

The "Zip Codes" of the World

Postal Codes on Stamps

Donald W. Hillger

While it's known as a Zip Code in the United States, it's a **postal code** (or **postcode**) in the rest of the world. Such codes are used in many countries to simplify mail addressing, help automate mail processing, and speed mail to its intended destination.

The United States adopted the 5-digit Zip Code in 1963. The original Zip Codes, an acronym for Zoning Improvement Program, were extensions of postal zones used in 178 of the largest urban areas dating from 1943. To further help with addressing mail, the Zip Code was expanded in 1983 to ZIP+4, by adding a hyphen and four more digits to the existing 20-year-old 5-digit Zip Code. Each 9-digit code represents a group of addresses, and in certain cases only a specific address or post office box.

The Zip Code has been featured on only one U.S. stamp issued in 1974 (*Scott* 1151). However, the Mr. Zip cartoon character was widely used on stamp selvages for many years to promote the Zip Code. Those appearances of Mr. Zip are not the subject of this article.

Cartoon characters or symbols have been used by several countries to promote their postcode systems. Japan in particular has issued the largest number of postcode stamps of any country. Most of the stamps feature a cartoon character that is their equivalent of

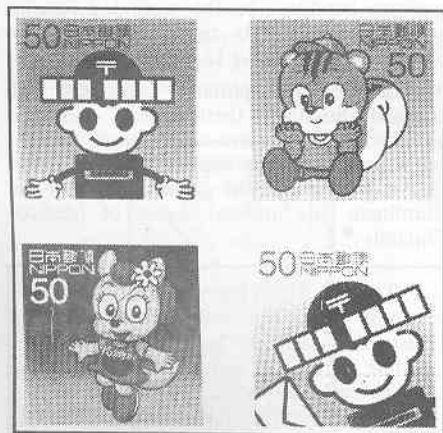


U.S. Adopted ZIP Code in 1963
U.S.A. (*Scott* 1151)

Mr. Zip. These stamps (*Scott* 956-959, 959c, 997-998, 1032-1033, 1064-1065, 1118-1119, 1143-1144) were first issued in 1968 for the introduction of Japan's postcode system, and every year thereafter until 1973, the fifth anniversary of their postal codes.

Likewise, South Korea used a cartoon character to promote its 3+2 digit postal code on a stamp issued in 1970 (*Scott* 712). Mexico issued a postcode stamp in 1981 (*Scott* 1259) for the inauguration of their postcode system, and another in 1982 (*Scott* 1270) to further promote their 5-digit system. Both stamps feature a postcode symbol consisting of a white pigeon carrying a mail sack. Mexico issued a third postcode stamp in 1984 (*Scott* 1344) but without the pigeon. This stamp was issued for the centenary of the centenary of their first use of postal zones.

Another unique postcode symbol is the black raven used to promote the 4-digit post-



Postnet Introduces New Postcode
Japan (Issued in 2003)



Pigeon With Post-Coded Mail
Mexico (*Scott* 1270)



Raven Admires 4-Digit Code
Hungary (Scott 2778)

code system of Hungary as seen on a stamp issued in 1973 (Scott 2209) for the introduction of their postcode system, and again in 1983 (Scott 2778) for the tenth anniversary of their postal codes. This raven is derived from a legendary Hungarian poem dating to 1854. The first stamp also featured a map of Hungary with the postal zones, one through nine as indicated on the map, presumably the first digit of their postal code.

Postal zone maps are featured on the stamps issued by several countries, such as on the postcode stamp issued by Austria in 1966 (Scott 756) for the introduction of their 4-digit system. One of the two postcode stamps issued by Czechoslovakia in 1976 (Scott 1978-1979) and one of the two stamps issued by Greece in 1983 (Scott 1452-1453), upon the inauguration of their postcode system, feature a postal zone map. Likewise, postal zone maps are features of postcode stamps from the other side of the world. One of the postcode stamps issued by the Republic of China in 1970 (Scott 1680-1681), and both of the stamps issued by Indonesia in 1984 (Scott 1240-1241), for the inauguration of their postcode system, feature a zone map.

