

# HARVARD

ALUMNI TRAVELS



## SAUDI ARABIA: FROM ANCIENT TRADE ROUTES TO CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY OCT 14–26, 2023 PROGRAM SCHEDULE

B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, R=Reception, D=Dinner

### SATURDAY, OCT 14 DEPART FROM HOME CITY

Depart your home city on independently arranged flights to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

### SUNDAY, OCT 15 ARRIVE JEDDAH

Upon arrival in Jeddah, transfer to the newly renovated *Jeddah Sheraton Hotel*.

Jeddah was once a port living mostly off the pilgrim trade of Mecca. It was always an important stop on the caravan route from Yemen to Egypt and Syria, and a local center of pilgrimage for the tribes from the surrounding deserts. The spread of Islam made the holy city a religious center for people from all over the world, many of whom arrived by sea, and Islam soon transformed Jeddah into a thriving metropolis. Over the years, it became one of the Arab world's most important commercial centers, although it remains the principal port of entry for more than two million pilgrims who make their way to the holy city of Mecca each year.

Overnight: *Jeddah Sheraton Hotel*

### MONDAY, OCT 16 JEDDAH

After breakfast attend an orientation to meet your fellow travelers and discuss the overall program.

Depart the hotel for the Al Tayebat Museum, part of the International Tayebat City of

Science and Knowledge, a three-hundred-year-old building that was originally the palace of Sheikh Abdul Rauf Khalil. This privately owned collection has displays ranging from pre-Islamic artifacts, exquisite Islamic manuscripts, old coins, and weaponry to stunning furniture, pottery, traditional Saudi dress, and replicas of home interiors from every region.

Meet with Mohammad Alrace, who runs the Furqan Educational group, that teaches youth about the Koran and uses the text of the Koran as a teaching tool for the Arabic language. They work closely with many national interfaith organizations for the betterment of society and have offices all over the world.

Enjoy lunch with Sami Nawar, director emeritus of Al Balad, Jeddah's famous historic district, at his home. Mr. Nawar then accompanies you on an exploration of Jeddah's historical core, now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Wander through a world of coral-block mosques, old merchants' houses, souks that still teem with cart men hawking pyramids of golden dates from Qassim province, oranges from Egypt and bark from the incense trees of Yemen.

Stop in to meet with Fatima Mazeh, the program manager at Art Jammel, a major educational program dedicated to teaching students traditional building techniques.

Later, head to the dunes just outside of Jeddah to learn about the Bedouin lifestyle. Although the kingdom's Bedouin have forsaken a desert lifestyle, their tribal identity remains a lingering influence in modern Saudi life.

Return to the hotel after dinner.

Overnight: *Jeddah Sheraton Hotel* (B, L, D)

## TUESDAY, OCT 17

### ABHA

Enjoy a morning excursion to the Red Sea, which contains one of the greatest coral reefs in the world with over 200 species of coral and numerous species of fish found nowhere else in the world. The coral reefs of Saudi Arabia are among the most beautiful and extensive anywhere.

Have lunch at Medd Café in Jeddah, located on the city's corniche. The business is setup on a cooperative business model and the five partners are connoisseurs specializing in various aspects of coffee making. Medd Café was amongst the first places in Jeddah to embrace men and women working together.

Depart Jeddah on a late afternoon flight to Abha, the capital of Asir province, which enjoys a beautiful setting in the Hejaz mountains.

Upon arrival transfer to the *Abha Palace* for dinner and overnight.

Overnight at *Abha Palace* (B, L, D)

## WEDNESDAY, OCT 18

### ABHA

Spend the day exploring the area including the spectacular Asir National Park with its striking mountain scenery. The park covers 450,000 hectares of land from the Red Sea coast to the desert areas east of the mountains. From the viewing point on Mount Soodah you can see traces of the ancient caravan routes weaving through mountains heavily traveled in the days of camels and horse.

Stop at the deserted village of Habalah, which is one of the most dramatic sites in Asir National Park. It was settled about 350 years ago by Kahtani tribes who were said to have been fleeing from the Ottomans. The village appears to literally hang from a steep cliff with the only access being by a long rope. It is still possible to see the iron posts to which these ropes were tied to lower people and goods to the village.

Meet with the Flower Men of Tihama, the descendants of ancient tribes who have lived completely isolated for centuries.

End the day with a visit to the new Al Muftaha Village comprised of the King Fahd Cultural Center, Archaeological Centre, Media Centre, and Al Muftaha Theatre. It was the first project in Saudi Arabia that embraced traditional crafts, photography, and fine arts.

In the evening, drive to the home of Ali Mughawi for a private dinner. Mr. Mughawi is a self-taught man, a writer, and scholar versed in the region's history. His wife, Fatima, is an artist who has learned the traditional motifs women traditionally drew on the interior walls of the homes in Asir.

