SAUDI ARABIA UNVEILED

2 November 2027 - 21 November 2027

Tour Cost ($AUD): $23,350

Single Supplement ($AUD): $4,690

Tour Duration: 20 days





OVERVIEW

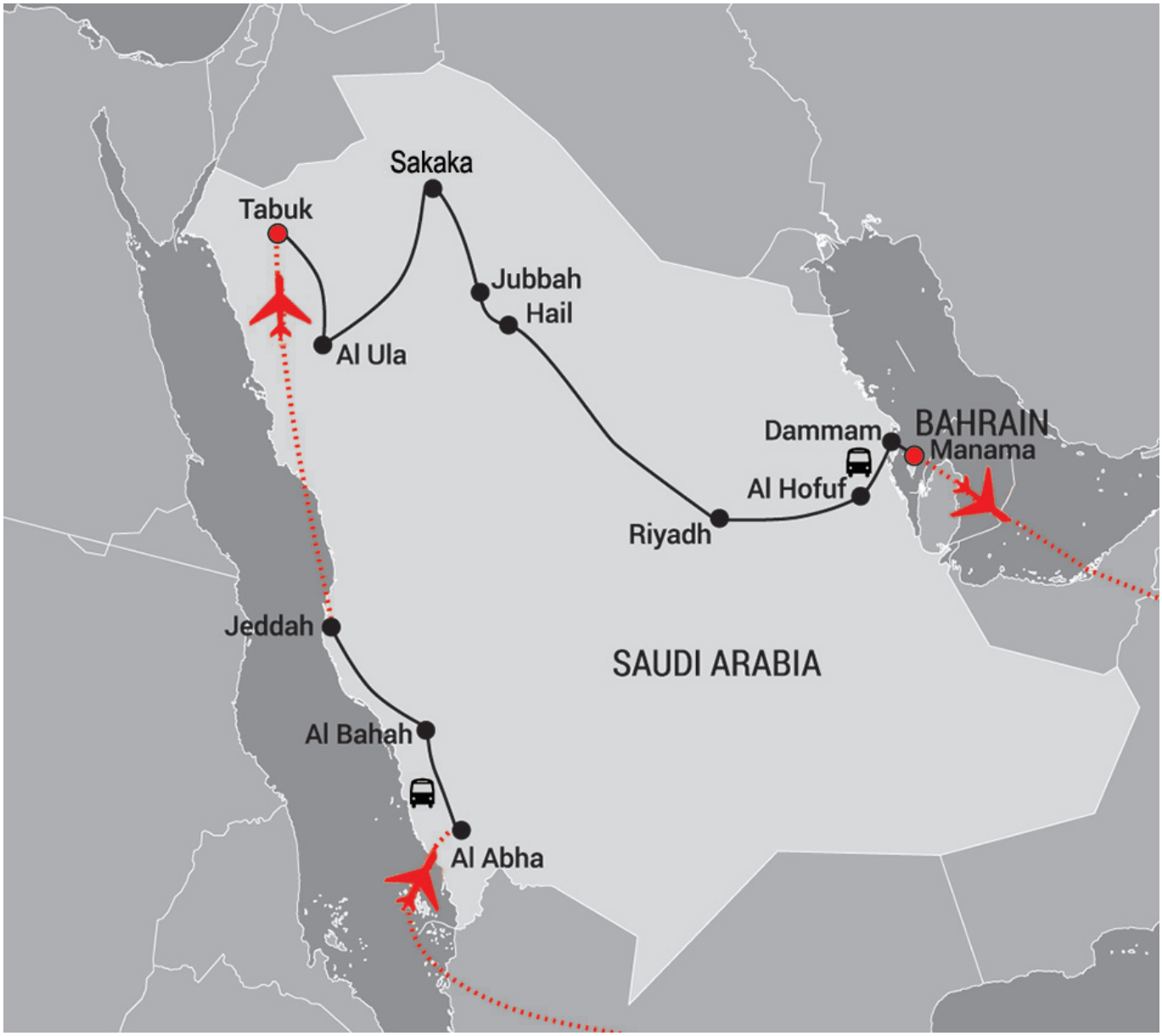
Closed for decades, this ancient kingdom has finally opened its doors to tourism. In a remarkable development, the government, looking to develop alternative income to oil, announced that it would grant tourist visas and lift the restriction on female visitors having to wear the abaya. The pronouncement has finally opened the door to one of the last unexplored region of the world! Our tour begins in the southern alps of Saudi Arabia and the Asir National Park, where huge juniper forests and lush vegetation cradle jaw-dropping cliff hanging villages. We then head to the Red Sea and the city of Jeddah. Founded 2,500 years ago, this great metropolis is home to beautiful coral architecture, bustling souks and alluring merchant houses. The sheer size of the country requires a flight to the town of Tabuk, 100 kilometres from the Jordanian border and the Gulf of Aqaba. From here a curtain of antiquities opens, unveiling a modernity cast by an age-old civilization. We then continue across the territory of the Nabateans to the remarkable town of Al Ula. Hidden in a formidable landscape composed of stunning rock formations is Madain Saleh, an amazing site of tombs and temples that is often compared to Petra. We then traverse an historical trade route where we discover the Stonehenge of Arabia, the Sawan Pillars and the great archaeological citadel of Marid Castle. We then travel by the new fast train that links Hail, in the north of the Kingdom, to Riyadh in the south-east. After two days in Riyadh, the tour moves to the wonderful oasis town of Al Hofuf, before departing the vast kingdom by crossing an imposing 25-kilometre causeway to the island of Bahrain. Slightly bigger than Singapore, Bahrain, the so called ‘pearl of the Persian Gulf’, is home to the ancient Dilmun civilization. A tour that was almost unthinkable a few years ago, Saudi Arabia Unveiled is an astounding traverse of a timeless kingdom!

