



Saudi Arabia Explorer

Trip Details

9 Days • Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Land Cost: \$11,195 • Dates: December 1–9, 2016

Highlights

- *Marvel at the spectacular night skies of the largest sand desert in the world, the Ar Rub Al Khali (the Empty Quarter)*
- *Explore the date palm oasis and the archaeologically rich city of Al Ula, former capital of the Lihyanites, as well as nearby Elephant Rock, hewn naturally by the desert winds*
- *Experience Mada'in Saleh—little-seen sister city to Petra—a Nabatean crossroads which controlled all the caravans carrying frankincense, myrrh, salt, gold, spices and silks*
- *Learn about the rich history of this complex land, with visits to the Murabba Palace, Fort Masmak and the National Museum, and enjoy the antique and gold souks of Riyadh*
- *Our group will be accompanied by Saudi Arabia expert Brid Beeler*



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Saudi Arabia is about the size of the United States east of the Mississippi. It is a country rich in heritage, natural beauty and archaeological sites. It boasts the largest sand desert in the world, Ar Rub Al Khali, also referred to as the Empty Quarter. The ancient Nabatean city of Mada'in Saleh, sister city to Jordan's Petra, once controlled the caravan routes north to the Mediterranean and beyond. D'Iriyah was the first capital of the Al Saud's, today's ruling family. Fort Masmak and Murabba Palace in the modern capital, Riyadh, played key roles in the foundation of today's Kingdom. The National Museum is a treasure trove of exhibits detailing the history, archaeology, Islam, the petrochemical industry, flora, fauna and the founding of the nation.

DAILY ITINERARY

Day 1 – Thursday, December 1: ARRIVE IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Arrive in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – flights usually arrive in the evening time. You'll be met by a representative of MTS who will transfer you to your hotel.

Be prepared for a lengthy immigration and customs process at the airport, and a minimum of one hour's drive to your hotel. Hotel check-in is at 4 p.m. We will endeavor to get rooms as early as possible for travelers, but cannot guarantee this unless an extra night is pre-booked at an additional cost. So your arrival for 4pm check-in or later on this day is ideal.

Radisson Blu Hotel

Day 2 – Friday, December 2: RIYADH

Breakfast is at your leisure in the hotel brasserie. Details will be explained upon arrival. No activities this morning, so you'll have plenty of time to sleep late and recover from your international flight.

We will meet for a trip briefing, and you will be advised of the exact time once you are in the Kingdom.

In the afternoon we will travel north to visit D'Iriyah and in Wadi Hanifa close to the Diplomatic Quarter. We will stroll through a labyrinth of beautiful adobe style architecture of the first capital of the Al Saud's, the ruling Saudi family. D'Iriyah dates to the 16th century. Many of the town's outer walls have been meticulously restored along with major renovations to parts of the old capital.

Tonight we'll enjoy an early evening Welcome Dinner in a traditional Saudi restaurant serving traditional Saudi style cuisine. Return to the hotel for overnight.

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Day 3 – Saturday, December 3: RIYADH – AL ULA

After breakfast, we continue our excursion of Riyadh visiting Fort Masmak dating from 1865. It played a central role in the Kingdom's history when King Abdulaziz, also known as Ibn Saud, and a small band of followers seized the citadel in 1902. We will visit the nearby antique souq and gold market of D'ira souq where we have an opportunity to do a little shopping.

Return to our hotel for buffet lunch.

We will check out from our hotel and leave all of our luggage behind in storage at the hotel, except for the whatever we need for our two nights in Mada'in Saleh. Please note that the **weight limit** applies.

We'll go directly to the National Museum, where we will stroll through its interactive displays and incredible array of artifacts about the Kingdom. Then we will visit the Murraba Palace and continue direct to the King Khalid airport for our flight to Al



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Ula on Saudia, departing at 8:25 p.m. and arriving 10:10 p.m.

Upon arrival in Al Ula, we will go direct to our traditional Saudi style tented camp for the next two nights.

Please note that dinner on this day is not included as we will be traveling during this time, but you'll have an opportunity to grab a bite at the airport if you choose.