Overnight at *Abha Palace* (B, L, D)

## THURSDAY, OCT 19

### AL ULA

Fly through Riyadh to Al Ula, home to Saudi Arabia's most spectacular archaeological site at Mada'in Salah.

Mada'in Salah was built by the Nabataeans around 50 BC when they extended their influence south from Petra in Jordan. Mada'in Saleh, roughly halfway between Petra and Mecca, was the Nabatean's second city. At its greatest extent the Nabataean empire stretched north to Damascus, south to the borders of Yemen, and west to Gaza.

Upon arrival in Al Ula transfer to one of the permanent tented camps.

Meet with staff from the Royal Commission for Al-Ula (RCU) led by Dr. Rebecca Foote (Master of Arts '91, PhD '99) a former senior researcher at the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University, and currently Director of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Research at the RCU. The RCU was established in 2017 to preserve and develop the 2,000-year-old archeological and historical site of Al-Ula.

Overnight at *Al Ula permanent tented camp* (B, L, D)

## **FRIDAY, OCT 20**

### **AL ULA**

Have the full day to explore Mada'in Salah and the area around it.

Begin at the northern end of the site at the Hejaz railway station (of Lawrence of Arabia fame), which is now a visitors' center.

The Nabataeans were a group of nomadic origins from northwest Arabia. Their sites are dotted all over northwest Arabia, Jordan, Sinai, and the Negev but it is at Mada'in Salah that the most intact tombs can be seen. There will be a chance to explore some of the 132 tombs here, including the largest, Qasr Farid.

After lunch return to Al Ula to explore the old town, which stands on the site of the biblical city of Dedan but was founded with the ancient North Arabian Kingdom of Lihyan, which ruled from the 5th to 2nd century BC. Once a bustling civilization, these 800 tightly packed mudbrick and stone houses—parts of which are more than 2,000 years old—are now abandoned ruins, decaying in the hot desert sun.

The walled city of Al 'Ula was founded in 6th century BC, an oasis in the desert valley, with fertile soil and plenty of water. It was located along "Incense Road," the network of routes that facilitated the trading of spices, silk, and other luxury items through Arabia, Egypt, and India.

The abandoned city has religious significance as well; Muslims believe Muhammad passed through Al 'Ula—located about 380 kilometers (240 miles) north of the holy city of Medina—in 630 AD on his way to the Battle of Tabuk between the Arabs and the Byzantines.

After being reconstructed in the 13th century, old town Al 'Ula was inhabited until modern times. When the cramped space and poor infrastructure didn't meet 20th century standards, it was abandoned by residents for a new town nearby, called Al- 'Ula. The last family left town in 1983, and the last mosque service was held two years later, in 1985.

Return to the camp for dinner and overnight.

Overnight at *Al Ula permanent tented camp* (B, L, D)

## **SATURDAY, OCT 21**

### **RIYADH**

Rise early this morning to drive to Tabuk Province, which has some of the richest history of the whole Arabian Peninsula. In 2019 a new state-of-the art museum was opened in the old Hejaz Railway Station. The elegant building has the architecture of the early twentieth and twenty-first centuries and, once inside, the museum offers a journey from prehistory to modern times and even into the future, with the "mega-city" of NEOM that will soon rise in Tabuk Province.

After lunch at a local restaurant, transfer to the airport for a mid-afternoon flight to Riyadh, the kingdom's capital city.

When Ibn Saud captured it in 1902, Riyadh scarcely resembled a nation's capital. The thick mud walls of the old city were not even half a mile long and the enclosed winding, narrow alleys were barely wide enough for two people to walk side by side. However, with the discovery of oil, Riyadh has boomed so that the city is almost unrecognizable from even 25 years ago. Between 1987 and 1992 the population grew an astounding 49%. The name ar-Riyadh means "the gardens" and refers to the lush date-palm plantations along the Wadi Hanifa on the western side of the city. The metropolis is the capital not only of the kingdom but also of Riyadh governorate, a huge area which includes much of central Saudi Arabia.

En route to the hotel stop at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, which was established to continue the mission of the late King Faisal bin Abdulaziz (1906-1975) in transmitting knowledge between the Kingdom and the rest of the world. The Center serves as a platform for research bringing together researchers and institutions to preserve, publish, and produce scholastic work. The Center aims to expand the scope of existing literature and research to bring to the forefront of scholarly discussions the contributions and roles of Muslim societies in the humanities, the social sciences, literature, and the arts—historically, as well as today.

Drive a few minutes to the *Hyatt Regency Riyadh Olaya or Similar*.

Dinner this evening at the hotel.

Overnight at *Hyatt Regency Riyadh Olaya or Similar* (B, L, D)

## SUNDAY, OCT 22 RIYADH

Meet this morning with a Saudi journalist and correspondent for the Financial Times.

