Tour Code
KS1

ADVENTURESABROAD

THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

14 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Riyadh

Welcome to Saudi Arabia!

Riyadh sits on a large plateau in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula, serving as both capital and largest city of the Kingdom. The name derives from the Arabic word rawdha, meaning "garden" - particularly those formed in the desert after spring rains. For more than 1,500 years, Riyadh has been a fertile area in the heartland of Arabia, historically famous for its palm trees, dates, and orchards. Once a small walled city, Riyadh has developed into a dynamic metropolis and become a focal point for both travel and trade.

This evening we gather with fellow travellers for our first meal together.

Overnight in Riyadh.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 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. 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 3 Riyadh - Train to Hofuf & Al-Hasa Oasis

This morning we travel by train from Riyadh to Hofuf, the major urban centre in the Al-Hasa Oasis. The area is dotted with date palm farms that make Al-Hasa the largest oasis in Saudi Arabia. Hofuf was capital of the Eastern Province until 1953, and parts of the old town still show evidence of Ottoman rule.

In ancient times, Al-Hasa sat at the centre of trade routes linking the Arabian Peninsula with India, Persia, and the Far East. The oasis has been inhabited since prehistoric times due to its water abundance in an arid region. We enjoy a drive through the greenery during our visit.

We explore Jabal al-Qarah (al-Qarah Mountain), added to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2018. We visit a small museum, "Land of Civilisations," featuring displays on the area's ancient history. The mountain's main attraction is the cave complex, where water and rain have gouged limestone into natural corridors and chambers.

Our sightseeing includes Qasr Ibrahim Fort, built in the 16th century by the Ottoman Governor (occasionally closed, so our visit may be exterior only). Nearby is the souq, a covered market home to the "women's souq," offering items from gold to textiles.

Overnight in Hofuf.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Al Khobar - Dhahran - Fly to Ha'il

This morning we travel north to Dhahran, which lies on a strip of land stretching into the Persian Gulf. This thriving modern hub is a major seaport. With continuing expansion, three towns inevitably merged into one municipality known as Dhahran Area. Near Dhahran are located some of the world's most important centres for petroleum production and refining. With oil's discovery in March 1938, the fortunes and lifestyle of Arabia's people changed dramatically.

Upon arrival in Dhahran we visit the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, which exhibits international and local exhibitions illuminating the developing modern art movement and Saudi Arabia's rich historical roots.

Later we travel the short distance to Dammam airport, from where we fly to Ha'il (via Riyadh). This may result in including lunch instead of dinner today; your Tour Leader will advise.

Overnight in Ha'il.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Ha'il Sightseeing - Jubbah - Sakaka

This morning we visit Ha'il, situated in the Shammar Mountain region west of the Al-Odairie Valley. Traditionally the Ha'il Valley derived wealth from being on the camel caravan route of the Hajj, and the city grew because of its location on this pilgrimage route from Iraq. The opening of the Hejaz Railway between Damascus and Medina, together with inexpensive steamship routes to Jeddah, undermined Ha'il's traditional camel caravan economy. Today Ha'il has been transformed into a modern city.

Gardens and landscaped areas dot the city, along with several historic palaces and fortresses, some dating to the Ottoman era. Ha'il is also known for its agricultural products - vegetables, fruit, wheat, and barley - and serves as the centre of Saudi Arabia's agricultural programme. We tour the city, where our sightseeing includes the old fort A'arif, situated prominently overlooking the old city with commanding views of surrounding desert terrain and the mountains of Jebel Selma and Aja. Below the fort sits a quirky but interesting local heritage museum featuring Saudi antiques.

We continue toward Sakaka through the Nafud Desert, connected to the Empty Quarter by a "sand corridor." En route we stop at Jubbah, surrounded by large sandstone outcrops filled with ancient petroglyphs and inscriptions. Some rock carvings show men wearing headgear, birds, monkeys, gazelles, and two animals pulling a wheeled cart.

Overnight in Sakaka.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Sakaka Area Touring

Today we tour Sakaka and Al-Jouf (Dumat al-Jandal), adjacent oasis towns in the northern Kingdom on the old caravan route from the Mediterranean to southern Arabia. This is Saudi Arabia's northern gateway, linking Syria and Iraq with the peninsula. It's the cradle of Nabatean and Assyrian cultures.

