



Saudi Destination Guide



Saudi
Welcome
to Arabia

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SAUDI Destination overview

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Middle East, and fourth most populous in the MENA region with its 2020 population estimated at approximately 35 million people.

80% of Saudis live in ten major urban centers – Riyadh, Jeddah, Makkah, Medina, Hofuf, Taif, Khobar, Yanbu, Dhahran, Dammam.

The country is also home to a large community of expatriate residents, including those from Western markets, India and Asia who live in the cities of Riyadh, Jeddah, Yanbu and Dhahran.

Saudi Arabia is divided into 13 administrative regions, or Provinces, each characterised by their own unique traditions and cultures. The Kingdom is home to the Makkah Region, Riyadh Region, Eastern Province, Asir Region, Jizan Region, Medina Region, Qasim Region, Tabuk Region, Hail Region, Najran Region, Al Jouf Region, Al Baha Region, and the Northern Borders Region.

Islam is the state religion in Saudi Arabia and the country is home to the two holiest cities in Islam, Makkah and Medina. Each year, the country attracts millions of Muslims who perform the annual Islamic Hajj pilgrimage. Non-Muslims are not allowed to enter the cities of Makkah and Medina.

In September 2019, Saudi Arabia opened its doors to leisure tourists from around the world. This historic milestone is a key step in the implementation of Vision 2030, the Kingdom's economic diversification program, aiming to connect Saudi to the world, build bridges between cultures and create prosperity for the future.

Saudi

SAUDI Map



Saudi

SAUDI
Themes



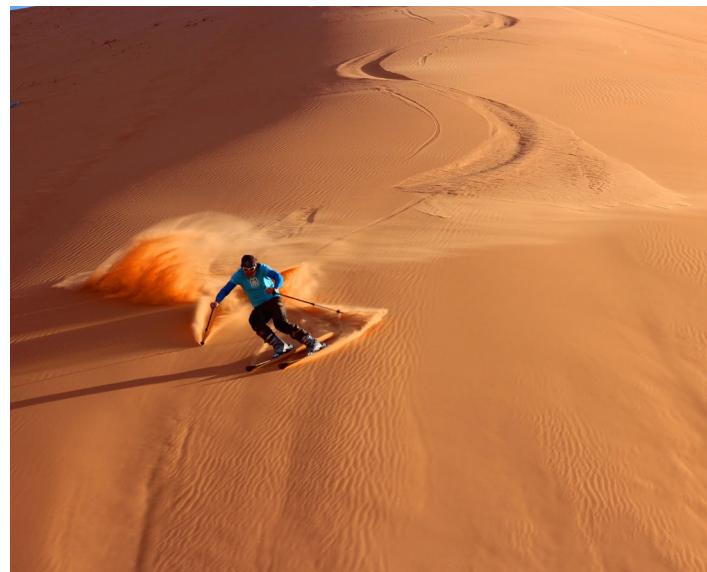
Adventure



Saudi offers awe-inspiring natural phenomena and exciting, unique ways to explore its diverse terrain, making the kingdom worthy of a spot on any outdoor enthusiast's bucket list. The kingdom boasts quite an itinerary, from desert and water adventures to camping and hiking through caves and craters.

Desert Adventures

Part of what's special about the Arabian Peninsula — and specifically Saudi — is its desert. In fact, Saudi Arabia is home to the largest sand desert on earth. From adrenaline-packed excursions like dune bashing and sandboarding to more serene, history-inspired activities such as camel riding and Arabian camping, the desert in Saudi serves as a canvas for more than just adventure travelers. **Dune bashing – Camel riding – Arabian camping.**



Hiking Adventures

Saudi's diverse topography is a delight for hiking enthusiasts. With striking lookout points atop cliffs and an oasis in the desert, there are plenty of adventures to embark upon on foot.

Edge of the World – Al Ahsa Oasis – Jabal Abyad.



Water Adventures

Saudi is bordered by the Red Sea to the west and the Arabian Gulf to the east — making an adventure on or in the water an ideal way to explore.

Red Sea Scuba Diving and Snorkeling – Visiting a Desert Lake – Exploring on boats and cruises.



Culture



Saudi culture is as rich as it is diverse. Visit the Kingdom's many mosques and traditional markets to experience a rhythm of life that has little changed over the centuries. Explore the different regions to experience the multi-cultural variety of foods, lifestyles and customs. And, for a taste of modern Saudi, don't miss the urban districts and entertainment centers where people meet to shop, dine or just spend time with friends.

From traditional dances and handicrafts to gleaming skyscrapers and thriving cities, Saudi is a destination in which history and modernity are inextricably linked and endlessly beguiling.

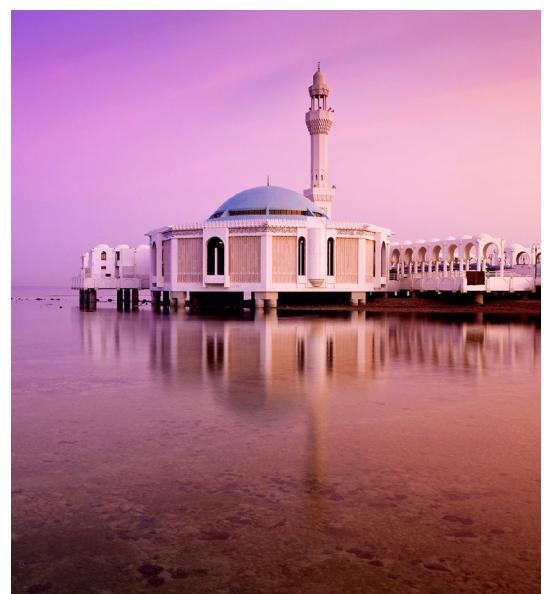


Mosques and Spirituality



While Saudi is home to the holy cities of Makkah and Medina, a pilgrimage route around the country doesn't have to stop there. Travelers can venture to other holy — and less crowded — spots to enjoy the mosques' calm atmosphere or pray in peace and to check out other sites of historical significance. Makkah and parts of Medina are accessible only to Muslims; however, other architecturally noteworthy mosques and historic sites across the country are accessible and can provide a firsthand glimpse into the intriguing religious roots of Saudi.

Al Rajhi Mosque – Al Rajhi Grand Mosque – Al Rahma Mosque



Museums and History



With such a rich history, it's no surprise that Saudi is home to a plethora of museums, castles and cultural institutions around the country. Visitors can immerse themselves in exhibitions and displays that not only highlight the ancient past but also bring to light more contemporary works by local and international artists.

The National Museum in Riyadh – The Antiquities Museum – King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture



Souqs and Shopping



From old-world souqs to modern malls to boutique concept stores, Saudi has a wealth of shopping options, offering everything from traditional wares to designer items to creative collections and offbeat décor.

Share Al Hob market - Souq Al Qaisariya - Personage



Heritage



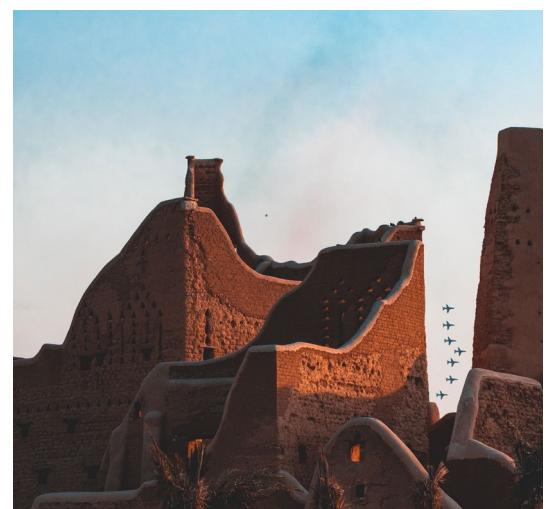
Experience a land where the past comes to life. From the labyrinthine streets of ancient cities, to the intricate rock carvings of early civilizations, the kingdom's rich history is written large across the landscape.

When you explore the ancient ruins and rock-carved tombs of Nabatean Hegra or walk the narrow winding streets of Al-Turaif, surrounded by beautiful Najd architecture, you are opening a doorway into Saudi's rich and fascinating history.

Since the days of antiquity, Saudi has occupied a pivotal position at the crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe.

