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Petersen v. Boeing Co., No. 11-18075 archived on June 24, 2013



January 23, 2013

**COUNTRY DESCRIPTION:** Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled by a king chosen from and by members of the Al Saud family. The king rules through royal decrees issued in conjunction with the Council of Ministers, and with advice from the Consultative Council. The king appoints members of both councils. Islamic law is the basis of the authority of the monarchy and provides the foundation of the country's conservative customs and social practices. Saudi Arabia has a modern and well-developed infrastructure, and facilities for travelers are widely available. Read the Department of State's [Fact Sheet on Saudi Arabia](#) for additional information.

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**SMART TRAVELER ENROLLMENT PROGRAM (STEP) / EMBASSY LOCATION:** If

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you are going to live in or visit Saudi Arabia, please take the time to tell our Embassy or Consulate about your trip. If you enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), we will be able to keep you up to date with the latest safety and security announcements. Your enrollment can also help us reach your family and friends in case of emergency. Here is the link to the [Smart Traveler Enrollment page](#). If you do not have Internet access, you may enroll directly with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulates.

Local embassy information is available below and at the [Department of State's list of embassies and consulates](#).

#### [U.S. Embassy Riyadh](#)

Abdullah Ibn Hudhafah As Sahmi Street, Roundabout no. 9, Diplomatic Quarter, Riyadh

Telephone: (966) (1) 488-3800

Fax: (966) (1) 483-0773

Emergency after-hours telephone: (966) (1) 488-3800

#### [U.S. Consulate General Dhahran](#)

Between KFUPM and King Abdulaziz Airbase, Dhahran

Telephone: (966) (3) 330-3200

Fax: (966) (3) 330-6816

Emergency after-hours telephone: (966) (3) 330-3200

#### [U.S. Consulate General Jeddah](#)

Falasteen Street intersecting with Al-Andalus Street, Jeddah

Telephone: (966) (2) 667-0080

Fax: (966) (2) 669-3098

Emergency after-hours telephone: (966) (2) 667-0080

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**ENTRY / EXIT REQUIREMENTS FOR U.S. CITIZENS:** A passport valid for at least six months and a visa are required for entry. Visas are issued for business and work, to visit close relatives, and for transit and religious visits by Muslims. Business visas do not grant the applicant the right to work or to reside in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. All visas require a sponsor, can take several months to process, and must be obtained prior to arrival: visas are not available at airports, land borders or seaports. In May 2008, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed to issue five-year multiple-entry visas to U.S. visitors and students. All Saudi Embassies have the authority to issue the 5-year visas, but only the Saudi Embassy in Washington, D.C., and Consulates in the United States appear to do so with some consistency for business visas. Women visitors and residents must be met by their sponsor upon arrival. Women who are traveling alone and are not met by sponsors have experienced delays before being allowed to enter the country or to continue on other flights.

Travelers should carefully read and understand the limitations of their visas. Those persons planning to enter Saudi Arabia by land should be sure that their visa is not limited for entry via air. For example, some first-time travelers to Saudi Arabia who have flown into Bahrain and expected to drive across the Causeway have been turned back when it was discovered that their Saudi visas were annotated "via air."

Women considering relocation to Saudi Arabia should be keenly aware that women and children who are considered members of a Saudi household (including adult U.S.-citizen women married to Saudi men, adult U.S.-citizen women who are the unmarried daughters of Saudi fathers, children born to Saudi fathers, and U.S.-citizen boys under the age of 21 who are the sons of Saudi fathers) require the permission of the Saudi male head of their household to leave the Kingdom. Married women require their husband's permission to depart the country, while unmarried women and children require the permission of their father or male guardian. The U.S. Embassy can intercede with the Saudi government to request exit permission for an adult U.S. woman (wife or daughter of a Saudi citizen), but there is no guarantee of success, or even of a timely response. Mothers are not able to obtain permission for the departure of minor children without their father's permission.

