

# RELOCATING TO **SAUDI ARABIA**

HELPFUL ADVICE  
AND KEY INFORMATION



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INTERNATIONAL

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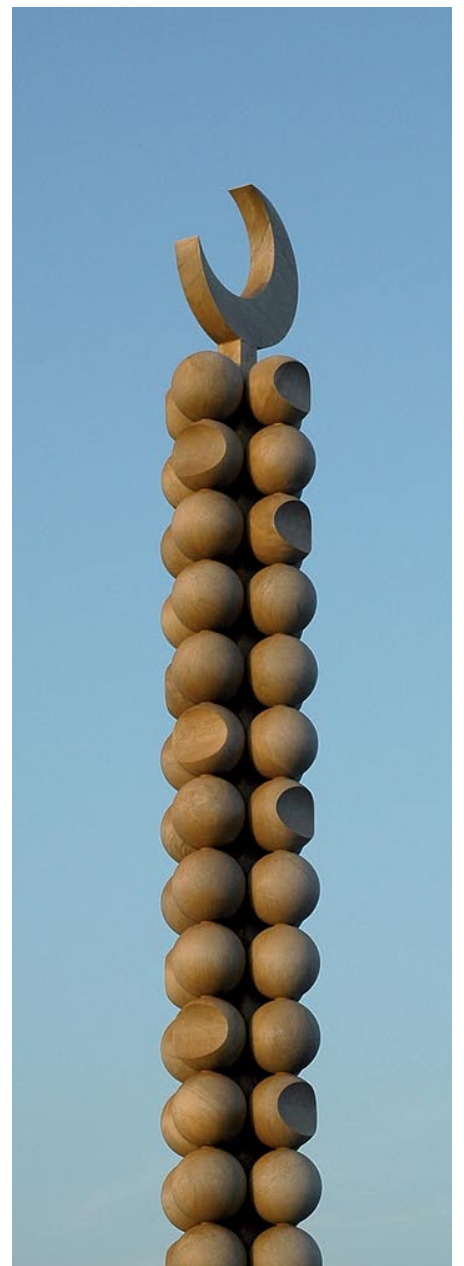
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Cover image: Arches in Tabouk, Saudi Arabia.

# 1.0 Overview



## 1.1 Map of Saudi Arabia



### Saudi Arabia

Population: 27,019,731

Area: 2,149,690 km<sup>2</sup>

Government: Absolute monarchy

Established: 8th January, 1926

Capital: Riyadh

## 2.0 Why move to Saudi Arabia?



### 2.0 Why move to Saudi Arabia?

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest country on the Arabian Peninsula. As the world's leading petroleum producer and exporter, oil accounts for more than 90% of exports and 75% of government revenue, with Saudi oil reserves the largest in the world.

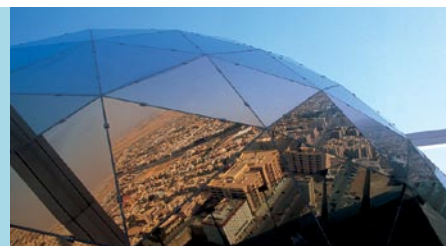
Roughly six million foreign workers play an important role in the Saudi economy, in a variety of sectors. Saudi has benefited from high oil revenues over the past 30 years, enabling the government to spend liberally on infrastructure and education. The government has begun to permit private sector and foreign investor participation in the power generation and telecom sectors.

While part of this spending has been directed towards creating greater private-sector employment for Saudis, there is still plenty of work for foreign workers with required skill sets and a desire to live in a very different culture.

Most expat employment opportunities have traditionally been in the oil and gas industry and a variety of diversified Saudi conglomerates, however with the growing economy, a boom in the retail and construction sectors have provided many opportunities for expats.



## 3.0 Life in Saudi Arabia



### 3.0 Life in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is very different from Dubai, and other parts of the Middle East known for their Westernisation. The life led in Saudi, especially by Western women, is starkly contrasted inside and outside the compounds due to the traditional restrictions placed on women in public. Inside the compounds there will be spacious, furnished and air-conditioned villas, Western dress codes, unisex swimming and gymnasium, satellite TV, internet access and European-style food in the small compound shop.