Today, there are more than 11,000 archaeological sites throughout the Kingdom, telling the story of the civilizations that lived over the years. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is proud to have five UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

- Al Ahsa Oasis
- Al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Hegra)
- Al-Turaif District in Diriyah
- Historic Jeddah
- Rock art in the Hail region



Nature



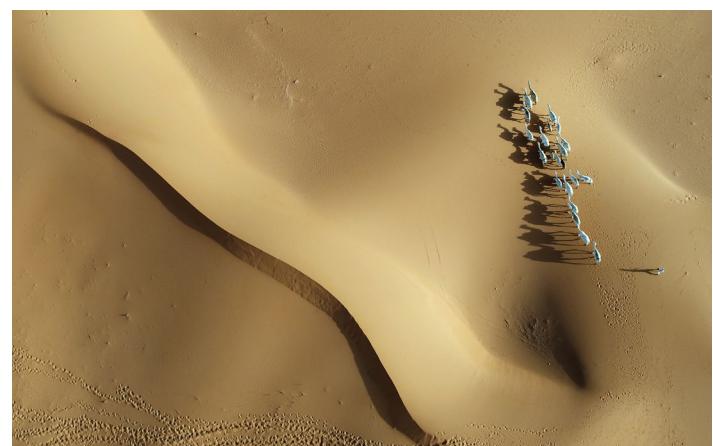
Whether you are sailing the crystalline waters of the Saudi Red Sea, exploring one the country's many national parks or hiking through the green hills of Al Baha, Saudi will surprise and delight you with a wealth of natural treasures.

From seas teeming with exotic fish, rare marine animals and thriving corals to lush oases, verdant farmlands and even desert areas that are rich with life and raw natural beauty, Saudi is a kaleidoscope of unique natural experiences.

Desert

Saudi is made up of a predominantly desert landscape, with desert tourism possible over three seasons of the year and varying from region to region. The desert experience is the perfect starting place to discover the culture, customs and nomadic way of life.

Empty Quarter - Hail - Al Jouf - AlUla



Mountains

Saudi has no shortage of mountainous landscapes and breathtaking views. From the highland region of Asir, known for its abundance of heritage sites and outdoor thrills to the north-western city of Tabuk, perfect for travelers looking for old ruins to inspect and new places to explore, there is something for everyone.

Asir - Tabuk - Taif



Coastal

With a coastline stretching more than 2,000 kilometres, Saudi offers some of the world's most stunning stretches of golden sand and tranquil blue waters, mostly untouched coastline and rich nature and marine habitats, perfect for swimming, diving and water sport activities.

Umluj - Yanbu - Jeddah



Food



Traditional Saudi cuisines use fragrant spices and the freshest of local ingredients inspired by the trading heritage of the country. The different types of food are largely tied to the terrain, with many traditional dishes reflecting the ancient trade caravans and nomadic lifestyles of desert dwellers. To this day, while dates and aromatic coffee are central to the culture of hospitality, there is a diversity and richness to cuisines across different regions to be explored.

Breakfast in Saudi

Kick off your day with a traditional Saudi breakfast. Opt for a classic, simple spread, such as flatbread, cheese and date jam, or try the savory shakshuka or the sweet Saudi banana masoub.

Lunch in Saudi

In Middle Eastern culture, lunch is the main meal of the day, with a cold, liquid yogurt called laban traditionally consumed at lunch (especially in central Saudi Arabia). In addition to drinking laban, midday is the ideal time to try some of Saudi's most popular entrees, including its national dish: kabsa.



Dinner in Saudi

Traditionally, dinner is a lighter meal, however with both men and women working, and workdays getting longer, dinner is becoming more like lunch with the two most traditional dishes to finish off the day being areesh (also known as harees) and thareed.



Dessert in Saudi

In Saudi, there is a wide variety of traditional sweets, from pastries to buttermilk cookies.

Coffee

Arabian coffee —or qahwa, as it is known in Saudi Arabia — generally (though not always!) refers to coffee made of arabica beans. Although it's often compared to Turkish coffee, Arabian coffee is known less for its thickness as it is for its richness in taste because of the use of spices and the manner in which it's served.



Saudi

SAUDI

Destination information



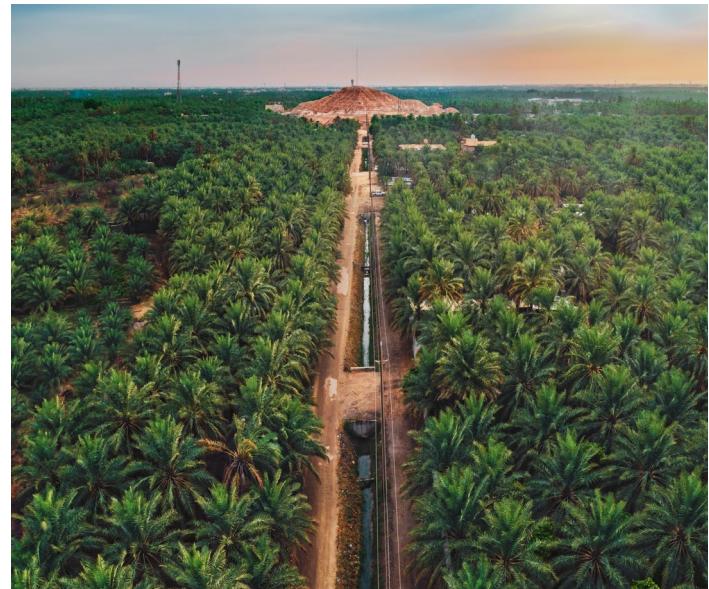
A trip out to Al Ahsa's undulating sands offers a chance to climb the popular Al Qarah Mountain and explore the rock-hewn caves that weave through it, or just to gaze over the oasis from its summit. If you're feeling adventurous, hire a four-wheel drive and head off road to explore the looming dunes. As evening falls, Al Ahsa's bustling Souq Al Qaisariy comes alive, ringing with street hawkers and the timeless sounds of this historic port city.

In Al Hofuf, the city's commercial hub, visit the country's first royal school and the Eastern Province's first masjid, Jawatha Mosque. Browse the hive of handicraft stalls and locally produced art, and sample the homegrown dates the region is famed for – both the Al Khalasah and Barhi varieties are farmed here. Other local delicacies to try, include the red-grained Hesawi rice the region is known for, and dishes such as Thareed (a breaded soup), Marqooq (a lamb-infused stew), and the saffron-tinged rice dish Majboos.

What to see

Al Ahsa Oasis

A desert oasis of shady palm groves and crystal clear springs, Al Ahsa Oasis stands as a dazzling haven against the untamed plains of the Rub' Al Khali (Empty Quarter). For millennia, this region's fertile land made it a hub for traders and caravans crossing the region's ancient trade routes, forging links across the Arabian Peninsula and beyond, and providing a stopping place for early pilgrims en route to Makkah. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site – a nod to the city's many archaeological landmarks, which show traces of human settlement all the way back to the Neolithic period – Al Ahsa Oasis is rapidly gaining appeal as one of Saudi Arabia's most captivating tourist destinations.



Jawatha Mosque

Built by the region's Bani Abd Al Qays tribe in the seventh century, Jawatha Mosque is believed to have been the first mosque in eastern Arabia. It's also where the second Friday congregation prayer was held. Much of the original building has been destroyed over the centuries, but the mosque was recently restored. Now Friday prayers are regularly recited there again.



A journey to Al Baha is a journey to a different Saudi Arabia. In a kingdom that's often characterized by ochre desert, this high-altitude city is a place of ancient towers, lush forests and winding valleys.

The ancient Ghamid and Zahran tribes forged a unique cultural identity in the area, building 1,001 stone qasbah lookout towers that are only found here, as well as setting up a bustling souq. But the real joy is driving out of the city on hairpin mountain bends, past apricot and pomegranate orchards, into the 40 or so forests that surround the city. The road to the famous marble village of Dhee Ayn — through Tolkienesque valleys and past ruined towers — is almost as spectacular as the site itself.

What to see

Dhee Ayn

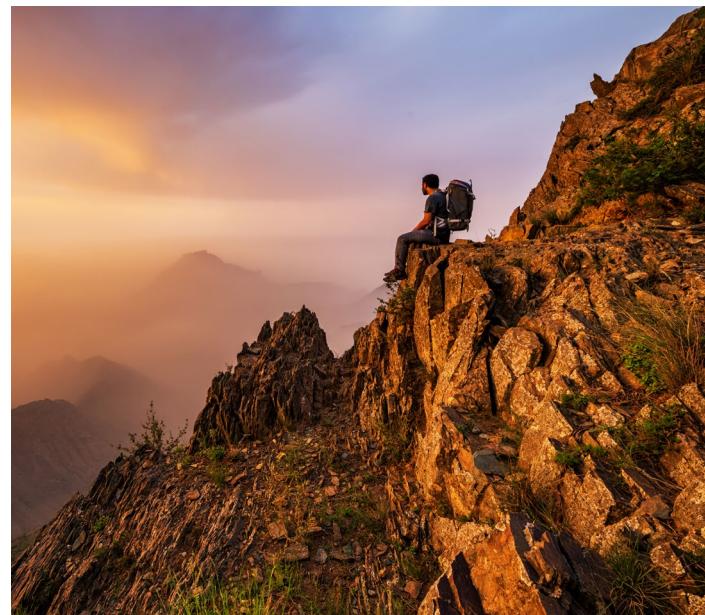
Built on a white marble outcrop in the epic Bidah Valley, south of Al Baha, Dhee Ayn looks like an Arabian citadel on a Tuscan hillside. Often called the Marble Village, the cuboid buildings were made of stone and slate more than 400 years ago, and abandoned sometime in the 1980s. Exploring its narrow pathways today is an eerily beautiful experience, especially during the golden hours, when the light reflects on the white marble and the colorful mountains in the background.

