



Alfaisal University

Welcome to KSA

Version 1.0

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1. Overview

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia covers the largest part of the Arabian Peninsula, which has for centuries formed a natural bridge and axis for trade between different cultures.

Geographically, it is situated in the southwestern part of Asia at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, extending from the Red Sea in the west to the Arabian Gulf in the east, bordered on the north by Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait, on the south, by Yemen and Oman, and on the east by the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain. The primary emphasis of Saudi planning has been the development of the nation's human resources to enable all citizens to achieve their maximum potential and contribute to the country's growth and progress. When King Fahad became Saudi Arabia's first Minister of Education in 1954, there were fewer than 30,000 students in the country. Today, more than four million students are enrolled at 22,632 schools, and 306,584 citizens are pursuing higher education at seven universities and 83 colleges. To ensure a healthy population, the Kingdom embarked on a similarly ambitious program to build a modern health care system.

While paved roads were a rarity in the Kingdom about 50 years ago, there are now more than 26,137 miles of highways and major roads. Roads are just one part of the modern transportation and communication infrastructure established to facilitate growth and development. Today there are 21 ports, 25 airports and a sophisticated telecommunications network.

Similar success has been achieved in social services, commerce, banking, sports, and in almost all areas of human endeavor. Taking strength from the example of King Abdul Aziz, as well as the cherished tradition of service to Islam, the leaders of Saudi Arabia have achieved much in such a short period of time.

What has enabled them to do so has been the ability to remain firmly rooted in the teachings of Islam and their rich heritage, while at the same time adapting to meet the challenges and demands of a modern world.

The opportunity to see the Arabian culture 'from the inside' is a wonderful experience and one not to be missed.



2. Geography

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia covers 2,240,000 sq kms, an area nearly the size of Western Europe. It comprises about 80% of the Arabian Peninsula between the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf and is bisected by the Tropic of Cancer.

3. Population

The population is estimated at 23.9 million, of which 6.4 million are non-nationals (2007).

4. Riyadh

The nation's capital is Riyadh which lies approximately in the center of the country, which covers an ever-growing area of over 2,000 sq kms and has a population of 4.3 million (2001). Riyadh is located in the Najd region which is in the central province. It is also home to the foreign embassies, which are located in a part of the city known as the Diplomatic Quarter (DQ). The city is a blend of modern and traditional architectural styles, offering convenient transportation, and a multitude of international shopping centers are located side by side with traditional Arab markets (Souqs).

Once a small walled city, Riyadh has developed into a dynamic metropolis over the years. The first major thrust came during the oil boom of the 1950s, when older structures were demolished to make way for commercial development. Today, it is one of the fastest growing and most prosperous cities in the world. The capital and largest city of the Kingdom, Riyadh is divided into 17 municipalities. Each contributes in its own way to the vibrant character of the city, which boasts of a fairly unique history and colorful past. The city has grown both culturally and commercially over the years. Along with the urban areas of Dhahran, Dammam, and Al-Khobar, Riyadh has become a focal point for both travel and trade. On the outskirts of the city lies the ancient town of Al-Dirriyah.

In addition to being the epicenter of power, the city is also a commercial hub. Numerous educational, financial, agricultural, cultural, technical, and social organizations have set up base here. The most striking aspect of Riyadh is its architecture, which is a vibrant juxtaposition of the old and the new - contemporary highrises tower over buildings exuberating of old world charm.



The bustling Olaya District is the heart and soul of this city. This commercial and residential district offers accommodation, entertainment, dining and shopping options that will cater to the budget of a prince as well as a pauper. The Sheraton, Howard Johnson Plaza, Al-Tamimi Shopping Centre, and Haif Shopping Centre are the areas' landmarks.

The center of the city, Al-Bathaa, is also its oldest part. At its heart lies the beautiful 19th-century Masmak Castle, which is one of the city's major attractions; and to the west lies the Riyadh Museum of History and Archeology.

The Diplomatic Quarter or DQ as it is popularly known, is home to foreign embassies, international organizations as well as residential structures. With gardens and numerous sports facilities, it is also one of the city's greenest areas. It is especially known for its fine architecture, and is considered a model for other Islamic cities around the world.

The Qasr Al-Hukm or the Justice Palace is located in the district of the same name. It is here that the Governor meets citizens and listens to their grievances and problems and stays up to date with all aspects of the region's life. Its architecture, like other buildings in the area, is a fine mélange of traditional and contemporary styles.

While the Al Khobar District is a preferred residential choice for expatriates, the Al-Dira area is rich with commercial markets and traditional buildings, which include the famous Royal Palace and Al-Mue'qila building.

Numerous shops, lively markets, world-cuisine restaurants, and huge malls keep both Salahuddin District and King Fahad Street packed with tourists. The many hotels in the area, which include the four-star Al Mutlaq Hotel offers convenient accommodation to those wishing to explore the city. Other attractions include the Fal Commercial, Recreational Center Mall and the Al-Shula Entertainment Centre.

5. Government

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state based on principles prescribed by the Quran, the Holy Book of Islam, and the Shari'ah, Islamic law. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, is Head of State and Prime Minister. Born in 1924, he became king in 2005, succeeding his brother King Fahd. All Saudis have the right of direct petition to monarch, provincial governors or other officials, who receive them during regular public audiences.



6. Administrative Divisions

13 provinces (mintaqat, singular - mintaqah); Al Bahah, Al Hudud ash Shamaliyah, Al Jawf, Al Madinah, Al Qasim, Ar Riyad, Ash Sharqiyah (Eastern Province), 'Asir, Ha'il, Jizan, Makkah, Najran, Tabuk.

7. Executive Branch

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King ABDALLAH bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud (since 1 August 2005); Heir Apparent Crown Prince SULTAN bin Abd al- Aziz Al Saud (half brother of the monarch, born 5 January 1928).

