

## Overview of Saudi Arabia

There is a certain stark beauty to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is home to the sacred cities of Medina and Mecca, the spiritual centre of the Islamic world. On the other hand, it also boasts spectacularly modern metros which attract plenty of visitors with its shopping and entertainment but, being a theocratic state, most of its annual visitors are pilgrims, permitted access on special religious visas.

Others come to this oil-rich nation on sponsored business trips, generally finding little time or facility for leisure and pleasure. Saudi Arabia is intent on keeping its traditions, culture and religious heritage free of western interference or influence.

Its cities are modern and bustling centres which can be thoroughly enjoyed by those who visit the country. The Royal capital, Riyadh, offers a multitude of sights to see and explore. The historical city of Jeddah is also a popular spot where people can enjoy a unique seaside experience alongside the locals who often flock there for staycations.

Occupying most of the Arabian Peninsula and bordered by no fewer than eight Middle-Eastern states, Saudi Arabia manages its highly-controlled religious society alongside the onslaught of modernity through the oil-boom industry. If visitors are informed about and prepared for the inevitable culture shock, Saudi Arabia can make for a memorable and unique holiday, as well as an eye-opening cultural experience to a world not often understood by western travellers.

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## Key Facts

### **Language:**

Arabic is the official language in Saudi Arabia, but English is widely understood.

### **Passport/Visa:**

All visitors require a visa to enter Saudi Arabia, and visas are only granted to those with sponsorship in the country. Tourist visas are hard to get, granted only to selected groups on a limited basis. Everyone who enters the Kingdom should have a valid passport with at least six months validity in addition to the appropriate visa and a return ticket, with all necessary documents. Muslim women entering the Kingdom alone must be met by a sponsor or male relative and have confirmed accommodation for the duration of their stay. Entry may be refused to any visitor arriving in an intoxicated state, men wearing shorts, women in tight clothing or with legs and arms exposed, and to couples displaying affection in public. There are special requirements for pilgrims undertaking the Hajj or visiting holy sites. It is strongly recommended not to hold passports containing any Israeli visa or stamp when entering or transiting Saudi Arabia as entry may be refused.

### **Currency:**

The Saudi currency is the Riyal (SAR), divided into 100 halala. Foreign currency can be changed at banks and exchange bureaux. Banking hours are generally Saturday to Wednesday from 8am to 12pm. Some banks also choose to open again later in the afternoon and stay open into the evening, from 5pm to 8pm. All major credit cards are accepted at shops, hotels and restaurants in Saudi Arabia, with ATMs being widely available.

### **Electricity:**

Electrical current is 220 volts, 60Hz. Three-pin, flat-bladed plugs are in use, in addition to round/flat-bladed two-pin plugs, as well as flat-bladed two-pin plugs with a third, round pin for grounding.

# Travel to Saudi Arabia

## Overview

Although not especially celebrated for its tourism opportunities, Saudi Arabia has some wonderfully enriching sites making it a memorable destination. Apart from the religious pilgrimages, there is growth in Saudi Arabia's leisure tourism sector, promising for those hoping to visit the country on holiday.

The cities are bustling and vibrant. Riyadh offers excellent hotels and some breathtaking sights, including the Al Faisaliah golden geodesic dome, which is one of the tallest buildings in the region, and the Al Musmak Castle, an important landmark and heritage site.

The historic city of Jeddah is certainly worth the visit. The preserved ancient city is listed as a tourist site, as it is the city's seafront corniche. It's a popular spot with the air of a British seaside resort, drawing the country's own domestic holidaymakers. Among it all, the magic of Arabia shines through in the souks (markets) where vendors enthusiastically tout everything from carpets to camel milk.

Rules and regulations can sometimes make sightseeing difficult for foreigners wanting to travel independently, so booking tours is the safest and most stress-free option. However, sites like the ruins of 15th-century Dir'ayah (the nation's first capital) and trips to the world's largest camel market make for one-of-a-kind experiences which make some sightseeing a must in this somewhat enigmatic country.

## Climate in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has a typical desert climate of blistering hot days and cool nights, and is one of the driest countries in the world. Summers can be extremely hot with temperatures rising to 130°F (55°C) in some areas, and the hottest months are June, July and August. The higher inland areas are cooler. Coastal cities are humid and hot year round while sandstorms blow anywhere in the country, some lasting for days. The best time to visit is from November to April in the period between winter and spring.

