

SAUDI ARABIA

TWENTY-FIVE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How will I get my visa to Saudi Arabia and what will it look like?

You will apply for the E-visa on a website run by the Saudi government. Once approved, usually less than 30 minutes and up to two days, your E-visa, will be emailed to you. The process is super quick, and you can expect to have your visa within minutes of filing your application. You will need to bring a printed copy of the visa with you upon arrival in Saudi Arabia.

The eVisa is a one-year, multiple entry visa, allowing travelers to spend up to 90 days in the country

Distant Horizons will provide you with detailed instructions on how to complete the Saudi Arabian E-visa form.

Currently the visa fee of approximately \$130 includes health insurance which covers medical emergencies up to SAR 100,000, roughly \$27,000. Depending on the circumstances, the policy may cover expenses such as hospital bills, diagnostic services, and medications.

Please note your passport MUST be valid 6 months beyond your return date and must have one completely blank page.

2. Will I be asked my religion on the e-visa application?

You will not be asked for your religion on the e-visa application.

3. Is it alright if I have an Israeli or Iranian stamp in my passport?

You can have an Israeli or Iranian stamp in your passport.

4. What inoculations or immunizations do I need before traveling to Saudi Arabia?

There are no required inoculations for travel in Saudi Arabia. We do recommend contacting the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta (800-CDC-INFO or wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel) or your local physician BEFORE traveling. In addition, please remember that you should take any medications with you that you anticipate needing as it can be very difficult to find some western medications in Saudi Arabia.

5. Is this trip demanding and do I need to be in good health?

Whilst we would not describe this as an extremely rigorous program, you should be in good health and able to walk at least a mile a day over uneven terrain. You should be comfortable standing for up to 90 minutes at a time as the program visits museums and other sites. Some sites require walking up and down steep stairs sometimes without a handrail.

There may be the very odd occasion when there will only be eastern-squat toilets.

We recommend bringing a comfortable pair of shoes that are not new – there is nothing worse than bringing new shoes to a program that requires walking as the most comfortable shoes are the ones that have been broken in a little!

6. What will the weather be like?

The majority of the country is desert, and, as such, has an extreme climate which varies substantially depending on where you are in the country. In the spring and fall you can expect highs in the 80s in most parts of the program and lows in the 70s. In Abha the temperature will be cooler and in Mada'in Salah it could be a bit warmer during the day and cooler at night.

We HIGHLY recommend looking at a website like weather.com or wunderground.com prior to travel for a more up to date description of anticipated weather during your stay.

7. What kind of dress code should we pack for?

Men

The dress code for men is quite relaxed and you should feel comfortable dressing as you would at home. You should plan on wearing trousers and short sleeved shirts (polos are ideal). Clothing should be simple and consist of layers which can be added or removed as temperatures vary. It is **not** appropriate to wear shorts. There is no need to bring formal clothing although one long-sleeved shirt and tie are recommended. Bringing a jacket is not necessary. Socks are advisable for visits to mosques, but open-toed sandals are fine.

Women

Under Islamic law, women must dress modestly in loose-fitting clothing that does not draw attention to their figures. It **is not necessary** for women to wear abayas or chadors (the traditional black one-piece clothing).

In September 2019 there was a definite relaxing of the code but as respectful visitors to the country, we recommend erring on the side of caution. With this in mind, women should wear loose fitting clothing. This can consist of a long-sleeved, **loose-fitting jacket** that comes to below your hips with loose-fitting trousers or long skirts. Solid colors are advised but muted colors and patterns are certainly acceptable.

In addition to the dress code above, please always have a scarf packed in your purse as you will need to cover your head when you enter a mosque. Alternatively, Saudi women often have a scarf which they wear, not on their head, but resting on their shoulders. In the photo below you can see the different styles women dress in. Some women will have their heads covered, others do not. Some have a scarf draped around their neck. **All though are wearing lose fitting clothing – usually a pair of pants and a loose long jacket on top!**



Socks are also advisable for mosques for when you take your shoes off.

Open-toed comfortable shoes are fine.

It is **not** appropriate to wear sleeveless shirts, tank tops or shorts above the knee. The shoulders and knees must be covered in public.

Please do not be overly concerned about the dress code. If you follow the above suggestions, you will feel appropriately dressed.

8. What is the best form of money to bring to Saudi Arabia?

ATMs are widely available in Saudi Arabia and using your ATM card to withdraw money is easy and safe.

9. Where can I exchange money and how does the exchange transaction work?

Money can be exchanged at any of the hotels on your program

The rate of exchange is 3.76 Saudi riyals to \$1 US dollar. This is a fixed rate and does not change.

Although changing money is possible, the best way to obtain Saudi money is using your ATM card at the many ATM machines!

10. Should I be concerned about safety?

Saudi Arabia is a very safe country with almost zero crime.

Like any country we recommend that you exercise caution and take care in crowded situations. Do not leave wallets visible from pockets and always be aware of the location of your valuables.

11. What are the hotels like?

All the accommodations we use are very good. All rooms have private bathrooms, air-conditioning with hot and cold water and all the modern conveniences as in the U.S.

All hotels provide soaps, shampoos and even toothbrushes and toothpaste.

All hotels we use also provide hairdryers but sometimes they are the kind of hair-dryer that is attached to the wall and are quite low in their heat and power output. We recommend bringing your own if you are particular about having a powerful hairdryer.

Almost all hotels also provide irons.

All hotels have mini fridges as well as tea and coffee making facilities.

12. Are there swimming pools and gyms at the hotels in Saudi Arabia?

All of the hotels on your program do have swimming pools but separate hours are usually reserved for men and women, so it is important to check this. It is not possible for men and women to swim in the same pool at the same time

The same policy applies for gyms – men and women cannot currently workout together.

The workout attire you would wear at home is acceptable for both men and women in these facilities.

Please feel free to call us if you have specific questions.

13. What are the roads and buses like? What about toilet facilities?

The buses we use in Saudi Arabia are modern buses with air-conditioning and are very comfortable.

The roads are all paved and single or double-lane roads.

14. What is the food like in Saudi Arabia?

Saudi Arabia has a delightful variety of cuisines which have been gathered from several cultures and heavily influenced by the Middle East.

In addition to more traditional food, Saudi Arabia has a wide variety of options, and you should expect to try Mediterranean, French, Italian, Thai and Chinese cuisine.

If you are a vegan or gluten-free be sure to let us know and we will definitely be able to accommodate you with good options!

15. Is it safe to drink the water and ice and what about salads? Are there other available drinks?

We recommend drinking bottled or filtered water which will be provided to you in unlimited quantities at all times. It's important to always stay very hydrated and so please be sure to drink lots of water. It's a good idea to bring your own water bottles which you can fill up in the mornings at breakfast buffets which normally (but not always) offer filtered water from a large water dispenser.

Rest assured that Distant Horizons will provide bottled water on the bus and drinks are included with each meal. Additionally, every hotel provides bottled water in the rooms.

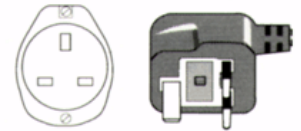
In the hotel and in the restaurants chosen on your program, all ice is made from filtered and purified water.

16. Can I drink alcohol in Saudi Arabia?

ALCOHOL IS ILLEGAL IN SAUDI ARABIA AND IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO LEGALLY IMPORT, POSSESS, OBTAIN OR DRINK ANY KIND OF ALCOHOL IN SAUDI ARABIA.

17. What is the electricity in Saudi Arabia and the plug size?

The electric current in Saudi Arabia is 220V and many outlets use the British style 3-point plug. Newer hotels do provide the American style, two-point plug but you should not count on this!



If you are planning to bring American electrical goods you will need a dual-voltage appliance (almost all cameras and lap-tops and chargers are dual-voltage) as well as an adaptor for the UK. There are all-in-one adapters available online which contain adapters for several countries all in a small appliance. These also usually have a USB port as well.

18. Can we watch international TV in Saudi Arabia?

All the hotels in Saudi Arabia provide TV which usually shows, amongst other English-speaking channels, CNN and the BBC.

19. Is it okay to walk on our own without the group?

It is perfectly safe and fine for you to walk in Saudi Arabia on your own.

20. Are there restrictions on photography in Saudi Arabia?

It is illegal to take photos of military bases or personnel, police stations or officers, airports, or other sites or people that might be considered sensitive.

Outside of these restrictions, it is possible to take photographs. Saudis are very friendly and usually are very happy to have their photograph taken but it is always wise to ask permission first!

21. What are the domestic flights like and what are my luggage restrictions?

Domestic flights in Saudi Arabia operate quite efficiently and you are most likely to be on an Airbus or Boeing flight. Even on short one-hour flights, a light snack and drinks will be served.

The domestic flights in Saudi Arabia allow one checked piece of luggage not to exceed 23kg/50lb, one carry-on piece not to exceed 7kg/15lb and one personal item such as a purse or camera bag.

As in the US, you will go through security with men and women going through separate security lines. Please note in Saudi Arabia it is possible to pass a bottle of water through security.

Saudi Airlines is a partner with Delta Airlines, so let us know your Delta number if you want to collect miles!

22. Can I use my cell phone in Saudi Arabia and what about access to the internet and checking emails?

Most cell phone providers in the US have international plans that will allow your mobile phone to work in Saudi Arabia! We suggest calling your service provider and discussing this with them.

One way to avoid expensive communication charges from our US phone provider is to purchase a local SIM card with data very inexpensively and, as long as your US cell phone is unlocked, you will be able to put this in your phone and have it work as if you were at home. Do remember though that the Saudi phone numbers will be the one you are using and so if friends and family call or text on your US number, you will not get the call.

All hotels on your program do provide free Wi-Fi access in public areas and in each room. Some hotels provide a code for use (usually your room number and name) others are just open use.

Given this, the other option to avoid spending a fortune on making calls back home, is to download the “App” “WhatsApp” before you leave. This is an internet-based phone service so as long as you are on the WiFi of the hotel, you will be able to make and send WhatsApp messages and make and receive WhatsApp calls. Remind your family and friends to also get WhatsApp so you can call them. If the person you want to reach is not registered with WhatsApp, you will not be able to call them.

You should have no problem checking your emails in Saudi Arabia but please note it is sometimes the case that certain news sites are blocked. You may, for example, be able to access the New York Times website but certain articles within the site may be blocked.

23. Is the Saudi weekend the same as the American one?

No, the Saudi weekend takes place on Fridays and Saturdays.

24. What is the service like in Saudi Arabia?

Be prepared for slow BUT warm and pleasant service. Do not be surprised if your tea order takes 20 minutes to reach you. This is Saudi Arabia – you will be surrounded by beauty, great spirit, and warmth...enjoy!

25. What is Saudi Arabia’s current COVID policy?

As of mid-2022, there are no longer specific COVID requirements for entry into Saudi Arabia. If anything changes, you will be updated.