



Saudi Arabia 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Cyber; Religious Terrorism; Rebellions; Human Trafficking; Anti-American sentiment; Faith-based Organization; Religious Violence; Extreme heat/drought; Economic Espionage; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Drug Trafficking; Kidnapping

Near East > Saudi Arabia; Near East > Saudi Arabia > Dhahran; Near East > Saudi Arabia > Jeddah; Near East > Saudi Arabia > Riyadh

3/8/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Low

Cybersecurity Issues

In 2012, Saudi Aramco fell victim to one of the first, well-documented cyber attacks to take place in the Gulf. Based on open media reports and various cyber security experts, Aramco's computer network was compromised by someone who had access to the network. A virus, likely via a USB memory stick, was inserted into the network. Aramco and the government have not disclosed who was responsible for the attack. However, shortly thereafter, another very similar one was launched against RasGas, the Qatari natural gas company.

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The Saudi government, through the Ministry of Interior (MOI), entered into several technology and training agreements with the U.S. government. Since the inception of this relationship, a collaborative environment has developed between U.S. cyber security experts and MOI representatives.

U.S. Embassy's cyber security environment is continually being assessed. Guidance to U.S. businesses and their interests is to practice cyber vigilance.

Other Areas of Concern

Terrorist operations and ongoing regional conflicts remain a concern for travelers. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continues to demonstrate not only the ability to inspire individuals to conduct attacks, but also the operational control to plan and conduct attacks inside Saudi Arabia. Multiple attacks since January 2015 have been linked to ISIL or inspired by ISIL rhetoric. There were four ISIL-linked suicide bombings at mosques: two Shia mosques in Qatif and Dammam during May 2015, an MOI Special Security Forces Sunni mosque in Abha in August 2015, and a Shia mosque in Najran City in September 2015.

Other ISIL-linked attacks on foreigners and Shia in Qatif and al Hasa prompted the U.S. Embassy to place those areas off limits to official U.S. government travel.

While ISIL has dominated the headlines, al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has not relinquished its goal of attacking the Saudi government and Western entities inside Saudi

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Arabia and remains an active concern.

Ongoing regional conflicts are also an issue for travelers, as instability in Iraq and the war in Yemen continue to produce attacks on both the northern and southern borders. Saudi Arabia continued military strikes into Yemen in 2016 in an attempt to stem the advance of the Houthi militia, as they attempt to extend their control over Yemen. Yemen's Houthi militia launched multiple SCUD missiles into Saudi Arabia, although missiles either did not hit their intended target or were intercepted by the military. U.S. government personnel are restricted from traveling within 50 miles of the border with Yemen, which includes Jizan and Najran, without permission from Embassy security officials due to the violence that has spilled into the area. This volatile situation, coupled with increased illegal immigration and smuggling from the southern border, provides a very real threat to Saudi Arabia.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Physical road conditions in larger cities are generally fair to good; in contrast, roads in rural areas are less developed. Road surfaces may range from pavement to sand and gravel, without road markings, lighting and/or reflectors. Drivers will sometimes drive with no lights, in the wrong direction, and in reverse, even on well-traveled highways. The U.S. Mission to Saudi Arabia strongly discourages individuals from driving at night outside of the greater Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dhahran areas due to poor lighting, unmarked construction areas, livestock crossing highways, and erratic drivers.

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Authorities have taken steps to curb unruly motorists through the implementation of the SAHER Road Safety Program in 2009 that utilizes speed and red light cameras in conjunction with a nationwide, computerized database of registered vehicle owners. This program has led to a tangible improvement in driving conduct, though lack of strict enforcement still contributes to reckless driving. Traffic police have yet to move toward actively enforcing the traffic management laws.

Traffic accidents are common and often result in serious injuries/fatalities. According to the World Health Organization, Saudi Arabia has one of the highest death rates caused by traffic accidents. In 2015, more than 8,000 people died, 35,000 people were injured, and 17,000 left with permanent injuries directly from traffic accidents. In the event of a traffic accident resulting in personal injuries, all persons involved may be taken to the local police station. Drivers may be detained for several days until culpability is determined and appropriate reparations are paid. Those involved in an accident should immediately contact their sponsor for assistance if necessary.

Short-term male visitors may drive using their U.S. driver's license or international driver's license. However, U.S. citizens employed in Saudi Arabia must obtain a Saudi driver's license from the Traffic Department. Authorities will not recognize foreign licenses held by women, nor will they issue driver's licenses to women.

Check the interior and exterior of your vehicle for things out of the ordinary prior to getting into your car. Avoid choke points while traveling. Keep your doors and windows locked.

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Public Transportation Conditions

Public transportation is growing, and several projects are in the planning phases. The Riyadh Metro, slated for completion in 2020, is the world's largest infrastructure project. Construction has begun on a mass transit subway system in Riyadh, but it is not yet in service.

