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## **Saudi Arabia**

### **The Kingdom of Amazement**

#### **14-Day Itinerary**



Majestic Wonders

*AL-'Ula*

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Though people of various cultures have lived on the Arabian Peninsula for more than 5,000 years, the harsh climate historically prevented settlement, except in major oases. Most of the great empires of the ancient world traded with the Arabian Kingdoms that commanded the important spice trade routes on the peninsula. The country's main attraction and its hidden treasure is the UNESCO World Heritage site of Madain Saleh. It is considered second only to the famous site of Petra in Jordan, in terms of Nabataean architectural remains.

There are colourful markets, desert landscapes, coral reefs, rock engravings and ancient monuments; the country has so much to offer to those who choose to venture in it and explore a nation that is seldom exposed to the eyes of the outsider.

#### **Day 1 – Arrive Jeddah**

Arrive in Jeddah and after clearing immigration and customs, you will be met by your guide and driver and transferred to your hotel for overnight.

#### **Day 2 – Full day visit of Jeddah**

This morning, we will visit some of the old Ottoman houses, which are mostly constructed from coral and reinforced with wooden beams that criss-cross the interior walls. The most beautiful and well known is Baashen and Sharbatly Houses and from the outside, we will also see Nassif House, which was built in the 1850's by the well-known Nassif Family; one of the most influential trading families in the history of Jeddah. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the house was one of the most important buildings in Jeddah. It was here that King Abdul Aziz spent his first night in Jeddah as the guest of Mohammed Nassif after he led his victorious army into the capital of the Western Province. Lunch will be served at a local restaurant. We continue onto the Corniche of Jeddah (the seaside promenade), a major attraction that acts as an open-air museum displaying an array of modern sculptures as well as a social gathering place for locals. Afterwards, we visit Al Tayebat International City for Sciences and Knowledge, also known as the Abdul Rauf Khalil Art Museum. This beautiful museum houses a huge collection of arts, and ethnographical and archaeological artefacts.

Return to your hotel for dinner and overnight.

### **Day 3 – Jeddah - Abha**

Check out of the hotel and depart for the colourful fish market followed by a transfer to the airport for the flight to Abha, the capital city of Asir. Upon arrival, transfer to your hotel for check-in, then visit the traditional basket market and the Muftaha Village Art Gallery. This evening, visit a typical Saudi home for some personal interaction with the local people.

Return to the hotel for dinner and overnight

### **Day 4 – Full Day Abha and Khamis Mushayt**

Asir is a highland province that encompasses the entire southwest of Saudi Arabia, all the way to the border with Yemen. A full day excursion takes you to Mount Souda, Khamis Mushayt and Bin Hamsan Village. The first stop will be atop Mount Souda, located in the Hejaz Mountain (Rejal Alma will be visited providing the cable car is operating). Continue to Khamis Mushayt, an industrial city about 25 km east of Abha. The city's antique silver market is a huge draw for visitors. The last stop today will be to Bin Hamsan Traditional Village, located on the outskirts of town. This village is an imaginative development that consists of a stone tower, a museum which is a replica of an Asir home from two decades ago, an auditorium, a traditional restaurant and a gift shop.

Dinner will be taken at a local restaurant or at Bin Hemasan, then we drive back to the accommodation for overnight.

### **Day 5 –Abha – Al-'Ula**

After breakfast, we transfer to the airport for the flight to Al-'Ula, connecting in either Jeddah or Riyadh. On arrival, transfer to the hotel or the tented camp, for check-in and lunch. Al-'Ula is known for its fine example of ancient Arabic architecture and this afternoon, we will visit the old mud houses and the Lion Tombs from outside the magnificent iconic Elephant Rock. This whole region witnessed history in the making during the time of Lawrence of Arabia.

Return to your hotel or tented camp for dinner and overnight.

### **Day 6 – Al-'Ula**

Begin the day with an excursion to the archaeological site of Madain Saleh, known as 'Al Hijr, during ancient times and once a stopover on a very prosperous trade route. The city flourished over a vast area encompassing 2000 square meters of relics and tombs. The area nowadays is, however, quite isolated.

We will visit the Nabataean Well, Qasr Al Bin, Diwan Tomb and Al Farid Palace. Continue to Wadi Al-'Ula, the gateway to Madain Saleh and known for its Lion Tombs of the Lihyanites – predecessors of the Nabataeans (100 to 500 B.C.).

Return to your hotel or tented camp for dinner and overnight.