Raghadan Forest Park

In the cool Sarawat mountains west of the city, Raghadan Forest Park was once a wilderness area but has been sensitively adapted for visitors, with a paved trail up into forested hills populated by impish baboons. From the top of the path, there are beautiful views of the surrounding mountains and valleys, including the winding road that leads to Dhee Ayn. Food stalls and barbecues mean it's possible to do as the locals do, and dine up in the hills as the sun goes down.

Sheda Village

Nestled halfway to the peak of Jebel Mussala Ibrahim is the hidden village of Sheda, offering dramatic views across the green cliffs and valleys of the Sarawat mountains. The picturesque drive up its slopes passes ancient, stone-made houses that dot the roadside, offering a glimpse of a time and communities past.



Al Jouf is the Kingdom's crossroad of ancient civilizations, with its spectacular natural landscapes, rich fertile lands, and desert climate. Located at the northernmost region of the Kingdom, Al Jouf is home to several archaeological sites and landmarks stretching over a long historical period from the Stone and Copper Ages to the Modern Age.

Formed by mountains, valleys, and flat sand dunes in the Nafud Desert, Al Jouf encompasses a range of attractions and archaeological sites including Sisira Well, Al Dar'i Quarter, Marid Castle, and the Al Jouf Museum. During wintertime, its climate gets extremely cold with temperatures going as low as 0 C°. The region has millions of olive, palm, and fruit trees, producing thousands of tons of olives and olive oil, with more than 23 oil presses and 3,000 agricultural projects and businesses, which helped the city earn the title of the Kingdom's Food Basket.

What to see

Marid Castle and Al Jouf Museum

Al Jouf Museum was constructed in 1416 AH in Dumat Al Jundal to host several historical artifacts in addition to Marid Castle, which dates back to the year 1 AD and served as the ruling headquarters during different periods. It contains many various sections, which display historical items, photos, paintings, and others.



Al Dar'i Quarter

Al Dar'i Quarter offers one of the most enjoyable tourist experiences and an opportunity to visit and explore the ancient town of Dumat Al Jundal, which dates back to the early Islamic period. It contains buildings, sites, and one or two yards surrounded by vast squares. It is located in Dumat Al Jundal next to Omar Bin Al Khattab Minaret, a mosque that was established back in 16 AH and named after Omar Bin Al Khattab. The mosque follows the ancient Islamic architectural style.



Visiting Olive Farms

Tourists can enjoy visiting any of the 3,000 small and medium sized agricultural businesses and farms, which make this area the biggest olive farm in the world. They can also visit oil presses in addition to packaging and distribution centers and get to know a part of the Kingdom's Food Basket, containing more than 30 million olive, date, and fruit trees. Visits can be arranged in coordination with tour operators who offer several tourist programs to visit the famous farms in Al Jouf.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has long been a crossroads of ancient civilizations — a place of deep history that is continuously evolving.

Positioned in the northwest of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, AlUla is a stunning example of the country's wonderful heritage. Its main city of the same name is located on the original pilgrimage route to Makkah, approximately 325km north of Medina. A place of extraordinary human endeavour, visitors to AlUla are immersed in a land of ancient civilizations spanning more than 200,000 years of human history.

Centred around its famed oasis and framed by sandstone mountains, AlUla's geography, geology and climate have enabled successive civilisations to flourish here. Today, AlUla is rich in both human heritage and natural beauty, acting as a home for a wide range of flora, fauna and a living museum of human societies spanning thousands of years.

What to see

AlUla's Historical Sites: Hegra, Dadan, Jabal Ikmah and More

The wind-swept expanses of AlUla are a true living museum spanning hundreds of years of Arabian history. Visit the rock tombs of Hegra, the ancient capital of Dadan and its Lion Tombs, the "open library" of inscriptions in the rocks at Jabal Ikmah, the labyrinth of mudbrick houses in the 12th-century AlUla Old Town, the 18th-century Fort of Hegra, the Hijaz Railway Station and much more.

AlUla Old Town

Located in the narrowest part of the AlUla valley, the Old Town is built on a slight elevation, and is overlooked by the Musa bin Nusayr Castle, a citadel dating to at least the 10th century. The Old Town is a key cultural site to understand the continuity and evolution of the AlUla historic routes for trade and pilgrimage, and for the development in terms of agriculture and water management.

Nabataean Oasis

The ancient Oasis of Hegra was a lush garden consisting of three layers of vegetation. The first protective layer was formed by the date palm trees, providing shade and shelter to the numerous fruit trees below. Peach, apricot, grape, pomegranate, olive and fig trees filled the second layer while in the third layer wheat, legumes and cotton were grown.



Known for its mountainous environment and breath-taking views, the highland of Asir is the southern endpoint of the Red Sea coast and a treasure trove for adventurous souls looking for excitement.

With an abundance of heritage sites, outdoor thrills, and vibrant traditional markets, Asir is a culturally and geographically rich destination with plenty of places for the whole family to explore.

There are vibrant traditional markets in Abha, the culturally rich capital of the Asir region and sister city Khamis Mushait, and historic neighborhoods like Al Nasb and Al Basta. More broadly, this is a place to get immersed in the unique culture of the Asir region, whether exploring the Al Muftaha art village or learning about the customs of tribes in the spectacular nearby villages of Al Habala and Rijal Almaa.

What to see

Green Mountain

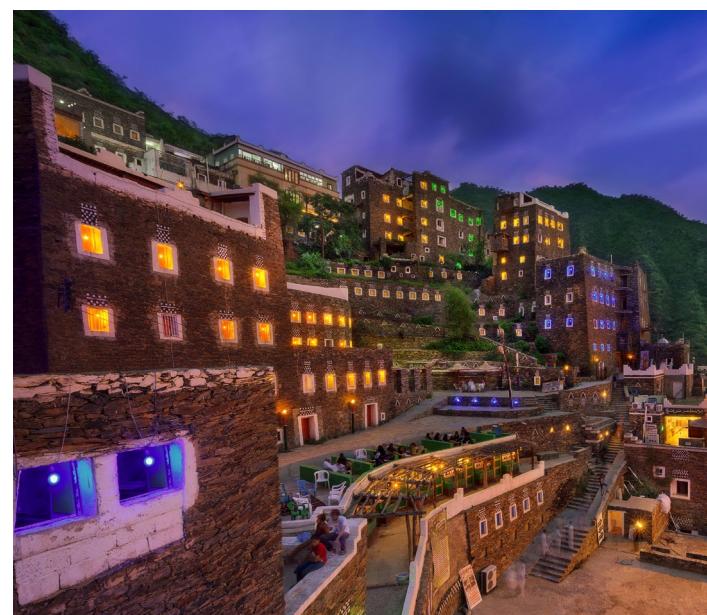
One of Saudi Arabia's more curious landmarks, Jebel Thera — better known as the Green Mountain — is a peak in the south of Abha, lit at night by neon green lights that emit a warm emerald glow across the city. The best way to get to the summit is by cable car, where there is a Lebanese restaurant and cafe with a terrace and panoramic views.

Al Habala

The hanging village of Al Habala is a curious wonder. A series of sandstone houses perched on the ledge of a sheer cliff, it was built almost 400 years ago by the Qahtani tribe, who reached the village by rope ladder (the name comes from 'habal', the Arabic term for rope). They lived here self-sufficiently until the 1980s, working small terraced farms. Today, there's a cable car to the village from May to October, and visitors are greeted at the top by Qahtani men wearing traditional flower garlands.

Al Muftaha Village

Abha's bohemian arts center, Al Muftaha Village is a beautiful little quarter around a mosque daubed with calligraphy. Little galleries showcase the work of regional craftspeople and artists, whose work is often colorful and figurative. Walls are daubed with bright murals, many nodding to the geometric patterns that Asiri women would traditionally paint their homes with. Small museums either side of the mosque tell the story of Abha's artistic heritage, including how the status of local families was defined by the quality of the murals in their homes.





Boasting endless views of a tranquil Arabian Gulf, Dammam is a modern metropolis that thrives on its coastal location. Along with nearby Al Khobar and Dhahran, these 'triplet cities' are tailored to a lifestyle in the open air, brimming with lush green parks, airy waterfronts and sandy beaches.