Travel by air and rail is accessible and relatively safe. Security is considered good at the main airports and train stations for both passengers and cargo. In 2014, the Saudi Railways Company (SAR) announced a multi-billion dollar plan for rail infrastructure. The goal is to be the regional leader in cargo transportation, with special emphasis placed on creating a robust railway plan for cargo between Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dammam.

Large cities provide some bus service.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

Several international airports exist. Riyadh and Dammam have robust security in place; both airports have new biometric systems for immigration processing. Jeddah is in the process of building a new international airport designed to better handle the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca. The U.S. Transportation Security Agency assesses the Kingdom's international airports on a regular basis. Some lapses (inconsistent management of badges) have been identified.

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Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: High

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has become a potentially destabilizing factor that has direct implications for security in the Kingdom. ISIL has voiced openly its desire to take over the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). That threat, and its potential impact, on regional security will continually be assessed. Additionally, AQAP remains dedicated to attacking the Saudi government and Western interests in Saudi Arabia.

The government's capacity to combat trans-national and domestic terrorism has increased dramatically. The Saudis have undertaken several initiatives that have led to arrests, identification of smuggling routes, and interdiction of attempts by ISIL and others to cross the border illegally. The government continues to have a strong security force that has increased its capacity to respond quickly anywhere in the Kingdom.

KSA continues to struggle with illegal immigration and smuggling along its southern border with Yemen. Saudi border guards reportedly have stopped thousands of people from crossing the border illegally and have encountered an increased volume of firearms and ammunition. The government is working on new initiatives (fingerprinting passengers at airports,

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constructing a wall along the Saudi-Yemen border). The government has also increased its use of media to announce arrests and to request assistance from the populace to identify and locate terrorists. Significant events include:

ISIL issues “threats” via the Internet.

March 15-19: Consular services at the U.S. Embassy and Consulates were canceled due to heightened security concerns at U.S. diplomatic facilities. The government has since broadcast that it arrested numerous individuals involved in a plot to attack the U.S. Embassy.

April 2015: Saudi MOI arrests 93 ISIL operatives.

May-September 2015: Multiple ISIL suicide bombings on mosques, resulting in significant loss of life.

August 2015: Reports of military activity at/near the border with Yemen continued. Restrictions remain on travel for U.S. government employees within 50 miles of the Yemeni border, as well as the governorate of Al Hasa and the city of Qatif and its surrounding suburbs in the Eastern province.

September 2015: Authorities arrested two ISIL-inspired individuals in Riyadh who had turned their residence into a bomb-making factory.

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

Westerners -- particularly Americans -- remain targets of opportunity for terrorist groups and attacks inspired by terrorist rhetoric.

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Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

Security forces generally do not tolerate public demonstrations and move quickly to prevent them from forming or gathering momentum. Security forces have sufficient resources in terms of equipment and manpower to respond to any civil disturbance.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

The most significant religious/ethnic disturbances materialized during protests in the Eastern province (EP). The EP is home to the largest concentration of the Shia sect in the Kingdom. In January 2016, protests against the government's executions of a Shia cleric and three other Shia on incitement charges occurred in the predominantly Shia area of Qatif. Police have set up checkpoints in the EP, particularly around Qatif, where security forces continue to maintain a robust presence. Protests and sporadic violent confrontations between police and Shia youth occur intermittently.

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Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Extremely high summer temperatures and the pervasive dust present ongoing, but predictable, environmental hazards. Ensure adequate water is available and carefully plan all trips during the summer months to ensure access to water and emergency communication.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

One of Saudi Arabia's main concerns is access to fresh water. Saudi Arabia processes salt water from the Gulf into fresh water, transporting it through a pipeline to the interior. Riyadh only maintains a three-day supply of fresh water. As such, the water pipeline is a critical infrastructure concern.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

Both economic espionage and intellectual property rights (IPR) violations are prevalent. Copyright, trade secrets, and patent infringements in various industries and commodities remain a challenge. However, the government has improved protection and enforcement of IPR violations, leading to its removal from the U.S. Trade Representative's Special 301 Watch

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List in February 2010.

The Ministry of Culture and Information (MCI) launched an IPR National Awareness Campaign to encourage respect for IPR. In February 2012, the Board of Grievances (BOG) sentenced a Saudi national to 10 days in jail for IPR violations. The sentence is the first to impose criminal sanctions on an IPR violator. Enforcement of IPR continues to be a daunting task for officials, but they appear to be making some headway. In 2012, the MCI blocked 52 websites for copyright violations, and IPR inspections resulted in the BOG imposing 1.7 million SAR (\$453,333) in fines for violators. The MCI increased enforcement efforts with the hiring of inspectors. The GCC Trademark Law has been approved by the Supreme Council for the GCC countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) and became effective in December 2015; it represents significant advancement for IPR in Saudi Arabia.

Privacy Concerns

The government blocks access to some Internet websites, claiming that restrictions bar access to pornography. However, the government also blocks access to sites with religious and political material that the government considers offensive or sensitive. Customs officials routinely open mail and shipments to search for contraband, including material deemed pornographic or that appears to be non-Sunni Islamic religious material. Customs officials arbitrarily confiscate or censor materials, to include Christian bibles and religious videos.

Drug-related Crimes

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Drug use among Saudi youth is an increasing concern, and narcotics smuggling continues to be a challenge along the border areas. MOI officials have identified border security as an area of concern and are addressing the issue through additional training and physical barriers. Large drug seizures are commonly reported in the media. Punishment for drug smuggling is death, and according to media reporting, at least 63 people were executed in 2015 for drug trafficking.

Although violent street crime associated with narcotics trafficking is not prevalent, security officials have encountered armed resistance from traffickers.

Kidnapping Threat

The threat of kidnapping by terrorist groups continues despite the government's counter-terrorism efforts in recent years. Terrorist elements may resort to targeting individuals rather than carrying out large-scale attacks. U.S. citizens should exercise prudence and security awareness at all times.

Criminal kidnappings have occurred and are usually associated with other violent crimes.

Politically-motivated kidnappings are uncommon.

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The U.S. Embassy periodically processes requests for assistance from U.S. citizens with children abducted or wrongfully detained in KSA. The majority of cases involve one parent refusing to allow his/her child to return to the U.S. Saudi Arabia is not a party to the Hague Abduction Convention, and custody orders and judgments of foreign courts are not enforceable in KSA if they contradict or violate local laws and practices. In the event of marriage or divorce under Sharia law, parents do not share equal rights of custody to their children, and religious/citizenship status affects the court's judgment in custody cases.

Police Response

Police response times to emergencies vary due to lack of physical addresses and street names. Local residents have reported that the police response time averages about an hour; however, the police are particularly responsive to the needs of the diplomatic and international business communities. Law enforcement efforts include large numbers of high-profile uniformed and plain-clothes officers working both openly and covertly throughout communities.

Saudi law is based on the local interpretation of Sharia law (the religious law of Islam), which is influenced by local customs and practices. Persons violating the laws of Saudi Arabia, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, imprisoned, or even executed. Penalties for the import, manufacture, possession, and consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs are severe, and convicted offenders can expect jail sentences, fines, public flogging, deportation, or death. Customs inspections at ports of entry are thorough and effective in finding drug and alcohol violators.

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Saudi Arabia is patrolled by members of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV), whose members are commonly referred to as “Haia,” “Mutawa,” or the religious police. Religious police enforce strict standards of social behavior, to include closing commercial establishments during the five daily prayer observances, insisting upon compliance with strict norms of public dress, dispersing gatherings of women in public places designated for men, and preventing unaccompanied or single men from entering public places designated for families. These officers encourage people to go to prayer, ensure shops/restaurants are closed at prayer times, and intervene if they see any behavior they deem “un-Islamic.” The most common enforcement issues are people being in the presence of a person of the opposite sex who is not a family member and women who are not covering their hair, arms, or feet. Religious police frequently reproach females for failure to observe strict dress codes and arrest men and women found together who are not married or closely related. Incidents involving the religious police increase during Ramadan because many religious police believe they must increase assertion of their authority during the holy month.

Americans are subject to all local laws and do not have special rights or privileges. If accused (or arrested) for a crime, Americans will need to resolve the matter through the local legal system. Suspects may be detained for months without being charged, pending final disposition of a criminal case.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

While many members of the Haia are respectful and polite, the enforcement can be harassing or even violent. Visitors should listen to the officer and let him know the visitor understands why s/he was stopped in order to resolve the interaction peacefully and without confrontation.

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Americans who become victims of crime or who are detained by police are strongly encouraged to immediately contact the Embassy or nearest Consulate for assistance.

Crime Victim Assistance

The emergency number throughout KSA is 999.

Police/Security Agencies

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) is responsible for policing throughout the Kingdom. There are various units within the MOI that have oversight over different areas of policing, security, and enforcement.

Medical Emergencies

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

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Riyadh

King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center

Tel: (966) (11) 464-7272; Emergency Tel: (966) (11) 442-3838

Poison Control: (966) (11) 442-7604 (Sunday-Thursday)

With the reputation of being the premier hospital and referral center in Saudi Arabia, King Faisal Specialist Hospital specializes in treatment of serious life-threatening conditions (cardiac arrest, trauma, head injuries). This hospital does not provide medical services to expatriates. In an emergency, they will stabilize the individual and transfer him/her to a private medical facility.