Continue to the National Museum with its sweeping, curved wall and Najd architectural design. Eight galleries here outline Saudi Arabia's history including towering models of the Nabataean temples of Madain Saleh and a gallery introducing the Prophet Mohammed and the spread of Islam. This extensive museum includes a village street that winds through buildings that replicate the unique architecture of houses in the Kingdom's various regions.

Close by is the Al Masmak Fort, the oldest complete building in Riyadh. Continue to the city's main square and the newly built Al Imam Turki bin Abdullah Mosque, which accommodated 17,000 worshippers (it will not be possible to go inside).

Continue past the Dira clock tower to the old souk where shops have exquisite examples of painted doors and extravagantly decorated chests. Nearby is the Bedouin souk where old women covered in black, their faces veiled, sell jewelry, nuts, and other items. Enjoy lunch in this historical area.

Take a mid-afternoon drive to the archaeological site of Diriyah whose zenith as capital of most of Arabia came during the reign of Saud the Great who ruled here from 1802–1814. What remains of Diriyah today is remarkably extensive and evocative of traditional settled life in the region.

Explore the Palace of Salwa, which has the highest remaining walls in Diriyah. The remnants of the three floored structure show the marvelous architecture of stones and clay. The Saad bin Saud Palace is an excellent example of the Najd traditional architecture, which uses sun-dried brick for walls and tamarisk beams for roofs.

Dinner tonight is at the wonderful, newly opened Takyia restaurant run by three women with the goal of serving traditional Saudi cuisine with a modern twist.

Overnight at *Hyatt Regency Riyadh Olaya or Similar* (B, L, D)

## MONDAY, OCT 23 RIYADH

Begin the day by meeting with the Founder and Executive Manager of SHEWORKS, the first licensed business incubator for women in Saudi Arabia. SHEWORKS is fully dedicated to empowering women and helping realize the Kingdom's vision 2030 for startups, freelancers, or professional experienced pioneers. They provide all the necessary tools to help women succeed and meet their goals. The co-working space was founded in 2014 and has expanded since then to include a creative Lab and business incubator/accelerator programs for women.

After lunch meet with staff at the NEOM head office. In 2017, Crown Prince and First Deputy Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman announced plans for the development of NEOM, which will be built on desert at the eastern part of the country bordering the Red Sea. It will cover an area three times the size of New York City and more than \$500 billion has already been pledged in support of the project, which will be developed by Klaus Kleinfeld, former chairman and CEO of industrial manufacturing company Siemens AG, and Alcoa.

End the day meeting with the two founders of Global Think Group who, after the announcement of NEOM and Vision 2030 understood the need for creating specialized research.

Dinner tonight is at your own leisure.

Overnight at *Hyatt Regency Riyadh Olaya or Similar* (B, L, D)

## TUESDAY, OCT 24

### DAMMAM / ALKHOBAR

This morning, take a train heading north-east today to Al Hofuf, capital of the Al Hasa oasis and one of the great oases of the eastern Province and the first UNESCO-listed oasis.

As home to over 3 million palm trees, the ruins of several abandoned cities, over 150 sparkling springs, serene green expanses, and so much more, the Al-Hasa Oasis, which is 60 miles inland from the Arabian Gulf, is the largest oasis in the world. Recognizing its unique heritage, UNESCO inscribed Al-Hasa as Arabia's fifth World Heritage site in 2018, joining Mada'in Salah, historic Jeddah, Diriyah and the rock art of Ha'il on the list.

After lunch at a private farm, drive just under two hours to Al Khobar. Upon arrival transfer to the *Le Meridien Al Khobar* for dinner and overnight.

Overnight at *Le Meridien Al Khobar* (B, L, D)

as the emerging field of alternative energy sources.

After lunch at the center, attend a meeting at Saudi Aramco, the current iteration of the petroleum enterprise that began in the 1920s with Bahrain Petroleum Co., a subsidiary of Standard Oil of California—when the Saudi government gave the company a concession to explore for oil in Saudi Arabia.

Conclude your journey with a farewell dinner this evening at the hotel.

Overnight at *Le Meridien Al Khobar* (B, L, D)

## THURSDAY, OCT 26

### DEPARTURES

Transfer to the airport for return flights.  
(B)

## WEDNESDAY, OCT 25

### DAMMAM / AL KHOBAR

After breakfast drive north to Qatif and on to Tarut Island, which is now joined to Qatif by a causeway. Although not much remains of Tarut's far-flung links with the Sumerian city states and the Indus Valley civilization there is still an old fort which stands in the middle of the modern village. The fort is large and well-preserved and there will be time to wander through the site.

Drive to Dhahran and visit the recently opened King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, an arts center developed by Saudi Aramco incorporating a museum, library, cinema, auditorium, and lecture halls. It is known locally as *Ithra*, an Arabic word meaning enrichment.

Enjoy the Energy Exhibit, which provides a hands-on, immersive experience of the world of petroleum, its sciences, energy, and technology. Visitors follow oil's journey in Saudi Arabia from the ground to consumers while exploring the latest innovations, as well