The Bir Sisra well in Sakaka is believed to belong to the Nabatean period. Local tradition holds that areas of Sakaka and land to the south and east were once irrigated from this well by underground channels. The Qasr Zabal citadel/fortress sits on the town's northern edge.

Al-Jouf is of particular interest because of its role in pre- and post-Islamic history. Archaeological evidence reveals Assyrian and Nabatean presence. Following its conquest by Muslims in the third year of the Hijira, it became a staging post for Muslim armies while remaining an important crossroads for traders and caravans heading to or from Iraq and Syria. Today, palm cultivation constitutes the main agricultural sector, along with wheat and a variety of fruit and vegetables including grapes, figs, olives, potatoes, and tomatoes.

Our sightseeing in Al-Jouf includes a tour of the old city. Qasr Marid is a walled fortress overlooking the ancient town. Umar Mosque, located next to Qasr Marid, was built during the time of the second caliph, Umar Bin Al Khatab, who passed through the region on his way to Jerusalem. We also see the Old City and museum at Dawmat al-Jandal.

Overnight in Sakaka.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Sakaka - Tabuk Touring

Today we travel 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. In former times it was a station on the Hejaz railway (now defunct). At the edge of the old part stands a Turkish fort, built in 1694. Present-day Tabuk is one of Saudi Arabia's fastest-growing industrial centres.

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 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.

Overnight in Tabuk.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Tabuk: Jethroâ€™s Tomb

Today we journey to Madian—now known as Al-Bad'—a small province lying two and a half hours northwest of Tabuk in a landscape where biblical history and Nabataean artistry converge in ways few travelers expect.

We begin at Jethro's Cave, locally called Maghayer Shu'aib, where ancient tradition places Moses' father-in-law in the very land of Madian mentioned in Exodus. But the revelation here isn't just scriptural—it's architectural. Rising from the rocky landscape is a collection of Nabataean tombs that rivals the famous sites yet remains virtually unknown. These facades, carved directly into the cliff faces with the same sophisticated craftsmanship found at Petra and Madain Saleh, display the full Nabataean vocabulary: columned porticos, pediments, decorative urns. This is Saudi Arabia's hidden treasury—a site of extraordinary importance that somehow escaped the tourist circuit entirely.

We continue to Maqna, where the Well of Moses marks another layer in this region's deep sacred geography—the traditional site where Moses, fleeing Egypt, first encountered Jethro's daughters and watered their flocks, beginning the chain of events that would transform him from refugee prince to prophet.

Our day concludes in the Bajda Desert, where the stark white sands create an otherworldly finale to a journey through landscapes where geology, ancient trade routes, and foundational narratives of three faiths have intersected for millennia.

Overnight in Tabuk.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Tabuk - Wadi Al-Disah Excursion - To Al-Ula

Today we travel from Tabuk to Al-Ula with a detour to visit Wadi al-Disah, a 15-kilometre canyon running through Jebel Qaraqir, a sandstone massif about 80 kilometres south of Tabuk. This natural wonder was long a well-kept secret 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 bottom and tallest cliffs reaches 500 metres. From the massive rocky peaks on both sides, dramatic scenery unfolds. The second amazing feature is a water stream running through the western canyon. The spring-fed stream has created lush vegetation in an otherwise arid landscape.

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

After our visit, we continue to Al-Ula, passing villages en route. 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, with a rare combination of striking geography, ancient history, and nature.

Overnight in Al-Ula.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 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.

Once back on our own bus, we visit locations closer to Al-Ula town. We walk through the old town, now developed by the RCA into a tourist hub with cafes and local handicraft stores. Our adventure also includes a stop at Elephant Rock.

Overnight in Al-Ula.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Al Ula - Medina

Today we have a half-day drive across the desert landscape from Al-Ula to Medina. 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 overnight in Medina to take the high-speed train to Jeddah the following morning.

Overnight in Medina.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Medina - Train to Jeddah

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

Located on the Red Sea coast, Jeddah is the principal gateway to Mecca, Islam's holiest city. Founded as a fishing hamlet over 2,500 years ago, today Jeddah is the commercial capital of Saudi Arabia. The city truly came to prominence in 647 AD when it was designated as a port for Muslim pilgrims making the Hajj to Mecca.

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.

We aim to complete some Jeddah sightseeing in the afternoon after transferring to the hotel from the railway station.

Overnight in Jeddah.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 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 14 Departure

Departure from Jeddah.

RHLAH S'IDAH / BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast