

# Saudi Arabia National Day Special

## History, hospitality and beauty await visitors

### THE JAPAN TIMES AGENCY

Sept. 23 marks Saudi Arabia's National Day, which commemorates the 1932 unification of the nations of Nejd and Hejaz into a single kingdom by King Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud. Observed since 1965, it became an official national holiday in 2005.

Across the nation, the day is celebrated with music, dance, fireworks and parades of floats highlighting the country's different regions. In the streets, green and white Saudi flags are displayed everywhere, buildings are lit up in bright green and people even dress in the national colors.

Saudi Arabia is the custodian of Islam's most holy sites, at which more than 2 million people make the annual pilgrimage that is one of the five pillars of Islam. Two of the most important cities on the Hajj pilgrimage are Mecca and Medina.

Medina is home to several important mosques, including the Prophet's Mosque, which was built by the Prophet Muhammad himself in 622 and contains his burial site. Medina is also the site of the Quba Mosque, the very first mosque in Islamic history, and of Mount Uhud, which, in addition to its natural beauty, is also the

site of significant historic events.

Mecca, the birthplace of the prophet, is home to the Sacred Mosque, which is the world's largest mosque and contains the Kaaba, the focal point that Muslims around the world face toward when they pray.

Saudi Arabia is the land of *hafawah* — a custom, formed by the region's harsh geography and traditional nomadic lifestyles, of generously welcoming travelers and guests. This spirit is reflected today in recent initiatives launched by the Saudi Arabian government to welcome tourists to experience the country's rich culture and breathtaking beauty.

This year over 41 million people from 18 countries are expected to visit, and the Saudi Tourism Authority is working in partnership with 120 private sector stakeholders to develop hundreds of unique experiences for visitors.

Popular tourist locations include the coastal city of Jeddah, the nation's commercial and shipping hub, where visitors come to enjoy beautiful beaches, blue waters, spectacular modern architecture and luxury shopping.

In the region surrounding Taif, an inland city high above the Red Sea, hikers can

trek to the Wahba Crater left behind by an ancient volcanic explosion, or visit the area's lush farms, known particularly for their strawberries.

In the mountainous region around Aseer, visitors can explore the traditional stone buildings preserved in the historic heritage village or discover opportunities to camp under the stars among surprisingly lush forests and waterfalls. In contrast, pristine resort islands such as Shebara, which just opened last year, offer guests ultra-modern luxury accommodations, such as beachside villas built over the water.

Saudi Arabia is also home to eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites, reflecting the nation's long history in the cradle of western civilization and its rich cultural traditions. The easiest of these for visitors to access is the neighborhood of Al Balad inside Jeddah. This centuries-old trading hub was recognized by UNESCO for its historic significance and beautiful wooden architecture, and it is now a popular area to buy traditional handcrafted goods.

Other World Heritage Sites include historic settlements such as Diriyah, Qaryat al-Faw and Mada'in Salih, ancient cultural

sites like the Bar Hima Petroglyphs and Ha-il Rock Art, and natural sites like the 'Uruq Bani Ma'arid desert dunes and the Al-Ahsa Oasis.

*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>.*



In the heart of the old town of Al Balad, several generations of Saudis sit on a park bench and pass the time.

GETTY IMAGES



Far left: Wahba Crater is the kingdom's largest volcanic crater. Left: Pilgrims gather around the Kaaba in Mecca.

GETTY IMAGES

CONGRATULATIONS  
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THE KINGDOM OF  
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ON THE OCCASION OF  
THE ANNIVERSARY OF  
THEIR NATIONAL DAY

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on the Occasion of the  
Anniversary of Their  
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**JAPAN-SAUDI ARABIA SOCIETY**

Chairman: Keiichi Iwata

Warmest Congratulations

to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques  
King Salman 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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