The region also has a growing reputation for arts, sports and entertainment. It is home to the kingdom's first street art exhibition in Al Khobar's Bayoonya district, and a range of cultural hubs and museums. Dip into science and innovation at SCITECH or get a dose of pop culture at the quirky Taybeen and Alfelwah and Aljowharah museums. As evening falls, wander the walkways of Dammam's Share Al-Hob souq, where a lively theatre of traders, performers and street musicians awaits.

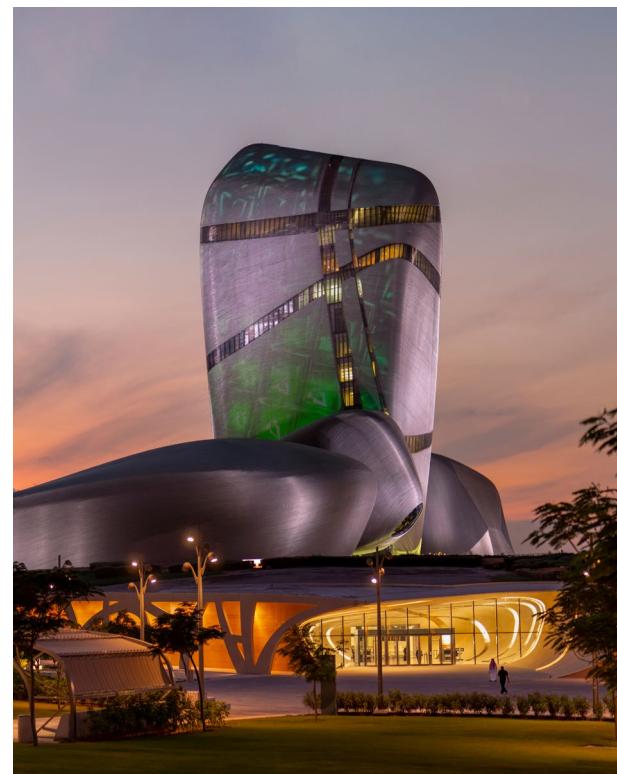
What to see

Half Moon Bay

A short drive south from Dammam, Half Moon Bay is a glorious pocket of beach resorts ideal for a family getaway. Dana Beach Resort offers watersports including jet-skiing, wakeboarding, sailing and diving, while the aqua play area features three water slides. Go-karting, horse riding and cycling are among the activities available back on land. The Radisson Blu Resort has boat trips and a palm-lined outdoor pool while Palm Beach Resort comes with tennis, football and volleyball courts along with beach-facing villas with an ocean view.

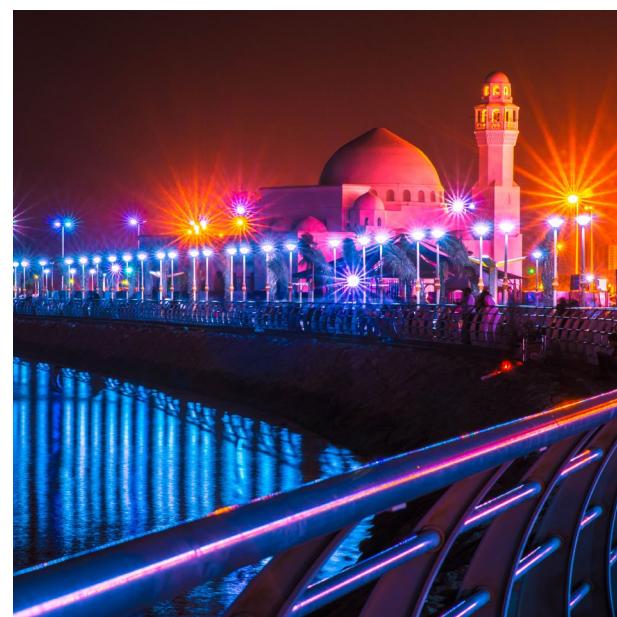
King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture

The iconic monolithic design of the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, known as Ithra, has become a symbol of Saudi's cultural renaissance. The sprawling building houses a theater, library, cinema, galleries and museum, alongside a wealth of interactive activities for children. The Ithra Journey Tour, a -30minute guided walk, offers an ideal overview from where families can then plot their own extended route.



Al Khobar waterfront

Dancing fountains and landscaped gardens make this seafront stretch a family favorite, where kids can frolic in playgrounds as adults take Instagram-worthy snaps of the historic water tower and remarkable King Fahd Causeway. For a bite among the sights, discover a range of dining options on the new Ajdan Walk south of the new corniche, or immerse yourself in Al Khobar's cafe culture at one of its dozens of waterfront coffee shops. Catch the sunset with a private boat trip across the waters.





Diriyah is the birthplace of the Kingdom and a symbol of the beauty, generosity and resilience of the Saudi nation and its people. The source of hundreds of stories, Diriyah is a vibrant destination filled with wonder and discovery for explorers traveling from near and far.

Founded in 1446 in a region surrounded by fertile agricultural land on the banks of Wadi Hanifa, Diriyah soon grew to become the center of knowledge on the Arabian Peninsula. The population of the Arabian Peninsula formed the nucleus of growing societies over hundreds of years and united under the umbrella of the first Saudi state between 1744 and 1818.

The topography of the area, with a fertile river valley offering shade and sustenance, meant that Diriyah became a natural resting point for traders, travelers and pilgrims from the Eastern and Northern parts of the Arabian Peninsula who were bound for Makkah and Medina.

What to see

Al-Turaif

Within Diriyah lies the UNESCO World Heritage Site Al-Turaif. The city of Al-Turaif, built in 1744 and recognized as one of the world's largest mud-brick cities, has been carefully restored to offer visitors a chance to walk in the footsteps of kings and heroes and explore Saudi history and culture in an authentic environment.



Museums of Ad Diriyah

Various museums are set to open in Ad Diriyah. They include: The Museum of Al Saud House, which will showcase the history of the ruling family and the kingdom's heritage; The Museum of the Saudi State and Arabian Peninsula; The Museum of the -100Stories Journey, where visitors can learn about Saudi history and culture, and Misk Heritage Museum, an educational institute aimed at encouraging young people to get involved with the nation's history and heritage.



The Al Bujairy Quarter

Situated about 12 miles northwest of central Riyadh, this newly renovated quarter is easy to navigate thanks to its many pedestrian walkways. Tucked into the alleyways, you'll find numerous eateries where you can sample Arabian cuisine, as well as coffee shops, a juice bar, an ice cream parlor and a dessert shop. Set to connect to Al-Turaif by bridge, the quarter comes alive every Thursday night with a traditional Saudi ardha (sword-dancing) performance. The hour-long show starts at 9 p.m. and takes place under the Al-Turaif ruins.

Nestled between Mount Shammer to the north and Mount Salma to the south, the city of Hail was once the capital of all the Arabian Desert and home to legends like Hatim Al Tai, the Arabian poet whose altruism earned him spots in stories like “One Thousand and One Nights” (also known as “Arabian Nights”).

Today it's the capital of the north-central region of Saudi Arabia bearing the same name and a popular stop during the pilgrimage to Makkah. The city of Hail is also known for hosting international events, including a Desert Festival celebrating the area's culture and the Hail International Rally, where rally cars, quads and motorcycles race through the Nafud Desert and through Hail, Baqaa, Al Ghazalah and the village of Umm Al Qulban.

What to see

Explore Al Nafud Desert

Sitting on the edge of Al Nafud Desert, no trip to Hail would be complete without a visit to these majestic red sands. The Hail region is home to rock art now classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Discover traces of what life was like more than 10,000 years ago through the inscriptions and petroglyphs just outside of Hail in Jubbah at Jabal Umm Sinman and Shuwaymis at Jabal Al Manjor. Adventure seekers might also enjoy camping, dune bashing or sand surfing in the sands right outside the city.



Castle Hop

If you see three castles, you've made it to the center of the city. A'arif Fort, Barzan Castle and Al Qishlah Castle are each worth stopping by, but if you have to pick only one, look up. Perched atop a peak, A'arif Fort is the oldest of the three and offers the best viewpoint over the city. A'arif has also been used as the meeting place to view the Ramadan moon and fire the iftar cannon to signal an end to the day's fasting.



Souq and Market Shopping

Also directly in the center of town, the Hail Souq sells fruits, vegetables and the kingdom's favorite – dates – as well as handmade crafts such as clay pots and woven mats. For those seeking souvenirs, this traditional souq should be on your itinerary. Alternatively, head east of the city's center to search for hidden treasures at the Hail Flea Market—one of the kingdom's last proper flea markets.