## Health Notes when travelling to Saudi Arabia

Anyone arriving in Saudi Arabia from a country infected with yellow fever requires a vaccination certificate for entry. People travelling to perform Hajj and Umrah are required to be inoculated against meningitis before travel and must present a vaccination certificate on arrival. Respiratory infections are common among pilgrims during the Hajj and Ramadan season.

There is a malaria risk in the south and parts of the western region of the country and visitors should take advice on anti-malarial precautions at least four weeks before leaving. Both an outbreak of cerebral malaria and Rift Valley Fever have occurred in Jizan, with Dengue fever also having been reported.

Food poisoning is a risk outside the good hotels and visitors should only drink bottled water. The standard of medical care and facilities in Saudi Arabia is high, but treatment is expensive so travel insurance is strongly advised.

## Safety Notes when travelling to Saudi Arabia

Safety in Saudi Arabia is a concern to some extent. All travel within 60 miles (100km) of the border with Yemen is not advised due to the clashes along the Saudi-Yemeni border.

Travellers should ensure they have individual security arrangements, remain vigilant and avoid public gatherings. Visitors should be particularly alert in public places frequented by foreigners such as shopping malls, restaurants and hotels and in the desert outside Riyadh.

Pilgrims are increasingly being targeted by pickpockets in Mecca and Medina and are advised to take care of personal possessions. In recent years pilgrims have died due to overcrowding and stampedes at events during Hajj. Religious police patrols rigorously enforce codes of behaviour and dress prescribed by Islamic law and visitors should respect these.

## Customs in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country, meaning Sharia law is strictly enforced. No alcohol, pork products or religious books and artefacts not related to Islam are permitted in the country. There are no bars in Saudi Arabia, and alcohol is served nowhere to anyone of any religious persuasion.

Dress should be conservative at all times, and women should take particular care not to offend. Visitors are advised to familiarise themselves with behaviour and dress codes before entering the country. Homosexual behaviour and extramarital sexual relations are illegal and can carry the death penalty. It is also illegal to be transgender.

Photography of local people, government buildings, military installations and palaces is not allowed. Religious customs should be respected, particularly during the month of Ramadan when eating, drinking and smoking during daylight hours should be discreet as it is forbidden by the Muslim culture. The right hand should be used for everything, including eating and the giving and receiving of things, as the left is considered unclean. It is illegal to hold two passports, and second passports will be confiscated if discovered by immigration authorities.

## Duty Free in Saudi Arabia

Travellers to Saudi Arabia do not have to pay duty on 600 cigarettes or 100 cigars or 500g tobacco, perfume or cultured pearls for personal use, or goods up to the value SAR3,000. Duty is payable on cameras and other electronic goods, and refunds on these are available if the articles are re-exported within 90 days.

Strictly prohibited are pork, narcotics, alcoholic drinks, anti-Islamic goods and publications, gambling devices, weapons and ammunition, explosives, fireworks, unlabelled medication, goods which prominently display flags of another country, goods bearing names and pictures of celebrities, wild animal hides, counterfeit money. Other prohibited items include formula milk, natural sand, and natural pearls.

## Doing Business in Saudi Arabia

If you are looking to do business in Saudi Arabia, prepare yourself for a unique experience. The Saudi corporate world is perhaps the most foreign of any of the Gulf nations, and in all likelihood you are going to have to remain flexible and to learn new skills, in order to make a real success of your time in the country. It is vitally important to understand that Saudi society is underpinned by fervent belief in the tenets of Islam.

The business culture of Saudi Arabia is prototypically Arabic, in that a great emphasis is placed on personal relationships between business associates. Saudi businessmen will always prefer to do business with people they are familiar with, or people who they feel they can trust, so it's worth putting in the time and effort to cultivate business relationships. In Saudi Arabia, business meetings will most likely be lengthy and subject to numerous interruptions and personal digressions. You will be judged on your conduct in meetings, so treat them as necessary parts of the relationship-building process.

Despite the heat, business dress in Saudi Arabia is strictly smart, formal and conservative, especially for women, who must take extreme care not to wear anything too revealing. The official language of Saudi Arabia is Arabic, though English is widely spoken and widely understood in the business world. Hours of business are generally from 8am to 12pm, and then 3pm to 6pm, from Sunday to Thursday.

