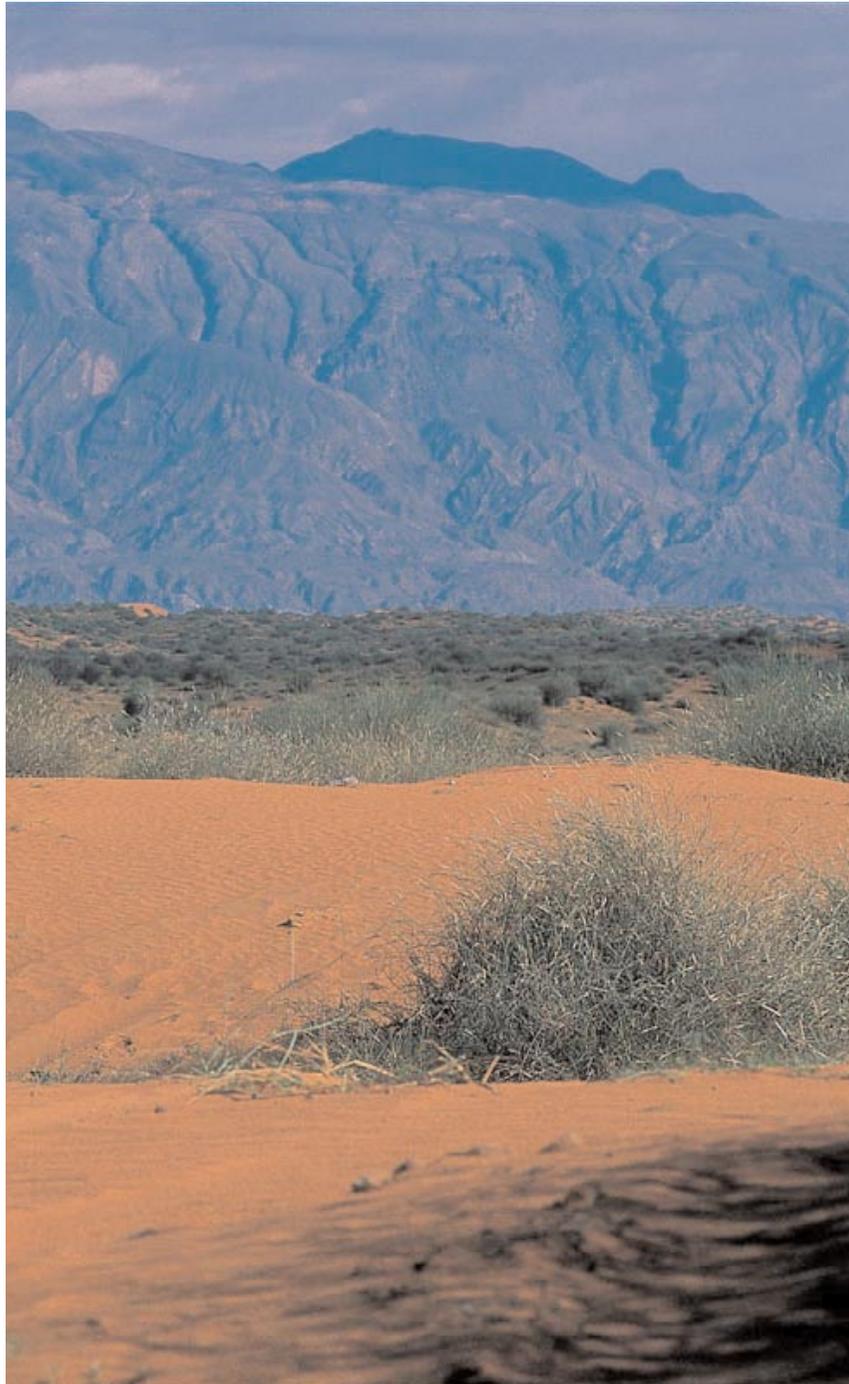




THE COUNTRY



## PHYSICAL FEATURES

THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES is situated along the south-eastern tip of the Arabian peninsula between 22.5° and 26° N and between 51° and 56.25° E. Qatar lies to the west and north-west, Saudi Arabia to the west and south and Oman to the north, east and south-east. Occupying a total area of about 83,600 square kilometres (32,400 square miles) – roughly the size of Portugal – the UAE has 700 kilometres of coastline, excluding islands, approximately 600 kilometres along the Arabian Gulf and 100 kilometres bordering the Gulf of Oman.

