

MAP OF SAUDI



Riyadh, The Capital City

Eat: Najd Village, named after the region in which Riyadh lies, serves traditional Arabian dishes, so if you're after a true taste of the region, make a bee-line here. www.najdvillage.com

Sleep: Perched high above the city in the world-famous Kingdom Tower, Four Seasons Riyadh offers authentic Saudi interior design and an excellent location. (+966 11 211 5000)

See: Don't miss a trip to The Edge of the World. The scenery is mind-blowing - it's something you really don't want to miss.

Food Trivia: Saudi qahwa

No visit to Saudi Arabia could be considered complete without sampling a glass or two of qahwa (Saudi coffee). The heady, aromatic drink is a source of huge national pride; made from finely ground Arabica coffee beans and infused with cardamom (and sometimes saffron and cloves), it is presented in a traditional coffee pot known as a dallah, and poured into tiny, decorative cups called finjan. Qahwa is consumed without milk and often served with dates.

Dammam

Eat: Dine on traditional Saudi dishes of kabsa, soups and grilled meat in a mudbrick fort at Heritage Village. www.heritage-village.com/sa

Sleep: In beautiful coastal surroundings, the Mövenpick Beach Resort Al Khobar offers a lagoon beach, swimming pool and spa and is only 30 minutes from Dammam town centre. (+966 13 849 2999)

See: Visit Tarout Island and head to Tarout Castle, an old fort dating back to the 16th century when the Portuguese invaded the Gulf.

Food Trivia: Kabsa

Scented, fluffy rice, vegetables and tender meat (most often chicken, but sometimes lamb, beef, goat or even camel depending on the region) combine to form what is regarded as Saudi Arabia's national dish.

Jeddah, The Red Sea City

Eat: Head to Maillard at Jeddah Waterfront where Saudi chefs present an exciting menu of star dishes such as duck waffle, coconut lobster and watermelon tatak. www.visitmaillard.com

Sleep: The Park Hyatt Jeddah - Marina, Club and Spa is a five-star resort on the peaceful shores of the Corniche with stunning rooms overlooking the Red Sea. (+966 12263 9666)

Experience: Go diving in the Red Sea - you can't come to the Red Sea City without going for a dive in the ocean.



Tabuk

Eat: For traditional Saudi Arabian food, look no further than Al Qariyah Al Turathiyah. Dishes on the menu include mandi, camel meat and mezze. (+966 56 120 6666)

Sleep: Hilton Garden Inn Tabuk is perfectly located near shopping centres, restaurants and Tabuk Castle. (+966 14 422 6116)

See: Go on a historic tour around the ancient carved tombs of Maghaer Shuaib. This is where Prophet Moses lived after he fled Egypt.

Food Trivia: Arekah

A breakfast staple in Saudi's mountainous southwest province of Asir, arekah features freshly baked bread blended or torn into pieces before being mixed with dates, ghee and honey, and warmed through. A divine indulgence that shouldn't be missed.

AlUla

Eat: British Michelin-starred chef Jason Atherton's Maraya Social sits atop the striking mirrored Maraya structure. www.marayasocial.com

Sleep: AlUla's stunning Habitas resort is an eco-friendly way to explore the area, with magnificent scenery and facilities including a yoga deck, fitness centre and serene swimming pool. www.ourhabitas.com/alula

See: As the Kingdom's first UNESCO World Heritage Site, Hegra is one of the most jaw-dropping locations on the planet. Don't miss it.

Food Trivia: Yughmush

Saudi street food at its finest. Little pockets of freshly cooked leavened bread stuffed with piquant tender meat are a must-try when in Saudi. Ideal on-the-go snacks, Yughmush are especially popular in Jeddah and they should be eaten while the bread is still warm and just starting to soften as the juices from the meat soak through the golden dough.

Sobia

This thirst-quenching sweet drink originated in the Hejaz region and tends to be enjoyed primarily during Ramadan. Traditional sobia preparations see Arabic bread, barley, dried fruit (often raisin or dates), sugar and spices such as cinnamon and cardamom left to soak for a day before being blended, strained to remove any solids, and further sweetened with more sugar.

EXPERIENCE SAUDI

3-DAY ITINERARY: RIYADH

Uncover the history

Take a stroll into Riyadh's old quarter and learn about the city's past. The historic 150-year-old Al Masmak Fortress has a citadel made from clay and mud and it's an ideal spot to start a tour of the city. Al Masmak, meaning a high, strong and thick building, is the heart of Riyadh's history. In 1902 it was captured by King Abdulaziz, who took control of Riyadh, and from here conquered and united the different regions to make up the modern-day Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. After being an ammunition warehouse and a prison, today it is a museum.

