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# I. THE COUNTRY

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## Area and Geography

Israel is situated on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and shares its borders with Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. At its southernmost tip, Israel enjoys a short coastline on the Gulf of Aqaba, its sole seaboard access to the Red Sea. The agricultural areas of Israel include the Galilee, the main wheat and vegetable growing region. The western coastal plain has land suitable for citrus groves. The Negev Desert, in the southwest, stretches from Beersheba to Eilat on the Gulf of Aqaba.

The total area of Israel is 20 720 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 24 per cent is cultivated, 40 per cent is pasture or meadow, 16 per cent is forested, and 9 per cent is desert, waste or urban.

Despite its small area, Israel contains almost every type of geographical terrain, including mountains, subtropical valleys, deserts, fertile farmlands and a richly varied flora and fauna.

## Climate

Israel enjoys a typically Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and mild winters. Rainfall is generally in evidence only in the winter months of November to March/April. Precipitation is heaviest in the northernmost region, where snow sometimes falls in the higher altitudes.

## History and Government

The modern state of Israel was established on May 14, 1948, ending the British mandate over Palestine that had existed since 1922. Since 1949, when Israel was admitted to the United Nations, it has assumed an increasingly prominent role in regional and global affairs. Israel is a parliamentary democracy based on democratic and judicial principles, with legislative authority lodged in the unicameral Knesset (or parliament), which is elected every four years by proportional representation. The Knesset is responsible for electing a president, who serves a five-year term. The independent judiciary system is headed by a Supreme Court.

Local authorities are differentiated by the population of their jurisdiction as a municipality, local council or regional