While many countries have some form of postal code, there are great variations in the practice of postcoding. The most common form seems to be the 4-digit code, but the sig-



Postal Zone Map Educates Public
Austria (Scott 756)

nificance of the digits in the postal code varies considerably from country to country. The more recent trend is toward increasing the length of postal codes, such as the addition of four digits to the U.S. Zip Code, and the more recent extension of the postal code in Singapore from four digits to six digits as seen on two stamps issued in 1995 (Scott 727-728). The most recent extension of the postal code was the change of the Japanese postal code from five to seven digits. To mark Japan's new 7-digit postal code, a sheet of 12 stamps was issued in 2003 that contains four different postcode stamps featuring a new cartoon character called *Poston*. *Poston* has seven blank boxes on the brim of his hat for the seven digits of Japan's new postal code.

Unique among postal codes are those used by Great Britain and Canada where both numbers and letters are intermingled. Examples of such codes are IV30 6UD (Scotland) and H9A 1L9 (Canada). Only a few other countries use letters in their postal codes: Bermuda, Malta, the Netherlands, and Swaziland. But in these postal codes the letters are used either before or after, not intermingled with the numbers.

Another feature that appears on several postcode stamps is the pen. Two postcode stamps issued by France in 1972 (Scott 1345-

Introduction of Postcodes

(Earliest postal code stamps)

1958	Argentina	1958/Scott 1203
1959	Great Britain	No stamp was issued
1963	U.S.A.	1974/Scott 1151
1966	Austria	1966/Scott 756
1967	Italy	1967/Scott 964-967
1968	Japan	1968/Scott 956-957
1970	Taiwan	1970/Scott 1680-1681
1970	Korea	1970/Scott 712
1971	Yugoslavia	1971/Scott 1087
1972	France	1972/Scott 1345-1346
1973	Hungary	1973/Scott 2209
1973	Poland	1973/Scott 1970
1974	Bulgaria	1974/Scott 2207
1975	Romania	1975/Scott 2543
1976	Czechoslovakia	1976/Scott 1978-1979
1977	Russia	1977/Scott 4619
1978	Netherlands	1978/Scott 574-575
1978	Portugal	1978/Scott 1404-1407
1979	Canada	1979/Scott 815-816
1979	Singapore	1979/Scott 323-324
1980	Luxembourg	1980/Scott 648
1980	Tunisia	1980/Scott 754
1981	Mexico	1981/Scott 1259
1983	Egypt	1983/Scott 1207
1983	Greece	1983/Scott 1452-1453
1983	Thailand	1983/Scott 1023-1024
1984	Indonesia	1984/Scott 1240-1241
1985	Saudi Arabia	1985/Scott 941
1985	Turkey	1985/Scott 2321-2326
1987	Spain	1987/Scott 2522
1989	Cuba	1989/Scott 3126
1993	Germany	1993/Scott 1777



Postal Code Entered By a Pen
Netherlands (Scott 575)

1346) for the introduction of their postcode system, feature a hand holding a pen consisting of five balls representing the five digits of France's postal code. These stamps were overprinted with new values for Reunion in 1972 (Scott 384-385). Two similar postcode stamps were issued by the Netherlands in 1978 (Scott 574-575) for the inauguration of their new postcode system, each featuring symmetrical renditions of a hand holding a pen.

Pen tips, or nibs, are featured on postcode stamps from two other countries. Spain issued such a stamp in 1987 (Scott 2522) for the inauguration of its postcode system. Likewise Bulgaria issued a similar postcode stamp in 1974 (Scott 2207) for the introduction of its postcode system. The stamp from Bulgaria also features an envelope with four blank boxes in the lower-left corner where Bulgaria's 4-digit postal code should be printed. Showing envelopes and the location of the postal code is common on the postcode stamps of many other countries.

The postcode stamp issued by Argentina in 1958 (Scott 1203) displays the postal code in the lower-left corner of the envelope. Likewise the postal code is to the left of the address on the envelope displayed on the postage stamp issued by Egypt in 1983 (Scott 1207). A similar location for the postal code is seen on postage stamps issued by Luxembourg in 1980 (Scott 648); Poland in 1973 (Scott 1970); and Yugoslavia in 1971 (Scott 1087) for the introduction of their postcode systems.