A Saudi man who wishes to marry a foreign woman is required by law to seek the

permission of Saudi authorities. Since February 20, 2008, a regulation exists requiring Saudi men to sign a document giving irrevocable permission to their foreign wife and the children born of their union to travel in and out of the country without restrictions. In practice, authorities rarely require this document and it is not retroactive when signed. Even with such documentation, the foreign spouse and their children may still have difficulty leaving Saudi Arabia freely. Also, if a couple consisting of a foreigner and a Saudi living in Saudi Arabia divorce, the foreign parent cannot under any circumstances leave the country with the children born of their union even if he or she is granted custody rights.

Visitors who overstay their visit in the Kingdom are subject to a fine of 10,000 Saudi Riyals (or \$2,667) and incarceration pending deportation proceedings. You should request clarification from Saudi immigration authorities upon arrival as to your permitted length of stay. A common mistake among visitors is confusing the validity of their Saudi visa with the permitted length of stay in the Kingdom. Dates are calculated in accordance with the Hijri calendar. The U.S. Mission in Saudi Arabia has received several reports of U.S. citizens fined for inadvertently overstaying their permitted time in the Kingdom. It can take several weeks to resolve such an error with Saudi immigration authorities. You may now check your permitted length of stay online at the [Visa Validity Service website](#) by typing in your passport number and Saudi visa number.

Foreigners holding Saudi work and/or residency permits require an exit visa to depart Saudi Arabia. Persons involved in business or labor disputes or employment dismissal disputes are generally not granted an exit visa prior to court resolution or abandonment of the case. Such cases may take many months to resolve. Saudi sponsors have substantial leverage in the negotiations and may block departure or bar future employment in the country.

Visitors on a single-entry or multiple-entry visa do not need an exit permit. Residents in Saudi Arabia who are departing the country must obtain an exit permit from the Saudi Ministry of Interior through their sponsor and an exit/reentry permit if they intend to return to Saudi Arabia. The Saudi sponsor's approval is required for exit/reentry and final exit permits. All travelers to and from the Kingdom carrying cash amounts, transferable monetary instruments, or precious metals exceeding 100,000 Saudi Riyals (or \$16,000) are required to declare them to Saudi Customs. Customs forms are available at all Saudi ports or downloadable from the [Saudi Arabian Customs Office website](#). Failure to declare or provide accurate information can lead to prosecution, legal penalties, and confiscation.

Visitors to Saudi Arabia should obtain a meningitis vaccination prior to arrival. Hajj and Umrah pilgrims should check vaccination requirements at the [Saudi Ministry of Health website](#). To obtain work and residence permits foreigners are required to obtain a medical report or physical examination confirming that they are free from contagious diseases, including HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis. Any worker testing positive for HIV/AIDS will not be allowed to work in the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia has not imposed HIV/AIDS travel restrictions on other categories of travelers. Please inquire directly with the [Embassy of Saudi Arabia](#) before you travel.

**Note for Dual Nationals:** Several U.S. citizens of Saudi descent have encountered difficulty leaving the Kingdom after entering on a Saudi Laissez Passer rather than a Saudi or U.S. passport. If a U.S. citizen has a claim to Saudi citizenship, Saudi missions abroad sometimes propose to issue a Laissez Passer to facilitate travel into the Kingdom. This only leads to difficulties when the traveler wishes to depart the Kingdom, however, as the traveler must first obtain a Saudi passport while in Saudi Arabia. U.S. citizens of Saudi descent should understand that Saudi nationality is not confirmed quickly or easily, and documentary requirements encountered in Saudi Arabia may differ from those described by Saudi missions abroad. On average, the processing time for a Saudi passport in these cases has been six to twelve months and often longer. Once you are in Saudi Arabia and have started the passport process, you cannot depart. Obtaining a U.S. passport at the Embassy will not help, as the Saudi government may refuse to recognize the validity of a U.S. passport presented by a Saudi passport applicant for travel out of Saudi Arabia, if it was not also used to enter Saudi Arabia. We strongly recommend that U.S. citizens who also have Saudi nationality enter Saudi Arabia with either a Saudi passport or U.S. passport and Saudi visa, and not with a Laissez Passer.

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For further information on entry/exit requirements, travelers may contact the following Saudi government offices in the United States:

Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 601 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20037, telephone (202) 342-3800.