Jeddah's unofficial motto is Jeddah ghair, or 'Jeddah's different'. No Saudi city has been more open to outside influences over the years than this ancient port, whether traders, international artists or Makkah-bound pilgrims. Today, Jeddah is Saudi's buzzing cosmopolitan hub, home to gleaming hotels and big-ticket events like the Red Sea International Film Festival.

The city's heart is still intact in Al Balad, the magical historical quarter that has undergone a renaissance in recent years. And the Red Sea is still central to it all – for trade, for diving among pristine reefs and fishing for the seafood Jeddah is known for. The city where Eve was laid to rest is a beguiling mix. It remains gloriously different.

What to see

Al Balad

Jeddah's UNESCO-listed old town is one of the Kingdom's most evocative quarters, with narrow alleyways between ancient merchant's houses leading to spice-scented souqs and glowing traditional bakeries. Many buildings have been restored in recent years, including the grand Nasseeef House where Abdulaziz Ibn Saud stayed in 1925, before becoming king of a unified Saudi Arabia. Empty spaces have become quirky cafes or art galleries, as a district built in the seventh century looks to the future.



Jeddah Corniche

Jeddah's 4.2km corniche has been transformed into a place of piers, swimming bays, restaurants and lushly landscaped walking and cycle paths. Iconic sculptures by the likes of Henry Moore and Joan Miro, which first arrived in the city in the 1970s, are dotted along the waterfront. For many, coming here is about watching the sunset over the Red Sea, then seeing the launch of the -300meter King Fahd's Fountain, the world's tallest, with its great jet of water lit until midnight and visible across the city.



Tayebat City

Jeddah has a rich -2,500year history of fishing tribes, early Arabian trade, and later, pilgrims. Tayebat City tells this story, and that of the wider Arabian peninsula. Built in traditional Hijazi style, with roshan window screens and ornate minarets, the vast complex is set over four floors and 18 wings, with more than 60,000 items on display. Explore ancient coins and manuscripts, traditional Saudi costumes and a recreation of the Kaaba, the sacred black cube at the centre of Makkah's Grand Mosque.



For many Muslims around the world, an opportunity to visit Makkah is the ultimate blessing. This is the holiest city in Islam: the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the city where the Quran was first revealed to him. It's also a fixture in observant Muslims' daily lives, as they orient themselves toward Makkah to pray five times a day. The annual Hajj pilgrimage to the city is one of the five pillars of the faith, but millions of people journey to the city year-round to perform the shorter Umrah pilgrimage as well.

Since the vast majority of the visitors are pilgrims—non-Muslims aren't permitted to enter the city—most travelers spend as much time as possible within the opulent complex of the Grand Mosque, which is a lively hive of activity at all hours of the day. But if you have time to spare once you've completed the required steps of the Umrah, the historic city has much to offer to complement your understanding of the region and the faith itself, from museums to landmarks that were backdrops to some of the most pivotal moments of Islam's earliest days.

What to see

Masjid Al Haram

At Makkah's heart is the expansive Grand Mosque, which can accommodate as many as 4 million worshippers. Its focal point is the Kaaba, the cube swathed in black silk with gold calligraphy at the center. The holiest mosque in Islam, this is where pilgrims perform the Umrah, by donning the appropriate attire and performing prescribed steps like the tawaf (walking around the Kaaba seven times) and strolling between the hills of Safa and Marwa seven times. If you have any questions about the steps, ask your travel agent for a pamphlet or pick up a book before you go.



Museums

Makkah has a host of fascinating, intimate museums that shed light on the city's history as the birthplace of Islam and a crossroads for travelers from all over the world for centuries. The Exhibition of the Two Holy Mosques guides visitors through the construction and many phases of the Masjid Al Haram in Makkah as well as the Masjid An Nabawi in Medina—browse intricate marble arches, reclaimed wooden doors and much more, saved and restored from previous iterations of the mosques. You'll have to do some wrangling to get permission to visit the Kiswah Museum next door—though it's still well worth the effort to see where the kiswah, the -670 kilogram black silk cloth draped on the Kaaba, is made by hand, and woven with calligraphic inscriptions done in threads made from real gold and silver.





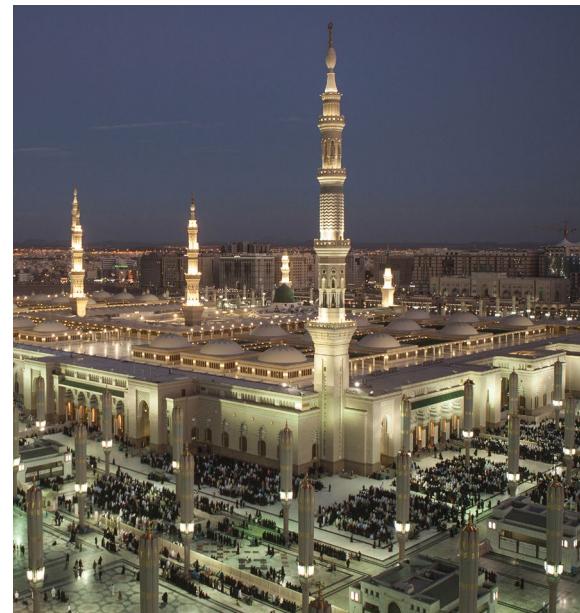
Medina is Islam's second holiest city, making it a key destination for millions of pilgrims traveling to Saudi Arabia for Hajj or Umrah. The city is centered around Al Masjid an Nabawi, also known as the Prophet's Mosque, which was constructed by the Prophet himself and is also where he is buried.

Medina is where the Prophet Muhammad lived and taught after the migration from Makkah in 622 A.D., called Hijrah. This year is so important in the history of Islam that it marks the start of the Islamic calendar. Although the city's name is usually written as Medina in English, its full name is Al Medina Al Munawwarah, meaning "the Enlightened City." Because of the city's pivotal role in the Prophet Muhammad's life, making a trip to Medina is a lifelong dream for many Muslims.

What to see

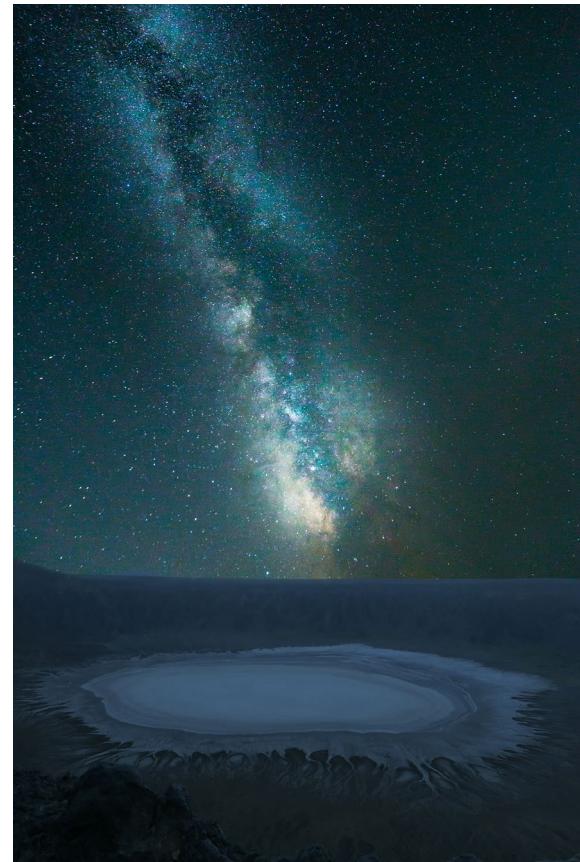
Al Masjid an Nabawi (The Prophet's Mosque)

The final resting place of the Prophet Muhammad is in this stunning -10minaret mosque, which can accommodate 1 million visitors and is open 24 hours. The Prophet's tomb is located under the mosque's only green dome, in its south-eastern corner. After his arrival in Medina, the Prophet Muhammad helped construct the mosque, originally an open-air building, which has since been expanded numerous times by subsequent city rulers. The area between the minbar and the Prophet Muhammad's tomb is known as Rawdah ash Sharifah, or the Noble Garden, which is one of the Gardens of Paradise. Tradition says that prayers uttered here are never rejected.



Quba Mosque

On the migration from Makkah to Medina in 622, the Prophet Muhammad and his followers stopped in the village of Quba and put down the foundation stone of the world's first mosque. Worshippers have gathered here ever since, though the current building is a more recent construction. Once outside the boundaries of Medina, the mosque and the surrounding area have been fully absorbed by the city, and Quba Mosque sees a steady stream of visitors. Nearby Quba City Market sells dates, perfumes and other local specialties.



Mount Uhud

A major pilgrimage site, Mount Uhud is the place where Muslim forces led by the Prophet Muhammad battled troops from Makkah. The mountain rises about 3,500 feet (1,077 meters), and it can be climbed to better observe the battlefield. Nearby is the Uhud Martyrs Cemetery, where 85 of the slain Muslim soldiers are buried. Mount Uhud is northeast of Medina's city center.