Head of government: King ABDALLAH bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud (since 1 August 2005).

Cabinet: Council of Ministers is appointed by the monarch every four years and includes many royal family members.

Elections: none; the monarch is hereditary; note - a new Allegiance Commission created by royal decree in October 2006 established a committee of Saudi princes that will play a role in selecting future Saudi kings, but the new system will not take effect until after Crown Prince Sultan becomes king.

8. Economy - overview

It possesses more than 20% of the world's proven petroleum reserves, ranks as the largest exporter of petroleum, and plays a leading role in OPEC.

8.1 Agriculture - products

Wheat, barley, tomatoes, melons, dates, citrus; mutton, chickens, eggs, milk.

8.2 Industries

Crude oil production, petroleum refining, basic petrochemicals, ammonia, industrial gases, sodium hydroxide (caustic soda), cement, fertilizer, plastics, metals, commercial ship repair, commercial aircraft repair, construction.

9. World Role

Saudi Arabia plays a prominent role in regional and international affairs and is a founding member of the United Nations, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and belongs to numerous other international bodies. The Kingdom is a substantial contributor to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and has applied for membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

10. Flag and Emblem

The Royal Standard bears the symbols of a date palm over crossed swords, white on a green background. This symbol means that prosperity can only be had through justice. The emblem is displayed on Government property, documents, coinage, etc.

The flag symbolises Saudi Arabia as the representative of Islam, justice and prosperity.

The National Flag displays the Moslem creed in Arabia over an unsheathed sword, hilt towards the mast. The main color is green with the creed and symbol in white. The creed translated reads: There is no God but God; and Mohammed is His messenger.

Unlike most other countries, Saudi Arabia does not fly its flag at half-mast on occasions of mourning.



11. Saudi Culture, Society, and Religion

Islam is practiced by all Saudis and governs their personal, political, economic and legal lives. Islam was born in Saudi Arabia and thus is visited by millions of Muslims every year (Hajj). The Prophet Muhammad is seen as the last of God's emissaries (following in the footsteps of Jesus, Moses, Abraham, etc) to bring revelation to mankind. He was distinguished with bringing a message for the whole of mankind, rather than just to a certain peoples. As Moses brought the Torah and Jesus the Bible, Muhammad brought the last book, the Quran. The Quran and the actions of the Prophet (the Sunnah) are used as the basis for all guidance in the religion.

The religion of Saudi Arabia is Islam, which means 'submission to the will of God'. The people who practise this religion are called Moslems or Muslims.

The Islamic world comprises some 500 million people and the Saudi's follow their religion most assiduously. It is noticeable that there are few moments, even in the most ordinary conversations, that do not contain references to God.

There are five primary duties known as the 'five pillars' of the faith that are required of a Moslem.

The first is the profession of faith: 'There is no God but God, Mohammed is the Prophet of God', which is said repeatedly during prayer.

The second is prayer itself, and Moslems are required to pray five times a day: before dawn, at midday, the middle of the afternoon, at sunset, and in the evening. During prayer, Moslems face towards the Ka'bah, the House of God, in Makkah.

The third is the giving of alms, both in the form of a religious tax (Zakat) and voluntary alms to the needy.

The fourth is fasting, which takes place during the holy month of Ramadan. In this month, Moslems are not allowed to smoke, eat or drink during the hours from dawn to sunset and these times are usually signified by the firing of a cannon. There are dispensations in the case of ill health, etc.

The fifth is the 'Hajj', or pilgrimage to Mecca, that takes place during the last month of the Moslem year. During this time, the Government provides enormous health, immigration, accommodation and travel facilities for millions of pilgrims from all over the world.

The Hajj is required of a Moslem only if he has the means, but there is great merit for those who manage to make it.



Mosques are sanctified places of prayer, and at prayer times the call to prayer is made from the minaret of the Mosque (usually by a recording through loudspeakers; in the old days, the 'Muezzin' used voice power alone). The act of prayer is an individual one between the person and God and congregational prayers, usually held on Fridays, simply mean that the Imaam from the congregation leads the prayers.

There are many prohibitions that apply to Moslems, and some impinge on foreigners residing in Saudi Arabia, e.g. the eating of pig products, such as pork, and drinking of alcoholic beverages.

The precepts of Islam, together with deep-rooted traditions founded on the customs of centuries, give to the Arab a deep respect for social dignity and courtesy. It is a matter of habit rather than ostentation and it is, therefore, important for foreigners to familiarize themselves with local custom.

In particular, every personal contact, in all spheres of life (casual or not, including telephone calls, entering shops and so on) begins with some form of courteous greeting. It is always much appreciated if foreigners take the trouble to learn the Arabic forms of greetings and responses, which are, for this purpose, fairly standardized.

Furthermore, a person visited must always stand up to greet and shake the hand of the visitor of any kind. Omission of this phase of the social or business contact gives rise to automatic mild social offence - so the dialogue 'starts off on the wrong foot'. Light social conversation generally centers around health (the weather is unremarkable conversationally!). It is generally safer at first to avoid asking after wife and family. Arabs are understanding if a foreigner unwittingly commits a social blunder and make considerable allowances for shortcomings. At the same time, efforts to follow custom are highly regarded. It is customary in Saudi Arabia for male relatives and close family friends to greet one another by kissing from cheek to cheek and for them to hold hands while walking and talking together. On very rare occasions, these courtesies may be extended to male foreign visitors.

The position of women in Saudi Arabia is far different from that in Western countries. The custom of purdah prevails in Saudi Arabia and women appear in public completely veiled from head to foot. It is most impolite to stare at them and on no account should they be photographed.