Saudi Consulate General in Houston: 5718 Westheimer, Suite 1500, Houston, TX 77057, tel: (713) 785-5577.

Saudi Consulate General in Los Angeles: Sawtelle Courtyard Building, 2045 Sawtelle Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90025, tel: (310) 479-6000.

Saudi Consulate General in New York: 866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 480, New York, NY 10017, tel: (212) 752-2740.

Visit the [Embassy of Saudi Arabia website](#) for the most current visa information.

Information about [dual nationality](#) or the [prevention of international child abduction](#) can be found on our website. For further information about customs regulations, please read our [Customs Information page](#).

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**THREATS TO SAFETY AND SECURITY:** Significant enhancements in the capacity and capability of Saudi security and intelligence forces have greatly improved the security environment, but in its most recent Travel Warning for [Saudi Arabia](#), the Department of State urges U.S. citizens to consider carefully the risks of traveling to Saudi Arabia.

While there has been a continued improvement in the security climate in Saudi Arabia, it is important to note that security threats remain due to the continued presence of terrorist groups -- some affiliated with al-Qaida -- that may target Western interests, housing compounds, hotels, shopping areas, and other facilities where Westerners congregate. These terrorist groups may employ a wide variety of tactics and also may target Saudi government facilities and economic/commercial targets within the Kingdom.

If you choose to visit or live in Saudi Arabia, you are strongly urged to avoid staying in hotels or housing compounds that do not appear to apply stringent security measures. However, please note that the U.S. Embassy cannot intervene to help resolve personal housing problems. You should remain aware of your surroundings when visiting commercial establishments frequented by Westerners. While crime is comparatively low, there are still risks to Westerners visiting the Kingdom. To the extent possible, maintain a low profile, vary times and routes of travel, and exercise caution while driving; incidents of road rage have occurred.

Ensure that your travel documents and visas are current and valid and secured in a safe place. Carry a photocopy of your travel documents in lieu of the originals. On occasion, the U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Saudi Arabia may restrict travel of U.S. officials or suspend public services for security reasons. Whenever threat information is specific, credible, and non-counterable, it will be made available to the U.S. public. In those instances, the Embassy and Consulates will keep the local U.S. citizen community apprised through the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) and make every effort to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens. [Messages to U.S. citizens](#) in Saudi Arabia are available at the U.S. Embassy Riyadh website.

The United States Maritime Administration (MARAD) has advised that elevated regional tensions have increased the risk of maritime attacks on vessels operating in the Gulf of Oman, North Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and the Bab el Mandeb regions.

MARAD recommends that vessels at anchor, operating in restricted maneuvering environments, or at slow speeds remain especially vigilant, and report suspicious activity. U.S.-flagged vessels that observe suspicious activity in the area are advised to report it, as well as any hostile action to the U.S. Fifth Fleet's "battlewatch captain" at 973-1785-3879. All suspicious activities and events are also to be reported to the U.S. Coast Guard National Response Center at: 1-800-424-8802, or 1202-267-2675, or TDD 202-267-4477. The complete advisory is available on the MARAD website at [www.MARAD.DOT.gov](http://www.MARAD.DOT.gov).

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Stay up to date by:

- Bookmarking our [Bureau of Consular Affairs website](#), which contains the current [Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts](#) as well as the [Worldwide Caution](#).
- Downloading our free Smart Traveler App available through [iTunes](#) and the [Android market](#) to have travel information at your fingertips. .
- Following us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).
- Calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free within the United States and Canada, or 1-202-501-4444 from other countries.

Taking some time before travel to consider your personal security –Here are some useful tips for [traveling safely abroad](#).