Crèches exist for the children, and there are many classes and pastimes for wives to take part in while their husbands are at work. However, outside of the compound things are very different – the mainstay of life is strict adherence to the Muslim call to prayer five times a day. This impacts most aspects of life, effecting the opening and closing times of shops, cafes and restaurants. Women are also restricted on visits to leisure facilities (excluding shops) as they must be accompanied by a male relative or husband.

Outside the compound, women are required to wear the long black cloak of the Abaya (traditional Islamic female dress). This is strictly enforced by the Mutawa'a (religious policemen) across Saudi. It is not necessary to wear a veil or headscarf.

The other obvious difference between Saudi and the Western world is the segregation of professional Saudi females, meaning they cannot have any direct contact with men in the workplace. This does obviously limit the professional opportunities for women in Saudi, although some arrangements involving segregated offices or working from home do exist.

While these differences are starkly different to the Western way of life, there are benefits. Aside from the obvious financial incentives of accepting a role in Saudi, many find that it allows more of a family orientated life for those with children. The indulgent Arabic approach to children ensures that those who are parents never need worry about their whereabouts, and often find their status as parents elevated by the children's presence.

While Arabic is the official language, English is widely spoken. Among the non-Saudi population Urdu, Farsi and Turkish are also common.

The month of Ramadan is a feature of life in the Middle East. During this month of fasting, eating, drinking and smoking are not permitted in public, from sunrise to sunset. This is strictly adhered to, and even as a non-Muslim it is unacceptable to partake in any of the above in view of anyone who is observing Ramadan. The Saudi calendar does not acknowledge Christmas, so many expats take annual leave to fit in with Ramadan and Hajj.

### 3.1 Climate

Saudi is a hot and arid country. The average winter temperature range is 8° to 20°C in January in interior cities such as Riyadh and 19° to 29°C in Jeddah. The average summer range in July is 27° to 43°C in Riyadh and 27° to 38°C in Jeddah.

## 3.0 Life in Saudi Arabia



### 3.2 Potential earnings and savings

One of the great attractions of working in Saudi Arabia is that there is no personal taxation. The only way to truly appreciate the quality of your offer is to analyse your package by factoring in cost of living.

Specifically geared towards the Middle East, the table below illustrates how net earnings in the UK compare to gross earnings in Saudi Arabia.

What you earn – and save every month:

	<b>UK Gross – Before Tax</b>	<b>UK Net – After Tax</b>	<b>KSA gross – Tax saving</b>
£30,000	£2,500	£1,825	£2,500 (+27%)
£36,000	£3,000	£2,196	£3,000 (+26.8%)
£50,000	£4,166	£2,886	£4,166 (+30.7%)
£48,000	£4,000	£2,788	£4,000 (+30.3%)
£60,000	£5,000	£3,378	£5,000 (+ 32%)
£72,000	£6,000	£3,968	£6,000 (+33%)
£100,000	£8,333	£5,345	£8,300 (+35%)

Notes:

1. All calculations are based on monthly earnings.
2. The right hand column shows a % increase between the net and gross.

### 3.3 Money

The currency in Saudi Arabia is the Saudi Arabia Riyal (SAR), which is divided into 100 Hallal. As of 20 February 2008, the relevant exchange rates were:

1 GBP = 7.2968 SAR

1 EUR = 5.5121 SAR

1 USD = 3.7450 SAR

#### Banks

Several of the world's leading banks, or their subsidiaries have branches in Saudi. Foreign banks include the British Bank of the Middle East, Citibank, and Standard Chartered.

Setting up an account is easy, as is transferring money to the UK. You'll be given a cash point card to withdraw money from ATM machines. Credit cards are widely accepted.

### 3.4 Accommodation

In Saudi, expats only have the option to rent, with ownership being restricted to Saudi nationals. A variety of accommodation is available, from unfurnished apartments to fully furnished villas. Foreign workers generally live on compounds, which vary massively in size, cultural mix and facilities.

Due to the constant movement of expats there is generally accommodation available on most compounds. The choice of compound is a key decision, especially for those workers with families as this is where most of their time will be spent. Depending on the size of the compound, facilities are likely to include a communal swimming pool, a restaurant and shop, tennis and squash courts and a gymnasium.

## 3.0 Life in Saudi Arabia



### 3.4 Accommodation (continued)

Most apartments and villas are let unfurnished, although partly furnished or fully furnished accommodation can be found. With a constant turnover of expats, secondhand furniture is easy to find at good prices.

