

SAUDI ARABIA

Location

Saudi Arabia is located in the Middle East. It is located on the Arabia Peninsula and comprises around 80% of it. It is bound by the Red Sea to the west, Egypt and Jordan to the northeast, Iraq and Kuwait to the north, the Persian Gulf, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to the east, Oman to the southeast and south as well as Yemen to the south and southwest. Its' coordinates are 25 OON, and 45 OOE with an area of 2,331,000 Sq. Km. (900,004 Sq. Mi.).

Geography

Saudi Arabia is divided into four geographical regions. The first region includes the Red Sea escarpment, from Hejaz in the north to Asir in the south. The second region includes the central plateau, which extends to the Tuwaiq Mountains and further. The third region consists of the sand deserts of Dhana and Nafud. The fourth region consists of the Run al-Khali Desert, which is the largest desert in the world. The country has no permanent rivers or bodies of water.

Climate

Saudi Arabia is one of the driest countries in the world. It has a hot and dry climate with frost and freezing temperatures in winter while the Red Sea coast experiences high humidity and temperatures. Rainfall is sparse with an average annual precipitation of approximately 100mm (4 inches). The prevailing winds are severe dust storms such as the southerly Kauf and the northwesterly Shamal. Average temperature ranges in Riyadh are from 8 to 21 degrees Celsius (46 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit) in January to 26 to 42 degrees Celsius (79 to 108 degrees Fahrenheit) in July.

History

The Saudi state began in central Arabia in about 1750. A local ruler, Muhammad binSaud, joined forces with an Islamic reformer, Muhammad Abd Al-Wahhab, to create a new political entity. Over the next 150 years, the fortunes of the Saud family rose and fell several times as Saudi rulers contended with Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and other Arabian families for control on the peninsula. The modern Saudi state was founded by the late King Adbul Aziz Al-Saud (known internationally as Ibn Saud). In 1902, Abdul Aziz recaptured Riyadh, the Al-Saud dynasty's ancestral capital, from the rival Al-Rashid family. Continuing his conquests, Abdul Aziz subdued Al-Hasa, the rest of Nejd, and the Hijaz between 1913 and 1926. In 1932, these regions were unified as Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Boundaries with Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait were established by a series of treaties negotiated in the 1920s, with two "neutral zones"--one with Iraq and the other with Kuwait--created. The Saudi-Kuwaiti neutral zone was administratively partitioned in 1971, with each state continuing to share the petroleum resources of the former zone equally. Tentative agreement on the partition of the Saudi-Iraqi neutral zone was reached in 1981, and partition was finalized by 1983. The country's southern boundary with Yemen was partially defined by the 1934 Treaty of Taif, which ended a brief border war

between the two states. A June 2000 treaty further delineated portions of the boundary with Yemen. The location and status of Saudi Arabia's boundary with the United Arab Emirates is not

final; a defacto boundary reflects a 1974 agreement. The border between Saudi Arabia and Qatar was resolved in March 2001. The border with Oman also is not demarcated.

The central institution of Saudi Arabian Government is the monarchy. The Basic Law adopted in 1992 declared that Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled by the sons and grandsons of King Abd Al Aziz Al Saud, and that the Holy Qur'an is the constitution of the country, which is governed on the basis of Islamic law (Shari'a). There are no political parties or national elections. The king's powers are limited because he must observe the Shari'a and other Saudi traditions. He must also retain a consensus of the Saudi royal family, religious leaders (ulema), and other important elements in Saudi society. The leading members of the royal family choose the king from among themselves with the subsequent approval of the ulema.

Important Dates

Here is a list of some important dates in Saudi Arabia history:

- 570 Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, in Mecca
- mid-i 700s time of Abu I-Wahhab, whose strict Wahhabi sect forms alliance with Saud family for control of central peninsula
- 1902-32 Gradual conquest of areas in the peninsula by Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, who is proclaimed king in 1938. Among those marginalized was the Hashemite family, which became rulers of Jordan and Iraq.
- 1933 first oil concession signed with precursor of Arabian American Oil Co. (ARAMCO). Late 1930s oil exports, but these become important after World War II.
- During WWII Saudi Arabia sided with Allies, and had significant debts at its end.
- 1 940s Ibn Saud distances himself from Palestinian/Jewish issues, except to be concerned with Palestinians and Jordan.
- 1953 Death of Ibn Saud, who is succeeded by his son, Saud
- 1953, 1956 Strikes by Arab workers at ARAMCO, over working conditions and training. Oil wealth facilitates improved situation
- 1955 Unsuccessful coup by Saudi army officers trained in Egypt, one of several frictions between the Saudi monarchy and Nasser's republican regime
- 1956 Saudis support Nasser's nationalization of Suez Canal, through which much Saudi oil flowed
- 1962-67 Saudis aid royalist forces in Yemen against Egyptian-backed republican rebels. Also leads to conflicts with US. Saudis supportd and others in June 1967 war.
- 1964 Saud is deposed by Faisal, his brother, the Crown Prince
- 1973 Saudis own 25% of ARAMCO
- 1974 60% ownership, and full ownership in 1980

- 1973 Saudi Arabia plays leading role in oil boycott of countries supporting Israel during Yom Kippur War.
- 1975 Faisal was assassinated by a nephew in a family revenge; is replaced by Khalid who pushes industrialization program
- 1979 Saudis cut off aid to Egypt over Camp David agreement
- 1979 Group of Sunni Muslims barricade themselves inside the Holy Mosque of Mecca, some 200 eventually die.
- 1982 King Khalid dies, succeeded by Fahd
- 1981 Gulf Cooperation Council formed, initially as a response to revolutionary Iran, but Iraq does not join.
- 1980s Increased military cooperation with the US. Also, Saudi financial help for anti-Russian Mujahadeen in Afghanistan, and perhaps other Islamic groups in Chechnya, former Yugoslavia, etc.
- 1987 Iranian pilgrims killed after clashes with Saudi security forces in Mecca. During this decade there are several confrontations between Saudi Arabia and Iran over which country best represents Moslem religion and interests
- 1990 Saudi Arabia supports US-led coalition that recovers Kuwait after occupation by Iraq. Leads to more than a hundred thousand foreign (mostly US) troops on Saudi soil.
- 1991 re-establishment of diplomatic relations with USSR which had been interrupted in 1938
- 1992 Formation of Majlis al-Shura, consultative council of Saudis, a faint echo of Western style representative democracy
- 1993 US asks Saudi Arabia to pay for the Gulf War (\$51 billion)
- 1994 Pilgrims die in a stampede in Mecca, strengthening criticism of Saudi role as protector of holy sites.
- 1995 King Fahd has a stroke; Crown Prince Abdullah is widely seen as *defacto* king
- 2001 The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US have significant Saudi influence, creating friction with US government, recently (2003) increased by a US government report on that influence
- 2003 Terrorist attacks on residential areas of Riyadh

Population

Saudi Arabia's 2003 population is estimated to be about 24.3 million. There are about 18.7 million Saudis and approximately 5.6 million resident foreigners. Until the 1960s, most of the population was nomadic or semi nomadic; due to rapid economic and urban growth, more than 95% of the population now is settled. Some cities and oases have densities of more than 1,000 people per square kilometer (2,600 per sq. mi). The annual growth rate in Saudi Arabia is 3.1%. The average life expectancy for a Saudi Arabian male is about 67 years and for a woman it is about 71 years. The birth rate is approximately 37.2 births/1000 population and the death rate

comes to 5.79 deaths/1000 population. Net migration comes to about 1.23 migrants/1000 population.

Most Saudis are ethnically Arab. Some are of mixed ethnic origin and are descended from Turks, Iranians, Indonesians, Indians, Africans, and others, most of who immigrated as pilgrims and reside in the Hijaz region along the Red Sea coast. Many Arabs from nearby countries are employed in the kingdom. There also are significant numbers of Asian expatriates mostly from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines. There are less than 100,000 Westerners in Saudi Arabia.

Currency

The official currency is the Riyal (SRI5), which is divided into 5 Qurushes and 100 Halalahs. It is estimated (2004) that Saudi riyal (SAR) comes to about 3.75 U.S. dollars.