Despite the fact that four-fifths of its land area is arid desert, the UAE is a country of contrasting landscapes. To the north and west are extensive areas of coastal salt flats (*sabkha*). Isolated *sabkha*, otherwise surrounded by dune and gravel desert, also exist inland (particularly in Abu Dhabi's Western Region).

The sandy desert begins behind the coastal *sabkha*, with little white dune ripples eventually forming an expanse of large orange-red dunes in the south-west. About 100 kilometres from the coast towering dunes rising to 200 metres are common. These form part of the Empty Quarter or Rub al-Khali, a vast desert which stretches beyond the UAE's southern border.

The sand and gravel desert dominating most of the south and west of the country extends east to the jagged Hajar Mountain chain that divides the UAE from north to south in the Northern Emirates and forms the eastern boundary of the UAE further to the south. The rocky slopes rise to 1300 metres within UAE territory, falling steeply to the UAE's East Coast on the Gulf of Oman where a fertile alluvial gravel plain separates the precipitous mountains from the ocean. To the north-east, a fertile gravel plain also separates the mountains from the coast around Ra's al-Khaimah.

Small sandy islets, patch and fringing coral reefs, sea grass beds, mangrove stands and *khors* (tidal inlets) as well as long sandy beaches abound along the UAE's shallow Arabian Gulf coast. For the most part seawater depth is less than 10 metres with an average overall depth of 31 metres and a narrow tidal range (ca. 0.5–1.5 metres). Water temperatures in the Gulf exceed 33°C in summer, falling in winter to 16°C in the north and 22–24°C in the south.

Larger offshore islands in the Arabian Gulf (Dalma, Sir Abu Nu'air, Sir Bani Yas, Qarnein and Zirku) are mostly the elevated portions of salt domes.

The Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea area is a much deeper body of water which is influenced by the Indian Ocean. Here upwellings of cold or cool nutrient-rich waters and abundant plankton support commercially important fisheries.

## CLIMATE

Straddling the Tropic of Cancer, the UAE is warm and sunny in winter and hot and humid during the summer months. Winter daytime temperatures average a very pleasant 26°C, although nights can be relatively cool, between 12–15°C on the coast, and less than 5°C in the depths of the desert or high in the mountains. Local north-westerly winds (*shamal*) frequently develop during the winter, bringing cooler windy conditions. Summer temperatures are in the mid-40s, but can be higher inland. Humidity in coastal areas averages between 50 and 60 per cent, touching over 90 per cent in summer and autumn. Inland it is far less humid.

