

# Saudi Arabia



<b>Capital:</b>	Riyadh (royal capital); Jiddah (administrative capital)
<b>Population:</b>	27 million (approx)
<b>Religion:</b>	Almost 100% of the population are Muslims (89% Sunni, 11% Shia). Islam pervades all aspects of Saudi life. A small Christian minority is represented by the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Greek Orthodox faiths.
<b>Government:</b>	The king holds supreme executive and legislative power and, since 1953, is assisted by an appointed Council of Ministers. There are no political parties and no parliament. There is also no formal constitution apart from the Koran and the Sharia, the Islamic legal code.
<b>Ethnic Groups:</b>	90% Arab, 10% Afro-Asian. The nomadic population is approximately 2 million.
<b>Language:</b>	Arabic is the official language. Some English is taught in secondary schools.
<b>Currency:</b>	The Saudi riyal (SAR), divided into 100 halalas.

- Occupying approximately 80% of the Arabian Peninsula in south western Asia, lies the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Over 95% of the terrain is arid or semi-arid desert. Approximately one third of the population lives in the cities of Riyadh, Jiddah, and Mecca (Makkah) and the surrounding urban areas.
- The new religion of Islam was the force which unified Arabia in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. Prior to its emergence, the peninsula was divided among a number of Arab tribes, many nomadic or semi-nomadic, with major trading centres at Medina and Mecca, the latter also being the site of a pagan religious sanctuary. The majority of the peninsula's peoples were animist, but there were also small Jewish and Christian communities.
- The Prophet Muhammad was born in AD 570 in Mecca, where he received revelations from God and founded Islam. Within a few years most of what is today Saudi Arabia had become Muslim.
- By far the most important economic activity is the production of petroleum and petroleum products. The petroleum sector accounts for about 85% of budget revenue, 80% of GDP and almost all export earnings. Saudi Arabia has the largest reserves of petroleum in the world, and is the largest exporter of petroleum.
- Only 1% of the land is put to arable use. There are no perennial rivers or permanent water bodies. Thus, the country is not self sufficient in food, except wheat.
- While Saudis are thankful for the protection of the United States and the Western Alliance in the Gulf War with Iraq, the government and much of the populace are

ambivalent about the west. Western values are seen as decadent and threatening to the Saudi way of life. Any change in this attitude will come very slowly.

- Guests in Saudi Arabia, whatever their nationality, are subject to the same rigorous Islamic law as Saudis. It is not uncommon for westerners to be imprisoned in Saudi Arabia for possessing an illegal substance (eg. alcohol, pornography, pork, and narcotics). Saudi law is draconian; thieves still have their hands amputated, and capital crimes are punished by public beheadings.

## **Business and Social Etiquette**

- Punctuality is not considered a virtue in Saudi Arabia. Your associate may be late for an appointment or not show up at all. You, however, should endeavour to be prompt.
- An appointment is rarely private. Expect your visit to be interrupted by phone calls and visits from your associate's friends and family. Westerners frequently find these distractions infuriating; try to maintain your equanimity.
- Saudi officials are prohibited by tradition from working more than six hours per day. Mornings are usually best for appointments.
- Friday is the Muslim holy day; no business is conducted. Most people do not work on Thursdays, either. The work week runs from Saturday through Wednesday.
- As there are several styles of greeting currently used in Saudi Arabia, it is safest to wait for your Saudi counterpart to initiate the greeting, especially at a first meeting.
- Westernised Saudi men shake hands with other men. Some Saudi men will shake hands with western women. Saudi women take no part in business.
- Business cards should be printed in English on one side and in Arabic on the other.
- Foreigners are not exempt from Saudi standards of dress. Foreigners should wear western clothes that approach the modesty of Saudi dress. Despite the heat of the desert, most of the body must remain covered. Saudi law prohibits the wearing of neck jewellery by men, and westerners have been arrested for violating such rules.
- The pace of business is much slower in Saudi Arabia than in the west. Be patient.
- Business meetings always start slowly with long inquiries into one's health and journey.
- Decisions will take a long time to be made.
- Coffee is often served toward the end of a business meeting. This is a signal that the meeting will soon conclude. Incense is often lit at this time as well.
- Saudi men often walk hand in hand. If a Saudi holds your hand, take it as a sign of friendship.
- When a Saudi says 'yes', it usually means 'possibly'. Be encouraged by this, but do not assume that the negotiating is over.

- Saving face and the avoidance of shame are vital to Saudis. You may have to compromise on some issue to protect someone's dignity even if there is no substantive reason to do so.
- The topics of Israel and women should be avoided. Do not even inquire as to the health of a Saudi's wife or daughter.
- Hosting visitors is considered a virtue among Saudis, so they will take care of all of the entertaining within their country. However, you are not expected to bring any gifts when invited into a Saudi home.
- Be prepared to remove your shoes before entering a building. Follow the lead of your host. As a general rule, keep both feet on the ground. Arabs do not cross their legs when sitting. Never show the bottom of your foot to an Arab; this is considered offensive.
- Eating is done with the right hand only. The left hand is considered unclean in the Arab world.

## Language

English	Arabic	Phonetics
Hello	a-ssalāma alaykum	See notes
Good Morning	sabaH al-kheir	
Good Morning (response)	sabaH al-nuir	
Goodnight (to a man)	tisbaH ala-kheir	
Goodnight (to a woman)	tisbaHin ala-kheir	
Goodnight response(man)	wa inta min alil-kheir	
Goodnight reponse (wom)	wa inti min alil-kheir	
Goodbye	ma'al salamā	
Yes	aiwa/na'am	
No	lā	
Please (to a man)	min fadhilk	
Please (to a woman)	min fadhilich	
Thank you (to a man)	mashkur	
Thank you (to a woman)	mashkura	
You're welcome	afwan/al afu	
I don't understand	ana afHām	

Notes:

,ā as in the 'a' in father

s as in 'so'

ay as in the 'y' in by

kh as in 'ch' in Scottish 'loch'

H a strongly whispered H as in a sigh of relief

sh as in 'ship'

r a rolled 'r'

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