Traditional Saudi-style tented camp...B,L

Day 4 – Sunday, December 4: AL ULA – LIHYANITE TOMBS - MADA'IN SALEH

Al Ula lies in the northern part of the Kingdom, situated 270 miles south of Jordan's Aqaba. We'll do an early morning walking tour through the incredible canyons of this area, which many say resemble Sedona in Arizona, then return to camp for breakfast.

After breakfast, we continue to visit Elephant rock, the Lihyanite tombs, and a date palm oasis. En route, we will drive through old Al Ula and new Al Ula, situated in a valley of palm trees along an old caravan route dating from Nabatean and Lihyanite times. We will explore this valley and Mada'in Saleh during our two day visit here.

Many of the artifacts on the "Roads of Arabia Exhibit" in the United States came from the archaeological sites of Al Ula's Lihyanite Tombs and Mada'in Saleh, the old Nabatean city whose capital, Petra, lies in what is now Jordan.

We will discuss date palm cultivation and how the town of Al Ula once thrived during ancient times.

We'll enjoy lunch in a local restaurant, then visit the UNESCO World Heritage site of Mada'in Saleh. Mada'in Saleh was the second most important city in the Nabatean world and is known for its carved tombs dating to between 100BC and 100AD. Qasr Al Farid is carved from a single rock monolith. We will walk through the Siq and visit the Diwan among many of the tombs in this area. We will take in the view of the valley of this incredible region before returning to our tented camp for overnight

Traditional Saudi-style tented camp...B,L,D

Day 5 – Monday, December 5: DESERT SAFARI - AL ULA – HIJAZ – TABUK – RIYADH

Depart early for a desert safari in 4x4 vehicles traversing the desert terrain of Al Ula. We will explore the desert canyon lands of Al Ula's beautiful rock formations for about two hours.

We will then visit the Hijaz Railway line made famous by T. E. Lawrence during World War I. We will explore the railway cars, steam engine, museum and video presentation of how life was for pilgrims.

We'll return to camp for lunch and afterward depart by road, paralleling the Hijaz Railway and an old caravan route north, just as the Nabatean's traveled by camel and as the pilgrims traveled when they came to Makkah on Haj and Umra. This is the countryside of T. E. Lawrence fame and the Arab Revolt with the Howeitat Bedu.

We will arrive in Tabuk to catch our flight to Riyadh, which departs at 8:40 p.m. and arrives at 10:40 p.m. Upon arrival in Riyadh we'll transfer to our hotel, about one hour's drive.

Please note that dinner on this day is not included as we will be traveling during this time, but you'll have an opportunity to grab a bite at the airport if you choose.

Radisson Blu Hotel...B,L

Day 6 – Tuesday, December 6: RIYADH – WADI AL DAWASIR – EMPTY QUARTER

After breakfast, it is time to repack our luggage. **Mandatory luggage requirements** for our trip into the desert are as follows:



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We will check out from our hotel and leave all luggage behind except our duffel bags and camera equipment, the weight of which must not to exceed 22lbs (10 kilograms) maximum *per person* for our nights in the Empty Quarter. This weight allowance includes all backpacks and camera equipment. Duffel bags need to be soft sided without wheels and without a frame. This is absolutely necessary as weight in the desert impacts our trip tremendously.

Lunch will be in a local restaurant serving Arabic cuisine. We will visit The Kingdom Towers—one of Riyadh’s iconic buildings—where we will go to the top and walk across the necklace, taking in the stunning 360° views of the city.

We will continue north to the King Khalid International airport to board our domestic flight to Wadi Al Dawasir, which departs at 7:20 p.m. and arrives at 8:30 p.m. Our Saudi drivers, Bedouin team, and 4x4’s will meet us and take us to our first night’s camp in Ar Rub Al Khali, known as the Empty Quarter.

Our desert camp this evening will be on the edge of Ar Rub Al Khali where we will enjoy the sparkling desert night sky in all its glory. Western style tents will be provided along with mattresses, tents and sleeping bags.

Though a light supper of fruits, dates, bread and tea will be served in camp, dinner on this day is not included as we will be traveling during this time, but you’ll have an opportunity to grab a bite at the airport if you choose.

Desert camp in the Empty Quarter (western style tents)...B,L

Day 7 – Wednesday, December 7: EMPTY QUARTER

After breakfast, we will visit the ancient site of Quaraiyat Al Fau, capital of the Kinda The Kingdom (1st century BC–4th century AD) situated at the edge of Ar Rub Al Khali on the ancient trade routes. Quaraiyat Al Fau is the most excavated site in the Kingdom and is a rich archaeological and historical gem.

