

Saudi Arabia National Day Special

A variety of culture, nature and modernity

Sept. 23 marks the national day of Saudi Arabia, commemorating the proclamation by King Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud that renamed the kingdoms of Nejd and Hejaz to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. It has been observed at official levels since 1965 and has been a public holiday since 2005 and is one of three non-religious holidays observed in the Islamic kingdom. Typically celebrated with folk dances, songs, displays of the Saudi flag and national colors of green and white, the occasion was also used to unveil what was at the time the world's tallest flagpole in Jeddah in 2014.

Saudi Arabia is one of the world's most prominent Muslim nations and has the privilege of being custodian of the religion's most holy sites. Indeed, the monarch (currently Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud) also holds the title of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, referring to the Sacred Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, showing how central the religion is to the country. These mosques, and several other locations linked to the religion's early

history, form the focus of visitors coming for the annual Hajj pilgrimage. The average number of pilgrims is above 2.2 million, with over half coming from outside the kingdom. The Islamic holy sites are only open to Muslim religious visitors, which means casual tourism is not a factor in these parts of Saudi Arabia. However, there are certainly other destinations where one can appreciate Saudi Arabia's long history, cultural traditions and diverse landscapes.

Images of endless desert surround the Rub' al Khali, or the Empty Quarter, which covers the southern third of the Arabian Peninsula. Though many sections are impassable, thanks to a road link to Oman completed in September 2021 the Al-Ahsa Oasis UNESCO World Heritage Site is now more accessible than ever. With scenes of vast palm tree plantations, the oasis is a haven of green dotted with historic buildings, a far cry from the harsh dunes of the desert.

The Red Sea coast boasts a number of beach resorts that attract visitors for swimming, snorkeling and the many

scuba diving sites accessible from the Saudi side of the waterway. Abundant sea life and coral reefs bring in enthusiasts from all over the world.

Tourism in the region is steadily developing, with some 130 kilometers of trails for hikers to explore, but an eye is also being kept on sustainability as 75% of the islands are being left untouched. Another noteworthy location on the west coast is King Abdullah Economic City, a planned development and so-called megaproject designed to attract attention and investment to the kingdom. Served by a high-speed rail link and designed to control sprawl and congestion in Saudi Arabia's other major cities, KAEC is envisioned to have an eventual population of 2 million who will have access to top-notch education, research, health and recreational facilities.

This content references excerpts from Visit Saudi, the official tourism website of the Saudi Arabian government. For more information, please visit <https://www.visitsaudi.com/en>.



Left: A group of camels is saddled and ready for tourists in Al-Ula. Right: Pilgrims from all around the world pray around the Kaaba in Mecca. GETTY IMAGES



Left: Al-Balad old town in Jeddah features traditional houses with wooden windows and balconies. Right: The Wadi Al Disah is a mountainous area in Tabuk province. GETTY IMAGES

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TO THE PEOPLE OF
THE KINGDOM OF
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ON THE OCCASION OF
THE ANNIVERSARY OF
THEIR NATIONAL DAY

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Warmest Congratulations to
**the Custodian of the Two
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bin Abdulaziz Al Saud**
of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
and his People
on the Occasion of
the Anniversary of
Their National Day



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Warmest Congratulations

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the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and his People
on the Occasion of the Anniversary of their National Day**

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