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**CRIME:** Crime in Saudi Arabia has steadily increased over recent years, but remains at levels below most major metropolitan areas in the United States. Visitors should take precautions to reduce their risk of becoming victims of crime. Individuals should be aware of their surroundings, keep valuables out of sight and secure, and travel with a companion, if possible. Private Saudi citizens who perceive that a foreigner is not observing conservative standards of conduct have been known to harass, pursue, or assault that person. The U.S. Embassy in Riyadh cautions U.S. citizens that Saudi Arabian police have detained potential witnesses to crimes without charges or access to legal counsel, and with limited or delayed consular access, during the investigative stage of criminal cases, which can take months. On occasion, Saudi authorities have temporarily confiscated the personal effects of detained potential witnesses. Even when released from detention, witnesses to criminal incidents may be prohibited from leaving the country until investigation of the incident is complete.

During 2011-12, the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh received several reports of carjacking incidents in Riyadh and throughout the Kingdom. These incidents involved multiple criminals who, in some instances, used force or a display of force. In other incidents, the criminals created a diversion such as a minor traffic accident or some other ruse to coax the driver out of the car. In the few cases involving Westerners, it appears that they were targeted because of the make of their car rather than the fact that they were Westerners. As in the United States, most vehicles are stolen for parts. If you are a victim of such an attack, please see the [Victims of Crime](#) section below for guidance on reporting the incident to the authorities.

Do not buy counterfeit and pirated goods, even if they are widely available. Not only are the bootlegs illegal in the United States, you may be breaking local law too.

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**VICTIMS OF CRIME:** If you or someone you know becomes the victim of a crime abroad, you should contact the local police and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. We can:

Replace a stolen passport.

Help you find appropriate medical care if you are the victim of violent crimes such as assault or rape.

Put you in contact with the appropriate police authorities, and if you want us to, contact family members or friends.

Help you understand the local criminal justice process and direct you to local attorneys, although it is important to remember that local authorities are responsible for investigating and prosecuting the crime.

The local equivalent to the "911" emergency line for police in Saudi Arabia is 999.

Please see our [information on victims of crime](#), including possible victim compensation programs in the United States.

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**CRIMINAL PENALTIES:** While in Saudi Arabia, you are subject to its laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those in the United States and may not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for

similar offenses. To visit incarcerated individuals, the Saudi Government requires diplomatic missions to request visits – including to police stations -- via formal diplomatic channels, which often causes delays.

Persons violating Saudi Arabian laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, imprisoned, or even executed. Suspects may be detained without charges or legal counsel, and with limited access to a consular officer, for months during the investigative stage of criminal cases. Penalties for the import, manufacture, possession, and consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs in Saudi Arabia are severe. Convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences, heavy fines, public floggings, and/or deportation. The penalty for drug trafficking in Saudi Arabia is death, and Saudi officials make no exceptions. Customs inspections at ports of entry are thorough. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates General have no standing in Saudi courts to obtain leniency for a U.S. citizen convicted of alcohol or drug offenses. Engaging in sexual conduct with children or using or disseminating child pornography in a foreign country is a [crime](#), prosecutable in the United States.

Saudi authorities do not permit criticism of Islam or the royal family. The government prohibits the public practice of religions other than Islam. Non-Muslims suspected of violating these restrictions have been jailed.

While some countries will automatically notify the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate if a U.S. citizen is detained or arrested in a foreign country, that might not always be the case. To ensure that the United States is aware of your circumstances, request that the police and prison officials notify the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate as soon as you are arrested or detained in Saudi Arabia. In the case of dual nationals the Saudi Government may recognize only the nationality of the document used to enter the Kingdom. While staff at the U.S. Embassy and Consulates General will make every effort to visit incarcerated U.S. citizens, they may experience delays in obtaining permission from the Saudi authorities for the visit.

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**SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:** Residents working in Saudi Arabia generally must surrender their passports to their sponsor while in the Kingdom. The sponsor (normally the employer) obtains work and residence permits for the employee and for any family members. Family members of workers are not required by law to surrender their passports, though some do. Residents carry a Saudi residence permit (Iqama) for identification in place of their passports. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates General in Saudi Arabia cannot sponsor private U.S. citizens for Saudi visas.

A married woman should be aware that she must have her husband's permission for her and their children to depart Saudi Arabia. This is true even if the woman and/or her children are U.S. citizens and even if her husband does not have Saudi nationality. The U.S. Embassy can intercede with the Saudi government to request exit visas for adult U.S. women, but there is no guarantee that visas will be issued, and obtaining an exit visa without the male guardian's consent takes many months, if it can be obtained at all. The U.S. Embassy cannot obtain exit visas for the departure of minor children without their father's permission (See Entry/Exit Requirements section above).