### **Day 7 – Al-'Ula – Al Jouf**

This morning we drive to Al Jouf via Taima, where you will see the Haddaj Water Well, the Al Hamra Palace, and the Radham Fort. Continue with the drive to Dowmat Al Jandal, an ancient stone fortress also known as Marid Castle. At 610 meters (2,000 ft) high this ancient structure was built with stones on a hill that majestically overlooks the old city. Visit Omar's Mosque, named after the second Moslem Caliph, Omar Ibn Al Khatab. Arrive in Al Jouf and transfer to your hotel for check in, dinner and overnight.

### **Day 8 – Sunday Medina – Taif (185km)**

The day begins with a visit to Sakaka Fort, situated on high ground overlooking the town of Sakaka from the northwest. It is the center of many legends but it is widely believed that this fortress was built in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. Known as Zaa'bal Fortress or Zaa'bal Palace, the mud construction was added to it during the third century A. D.

We continue on to visit Al-Rajajil, the site of a group of standing stone pillars that date back to the Chalcolithic period. Continue on to Ha'il via the Nafud Desert stopping en-route at Jubbah to see the magnificent rock carvings and petroglyphs showing camels, lions, and other wildlife that existed in these regions millennia ago.

Upon arrival, transfer to your hotel for check-in, dinner and overnight.

### **Day 9 – Hail – Qassim Uyoon Al Jawa**

In the morning we will see from the outside the Oraif and Qishla Forts (many of the forts are under renovations). Our day continues by driving to Uyoon Al Jawa Mosawgef Souq and Al-Shanana Tower where we explore.

We then transfer to your hotel for dinner and overnight.

### **Day 10 – Ushaiger – Shagra - Riyadh**

Today, we will drive to Riyadh via Ushaiger, a small village located about 200km north west of Riyadh. The village is one of the oldest towns in the Saudi Arabian region of Najd and was a major stopping point for pilgrims coming from Kuwait, Iraq and Iran to participate in the Hajj. Ushaiger Historical Village was restored to preserve its heritage and contains a museum that displays various relics and pieces from the village.

After lunch at a local restaurant, continue to Shagra where you will visit the old walls, which were used to protect the city from attacks. Built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the walls were still in use up until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Continue to Riyadh for dinner and overnight.

### **Day 11 – Full Day tour of Riyadh**

Begin your day by visiting Diriyah, one of the most important sites where the history of the Al Saud Dynasty began. We walk through the old town to see the ruins including the palace, houses and marketplace. Continue on to Masmak Fort, which was built during the reign of Abdullah bin Rashid in 1895 A. D. Afterwards, we explore the Dira Souq then stop for lunch at a local restaurant.

Continue on to explore the National Museum, which is meant to kindle pride of the Arabic heritage and reverence for Islam. This national landmark is composed of eight galleries that depict the complete story of Arabian history from the creation of the universe to our modern era. Continue with a visit to the Murabba Palace, one of the most important palaces built by King Abdulaziz in 1937. It was built to accommodate his family and is composed of a number of smaller palaces, service buildings and the Royal Diwan. The palace was also built in the local traditional Najid style by only using local building materials.

Return to your hotel for dinner and overnight.

### **Day 12 – Riyadh – Al Hofuf**

This morning departs to Al Ahsa / Al Hofuf, considered the largest oasis in the world. Visit the Qara Caves, which consist of calcareous sandstone and sedimentary rock of clay and lime. The Jabal Al-Qarah Hills rise about 225 meters (738 ft) above sea level and include a complex set of passageways. The site has iron railings and smooth walkways to allow visitors to safely navigate small portions of the intricate caves. Continue to the 17th century AD Ottoman Turkish Fort (from the outside only) and the mosque it houses within its walls built in 1571 A.D. Also, visit Al Qaisariya Souq and the oldest Souq of Hofuf, before transferring to your hotel for check in and overnight.

**Day 13 – Al Hofuf - Dammam**

This morning we drive to Dammam and visit the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, otherwise known as 'Ithraa.' Later, we transfer to your hotel for check-in and overnight.

**Day 14 – Dammam – Departure**

Transfer from your hotel to the airport for your onward destination.

End of services.

**Note:**

*Saudi Arabia is a dry country; alcohol is absolutely forbidden (as are narcotics and pornographic materials). Dress is modest and women do not need to cover their heads but must wear long gowns, called abayas at all times (these will be provided by your local hosts in Saudi Arabia). Please be advised that upon arrival in the country, the immigration process includes having fingerprints taken, along with a retinal scan.*

*Also be aware that everything in the kingdom closes down between noon and 3pm each day as well as for prayers. During such occasions, you will return to your hotel for free time. In addition, occasionally sites may be closed for unforeseen reasons. Local authorities can also deny visits to certain places without prior notice. We are not responsible for any such events.*