Education

The educational in Saudi Arabia is two tiered, although the well off would not send his children to the lower tier. There are state Islamic schools of which there are approximately 22,000 and 7 universities throughout the Kingdom. Illiteracy amongst the Saudis is about 20%. People of the age of 25 or over and having attained no formal schooling is approximately 31.8%, primary, secondary or higher 68.2% (1986). Literacy; of the population aged 15 or over 62.4% (1990).

Language

The official language is Arabic, although English is also widely understood.

Religion

The official religion of Saudi Arabia is Islam with 85% of the population being Sunni Muslims while 14% are Shiite Muslims. Christians account for less than 1% of the population and are the largest religious minority. Saudi Arabia is known as the birthplace of Islam, which, the century following Muhammad's death in 632 A.D, spread west to Spain and east to India. Islam obliges all Muslims to make the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Makkah, at least once during their lifetime if they are able to do so. The cultural

environment in Saudi Arabia is highly conservative; the country adheres to a strict interpretation of Islamic religious law (Shari'a). Cultural presentations must conform to narrowly defined standards of ethics. Men and women are not permitted to attend public events together and are segregated in the work place.

Because Saudi Arabia is an exclusively Islamic (Muslim) kingdom, Islam governs nearly every aspect of life. The public practice of any form of religion other than Islam is prohibited in Saudi Arabia. Severe punishment (imprisonment and deportation) can result should such activities come to the attention of the authorities. The authorities also stamp firmly on attempts to proselyte or convert Muslims to Christianity. However, non-Muslims are free to worship in their own homes. The Muslim holy day is Friday.

Agriculture

Only 0.8% the whole surface area of Saudi Arabia is farmed. This equates to about 9% of the farmland of the UK. All agricultural areas are intensively irrigated with a considerable climatic

range, from tropical in the far south, through extreme desert conditions in the central area, to hot summers and cold winters almost like the Mediterranean climate in the north.

Trade

Saudi Arabia's main trading partners include the United States, Western Europe and Japan. Because Saudi Arabia is one of the largest oil producing countries in the

world, one of its main primary products is of course crude oil and natural gas. Other primary products include alfalfa, cattle, dates, goats, grapes, poultry, sheep, sorghum, watermelons and wheat.

Its major industries are cement, crude oil and natural gas production and refining, fertilizers, petrochemicals and steel. Saudi's main exports include crude oil and refined products and natural gas.

Food

The desert environment and Islam have influenced the Saudi diet. The diet consists mainly of milk products from goats, sheep or camels together with dates, rice and sometimes wheat. Milk is consumed fresh or made into yogurt or cheese. Meat is eaten only on special occasions when an animal is slaughtered or when wild game is available. Nomads eat fresh fruits and vegetables when they visit a village. They take little food during the day and have their main meal in the evening. Coffee and tea are favorite drinks among nomads as well as among other Saudis. A guest is usually served a cup of coffee, then a glass of tea and finally another cup of coffee.

The diet of the average farmer is more substantial than that of the nomad. The staple food of this group is millet, supplemented by rice, barley and wheat. These grains are cooked into gruel while wheat and barley are made into bread. Varieties of fruit, especially dates, are eaten regularly. While goat and camel meat are eaten, sheep remains the main source of meat consumption.

A typical Saudi meal consists of rice with mildly spiced lamb or chicken, dates and milk products. Food is traditionally eaten with the fingers while sitting cross-legged on the floor. Banquets are usually served on the floor covered with rugs. *Aria*, a special bread, is broken off and eaten with honey. Tea or coffee is served at all gatherings. Camel's milk, *laban*, a yogurt drink, buttermilk and cola are popular beverages. Saudi law prohibits the sale or use of alcohol. The consumption of pork is forbidden to Muslims and slaughtering of animals is governed by Islamic ritual. During the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, all Muslims must abstain from food and liquids during the daylight hours.

Landmarks

Some nice attractions and landmarks in Saudi Arabia include a variety of things from a giant-sized bicycle, to a fountain built of model sacks of flour, to fishermen's nets and date palms, all larger than life and very impressive. You can also visit some attractions such as the Al Akariya Shopping Center, the Al Diriyah Souk, the Al Musmak Fort, King Abdul Aziz Historical Center, King Fahd Football Stadium, King Fahd Stadium, King Faisal Museum, and the Riyadh Water Tower.

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