Other countries that issued stamps featuring an envelope with the postcode to the left



First Postcode Stamp in 1958
Argentina (Scott 1203)



Don't Forget the Postal Code
Russia (Scott 4619)

of the address are Russia in 1977 (Scott 4619) and Cuba in 1989 (Scott 3126) for the introduction of their postcode systems. These two are unique in that the postcode is to be added to the envelope by connecting the appropriate dots in a row of rectangular arrays of dots, to clearly indicate the digits zero through nine of the postal code. Cuba apparently copied the connect-the-dots system used by Russia, but with five digits as opposed to Russia's 6-digit postal code.

Other postcode stamps featuring envelopes, but with the postcode as part of the main address more like the U.S. addressing form, are seen on the four postage stamps issued by Italy in 1967-1968 (Scott 964-967); one stamp issued by Romania in 1975 (Scott 2543); one stamp issued by Saudi Arabia in 1985 (Scott 941); two postage stamps issued by Singapore in 1979 (Scott 323-324); one of two postage stamps issued by Thailand in 1983 (Scott 1023-1024); and a postage stamp issued by Tunisia in 1980 (Scott 754), all for the introduction of their postcode systems.

To conclude this article, there are a few remaining postage stamps that do not necessarily follow any of the patterns already mentioned. Canada issued two postage stamps in 1979 (Scott 815-816) to promote their postal code system. Both stamps feature a hand with a string or ribbon tied onto the index finger as a reminder to use the postal code. Germany's postage stamp was issued in 1993 (Scott



Where You Place the Postcode
Cuba (Scott 3126)



Postal Code Inaugurated in 1985
Saudi Arabia (Scott 941)

1777) to promote their new postal code system needed as a result of unification of East and West Germany. The stamp explains the meaning of the two parts of the 5-digit postal code. Luxembourg's second postcode stamp issued in 1983 (Scott 693) shows a postrider on a horse and a particular 4-digit postal code 9960 for the city of Hoffelt.



String Around Finger as Reminder
Canada (Scott 815)

More on Postal Codes

Postal Codes have been the subject of several earlier articles in *Topical Time*. Paul Roling identified postcode stamps issued by 15 countries in the May-June 1980 issue of *Topical Time*, all of which are covered in the current article. Dorothy Repine added a second article in the May-June 1984 issue of *Topical Time* offering the following supplemental information:

"The first postal coding in Great Britain started in 1959 with "NOR" for Norwich. The task of coding other areas in Britain was begun in Croydon in 1966. By 1969, the British were using slogan postmarks reading "Please Use Postcodes."

In Italy, the postal codes were adopted in 1967 with five numbers, called CAP for *Codice di Avviamento Postale*. Machines to read these codes have nicknames such as "Elsie" (Electronic Letter Sorter) and "AIF" (Automatic Letter Facer) which turns letters right side and corner up."



Postrider Carries a Postcode
Luxembourg (Scott 693)

Portugal issued four postcode stamps in 1978 (Scott 1404-1407) with some of the same themes already discussed including a postrider, a carrier pigeon, an envelope, and a pen. Finally, Turkey issued a set of six postcode stamps in 1985 (Scott 2321-2326) for the inauguration of their postcode system. The six stamps have different denominations and colors, but all display a PIT (Postal, Telegraph, and Telephone) symbol and below that five blank circles for the five digits of Turkey's postal code.

If readers know of other postcode stamps that have been missed, the author would appreciate hearing about them. It seems probable that other countries will expand their postal codes and will issue stamps either to announce the introduction or to promote the use of those postal codes.

For more information on postcodes, see Raper, J. F., D. W. Rhind, and J. W. Shepherd, *Postcodes: The New Geography*, Longman Scientific and Technical, England, 1992; and "Postal Code Formats of the World," <<http://www.io.org/~djcl/postcd.txt>>.

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