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Saudi Arabia

Discovery of Saudi Arabia

10-Day Itinerary



Majestic Wonders

AL-'Ula

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Saudi Arabia – a country full of intrigue and one of the lesser visited parts of the world, particularly from the Western World. It's status places it high up in terms of one of the world's biggest oil producers and as the birthplace of Islam. The country has opened its doors for leisure visitors from the end of 2019, and what a wealth of attractions and sightseeing the country has to offer; there is outstanding natural beauty with vast deserts and mountainous areas, archaeological sites and bustling cities. The country was strategically positioned on the trading routes across the Arabian Peninsula and the routes of pilgrims, which have run criss-cross through the country for centuries, and all routes leading to Mecca and Medina in the south west.

Travel overland from Riyadh to Jeddah en route visiting 4 of the 5 UNESCO World Heritage sites in the country as well as impressive fortresses and castles all constructed in traditional mud architecture. The biggest camel market in the world is here and a date market in the Buraidah area.

The highlight of this trip is undoubtedly the visit to Madain Saleh (Al Hegra), the sister city of the Red Rose City of Petra in Jordan, built by the Nabatean and where 96 tombs have been found carved out of the rock face. We travel along a part of the Hejaz Railway from Mada'in Saleh to Medina, which was made famous by TE Lawrence during WW1. We will visit some of the restored stations along the way. Saudi Arabia is huge, it is almost 3.5 times the size of France. This 10-Day round trip includes some of the key attractions for a more in-depth visit to this fascinating destination.

Notes:

This tour can be experienced in reverse order, i.e. from Jeddah to Riyadh.

The distances and driving times mentioned are indicative and do not take into consideration required visits during the day.

Themes: Discovery and Culture & Customs and Traditions.

Day 1 – Arrive Riyadh

Upon arrival at Riyadh International Airport, you will clear immigration and customs. A meet and greet service will then take you to your vehicle and you will be transferred to your hotel for check-in and overnight.

Driving time: Approximately 45 minutes

Day 2 – Riyadh

In the morning, we head to Old Riyadh and the King Abdul Aziz Historical Area where we find the National Museum and the Murabba Palace. Continue on to the Masmak Fortress, which was converted into a museum in the 1990's. In modern Riyadh, Al Faisaliah and Kingdom Towers rise above the city. A view from one of the towers offers a panorama over the entire city.

In the afternoon, visit the old walled city of Al Diriyah, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The city was the first capital of the Saudi Kingdom in the 18th century and it was abandoned after the siege of the Ottomans in the 19th century. A new capital was then built, and that was Riyadh.

Day 3 – Riyadh – Ushaiqer – Buraidah

Depart north out of Riyadh to Ushaiqer Heritage Village, a mud village dating back to more than 1,000 years that has been fully restored and allows a glimpse into Saudi Arabia's ancient lifestyle. Ushaiqer was an important destination on the pilgrim's route to Mecca. Continue on to Buraidah for a visit to a date farm.

Distance travelled: Riyadh – Buraidah via Ushaiqer = 400 kms

Day 4 – Buraidah and Ha'il

Today we have an early morning visit to the camel market of Buraidah and then continue on 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 view over the city.

Distance travelled: Riyadh – Buraidah – Ha'il = 275 kms

Day 5 – Ha'il – Jubbah – Ha'il

We depart for Jubbah, a 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 elephant, buffalo and from a later period, camel and other domestic animals.

Distance travelled: Ha'il – Jubbah = 175 kms

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 then continue to Madain Saleh (a UNESCO World Heritage site), the second city of the Nabateans after the Rose Red City of Petra in Jordan. It is on the caravan route between Mecca and Petra. The structure of the city has influences from ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt and Greek-Roman.

The remains of the city include over 90 tombs that were carved out of the rock face. 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. We return to Al-'Ula for the night.

Distance travelled: Al-'Ula Madain Saleh = 40kms

Day 7 – Al-'Ula – Medina

Depart for Medina, one of the holy cities for Muslims. We will 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 it 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 station from where fresh water could be taken before reaching Medina. In the late afternoon, upon arrival in Medina, we drive to Mount Uhud for a view of the city.

Distance travelled: Al-'Ula Medina = 400kms

Day 8 – Medina – Jeddah

Depart in the afternoon towards the Red Sea and along the coast towards Jeddah. There is the possibility to spend the day on the coast for snorkelling. The area around Jeddah has numerous shipwrecks and coral reefs. Enjoy a local lunch and then continue on to Jeddah.

Alternatively, depart to Taif, known for its souk and rose plantation. The rose grown here is used in various perfumes and is celebrated during the Rose Festival each spring. Taif is a popular summer resort, with its cooler climate and mountainous area. Drive around Mecca in order to reach Jeddah.

Distance travelled: Medina – Jeddah, via Taif = 650kms
Medina – Jeddah, via The Red Sea – 460kms

Day 9 – Jeddah

In the morning, visit Al Balad, the old and historic part of Jeddah which is registered as a UNESCO World Heritage site with its narrow lanes and merchant houses, Nassif House and Souq Al Alawi. In the late afternoon, we head over to the coastal road known as the Corniche. It is lined with sculptures over a length of 30kms. View the Fatima-Al-Zahra Mosque from the outside; it is built in the sea and it is fondly known as The Floating Mosque.

Tonight, enjoy a farewell dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 10 – Depart Jeddah

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

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.