

Introduction to Jeddah and the South

DAY 1 Arrival Day - Jeddah



Welcome to Jeddah! Over the years, no Saudi city has been more open to outside influencers such as traders, international artists, and Makkah-bound pilgrims than the ancient port of Jeddah. Indeed, the city's unofficial motto is "Jeddah ghair," or "Jeddah's different." Today, Jeddah is Saudi Arabia's buzzing cosmopolitan hub, home to gleaming hotels and big-ticket events as well as historical quarters and Red Sea beach vibes.

DAY 2: Jeddah - City tour Al Balad Tour (Jeddah Historical City)



Our exploration of the city of Jeddah will begin with a tour of The Tayebat Museum for a fascinating look into Jeddah's long and cosmopolitan past. Located in the Al Faisaliyah district, the museum is housed in a multiroom complex that re-creates the traditional Hijazi architecture of the old city, boasting bay windows overlaid with intricate wooden lattice work and ornate coral masonry. With several floors of in-depth exhibits, the museum offers a living history lesson on the foundation of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and the wider Arabian Peninsula. There is also an entire floor dedicated to the city's rich Islamic heritage.

Following the museum tour, lunch will be taken in one of Jeddah's famous restaurants, where you will be able to sample traditional dishes and enjoy a refreshing break.

Following lunch, we will take a city tour, making brief stops at popular landmarks and famous monuments for photo opportunities, such as the world's tallest flag pole, the world's tallest fountain and the open-air museum. Moving on to the coast, we will marvel at the floating mosque and Jeddah's waterfront, and enjoy a walk along the beach. Then on to Jeddah's historical city, Al Balad.

During our tour of Al Balad, which means "the town," we will explore the rich and diverse culture of the city's food and its people. Al-Balad, founded in the 7th century, historically served as the center of Jeddah. The town's defensive walls were torn down in the 1940s, but it wasn't until the 1970s and 1980s that Jeddah really began to grow, thanks to the oil boom. Many Jeddawis moved north, away from Al-Balad, and the center is today registered as a world heritage UNESCO site. You will see why, as you walk around the historical buildings with their unique window designs and doors, some even constructed using sea shells and stones! We will explore the interiors, learning about life in the early days, the historical importance of the city, and the part it played in trade and religious tourism.

The old Mosques are a popular tourist attraction, with several founded over 300 years ago and still used today.



With food as a focus of this tour, we will also visit some of the famous vendors offering the best local snacks and popular drinks for you to taste!

Stopping for refreshments in one of the open-air coffee houses, where you can try the famous local tea mixed with milk and herbs, we will then move on to the first hotel built in Jeddah, influenced by Italian architecture, then pass by the first school built in Saudi. During this tour you will pass many shops offering local produce and gifts such as perfumes, cloth, jewelry, antiques and souvenirs where you can buy and bargain, as well as art houses and the museum offering a collection of local art and antiquities!

Finally, dinner is scheduled in one of the local restaurants, featuring specialties such as fish or liver kabab with bread, amongst other delicacies.

DAY 3: Taif



Over the Hada Mountains above Mecca, on the eastern slopes of the Al-Sarawat mountains, lies The City of Taif, the cool and green Summer Capital located in the western part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

People come here for the weather (much cooler than Jeddah in the summer months), beautiful scenery and the town's relaxed atmosphere. Driving along the winding roads to escape the steamy heat of Jeddah or entering from the east away from the dry desert climate of the Najd, visitors to Taif are greeted by a fresh, cool breeze as they ascend to the city. Set in a hollow between granite hills rising from the eastern slope of the Hejaz in the southwest region of the Kingdom, this city is a magnet that draws visitors from across Saudi Arabia.

In this day trip will visit the highlights of this city, first visiting the old abandoned palaces, each with their own appeal, still preserving their original design, offering a good indication of how they might have looked back in the 1920s. Shobra House, also a former palace, is now one of the city's museums, and is the most stunning vestige of old Taif, with latticework windows and balconies, and interior marble from Carrara. King Abdul Aziz used to stay here, and the palace was later the residence of King Faisal.

Moving from palaces to agriculture, we will visit one of the local farms to rest and enjoy the local cuisine for lunch. We will have the opportunity to try one of the popular local cuisines of this region, "Seleq" - rice mixed with boiled milk and served with lamb!

Will visit one of the local farms known to plant and produce Rose. Taif has the perfect climate for growing roses, and a dedicated season to celebrate its production. We will visit one of the rose production farms, where you will learn about the origins going back to the Ottoman rule, when the seeds were first introduced to the region. You will also be introduced to the process of oil extraction from the roses, which is used in the production of perfume. Time permitting, we will also visit the nearby mountain area "Al Hada" where the landscape and scenery are very different and cloudy due to the altitude.



Our visit to Taif will include stops at several vantage points to admire the view, but beware as baboons might join you-! We will pass by the small fruit venders in this area and see the different fruits produced in this area including the unique fruit called “Barshomi”, ending the tour in the Old Souq, or local market before heading back to the hotel in Taif.