Haggle at the souk

Just up the road from Al Masmak Fortress is the historic Souk Al Zal where you'll find jewellery, spices, textiles, handicrafts and souvenirs, so if you're looking for a gift or keepsake you're in the right place. It's been open since 1901 and is a top place to explore the alleyways and market stalls. It's best to visit at 6pm to see the daily auctions of carpets and antiques and feel the electric atmosphere of the old souk really come to life.

Shop at Riyadh Park Mall

Take a stroll around this mall, which has a wavelike glass roof in one area and an open-air precinct, The Zone, in another. Check out the shops and restaurants or catch a movie at the IMAX cinema if you fancy chilling out in the air-conditioning. There are loads of high streets stores and high-end fashion chains from Abercrombie and Fitch to Coach, plus popular restaurant chains including PF Chang's, SALT and The Cheesecake Factory. There's even the Museum of Illusions to marvel at, or if you're travelling with family, then Magic Planet is a top choice for kids.

Go on a desert safari

You can't visit Saudi Arabia without an adventure in the desert, so while you're in the capital why not book a safari? Hold on to your hats, and your stomachs, as you hurtle over the dunes and take in an amazing sunset over the sand. There are several companies offering afternoon and evening trips, which include dune bashing, sandboarding, a traditional dinner and stargazing in the super-clear desert skies, before you're dropped back at your hotel for a good night's sleep.

Hike at Wadi Hanifa

If you're into the great outdoors then a hike on Wadi Hanifa will be right up your rocky path. The 120km stretch of rugged terrain just to the east of As Suwaidi is a beautiful location for a hike, with one side of the wadi lined with lush palm trees, plus pretty landscaped gardens to roam around. There are also barbecue and picnic spots if you fancy parking up and cooking your lunch while you're there. Don't forget snacks, comfy shoes and a fully charged smartphone or camera to capture memorable shots.

Visit Al Faisal Museum for Arab Islamic Art

If you are a fan of art there are lots of cultural spots in Riyadh to explore, but this newly re-opened museum in Al Olaya has a large number of free exhibitions scheduled. The current one, *Asfar: Treasures of the King Faisal Center for Research and Studies* runs until February 2023 showcasing nearly 30,000 manuscripts.

3-DAY ITINERARY: AL AHSÄ

Go back in time

If you're looking to quench your thirst for history, then Jawatha Mosque built by the Bani Abd al-Qays tribe should be high on your list. It is believed to be the earliest mosques in eastern Arabia, dating a back nearly 1,400 years. Located around 12km northeast of Hofuf, the building has been restored in recent years, and while it isn't the biggest mosque, it more than makes up for that in terms of historic and cultural significance, and is well worth a visit.

Enjoy the oasis

Explore exactly what makes this place special by touring around the oasis in Al Ahsa's capital Hofuf. Take a trip to King Abdullah Environmental Park, a green area with fountains and fun things to do for all the family with playgrounds, games and a selection of dining spots. Make sure to try a khalasia date, popularly thought of as the best dates in the world.

Driving adventure

Take a 4x4 vehicle just outside the city and you'll find the Yellow Lake, otherwise known as Asfar Lake. The water itself isn't yellow, but rather the edges are made up of striking sand dunes. The lake is home to plenty of bird life, including eagles, warblers and plovers. If watching our feathered friends isn't your thing, then you can take a kayak out onto the water for a relaxing way to unwind, or sit back and enjoy a picnic for lunch. If you fancy more of a drive, then continue on to Uqair, where you can see the Arabian Sea, walk along the beach and visit the historical fort and port.

Potter around a palace

Qasr Ibrahim, or Ibrahim Palace, is a domed castle that dates back to the Ottoman Empire and was captured by King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud in the early 20th century. It showcases a mix of Islamic and military architectural styles, and has been painstakingly restored. It is also one of the places recognised on the revered UNESCO list as a site of cultural significance.

Head for heights

It's time to get those hiking boots on with a trip to Al Qarah mountain. It's not a difficult climb up the 220-metre mountain, and once you reach the top the view across the oasis is worth the journey. You can also explore the canyons and caves of the area, forged by thousands of years of weathering and erosion. For those who want to understand more about the history of the area, the Land of Civilizations museum will suffice. Feeling creative? Pay a visit to the Dougha Handmade Pottery Factory (a 150-year old craft business) where you can have a go at traditional clay pot making.

Go shopping in Souq Al Qaisariya

No trip would be complete without collecting a souvenir or two for friends and family back home, and in the 400-plus shops of the 600-year-old Souq Al Qaisariya there is a lot of choice. Honoured with World Heritage status in 2018, the souq showcases everything from bargain trinkets to luxury leathers, prayer beads to abayas, incense and even antiques. Be sure to leave extra space in your luggage for your purchases.

3-DAY ITINERARY: JEDDAH

Take a boat trip on the Red Sea

You can't visit Jeddah without a trip out on the water, and happily there are loads of options at the Red Sea City. Head to Red Sea Marina if you fancy chartering a yacht, while you can also go on a sunset cruise, snorkelling trip, a dolphin watching excursion or scuba diving mission. Get the adrenaline racing with a speed boat trip and see the stunning coastline from the sea.

Explore Souk al-Alawi and Al-Balad

The historic area of the city is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and there's a buzzing vibe. Head along to Souk Al-Alawi to pick up trinkets including jewellery, textiles, art and more. Bring your best haggling skills to bag a bargain. Peckish? Grab a snack at the balia stands where you'll find the traditional Saudi Arabian street food made from chickpeas, garlic and spices.

Go on a dive to a shipwreck and snorkel in the Red Sea

Get ready to make the most of your time in the Red Sea City and go on a full-day trip out to sea. There are loads of dive companies to choose from and you can even explore historic shipwrecks not too far off the coast. If you're not qualified to dive, then go snorkelling and see the marine creatures from above. The crystal clear waters of the Red Sea are a special place to admire the sea life and you might even see the rare black marlin or Napoleon fish.

Visit Naseef House and walk through Bab Makkah

One of the oldest and best-restored coral houses in Al-Balada is Naseef House, built for the merchant Omar Nasseef Efendi in 1881. It's where King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud stayed when in the city from 1925 and is now a museum. It has a huge tree outside, which was the only tree in the city until the 1920s. While in Al-Balad you can see Bab Makkah – the gate to the historical city of Mecca where billions of pilgrims have walked in years gone by.

Take a trip to Moon Mountain

You'll need a 4x4 but once you've secured your vehicle it's time to take a trip to Moon Mountain, just outside Jeddah. The 95km road trip promises lunar landscapes, stunning rock formations and amazing hikes. You can even set up camp and enjoy stargazing too.

Eat your way around Jeddah

An exciting and varied dining scene is at the heart of Jeddah, with world-class restaurants from renowned chefs as popular as local haunts, be sure to sample as many venues as you can. For fresh catch of the day look no further than *Sultana seafood restaurant* (+966 55 144 1423) and *grilled shrimps at Twina* (+966 92 002 8284), or for some great Saudi cuisine *Taibat Al Hijaz* (+966 12 6060 1474) has a great selection - its *Hejazi breakfast is a must-try*.

3-DAY ITINERARY: ALULA

Visit AlUla Heritage Village

Also known as Ad-Deerah, the village is built on a higher part of the valley to escape the floods. AlUla Old Town is overlooked by Musa Bin Nusayr Castle – which is said to date back to the 10th century. The old town has hundreds of houses, shops and four town squares and was a popular stop on the pilgrimage route between Damascus and Mecca. The city is built with houses attached to each other, to act like a fort, and at some points in history the gated settlement physically opened and closed the gates each morning and evening. You can take a tour around the old town with a guide to soak in the history, plus there's an outdoor market to explore too.

Soak up the culture at Athr Gallery

Athr Gallery opened recently in the city's new art and culture precinct, AlJadidah. As one of AlUla's first permanent cultural structures, the dedicated exhibition space is found within the AlUla Design Gallery, and the inaugural exhibition focused on the themes of human nature, ecology, the inner self, country and representation, so get ready for a lot of fascinating culture shows coming up.

Visit the tombs of Hegra

As the Kingdom's first UNESCO World Heritage Site (one of currently six in Saudi Arabia), Hegra is one of the most jaw-dropping locations on the planet, and is fully deserving of a full-day excursion. With more than 100 well-preserved tombs, it's a massive historic area that only recently opened to tourists. The area dates back to the first century BCE as it was originally a trade route for pilgrims heading to Mecca. The rock formations are absolutely incredible and include Face Rock – which looks, as you'd imagine, like the profile of a face. Don't miss a trip to Qasr Al Farid, which is more than 22m high and built as a tomb for Lihiyan, son of Kuza. It's one of the most amazing natural sights you'll see, so don't forget your camera. The Nabataean civilization left behind 111 preserved tombs, so history buffs, you're in for a treat.

Explore the Hijaz station and Hegra Fort

While you're in Hegra you can check out the Hijaz Railway, which was built in 1900 along the historic pilgrimage route. The Hegra station still stands, and you can explore it. Next, make your way to Hegra Fort, which used to be a shelter for travellers.