Villas and apartments are usually found through the company you are employed through, or word of mouth. Alternatively most compounds will have an office where enquiries about vacant properties can be addressed to. Generally your employer will be of great help in this area, to ensure you are happily settled as soon as possible.

Rental costs and property prices vary widely depending on location, standards and compound facilities. Studio apartments usually start from 2800 SAR. 2 and 3 bedroom apartments start from 3750 – 5600 SAR. Villas start from 6750 SAR and can go as high as 11200+. It is common for companies to provide free accommodation or a good housing allowance as part of the salary package for expats.

### 3.5 Travel and transport

There are three international airports in Saudi Arabia, located in Jeddah, Riyadh and Dammam. All have frequent scheduled flights to the rest of the world. Regional flights within the Middle East are also easily available, from both the international, regional and domestic airports.

Roads within Saudi are reasonably well maintained throughout the country, although driving styles can be erratic. Cars can be leased or bought, although can only be driven by men. Women must be driven by their husband, a male relative or one of the taxi companies licensed to take women. Most compounds offer bus services to and from popular local destinations such as shopping malls.

### 3.6 Legal System

Saudi Arabia does not have a formal criminal code, and thus much of its law is derived from an ultra-conservative form of Sunni Islam. Judges are free to impose capital punishment or corporal punishment, for crimes such as murder, robbery, rape, drug smuggling and for various forms of sexual behavior such as homosexuality and adultery. The courts may impose less severe punishments, such as floggings, for less serious crimes against public morality such as drunkenness. It is worth mentioning that life inside the compounds of expat workers is not subject to these traditional laws, as the religious police are not permitted within them.

### 3.7 Education

There is an excellent range of primary and secondary private schools in Saudi catering especially for the expat community. The majority are managed by and run for English-speaking westerners, and offer an American curriculum plus a UK or international syllabus. In general, standards at private schools are high, with small class sizes and modern facilities. Enrolment in private schools usually involves an interview with the parent and child, and sometimes an examination. School buses are usually provided to and from the compounds.

## 3.0 Life in Saudi Arabia



### 3.8 Shopping

Saudi is a shopper's paradise with malls, department stores and supermarkets where just about anything can be found. There are plenty of smart, modern indoor shopping malls selling everything from DVD players to designer clothes, all with no sales tax.

### 3.9 Food and drink

Islamic dietary laws forbid the eating of pork and the drinking of alcohol, and this law is enforced strictly throughout Saudi Arabia. Arabic unleavened bread, or khobz, is eaten with almost all meals. Other staples include lamb, grilled chicken, falafel (deep-fried chickpea balls), shawarma (spit-cooked sliced lamb), and Ful medames (a paste of fava beans, garlic and lemon). Arabic tea is also a famous custom, which is used in both casual and formal meetings between friends, family and even strangers.

The tea is black (without milk) and has herbal flavoring that comes in many variations. Away from this more traditional side to Saudi Arabia, there are a large number of American style restaurants and Indian establishments offering a variety of countries cuisine, although again with separate areas for single men and families.

### 3.10 Communications

All mail in Saudi is addressed to post office boxes. Although a PO box can be rented, most residents use their company address for private mail. The telephone network is operated by the Saudi Telecom Company since privatisation in 1999. It provides landline, mobile and internet services. The international dial code for Saudi is +966.

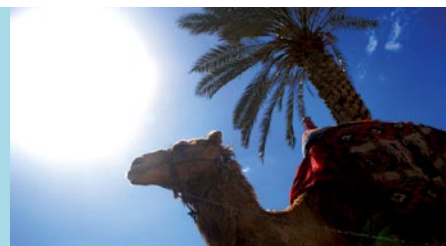
### 3.11 Recreation

Public theatres, cinemas and clubs are prohibited, as traditionally they are believed to be incompatible with Islam. However, in private compounds theatres can be found, but often are more popular for local music, arts, and theatre productions rather than films. DVDs of Western movies are legal and widely available, although subject to censorship. Often books and DVDs will be confiscated at the airport and returned once censored. Sports are a popular pastime, especially football, hiking, diving and golf. Women participate as well, but in separate facilities.

Within expat compounds there are generally many pastimes and clubs to participate in, which are not subject to the same rules of segregation.



