

Getting a Saudi Tourist Visa: Is it really that complicated?

Gulf News (United Arab Emirates)

October 9, 2019 Wednesday

Copyright 2019 Gulf News - Al Nisr Publishing LLC. Provided by Syndigate Media Inc. All Rights Reserved



Length: 1423 words

Byline: Yousra Zaki, Web Features Editor

Body

Gulf News goes through the steps of getting a Saudi Tourist **Visa**

Image Credit: Pixabay

Dubai: Saudi Arabia opened its doors to the world through its new visit **visa**, which was made available from September, 27. With this new **visa**, travellers should be able to obtain a one-year, multiple entry **visa** allowing them to spend up to 90 days in KSA. But these processes are never as easy and as straightforward as they seem.

Gulf News goes through the **visa** process for the sake of the story and tells you exactly what to expect when applying for the KSA **visa**.

Getting the e-**visa**: Some issues I faced:

I am a Canadian living in the UAE. I decided to apply for an e-**visa**, since Canada was listed as one of the 49 countries that are eligible to get an e-**visa** to Saudi Arabia.

As I continued to answer detailed questions about my place of birth, the names of my parents and my passport type, among other things, I came across a question that stumped me.

I had to choose my country of residence. I scrolled to look for the UAE as an option but it wasn't there.

This means that I have to be a Canadian, living in Canada in order to apply.

As a Canadian living in the UAE, I was not eligible, since UAE was not supplied as an option.

We called the Saudi consulate. They informed us that they don't understand our issue, and that we should call VFS.

I got in touch with VFS, who explained that they were booked up, until the end of the month, so couldn't help with my inquiry.

The only thing left to do was submit an inquiry over the Visit Saudi website. "Hi, I am a Canadian citizen currently residing in the UAE. Am I still eligible to get an e-**visa**?" to which I received the response. "Regarding your inquiry, yes you are eligible to get an e- **visa**."

So it looks like there is a glitch in the system, that hasn't taken into account that the passport holders from the 49 countries, who live in countries that are not on the eligible list.

Getting a Saudi Tourist Visa: Is it really that complicated?

I emailed him back explaining this glitch, but have yet to receive a response.

My potential solutions could be:

A) Put down my Canadian address in Toronto, and continue the application process. Arrive at the airport in Saudi and potentially face questions on why I didn't fly in from Toronto.

B) Apply through VFS for a normal tourist visa but wait a few weeks until they have appointments available.

C) Waiting until the contact person from Visit Saudi gets back to me over email.

Either way, here is a guide on how to get your e-visa to Saudi

How to get an e-visa: A step by step process First of all, are you eligible?

If you have the passport and are living in any of these 49 countries then you are eligible to get an e-visa.

Canada

USA

Andorra

Austria

Belgium

Bulgaria

Croatia

Cyprus

Czech Republic

Denmark

Estonia

Finland

France

Germany

Greece

Holland

Hungary

Iceland

Ireland

Italy

Latvia

Getting a Saudi Tourist Visa: Is it really that complicated?

Liechtenstein

Lithuania

Luxembourg

Malta

Monaco

Montenegro

Norway

Poland

Portugal

Romania

Russia

San Marino

Slovakia

Slovenia

Spain

Sweden

Switzerland

Ukraine

United Kingdom

Brunei

China (Including Hong Kong and Macau)

Japan

Kazakhstan

Malaysia

Singapore

South Korea

Australia

New Zealand

Now that you are eligible, here are the next steps:

Getting a Saudi Tourist Visa: Is it really that complicated?

1.You create an account and sign in. Make sure that you have a passport from the 49 countries and that you also reside in one of the 49 countries, from what we can see on the website, you cannot select the UAE and be eligible for the e-visa.

2.You will also have to choose temporary medical insurance for when you are there, which is mandatory and covered as part of the cost.

3.You will also need a soft copy of your passport size picture, which you will be asked to upload.

How much does it cost?

The e-visa or visa on arrival will cost SAR 440 (Dh431), plus VAT, which is a fee of SAR 100 (Dhs98).

How long does it take to issue the e-visa?

