

General Information

1. Information for Casual Visitors

- (i) Saudi Arabia does not issue tourist visas; only family visit and business visit visas are issued.

2. Information for visitors on Haj Pilgrimage

- (i) Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India coordinates arrangements for Haj pilgrimage in consultation with the Haj Committee of India and the Indian Consulate, Jeddah.
- (ii) Haj pilgrims may acquaint themselves with the relevant rules and regulations of the pilgrimage from the website of the [Indian Consulate, Jeddah](#) and the [Haj Committee of India \(www.hajcommittee.gov.in\)](#)
- (iii) **On family visit visa** performing Haj is NOT permitted, but Umrah is permitted.
- (v) On Haj/Umrah visa travel is restricted to the places of pilgrimage in Makkah and Madinah
- (vi) **For Umrah**, visas are issued by the Saudi Embassy, New Delhi/Consulate, Mumbai.

3. What are the Social customs and Cultural aspects to followed while in Saudi Arabia

- (i) The official religion is Islam. Public practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited.
- (ii) All women, including foreign, must wear an abaya (a full-length loose black robe that is worn over the normal clothes) outside the home and also have their heads covered.
- (iii) Men should also dress conservatively and not wear shorts in public or go without a shirt. Standard dress for men is lightweight trousers and shirt (usually long-sleeved).
- (iv) Gender segregation is practised in public places. Men and women are not allowed to interact in public unless they are related in some way. Public display of affection is not allowed.
- (v) During the holy month of Ramadan, one should not eat, drink or smoke in public until sunset.
- (vi) Entry to Makkah and Madinah is strictly forbidden to all non-Muslims.
- (vii) All expatriates are expected respect the culture, customs and rules of Saudi Arabia. It is important for anyone travelling to Saudi Arabia to familiarize with local rules and regulations, working and living conditions and labour laws, etc. One may visit the websites of the [Indian Embassy/Consulate and the Saudi Ministry of Labour](#) for this purpose.

4. Whether forming associations/unions, striking work, demonstrations, etc. are allowed ?

- (i) Formation of association/unions, etc. is illegal in Saudi Arabia.
- (ii). Refusal to work/striking work or organizing public protests, etc. are strictly banned and dealt with sternly, with arrest, imprisonment and deportation. One should not resort to such methods as a means for bringing their grievances to the notice of the

authorities. All work related grievance must resolved ONLY through the appropriate Labour Courts.

5. What is the advisory on the use of Photography/Social Media/Internet, etc.?

- (i) Photography is a sensitive subject in the Kingdom. Do not attempt to take photos/video of government buildings, industrial areas, airports, police checkpoints, etc. or such sensitive installations as this could lead to arrest, jail and deportation. Also avoid taking pictures/video of streets, public places, etc. and people, especially women, without permission, as well as posting such photos/video on the social media.
- (ii) Exercise extreme caution while using internet and social media so as not to break the local/cyber laws – e.g. browsing/forwarding of objectionable material/contents from any prohibited sites on the internet; sharing/‘liking’ of pictures/posts on the social media, of a religious nature could be construed as blasphemous, offensive to religious/social sensitivities, critical of political system, etc. - as such acts could lead to arrest, punishment and deportation.
- (iii) Do not circulate videos of grievances relating to working conditions, etc. in the Kingdom, on the social media as this could be counter-productive since circulation of such videos which are perceived to be tarnishing the reputation of the employer as well as the image of the host country or violating the cyber/privacy laws, etc. are dealt with sternly.

6. Legal Environment

- (i) The legal system in Saudi Arabia is based on Islamic Shari’ah law.
- (ii) The judicial system of the Kingdom is comprised of the Supreme Court at the apex followed by Courts of Appeal (Second Degree Courts), and Courts of First Instance, viz. General Courts, Criminal Courts, Matrimonial Courts, Business Courts, and Labour Courts.
- (iii) The criminal law has two aspects: the **Public Rights** section which allows the authorities to prosecute individuals committing criminal acts, and the **Private Rights** section which allows individuals to claim restitution for the injuries (physical/material) caused by the action(s) of the accused, as well as the legal heirs of the injured person the right to either claim or waive the right to claim compensation or the imposition of the death penalty (in murder cases). While Civil ‘Private Right’ cases areailable (subject to providing guarantee), the Criminal Public Right cases are notailable. The accused person remains in prison until completion of the legal proceedings.

iv. **Please note that in Cases where private rights (monetary compensation to the victim or family for the damages caused) - for offences involving theft, monetary loss, misappropriation, debt, moral and material damages, or in cases involving death where ‘diyaa’ (blood money), is admissible, even after completing punishment/jail term (public rights), the prisoner will not be released until such private rights claims are settled.**

- (v) Law enforcement is very strict and punishments for violation of the rules are very severe. Crimes such as murder, rape, drug trafficking, adultery, homosexual acts, blasphemy, converting a Muslim to another faith, terrorism etc. carry death penalty. Possession/use of narcotics, alcohol, or other forbidden material such as religious

literature or articles associated with faiths other than Islam, pornographic/obscene material, etc. is dealt with sternly with severe punishments including jail term, public flogging and deportation.

- (vi) Expatriates in business/labour disputes/financial claims, etc. are subject to travel ban. Those found guilty will not be allowed to leave the Kingdom even after serving the punishment, until the private rights claims, if any, are settled.
- (vii) As Arabic is the official language, all legal proceedings are carried out in Arabic only.
- (viii) The detained has the right to appoint a Saudi lawyer to defend him and follow up his case with police/court, etc. However, the cost of hiring of lawyers for litigation purposes is a very high.
- (ix) Appeal against judgements must be brought before the higher court within 30 days from date of judgements failing they become final after confirmation by higher courts.

6. Arrest by Police/Imprisonment-Precautions

- (i) All efforts must be made for observing the local rules, regulations and customs so that one stays on the right side of the law especially since some of the practices/actions that are legal in India are strictly prohibited here.
 - (ii) **In the event of arrest or detention by the police**, the person must:
 - (a) alert the sponsor and friend/relative about the arrest. (b) notify Indian Embassy(Tel:+966-11)-4884144/extn.128; or/8002471234 fax 4810742; email: jail@indianembassy.org.sa),or Consulate: Tel: +966-12-2610189/8002440003,fax +966-122610574 email: vccw.jeddah@mea.gov.in) of the arrest.
 - (iii) As the accused has the right not to sign a document in a language he does not understand, do not sign or put fingerprint on any document without understanding the contents; ask for English translation.
- (iii) **It may be noted that as a Diplomatic Mission, Indian Embassy/Consulate has no powers to release the arrested/detained person. The Mission, however, renders counselling/advice to the detainee and request the authorities to follow the due process of law as well as seek consular access to the accused through diplomatic channels.**
- (iv) In case the arrest leads to prosecution in a court of law he must:
 - (a) inform the Embassy/Consulate about the date of hearing in advance to enable the latter to provide assistance during the hearing. (b) insist on the presence of a translator during the proceedings in the Court, if he doesn't know the Arabic.
