

Saudi Arabia National Day Special

Land of Sand brimming with attractions

THE JAPAN TIMES AGENCY

The birthplace of Islam and a major player in the global oil and gas industry, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a nation of 34 million people on the Arabian peninsula.

Dominated by an arid ecosystem that includes the Rub' al Khali (Empty Quarter), one of the world's largest contiguous deserts, the kingdom has coastlines on both the Red Sea and Persian Gulf.

Within the Rub' al Khali desert are scattered oases that permit agriculture and urbanizations, the largest being the city of Medina. However, with no permanent rivers or bodies of water anywhere in the country, desalination plants are vital infrastructure in the coastal regions. Vast swathes of the country are sparsely populated, a mere 7% suitable for cultivation, with large areas of tidal salt flats, rugged mountains, dry seasonal riverbeds and rocky plateaus.

Centered on the east bank of Wadi Hanifa, Riyadh, the capital and largest city, is visited by over 5 million tourists each year. The cur-

rent metropolis, home to 7 million people and replete with the King Abdullah Financial District's glittering towers of commerce and the new commercial development Boulevard World, began its transformation in the 18th century after its defensive walls were dismantled in the 1950s.

The suburb of Diriyah — historical home of the ruling House of Saud — contains reminders of the past, while the mud brick Najdi architecture features prominently in the open-air museum and UNESCO World Heritage Site of At-Turaif. The story of the first Saudi state can be found here, with remains of the kingdom's precursor in the Salwa Palace and At-Turaif Mosque carrying memories of simpler times.

Back in the heart of the city, the KADF is worth a look even for those not in town for business. Connected by open-air walkways and accessible from the main station of Riyadh's metro system, there is a mix of cultural, leisure and dining experiences among the 95 towers. Many offer bird's eye views of the capital.

Around 100 kilometers away is the ter-

minus of the Tuwaik mountain range, epically nicknamed the "Edge of the World." A cliff rising 1,131 meters over the arid landscape, reached after a challenging climb and best viewed during sunrise or sunset, this adventurous destination needs some organization to reach — travel companies can arrange four-wheel drive transport to tackle the rough terrain. Eagle-eyed visitors might even notice fossils of snails and marine life in the layers of rock, hinting at the far distant past.

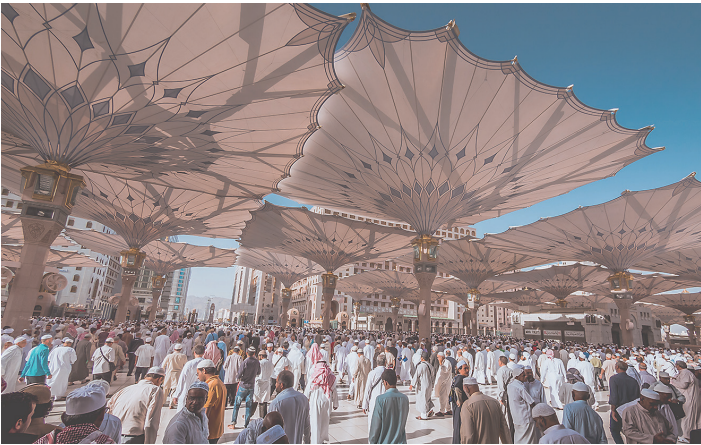
Whether just visiting or venturing forth to Saudi Arabia's many other worthwhile tourist destinations, Riyadh is certainly a key part of any travel itinerary to the kingdom. As the country continues to welcome more people to discover its treasures, Riyadh will continue to act as the gateway.

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>.



Far left: The Tuwaik mountain range is home to "The Edge of the World." Left: The King Abdullah Financial District is a major lifestyle and business area in Riyadh.

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A canopy of giant umbrellas shades worshippers from the Medina sun. GETTY IMAGES



The Wadi Al Disah is an oasis surrounded by sandstone cliffs. GETTY IMAGES

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to the People of the
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
on the Occasion of the
Anniversary of Their
National Day



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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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