The Saudi government does not recognize dual nationality. Saudi authorities have confiscated the U.S. passports of U.S. citizens and U.S.-Saudi dual nationals when they have applied for Saudi citizenship or a Saudi passport. This does not constitute loss of U.S. citizenship, but should be reported to the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh or the Consulates General in Jeddah or Dhahran. In the case of dual nationals, the Saudi Government may recognize only the nationality of the document used to enter the Kingdom. For additional information, please refer to the Bureau of Consular Affairs [dual nationality](#) flyer.

Saudi customs authorities enforce strict regulations concerning the importation of such banned items as alcohol, weapons, and any item that is held to be contrary to the tenets of Islam, such as pork and pornography. Imported and domestic audiovisual media and reading matter are censored.

Saudi customs and postal officials broadly define what is contrary to Islam and

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therefore prohibited. Christmas decorations, fashion magazines, and "suggestive" videos may be confiscated and the owner subject to penalties and fines. Electronic devices may be subject to inspection upon entry or exit. Please see our [Customs Information](#).

**Importing Animals:** All dogs, regardless of breed, may enter Saudi Arabia if their importation documents describe them as "guard dogs" or "hunting dogs." Cats and dogs entering Saudi Arabia require a Veterinary Health Certificate and a dated letter from the veterinary private practitioner addressed to the Director of Customs, Saudi Arabia. Both documents must be authenticated by the [Department of Agriculture Veterinary Service Office](#) and the [State Department's Authentications Office](#) and attested by the [Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia](#). The certificate must indicate that the animal was examined and is free from disease, and confirm that rabies and other vaccines are current. Information on the name, breed, sex, color, and age of the animal must also be stated. Birds generally require a prior import permit issued by the Saudi National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD). However, birds coming from the United States and transiting a third country are not permitted entry in the Kingdom due to the lack of quarantine facilities and a virus-related import ban on all birds.

**Employment and Business Contracts:** The Arabic text of a contract governs employment and business arrangements under Saudi law. Before signing a contract, U.S. companies should obtain an independent translation to ensure a full understanding of the contract's terms, limits, and agreements. No U.S. citizen should come to work in Saudi Arabia or make a business arrangement without having read and understood the full written contract. Verbal assurances or side letters are not binding under Saudi law. In the event of any contract dispute, Saudi authorities refer to the contract.

Since the Saudi sponsor generally holds the employee's passport and controls the issuance of exit permits, U.S. citizens cannot leave Saudi Arabia in the event of a labor or business dispute. A U.S. citizen who breaks an employment or business contract may have to pay substantial penalties before being allowed to leave. To change employers within the Kingdom, Saudi Arabia requires the written permission of the original sponsoring employer, which is discretionary. Saudi courts take seriously their responsibility to adjudicate disputes. This process, which is performed in accordance with Saudi law and customs, should not be entered into without an Arabic interpreter, generally takes several months, and may require hiring legal counsel.

Persons involved in legal cases are not permitted to leave the Kingdom until the case has been resolved or abandoned. The U.S. Embassy and U.S. Consulates General cannot adjudicate labor or business disputes or provide translation or legal services. U.S. consular officers can provide lists of local attorneys to help U.S. citizens settle business disputes, but ultimate responsibility for the resolution of disputes through the Saudi legal system lies with the parties involved. For additional information on Saudi labor law, please refer to the [Ministry of Labor's information](#) on related regulations.

