Tour Code
GS9

ADVENTURESABROAD

THE ARAB GULF STATES

with Saudi Arabia Extension

29 days

Created on: 25 Nov, 2026

Day 1 Arrival in Doha

Today we arrive in Doha - welcome to Qatar!

Doha is the capital of Qatar. It is a modern and rapidly developing city and, considering the money being poured into construction, Doha looks set to become one of the premier cities in the Gulf within a few years. Back in 1825, the city was founded under the name Al-Bidda. The name "Doha" came from the Arabic "ad-dawa," or "the big tree." The reference might be to a prominent tree that stood at the site where the original fishing village arose, on the eastern coast of the Qatar peninsula. Or it might have been derived from "dohat" -- Arabic for bay or gulf -- referring to the Doha Bay area.

PLEASE NOTE that the meal plan indicated on each day of this itinerary may vary depending on internal logistics (such as local air schedules), which may result in your Tour Leader switching dinner for an included lunch if it makes more sense on that day.

Overnight in Doha.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Qatar: Area Touring

This morning we visit a camel race track to experience a living tradition. In Qatar, camels - the "ships of the desert" - are symbols of national pride and heritage. We witness their rigorous morning training routines and the use of robot jockeys, a revolutionary innovation introduced in 2004 that replaced child jockeys and transformed the sport. Though we're unlikely to witness an actual race, the training session provides fascinating immersion into Qatari culture.

Qatar transformed from a poor British protectorate noted mainly for pearl diving into an independent state with significant oil and natural gas revenues. Ruled by the Al Thani family since the mid-1800s, the country experienced a pivotal moment in 1995 when the current Amir, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, overthrew his father in a bloodless coup. Today, oil and natural gas revenues enable Qatar to have one of the highest per capita incomes in the world.

Our day also includes the Qatar National Museum and a panoramic tour of cultural sites, a stroll along the dhow harbour and seafront corniche, where the ever-expanding urban skyline rises dramatically from the waterfront.

Overnight in Doha.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Doha, Qatar - Fly to Kuwait City, Kuwait

Today we fly to Kuwait City. Flight time permitting, we may begin sightseeing upon arrival.

Kuwait City sits on the shores of the Arabian Gulf, blending Western-style hotels and designer shopping malls with traditional Islamic architecture and street markets. The discovery of oil in 1938 transformed Kuwait from a pearling and trading port into one of the world's wealthiest nations. Oil revenues helped the city rebound spectacularly from the 1991 Gulf War, when Iraqi forces occupied Kuwait for seven months. The building boom that followed shows no signs of slowing - construction cranes dot the skyline as the city continues to reinvent itself.

Despite rapid modernisation, Kuwait City maintains connections to its maritime past. Traditional dhows still dock in the harbour, and the fish market remains a centre of daily life. The city serves as both the economic and political capital, mixing exclusive modernity with traditional souks in a metropolis that has grown from a modest 18th-century fishing village into a gleaming Gulf city.

Overnight in Kuwait City.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Kuwait City: City Tour

Today we explore Kuwait City, beginning at the Kuwait Towers, an iconic landmark completed in 1979. The towers have become the symbol of modern Kuwait, with the main tower featuring a rotating observation deck and restaurant offering 360-degree views of the city and Arabian Gulf.

Our exploration of Kuwaiti culture continues at the Tareq Rajab Museum, a private collection that ranks among the finest in the Islamic world. The family's passion for preserving Islamic heritage is evident throughout the galleries, which showcase calligraphy, pottery, metalwork, glass, and intricate jade carvings. A separate small room displays early Qur'anic manuscripts dating to Islam's first three centuries, their faded scripts and illuminations revealing the evolution of Arabic calligraphy. The costume and textile galleries feature embroidered robes, ceremonial garments, and jewellery that span the breadth of the Islamic world from Morocco to Indonesia.

At the Bayt Al Othman Museum, Kuwaiti life from past generations comes alive through a traditional complex of interconnected houses and courtyards. The museum recreates domestic scenes, workshops, and communal spaces, offering insights into how Kuwaitis lived before oil transformed their nation.

We also visit the dhow harbour and fish market, where traditional wooden sailing vessels still dock alongside modern fishing boats - a reminder that Kuwait's relationship with the sea long predates its oil wealth.

