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Tour Notes

Saudi Arabia Discovery

Tour Duration – 14 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●○○ | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●● | Wildlife ●○○○○

Tour Pace

Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Dir'iyah, the first capital next to Riyadh and now listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- ✓ Ushayqer Heritage Village, a village displaying the typical Najdi architecture and allowing a glimpse into Saudi Arabia's ancient lifestyle
- ✓ The oasis of Tayma, located on the incense trading route across the Arabian Peninsula
- ✓ Jeddah and its old city, Al Balad, which was founded in the 7th Century, and now listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- ✓ Medina, the second holiest city in Islam
- ✓ The Red Sea coast with its atmospheric small towns and ports





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Tour Map



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Comfortable tourist class hotels with private bathrooms
Included Meals: Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary
Group Size: Minimum of 4 travellers and maximum of 12 travellers
Start Point: Riyadh
End Point: Jeddah
Transport: SUV, minivan or minibus depending on group size
Country Visited: Saudi Arabia



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Saudi Arabia Discovery

Saudi Arabia opened its doors to tourism in late 2019 and now welcomes intrepid visitors to its vast land. And oh how there is much to discover; the capital Riyadh and the coastal city of Jeddah on the Red Sea are where any discovery of the country starts or ends; the country's first capital Dir'iyah built in traditional mud architecture has been fully restored and is integral to any visit to Riyadh; the natural beauty of its deserts with high dunes and rock formations and of course the Nabatean site of Mada'in Saleh (Al Hegra) – a sister city to Petra in Jordan - and which was a major trading hub on the caravan routes across the Arabian Peninsula, Dedan and the rock art of Jubbah. The Hejaz Railway, forever made famous by Lawrence of Arabia, runs across the country to Medina and several of the stations have been restored and can be visited. When one thinks desert, one thinks camels; the itinerary will take you through the Al Nefud Al Kebir desert toward Sakaka. The country was strategically positioned on the trading routes across the Arabian Peninsula and pilgrims' routes having been running crisscross through the country for centuries, all leading to Mecca and Medina in the southwestern part of the country, leaving us today archaeological sites to visit and marvel at. Join us on this voyage of discovery and unearth the secrets of Saudi Arabia, for so long just a tantalising wanderlust, but now very much a travellers reality.

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Riyadh (Overall driving time today is approx. 30-45 min)

Arrive in Riyadh and transfer to your hotel. Depending on your time of arrival, there may be time to explore the city at leisure. No meals or guided services are provided today. Overnight at Centro Olaya by Rotana, or similar.

Day 2: Riyadh

This morning, we take in old Riyadh at the King Abdul Aziz Historical Area with the national museum and the Murabba Palace. Continue to Masmak Fortress, which was converted into a museum in the 1990's. In modern Riyadh Al Faisaliah and Kingdom Towers tower above the city. A view from one of the towers offers a panorama across the whole city. This afternoon visit the old walled city of Al Dir'iyah, listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site (optional visit). The city was the first capital of the Saudi kingdom in the 18th century and abandoned after the siege of the Ottomans in the 19th century. A new capital was then built, which was Riyadh. Overnight at Centro Olaya by Rotana, or similar. (B)



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Day 3: Riyadh – Buraidah (Overall driving time today is approx. 4.5 hours)

Departing Riyadh we travel to Ushayqer Heritage Village, a mud village dating back around 1,000 years. It has been impressively restored and allows a glimpse into Saudi Arabia's ancient lifestyle. Ushayqir was an important point on the pilgrimage route to Mecca. Continue to Buraidah. Overnight at Best Western Plus Hotel, or similar. (B)

Day 4: Buraidah – Ha'il (Overall driving time today is approx. 3 hours)

Early this morning, visit the camel market followed by a visit to a date farm outside of Buraidah. Drive to Ha'il. The city was an important trading centre for the traditional camel caravans until the construction of the Hejaz Railway. Visit Al-Qashalal fortress and Al 'Arif Fort, built with mud and clay, on the top of a hill providing a nice view over the city. Overnight at Aronani Hotel, or similar. (B)

Day 5: Ha'il – Jubbah – Sakaka (Overall driving time today is approx. 1.5 hours)

Departure towards Jubbah, UNESCO World Heritage Site, with its impressive rock carvings that are believed to date back to 5500 BC. The rock engravings feature a variety of animals, such as elephants, buffalo and then from a later period camels and other domesticated animals. Continue to Sakaka. Overnight at Raoum Inn, or similar. (B)

Day 6: Sakaka – Rajajil Columns – Dawmat Al Jandal - Tabuk (Overall driving time today is approx. 6.5 hours)

Our first stop today is Rajajil, an ancient burial site. The standing stones are monoliths, some over 3 metres tall. Continue to Dawmat Al Jandal, which was an important point on the trading routes of Arabia, because of the presence of water. This afternoon, visit the fortress of Marid, which lies on a hill above the oasis, which is dotted with ancient villages. Through the Nefud Al Kebir desert, the large sand desert with its hilly dunes and bush vegetation, presenting itself in different colours, to Tabuk. Upon arrival, time permitting, visit the old Hejaz railway station in Tabuk which houses the Tabuk provincial museum, holding artefacts of the past but also a glimpse into the future with the plans of Neom City, a new city under construction on the Red Sea. Overnight at OYO 358 Garden View Hotel, or similar. (B)

