

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – A Brief Introduction

Location and geography: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the largest country in the Middle East, with an area of 2.24 million sq. km. (nearly 2/3rd the size of India), is the 14th largest country in the world. It occupies 80% of the Arabian Peninsula. One-third of the land is desert which includes a major portion of the world's largest contiguous sand desert known as the Empty Quarter (Rub-al-Khali). Saudi Arabia is bordered on the west by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba, and to the east by the Arabian Gulf. It shares borders with Yemen (1458 km) and the Sultanate of Oman (676 km) on the south; Jordan (728 km), Iraq (814 km), and Kuwait (222 km) on the north, and UAE (457km) and Qatar (60km) on the east, with the Island of Bahrain located off the eastern coast in the Arabian Gulf.

Climate: In the inland regions including Capital Riyadh, the summer (May to September) day temperatures average around 45°C, with readings over 50°C are not unusual, followed by cool nights,. The winter (November to March) day temperatures vary between 8°C and 20°C, with night temperatures rarely dropping below 0°C. Along the coastal regions, such as Jeddah, in summer day temperatures are around 38° C, but with high relative humidity, while winter temperatures are between 19° C and 29° C. Brief rainy season is normally between January and May when sudden downpours followed by flash floods are not uncommon. From late-February to mid-July, sand storms are experienced. In the South-West, Asir Province with highest mountain peaks in the country and influenced by monsoons, receives about 300-500 mm of rainfall annually, has a more moderate climate.

History: Saudi Arabia has been the homeland of the Arabs. Islam took birth here in the 7th century. Makkah and Madinah, the two holiest cities in Islam, are located here. Saudi Arabia owes its present formation to King Abdulaziz Al-Saud (1882-1953), who established the modern Kingdom in 1932. Since 1953, Saudi Arabia has been ruled by the sons of King Abdulaziz. The present ruler King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, ascended to the throne in January 2015.

Economy: Oil was discovered in 1936 and commercial production began after the World War II. Saudi Arabia is the world's major producer of oil, and has the second largest proven hydrocarbon reserves (20%). The petroleum sector accounts for about 90% of budget revenues and 75% of export earnings. About 40% of the GDP comes from the private sector. Saudi Arabia joined the WTO in 2005. The per capita income of Saudi Arabia was US \$20,494 in 2015.

Foreign Labour: There are about 11.67 million expatriates in the country, mainly from South and South-East Asian countries. Indians are the largest expatriate community, numbering over 3 million (March 2017), of which, it is estimated that about 70% are blue collar category workers, while 20% are professionals and 10% white collar non-professionals. Other major expatriate communities are: Pakistan-1.5 million; Bangladesh-1.3 million; Indonesia-1.2 million, Philippines-1 million, Egypt-0.8 million, and Sri Lanka -0.5 million.

| KSA- Basic Facts | |
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| Capital | Riyadh |
| Other major cities | Jeddah, Dammam, Jubail, and the two Holy Cities of Makkah and Madinah. |
| Head of State & Prime Minister | King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (since 23 January, 2015) |
| Crown Prince & Deputy Prime Minister | M.H. Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud |
| Administrative divisions | Provinces, each headed by a Governor (Muhallib) |
| Working Days | Sunday - Thursday |
| National Day | September 23 |
| Currency | Saudi Arabian Riyal (SAR), subdivided into 100 Halalas. SD=SAR 3.75 (pegged to US\$ since 1986); 1 SAR = INR17 (approx) (June 2017) |
| Population | 24 million (2016) (including 11.67 million expatriates) |
| Legal system | Based on the 'Shariah'. |
| Religion | Islam |
| Language | Arabic |
| Political system | Monarchy governed in accordance with 'Shariah' and 'Royal Decrees'. |
| Major trading partners | China, USA, Japan, South Korea, India |
| Major Exports | Petroleum products, refined oil, chemical, plastics, rubber, fertilizers, etc. |
| Major Imports | Machinery, industrial equipment, foodstuffs, chemicals, motor vehicles, textiles, electrical appliances, defence equipment, etc. |