DAY 4: Drive to Al Baha - Baljurashy - Al Akhawain museum - Dhee Ayn village



After breakfast before leaving Taif and heading further south, weather permitting, we will take a short hike to a vantage point from where we can see the holy city of Makkah and the famous clock tower.

Continuing our journey, we will stop to visit Al Akhawain museum which means “the two brothers”. This museum is located in Al Mald heritage village and holds many traditional pieces dating back over 120 years. Less than one hour’s drive from here is Dhee Ayn, a village built on a white marble outcrop in the epic Bidah Valley, south of Al Baha. Dhee Ayn looks like an Arabian citadel set on a Tuscan hillside. Often called the Marble Village, the cuboid buildings were made of stone and slate more than 400 years ago, and abandoned sometime in the 1980s.

Exploring the narrow pathways of Dhee Ayn today is an eerily beautiful experience, especially during the golden hours, when the light reflects on the white marble and the colorful mountains in the background. We will be having our lunch break here in this beautiful village.

Subject to availability, our day ends with a visit to the caves resort before returning to our own hotel. As its name suggests, this is a resort literally built with-in the caves, with a gorgeous view over the mountains, and well worth a visit.

DAY 5 Drive to Abha - Al Namas



Here comes another worthy road trip all the way to Abha but this time we will stop in Al Namas city on the way which is a must see! our drive to Al Namas will be 3 hours long. but before we head there, we will start our day with a breakfast in one of the oldest and most famous traditional restaurants serving a traditional dish called “fool” which is made of beans!

Al Namas, often known as the city of fog, is surrounded by wild nature; from the striking views and forests of the Cloud Park to the wildlife-filled Jebel Mareer mountain to the north, where it's sometimes possible to see all the way to the Red Sea. We will stop to explore the Arabic artifacts and literature at the grandly ornate Al Maqar Museum, dubbed the Museum in the Clouds and one of the most striking buildings in the region.

Al-Maqar palace in the Asir region is an architectural marvel. It looks like a fictional palace come to life from the pages of a fantasy book. It erupts tall and beautiful in an otherwise subtle city. The palace is illuminated with lights that make it appear to glow. As Asir is a cold region, fog looms around the castle during the winter months, adding to the dreamy view. After marveling over the beauty of the exterior, visitors can enjoy the inside of the place. It took 35 years to build and used more than two million natural stones from the mountains of the Asir region in its construction. A citizen inspired by Andalusian palaces built it and collected Islamic artifacts dating back to the Abbasid, Umayyad and Ottoman periods.

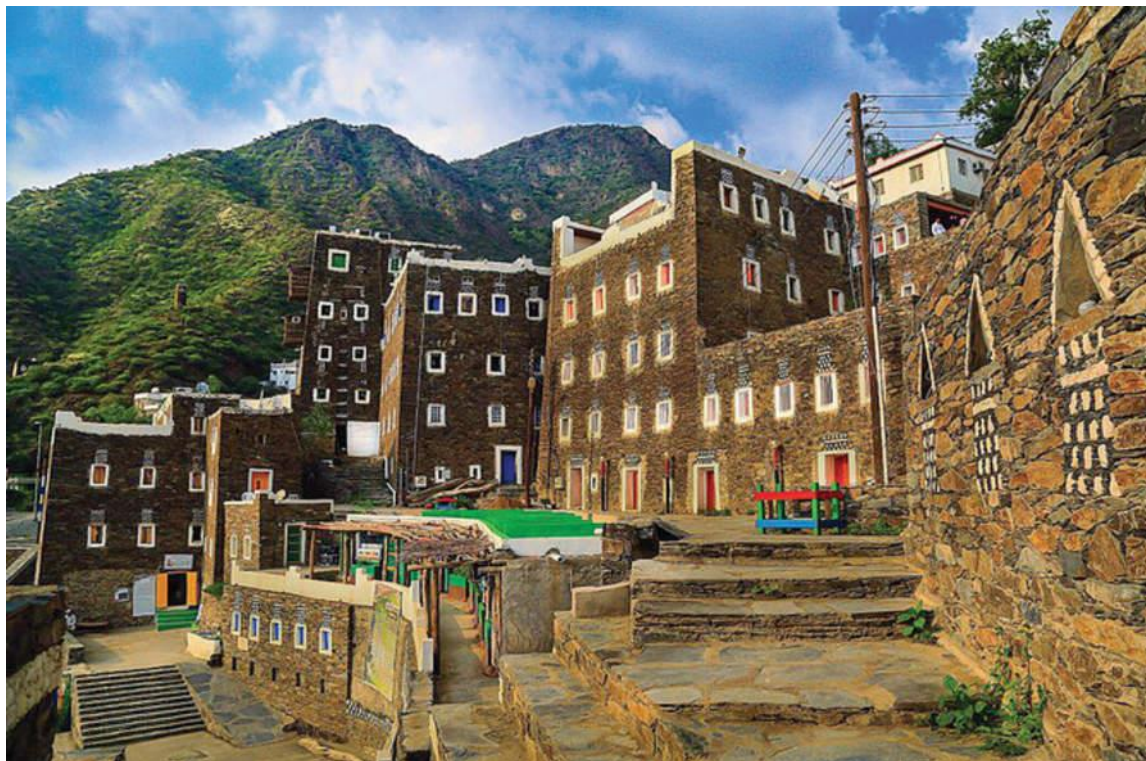
To some the interior may look more like a private collection than a museum, with 16 million Islamic decorations gathering dust on the shelves. The artifacts were collected by Mohammed Al-Maqar Al-Shehri, who traveled the world finding items to add to his collection. Considering what it has to offer, the museum does not get as much recognition as it should. There are 20 entrances to the palace, and the structure of the building has seven domes each representing the continents of the world. The museum itself stands on 365 columns, dedicated to each day of the year. The attention to detail in the museum is outstanding.