## Communication in Saudi Arabia

The international dialling code for Saudi Arabia is +966. Mobile telephone coverage is extensive, even in remote parts of the country. Internet facilities are available in most towns and cities.

## Tipping in Saudi Arabia

Service charge is usually included in bills at hotels. Elsewhere a tip of 10 percent can be offered for services rendered. Taxi drivers can be given 10 percent of the fare.

## Passport/Visa Note

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## Entry Requirements

### Entry requirements for Americans:

**US citizens require a passport and visa to enter Saudi Arabia, and must be valid for the duration of their stay.**

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**Entry requirements for Canadians:**

Canadians require a passport that is valid for a minimum of six months from the date of arrival, and a visa to enter Saudi Arabia.

**Entry requirements for UK nationals:**

British passport holders require a passport that is valid for a minimum of six months from the date of arrival, and a visa to enter Saudi Arabia.

**Entry requirements for Australians:**

Australians require a passport that is valid for a minimum of six months from the date of arrival, and a visa to enter Saudi Arabia.

**Entry requirements for Irish nationals:**

Irish passport holders require a passport that is valid for a minimum of six months from the date of arrival, and a visa to enter Saudi Arabia.

**Entry requirements for New Zealanders:**

New Zealanders require a passport that is valid for a minimum of six months from the date of arrival, and a visa to enter Saudi Arabia.

**Entry requirements for South Africans:**

South Africans require a passport that is valid for a minimum of six months from the date of arrival, and a visa to enter Saudi Arabia.

## **Tourist Offices**

The Supreme Commission for Tourism, Riyadh: +966 (0)1 480 8855 or <http://www.scta.gov.sa>.

## **Saudi Arabia Embassies**

### **In the United States:**

Saudi Arabian Embassy, Washington DC, United States: +1 202 342 3800.

### **In Canada:**

Saudi Arabian Embassy, Ottawa, Canada: +1 613 237 4100.

### **In the United Kingdom:**

Saudi Arabian Embassy, London, United Kingdom (also responsible for Ireland): +44 (0)20 7917 3000.

### **In Australia:**

Saudi Arabian Embassy, Canberra, Australia (also responsible for New Zealand): +61 (0)2 6250 7000.

### **In South Africa:**

Saudi Arabian Embassy, Pretoria, South Africa +27 (0)12 362 4230.

## **Foreign Embassies in Saudi Arabia**

### **American Embassy**

United States Embassy, Riyadh: +966 (0)1 488 3800.

### **Canadian Embassy**

Canadian Embassy, Riyadh: +966 (0)11 488 2288.

### **British Embassy**

British Embassy, Riyadh: +966 (0)11 481 9100.

### **Australian Embassy**

Australian Embassy, Riyadh: +966 (0)1 488 7788.

### **Irish Embassy**

Irish Embassy, Riyadh: +966 (0)1 488 2300.

### **New Zealand Embassy**

New Zealand Embassy, Riyadh: +966 (0)1 488 7988.

### **South African Embassy**

South African Embassy, Riyadh: + 966 (0)1 422 9716.

# Currency

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## Exchange rate for 1 SAR - Saudi Riyal

