

Topic Page: [Sinai](#)

Definition: **Sinai** from *Merriam-Webster's Geographical Dictionary*

Peninsula, NE Egypt, bet. Gulf of Suez on W and Gulf of Aqaba on E, at N end of Red Sea; 23,442 sq. mi. (60,715 sq. km.); very mountainous, contains plateaus of Al-Tih and Egma, and at S end Gebel Musa. Thinly populated esp. in interior; has oil fields and manganese deposits. Scene of the principal campaign of the Arab-Israeli War 1967; under Israeli occupation 1967–82.

Summary Article: **Sinai**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(sī'nī), triangular peninsula, c.23,000 sq mi (59,570 sq km), NE Egypt. It is c.230 mi (370 km) long and 150 mi (240 km) wide and extends north into a broad isthmus linking Africa and Asia. Sinai is bounded on the E by the Gulf of Aqaba and on the W by the Gulf of Suez, which is linked to the Mediterranean Sea by the Suez Canal; the Negev desert is to the northeast. Level and sandy in the north, Sinai rises to the south in granitic ridges; Mt. Catherine (Arabic *Jabal Katrinah*), c.8,650 ft (2,640 m), is the highest peak. Sharm el Sheikh, or Sharm ash Shaykh, a strategic promontory overlooking the Strait of Tiran, is near the southern tip of Sinai, at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba. Sinai has a very hot and dry climate and is sparsely vegetated; abandoned watercourses indicate that the region was once humid. Limestone quarrying and oil drilling are the main economic activities; nomadic herding is practiced. Jabal Musa [Arab.,=mount of Moses], or Mt. Sinai, c.7,500 ft (2,290 m), is said to be the place where Moses received the Ten Commandments; however, some authorities suggest that the site could have been any one of several nearby peaks. On Jabal Musa is the famed Greek Orthodox monastery of St. Catherine, founded c.A.D. 250; in 1844 the Codex Sinaiticus, one of the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament, was found there. (The manuscripts were purchased from the USSR by the British Museum in 1933, and by 1950 the 3,000 volumes were microfilmed.) In ancient times Sinai was ruled by the Arabs of Petra; however, for most of its history it was under the Egyptian kings, who worked its copper mines. Sinai was the scene of fighting during the Arab-Israeli Wars of 1956, 1967, and 1973. Israel occupied, then withdrew from, the peninsula in 1956. In 1967, Israel again drove the Egyptians from Sinai, establishing a defense line along the Suez Canal and capturing strategic outposts overlooking the Gulf of Aqaba. In the 1973 war, the Egyptian army crossed the Suez Canal and recaptured territory in the Sinai; still, Israel retained control over a large part of it. Under the Camp David accords (1978) and Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty (1979), Israel returned virtually the whole of Sinai back to Egypt; the process was completed in 1982. The remaining border area of Taba, at the tip of the peninsula, was negotiated and relinquished by Israel in the early 1990s. Overall, the Sinai is sparsely populated, although some Bedouins and tourists dwell in the seaboard towns on the Gulf of Aqaba and along the Red Sea.

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