The Red Sea coast is a stretch of richly varied cultures: from the port city of Jeddah to the fertile mountains of Taif, via the turquoise-fringed coast around Yanbu.

The Red Sea is home to an abundance of flora and fauna including rare species such as dugongs and green and hawksbill turtles. As the world's fourth largest barrier reef system, home to untouched corals and a significant number of endangered species, the Red Sea is a haven of natural beauty and one of the few destinations to have such diversity so close to each other.

Inland from the coast, the area around the Red Sea features miles of sweeping desert and dramatic landscapes that include dormant volcanoes, rich natural environments and ancient archaeological sites. The area is crisscrossed by trading routes that date back to the Nabataean civilization, reflecting the history of the region as part of the Incense Trail and the maritime spice route.

What to see

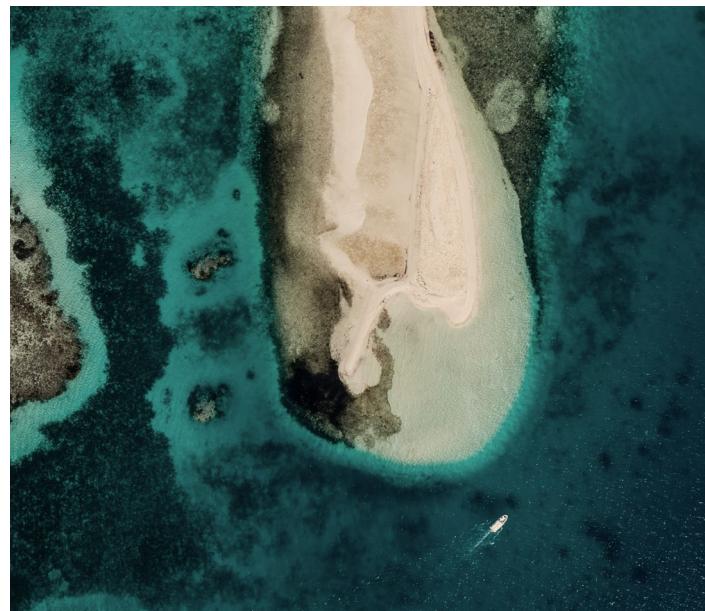
Shopping

The shopping is just as diverse as the landscape from the laden stalls of Al Hada's farm markets to the high-gloss boutiques of Jeddah's Boulevard. In Tabuk, venture to Souq Twaheen in the city's old quarter, still used by Bedouin nomads. Yanbu, the port city six hours down the coast, offers the best shopping experiences around the harbor with Souq Al Layl, a maze of traditional coral stone buildings, a fish market and less traditional places to shop. In Taif shopping tends to revolve around the areas' delectable natural produce. The central market has a whole section devoted to the sweet honey from the surrounding mountains, and a perfume section where you can buy the famous Taif rose oil beloved by regional royalty.



Cruise the Red Sea

For travelers seeking a getaway that blends culture, adventure and balmy summer sun, a cruise is the ultimate luxury experience. Escape to culinary feasts, elegant spas, and boundless skies, as you drift between islands and sail for the horizon, taking in a world of wonder, of white sand atolls, lapping waves and shoals of jewel-bright fish. The best way to gain an overview of this beautiful and diverse coastline is by ship – and particularly from the opulent upper deck of a sleek, luxury liner.



Riyadh is at first glance a modern metropolis, its highways hives of activity amongst urban high-rises. But delve beneath its shiny new façade and the city's fascinating centuries-old history can still be found within its atmospheric souqs, compelling museums and ancient architecture.

Throw in a burgeoning art scene with contemporary settings like Mono Gallery and Noqtah Studio, and this blend of medieval and millennial makes for a beguiling cultural union, one where Arabia's first roots can be traced, and where its bold future can be envisaged. It's the perfect setting for a staycation or weekend break, exploring the best of the capital's cultural appeal.

What to see

The Saudi National Museum

The Saudi National Museum has over 3,700 antiquities on show, documenting the grand history of Arabia over millennia. Beginning with pre-historic skeletons and a meteorite from the vast Rub Al Khali desert, through pre-Islamic Arabian kingdoms, it portrays the birth and rise of Islam, and the creation of the modern kingdom, following the 1902 capture of Riyadh. The famous battle behind this birth centres on another must-visit location, Al Masmak Fortress. Built in 1865 and superbly preserved, the fort houses a collection of photographs charting the city's evolution over the years.

Souq Al Zal

Located only a few minutes' walk from the Masmak Fort, the Souq Al Zal remains as noisy and vibrant as when it first emerged back in 1901. Filled with the scent of burning oud and the din of cheerful hawkers, the crackle and hubbub here is at its peak on Friday evenings during the Haraj auction, when merchants display their rarest goods of the week. Everything from gold coins to quirky handcrafts and dusty antiques can be found here, with traditional Saudi items such as dallah coffee pots, hooked jambiya daggers and mabkhara incense burners making for excellent souvenirs.

Sample Saudi cuisine

Perhaps the best way to experience Riyadh's cultural fusion is through its cuisine, with combined dining and heritage experiences like that at Najd Village. Here, faithfully recreated Najd architecture creates a traditional environment and authentic recipes like kabsa, jareesh and hashi are served in a setting ideal for group dining, with its plentiful platters the best way to sample the full menu. More contemporary takes can be found at the sophisticated Takyia, serving Saudi fusion food inspired by the country's regions, and Suhail, with its modern spin on traditional Saudi favourites.



The northwestern city of Tabuk has long been a resting point for Jordanian and Egyptian pilgrims, with a rich Bedouin culture that can be felt in Souq Twaheen, which still supplies patterned rugs and goat-hair tent covers for modern nomads.

Today's Tabuk marks the Northern point of the Saudi coast, but is also a base for exploring wild beauty spots and the story of the Prophet Moses, who is believed to have lived east of the city for a decade. It's possible to visit the carved tombs of Maghaer Shuaib in the desert, or the Moses Spring near Maqna, where natural springs still flow under the date palms.

Nearby is the stunning Tayeb Al Ism, a steep granite massif separated from the turquoise-fringed Gulf of Aqaba by only the road. For clear seas and sun-swept-beaches, explore the charms of local coastal towns Haql and Sharma.

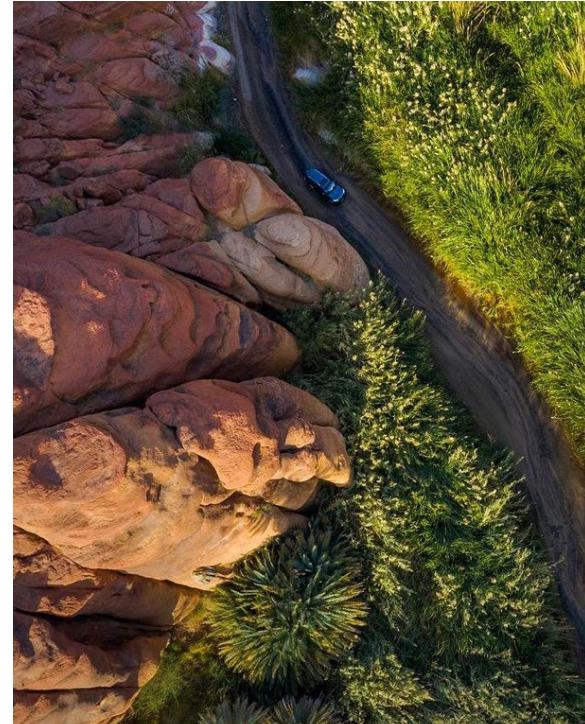
What to see

Tabuk Castle

There are spectacular fortresses all around Tabuk, but this imposing castle in the center of town might be the oldest. Known to date from 1559, some claim there was a fortress here as early as 3,500BC. Inside its walls, two mosques are linked by courtyards, stairwells and watchtowers and there's a small museum detailing the history of the castle and the wider city – from the great explorers that visited, like Ibn Battuta, to the caravans of pilgrims who would stop to drink from its wells on their way to Makkah and Medina.

Al Disah Valley

At the crossroads of three valleys south of Tabuk, the wildly sculpted sandstone columns of Wadi Al Disah (Valley of the Palms) look like a mix between the Grand Canyon and Monument Valley in America. While much of the landscape is ochre desert, there are oases of pools, tall grasses and palm trees running through deep canyons, creating an otherworldly feeling, especially during glowing sunsets. It's possible to hike through much of the valley, or visit on a 4WD drive tour.