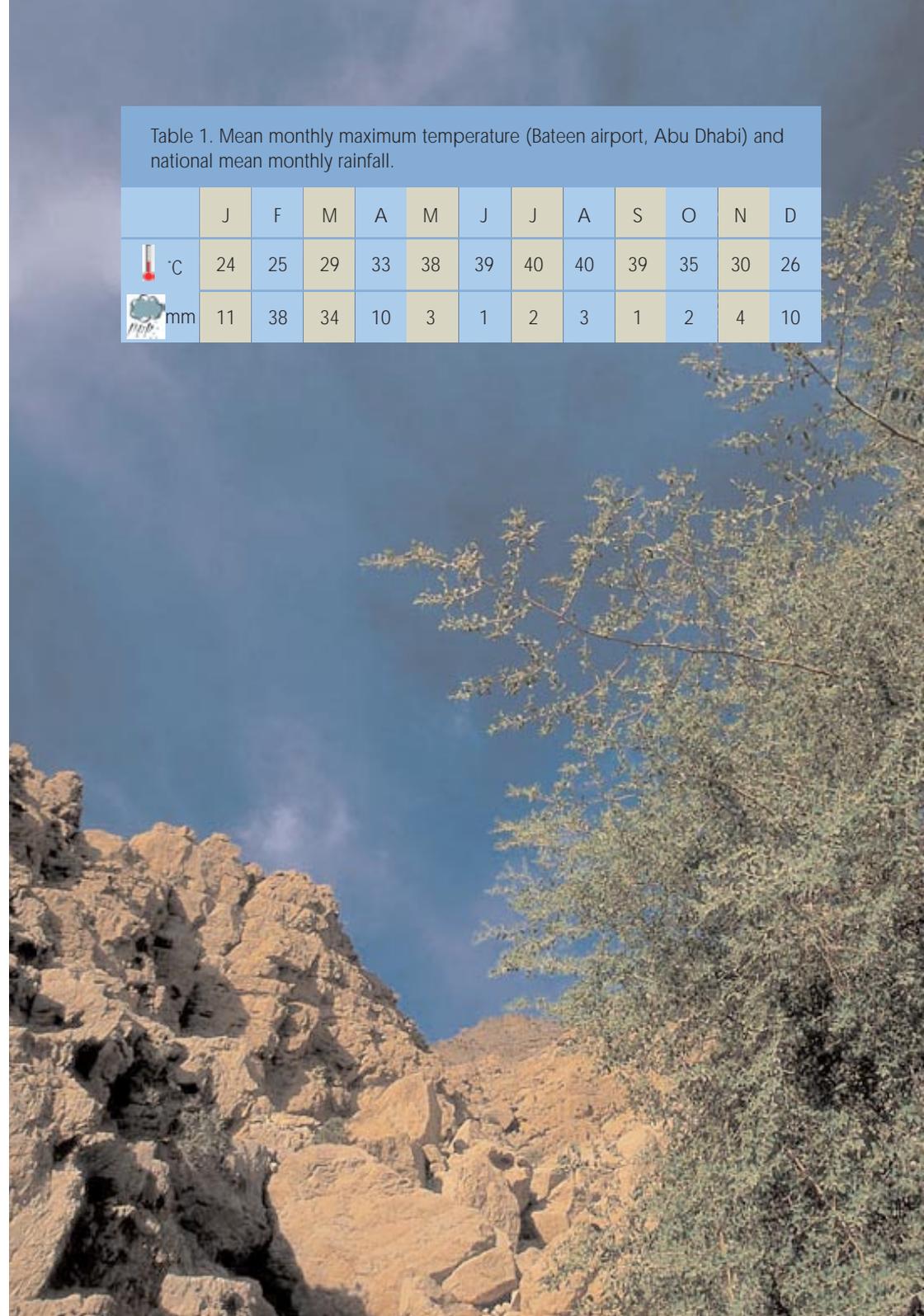
Rainfall is sparse and intermittent. In most years it rains during the winter months, usually in February or March, but occasionally earlier. Winter rains take the form of short sharp bursts, which, if occurring in the Hajar Mountains, run off rapidly into wadis and onto the downwashed gravel plains, perhaps reaching the sea on the East Coast, but invariably braiding widely and soaking rapidly into the desert on the west side piedmont. Further west and along the coast, rainfall is often trapped on the *sabkha* (salt flat) surface until it evaporates or soaks away. Inland, surface water seldom remains for more than a day or two, except where ponds or dams have been constructed.

Localised thunderstorms occasionally occur during the summer. Generally appearing over the mountains of the south and east of the country, these rumbling cloudbursts, a breakaway from the south-west monsoon affecting southern Arabia, can give rise to severe flash floods.

Some years are totally dry, with no rain recorded from some locations for over three years, and it is only through the regular formation of dew that vegetation and wildlife can survive. This applies even to those places that experience a relatively high annual rainfall: at the Hajar Mountain town of Masafi, for example, 350 mm may fall in a 'wet' year, whereas as little as 30 mm may be recorded in a 'dry' year.

Table 1. Mean monthly maximum temperature (Bateen airport, Abu Dhabi) and national mean monthly rainfall.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
 °C	24	25	29	33	38	39	40	40	39	35	30	26
 mm	11	38	34	10	3	1	2	3	1	2	4	10



## THE SEVEN EMIRATES

### ABU DHABI

Abu Dhabi, which occupies over 86 per cent (67,340 square kilometres) of the country's total landmass, is the largest of the seven emirates that constitute the federation known as the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Abu Dhabi city, capital of the emirate and of the UAE, is situated on an island about 8 kilometres wide and 14.5 kilometres long, which is connected to the mainland by two bridges, Maqta and Mustafah.