<b>0.00</b> BMD Bermudan Dollar	<b>0.25</b> EUR Euro	<b>0.27</b> USD U.S. Dollar	<b>0.21</b> GBP U.K. Pound Sterling	<b>40.79</b> JPY Japanese Yen	<b>0.36</b> CAD Canadian Dollar
<b>0.24</b> CHF Swiss Franc	<b>0.40</b> AUD Australian Dollar	<b>10.50</b> UAH Ukrainian Hryvnia	<b>118.37</b> KZT Kazakhstani Tenge	<b>24,817.75</b> LBP Lebanese Pound	<b>1.30</b> LYD Libyan Dinar
<b>1.83</b> BOB Bolivian Boliviano	<b>0.00</b> NPR Nepalese Rupee	<b>0.00</b> OMR Omani Rial	<b>0.00</b> QAR Qatari Rial	<b>0.36</b> SGD Singapore Dollar	<b>2.89</b> SEK Swedish Krona
<b>0.00</b> TTD Trinidad Tobago Dollar	<b>0.00</b> VEF Venezuelan Bolivar	<b>15.50</b> DOP Dominican Peso	<b>0.00</b> HRK Croatian Kuna	<b>4.52</b> MXN Mexican Peso	<b>162.79</b> XOF West African CFA Franc
<b>0.00</b> PGK Papua New Guinean kina	<b>0.00</b> BSD Bahamian Dollar	<b>0.00</b> FJD Fiji Dollar	<b>0.00</b> HNL Honduran Lempira	<b>35.69</b> DZD Algerian Dinar	<b>0.00</b> MMK Myanma Kyat
<b>0.00</b> BWP Botswana Pula	<b>0.99</b> PEN Peruvian Nuevo Sol	<b>250.23</b> CLP Chilean Peso	<b>103.15</b> AMD Armenia Dram	<b>6.21</b> CZK Czech Koruna	<b>4.70</b> MDL Moldova Lei
<b>37.30</b> ISK Icelandic Krona	<b>3,355.00</b> UZS Uzbekistan Sum	<b>0.99</b> ILS Israeli New Sheqel	<b>0.19</b> JOD Jordanian Dinar	<b>0.00</b> KWD Kuwaiti Dinar	<b>10.17</b> UYU Uruguayan Peso
<b>0.00</b> MUR Mauritian Rupee	<b>0.00</b> NIO Nicaraguan Córdoba	<b>2.90</b> NOK Norwegian Krone	<b>1.07</b> PLN Polish Zloty	<b>0.00</b> LKR Sri Lanka Rupee	<b>9.81</b> THB Thai Baht
<b>0.98</b> AED U.A.E Dirham	<b>1.36</b> BRL Brazilian Real	<b>1.23</b> RON Romanian New Leu	<b>2.08</b> HKD Hong Kong Dollar	<b>162.79</b> XAF Central African CFA Franc	<b>6,774.24</b> VND Vietnamese Dong
<b>234.21</b> ARS Argentine Peso	<b>0.00</b> XCD East Caribbean Dollar	<b>0.00</b> GTQ Guatemalan Quetzal	<b>2.68</b> MAD Moroccan Dirham	<b>0.00</b> BHD Bahrain Dinar	<b>0.27</b> PAB Panamanian Balboa
<b>0.45</b> AZN Azerbaijan Manat	<b>1,045.24</b> COP Colombian Peso	<b>23.58</b> KGS Kyrgyzstan Som	<b>96.53</b> HUF Hungarian Forint	<b>2.90</b> TJS Tajikistan Ruble	<b>4,285.93</b> IDR Indonesian Rupiah
<b>12.79</b> EGP Egyptian Pound	<b>362.32</b> KRW South Korean Won	<b>1,988.23</b> PYG Paraguayan Guaraní	<b>1.26</b> MYR Malaysian Ringgit	<b>135.54</b> CRC Costa Rican Colón	<b>0.45</b> NZD New Zealand Dollar
<b>74.09</b> PKR Pakistani Rupee	<b>24.37</b> RUB Russian Rouble	<b>4.94</b> ZAR South African Rand	<b>0.84</b> TND Tunisian Dinar	<b>0.00</b> BBD Barbadian Dollar	<b>0.49</b> BGN Bulgarian Lev
<b>8.62</b> TRY Turkish Lira	<b>15.27</b> PHP Philippine Peso	<b>8.62</b> TWD New Taiwan Dollar	<b>310.60</b> NGN Nigerian Naira	<b>0.00</b> XPF CFP Franc	<b>0.00</b> GHS Ghanaian Cedi
<b>0.00</b> JMD Jamaican Dollar	<b>0.00</b> ANG Neth. Antillean Guilder	<b>0.00</b> BND Brunei Dollar	<b>29.04</b> RSD Serbian Dinar	<b>1.93</b> CNY Chinese Yuan	<b>1.85</b> DKK Danish Krone
<b>0.93</b> TMT New Turkmenistan Manat	<b>22.24</b> INR Indian Rupee				

## Overview of the Attractions in Saudi Arabia

Although not especially celebrated for its tourism opportunities, Saudi Arabia has some wonderfully enriching sites making it a memorable destination. Apart from the religious pilgrimages, there is growth in Saudi Arabia's leisure tourism sector, promising for those hoping to visit the country on holiday.

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# Public Holidays in Saudi Arabia

	2020	2021
<b>Unification of the Kingdom</b>	Mon. September 23	Mon. September 23
<b>Eid al-Fitr</b>	Fri. May 24 to Mon. May 27	Mon. May 13 to Thu. May 16
<b>Eid al-Adha</b>	Wed. July 31 to Thu. January 1	Sat. July 20 to Mon. July 22