Overnight in Kuwait City.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Kuwait City, Kuwait - Fly to Manama, Bahrain

Today we fly from Kuwait to Bahrain and transfer to our hotel.

Frequently called the Pearl of the Arabian Gulf, Bahrain is an archipelago of 33 low-lying islands located in the heart of the Gulf, and offering a blend of ancient and modern. This is a place where modern skyscrapers share the landscape with majestic mosques, embodiments of Islamic art, culture and architecture. Rich in history, Bahrain was once part of the ancient civilization of Dilmun and served as an important link in trade routes between Sumeria and the Indus Valley as long as 5,000 years ago.

Manama is Bahrain's modern capital, and is dominated by a Manhattan-style skyline. Today much land, including the diplomatic area, has been reclaimed from the sea.

Overnight in Manama.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Bahrain: Area Tour

Today we explore this tiny island state, beginning at the Bahrain National Museum where exhibits trace the region's development from the ancient Dilmun civilisation through successive eras. Reconstructed burial mounds, Arabic calligraphy, and illuminated Korans reveal different periods of Bahrain's layered history.

We visit Bahrain Fort, where archaeological excavations have revealed settlements dating to 2800 BC. Layer upon layer of fortified communities were built here across four millennia, each civilisation building atop the ruins of its predecessors. The current fort structure dates to the early 16th century when Portugal controlled these islands and built defences against Ottoman expansion - hence its alternate name, the Portuguese Fort.

At the Al Fatih Grand Mosque, Bahrain's largest place of worship, we admire the building's scale and architectural details. On Muharraq

Island we explore Shaikh Isa House, once home to the Amir's great-grandfather. Traditional architecture is on full display here - intricate wall carvings, latticed windows, and most notably the wind tower rising 5-6 metres above the roofline. Open on all four sides, this ingenious structure catches breezes and funnels them down into the rooms below while allowing hot air to escape, creating natural air conditioning in the sweltering Gulf climate.

We tour the Old Souk near Bab al-Bahrain, where narrow lanes preserve the traditional division of trades - goldsmiths clustered in one area, spice merchants in another, textile sellers in a third. Though the surrounding city has modernised, the souk's layout and rhythms remain rooted in centuries-old patterns.

Time permitting, we visit the A'ali Burial Mounds.

Overnight in Manama.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Manama, Bahrain - Fly to Abu Dhabi, UAE

In order to sample some of Bahrain's past, we will make a visit to the A'ali Burial Mounds. This is the site of what may be the largest prehistoric cemetery in the world, with approximately 170,000 burial mounds dating from between 3000 BC and AD 600.

We will also visit the pottery makers at A'ali village. This time-honoured industry has been handed down from generation to generation. The clay used for pottery, which is the centre of the industry in Bahrain today, is made from a blend of two types of clay. These are combined to create the optimum blend for their products, which range from traditional bread ovens to water pipes, plant pots, and moneyboxes. Kilns are frequently located inside the surrounding burial mounds, and the smoke given off can sometimes be seen from a distance as you approach the village.

We will also visit Jasra House, built by Sheik Hamad in 1907 and the birthplace of the present Amir in 1933. We will drive out along the Bahrain -- Saudi Causeway, the symbolic and actual link between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

This evening we fly to Abu Dhabi, largest of the Emirates and its ultra-modern capital on the Arabian Gulf.

Overnight in Abu Dhabi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Abu Dhabi: City Touring - Al-Ain

This morning we tour Abu Dhabi. Founded in the late 18th century, the city exploded with oil wealth in the 1960s and was entirely rebuilt. Almost no buildings predate the oil boom, yet Abu Dhabi's citizens take pride in their city's futuristic architecture - an interpretation of Islamic designs crafted in glass, steel, and marble.

We see the waterfront corniche and visit the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, Abu Dhabi's most iconic landmark. Completed in 2007 after 11 years of construction, the mosque features 82 white domes visible for kilometres across the flat coastal plain. Greek and Italian marble covers the exterior, while the interior is decorated with Islamic calligraphy and one of the world's largest hand-knotted carpets.

We also visit the Louvre Abu Dhabi, result of an unprecedented cultural collaboration between France and the UAE. The museum's striking dome - appearing to float above the galleries - filters sunlight through intricate geometric patterns, creating a "rain of light" effect inspired by traditional Arabic architecture. Inside, galleries present ancient and contemporary works from civilisations across the globe, emphasising cultural connections rather than geographical divisions.