Sheikh Zayed, President of the UAE, has his home in Abu Dhabi and Federal Government offices, the Federal National Council (Parliament) building and foreign embassies are located in this compact modern city. Since Abu Dhabi emirate possesses more than 90 per cent of the UAE's oil reserves and produces over 85 per cent of its oil, the city is also the headquarters of the main oil companies and a major business, manufacturing and trading centre.

Architecturally, Abu Dhabi is a fascinating place where the domes and minarets of traditional mosques sit comfortably in the shade of gleaming futuristic skyscrapers. Tree-lined boulevards, manicured roundabouts, dazzling fountains and extensive parks soften the modern cityscape. All the major shopping malls and souqs are within easy reach. A short distance from the city centre the wonderfully engineered Abu Dhabi Corniche runs for 8 kilometres along the island's mangrove-fringed and white sandy shores. Many of the city's top class hotels and restaurants are located along the downtown section of this scenic stretch.

Al Ain, the capital of Abu Dhabi's mainland Eastern Region, is a green, low-rise city nestling in the shade of Jebel Hafit. The surrounding district, blessed with substantial groundwater resources, is a rich agricultural area and is also home to the UAE's main university.

Bida Zayed (Zayed City) is the capital of the Western Region, Abu Dhabi emirate's third administrative sector. This area has undergone extensive afforestation in recent years, including the planting of more than 20 million evergreens, covering at least 100,000 hectares. The country's main onshore oil fields are located in this region, as is the largest oil refinery (Ruwais). Liwa, a series of oasis villages and the site of spectacular high dunes on the edge of the Empty Quarter, is situated to the south-west.

Abu Dhabi emirate also possesses a number of important islands, including Das, Mubarraz and Zirku, near where the main offshore oil fields are located.



Closer inshore are many more islands, including Dalma, Sir Bani Yas, Marawah, Abu al-Abyadh, and Saadiyat.

#### DUBAI

The Emirate of Dubai extends along the Arabian Gulf coast of the UAE for approximately 72 kilometres. Dubai has an area of c. 3885 square kilometres, equivalent to 5 per cent of the country's total landmass.

Dubai city is built along the edge of a narrow 10-kilometre winding creek that divides the southern section of Bur Dubai, the city's traditional heart, from the northern area, Deira, which is a bustling commercial centre, containing a range of retail outlets, souqs, hotels, golf courses etc. Bur Dubai and Deira are linked by Al Maktoum and Al Garhoud bridges, as well as Al Shindagha tunnel, which passes under the creek.

About 20 minutes from Dubai city, Jumeirah Beach is a major tourism area with a number of award-winning hotels and a delightful sandy beach. Jebel Ali, home of a huge man-made port and the largest free trade zone in Arabia, is located about 30 kilometres away. Inland is the attractive mountain resort town of Hatta. Dubai has four offshore oil fields, Fateh, Southwest Fateh, Rashid and Falah, and an onshore gas and condensate field at Margham.

#### SHARJAH

The Emirate of Sharjah occupies an area of 2590 square kilometres, equivalent to 3.3 per cent of the country's total landmass. Sharjah has the distinction of being the only emirate to have land on both coasts since, although the main city is situated on the Arabian Gulf coast between Dubai and Ra's al-Khaimah, enclaves belonging to Sharjah, Kalba, Khor Fakkan and Dibba al-Husn, are located across the Hajar Mountains on the coast, bordering the Gulf of Oman. Two offshore islands also belong to Sharjah: Abu Musa, which has been under military occupation by Iran since 1971, and Sir Abu Nu'air.

Sharjah city, the main administrative and commercial centre, has some fine restored traditional buildings, together with a number of impressive museums. Distinctive landmarks are the two major covered souqs, reflecting Islamic design, and the many elegant mosques. In 1998 Sharjah city was designated by UNESCO as the cultural capital of the Arab world for its commitment to art, culture and the preservation of its heritage.

Sharjah encompasses some important oasis areas, the most famous of which is the inland agricultural area of Dhaid, whilst on the East Coast





precipitous mountains sweep down to sandy beaches washed by the clear blue Indian Ocean. Khor Fakkan provides Sharjah with a major East Coast port. Dibba to the north of Khor Fakkan has a long and valiant history whilst Khor Kalba to the south is the location of an extensive mangrove stand that has been designated a nature reserve.