Maghaer Shuaib

The Maghaer Shuaib seems to appear from nowhere in the reddish desert west of Tabuk – its elegantly carved facades and tombs built into the sandstone rocks recalling Petra in Jordan and Hegra at Al Ula. According to tradition, having fled Egypt, Moses lived here for a decade under the patronage of the Prophet Shuaib, who had been impressed by Moses' chivalry and offered his daughter's hand in marriage. Moses eventually returned to Egypt, but it's easy to imagine that this beautiful place stayed with him.



Just reaching Taif is a thrill. From the hollow of Makkah, a beautiful serpentine road winds up through the mountains to the plateau where Taif sits, passing fruit markets, rose farms and deep valleys. Taif is often referred to as the City of Roses, for the famously fragrant flowers that grow in the wadis and mountains around it. It's also known as Saudi's unofficial summer capital.

Because of its altitude, Taif is a cool escape from the summer heat, especially in the beautiful nearby mountains of Al Shafa, where baboons frolic in front of plunging valleys. While the roses bloom in April, the city really blossoms in August, where the Souq Okaz cultural festival and the Crown Prince Camel Festival are just a few of the attractions around town.

What to see

Al Hada Mountain

High above the valley that runs towards Makkah, Al Hada is a place of comedic baboons, rose fields and natural vastness. A curving road sweeps elegantly down the mountainside, as do ancient zig-zagging camel trails. As the sun sets and locals gather at lookout points, the rows of mountains on the horizon are cast in a greyish ombré. Saudi's longest cable car runs between the mountaintop and the wadi floor, where there's a water park and toboggan slide at the Al Khar Tourist Village.



Taif Central Market

Taif's central market is a labyrinth of narrow alleys through sand-colored buildings to peaceful plazas. Laid out in themed areas, there are colorful, fragrant sections devoted to rich local honey, perfume (especially rose water and oil), Islamic dress and jewelry. Street jewelers with blow torches work on silver rings inlaid with Yemini agate, while nearby shops sell elaborate body pieces made of gold mined near Medina. Sellers of ghee milk, oud, decorative swords and healing herbs are all part of a quintessential Taif experience.

Taif's Rose Fields

Every year, Taif turns pink and red, as the city's famous -30petal damask roses scent the air. In the City of Roses, more than 900 rose farms produce well over 300 million flowers, which are harvested to produce the world's most expensive rose oil, or attar. See the mechanism first-hand with a guided visit to one of the city's rose factories, or visit Taif's central market to browse and buy rose-scented oil, water, fragrance and soaps.



Saudi

SAUDI
The Future



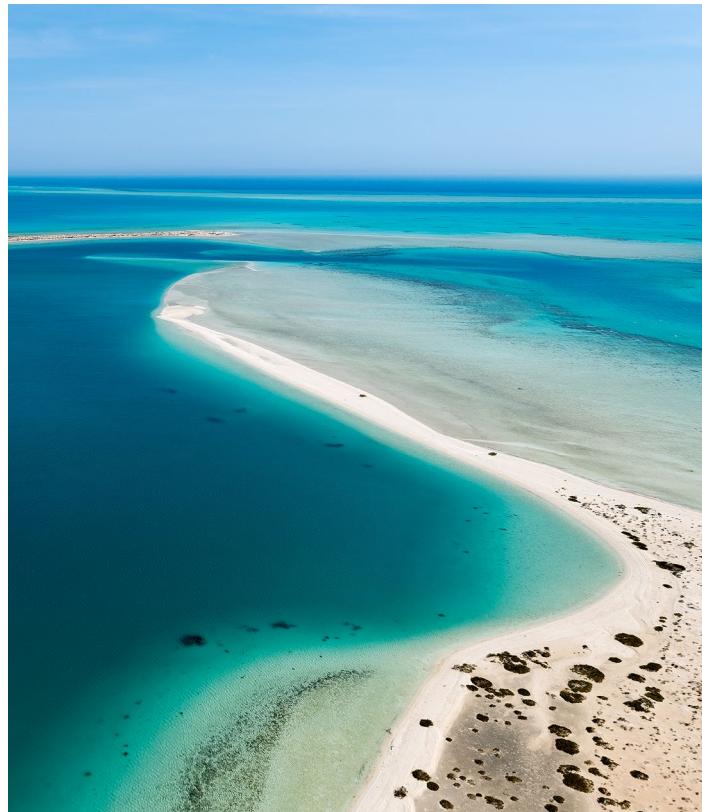
Red Sea Project



The Red Sea will be an exquisite sanctuary offering indulgent experiences, seamlessly customized to the unique needs of each visitor. Setting new standards in sustainable development, the Red Sea encompasses an archipelago of more than 90 pristine islands, miles of sweeping desert and dramatic landscapes that include volcanoes, and canyons.

The Red Sea is the world's most ambitious luxury tourism development, offering an exclusive experience of unparalleled diversity for discerning global travellers. Smart technology will deliver innovative, tailored services from the moment visitors begin to research their trip to the time they return home and for years to come.

The Red Sea will welcome its first guests by the end of 2022 and will attract 1 million overnight visits per year by 2030.



AMAALA



Opening in 2022, AMAALA will be an ultra-luxury resort destination spanning three sites, a first for the region. Its pristine natural environment and temperate climate will provide a magnificent backdrop to premium facilities, diverse offerings and engaging experiences.

Hidden in plain sight on Saudi Arabia's north western coast, AMAALA will be a place of self-transformation, inspired by the arts, wellness and the purity of the Red Sea.



Qiddiya

Qiddiya will be the capital of Entertainment, Sports and the Arts in Saudi, an integrated destination offering immersive experiences and memorable moments of delight.

Qiddiya will be a place of inspiration, discovery and engagement for a youthful Saudi society to fulfil ambitions. Qiddiya is being built around five cornerstones: Parks & Attractions, Sports & Wellness, Motion & Mobility, Arts & Culture and Nature & Environment and will be a place where Saudi youth can enjoy, appreciate, aspire, advance and nurture their potential and stimulate interest in new professional pathways that help build a stronger future.

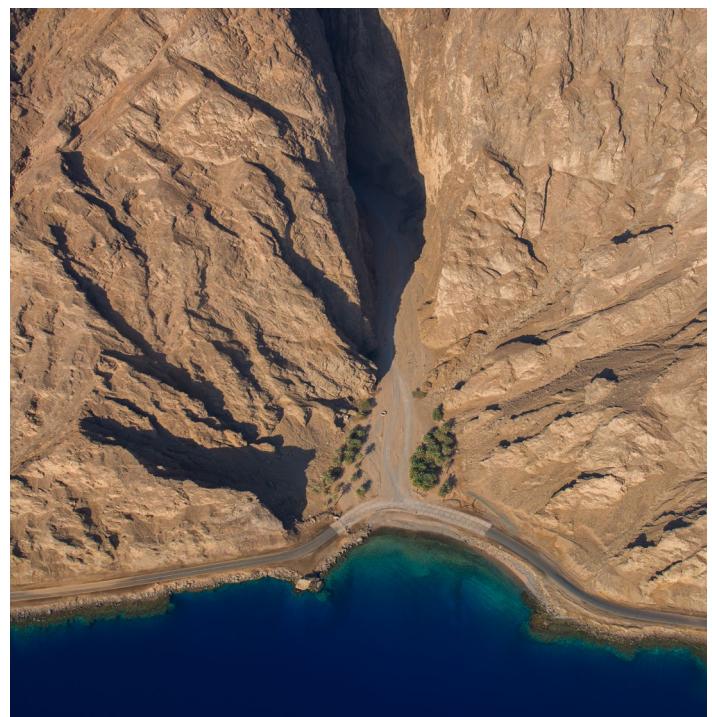
The first phase of Qiddiya's master plan is scheduled to open in 2023, including the Six Flags Qiddiya park.



NEOM

NEOM will become the world's most ambitious futuristic and sustainable ecosystem for living and working, over 33 times the size of New York. With an ambition to be the home and workplace for more than a million citizens from around the world, NEOM will be home for people who dream big and want to be part of building a new model for sustainable living, working and prospering.

Solar dome technology will produce carbon neutral desalinated water for Neom, a city of zero emissions projecting a progressive model for healthy lifestyles and urban living. Work on NEOM has already started, and construction will begin as soon as the research and planning phase is finalized. The bulk of the construction of NEOM is scheduled to be completed by 2030.



Appendix



Saudi: Tourism information and statistics



Visa logistics

- The Saudi e-Visa process, launched in September 2019, is **%100 digital**.
- The e-Visa is a multiple-entry visa valid for a year, allowing tourists to stay for up to **90 days per visit, and up to 180 days per year**.
- Tourists from eligible countries can apply for a tourist visa online through the fast and easy-to-use e-Visa portal (<https://visa.visitsaudi.com>) ahead of their trip, or upon arrival in Saudi Arabia through visa kiosks at immigration.
- Tourists from other countries should apply for a consulate visa through Saudi embassies and consulates abroad.
- Visitors from any country can gain a tourism visa-on-arrival if they have an activated and valid US, UK or Schengen visa and are travelling with a Saudi national airline (Saudia, Flynas or Flydeal).
- Tourism visas **cost SAR 440 plus VAT** and are inclusive of mandatory health insurance.