Day 7: Tabuk – Excursion by 4WD to Al Shuwaq and Wadi Disah OR, Excursion to Jebel Al Lawz – Wadi Damm – Jebel Hisma

Your guide today will choose one of two possible excursions showcasing superb Arabian scenery. The first option is a 4WD excursion to Al Shuwaq and Wadi Disah, also known as Wadi Qaraqir. Wadi Disah is one of the most famous valleys in the kingdom. The valley is surrounded by red mountains and contains a wide variety of trees and plants. Al Shuwaq is wide canyon, locally also nicknamed the Grand Canyon of the Saudi Arabia. The second option is a full day excursion to Jebel Al Lawz, Wadi Damm and Jebel Hisma. Jebel Al Lawz, The Almond Mountain in Arabic, dominates the landscape and offers great views over the surrounding areas from a viewpoint at about 2000 m. The mountain can be covered in snow during wintertime. Wadi Damm and Jebel Hisma are the extension of Wadi Rum in Saudi Arabia. The desert, dotted with rock formations, offers a great sight and exploration. Return to Tabuk. Overnight at OYO 358 Garden View Hotel, or similar. (B, Picnic Lunch)

Day 8: Tabuk – Tayma – Al' Ula (Overall driving time today is approx. 5 hours)

Drive through the desert to the oasis of Tayma, located on the incense trading route. Tayma is one of the oldest settlements in Saudi Arabia where human activity dates back an incredible 90,000 years. Visit the museum and Haddaj Well, which dates back to 6th century BC and noted as an archaeological masterpiece. The well has a diameter of over 15 metres and had a number of pulleys attached to it that were operated by numerous camels to extract the water. The water was then directed to farmlands via small canals. Nowadays, the well still provides water for irrigation, albeit via a more modern system. Continue to Al Ula. Upon arrival, time permitting visit Al 'Ula old town. Overnight at Sahary Resort Al Ula, or similar. (BD)



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Day 9: Al' Ula - Excursion to Dedan and Mada'in Saleh (Overall driving distance today is approx. 100 kms)

Visit Elephant Rock and continue to Mada'in Saleh (UNESCO World Heritage Site), the second city of the Nabateans after Petra in Jordan, on the caravan route between Mecca and Petra. The structure of the city has influences from Mesopotamia, Egypt as well as Greek-Roman. The remains of the city include over 90 tombs that were carved out in the rocks. Mada'in Saleh lost its importance on the caravan routes, once the naval route to Yemen had been established by the Romans.

Only 4% of the biblical site of Dedan has been excavated, but the organised structure of the city is clearly visible and the inscriptions found document the political and societal organisation of the kingdom. Back to Al 'Ula for overnight. Overnight at Sahary Resort Al Ula, or similar. (BLD)

Day 10: Al' Ula – Medina (Overall driving time today is approx. 3.5 hours)

Depart this morning towards Medina. Travel partly via the old Hejaz Railway, originally built by the Ottomans to reduce the travel time for pilgrims from Damascus to Mecca, but the line was never finished beyond Medina. The construction of the line was a controversial project with the Arabs suspecting the Ottomans of using the transportation of pilgrims as a pretext for more political and military purposes. The railway was forever made famous by TE Lawrence by his attacks and sabotage during WWI. Several stations can be visited today, among them the station of Al 'Ula, which was the last one where fresh water could be taken before reaching Medina. Upon arrival in Medina, walk through the city. Later this afternoon, drive to Mt Uhud for wonderful views over the city of Medina. Overnight at Delights Inn, or similar. (B)

Day 11: Medina – Hafir Kishb (Al Wahba Crater) - Ta'if (Overall driving time today is approx. 5.5 hours)

Departure to Al Wahba Crater, northeast of Ta'if. The crater is 250m deep and 2km wide. Descend down into the crater or if you prefer just walk a part of the rim. Picnic lunch. Continue to Ta'if. We end the day with a visit through the busy and atmospheric souk where you can haggle for a bargain. Overnight at Tulip Inn, or similar. (B)

Day 12: Ta'if – Jeddah

Ta'if is known for its beautiful rose plantations. The rose that is grown here, is used in all kinds of perfumes and is celebrated during the Rose festival each spring. Ta'if is a popular summer resort, with its cooler climate and mountainous area. Visit Shubra Palace, the city's museum, and a beautiful 20th century house. Continue towards Jeddah, driving around Mecca. The winding road leads via Al Hada, with its hairpin bends and spectacular views. Overnight at Centro Shaheen by Rotana, or similar. (B)

