



The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Profile & Protocol

Saudi Profile

Location:

Saudi Arabia is located in the southwest corner of Asia, occupying almost 80 percent of the Arabian Peninsula. It is surrounded by the Red Sea on the West, by Yemen and Oman on the South, the Arabian Gulf and the United Arab Emirates and Qatar on the East, and Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait on the North. Desert covers more than half the total area of Saudi Arabia. A narrow coastal plain runs through the Kingdom's western coast while a range of mountains run parallel to the coastal plain along the Red Sea. Along the Arabian Gulf in the east is a low-lying region called Al-Hasa. The eastern region has the richest reservoirs of oil in the world.

Capital:

Riyadh

Second Largest City:

Jeddah

Third Largest City:

Makkah

Language:

Arabic is the official language.

Other Languages:

English

Currency:

Saudi Riyal (SAR)

Land Size:

2,250,000 square kilometers

Climate:

The climate in Saudi Arabia differs greatly between the country's two distinct regions: the coast and the interior. High humidity coupled with more moderate temperatures is prevalent along the coast, whereas aridity and extreme temperatures characterize the interior.

Natural Resources:

Saudi Arabia has vast oil resources. The country also has large natural gas reserves, as well as deposits of bauxite, coal, copper, gold, iron, phosphates, platinum, silver, tungsten, uranium, and zinc. Non-mineral resources include limestone, glass-sand, and stone.

Working week days – Saturdays to Thursdays



Bank opening hours: 09:30 AM - 16:00PM. Thursdays open from 08:00AM - 12:00PM.

Business Hours:

Government offices are open from 7.30 AM – 13.30 PM.

Most shops remain open until 21.00 PM –22.00 PM

Department stores, boutiques, markets and many food shops remain open on a Friday

Embassies and consulates are generally open from 8.45 AM–12.30 PM and are closed on Fridays

Credit Cards: American Express, Diners Club, Visa, MasterCard, etc are generally accepted in the main hotels and larger shops but some retailers offer better bargains for cash.

Time Difference – GMT+3

Dialing Code: +966

Emergency Services: Police: 999

Fire Department: 997

Demography

Population:

Total - 26,810,000

Population - Capital City:

Riyadh: 5,835,618

Population - Second Largest City:

Jeddah: 3,262,697

Population - Third Largest City:

Makkah: 2,000,000

Age Structure:

Age 0-14 – 38.2% of population

Age 15-64 – 59.4% of population



Age 65+ – 2.4% of population

Population Growth Rate:

2.24% per annum

Saudi Protocol

Saudi Society & Culture

Islam is practiced by all Saudis and governs their personal, political, economic and legal lives.

Among certain obligations for Muslims are to pray five times a day - Friday is the Muslim holy day.

During the holy month of Ramadan all Muslims must fast from dawn to dusk and are only permitted to work six hours per day. Expatriates are not required to fast; however, they must not eat, drink, smoke, or chew gum in public.

In general, things happen more slowly during Ramadan. Many businesses operate on a reduced schedule. Shops may be open and closed at unusual times.

Family Values

The family and tribe are the basis of the social structure.

As is seen in their naming conventions, Saudis are cognizant of their heritage, their clan, and their extended family, as well as their nuclear family.

Saudis take their responsibilities to their family quite seriously.

Families tend to be large and the extended family is quite close.

The individual derives a social network and assistance in times of need from the family.

Nepotism is considered a good thing, since it implies that employing people one knows and trusts is of primary importance.

Men shake hands. Good friends may greet each other with a handshake and a kiss on each cheek.

Alcohol is strictly prohibited.



Women are not allowed to drive.

Women always wear a traditional covering, called an abaya.

Women generally hug and kiss close friends.

Men and women would not greet each other in public from outside the family.

When Saudis greet each other they take their time and converse about general things.

Gift Giving Etiquette

Gifts are not the norm as in many other countries.

If you are invited to a Saudi's house bring something small as a thank you.

Flowers do not make good gifts from a man, although a woman could give them to her hostess.

Never give alcohol as a gift.

Gifts are not opened when received.

Dining Etiquette

Saudis socialize primarily in restaurants and international hotels when entertaining expatriates whom they do not know well. After some time you will be invited to the home.

Entertainment will generally be same-sex only. If both sexes are included, they will be in separate rooms.

If you are invited to a Saudi's house:

You would usually remove your shoes.

Dress conservatively.

Try to arrive at the invited time. Punctuality is appreciated but not crucial.

Show respect for the elders by greeting them first.

Accept the offer of Arabian coffee and dates even if you do not normally drink coffee.

If you are invited for a meal, understand that there will be a great deal of socializing and small talk before the meal is served.

Table manners

If the meal is on the floor, sit cross-legged or kneel on one knee...

Eat only with the right hand as the left is considered unclean.



Try a bit of everything that is served.
 Meals are generally served family-style.
 Honored guests are often offered the most prized pieces such as a sheep's head so be prepared!
 There is often more food than you can eat. Part of Saudi hospitality and generosity is to show guests with abundance.
 There is little conversation during meals so that diners may relish the food

Relationships & Communication

You will need a Saudi sponsor or foreign investor to enter the country.

Saudis do not require as much personal space as most western cultures. As such, they will stand close to you while conversing and you may feel as if your personal space has been violated.

Saudis prefer to work with people they know and trust and will spend a great deal of time on the getting-to-know-you part of relationship building.

Since Saudis will most likely judge you on appearances, dress and present yourself well.

Business Meeting Etiquette

Appointments are necessary and should be made several weeks to one month in advance if at all possible.

When meeting with government officials, a firm date will not be settled upon until you are physically in the country.

Try to schedule meetings in the morning.

You should arrive at meetings on time, although it is an accepted custom to keep foreigners waiting.

It is not uncommon to have a meeting cancelled once you arrive.

Meetings are generally not private until after a relationship of trust has been developed.

Business meetings start after prolonged inquiries about health, family, etc. Never inquire about a



Saudi's wife.

Business Negotiating

Decisions are made slowly. Do not try to rush the process.

The society is extremely bureaucratic. Most decisions require several layers of approval. Saudis are tough negotiators.

Business is hierarchical. Decisions are made by the highest-ranking person.

Repeat your main points since it will be interpreted as meaning you are telling the truth.

Do not use high-pressure tactics.

Decisions are easily overturned.

When discussing price, Saudis will often make an initial offer that is extremely low when they are buying. Conversely, when they are selling, their initial offer will be extremely high.

You may need to compromise on a point if someone's dignity is at stake.

There is a tendency to avoid giving bad news and to give effusive acceptances, which may only mean 'perhaps'.

Dress Etiquette

Most Saudis wear long white thobes. You would be expected to wear a suit.

Dress well if you want to make a good impression.

Business women should make certain that their collarbones and knees are covered and that their clothes are not form-fitting.

Business Cards

Business cards are given to everyone you meet, although it may be an idea to be selective if you have few in your possession.

Have one side of your card translated into Arabic. Be sure to check the translation carefully as there is often confusion with the order of western names.