European women are not expected to adopt purdah (veil themselves) when outside the home, but are expected to wear an abaya and carry a headscarf at all times in case they are confronted by the Muttawa. Indeed, except for taking part in sporting activities, European men are expected to appear in public with no more than arms and head uncovered.

The Saudi's are justifiably famous for their hospitality and, while the standards are set by custom, the Arab applies them with a warmth that reflects his enjoyment in entertaining his guest. The most usual gesture for the entertainment of an individual or small group is the serving of Arabic coffee (usually unsweetened and heavily flavored with cardamom seed - for the foreigner, a taste to be acquired).

It is also common to serve tea (sweetened and without milk) or soft drinks in offices and shops when the occasion arises. It is impolite to refuse these important tokens of hospitality.

If the group is large and the guests important, a more elaborate form of entertaining might be the Arab feast where the main dish may be camel but is more likely to be sheep, with many side dishes. The host frequently will not eat with his guests but spends his time making sure that they are amply served. Food is taken and eaten with the right hand only. Some skill is required when eating rice in this way, but guests are not expected to eat tidily and the host always provides them with the means to wash and clean up after the meal. The eating of food with gusto indicates to the host how much a guest is enjoying the meal.

12. Islamic Calendar

The official calendar of Saudi Arabia is that of Islam, which is based on the lunar rather than the solar month. The date of this calendar is referred to by foreigners as the 'Hejira' date to distinguish it from the 'Gregorian' date used in Christendom. The starting date of the Islamic calendar was decreed to be the time of the prophet Mohammed's escape from his enemies and flight (Hejira) from Makkah to Medina in 622AD.



The Islamic year is normally 354 days long and divided into 12 months, each 29 or 30 days long. The length of the month of Ramadan (ninth month) is determined by the sighting of the new moon at the beginning of the next month. In this way, Ramadan is some times 29 rather than 30 days long and the calendar is thereby kept in step with the moon.

Saudi Arabian time is GMT plus three hours: in Central Arabia, sunset occurs between about 17.30 and 19.00 hours local time throughout the year.

The days of the week are named as follows:

Ahad (Sunday)

Thnain (Monday)

Talaat (Tuesday)

Raboo (Wednesday)

Khamis (Thursday)

Juma (Friday)

Sabt (Saturday)

The months, starting with the first month of the Hejira calendar are named as follows:

MUHARAMM (30)

SAFAR (29)

RABI 1 (29)

RABI 2 (29)

JUMADA 1 (30)

JUMADA 2 (29)

RAJAB (30)

SHA'BAN (29)

RAMADAN (29/30)

SHAWWAL (29)

DHU AL QADAH (30)

DHU AL HIJAH (29)

13. Climate

Hot and dry conditions are typical of most of the country, although the Asir highlands in the southwest can be relatively cold and moist. In summer, daytime temperatures exceed 40 degrees C in most parts of the Peninsula, with lower areas balanced by higher humidity. Most hotels, shops and restaurants are air-conditioned. The cooler months from November to April are very pleasant, although in Riyadh and higher elevations the temperature may fall at night to zero or even slightly lower.

14. Language

The official language of the Kingdom is Arabic, although English is widely understood in hotels, department stores and business circles, and in many places connected with tourism. English and other foreign-language newspapers and magazines are widely available, and international radio and satellite TV programs are also received in a variety of languages. English can also be seen in some advertisement and on most highway signs.

15. Time Zone

Saudi Arabia is in a single time zone, three hours ahead of GMT year round (8 hours ahead of US Eastern Standard Time).



Alfaisal University Academic Calendar for the 2008–2009 - (1429-1430) Academic Year

Academic Year Week	Semester	Semester Week	Month Start	Sat – Wed	Month Year	Sat - Wed	Activity					
			Gregorian Dates		Hijri Dates							
1	Academic Semester 1	1	October 2008	11 – 15	Shawwal 1429	11 – 15	Start of the academic year on Oct 11: Students receive orientation to Western style university.					
2		2		18 – 22		18 – 22						
3		3		25 – 29		25 – 29						
4		November 2008	4	November 2008	01 – 05	Due Al-Qaeda 1429	03 – 07					
5			5		08 – 12		10 – 14					
6			6		15 – 19		17 – 21					
7			7		22 – 26		24 – 28					
8			8		29 – 02 Sat - Tues		01 – 04 Sat -Tues					
-		-	-	December 2008	06 – 10	Due Al-Hijjah 1429	08 – 12	Eid Al Adha (Haj Holiday3-13 Dec) 11 Days				
9		9	December 2008	14 – 17 Sun - Wed	16 – 19 Sun -Wed							
10		10		20 – 24	22 – 26							
11		11		27 – 31	29 – 03							
12		January 2009	12	January 2009	03 – 07	Muharram 1430	06 – 10					
13			13		10 – 14		13 – 17					
14			14		17 – 21		20 – 24					
15			15		24 – 28		27 – 02					
16			16		31 – 04		05 – 09					
17		Final Exams		February 2009	07 – 11	Safar 1430	12 – 16	First Semester Final Exams (required)				
18	14 – 18				19 – 23							
-	-	Administrative Week	February 2009	21 – 25		26 – 30	Mid Year Break (19 –27 Feb) 9 Days Administrative week: Decision making for student placement and student workshops					
19	Academic Semester 2	1	March 2009	28 – 04	Rabi Al-Awal 1430	03 – 07	Start of the Academic semester 2 on Feb 28: Students continue taking courses.					
20		2		07 – 11		10 – 14						
21		3		14 – 18		17 – 21						
22		4		21 – 25		24 – 28						
23		April 2009	April 2009	April 2009	28 – 01	Rabi Al-Than 1430	01 – 05					
24					6		04 – 08		08 – 12			
25					7		11 – 15		15 – 19			
26					8		18 – 22		22 – 26			
-					-		-		25 – 29	29 – 04	Mid Semester Break (23 April– 01 May) 9 Days	
27		May 2009	May 2009	May 2009	02 – 06	Jumadi Al-Awwal 1430	07 – 11					
28					10		09 – 13		14 – 18			
29					11		16 – 20		21 – 25			
30					12		23 – 27		28 – 01			
31		June 2009	June 2009	June 2009	30 – 03	Jummada Al-Akhir 1430	04 – 08					
32					14		06 – 10		11 – 15			
33					15		13 – 17		18 – 24			
34					Final Exams					20 – 24	Rajab 1430	27 – 01
35	27 – 01									04 – 08		
-	-	-	July 2009	04		11	- Graduation - Annual holiday – students only					
-	-	-	September 2009	26 – 30	Shawwal 1430	07 – 11	Starting of the new academic year					