Later we continue to Al-Ain, the "Garden City," crossing the desert to this oasis city cradled by the Hajar Mountains on the Omani border.

Overnight in Al-Ain.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Al-Ain: City Tour - Dubai

Al-Ain is the birthplace of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the first president of the United Arab Emirates, and it has the country's highest number of Emirati nationals. Al-Ain has been inhabited for over 4,000 years; these early cultures built "beehive" tombs for their dead and engaged in hunting and gathering in the area. The oasis provided water for early farms until the modern age. Today Al-Ain is a popular vacation destination, away from the humidty of the coast, and enjoyed by the Emirati and expatriates looking for a break from the hubub of Dubai.

Today in Al-Ain, we discover its history and see its Bronze Age relics, picture-postcard Al Jahili Fort, former royal palace, two museums, and "falaj" irrigation channels. A tour inside the Al Ain Palace Museum, once the residence of the late ruler Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, reveals an insight into their family and lifestyle. We continue to Dubai.

Overnight in Dubai.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Dubai: City Tour

Today we tour Dubai, the city of superlatives. Home to the world's tallest building, largest shopping mall, and iconic Palm Islands, Dubai has transformed its skyline with ambitious architecture that pushes engineering boundaries.

We visit Bastakiya (Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood), dating to the 1890s. Built by Persian merchants drawn to Dubai's trading opportunities, the district was nearly demolished during Dubai's building boom but was preserved in the 1990s. Walking these narrow lanes reveals traditional architecture from before air conditioning - wind towers rising above courtyard houses, their open sides catching breezes and channelling them into rooms below.

A ride on a traditional abra boat crosses Dubai Creek, the natural inlet that defined the city's original settlement and trading patterns. From the water, the contrast becomes clear - modern glass towers on one bank, older low-rise buildings on the other. We disembark at the souks, where spice merchants and gold dealers continue centuries-old trading traditions despite the surrounding modernisation.

After photo stops at Jumeirah Mosque and a drive across Palm Jumeirah - the palm-shaped artificial island - we enjoy lunch at the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding. Here we taste traditional Emirati cuisine while learning about local customs and Emirati culture in an interactive setting hosted by local guides.

A highlight is our visit to the observation deck on level 124 of Burj Khalifa. At 828 metres, the tower stands more than twice the height of the Empire State Building, offering views that stretch to the desert horizon.

Overnight in Dubai.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 11 Dubai - Sharjah - Ras Al-Khaimah - Ajman, UAE - Khasab, Oman

From Dubai we travel north to Sharjah, the third-largest emirate. Spread along the Khalid Lagoon, Sharjah maintains a more conservative character than Dubai, with stronger emphasis on cultural preservation and Islamic heritage.

We visit the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation, where galleries trace Islamic contributions to science, navigation, architecture, and the arts across fourteen centuries. We continue through Ajman, the UAE's smallest emirate, pausing at Souk Al Arsa, one of the UAE's oldest markets. The restored souk recreates traditional commercial life from 200 years ago.

We travel north into Ras Al-Khaimah before crossing into Oman (have your passports handy). A panoramic coastal road follows the Gulf and Straits of Hormuz to Khasab, capital of Musandam Governorate - the "Norway of Arabia." The Musandam Peninsula is completely separated from mainland Oman by UAE territory. Limestone mountains rise directly from the sea, creating fjord-like inlets along this sparsely populated peninsula inhabited primarily by the Shihuh tribe, whose villages are often accessible only by boat.

On arrival we tour Khasab Fort, a Portuguese structure restored as a museum. We may also see prehistoric rock carvings in the neighbouring

village of Qadah (timing permitting, this visit may occur tomorrow).

Overnight in Khasab.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Musandam Peninsula: Dhow Cruise

Mountains dominate the Musandam landscape, rising straight from the sea to create a fjord-like coastline unique in the region. This coastal zone, along with offshore islands and inlets, supports diverse wildlife including seabirds, dolphins, and whales.

After boarding our traditional Omani dhow pierside, we cruise toward Musandam's longest and most dramatic fjord. Calm turquoise waters contrast with creamy limestone cliffs as we pass small fishing villages and perhaps encounter dolphins. The dhow anchors near Telegraph Island, where a British telegraph relay station operated in the 1860s as part of a cable linking London to India. Here you can swim (bring your suit) or relax on deck with refreshments while admiring mountains rising over 600 metres (2,000 feet) in the distance.