Our journey in the Empty Quarter will require a sense of adventure, as it is quite likely that we will get stuck in the sand from time to time, and much effort will go into getting us mobile once more.

We will be covering some 300 miles (500 kilometers) over the next few days. Saudi Arabia’s Empty Quarter is the largest sand desert in the world, and is approximately the size of France! We will traverse high desert dunes known as Urgs in between flat desert floor as we travel. Courageous British explorers like Wilfred Thesiger and Bertram Thomas crossed this desert in the company of the local Bedouin. Our team, too, will be made up of local Saudi drivers. While its name implies that Ar Rub Al Khali is empty, the reality is that it is rich in flora and fauna, as you will discover on this journey. We will discuss how oryx and gazelle survive the harsh temperatures (122°F / 50° C) of the summer desert.

Desert Camp in the Empty Quarter...B,L,D

Day 8 – Thursday, December 8: EMPTY QUARTER

Today we will continue on our journey in the Empty Quarter, leaving the high dunes of yesterday and traversing crescent flats where smaller islands of sands exist. Here lie 5,000-year-old lakebeds, rich with fossil remains and stone tools. African animals once roamed this region when it was a rich savannah. We will spend the day exploring this fascinating area.

Desert Camp in the Empty Quarter...B,L,D

Day 9 – Friday, December 9: EMPTY QUARTER - RIYADH

Today, we will begin our journey out of the Empty Quarter traversing flat desert terrain towards Layla Lakes, which were once part of an elaborate Falaj irrigation system, but are now dry. Our final journey back to Riyadh will be approximately 180 miles (300 kilometers) on asphalt roadway.



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Upon arrival in Riyadh we'll check into the Radisson Blu hotel and be reunited with our luggage. You'll have time to repack for your international departure flight, either later this evening after our farewell dinner, or in the early morning hours of Saturday, December 10th. Please be aware that most international flights from the Kingdom are late night/early morning departures.

Radisson Blu Hotel...B,L,D

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Travel in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia carries with it certain conditions to which all participants must adhere. For a full description of the conditions of participation in this adventure, please [click here](#).

WHAT'S INCLUDED:

- Domestic flights in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- Meet and assist upon arrival and departure
- All transportation as per the itinerary: 4x4 wheel drive vehicles with drivers
- All Accommodation throughout
- Meals as specified with the exception of 3 dinners and 1 lunch due to travel times (see itinerary for details)
- Water and soft drinks throughout
- National Saudi Guide
- Tour Manager
- All tips for hotel portering, housekeeping, waiters, drivers and 4x4 drivers, reception, restaurant meals

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED:

- International Airfare
- International arrival and departure transfers (please bring *two* \$5 US notes) per person to tip the drivers.
- Saudi Visa fee
- Tips to the Saudi National guide or for any additional local guide are not included. Your tour manager will advise on this.
- *Abayas* and headscarves—to be purchased if you wish to travel to Kingdom. These are available online, and we highly recommended you do this. When an opportunity presents itself in the Kingdom and you wish to purchase an additional abaya with embroidery, there will be an opportunity.
- Travel insurance, which is *mandatory*



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ABOUT THE EXPERT

BRID BEELER



Born in Kinsale, Ireland, **Brid Beeler** has traveled extensively—she has visited over 60 countries on six continents—and lived in Ireland, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Zimbabwe, Oman and Yemen. She first went to live in Saudi Arabia almost 30 years ago, which resulted in a love affair with its people, deserts, history, and culture that has endeared her to this nation ever since. She is a true pioneer of adventure travel tourism to Saudi Arabia, and one of the few modern day adventurers who has traveled extensively to every corner of the Kingdom. In doing so Brid has led three-week-long expeditions traversing its vast deserts and cities, camped with the Bedouin, tracked oryx and gazelle with rangers in Ar Rub Al Khali (the Empty Quarter), and followed in the footsteps of T. E. Lawrence along the old Hijaz Railway line. Brid's expertise has been called upon by numerous prestigious organizations, including the Smithsonian, UNICEF, the History Channel, Discovery Channel, and Mountain Travel Sobek.

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