Alfaisal University Academic Calendar for the 2008–2009 – Continued

- Academic Semester 1 is 18 weeks including examination period.
- Academic Semester 2 is 17 weeks including examination period.
- Eid Al Adha, Haj Holiday (11 Days).
- Mid Year Break (9 Days).
- Mid Semester Break (9 Days).

16. Business Hours

Government offices are open Saturday through Wednesday from 7:30 a.m., to 2:30 p.m. The official weekend holiday for the government and some private businesses is Thursday and Friday. Private business working hours vary but are generally from 7:30 or 8:00 a.m. to noon, and from 3:30 or 4:00 p.m. until 7:00 or 8:00 p.m. General banking hours are from 9:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. Markets and shops are open from 9:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m., and from 4:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m.. During the month of "Ramadan", working hours are reduced. Shops and Governmental Offices usually open late evenings during the month of Ramadan.

17. Public Holidays and Festivals

The main public holidays are the religious festivals of Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan) and Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice), when government offices, educational institutions and some businesses close for five to ten days, and the Saudi National Day (Unification of the Kingdom, 23 September (1932)) as well. The country's main cultural festival is Janadriya, held at a large permanent exhibition site about 30 km northeast of Riyadh. Usually held in January, it celebrates the nation's cultural heritage and recent history with exhibitions and displays from all parts of the Kingdom.



18. Currency

The currency of Saudi Arabia is based on the Riyal (pronounced reeyal') and is fixed to the US Dollar.

Notes are issued in denominations of 500 - 200 - 100 - 50 - 20 - 10 - 5 and 1 Riyal. The amount is written in Arabic on one side and English on the other.

Coinage is issued as fractions of a Riyal known as Halalah. The Halalah is equal to one-hundredth of a Riyal, and the coins are in denominations of 5 - 10 - 25 and 50.

19. Electricity, Gas & Water Supplies

Electricity

Although electricity supplies are fairly reliable, voltages vary throughout Saudi Arabia and care must be taken to ensure that the supply at a socket is compatible with the supply required for the appliance to be used. Standardization of electricity supplies to 220 volts at 50 cycles is planned. It should be noted, however, that even in the same room, you can get different voltages from the same type of socket, depending to which mains supply they are connected. Bearing this in mind, note that in Riyadh you may have access to 110V, 220V or a combination of both.

Electric sockets vary considerably from the American flat two-pin to the British rectangular three-pin. Plugs and adaptors to meet the local situation are easily obtained.

Gas

Bottled gas, which is plentiful and cheap, is used for cookers and heaters. Bottles can be bought or hired with an attached pressure regulator and refilled by a local service. Check that no leaks are apparent or develop, and that the pressure regulator is correctly set.

Water

Water in towns is generally distributed by a mains system and sometimes by lorries. Almost every dwelling has a water tank on its roof. This is filled from a ground tank by an electric pump, the tank being filled by lorries or the mains water system.

Mains water is sometimes intermittent and low pressure, but it can serve your domestic needs adequately. Whether the water is drinkable from the tap depends on the locality. It is highly recommended to consume bottled mineral water, which is widely available and relatively cheap compared to the US and Europe.

20. Transportation

Motor cars

Saudi Arabia has a very high and tremendously increasing motor car population. The high density of traffic in towns and cities makes life for the motorist very difficult indeed.

The road-building program is large and the authorities have provided many dual carriageways and car parking areas. Most models are American and Japanese, with European makes, e.g. Mercedes, Peugeot, in evidence. Second hand cars are available, but some have been very roughly used and careful choosing is required.

A Saudi Arabian driving license is required and may be issued against a valid license to certain individuals. The procedure for getting one can be time consuming and offenders caught driving without a license can be jailed until they pay a heavy fine. Women are not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia.

Gas is very cheap indeed, although spare parts may be difficult to obtain, especially for older cars.

Driving in Saudi Arabia is on the right-hand side of the road with vehicles left-hand drive. Driving in Saudi Arabia is different from that in the West, as every driver, cyclist or pedestrian makes his way through the traffic the best he can, but is expected to avoid causing an accident. Lane discipline does not apply and moving from lane to lane and back again is normal procedure.

Traffic control signs generally follow recognizable international regulations and are becoming more and more in evidence. The traffic police dress in khaki with white caps or helmets and rarely stand in the middle of the road to direct traffic but at the roadside out of the sun. Their signals should be obeyed.

Any hold-up in traffic is usually indicated by the constant blowing of car horns to encourage those at the front to get a move on.

If an accident occurs, all vehicles involved must remain at the scene until the specialist traffic policeman appears to assess and allocate responsibility. The police may insist on taking all those involved to the police station and until expert assistance is available, attempts to explain are best avoided.

It is particularly advisable not to attempt to render any assistance to Arabs who may have been injured in a road accident (even if you just happen to be on the scene) because under Saudi Arabian law, you can be held responsible for the injured person's subsequent well being; this responsibility can be very far reaching and punitive.