Lunch is served on board as we continue our leisurely cruise back to Khasab.

Overnight in Khasab.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 Khasab, Oman: Mountain Safari - Fly to Muscat, Oman

We have an early start today, departing by 4-wheel drive vehicle (closed and air-conditioned) for an excursion through some of Oman's most dramatic scenery. Driving partially on winding mountain roads, we head to Jebel Harim (Mountain of Women), the highest peak on the Musandam Peninsula at 1,910 metres (6,260 feet). During the journey we pass terraced mountain villages, acacia forests, and wadis (dry riverbeds).

After about an hour, we stop at Sayah, a Bedouin village at 900 metres (3,000 feet) elevation. Surrounded by palm groves, Sayah is one of the peninsula's most picturesque villages. From Jebel Harim's summit, grand panoramas reveal the peninsula's geography - mountains plunging to the sea on one side, the Arabian Gulf stretching to the horizon on the other. The return drive takes us past Khawr Najid, a viewpoint overlooking the Indian Ocean, before stopping at Al Khalidya Nature Park.

We then fly to Muscat. Most of Oman's 3 million people live in or around the capital. Cultivation in the Batinah region is concentrated in a narrow coastal strip where about half of Oman's cultivated land supports dense palm groves sheltering limes, bananas, pomegranates, figs, mangoes, and vegetables. Fishing remains important here.

Muscat is not one town but three separate towns - Muscat, Mutrah, and Ruwi - plus several associated settlements separated by the mountainous, indented coast. Time permitting, we may accomplish some sightseeing upon arrival.

Overnight in Muscat.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Muscat: Area Tour

Oman's position on the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean and its isolation from the rest of Arabia have given the country an outward orientation. Trade with India and Africa has been conducted for thousands of years. During the age of European empires, Oman developed strong ties to Britain. Sharing the mountainous south coast of the Arabian Peninsula with Yemen, Oman shares features with its western neighbour, including aspects of dress and architecture. In ancient times this area was where frankincense was grown and exported.

Today we visit the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, completed in 2001. The mosque accommodates 20,000 worshippers and features a single-piece Persian carpet in the main prayer hall - one of the world's largest - and a Swarovski crystal chandelier.

After lunch we visit the Old Palace Area and the National Museum, opened in 2016. The museum presents Omani heritage through 14 galleries covering prehistory, maritime history, arms and armour, currency, and traditional crafts. Displays include ancient frankincense burners, medieval manuscripts, and traditional silver jewellery.

Overnight in Muscat.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Muscat - Qariyat - Sur

Today we depart Muscat by road to the Bimmah Sinkhole, a giant depression where seawater has merged with fresh. Two flights of steps descend to a dazzling pool of blue and green water. After a lunch break at the sinkhole, we continue past Wadi Shab and Wadi Tiwi. This region preserves the atmosphere of traditional Oman before oil wealth. Towns here prospered centuries ago on trade with Africa and Zanzibar flowing through the port of Sur. Fine houses and forts were built, many still standing today behind modern buildings.

Most of Oman's desert is flat gravel plain, but the Wahiba features huge ridges of orange sand dunes separated by valleys. The few Bedouin who still live here breed fine camels. Oman is not principally a land of sand deserts but rather dramatic areas of dry, jagged mountains with narrow river valleys (wadis) between. Evidence of Oman's tribal past is everywhere, with ruined forts commanding important vantage points. Much of Oman remains hidden in remote valleys, creating a feeling of self-imposed isolation at the tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

Overnight in Sur.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Sur - Wahiba Desert Camp

Sur's historical importance is based on dhow building, the wooden sailing vessels used to sail to India and other countries. We may visit the dhow-building yard if activity permits (unfortunately, very few dhows are built here in recent times). Sur was an important port in ancient times but flourished when Oman traded extensively with East Africa. Merchants here made fortunes from trade in slaves and cloves, using profits to build elaborate houses. We learn of Sur's history and its role in shipbuilding.

Later we transfer to 4x4 vehicles for our desert camp experience. Our camp sits within the golden sands of Wahiba Sands. Gas is used for cooking and refrigeration; paraffin lamps and candles provide light. The camp offers a peaceful place to experience authentic desert nights.