## 4.0 Working in Saudi Arabia



### 4.1 Passports and visas

Your visa will be organised by your employer once you have secured a job offer from them. For the duration of your stay in the Middle East they act as your sponsor, and all documents such as driving licence, bank account, health cards etc are reliant on your being in possession of a Residence Visa, which will be organised by your employer. Generally partners are not permitted on your visa unless you are married. Tourist visas are not permitted within Saudi Arabia, so employment must be secured before you travel.

### 4.2 Health regulations

There are no compulsory regulations for entry to Saudi Arabia.

### 4.3 The Saudi Arabian workplace

Smart, conservative clothing is expected, despite the soaring heat outside and the fiercely efficient air conditioning inside.

While there are no laws that bar women from working in Saudi Arabia, there is a long tradition of segregation. Often women will work in separate offices, or from home, however this is slowly changing.

When greeting Arab women do not offer to shake their hand unless the woman extends hers first. The terms 'Sayed' (Mr) or 'Sayeda' (Mrs), followed by the first name, should be used in greeting, to ensure politeness. It is also very important for visitors never to sit with their feet pointing directly at someone else, as this causes offence. Be careful when criticising a colleague or client, as causing someone to lose face is considered bad manners.

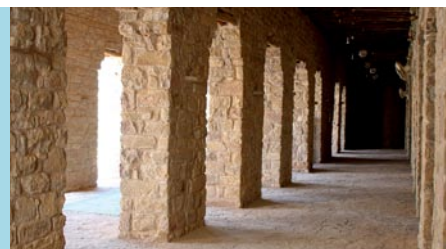
Any criticism of colleagues should be kept for private discussions afterwards.

Friday is the main day of prayer, so meetings should not be scheduled for this day. Calls to Arab colleagues or clients should also be avoided on this day. Depending on the company, the other day of the weekend will be Thursday or Saturday, but for most employers it is Thursday.

### 4.4 Working hours

Office hours are usually from 8.30 or 9.00 am to 5.30 or 6.00 pm. In the month of Ramadan, the working day is reduced to six hours for Muslims, who fast during daylight hours.

## 4.0 Working in Saudi Arabia



### 4.5 Employment prospects

The market is strong in Saudi, and excellent opportunities exist for the right candidates who possess the required skills that are lacked by nationals.

The government strongly encourages employers to use the local labour force where possible, in order to reduce unemployment within the country. UK graduates are likely to have particular difficulty securing a position unless they have substantial relevant work experience, or are already employed by a UK firm who transfers them to Saudi.

In general, for a candidate to be employed from overseas they must have experience and skills that cannot be found locally. Given clients stringent criteria and the visa relocation process, this does not necessarily make finding a job in Saudi a foregone conclusion or a quick process. As a general rule, candidates will need to have at least four years post qualification experience to be considered as viable.

Often, lower to middle level jobs are not advertised, instead recruiting and man power contracting agents are used to hire back in their native country. So many of these jobs never appear in a public forum. Even if they did, the salary packages would be too low for most candidates who have previously lived and worked in the West to consider and survive on.

However, for those candidates with skills in demand the tax-free salaries and heavily subsidised or free housing can be a great career move. Particularly popular with single men and those with young or school age children Saudi offers a different but excellent style of living for some. Many find that the close community within the compound offers more safety than is typical in more liberal Western countries. Generally the remuneration packages are higher than in other Middle East countries, reflecting the differing quality of life from places like Dubai, and as such the more limited number of people who are willing to relocate.

## 5.0 General information



### 5.1 Useful links

#### 1. City Guides and Information

[www.wordtravels.com/Cities/Saudi+Arabia/Riyadh](http://www.wordtravels.com/Cities/Saudi+Arabia/Riyadh)  
[www.arab.net/saudi/index.html](http://www.arab.net/saudi/index.html)  
[www.justlanded.com](http://www.justlanded.com)  
[www.ameinfo.com](http://www.ameinfo.com)

#### 2. Government Departments

[www.saudinf.com](http://www.saudinf.com)

#### 3. Local News

There are three English speaking newspapers in Saudi Arabia:

[www.arabnews.com](http://www.arabnews.com)  
[www.saudigazette.com.sa](http://www.saudigazette.com.sa)  
[www.sauditimes.com](http://www.sauditimes.com)

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