Taxis

Most large towns have chauffeur-driven white limousines at very competitive prices. Although normally based at airports, you can telephone for the service. There is a fixed price, agreed with an English-speaking supervisor before you commence your journey.

Some drivers speak English. Agree the fare before taking the journey and have the correct money ready to give the driver at the end of the journey. Let experienced travelers guide you on fares, which can fluctuate alarmingly. You could end up paying three or four times more than you should, unless you take care! Women should avoid using taxis when they are on their own and they should never use taxis at night when alone. It is easy to rent a car in Riyadh. To rent a car, you must have a Saudi driver's license or an international license issued in an approved country (European and North American countries are approved). Obtaining a Saudi drivers license and buying and registering a car are financially viable options. If you buy a car, you can obtain auto insurance.

The majority of petrol stations are open 24 hours.

Taxis and limousines are readily available, reasonably priced, and generally reliable. They are all white with a white light on the roof. Calling them can be difficult unless you speak Arabic; finding one at a hotel or compound is easy and safe; flagging one on the move is easy. Pre-arranged regular taxi pickup and delivery is the standard way for people without cars to travel between home and work.

21. Dress

Local dress

Saudi Arabian men normally wear a loose ankle-length gown called a 'thobe'. The cloth head-dress they wear is called an 'Schmaagh' (red and white pattern) or 'kafir' (plain white).

The gold and white skullcap is a 'tagiyah' and the double loop of black cord-like material is called a 'ukal'. The brown or black fine wool cloak edged with gold thread that is sometimes worn is called a 'bisht'.

Saudi Arabian women may wear fashion in private, but in public invariably wear a black 'abaya' and cover their faces with a black silk veil. People of other Middle Eastern countries working in Saudi Arabia usually wear variations of the clothing described above.

Styles of dress for expatriates

Expatriate men living and working in Saudi Arabia generally wear short-sleeved shirts and lightweight washable slacks for most of the year. Suits are sometimes worn, though mainly for business reasons and more formal occasions.

For Expatriate women, there are far more restrictions in the way they dress in public places. The Saudi Arabian authorities require that when women appear in public, they should be dressed conservatively, and this means long sleeves, high necks and full-length skirts.

Local tailors will make up dresses quite cheaply and there is an abundance of bright and colorful materials to choose from.



22. Shopping

With local traditions restricting other types of entertainment, shopping is a major diversion for the whole population. Saudi Arabia offers a wonderful shopping experience, from traditional souqs and corner shops to supermarkets and vast shopping malls.

The Al-Faisalia Mall opening was followed by the Kingdom Center, a little further north with a whole floor dedicated to "ladies only" shops. These types of Mega Malls are now visible all over Riyadh. Carrefour, Sahara, Azizia, and Geant are here and are sure to expand and grow.

There are several world-class shopping centers available in Riyadh that have a wide range of stores offering clothes, stationery, shoes, jewelry, gifts, cosmetics, perfumes, toiletries, electrical goods, pharmaceutical supplies and so forth.

Well-known international brands are widely available, and at attractive prices for there is no sales tax or VAT on retail items. Shops are open long hours, often seven days a week, although they close temporarily at prayer times. Furniture, household items and soft furnishings are available at stores such as IKEA, and Saco. Arts and crafts supply stores cater to a wide variety of craft needs. There are many large bookshops also available which carry a wide range of publications. In addition, gold and luxury carpets are also readily available.

Food and beverage products, available in Riyadh are of the highest quality and variety. Strict standards exist for imports and the many Saudi manufactured foodstuffs (soft drinks, all dairy products, frozen foods, etc) are excellent. You need to try out a few supermarkets to find which has most of what you want. All foodstuffs carry a sell-buy date. Some of the larger supermarkets are: Euromarche on Takhasussi Street, various Tamimi branches, Azizia, Food Basket, Al Jazeera at Orouba Plaza, and Al-Othaim. The French supermarket chains of Carrefour and Geant have opened stores and are expanding rapidly. In addition, many of the larger compounds also have mini supermarkets.



In the Middle East, haggling is totally expected. The main thing to remember in all shops (apart from supermarkets) is to try and barter for the best price. There are more locals than foreigners so do be prepared; shops often mark up goods to allow for a discount. Fashion and shoe shops, which are not international brand names, will almost certainly give a discount if asked, and shopkeepers in the souqs will almost certainly be disappointed if you do not haggle. Unfortunately, most of the international brand stores have fixed price policies and that is the price you will have to pay.

With the advent of air conditioned shopping malls and the relative prosperity of the Riyadh population, it is not surprising that the traditional open-fronted souq shopping areas are less apparent than in other Saudi cities.

Shopping Malls are becoming increasingly popular as shopping, food, and entertainment venues as it essentially provides a complete one-stop shopping experience. Trading hours cater for around the clock shopping from 9 a.m. until 11 p.m. which makes the Mall a first choice venue for everyday shopping needs.

For the serious shopper, in the central part of the city, there are several distinct shopping areas where you can find international brand stand-alone stores and malls.

The major shopping zone is within a square area from Prince Abdullah Street in the north to Makkah Road in the south. Takhasussi Street in the west and King Abdul Aziz Road in the east. The main shopping street is Olaya Road and perhaps the most chic is Prince Sultan Street. Prince Mohammed Street should not be missed either.

Before leaving home for your shopping trip, double check the day's prayer times as all shops close for them (about ten minutes before in fact).