**Teaching English in Saudi Arabia:** English teachers comprise a large and growing segment of the U.S. expatriate population in Saudi Arabia. In the past year, several teachers have complained about rapid dismissals and restrictions on their movement. Employers of English teachers frequently issue short-term, single-entry work visas that coincide with a 90-day "probation" window, during which time the employee or employer can freely end the working relationship. Many teachers facing dismissal have claimed they were unaware of a 90-day probationary period and felt that their contracts were not honored. Because foreign employees reside in Saudi Arabia under the sponsorship of their employer, they must leave the country soon after dismissal or face deportation proceedings. For this reason, and because individuals on a visit visa lack the same rights as a permanent resident in Saudi Arabia, dismissed employees have little, if any, recourse or grounds for appeal. It is important for prospective teachers to consider these factors prior to relocating to Saudi Arabia and to be aware of the type of visa they were issued. Further information can be found in our [Guide to Teaching English in Saudi Arabia](#).

**Standards of Conduct and Religious Police:** Islam is the official religion of the country and pervades all aspects of life in Saudi Arabia. Public display of non-Islamic religious articles such as crosses and Bibles is not permitted. Non-Muslims

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are forbidden to travel to Makkah (Mecca) and Medina, the cities where two of Islam's holiest mosques are located. Norms for public behavior in Saudi Arabia are extremely conservative, and the Commission on Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV), the religious police (referred to colloquially as the Mutawwa or Al-Hay'a), are charged with enforcing these standards on behalf of the CPVPV. Mutawwa are required to carry special identification and usually are accompanied by uniformed police; however, in some cases they have detained persons without police presence. The Muttawa have accosted or arrested foreigners, including U.S. citizens, for improper dress or other alleged infractions, such as consumption of alcohol or association by a female with a male to whom she is not related. Mutawwa who are accompanied by a uniformed police officer have the power to take individuals to police or Mutawwa headquarters. If a uniformed police officer is present, individuals must (if requested) hand over his or her iqama or other identification to the police officer. While most incidents have resulted only in inconvenience or embarrassment, the potential exists for an individual to be arrested, physically harmed or deported. U.S. citizens who are involved in an incident with the Mutawwa should report the incident to the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh or the U.S. Consulates General in Jeddah or Dhahran.

In most areas of Saudi Arabia, and particularly in Riyadh and the central part of the Kingdom, women wear a full-length black covering known as an Abaya, and cover their heads. Women who choose not to conform to this dress code face a risk of confrontation by Mutawwa and possible detention/arrest. Men should not wear shorts in public or go without a shirt.

Many areas of life in Saudi Arabia are segregated by sex to ensure that unrelated men and women have no possibility of mingling (a punishable crime). Some Mutawwa try to enforce this normally by asking for proof that a couple is married or related. Women who are arrested for socializing with a man who is not a relative may be charged with prostitution. Some restaurants, particularly fast-food outlets, have refused to serve women who are not accompanied by a close male relative. In addition, some restaurants or cafes do not have a "family section" in which women are permitted to eat. These restrictions are not always posted. This is more common in Riyadh and the more conservative central Nejd region.

Dancing, playing music, and showing movies in public are forbidden.

**Special Concerns for LGBT Travelers:** Consensual same-sex sexual relations are criminalized in Saudi Arabia. Penalties include fines, jail time, or death. For further information on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender travel, please read our [Information for LGBT Travelers](#) page.

**The Hajj and Umrah:** Please review the Department of State's [Hajj Fact Sheet](#). Muslims from the United States who plan to participate in the annual Hajj or seasonal Umrah pilgrimages to the holy cities of Makkah (Mecca) and Madinah should pay close attention to the following:

For those interested in performing Hajj visits, all travel plans must be made only through a Saudi government-approved travel agent in order to obtain entry, accommodation, and transportation in Saudi Arabia during the Hajj season. See the [Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia web site](#) and the [Saudi Hajj Ministry web site](#) for further information, including a list of approved travel agencies. Please carefully select a reputable travel agent and ensure that you are guaranteed accommodation and transportation, in addition to an entry visa. Pilgrims who arrive in Saudi Arabia with no accommodation or transportation arrangements may face difficulties with Saudi immigration. The Embassy and our Consulates General in Jeddah and Dhahran are unable to help in these situations.