Our accommodation is in well-equipped huts (called Barasti) with comfortable beds and private bath facilities. Our huts are basic but cosy, offering an atmospheric way to enjoy desert life and learn about local culture. Activities include sunset viewing, musical entertainment, and stargazing.

Overnight at Wahiba Desert Camp.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Wahiba - Ibra - Jabreen Castle - Nizwa

We recommend an early wake-up to observe sunrise over the dunes. After breakfast we depart toward Nizwa, the main town of the interior province. En route we experience the inland side of Oman's mountainous backbone, where sands meet farmlands and border towns mark the transition between nomadic and settled peoples. In Oman's oasis villages, desert and agricultural economies have mingled for ages. Living within and along the sands are approximately 3,000 pastoralist Bedouins from different tribes, primarily herding goats and camels.

Forts and castles are Oman's most striking cultural landmarks, historically used as defensive bastions or lookout points. An estimated 500 forts, castles, and towers dot the country. En route to Nizwa we pass Bahla Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site whose massive mud-brick walls stretch along the oasis for several kilometres — an impressive sight from the roadside.

Upon arrival in Nizwa, we visit the Oman Across Ages Museum, opened in March 2023. This state-of-the-art museum uses cutting-edge technology to trace Oman's history from prehistoric times to the modern era through artifacts, traditional clothing, and historical documents. Visiting the museum on our first afternoon provides excellent context for the forts, villages, and mountain landscapes we'll explore over the next two days.

Overnight in Nizwa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Nizwa: Jebel Shams Mountains

This morning we drive south to Jabreen Castle, built as a defensive stronghold and perhaps the finest of Omani castles. Dungeons, passages, and rooms feature carvings and paintings; ceilings are decorated with Islamic-era inscriptions and beautifully carved doors distinguish its many chambers.

We then head into the Western Hajar Mountains toward Jebel Shams, often called the "Grand Canyon of Oman." As Oman's highest peak at 3009 metres (9,872 feet), it offers breathtaking panoramas. Our journey takes us to Wadi Ghul, a dramatic canyon carved by centuries of erosion. As we ascend the winding road, we encounter small villages nestled amid towering cliffs. A highlight is a hike to the abandoned village of As Sab, following an ancient donkey path along the edge of Wadi an Nakhar, with panoramic views of the canyon and the distant plains below.

Overnight in Nizwa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Nizwa - Bilad Sait - Muscat - Fly to Salalah

This morning we drive to Al Hamra, one of the oldest towns in Oman, situated at the base of the Jebel Shams massif. Here we wander through date plantations, admire ruins of centuries-old mudbrick houses, and absorb serene mountain scenery. Nearby we explore the village of Misfat Al Abriyeen, where we see its fascinating agricultural terraces and falaj watering system — a living example of the ancient Omani irrigation engineering recognised by UNESCO.

We then continue to Muscat along the main highway, arriving in time for a farewell dinner before our evening flight to Salalah, the second-largest town in Oman. Salalah is isolated far in the southeast, close to the Yemeni border. The setting is magnificent — Salalah faces the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean, backed by hills.

Overnight in Salalah.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Salalah Area

This morning we tour Salalah including the archaeological site of Sumhuram. In pre-Christian times this tiny area was one of three centres producing frankincense, one of the ancient world's most prized commodities. The frankincense tree grows only in this specific region. Demand was enormous in the Mediterranean world, where it was burned in huge quantities during religious rites in temples throughout the Roman Empire. Frankincense is gum dried from the sap of a special tree. We visit Sumhuram, the port at the beginning of the Incense Route.

We finish at the traditional boat-building village of Taqah and the so-called "Queen of Sheba's Palace," a whitewashed fort overlooking the sea. You'll have a chance to shop for frankincense at the market in Salalah.

Overnight in Salalah.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 21 Salalah, Oman - Fly to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Today we fly to Jeddah - welcome to Saudi Arabia!

Founded as a Red Sea fishing hamlet over 2,500 years ago, today's Jeddah is the commercial capital of Saudi Arabia. The city first gained prominence in 647 AD when Caliph Osman Ibn Affan designated it as the main port for pilgrims making the Hajj to Mecca. This role transformed Jeddah from a modest fishing village into a cosmopolitan hub where pilgrims from across the Muslim world converged before journeying inland to the holy cities.