Sharjah's Mubarak oilfield is located near the island of Abu Musa. The emirate also has an important onshore gas and condensate field at Saja'a.

#### AJMAN

Ajman, located a short distance north-east of Sharjah's capital city, has a beautiful 16 kilometre coastline fringed by a sandy beach. It is the smallest of the seven emirates in terms of its physical size, covering about 259 square kilometres, equivalent to 0.3 per cent of the country's total landmass.

The capital city, Ajman, has an historic fort at its centre. The emirate is blessed with a natural harbour in which the Port of Ajman is situated. Fishing and dhow building are still important industries. Ajman has two inland enclaves: Masfut is an agricultural village located in the mountains 110 kilometres to the south-east of the city, whilst Manama lies approximately 60 kilometres to the east.

#### UMM AL-QAIWAIN

Umm al-Qaiwain, which has a coastline stretching to 24 kilometres, is located on the Arabian Gulf coast, between Sharjah to the south-west and Ra's al-Khaimah to the north-east. Its inland border lies about 32 kilometres from the main coastline. The total area of the emirate is approximately 777 square kilometres, equivalent to 1 per cent of the country's total landmass.

Umm al-Qaiwain city, capital of the emirate, is situated on a narrow peninsula encircling a large creek 1 kilometre wide by 5 kilometres long. The preserved remains of an old fort, its main gate flanked by defensive cannons, are a delightful feature of the city. Traditional occupations of fishing and date cultivation are still important, but a mariculture research centre and a free zone have helped to develop the emirate whose main attraction lies in its small size, relatively remote location, and long clean beaches.

Sinayah island, lying a short distance offshore, has important mangrove areas together with a breeding colony of endangered Socotra cormorants. Falaj al-Mu'alla, an attractive natural oasis, is located 50 kilometres south-east of Umm al-Qaiwain city.



## RA'S AL-KHAIMAH

Ra's al-Khaimah, the most northerly emirate on the UAE's west coast, has an impressive coastline of approximately 64 kilometres bordering the Arabian Gulf. This is backed by a fertile palm-filled plain which is overshadowed by the precipitous Hajar Mountains to the east. In the north, close to the emirate's border with the Sultanate of Oman, the sheer rocky slopes seem to rise straight out of the sea. The area of the emirate is 1680 square kilometres, equivalent to 2.2 per cent of the UAE's total landmass. Ra's al-Khaimah also possesses a number of islands including those of Greater and Lesser Tunb, occupied by Iran since 1971.

A winding creek, Khor Ra's al-Khaimah, divides the city of Ra's al-Khaimah into two distinct areas connected by a large modern bridge. The old fort housing Ra's al-Khaimah National Museum and the old souq are located in the western section, old Ra's al-Khaimah, whilst the eastern area, Al Nakheel, is a modern commercial centre.

For centuries Ra's al-Khaimah depended on seafaring, fishing and agriculture and these occupations are still important today, albeit with a distinctly modern outlook. Digdagger in the fertile hinterland is now a major agricultural area supplying fruit and vegetables to the other emirates. Mina Saqr, to the north of Ra's al-Khaimah city, is an important modern port. Stone quarrying in the mountains and oil production from the offshore Saleh field have also helped to fund prosperity.

## FUJAIRAH

Fujairah, with a breathtaking coastline of more than 90 kilometres, is the only emirate situated along the Gulf of Oman, although it also has outlying areas to the west of the Hajar Mountains. The emirate occupies an area of 1165 square kilometres, equivalent to 1.5 per cent of the country's total landmass.

Fujairah's natural beauty features jagged mountains and valleys sweeping down to the palm-fringed coastal plain. There are some stunning beaches and good diving locations along the coast, whilst both the coastal strip and the hinterland contain many cultural and historic sites. Agriculture and fishing, two traditional mainstays of the economy, still feature prominently.

Fujairah city is an attractive town and a rapidly developing commercial and tourist centre. Its strategic location outside the Straits of Hormuz, which provides easy access to international shipping routes, has played a key role in its development as one of the world's top oil-bunkering ports.