23. Food/Dining Out

Spacious, well-stocked local supermarkets and European hypermarkets carry fresh and prepared foods from around the world. A wide range of food and drink is available, except for alcoholic beverages. However a great variety of fruit juices, cola, sparkling water and other soft drinks make excellent alternatives, plus naturally, tea and coffee, both Arabian and American style. Alcohol-free beer is popular, as is laban, a delicious yoghurt-like creamy drink, sometimes flavored with salt and mint. Meals tend to consist of an appetizer, like salad or mezze with hummus and other Eastern Mediterranean-style dishes, and perhaps some soup, followed by a main course of meat or fish, vegetables and rice and Arab flatbread. Chicken and lamb, minced, grilled or roasted, are very popular, and served in a variety of ways.

Eating forms a large part of the social scene in Riyadh. There are hundreds of restaurants across the city. If you only want a quick snack, the city is dotted with fast food outlets including McDonald's, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Kenny Rodgers Restaurants and Kentucky Fried Chicken. Most restaurants have two sections - 'men only' and a 'family section'. Single women and married couples with or without children eat together in the family section. Restaurants generally close during prayer times. However, if you are in a restaurant when a prayer call occurs, you are usually allowed to stay but you will not be able to place any additional food or beverage orders until after the prayer has finished.

Many hotels offer a well-stocked buffet as an option for lunch and dinner. The coastal areas specialize in fresh fish and shellfish. Meals traditionally end with a serving of fresh fruit or sweet pastry or pudding or cream caramel, rounded off with delicious dates and Arabian or Turkish coffee. A real treat is to take part in a traditional Arab feast at a picnic in the desert under tents, or at a beach party. The food is laid out on mats or carpets. The main dish might be a young roasted camel or sheep, served with rice and an array of salad and vegetables. Finally there will be delicious sweet, coffee and splendid display of fresh fruit from which to choose.

24. Social Life

Saudi Arabia offers diverse terrain and plenty of open space for enjoyment. Local sightseeing excursions are very popular, especially trips to the desert.

You can camp under the moon and the stars, explore a wadi, climb to the top of a red sand dune, examine desert flora or hunt for desert diamonds. The more adventurous might even want to check out quad biking through the huge sand dunes.

There are many aspects of Arabic life to discover in cities and villages around Riyadh and in neighboring regions. The choices are really endless!

Diving in the Red Sea, one of the most beautiful underwater locations in the world is another favorite pastime. Located off the west coast, the Red Sea offers many ways to relax and enjoy a break away from city life. For the serious joggers and power walkers, the Diplomatic Quarter has excellent running and walking trails. The National Museum is located in Riyadh. There are many festivities and national sites worth visiting including the National Museum, Dira Square, Musmak Fortress, Murabba Palace, Dir'iyyah, Janadriyah Festival, Camel Races, Horse Races and the Riyadh Zoo.

Cinemas, theaters, nightspots, discos, dancing halls and bars are not allowed within the Kingdom. There are however a number of 'coffee shops' where people gather to chat and socialize. Major hotels have restaurants open to residents and non-residents, with family sections where couples can enjoy lunch or dinner.

25. Recreation

There are sporting opportunities throughout the Kingdom. Tennis and golf are widely available, and groups go running and jogging. Football (soccer) is a national obsession and there are a few club stadiums where men can go to watch matches during the season. Hot-air ballooning, sailing, wind-surfing and other water sports are also available. Horse racing and camel racing are also very popular, although gambling is not permitted.

26. Wildlife

Animals

The Saluki is considered by the Arabs to be the finest dog in the world and among the Bedouin they have almost the same status as the horse.

Birds like the house sparrow and pigeon are found in towns, but the main bird population is in the wild and comprises eagles, hawks and falcons. The last are used by Arabs in the age-old sport of falconry, which is as popular today as it probably ever was. Vultures, owls and ravens are other birds, along with many small birds of different species, that can be found.

Reptiles in the form of lizards range in size from a few inches to a couple of feet in length and the monitor, the largest, and equipped with sharp teeth and claws, will fight if cornered. Quite a few snakes live in Saudi Arabia, but they, along with many other animals, are not easy to find. Some are poisonous, such as the Puff Adder.

Camels spend much of their life grazing in the desert away from population centres and are a relatively rare sight. The Bedouin still rear and herd them and the camel markets are probably the only places where they can be seen in numbers. The most common animals seen are sheep and goats. The hunting of animals is forbidden to foreigners.

Fish

The seas around Saudi Arabia are rich in many species of fish, and the fisherman and underwater diver will be in his element in these waters.

Insects

Flies and mosquitoes are the biggest pests during spring and autumn but, thankfully, disappear in dry summers and winter. Cockroaches (which can be fairly large) and ants are two other house pests, but they can all be controlled by using modern insecticides.

Beetles of all shapes and sizes abound in the desert and probably the most readily identified is the dung beetle. Scorpions are also to be found under rocks and in discarded tin cans. They can give quite a nasty sting.



27. Health Requirements \ Personal Health

Preliminary medical examinations must be performed in the home countries of foreign applicants. Required documentation includes a medical history record, a medical examination report, results of standard laboratory tests including an AIDS test, an X-ray report and a dental examination report.

In Saudi Arabia, medical reports must be completed at hospitals or clinics prescribed by the Insurance Policy or by the Saudi Arabian Embassy in the applicant's home country. In other countries, reports can be prepared at hospitals or clinics of the applicant's choice, but the reports must be validated by the Saudi Arabian Embassy and the government of the country in which the report is prepared. Failure of the medical examination, or failure to complete the validation process successfully, results in the withdrawal of the offer of appointment.

It is most important that medical examinations of foreign applicants and their dependants be performed properly in the applicant's home country. A final medical examination is performed immediately after foreign applicants and their dependants arrive in Saudi Arabia. Failure of this examination results in immediate deportation of applicants and/or dependants at the applicants' expense. Health care and medical facilities are excellent but can be expensive.