Tour Fitness Level: Moderate

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TOUR MAP



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ITINERARY

02/11/2027 Australia – Dubai

Depart from your chosen Australian airport on the flight to Dubai.

03/11/2027 Dubai - Abha (D)

On arrival in Dubai connect with our onward flight to Abha.

Depart Dubai, Fly Dubai FZ 813, 13.15

Arrive Abha 15.15

On arrival into Abha we transfer to our hotel.

Abha Palace Hotel

Abha

04/11/2027 Abha (BLD)

Situated at an altitude of 2,200 metres, Abha is Saudi Arabia's mountain kingdom that is home to dense juniper forests. Close to the beautiful Asir National Park, it is an area of lush vegetation where villages cling precariously to steep cliffs. Today we begin our exploration of this remarkable area with a visit to Al Khalaf mud village that resembles something straight out of a Yemeni tourist magazine. Containing archaeological gems and inscriptions, Al Khalaf village has been partially restored to preserve the traditional architectural aesthetics of the Asir region. Numerous ancient Islamic inscriptions with verses from the Holy Quran and supplications can be found on the basalt stones.

05/11/2027 Abha (BLD)

Today we explore the rugged beauty of the region as we head towards Jebel Soudah, the highest peak in the Kingdom, and on to the stunning village of Rijal Almaa. Here multi storied mud houses provide a fascinating reminder of Wadi Hadramaut in Yemen. In the afternoon we visit a cultural village in the heart of Abha city that embodies the spirit of the Asir region. Al Muftaha Village is essentially a platform for local creativity and here art galleries feature work by local artists and photographers.

06/11/2027 Abha – Al Bahah (BLD)

This morning we depart Abha by road for the five-hour journey to Al Bahah. Though just over 300 kilometres the road zig zags sharply through the mountains, and passes through some 25-tunnels. At an elevation of 2,300 metres the region enjoys a wonderful climate. Surrounded by 53 forests, it attracts visitors from all over the Persian Gulf because of the beauty of the valleys and mountains. Inhabited by the Ghambi and Zahrani tribes, the area is regarded as the prime health resort of Saudi Arabia.

Cloud City Hotel

Al Bahah

07/11/2027 Al Bahah – Jeddah (BLD)

This morning we drive north through beautiful forests to the city of Jeddah. The city is the port and commercial centre of Saudi Arabia and is also the main gateway for Muslims arriving from around the

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world for Haj or Umrah. The city is said to be the burial place of Eve, hence the name Jeddah, which is grandmother in Arabic.