Day 13: Jeddah

This morning visit Al Balad, the old and historic part of Jeddah, which is registered as UNESCO World Heritage Site; with its narrow lanes and merchant houses, Naseef House and Souq Al Alawi. Later in the afternoon, we head over to the coastal road, the Corniche, that is lined with sculptures over a length of 30 kms. Visit (from the outside) to Fatima-Al-Zahra Mosque, which is built in the sea and is nicknamed the Floating Mosque. Farewell dinner in Jeddah. Overnight at Centro Shaheen by Rotana, or similar. (BD)

Day 14: Jeddah – Departure from Saudi Arabia (Overall driving time today is approx. 30-45 min)

The day is at leisure until your transfer to the airport and your onward flight. End of services. (B)

Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions

Arrival and departure airport transfers
All accommodation as per the itinerary, or similar



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Land transportation in SUV/minivan/minibus depending on group size
Services of an English-speaking guide/tour leader
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

Excluded

International flights
Travel Insurance
Items of a personal nature
Drinks
Tips (discretionary)
Visa if applicable

Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At the time of writing there are no travel warnings in place for areas that we visit on this tour apart from the general warning in place for COVID-19.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

The accommodation on the tour is of a comfortable tourist class standard with private bathrooms. In general you will find your hotel has a restaurant or facilities close by.

Please note if you are taking solo room occupancy supplement, that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.





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Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that on occasion lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch £7 / Dinner £14

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Please note that alcohol is not served in Saudi Arabia.

Water £0.5 - £1 / Soft drinks £1 / Fresh juices £1.5

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is common practise in the Middle East. If you have been happy with the services of your guide and driver, then a reasonable amount to tip would be \$5-10 per day for the guide and \$3-5 for the driver, if you are travelling on a group tour.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: ATMs found in the main cities only

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are widely accepted at throughout Saudi Arabia

Local Currency: Saudi Riyal (SAR)

Recommended Currency for Exchange: GBP or US Dollars

Where to Exchange: Our local representative will advise you

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive an airport transfer, both on arrival and departure include in the tour price. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your





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arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities.

Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

Citizens of 49 countries, including the UK, US and Australia, can obtain e-visa for Saudi Arabia. Conditions and payment on <https://visa.visitsaudi.com/>

For further details please visit the applicable website shown below

British Nationals - www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

US Nationals - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

Australian Nationals - www.smartraveller.gov.au/

Other nationals should check the latest requirements with the authorities in their home country, or with the destination's nearest embassy or consulate.

Should you require any documentation to support a visa application, such as a letter of invitation, upon request this will be provided by Undiscovered Destinations after receipt of your balance payment.

As it is the travellers' responsibility to ensure that they meet all entry requirements it is essential that you check the rules and any other conditions at the time of booking and again when making your balance payment. In addition, we would strongly advise that you make a final check around two weeks before your arrival. This is important as requirements can change at short notice. Undiscovered Destinations, when possible, will provide guidance about entry rules, but in the first instance please contact the relevant authorities, including the applicable embassy or consulate for assistance.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to the country from where you originate.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

Evidence of a previous visit to Israel like an Israeli entry/exit stamp in your passport does not normally cause any difficulties when entering Jordan. It is, however, for the Jordanian authorities to determine the right of entry into the country.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice



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Vaccinations & Protection

For the visitor of Saudi Arabia, there are no compulsory vaccinations. However, we strongly recommend that you contact your Doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the recommended vaccinations.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

In general, Saudi Arabia has a dry desert climate, but due to the size and geography of the country, the climate varies from region to region. The Red Sea Coast is sunny all year-round, cooler in winter in the north toward the Jordanian border and warmer near Jizan in the south. The summer is hot and humid all along the coast. In the mountain range parallel to the Red Sea, winters are cool in the northern part with some rain and even occasionally snow at Jebel Al Lawz.

In the mountains south of Jeddah and Mecca, in the Al Bahah and Asir regions, the temperatures are lower due to the mountain peaks and there is a bit of rain and cloudiness in summer as the region is affected by the southwest monsoon. In the rest of the country winters are mild and sunny with cold nights, summers are hot and dry.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet although this will be rare in summer.

Visitors are asked to dress modestly, both men and women are asked to avoid tight-fitting clothes, clothes with disrespectful language or images and keep shoulders and knees covered.

Despite common belief, women do not need to cover their head nor need to wear an abaya (robe covering the body). It is advisable to always keep a scarf or shawl handy for certain visits and especially when visiting Medina. In the desert, a more relaxed attire can be worn; shorts are not advisable for women at all; men can wear knee length slacks or bermudas.

Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared and to be adequately immunized. A good insect repellent and bite cream is advisable. Suncream/sunblock is a must – please ensure you bring enough as it may not be available locally. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. It is recommended to also bring a torch (flashlight) or head torch for any dimly lit areas.





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Footwear

Comfortable walking shoes are recommended when visiting the various sights during the tour. Sandals are fine when travelling.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 230V/50 Hz and plugs have three rectangular pins in a triangular pattern, as per in the UK.

Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated 31 October 2022.