All visitors should be insured for travel and medical eventualities. No compulsory vaccinations or inoculations are required, but visitors may wish to be protected against typhoid, tetanus, malaria, polio or hepatitis depending on their destination.

Prevention is easy

Ensure that adequate amounts of fluid and salt are consumed. The minimum amount of liquid intake is eight pints per day, and the amount of salt should be enough to taste its bitterness on food. Taking salt without an adequate amount of liquid at the same time is not recommended.

In the less humid parts of the country (Riyadh notably), the air is so dry that perspiration is almost immediately evaporated and is not noticed,

Heat

The heat in Saudi Arabia causes excessive losses of fluid from the body through perspiration. If these losses are not replaced, you will suffer conditions ranging from headache, rashes and stomach upsets to heatstroke; this is a very serious condition.

The warning signs are: pain in the arms and legs, thirst, headache, drowsiness and a lack of sweating. If treatment is not carried out, the symptoms become very serious indeed: convulsions and unconsciousness ensue as the body temperature rises to 106°F (41°C) and more. Cases of heatstroke must be treated as an emergency and medical help sought immediately. First Aid procedure is to take the patient to a cool room, strip completely and sponge with water until body temperature falls to 102°F then cover the patient lightly and keep checking the body temperature; if it starts to rise, repeat sponging.

The Sun

The sun in Saudi Arabia can be deceptively dangerous especially at midday, and sunbathing is not recommended, even when it is cloudy. Do not underestimate its power. In areas that are high above sea level (Khamis Mushayt is one), the ultra-violet content penetrates very rapidly and particular care should be taken.

Sunbathing should be carried out very carefully and acclimatisation can take weeks, to prevent what could be serious burning of the skin. (Sunbathing should not be done where the locals can be offended.) Any severe case of sunburn should be reported to a doctor so that proper medication can be used. (Exposure of limbs in public may cause offence against Saudi Arabian laws and customs.)

28. On Arrival in Riyadh

On arrival at the King Khaled International Airport in Riyadh, you will be met by a representative of the University (after passing through immigration).

Representatives are based at the airport to assist and greet new employees. Generally, a member of our staff travels to the airport to meet new employees and escorts them to their accommodation. On arrival at your allocated housing, you will find a welcome food pack. This comprises various food items, as well as tea and coffee, to hold you over for your first few days or until you get a chance to visit one of the local supermarkets, or the mini market located on-site.

29. Sponsorship

If you are a Saudi Arabian national employed by Alfaisal University, the University is simply your employer; if you are a foreign national, the University is both your employer and your sponsor.

In order for a foreign national to enter Saudi Arabia, a responsible individual or organization must agree to employ you or otherwise be legally responsible for you. If you are an expatriate employee, your employer is your sponsor; if you are the wife or child of an expatriate employee, your husband or father is your sponsor and the man's employer is his sponsor.

In its role as employer, the University is regulated by labor laws similar to those that apply in most free market economies. In its role as sponsor, the University has additional important responsibilities for your presence and behavior in Saudi Arabia.

As an adult, you are legally responsible for your own actions in Saudi Arabia as you are elsewhere. However, a sponsor also is legally responsible for each person whom it sponsors. If an employee breaks the law, the sponsor can be punished; if an employee leaves the country without paying his bills, the sponsor can be forced to pay them; if a single woman becomes pregnant, the sponsor can be held morally, legally and financially responsible. The sponsor is responsible for reporting and stopping violations that come to its attention, and for terminating contracts and assisting in deportations when that becomes necessary.

Obviously a sponsor has a very strong interest in insuring that everyone he sponsors abides by the laws of Islam and Saudi Arabia, and a very strong interest in keeping his employees inside the country when they are supposed to be in, and getting them out when their contracts end.

The role of sponsor is potentially as difficult for the sponsor as for the person sponsored, but it is part of the price that Saudi Arabia has elected to pay in order to maintain the integrity of its Islamic society while undertaking rapid technical and economic development. You must cooperate with your sponsor to make your stay in Saudi Arabia a pleasant one.

Unmarried spouses, domestic partners or significant others are not recognized as dependents in Saudi Arabia and are not eligible for any benefits accorded to dependents.

30. Passport and Visa Requirements

A passport valid for at least six months beyond the proposed date of entry is required by all visitors to Saudi Arabia. In addition, all visitors with the exception of nationals of the GCC countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates) require a visa. Visa application should be made to the Saudi embassy in country of trip origin.

Once in possession of a residency stamp an exit/re-entry visa will be required for all your travel out of Saudi Arabia. You may wish to have a single exit/re-entry visa or alternatively a multiple exit/re-entry visa stamped in your passport, which will allow you to come and go from the Kingdom anytime within a six-month period without having to request an individual exit/re-entry visa each time.

Individual visas are generally valid for two months from the date of issue and are good for one trip only.

A single exit visa will cost you 200 SR and a multiple exit visa with six months period will cost 500 SR. For identification purposes you will be required to carry an Iqama, issued to you on completion of your residency procedure. This will be given to you by the Human Resources Department.

The Iqama must be carried at all times while living or traveling in the Kingdom. Dependents (i.e. wife and children) should carry a photocopy of it with them at all times. Depending on your employment contract, visas can be issued for visits by parents or children after you complete your probationary period.

You can obtain an exit/re-entry visa by requesting it from the Human Resources representative. You should submit your request a week in advance of your proposed travel to allow adequate time for preparation of the required documents. All dependents also need exit/re-entry visas in order to leave the country and come back. The requirements for issuing re-entry visas are as follows:

- Two color photographs
- A fee of 200 SR per passport
- A copy of the Iqama

The following special restrictions apply to domestic travel by women:

- It is illegal for a woman to drive an automobile in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- A woman may not ride alone in an automobile with any man other than her husband, a male relative whom she is forbidden to marry, or a hired limousine driver.
- A woman may not sit in an automobile seat beside any man other than her husband.
- A woman may not ride in an automobile with a married man other than her husband unless the other man's wife is in the car.
- To stay in a hotel, eat in a restaurant or travel by public conveyance other than a hired limousine, a woman must be accompanied by a legally responsible man at all times.