Jeddah Hilton Hotel

Jeddah

08/11/2027 Jeddah (BLD)

Jeddah's nickname 'Bride of the Red Sea' is well justified. The Corniche runs along the waterfront for more than 60km and boasts some of the most wonderful coral reefs in the world. Today we explore on foot the old area of Al Balad, which is like stepping back in time. This is where Jeddah was founded by fishermen more than 2,500 years ago and where for over 1,000 years hundreds of thousands came ashore on their way to the Holy city of Mecca. Many houses in the old district date back to this period, built from traditional coral stones and palm wood lattices.

09/11/2027 Jeddah (BLD)

Today we continue to explore the remarkable city of Jeddah. Among the highlights are a visit to the bustling fish markets. Later we transfer to the airport for our flight north to Tabuk.

Depart Jeddah, Saudia SV 1543, 16.15

Arrive Tabuk 17.55

On arrival in Tabuk we transfer to our hotel.

Hilton Garden Inn

Tabuk

10/11/2027 Tabuk - Al Ula (BLD)

This morning we leave Tabuk for Al Ula via the staggering canyon of Wadi Al Disah. Meaning 'Valley of the Palm trees' this green natural wonder is home to some of the kingdom's most diverse and jaw-dropping landscapes. The valley is flanked with towers of red rock that rise from the fertile green carpet of lush palm trees that reflect in the valley's still pools. After our visit to the wadi we drive to the ancient town of Al Ula, an important staging post on the frankincense trade route to Oman and Egypt. Here we explore the heritage mud village and fort. Once a bustling civilization, these 800 tightly packed mud-brick and stone houses — parts of which are more than 2,000 years old — are now abandoned ruins, decaying in the hot desert sun. The village is flanked by a landscape of sweeping sands and astonishing rock formations, where we find ancient rock art and petroglyphs.

The Sahary Resort

Al Ula

11/11/2027 Al Ula (BLD)

Madain Saleh was the second largest city of the Nabatean kingdom – next to Petra – and its importance is ostensibly displayed by its fantastically preserved 131 monumental tombs, among which 94 were decorated with majestic facades on the sandstone massifs of the area. These enigmatic tombs combine elements of Greco-Roman architecture with Nabataean and Babylonian imagery ensuring that any visit to this iconic site is simply breathtaking. After lunch we head out into the countryside to see the historic Hijaz Railway Station no 21. Al-Ula was a stop along the Hijaz Railway, which connected Medina with Damascus and eventually Istanbul. It was built by the Ottomans in the early 20th century to speed up the journey to

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Mecca during the pilgrimage season, but the railway was only in use for a short period. During WWI, Lawrence of Arabia and his Arab allies blew up the railway in their revolt against the Ottoman Empire.

12/11/2027 Al Ula – Sakaka (BLD)

Today we drive east, skirting the town of Tayme and the vast Al Khanafah wildlife sanctuary, before arriving into the town of Sakaka.

Al Nusl Hotel

Sakaka

13/11/2027 Sakaka – Dumat al-Jandal – Sakaka (BLD)

Al Jawf is an oasis that encompasses 13 million olive trees. It is the oldest human settlement in the world, having first been inhabited around 1.4 million years ago. The location of the oasis is critical since it lies on the trade route between the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Iraq and Turkey. This morning we visit the legendary Sakaka Fort that dates back to the 7th century BC. We then continue to Rajajil, Saudi Arabia's Stonehenge. The ancient Sawan pillars found here, spread over an area of 120,000 square metres, appear to be roughly aligned to sunrise and sunset, and as such, are thought to be an ancient means of indicating the time. In the afternoon we visit the archaeological citadel of Marid Castle. Built with stone on a highland overlooking the city of Dumat al-Jandal at a height of 600 metres, this fortress protected the area from enemies and dates back to several centuries before the Islamic era. The earliest mention of it is in the third century A.D. when Zenobia, the queen of Palmyra, invaded Dumat al-Jandal and Tayma but could not break into the castle.

14/11/2027 Sakaka – Jubbah – Hail (BLD)

Today is an exciting one as we head for Jubbah, one of the most significant archaeological sites in Saudi Arabia. Here magnificent rock carvings and inscriptions date back to three different eras, the earliest being 7,000 BC. After our exploration of Jubbah we continue to Hail.

