

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia occupies most of the Arabian Peninsula, with the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba to the west and the Persian Gulf to the east. Neighboring countries are Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, the Sultanate of Oman, Yemen, and Bahrain, connected to the Saudi mainland by a causeway. Saudi Arabia contains the world's largest continuous sand desert, the Rub Al-Khali, or Empty Quarter. Its oil region lies primarily in the eastern province along the Persian Gulf.

History

Although the region in which the country stands today has an ancient history, the emergence of the Saudi dynasty began in central Arabia in 1744. That year, Muhammad ibn Saud, the ruler of the town of Ad-Dir'iyyah near Riyadh, joined forces with a cleric, Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab, to create a new political entity. This alliance formed in the 18th century and remains the basis of Saudi Arabian dynastic rule today. Over the next 150 years, the fortunes of the Saud family rose and fell several times as Saudi rulers contended with Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and other Arabian families for control on the peninsula.

The third and current Saudi state was founded in the early 20th century by King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud.

Abdul Aziz's military and political successes were not mirrored economically until vast reserves of oil were discovered in March 1938.

Geography

The Kingdom occupies about 80 percent of the Arabian peninsula. In 2000 Saudi Arabia and Yemen signed an agreement to settle their long-running border dispute.

A significant length of the country's southern borders with the United Arab Emirates, and Oman, are not precisely defined or marked, so the exact size of the country remains unknown. The kingdom is commonly listed as the world's 14th largest state.

Saudi Arabia's geography is varied. From the western coastal region (Tihamah), the land rises from sea level to a peninsula-long mountain range (Jabal al-Hejaz) beyond which lies the plateau of Nejd in the center. The southwestern 'Asir region has mountains and is known for having the greenest and freshest climate in all of the country. The east is primarily rocky or sandy lowland continuing to the shores of the Persian Gulf. The geographically hostile Rub' al Khali . Mostly uninhabited, much of the nation's landmass consists of desert and semi-arid regions, with a dwindling traditional Bedouin population.

Climate

Extreme heat and aridity are characteristic of most of Saudi Arabia. It is one of the few places in the world where summer temperatures above 50 °C (122 °F) have been recorded, 51.7 °C (124 °F) being the highest ever recorded temperature. In winter, frost or snow can occur in the interior and the higher mountains, although this only occurs once or twice in a decade. The lowest recorded temperature is -12.0 °C (10.4 °F), recorded at Turaif. The average winter temperature ranges from 8° to 20 °C (47° to 68 °F) in January in interior cities such as Riyadh and 19° to 29 °C (66° to 83 °F) in Jeddah, on the Red Sea coast. The average summer temperature range (in July) is 27° to 43 °C (81° to 109 °F) in Riyadh and 27° to 38 °C (80° to 100 °F) in Jeddah.

Population

Saudi Arabia's population as of July 2006 is estimated to be about 28,686,633, including an estimated

5.5 million resident foreigners. Until the 1960s, a majority of the population was nomadic; but presently more than 95% of the population is settled, due to rapid economic and urban growth.

Currency: Saudi Riyal

Living as expat – Housing

A wide range of apartments and villas available in Saudi Arabia, both within and outside enclosed compounds, but it should be noted from the outset that expatriates cannot own land or property in Saudi Arabia and therefore you will have no choice but to rent.

Most accommodation is in urban or suburban areas; the desert is for camels and the Bedouin. Relocation consultants are most frequently used by multi-national companies and larger institutions moving into the region. Some consultants provide practical and cultural help to those new to the region

Renting accommodation in Saudi Arabia is a straightforward, well-established practice. Major international companies with trading links in the region often have housing arrangements in the form of long-term leases on properties for their staff. If you have to find your own accommodation, your sponsor and his staff will invariably help. There's considerable choice in all price bands and it's usually quite straightforward to find the type of property you want.

Having decided on a budget, you need to decide on the location of the property, weighing up the importance of access to your place of work, type and size of living space you want, whether villa or apartment, the number of bedrooms, etc..

Getting there and around

Immigration is much quicker than it used to be (except during the haj and Ramadan when you can expect long queues). All bags (including hand luggage) are now X-rayed and only opened when warranting further investigation. Don't forget to fill in immigration cards.

There are four airports handling international traffic in Saudi Arabia

All domestic bus services are operated by the **Saudi Arabian Public Transport Company**. The company is professionally run and has a good safety record with well-maintained buses (usually replaced every two to three years). Despite its impressive public-transport system, Saudi Arabia remains a country that glorifies the private car (the large private car above all), rivaled in this regard only by the US. Roads are generally sealed and well-maintained.

Saudi Arabia has the only stretch of train track in the entire Arabian Peninsula. Trains travel between Riyadh and Dammam via Al-Hofuf.

More information

For more information on Global Relocation Consultants (GRC) expat relocation services and mobility management please visit our website: www.grconsultants.org