Jeddah has been mentioned in many ancient travellers' journals - some describing it as "the city surrounded by walls with beautiful markets and teeming with buildings," others as "the small city on the Red Sea coast crowded with pilgrims." Inns, caravanserais, and hostels have always catered to travellers and pilgrims passing through.

Overnight in Jeddah.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 22 Jeddah: City Tour

In AD 647, Caliph Osman Ibn Affan chose Jeddah as the main port for Mecca, and it became known as Bilad al Kanasil - the City of Consulates. In the 16th century, the Ottomans built a stone wall to fortify the town against Portuguese attacks. Jeddah remained walled for centuries and was not released from Ottoman rule until 1915. Buildings in old Jeddah were constructed of coral limestone and decorated with intricately carved wooden facades known as "rawasheen," designed to break the sun's glare and catch cooling sea breezes.

Our walking tour of old Jeddah (Al-Balad) reveals twisting streets once flanked by closely-packed buildings. Camel caravans once plodded through wider thoroughfares while goats and donkeys wandered narrow alleys.

We visit the bustling Alawi Souq, still an exciting part of today's city. Traditionally, open-fronted shops were grouped by trade - an Oriental bazaar tradition continuing into modern life. We also visit Al Tayebat International City, an eclectic museum featuring historical objects in a reconstructed old Jeddah-style building.

In the evening we drive along the Corniche. After the Maghreb (sunset) prayer, the Corniche springs to life with Saudi families dining al fresco, a favourite local activity.

Overnight in Jeddah.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 23 Jeddah - Fast Train to Medina

This morning we take the high-speed train on the Haramain Railway (approximately one hour). Completed in 2018, it connects the holy cities of Medina and Mecca.

Medina is one of Islam's two holiest cities. The Prophet Muhammad lived and taught in Medina after departing Mecca in 622 AD. His arrival marks the beginning of the Islamic Calendar. Medina, or Medina al Munawwarah, means "the Enlightened City." The focal point is the Masjid an Nabawi or "Prophet's Mosque," constructed by Muhammad and also the site where he is buried.

We hope to get close to the mosque for exterior photos, but due to cultural sensitivity in a city that was closed to non-Muslims until very recently, we proceed based on the local guide's assessment at the time.

We also visit the old Ottoman Hijaz Railway station, converted into a comprehensive museum with artifacts and displays covering many periods in Saudi history (please note that several railway vestiges are currently under renovation, which could impact plans at this and other related sites).

Overnight in Medina.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 24 Medina - Al-Ula

Our journey continues to Al-Ula, passing several villages en route. This journey follows amazing rock formations and desert sites where we may have opportunities to photograph camel herds wandering the vast desert.

The Al-Ula Oasis was located on the incense route and was capital of the ancient Lihyanites. Today, Al-Ula sits in a beautiful corner of Saudi Arabia on the west side of a narrow palm-lined wadi. Al-Ula has a rare combination of striking geography, ancient history, and nature that makes this a fascinating place to visit. This is a rare example of an Islamic city dating to the 11th century AD.

During our time in Al-Ula, we walk through the old town, now developed by the Royal Commission for Al-Ula into a tourist hub with cafes and local handicraft stores. Our adventure also includes a stop at Elephant Rock and the Al-Ula Museum (though it has been periodically closed in recent years).

Overnight in Al-Ula.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 25 Al-Ula & Madain Saleh

Madain Saleh, rising from the sands in a landscape of striking beauty, dates to the Nabataean civilisation and is considered one of Saudi Arabia's most important archaeological sites. The Nabataeans were ancient traders whose oasis settlements controlled the borderland between Syria and Arabia. This "Capital of the Monuments" contains over 130 tombs, many dated between the 2nd century BC and 2nd century AD.

The Kingdom of Nabataeans, with its capital Petra in Jordan, expanded to dominate Madain Saleh as their second city. The landscape of sweeping sand and rock formations is stunningly beautiful. The tombs are excellently preserved, as the local stone is much harder than that at Petra.

Our early morning visit to the most important tombs is with the Royal Commission for Al-Ula's "Experience Al-Ula" programme. The RCA has exclusive access to the Hegra site protecting most tombs.

