

Overview of Iraq

Iraq remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world. However, travellers can look forward to a land of many wonders when regional tensions ease.

The destination is a veritable gold mine of archaeological wealth, with Ancient Mesopotamia once calling it home. Ancient Mesopotamia was in many ways the birthplace of civilisation, gifting the world with, among other things, math, the wheel and the concept of time. Its capital, Babylon, was situated on the modern site of Al-Hillah on the east of the Euphrates River. The ruins of this ancient city, where the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon once existed, were treated as sacred palaces by Saddam Hussein during his reign and today are host to coalition forces and their often tasteless graffiti.

The capital of Baghdad was a learning centre and focal point of the Middle East silk trade. The history of the three Mesopotamian civilisations that conquered the land (the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Achaemenids) is captured in the Iraq Museum. Baghdad is also home to the remains of the Ishtar Gate, the Ancient Theatre and the Babylon Tower (all precious Mesopotamian sites) that are slowly being eroded by bombing and fighting in the city, much to the chagrin of archaeologists the world over.

To the south of Baghdad, near Nasiriyah, is one of the few landmarks left untouched by the conflict so far, the Great Ziggurat of Ur. Built over 4,000 years ago as a platform onto which the gods could descend from the heavens, the strange stone temple is built on a trapezoid base and overlooks the ancient tombs of long gone Mesopotamian leaders.

Currently the only way to travel with a modicum of safety in Iraq is with an armoured army convoy. Again, it is emphatically advised that travellers don't venture there at all.

Key Facts

Language:

Arabic is the majority language, Kurdish is spoken by approximately 15-20 percent of the population. English is spoken by most businessmen.

Passport/Visa:

A vaccination is required for passengers who are older than nine months of age and are travelling from a country with a risk of yellow fever. This includes those transiting for more than 12 hours in an airport located in a country with a risk of yellow fever transmission. Visa extensions are possible by application. Regardless of official guidelines, it is always recommend that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity.

Currency:

Electricity:

Electrical current is 230 volts, 50Hz. Round two-pin plugs are standard.

Travel to Iraq

Health Notes when travelling to Iraq

There are a few health risks to consider when travelling to Iraq. It's recommended that travellers be vaccinated against polio and typhoid, and cholera outbreaks also occur. Vaccination certificates are required by those arriving from countries where there is a risk of yellow fever. Tap water should not be drunk, including ice in drinks, and food precautions should be taken. Healthcare facilities are limited, especially in rural areas. Travellers are advised to have full medical insurance and to consult with their medical practitioner prior to travel.

Safety Notes when travelling to Iraq

All but essential travel to Iraq is advised against. Travel within the country remains very dangerous given the security situation, and visitors are strongly advised to employ a private security company if they mean to venture outside of the Kurdistan Region.

Customs in Iraq

The overwhelming majority of Iraqi citizens are devout Muslims, and travellers to the region should be aware that the Koran still provides the basis for many of the country's social mores and customs. Conservative dress (covering the arms and legs) and reserved public behaviour are the norms, and drinking in public is taboo. Photography is becoming more socially accepted, although travellers should exercise caution whenever using their camera. ('Ask First' is probably a good rule to abide by, and visitors should not photograph military installations or personnel.) It is considered rude for anyone to show the soles of their feet or shoes, and to touch or move objects with their feet. Visitors should also avoid using their left hand when greeting others, or when eating, as it is considered 'haram' (impure). During the month of Ramadan, visitors should not eat, drink or smoke in public places between the hours of sunrise and sunset, as it is bound to offend local sensibilities. Finally, it might be useful for travellers to bear in mind that in Iraq, an indirect communication style is favoured, with politeness and deference (especially to one's elders) being highly valued.

Duty Free in Iraq

Travellers to Iraq may import the following goods tax-free: up to 200 cigarettes, 10 cigars, 250g of tobacco, one litre spirits, two litres wine, and goods valued to goods up to the value of IQD100, 000.

Doing Business in Iraq

Most Iraqi businessmen speak English and are polite and conservative in their manner. The same respect is expected in return. Exchanging business cards is normally restricted to senior business figures and it is advisable to have a translation of details on the alternate side. Appointments should be made and punctuality is expected for business meetings. Dress is formal and conservative and though Iraqis do not wear ties, it is not negative for foreigners to do so. Women should dress modestly and cover their hair. Business gifts are quite acceptable. Friday is the Muslim holy day when everything is closed, and most businesses also close on Thursday. During Ramadan business hours may be shortened.

Communication in Iraq

The international dialling code for Iran is +964. The outgoing code is 00 followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 0044 for the United Kingdom). Hotels and restaurants in Baghdad offer WiFi; travellers can purchase local SIM cards for unlocked phones.

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Entry Requirements

Entry requirements for Americans:

A passport valid for at least six months beyond the period of intended stay, and a visa, are required to enter Iraq. US nationals can obtain a visa on arrival at Erbil or Sulaymaniyah Airports for a maximum stay of 30 days.

Entry requirements for Canadians:

A passport valid for at least six months beyond the period of intended stay, and a visa, are required to enter Iraq. Canadian nationals can obtain a visa on arrival at Erbil or Sulaymaniyah Airports for a maximum stay of 30 days. They can also apply to extend their stay.

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Entry requirements for UK nationals:

A passport valid for at least six months beyond the period of intended stay, and a visa, are required to enter Iraq. Holders of British passports endorsed British Citizen can obtain a visa on arrival at Erbil or Sulaymaniyah Airports for a maximum stay of 30 days.

Entry requirements for Australians:

A passport valid for at least six months beyond the period of intended stay, and a visa, are required to enter Iraq. Australian nationals can obtain a visa on arrival at Erbil or Sulaymaniyah Airports for a maximum stay of 30 days. They can also apply to extend their stay.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

A passport valid for at least six months beyond the period of intended stay, and a visa, are required to enter Iraq. Irish nationals can obtain a visa on arrival at Erbil or Sulaymaniyah Airports for a maximum stay of 30 days. They can also apply to extend their stay.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

A passport valid for at least six months beyond the period of intended stay, and a visa, are required to enter Iraq. New Zealand nationals can obtain a visa on arrival at Erbil or Sulaymaniyah Airports for a maximum stay of 30 days. They can also apply to extend their stay.

Entry requirements for South Africans:

A passport valid for at least six months beyond the period of intended stay, and a visa, are required to enter Iraq.

Currency

Overview of the Attractions in Iraq

Public Holidays in Iraq