Visa numbers



First six months after the e-Visa was launched,



By 2022, Saudi Arabia is targeting



By 2030, Saudi Arabia expects to host

**+ 400,000 visas
were issued**

**62M
annual visits**

**100M
annual visits**

from both the domestic and international market.

Saudi: Q&A



Saudi culture

Saudi Arabia's rich heritage and traditions have been shaped by its position as a historic trade hub and the birthplace of Islam. In recent years, the Kingdom has undergone a significant cultural transformation, adapting centuries-old customs to fit the contemporary world. For example, while modest dress is still encouraged for both men and women — tourists are advised to avoid tight-fitting clothing, and women must cover their shoulders and knees — female visitors no longer need to wear an abaya and hijab (robe and head covering). Unmarried guests to the country may now stay together in hotels, and female tourists (as well as locals) may also drive.



The official language of Saudi Arabia

Arabic is the official language of Saudi Arabia and the first language of all native Saudi people. It is the primary language used in all public transactions and is a language spoken by Muslims all over the world. However, English, which is a compulsory second language in schools, is widely spoken in the Kingdom. And most road signs are bilingual, showing information in both Arabic and English.



Time zone in Saudi

The standard time zone of Saudi is Arabia Standard Time (AST). The time zone is 3 hours ahead of GMT (GMT+3) with no daylight savings.



Getting to Saudi

With 13 international airports, served by global carriers, getting to and around the Kingdom couldn't be easier.

1. King Khalid International Airport (RUH) – Riyadh
2. King Abdulaziz International Airport (JED) – Jeddah
3. King Fahd International Airport (DMM) – Dammam
4. Prince Mohammed bin Abdulaziz International Airport (MED) – Medina
5. Taif International Airport (TIF) – Taif
6. Abha International Airport (AHB) – Abha
7. Hail International Airport (HAS) – Hail
8. King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Airport (GIZ) – Gazan
9. Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz International Airport (ELQ) – Qassim
10. Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz International Airport (TUU) – Tabuk
11. Prince Abdulmohsin Bin Abdulaziz International Airport (YNB) – Yanbu
12. Al Jouf International Airport (AJF) – Jouf
13. Al Ahsa International Airport (HOF) – Al Ahsa

Saudi Arabia also operates 15 domestic airports, for short hops between regions. For further information, visit the General Authority for Civil Aviation.



Getting around Saudi

A first-rate transportation system connects Saudi Arabia's provinces and cities, some of the modes of transport include car rentals, taxis, ride-hailing apps, trains and buses.

For more information [click here](#).

Saudi: Q&A



Weather in Saudi

Contrary to popular belief, it's not always hot in Saudi Arabia. The kingdom experiences four distinct seasons —from chilly winter breezes in January to peak desert heat in August —and a climate that varies between regions. Read on for a seasonal overview of the kingdom's weather.



Spring in Saudi

Mid-March to Mid-June

Spring in Saudi Arabia can be brisk, particularly in the north, where the temperature at night can drop below 15 degrees C. The central and southern regions are warmer, averaging around 20 degrees after nightfall. Rainfall is at its highest during spring, particularly in the central region and in the southwest over the Asir Mountains.



Summer in Saudi

Mid-June to Mid-September

With the exception of the comparatively mild highlands in the southwest, summer signals the start of rising temperatures across most of the country, with the average hovering around 45 degrees C. The early mornings and long evenings are more temperate, so take advantage of the warm seas to explore Saudi's world-class scuba diving sites, or try sailing and snorkeling.



Autumn in Saudi

Mid-September to Mid-December

Autumn brings gentler weather and cool breezes in both Saudi Arabia's northern regions and the southwestern highlands. While daytime temperatures remain warm and can reach the 30s in early fall, evenings are milder and fit for outdoor strolling, especially along Jeddah's waterfront, indulging in al-fresco dining or visiting Al Ahsa's cool desert springs.



Winter in Saudi

Mid-December to Mid-March

Take advantage of Saudi Arabia's beautiful winter weather to explore the kingdom. The balmy days and cool nights are ideal for camping, rock climbing or exploring Saudi Arabia's verdant highlands and bustling cities, from Riyadh to Jeddah. Average winter temperatures are in the teens, but visitors might be lucky enough to see snowfall in the mountains of the northern regions blanketing the slopes and desert sands.

Saudi: Q&A



Saudi currency and payments

Currency exchange and transactions are easy in Saudi Arabia. And even if you don't yet know the difference between a riyal and a halala, there's no need to worry: Many businesses in the kingdom accept credit cards and contactless payments. Use this guide to learn the ins and outs of Saudi currency and exchange rates so you can get back to scuba diving, sightseeing and shopping instead.



The basics of Saudi currency

Saudi Arabia's national currency is the Saudi riyal (. SAR), which is subdivided into 100 halala. You'll receive notes in denominations of 100 ,50 ,10 ,5 ,1 and 500 riyals, and coins in denominations of 1 or 2 riyals and 25 ,10 ,5 ,1 and 50 halala.



What is the Saudi exchange rate?

The U.S. dollar is equivalent to SAR3.75 (fixed rate). All banks in the kingdom offer currency exchange services. You can also find exchange bureaus at airports, some shopping centers and other locations throughout the country. Banking hours are generally from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday to Thursday. (Exchange bureaus are often open later, although they may charge higher commission fees.) Banks are usually open at international airports and currency transactions are at a lower rate than specialist currency exchanges. ATMs are widely available for the withdrawal of funds using the Visa and Mastercard networks, and credit cards including Visa, Mastercard and American Express are accepted throughout the kingdom. Many businesses also accept digital payment methods, such as Apple Pay.



The customs and laws of Saudi

Cultural heritage and religion inform the public etiquette that's expected and practiced in Saudi Arabia. If you're not familiar with Saudi Arabia's laws and customs, don't worry: Behind these conventions are values that people across many cultures are accustomed to, including respect for others, decorum in public and protection of privacy. Before your trip, learn more about how to act and dress in Saudi Arabia, as well as the role of religion and rules about alcohol and other substances.



Saudi dress code

In public, both men and women are asked to dress modestly, avoiding tight-fitting clothes and items with profane language or images. Women should cover their shoulders and knees in public. (Consider packing blouses with sleeves, scarves or shawls for your shoulders and mid- to maxi-length skirts and dresses, capris or pants to cover your knees.)



Public decency laws of Saudi

Public displays of affection are not consistent with the local culture. Visitors should also avoid using profane language or gestures.

Saudi: Q&A

► Respecting Saudi religion

During prayer time in Saudi Arabia, five times a day, music is turned off in public places and many shops close briefly. For one month a year, during Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. If you visit during Ramadan, the most sacred month of the year in Islam, avoid eating, drinking or smoking in public during the day out of respect. Learn more about how to participate in Ramadan, whether you're visiting Jeddah or Riyadh.

► Illegal substances and alcohol in Saudi

The sale, purchase and consumption of alcohol are illegal in Saudi Arabia. It is also illegal to bring alcohol or drugs into the country, so plan to unwind with coffee or tea at one of the country's many cafés instead.

► Saudi: Emergency Contacts

Important contacts to keep on hand in the event of an emergency.

There are individual emergency numbers and services in Saudi to connect you with the relevant local authorities.

General emergency - **112**

Police Services

There are two emergency numbers for police assistance in Saudi. There is also an app that allows citizens and residents to file security and traffic reports for humanitarian assistance outside the urban area.

Police assistance - **911 / 999 / Kollona Amn** [Download](#) 

Fire Services

The General Directorate of Civil Defense is responsible for dealing with fire emergencies in Saudi.

Fire emergency response - **998**

Ambulance Services

Public ambulance services - **997**

Flying Ambulance - **123**

Saudi Red Crescent Authority **ASAFNY** [Download](#) 

Road and Traffic Emergency Services

Traffic accidents - **993**

Roadside Assistance (RSA) - **920003922 / Morni** [Download](#) 

Najm (non-emergency traffic accident team) - **920000560 / Najm** [Download](#) 

Tourism Services

Tourism Call Center - **930**

Tourism International Call Center - **920000890**

COVID - 19

COVID19- hotline - **937**

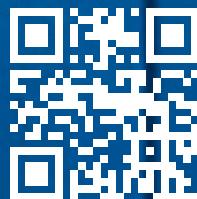
Whatsapp assistance: **920005937 / mawidapp** [Download](#) 



Saudi
Welcome
to Arabia



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