

Discovery of Saudi Arabia

10 days

Date	February 2020	Number of days	10 days / 9 nights	Period	Nov 20 – Oct 21
Destination	Saudi Arabia	Number of Pax	TBA		

Saudi Arabia, not very well known in the Western world, apart from its status as one of the world's biggest oil producers and as the birthplace of Islam, has opened its doors for leisure visitors end of 2019. And what wealth of attractions and sightseeing the country has to offer: outstanding natural beauty with vast deserts and mountainous areas, archeological sites and bustling cities. The country was strategically positioned on the trading routes across the Arabian Peninsula and pilgrims' routes having been running crisscross through the country for centuries, all leading to Mecca and Medina in the southwestern part of the country. We travel overland from Riyadh to Jeddah, visiting 4 of the 5 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the country as well as fortresses and castles constructed in traditional mud architecture, the biggest camel market in the world and a date market in the Buraidah area. The highlight of the trip is undoubtedly the visit to Mada'in Saleh (Al Hegra), the sister city of Petra in Jordan, built by the Nabateans and where 96 tombs have been found carved out in the rocks. We travel along a part of the Hejaz Railway from Mada'in Saleh to Medina, which was made famous by TE Lawrence during WW1, visiting some of the restored stations along the way. Saudi Arabia is huge, almost 3,5 times the size of France; this 10-day roundtrip includes some of the key attractions for a more in depth visit to this fascinating destination.

Notes:

- The tour can be done in reverse order Jeddah - Riyadh
- The distances and driving times mentioned are indicative and do not take into consideration time required for visits during the day
- Themes: discovery & culture // customs & traditions

◆ **DAY 1: RIYADH**

Arrival in Riyadh, meet and greet and transfer to your hotel.

Meals included: dinner

Driving time: approx: 30-45 mins

◆ **DAY 2: RIYADH**

In the morning, we head over to old Riyadh with King Abdul Aziz Historical Area with the national museum and the Murabba Palace. Continue to Masmak Fortress, which was converted into a museum in the 1990s. In Modern Riyadh Al Faisaliah and Kingdom Towers tower above the city. A view from one of the towers offers a view over the whole city.

In the afternoon, visit the old walled city of Al Dir'iyah, listed as Unesco Heritage Site. The city was the first capital of the Saudi kingdom in the 18th century and abandoned after the siege of the Ottomans in the 19th century. A new capital was then built, which was Riyadh.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

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—◆ **DAY 3: RIYADH – USHAIQIR - BURAIDAH**

Departure north out of Riyadh to Ushayqir Heritage Village, a mud village of more than 1,000 years old that has been fully restored and allows a glimpse into Saudi Arabia's ancient lifestyle. Ushayqir was important on the pilgrim's route to Mecca.

Continue to Buraidah, for a visit to a date farm.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Distance travelled: Riyadh - Buraidah via Ushayqir: 400 kms (4h20)

—◆ **DAY 4: BURAIDAH & HA'IL**

Early morning visit to the camel market of Buraidah.

Continue to Ha'il, a former trader crossroad, for a visit to the mud fortress Al-Qashalah and Aarif Fort, built on a hill and providing a nice view over the city.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Distance travelled: Buraidah - Ha'il: 275 kms (2h45)

—◆ **DAY 5: HA'IL – JUBBAH – HA'IL**

Departure to Jubbah, UNESCO World Heritage Site, with its impressive rock carvings that are believed to date back to 5500 BC. Carvings include a variety of animals, such as elephants, buffalo and from a later period camels and other domesticated animals.

Continue to Al'Ula. Time permitting, walk in the old town of Al 'Ula.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Distances travelled:

- ❖ Ha'il - Jubbah: 125 kms (1h 30 mins)
- ❖ Jubbah - Al Ula: 500 kms (5 hrs)

—◆ **DAY 6: AL 'ULA, MADA'IN SALEH, DEDAN**

A full day for the discovery of the archaeological remains of the area in and around Al 'Ula, with Dedan and Mada'in Saleh.

Visit Elephant Rock and continue to Mada'in Saleh (UNESCO World Heritage), the second city of the Nabateans after Petra in Jordan, on the caravan route between Mecca and Petra. The structure of the city has influences from Mesopotamia, Egypt as well as Greek-Roman. The remains of the city include over 90 tombs that were carved out in the rocks. Mada'in Saleh lost its importance on the caravan routes, once the naval route to Yemen had been established by the Romans.

Only 4% of the biblical site of Dedan has been excavated, but the organised structure of the city is clearly visible and the inscriptions found document the political and societal organisation of the kingdom.

Back to Al 'Ula for overnight.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Distances travelled: Al 'Ula - Mada'in Saleh: 40 kms

—◆ **DAY 7: AL 'ULA - MEDINA**

Departure to Medina, one of the holy cities for Muslims. We travel via the old Hejaz Railway, which was originally built by the Ottomans to reduce the travel time for pilgrims from Damascus to Mecca, but was never finished beyond Medina. The construction of the line was a controversial project with the Arabs suspecting the Ottomans of using the transportation of pilgrims as a pretext for more political and military purposes. The railway was forever made famous by TE Lawrence by his attacks and sabotage during WWI. Several stations can be visited today, among them the station of Al 'Ula, which was the last one where fresh water could be taken before reaching Medina. Late afternoon, upon arrival in Medina, drive to Mt Uhud for a view over the city.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Distances travelled: Al 'Ula - Medina: 400 kms (4 hrs)

—◆ **DAY 8: MEDINA - JEDDAH**

Departure in the direction of the Red Sea and along the coast we drive toward Jeddah, possibility to spend the day on the coast for snorkeling. The area around Jeddah has numerous shipwrecks and coral reefs. Local lunch. Continue to Jeddah.

OR

Departure to Ta'if, known for its souq and rose plantations. The rose that is grown here, is used in all kinds of perfumes and is celebrated during the Rose festival each spring. Ta'if is a popular summer resort, with its cooler climate and mountainous area. We drive around Mecca, to reach Jeddah.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Distances travelled:

- ❖ Medina - Jeddah via Ta'if: 650 kms (7h20)
- ❖ Medina - Jeddah via the Red Sea: 460 kms (5 hrs)

—◆ **DAY 9: JEDDAH**

In the morning, visit Al Balad, the old and historic part of Jeddah, which is registered as UNESCO World Heritage Site; with its narrow lanes and merchant houses, Naseef House and Souq Al Alawi. Late afternoon, we head over to the coastal road, the Corniche, that is lined with sculptures over a length of 30 kms. Visit (from the outside) to Fatima-Al-Zahra Mosque, which is built in the sea and is nicknamed the Floating Mosque.

Farewell dinner in a local restaurant.

Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

—◆ **DAY 10: JEDDAH DEPARTURE**

Transfer to the airport for the flight out. End of services

Meals included: breakfast

Driving time: approx: 30-45 mins



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