

The Hajar Mountain range is the highest in eastern Arabia, forming a spectacular isolated wall of rock that rises dramatically from the sea below. It runs northwest to southeast in a 650 km continuous arc parallel to the Oman and UAE coastline along the Gulf of Oman, from the Musandam Peninsula to Ras Al Hadd. This impressive massif is flanked by the sea to the East and by very large gravel and sand deserts to the West and South. Cut by deep wadis, these arid mountains have a complex topography and can be divided into three distinct blocks; **Western Hajars**, **Jebel Akhdar** and **Eastern Hajars**; separated by some topographical discontinuities. With a maximum elevation of 3,009 m, Jebel Shams in the Jebel Akhdar massif is the highest peak, although several peaks above 2,000 m also occur in the Eastern and Western Hajars.



The Hajar Mountains originated about 30 Mya due to the tectonic motions that resulted in the opening of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden but final uplift occurred approximately 4–6 Mya. The Hajar Mountains are usually referred to as a mountain desert for its arid conditions but it is actually **one of the most climatically variable areas in southeastern Arabia**. Owing to its geological origin, high elevations, very deep canyons and geographic isolation from other mountains, high levels of species richness and endemism are recorded in several animal and plant groups, making the Hajar Mountains a focal point of conservation in Arabia.

To date, 28 species of reptiles and two amphibians inhabit the Hajar Mountains and this number is likely to increase in the next few years as a result of ongoing research. Of these species, **19 are endemic** to the massif, which means that they do not live anywhere else in the world, highlighting the importance of the Hajar Mountains as a hotspot of reptile diversity and endemism.