We see the famous Qasr al-Farid tomb, a carved rock standing alone in the desert, and Al-Diwan, likely used for Nabataean ceremonies. We also view Qasr al-Bint, Hejaz Railway Station #21, and the magnificent Al-Khuraybah tombs cut into a cliff face.

Overnight in Al-Ula.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 26 Al-Ula - Wadi al-Disah - Tabuk

Today we travel from Al-Ula to Tabuk with a detour to visit Wadi al-Disah, a 15-kilometre canyon running through Jebel Qaraqir, a sandstone massif lying about 80 kilometres south of Tabuk. This natural wonder was long a well-kept secret among explorers before roads were built and satellite images became available. Today it has become one of Saudi Arabia's must-see places.

The first striking feature is the wadi's dimensions. At the eastern entrance, side cliffs rise over 100 metres, but at the western entrance the gap between the bottom and tallest cliffs reaches 500 metres. From the massive rocky peaks on both sides, one can admire dramatic scenery. The second amazing feature is a water stream running through the western part of the canyon. The spring-fed stream has created lush vegetation in an otherwise arid landscape.

We explore this magnificent canyon by 4x4 vehicles, taking in towering rock formations, vegetation, and water features that make this location unique in the Arabian landscape.

After our visit, we continue to Tabuk. From snowy mountains to the deep blue sea, Tabuk Province is home to some of Saudi Arabia's most varied natural landscapes. The region holds highly treasured historic and archaeological sites, a rich heritage from ancient civilisations. Tabuk sits amid a grove of date palms. At the edge stands a Turkish fort built in 1694. Present-day Tabuk is one of Saudi Arabia's fastest-growing industrial centres.

Overnight in Tabuk.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 27 Tabuk - Fly to Riyadh

Today we tour Tabuk's historical sites before our afternoon flight to Riyadh.

Tabuk's early-20th-century Hejaz Railway Station is one of the best-preserved in Saudi Arabia. Thirteen refurbished buildings include a workshop, handicrafts centre, and a building housing a locomotive and Ottoman relics. The Hejaz Railway was a narrow-gauge line running from Damascus to Medina, built to connect Istanbul, capital of the Ottoman Empire and seat of the Islamic Caliphate, with Hejaz, site of Islam's holiest shrines.

Dating to 1559, Tabuk Fort is now a museum with artifacts from the Ottoman period. The castle features mosques, an open courtyard, and watchtowers. Outside are cisterns that once captured water from a spring the Prophet Muhammad reportedly drank from.

We see At Tawba Mosque (from outside), where the Prophet Muhammad prayed when he arrived with 30,000 men in AD 630 for the Battle of Tabuk against the Byzantines. The battle never occurred, but while here, the Quran's ninth chapter, Surah At Tawba, was revealed. Originally made of bricks, mud, and palm trunks, the Ottomans rebuilt it in 1652.

Later we fly to Riyadh, situated on a large plateau in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula - both the capital of Saudi Arabia and its largest city.

Overnight in Riyadh.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 28 Riyadh: City Tour

Considering that at the turn of the 20th century no main roads led into Riyadh, this desert capital has come a long way. Although Riyadh has always been the base of the ruling Al-Sauds, only in the 1970s did ministries and embassies relocate from Jeddah to Riyadh. Much of the city has been constructed since the boom years of the 1970s.

In addition to being the centre of power, the city is a commercial hub. Numerous organisations have established bases here. Architecture is mostly modern, including contemporary high-rise towers and spacious, air-conditioned malls. The Al-Diriyah district, located northwest of the modern city, is the original seat of power of the Al Saud family. Recently rebuilt in a style meant to evoke old pre-20th-century mud-brick buildings, it's now a focal point for Riyadh tourism. We visit the UNESCO-listed site of At-Turaif and explore its winding alleyways.

Our sightseeing also includes the Masmak Fortress, a very important historical monument symbolising the unification and foundation of the Kingdom. Located in the centre of the modern city, this fortress and museum represents Saudi Arabia's founding. A highlight is the state-of-the-art National Museum, one of the finest in the Middle East. Encased within modernist architecture, its two floors contain eight well-designed galleries covering Arabian prehistory, history, culture, and art. When passing through the new part of city we view the Al-Faisaliah Tower and visit the Kingdom Tower.

Overnight in Riyadh.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 29 Departure

Departure from Riyadh.

RHLAH S'IDAH / BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast