

Overview of Yemen

At its best, Yemen is a place of incredible scenery, striking Islamic architecture and bustling souks, along with peaceful mosques, lush valleys and epic mountains. The capital Sana'a embodies the two faces of Yemen: the modern city with upmarket tourist infrastructure, and the old city with its Great Mosque and distinctive, multistorey buildings crafted in clay. Sana'a is one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world, and visitors can take it in from hotel rooftops, enjoy the authenticity of its old souks or be spellbound by the magnificent 700-year-old Great Mosque.

Aden, the second largest city, is a port dating back to times of antiquity. It has a more cosmopolitan, liberal air than Sana'a and makes for an interesting visit. Other cities worth exploring are Shibam, known as the Manhattan of the Desert, and the garden city of Radda. But Yemen's most incredible attraction is the Socotra Archipelago, with over 700 species of wildlife and plants unique to the islands. Seen as a contemporary of the Galapagos Islands, it's a place of unique beauty and scientific fascination, with a distinct tribal culture that has thrived for thousands of years.

To the Romans, the country of Yemen was known as Arabia Felix, the 'fortunate land', on account of its fertile fields. Yemen used to be a land of milk and honey, a place of great significance. Sadly, the country is struggling with unrest, instability and widespread terrorism, but travellers eagerly await the day this famously interesting country will again be hospitable to visitors.

Key Facts

Language:

Arabic is the official language and English is the most commonly spoken foreign language.

Passport/Visa:

The government of Yemen refuses entry to both holders of Israeli passports and those who have Israeli entry or exit stamps in their passports. Authorities in Yemen have stopped issuing visas upon arrival for foreign nationals from various countries in an effort to increase security measures due to concerns that extremists were entering Yemen to receive training to carry out attacks. Visitors to the country will now be required to apply for visas from a Yemeni diplomatic office in their country of residence. It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Currency:

The local currency is the Yemeni rial (YER), which is divided into 100 fils. US dollars in cash is the most easily convertible currency; ATMs are very rare outside Sana'a.

Electricity:

Electrical current is 220 - 240 volts, 50Hz. Plug types vary but plugs with two or three flat pins or three round pins are most common.

Travel to Yemen

Health Notes when travelling to Yemen

All eligible travellers should be up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines, and malaria medication is recommended for travel to all parts of Yemen except Sana'a and areas above 2,000 metres (6,561ft) altitude. Medical facilities, particularly away from the main towns, are poor, so comprehensive travel insurance, with provision for emergency repatriation, is strongly advised.

Safety Notes when travelling to Yemen

The security situation in Yemen remains highly unstable because of the ongoing civil war between government forces and different rebel groups throughout the country. A coalition of countries is launching airstrikes into Yemen to curtail rebel gains in the country. Airstrikes could occur anywhere, at any time. Weapons are easily available throughout the country and tribes are usually heavily armed. Travellers should note that terrorists are very likely to try to carry out attacks in Yemen. The threat is heightened where AQAP have strong tribal connections and in more isolated governorates such as Hadramawt and Shabwah.

Customs in Yemen

Yemen is an Islamic country and the faith is tightly woven into the fabric of daily life. Visitors should dress conservatively to avoid causing offence; women should cover their shoulders, arms and legs and men should wear long trousers. Tourists shouldn't drink alcohol in public, and always use their right hand when eating or greeting as the left is considered unclean. Visitors should only enter mosques if invited to do so, and should not take photographs of soldiers, military installations or local people without permission. Yemeni people are famously hospitable and will frequently invite visitors to their homes to eat, drink tea or chew qat.

Duty Free in Yemen

Travellers to Yemen over the age of 18 years can import the following without incurring customs duty: 600 cigarettes or 60 cigars or 450g tobacco; one bottle of perfume or eau de toilette for personal use; and goods up to the value of YER 100,000. The import of any items of Israeli origin is prohibited.

Doing Business in Yemen

Business people are expected to dress smartly for meetings and formal social occasions in Yemen. Business casual dress made of lightweight fabrics is suitable for men, though a suit and tie is preferable for more formal meetings. Women should opt for dresses of lightweight fabric, and blouses are considered appropriate as long as they cover most of the body. English is commonly used in business circles. Appointments are needed and visitors should be punctual; business cards are often exchanged. Gifts should only be given to the most intimate of friends. To receive a present from a lesser acquaintance is so embarrassing as to be offensive. Even worse is expressing admiration for something belonging to another, as it makes them feel obliged to offer it as a gift.

Tipping in Yemen

Tipping isn't common in Yemen but patrons can leave 10 percent if they're eating in a nicer restaurant. Taxi drivers don't expect tips, though most passengers round up the fare; people generally leave tour guides 10 percent, and tour drivers five percent.

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Entry Requirements

Entry requirements for Americans:

United States citizens must have a passport valid on arrival. A visa is required and must be applied for in advance.

Entry requirements for Canadians:

Canadians must have a passport valid on arrival. A visa is required and must be applied for in advance.

Entry requirements for UK nationals:

British nationals must have a passport valid on arrival. A visa is required and must be applied for in advance.

Entry requirements for Australians:

Australians must have a passport valid on arrival. A visa is required and must be applied for in advance.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

Irish nationals must have a passport valid on arrival. A visa is required and must be applied for in advance.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

New Zealand nationals must have a passport valid on arrival. A visa is required and must be applied for in advance.

Entry requirements for South Africans:

South Africans must have a passport valid on arrival. A visa is required and must be applied for in advance.

Yemen Embassies

In the United States:

Embassy of the Republic of Yemen, Washington DC, United States: (202) 717-1066

In Canada:

Embassy of the Republic of Yemen, Ottawa, Canada:(613)729-6627

In the United Kingdom:

Embassy of the Republic of Yemen, London, United Kingdom: (0) 20 7584 6607

In Australia:

Consulate-General of the Republic of Yemen, Sydney, Australia: +61 2 6261 1111

In South Africa:

Yemeni Embassy, Pretoria, South Africa: (+27) 12 425 0760

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Overview of the Attractions in Yemen

Public Holidays in Yemen