Hajj and Umrah visas are required for all U.S. citizens, and are valid only for travel to the Holy Cities of Makkah (Mecca) and Medina. Onward travel to Riyadh or other Saudi Arabian cities is usually not permitted during the Hajj. During Umrah, visitors may obtain permission after arrangements have been made with a travel agency to travel to other cities in Saudi Arabia. Umrah visa holders may only visit Saudi Arabia outside of the annual Hajj period. Please note that the U.S. Embassy and Consulates General in Jeddah and Dhahran cannot assist in arranging such travel permissions within Saudi Arabia. Visitors who overstay their Hajj or Umrah visas are subject to a fine of 10,000 Saudi Riyals (or \$2,667) and incarceration pending deportation proceedings. All visitors should request clarification upon arrival as to the permitted length of stay.



Foreign Muslim residents of the Kingdom may perform the Hajj once every five years. Advance approval must be obtained from an immigration office with the approval of the Saudi sponsor. U.S. citizen residents of Saudi Arabia must travel with Saudi-government-approved sponsor groups to perform Hajj.

King Abdul Aziz International Airport in Jeddah is large and modern, with special terminal facilities to accommodate hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. However, due to the extremely large number of people arriving, waiting time at the airport upon arrival during the Hajj may be as long as 10 hours. Pilgrims should plan on a lengthy wait before leaving the airport on their way to Makkah or Medina. Travelers with only carry-on bags will find baggage transfer at the airport much easier than will those with checked baggage. Some Hajj pilgrims now fly directly to Medina and proceed to Makkah by road. There is no airport in Makkah.

Before leaving home, travelers should make at least two copies of their U.S. passports, including the pages stamped with Saudi visas. One copy should be left with someone at home and one taken with the traveler and kept in a secure location when possible.

Tour group organizers require Hajj visitors to turn their passports over upon arrival in the Kingdom, and return them only immediately prior to departure while at the airport. This is a Hajj Ministry-mandated practice for all Hajj pilgrims, and it has proved effective in nearly eliminating the problem of lost and stolen passports. Upon arrival, all pilgrims are issued an identification card and wristband that they must carry at all times. Umrah visitors do not receive an identification card or wristband.

Hajj and Umrah pilgrims have reported thefts (including of passports) at the pilgrimage sites, and therefore a money belt or pouch is a recommended means to carry valuables. Upon arrival it is possible to buy what is known as a "Hajj belt," which is somewhat larger than U.S. equivalents. Pilgrims should bring sufficient funds to cover any unforeseen emergencies. If pilgrims need to purchase Saudi Riyals, there are exchange and ATM facilities available in the airports and in all major cities of Saudi Arabia.

The Hajj has been an attractive target for defrauding unsuspecting tourists. Travelers should be aware and vigilant of unscrupulous tour operators who defraud tourists, leaving them with unpaid bills, and hoteliers who demand the payment of exorbitant "hidden charges" for the return of passports. Pilgrims are urged to deal only with licensed and established tour operators. In addition, experienced personnel are available from the Saudi government's Ministry of Hajj in the Holy Cities area during the Hajj season.

Communications facilities to contact family in the United States are available in all parts of Saudi Arabia. Internet cafés are available in all major cities. Before arriving in Saudi Arabia for Hajj or Umrah, establish a communication routine for family and friends with whom you wish to keep in contact.

Travelers should expect crowded conditions during the Hajj. Historically, temperatures in Makkah have ranged between 64 and 108 degrees Fahrenheit. There are many facilities providing water, public accommodations, and other amenities. In case of emergency, Hajj pilgrims should first contact the National Experimental Establishment for Pilgrims from America, Australia, Europe and Turkey at: 966- 02-542-7003; 966-50-560-8150; Fax:966-2- 542 0992; Website: <http://www.teaa.com.sa/>(only in Arabic) Street Address: Al-Nuzha District, Main Street, Makkah and then the Health Affairs Office at: 966-2-530-8812; and Office of Lost Pilgrims at: 966-2-530-8813, and then contact the U.S. Consulate General in Jeddah at: 966-02-667-0080.

**Accessibility:** While in Saudi Arabia, individuals with disabilities may find accessibility and accommodation very different from what is generally found in the United States.