The time taken to issue the e-Visa is 5 to 30 minutes in most cases

Make sure you keeps these terms and conditions in mind:

- Minimum age of applicant should be 18 years old
- Underage applicants require an individual above 18 years old to be the guardian while on their visit
- When applying, passport validity must be for at least 6 months at the time of entering Saudi Arabia
- Visa fees are non-refundable. Refund in case of rejection is not possible.
- Overstay fees: Dh100 for each day of overstay when the visa expires without leaving Saudi Arabia.
- Religion of applicant is not relevant.
- Countries with bilateral agreements can apply for the visit visa through e-visa or visa on arrival, or through the consulate visa (USA, UK, South Korea and Japan)
- Documents not required to get a visa:
 - o Return ticket
 - o Booking accommodation (only address is required)
 - o Hard copy of the visa, although a soft copy is advised
- Visa eligibility pre-checks are conducted by all airlines before boarding flights to Saudi Arabia

Getting a tourist visa as a 'Group B category' Some issues I faced:

I am an Indian national living in the UAE. I wanted to see South Korean band BTS live in Saudi Arabia. The much-anticipated October 11 show in Riyadh, might be the only way to watch the K-Pop sensations on this side of the world. As tourist visas to the Kingdom have been challenging to acquire for the so-called Group B category, which comprises countries such as Jordan, Egypt, India and the Philippines.

Alternatively, those from 51 countries in Group A, including the UK, China and USA, have been able to get their visas through an online application.

The brand new tourist visa for Saudi Arabia was announced on September 28, with a statement claiming that Group B applicants would be able to get their visas within one to two days through the consulate or embassy. However, the ground reality has been different.

Getting a Saudi Tourist Visa: Is it really that complicated?

Between the announcement and now, Twitter users have been documenting the hurdles they've faced trying to apply via their country's missions, and through visa assistance companies such as VFS Tasheel in the UAE.

Posts under the #VISAFORBTSCONCERT hashtag show fans from countries including Tunisia, Pakistan and Iraq asking for advice and venting their frustrations at being so close to seeing the 7-member group live yet so far.

For UAE ARMY (the term for fans of BTS) in the Group B category, VFS Tasheel seems to be the only way to apply for the tourist visa. The catch about VFS Tasheel? The dearth of visa application appointments, a requirement to be attended to at the centres in Dubai, Sharjah and Abu Dhabi.

Some fans who were unable to secure an appointment turned up at VFS Tasheel with their documents in the hopes of getting a walk-in appointment have been turned away, just days before the concert.

One fan who managed to get an appointment told Gulf News about the stress of trying to complete the process in the little time she had.

"I was hopeful until last week, when we had less than two weeks to process everything. I think that's when the pressure kicked in. I'm quite used to applying for a visa since my passport is not that strong. It's just the timeframe was too short. That's what really stressed me out," the Filipino woman said.

Others have given up on the visa entirely and have resorting to selling their tickets, sometimes at a discount since many seats are still available for sale on Ticketmaster. In contrast, the K-Pop sensation's past concert stops in cities such as London, Berlin and New York sold out in minutes – it can be argued that no BTS concert in the recent past has had seats left to spare.

How to get your visa through VFS or the Saudi Embassy:

If you are not one of the 49 countries, you are required to visit VFS or the Saudi embassy in person. The documents required also vary, depending on which country you hail from.

But you will need the following documents when you visit VFS:

- A passport, that is valid for at least 6 months
- Emirates ID
- Residency Proof (UAE Visa).
- Proof of accommodation in KSA (the hotel address is just fine)
- Return flight ticket
- Provide No objection letter (HR letter including Job title and purpose).
- Bank statements (for the last 6 months)
- Travel plan during the stay in KSA

How much does it cost?

The tourist visa costs Dh888 and includes everything, such as medical insurance, service fees and more. You have to pay this amount in cash.

How long does it take?

If you are lucky to get an appointment early on, the whole process should take around 2 working days. But you need to physically be there in person.

Getting a Saudi Tourist Visa: Is it really that complicated?

Tips:

- Give yourself enough time
- Read the document list carefully, so you come prepared
- Book your hotel with free cancellation, so that you can have your address ready

<http://imgs.syndigate.info/34/57/31/157062969483.jpeg>

Riyadh skyline, Saudi Arabia.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Journal Code: 57

Subject: PASSPORTS & VISAS (94%); EMBASSIES & CONSULATES (71%)

Company: VISA INC (91%)

Ticker: V (NYSE) (91%)

Industry:

Geographic: TORONTO, ON, CANADA (55%); DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (79%); ONTARIO, CANADA (55%); UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (93%); SAUDI ARABIA (92%); CANADA (92%)

Load-Date: October 9, 2019