To prove that she is traveling with her husband, a woman must always carry a copy of an Arabic language translation of her marriage license.

31. Useful Phrases

The following are not intended to be a definitive course in Arabic - merely a quick guide to some useful words and phrases. The sounds of Arabic are not merely reproduced in English spelling and you must, therefore, regard the spellings as only conveying approximately the sounds you should make.

The best way of finding the correct sounds is to get an English-speaking Arab to pronounce the words properly for you. If you do wish to go further in the language - and it can pay dividends socially if you do - then find and join an Arabic language class for foreigners in Saudi Arabia.

Greetings

SALAAM-ALAY-IKUM - Peace be with you

Response is: **WALAY-IKUM-SALAAM** - and upon you peace

SABAH-Alkhair - Good morning (NB Pronounce (CH) as the CH in LOCH.

Response is: **SABAL-(CH)AIR** - Good morning or **SABAH-A-NOOR** - Good morning (literally: Bright morning)

MARRA-HABA - Hello

Response is the same

MASSAH-AL-(KH)AIR - Good afternoon/evening

Just as in English, you usually follow the greeting with an enquiry after health (it is polite to make this an earnest enquiry rather than merely casual):

KAIF HALEK? - How are you? (How do you do?) or **KAIF-EL-HAL?** - How are you?

The reply of course describes how one feels:

EL-HAMDU-LILLAH, MABSOOT - Praise be to God, quite well - You should note that it would sound extremely curt to a Moslem if you omitted the first part

NOOS-NOOS - So-so (literally half and half) or

MAREED - I am sick (or feel ill) or

TABAAN-SHWAY - I feel a bit tired or

ZAIN AL-HAMDU-LILLAH - Very well

You might also say: - **ASAK-TAYYIB** - I hope you are well

Response is: **ALLAH-YUWAFIK** - May God grant you health yourself

While a Moslem naturally thanks God for all good things that happen to him, we westerners find it very difficult to drop our expectation of 'please' and 'thank-you'. Do not think that a Moslem is being impolite if he does not thank you for a service. The words for 'please' and 'thank-you' are:

MIN FUD LAK - Please
SHUCKRAN - Thank you

And, as in most of Europe, one replies to 'thank you' with the equivalent 'you're welcome'.

AFWAN - That's all right

A slightly more emphatic 'thank you' is:

SHUCKRAN GAZEELAN - Thank you very much
Response is: **AFWAN KATHEERAN** - That's quite all right

Parting phrases after meeting are:

MAASALAAMA - Cheerio
Reply is the same: **FEE AMN ALLAH** - God go with you
Response is the same: **INSHALLAH** - God Willing (will be said after anything to do with the future).

32. Useful

Contacts

Alfaisal University HR Employee Relations Officer	Tel: +966 (1) 920000570 x 109 Fax: +966 (01) 4623508 Email: HR_Services@alfaisal.edu
Australian Embassy	+966 (0) 1 488 7788
British Embassy	+966 (0) 1 488 0077
US Embassy	+966 (0) 1 488 3800
Canadian Embassy	+966 (0) 1 488 2288

Websites

BUPA Middle East	www.bupame.com
Riyadh British Businessmen	www.rgbb.org
Riyadh Rovers	no website but contact via – riyadhroversregister@hotmail.com
Guide to Saudi Arabia	Just Landed website via - www.justlanded.com/english/saudi_arabia/tools/just_landed_guide

33. Pre-Departure Checklist

Part 1- Documentation

Ensure passports and travel documents are in order (passport expiry date must exceed your repatriation date by 6 months)
Drivers licence (find out what type of licence is acceptable in your host country)
Marriage certificate & Birth Certificates for your children
School records for your children (if applicable)
Health and Vaccination Records
Copies of any Prescriptions (eg glasses or contact lenses)
Copies of all insurance policies- life, accident, medical etc.
Social Security (eg family allowance etc.)
Spare passport size photographs <i>at least 12 in colour</i>
Update your will
Letter of reference from your bank
Credit Cards & a record of numbers
Serial numbers of major appliances, warranties, instruction leaflets
Address book

Part 2 – Financial

Credit Cards- check your current credit card is valid for international use.
Arrange Power of Attorney
Charge accounts if applicable close them or arrange direct debits with your bank.
Make arrangements for loan payments
Obtain some foreign currency for taxis, tips etc.

Part 3 – Home and Family

Obtain information about schools and check enrolment requirements
If applicable arrange for the care of your pets whilst on secondment.
Make appropriate arrangements for personal mail.
For home-owners, make appropriate arrangements for managing your property.
For those renting, give your landlord as much notice as possible.
Decide which personal effects you wish to be transported overseas within your allowance.
Make appropriate arrangements for the personal effects you wish to leave in your country of domicile (eg. Storage)
Make appropriate arrangements for all valuable items eg jewellery etc.
Liaise with chosen removal company
Dispose of unwanted items
Return rented/hired goods

Part 4- Notifications

Give notice of your pending move to those of the following with whom you are concerned.

Utilities/ Services – Electric, gas, telephone
Insurance Companies
Publications
Business accounts
Electoral Commission
Professional Services
Organisations/Clubs
Government/Public Offices eg Social Security

Please note that this list may not cover everything that is specific to you, however, it does cover the main areas to be considered when moving overseas and may be useful in prompting you to think about others.