The Basic Law does not prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities and there is no legislation mandating public accessibility. Newer commercial and government buildings, however, often include such access. The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

According to the Ministry of Social Affairs, there are numerous government-

sponsored centers for people with disabilities, such as the Noor Institute for the Blind, the Amal Institute for the Deaf, and social rehabilitation and welfare centers for the elderly. Note that Saudi Arabia has extremely limited infrastructure to care for those with mental disabilities. Royal decrees in the past have encouraged institutions and individuals to contribute to charitable activities to assist persons with disabilities.

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**MEDICAL FACILITIES AND HEALTH INFORMATION:** You can find detailed information on vaccinations and other health precautions on the [CDC website](#). For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the [World Health Organization \(WHO\) website](#). The WHO website also contains additional health information for travelers, including [detailed country-specific health information](#).

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**MEDICAL INSURANCE:** Private hospitals in Saudi Arabia require cash payment or evidence of insurance prior to treatment/admittance. Public hospitals are not available for expatriates' routine treatment. Do not assume your insurance will go with you when you travel; find out BEFORE you leave whether or not your medical insurance will cover you overseas. You need to ask your insurance company two questions:

Does my policy apply when I'm out of the United States?

Will it cover emergencies like a trip to a foreign hospital or a medical evacuation?

Your regular insurance may not cover doctors' and hospital visits in other countries. If your policy doesn't go with you when you travel, it's a very good idea to take out another one for your trip. For more information, please see our [medical insurance overseas page](#).

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**TRAFFIC SAFETY AND ROAD CONDITIONS:** While in Saudi Arabia, you will encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. The information below concerning Saudi Arabia is provided for general reference only and may not necessarily apply to all locations and circumstances.

Saudi Arabia recently activated an automatic traffic control and management system called "Saher" to improve traffic safety in major cities. The system is a network of digital cameras linked to the National Information Center of the Ministry of Interior to monitor traffic accidents and violations.

Residents should update their personal details through one of the methods available at the following link to receive SMS notifications once a traffic ticket is issued. Delay in payment of any ticket might result in doubling of the ticket amount: <http://www.saher.gov.sa/default.aspx>. Travelers will need to pay any fines issued through this system before leaving the country; this may be possible at the airport but only during regular Saudi office hours.

Temporary male visitors may drive on their U.S. driver's license. Foreign men employed in Saudi Arabia must obtain a local driver's license from the Department of Traffic Police. Women are not allowed to drive or ride bicycles on public roads. Article no. 42/3 of the Saudi Traffic Law states that a valid foreign or international driver's license can be used for either a year or until the expiration date, whichever is closer.

According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) 2009 Global Status Report on Road Safety, Saudi Arabia has one of the world's highest traffic accident rates. The General Directorate of Traffic reported 544,179 traffic accidents during 2011, or the rate of 1537 per day, resulting in approximately 19 fatalities daily. Driving habits are generally poor, and accidents involving vehicles driven by minors are not uncommon. The main causes for accidents are speeding, unauthorized passing, and running red lights. In the event of a traffic accident resulting in personal injury, everyone involved (if not seriously injured) may be taken to the local police station. Drivers are likely to be held for several days until responsibility is determined and any reparations paid. In many cases, all drivers involved in an accident are held in custody regardless of fault. U.S. citizens involved in a serious

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accident resulting in injury or death should immediately contact their sponsor and the U.S. Embassy or nearest U.S. Consulate.

Please refer to our [Road Safety](#) page for more information. Visit the website of [Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities](#) for further information. Contact information for the [Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities](#) is: Kindi Center, D.Q., P.O. Box 66680, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 11586, telephone: 966-92000756.

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**AVIATION SAFETY OVERSIGHT:** The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the Government of Saudi Arabia's Civil Aviation Authority as being in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of Saudi Arabia's air carrier operations. Further information may be found on the [FAA safety assessment page](#).

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**CHILDREN'S ISSUES:** Please see our Office of Children's Issues web pages on [inter-country adoption](#) and [international parental child abduction](#).

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\* \* \*

This replaces the Country Specific Information for Saudi Arabia dated July 5, 2012, to update the section on Traffic Safety and Road Conditions.

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