Pedal your way through AlUla

Think yourself a bit of a Chris Froome? Pull on the lycra (optional) and head off on AlUla's 14km cycling trail. The pathway offers spectacular views as it winds and traverses through the region's sandstone mountains. There are sandy tracks, steep slopes and uphill climbs to tackle, so while it's not the easiest of trails, the rewards will be rich and it will take around an hour to complete.

Cool off at AlUla Oasis

Surrounded by lush date palm groves and citrus trees, this picturesque and serene oasis is a charming place to spend an afternoon. You'll find it nestled within the Wadi AlQura (or Valley of Villages) and there are plenty of other crops grown including wheat, barley, olives, figs and oats.

When in Saudi pack in as much as possible with a little help from these three-day itineraries. From tourist hot-spots, to local restaurants, great adventures and relaxing beach days, find everything you need and more in Saudi

3-DAY ITINERARY: TAIÛ

Take a trip up Al-Hada Mountain

Taif is a top spot for adrenaline seekers and nature-lovers. While you're there don't miss a visit to the Al-Hada Mountain, and hop aboard the 4.5km cable car ride that takes you to the top where you can marvel at the stunning views across the Sarawat Mountain range.

Go zip-lining at Al-Hada

If you've travelled all the way to Al-Hada you might as well make a day of it – and once you've explored on foot it's time to test your nerves and whizz along on a zip-wire for a thrill-seeking, bird's-eye view of the region. (+966 59 144 2982)

Trek up Jebel Daka

Keen hikers should take a trip further out to the highest peak in the area. Jebel Daka lies about 20km from Taif town, and is the fifth highest mountain in the Kingdom, reaching around 2,900 metres above sea level. Those who love climbing are in luck as it's a popular place for adventure seekers, while those who are less brave can take it easier with a drive, which offers just as spectacular vistas to view.

Check out the fruit gardens of Ta'if

The town of Ash-Shafa is 20km from the city of Taif and only 200km from Jeddah. The area is abundant with fruit gardens and orchards showcasing a colourful display of pomegranates, grapes, cactus fruit and figs all bursting with flavour. Be sure to try the local produce while you're there.

Haggle at Souk Al-Balad

Fancy bagging yourself a bargain? You'll find spices, honey, textiles, gold, silver and more at Souk Al-Balad. Don't forget to barter – it's expected – to get a top deal. For high street brands and family shops visit Taif International Mall or Jouri Mall for a shopping trip. But if its something more authentic you are after, take a trip to Sharif Museum to explore its interesting private collection of artefacts.

Saiysad National Park

Whether travelling alone or with family, this nature reserve is a great place to get lost. Lush green trees and wild streams make for a super backdrop in which to get back to nature, while there are numerous kids' play areas dotted about to keep the whole gang entertained.

3-DAY ITINERARY: TABUK

Explore traditional Tabuk

Start off your trip to Tabuk by exploring the town itself. And if you're looking for traditional souks, make your way to the old quarter, where you'll find several, including the must-visit Souk Twaheen, where you can discover trinkets, textiles and more to pick up, with speciality buys including patterned rugs and goat hair tent covers. Once you've had your shopping fill, head to the Museum of Tabuk to get a deeper insight into the area and learn all about the rich heritage of the area.

Take a trip to Tabuk Castle

One of the most famous landmarks in Tabuk, the castle dates back to 1559 and is now a museum with loads of artefacts on display showcasing the region's history, including references to Ibn Battuta and the pilgrims who stopped in on their way to Mecca and Medina. There are two mosques inside, too.

Seek adventure at Maghaer Shualb

Become Indiana Jones for the day and take a trip back in time with a visit to the ancient carved tombs of Maghaer Shuaib. Situated in the red desert 225km west of Tabuk, the haunting facades and poky tombs carved into the sandstone rock is an experience not to be missed. This is where Prophet Moses lived after he fled Egypt, and has long been a resting point for pilgrims.

Visit the Moses Springs

In the Magna area, on the border of the Hejaz region, you'll find the 12 Springs of the Prophet Moses – an ethereal oasis where natural springs flow under swaying date palms. Not just a pretty space, it's also steeped in history and is said to be where the Prophet Moses came to drink after he arrived in Magna from Egypt.

Wadi Al Disah

Set in the Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Natural Reserve, southwest of Tabuk, is Wadi Al Disah – a stunning valley famed for its mountainous terrain, green palms, rushing streams and hidden hot springs. Described as a mix of the Grand Canyon and Monument Valley in the USA for its magnificent rock formations, its also home to relics that date back to the Nabataean Empire – as you explore the reserve, ancient inscriptions etched onto cave walls are uncovered all over the valley.

