



Saudi Arabia

المملكة العربية السعودية

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Why Go?

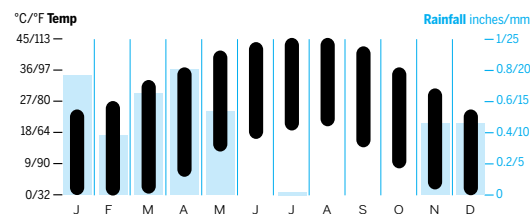
The birthplace and spiritual home of Islam, Saudi Arabia is as rich in attractions as it is in stirring symbolism. It is also one of the most difficult places on Earth to visit.

For those who do get in, rock-hewn Madain Saleh is Arabia's greatest treasure. Other wonders abound, from the echoes of TE Lawrence along the Hejaz Railway to the mud-brick ruins of Dir'ayah. Fascinating Riyadh is a showpiece for modern Saudi Arabia, Jeddah blends ancient and modern and has an enchanting old city made of coral, while the Red Sea coast has world-class diving. And for Muslim travellers, Mecca and Medina represent the most sacred destination you can imagine.

There are few places left that can be said to represent the last frontier of tourism. Whether you're an expat or a pilgrim, Saudi Arabia is one of them.

When to Go

Saudi Arabia



Nov–Mar Cooler temperatures make daytime weather bearable and nights surprisingly chilly.

Apr–Oct Daily temperatures above 40°C, high humidity along the coast; Ramadan; April sandstorms.

Year round Red Sea diving has excellent visibility all year, but in summer morning dives are best.

FAST FACTS

- ➔ **Capital** Riyadh
- ➔ **Area** 2,149,690 sq km
- ➔ **Population** 27.8 million
- ➔ **Country code** ☎ 966

At a Glance

- ➔ **Currency:** Saudi riyal (SR)
- ➔ **Money:** ATMs widespread, credit cards widely accepted
- ➔ **Visas:** Only business visas possible (no tourist visas)
- ➔ **Mobile phones:** GSM phone network widespread

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	SR2.73
Canada	C\$1	SR2.91
Euro zone	€1	SR4.26
Japan	¥100	SR3.14
New Zealand	NZ\$1	SR2.56
UK	£1	SR5.80
USA	US\$1	SR3.75

Resources

- ➔ **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com/search?q=saudi+Arabia) Includes the invaluable Thorn Tree forum.
- ➔ **Saudi Arabian Information Resources** (www.saudinf.com) History, culture, economics and helpful addresses.
- ➔ **Arab News** (www.arabnews.com) Up-to-the-minute news from a Saudi perspective.

Daily Costs

Saudi Arabia isn't a budget destination. Eating well for SR50 to SR75 per day is rarely a problem, but few budget hotels accept Westerners – expect to pay at least SR500 for a double in a decent midrange hotel. It is, of course, easy to pay much more than this for both food and accommodation; a more realistic midrange budget, once you factor in transport, is around SR1000 per day.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Begin in Riyadh, with a couple of days exploring the modern architecture, Masmak Fortress, the National Museum and the nearby camel races. On the third day, factor in an afternoon at Dir'ayah and camp in the Red Sands. Fly to Medina and drive, with one or two stops along the Hejaz Railway en route, to Al Ula; spend a day amid the wonderful Nabataean ruins of Madain Saleh. Fly down to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia's most beguiling city, and lose yourself in the souqs and coral houses of Old Jeddah and a stroll along the corniche.

Two Weeks

With an extra week, head for the hills (especially in summer) of pretty Taif; make it a weekend if you want to catch the camel races. Then allow for a couple of days' diving around Yanbu before continuing your way north along the Red Sea coast, with numerous fine beaches to pause in along the way. Then cut inland to Tabuk in the Kingdom's far north, one of Saudi Arabia's most intriguing cities.

Essential Food & Drink

- ➔ **Mezze** Truly one of the joys of Arab cooking and similar in conception to Spanish tapas, with infinite possibilities.
- ➔ **Fuul** Mashed fava beans served with olive oil and often eaten for breakfast.
- ➔ **Shwarma** Ubiquitous kebab- or souvlaki-style pita sandwich stuffed with meat.
- ➔ **Baby camel** Among the tenderest of Saudi meats, it's a particular speciality of Jeddah and the Hejaz.
- ➔ **Red Sea seafood** Fresh and varied and at its best when slow-cooked over coals or baked in the oven; try *samak mashwi* (fish basted in a date puree and barbecued over hot coals).
- ➔ **Khouzi** A Bedouin dish of lamb stuffed with rice, nuts, onions, sultanas, spices, eggs and a whole chicken.