Each floor is dedicated to the era from which the artifacts are from, making it a rare Saudi landmark in the 21st century.

The museum is home to many Islamic manuscripts on medicine, astronomy and mathematics. It also has the first record of the handwritten manuscript of the Qur'an. In addition, there are a few thousand manuscripts to view. The museum opens a window on Islamic and Arabic history and takes the visitor on a journey back in time!

After this visit, we continue our road trip to Abha, which will take roughly 2 hours. Here we will check into our hotel, and relax, in preparation for further adventures.

DAY 6: Abha city tour - Al Moftaha District - Rejal Alma'a



Abha is the capital of Aseer Province and has the 6th largest population in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

It is famous for being the highest large city of Saudi Arabia at over 2 200 meters, some parts of the city even reaching around 2 400 meters. With such an altitude it is not surprising that Abha benefits from milder climatic conditions than most the rest of the country. We will start our day with an introduction to the most popular and historical site

here in Abha, the Aseer Regional Museum. The museum tells the long history of Abha and Aseer Province and exhibits some of the province's traditional handicrafts, along with antiquities of Aseer Province. A few hundred meters from the Regional Museum is Al-Muftaha Village, a cultural center built according to the standards of Aseer traditional architecture. It hosts a hall of plastic arts and shops where the handicrafts are sold.

After our lunch break, we will head to the place that everyone comes to Abha to see - Rejal Alma'a!!

Rijal Alma' is today on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage in recognition of its exceptional features. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is famous for its typical Arabian traditional architecture that can be found throughout the whole country, each region having its own specificities. But when it comes to Saudi traditional architecture the first image that comes to mind is the charming and colorful houses of Rijal Alma'. The fame of this village isn't only due to the stunning scenery it offers, but also to the important role it played in the history of the region. The dressed stone square towers, patterned with gleaming lumps of sugar-white quartz, that comprise the original village are typical of the culture of the area.

They tell the story of a culture with ingenuity and skills that allowed them to capitalize of the materials to hand and were surprisingly sophisticated in their use of dressed stone to make complex structures.

The solidly built houses double as mini-fortresses and comfortable habitation. But the most striking surprise of Rijal is hidden inside its walls. After entering through the sculpted doors, each dark stone building turns out to be a jewelry box containing a treasure trove of colour, painted by skilled and patient artisans. Today the vibrant colors of these fascinating patchworks still decorates the walls of Rijal Alma'a.

After our visit, we will continue to our hotel in Abha.

DAY 7: Exploring Soudah Mountain - Wadi Lajb - Jazan



Today after we check-out from our hotel and before we continue on to Jazan we will have one last stop here in Abha, the Soudah mountain.

At 3,000 meters, perched on the side of Saudi Arabia's highest mountain, the juniper-covered Soudah is the unofficial outdoor adventure capital of Saudi Arabia. Part of the vast Asir National Park, with its network of hiking routes, this is an area of cool mountain air, wild nature and mist-cloaked valleys. We will enjoy a cable car ride down this gorgeous mountain - 20 minutes of endless beauty between greenery and fog - a magical view indeed. Visitors can enjoy a hike in the national park and take a break in the same area where there are many cafes and restaurants.

After our visit here, we will continue our road trip to Jazan.

Shortly after arriving at the borders of Jazan, we reach Wadi Lajb - a massive canyon from which freshwater streams flow along the Reeth Mountains of the Tihama valleys in the southwest of Saudi Arabia. It is distinguished by its high altitude that reaches 800 meters, its narrow width which does not exceed 6 meters, and its extreme depth that the sunlight touches very lightly, with vast green spaces covering its rough slopes. This majestic valley is one of the most important attractions in Jazan. It also includes "The Hanging Garden", which is the most beautiful and strangest park of its kind - consisting of a group of young trees growing at heights ranging from 200 to 400 meters.

At the end of this tour in the canyon we will head to Jazan to get some rest in our hotel.

DAY 8: Full day between coffee farms and mountains



Today will be a full day spent with the locals of Jazan, who are predominantly farmers keen to tell you all about this hidden gem in Saudi that is almost unknown to the world.

Jazan region specializes in cultivating coffee trees that produce high quality Khoualani coffee, one of the finest types of coffee in the world. We will visit some local farmers, who will host us for lunch with them and their families in the middle of the farm. After our tour today, we will return to our hotel for some rest, and prepare for departure tomorrow

DAY 9: Departure

Today we say goodbye to beautiful Saudi, and will be dropping you off to the airport according to your flight schedule