Millennium Hotel

Hail

15/11/2027 Hail – Riyadh (BLD)

This morning we explore Hail, a city that is renowned for its hospitable people and is traditionally the home of Saudi Arabia's poets and writers. After lunch we depart for Hail railway station and board the fast train for Riyadh. The railway link was constructed only a year ago and allows us to reach Riyadh in less than five hours – the road trip is more than eight. As we continue south, we reach the imposing Shammar mountain range before arriving into Riyadh.

Depart Hail Train 02, 15.25

Arrive Riyadh 20.00

On arrival in Riyadh we transfer to our hotel.

Novotel Al Anoud

Riyadh

16/11/2027 Riyadh (BLD)

Riyadh has a population of seven million and is located on the eastern part of the Najd plateau 600 metres above sea level. It is a modern city that gleams in the middle of the desert and its unique architecture makes for a spectacular skyline. Yet

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Riyadh is still a mix of ancient and modern. This morning we head to the UNESCO site of Diriyah, where the history of the Al Saud dynasty began. We then delve into the heritage souk near Masmak fort. The souk is famous for its brass and copper objects, silver daggers and a variety of Bedouin jewellery and antiques.

17/11/2027 Riyadh – Al Hofuf (BLD)

After breakfast we drive across the Rub al Khali (Empty Quarter) to Al Hofuf. Lying in the enormous Al Hasa oasis, Al Hofuf was the headquarters of the Ottoman administration from 1871, when the Ottoman Empire seized eastern Arabia. It was recaptured in 1913 by the Wahhābīs, a Muslim fundamentalist group, under Ibn Saʿūd. The town remained under their control, thereafter becoming part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia formed in 1932. On arrival we explore a group of intricate natural caves that are made up of sandstone and limestone that lie beneath the Jabal Qarah, a flat-topped hill with an elevation of 225 meters above sea level. Erosion by wind and water over the passage of time has transformed this hill into an abode of caves and a fascinating landscape.

Intercontinental Hotel

Al Hofuf

18/11/2027 Al Hofuf – Dammam – Bahrain (BLD)

This morning we make the short journey north to Dammam, the capital of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. On our arrival in Dammam we visit the World Culture Centre, before crossing the extraordinary King Fahd causeway, a 25km bridge that links Saudi Arabia with the island nation of Bahrain, located in the Persian Gulf. Construction of the longest sea bridge in Asia started in 1981 and was completed in 1986 at a cost of US$800 million. The border station between the two countries is located in the middle of the bridge on an artificial island. The causeway is Bahrain's only link to the mainland. Bahrain has a land area slightly greater than that of Singapore. This land mass, made up of 33 islands, has a heritage that dates back several millennia and today boasts a buzzing modern lifestyle and cosmopolitan outlook that sets it apart from the rest. Home to the ancient Dilmun civilization, Bahrain has been an important centre of commerce for more than 4,000 years and has been influenced by several cultures. Today, Bahrain's skyline is punctuated with skyscrapers that reflect its emergence as a hub for banking and financial activities. On arrival in Bahrain we visit the Al Fateh mosque which is a beautiful testament to Islamic architecture. It was built with marble from Italy, glass from Austria, teak wood from India and finally crafted to perfection by the local Bahraini artisans.

Gulf Hotel

Bahrain

19/11/2027 Bahrain (BLD)

This morning we visit The Tree of Life: If you are looking for a miracle in Bahrain, you'll find it under the shade of this ancient majestic mesquite tree. This tree is believed to be from the Garden of Eden and is a popular tourist destination. We then step back in time as we enter the Bahrain National Museum, where we glimpse the nation's rich cultural and historic legacy.

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20/11/2027 Bahrain (BL)

After breakfast we set out for the Muharraq area of Bahrain where we explore Bahrain's rich heritage and cultural history that has been preserved almost perfectly. Here we take a walking tour of the old town with its century-old houses and mosques. We then meander through the marketplace of Suq Al-Qaisariya which is more than 100 years old and has shops selling traditional wares. After lunch we explore the UNESCO World Heritage Bahrain Fort which was the ancient capital of the Dilmun era. After our visit here we transfer to the airport for our flight to Dubai.

Depart Bahrain Emirates EK 840, 17.45

Arrive Dubai 20.00

On arrival in Dubai connect with your flight home to Australia.

21/11/2027 Dubai – Australia

Arrive home in Australia today.