Kingdom Hospital

P.O. Box: 84400, Riyadh, 11671

Tel (966) (11) 275-1111; Emergency Tel: dial ext. 1 or ext. 5301.

One of the newest facilities, Kingdom Hospital has a 24-hour emergency department best suited for non-life threatening medical conditions or injuries (broken bones, lacerations). Kingdom Hospital has evening private clinics.

King Abdulaziz National Guard Hospital

P.O. BOX 22490, Riyadh 11426

Tel: (966) (11) 252-0088; Emergency Tel: dial ext. 3332

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Poison Control (966) (11) 252-0088 ext. 2200 (24 hours per day/seven days per week)

Best hospital for mass casualties. This hospital has evening and daytime private clinics.

Dr. Sulaiman Al Habib Takhassusi Hospital

P.O. Box 2000, Riyadh 11393 KSA

Tel: (966) (11) 283-3333; Emergency number: (966) (11) 283-3500

This is one of the newest private healthcare facilities and offers multi-specialty medical services. It is located in Al Rahmaniah District, not far from the U.S. Embassy. The hospital has a 24/7 emergency department, which can provide intensive care services to pediatric and adult patients. It is also distinguished by having the largest private cardio-surgery unit in the Kingdom and can manage trauma cases.

King Khaled University Hospital, King Saud University

P.O. Box 7805, Riyadh 11472 KSA

Outpatient Specialized Polyclinic

Tel. #: (966) (11) 469-0077; Emergency hotline: (966) (11) 467-1079 / 469-9199

KKUH is one of the largest government medical school healthcare facilities. It has a 24-hour emergency department, which can accommodate intensive care for acute medical and surgical emergencies, although only on a short-term basis until the patient is stabilized and transferred to a private medical facility. This hospital is one of the few facilities in the Kingdom that has a burn unit. This hospital has an Outpatient Specialized Polyclinic (evening clinic) that can provide medical services to expatriates.

Specialized Medical Center

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P.O. Box 66548, Riyadh 11586 KSA

Tel: (966) (11) 434-3800; Emergency hotline: (966) (11) 434-3800 ext 1036

SMC is a private healthcare facility that offers primary care service. They have a 24-hour emergency department that can provide intensive care services to pediatric and adult patients.

Jeddah

International Medical Center in Jeddah

Tel: (966) (12) 650-9000 ext. 2735 or 1002

King Fahad Armed Forces Hospital

Tel: (966) (12) 669-2085

Good quality but some difficulty with access for expatriates due to security.

King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Jeddah

Tel: (966) (12) 667-7777 ext. 7340; Emergency Tel: (966) (12) 667-7777 ext. 5555

Eastern Province

Saad Specialist Hospital, Khobar

28th street, Khobar.

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Tel: (966) (13) 882-6666 / 882-8999

Saad Specialist Hospital is a 600-bed private hospital, which is in the process of expanding to 800-900 beds. It has been the primary hospital for use by U.S. citizens in the Dammam/Dhahran/al-Khobar area. It is about a 15-minute drive from the Dhahran Consulate. A MERC (Medical Emergency Response Center) was established and a cancer treatment facility is located next door. It has CT, MRI, and PET scan capabilities, and all the physicians are either U.S. or Canadian board certified.

Al-Mana Hospital, Al Khobar

Corniche Main Road, Behind Tamimi Market Cross 16/17

Tel: (966) (13) 898-7000 / 864-5555

Emergency service facilities are available 24-hours per day/seven days per week. It is a 15-20 minute drive from the Dhahran Consulate.

Al-Mana Hospital Dammam

Ibn Khaldoun Street, Abdullah Fouad District

Tel: (966) (13) 826-2111

Emergency services available 24-hours per day/seven days per week. There are dental, EMS, lab, x-ray, MRI, and CT scans services available for outpatients and for emergencies at any time. It is a 20-minute drive from the Dhahran Consulate.

Al-Mauwasat Hospital, Khobar

Khobar, Dammam Highway, behind Ford Showroom Dammam, 71 Street

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Tel: (966) (13) 864-1960

It is a 350-bed hospital with EMS services available 24-hours per day/seven days per week. It has CT, MRI, and PET scan capability.

Dammam Central Hospital

King Saud Street, Cross Road.

Tel: (966) (13) 842-7777

EMS services available 24 hours per day/seven days per week.

King Fahad Teaching Hospital

Akrabiah area next to Riyadh compound.

Tel: (966) (13) 898-4501 / 894 3600

EMS services available 24-hours per day/seven days per week.

Procure Hospital

Opposite Dhahran Mall, Khobar.

Tel: (966) (13) 895-5900

It is a newly built hospital; lab, x-ray, and CT scans available. EMS services available 24-hours per day/seven days per week.

Al Fakhry Hospital

Prince Bandar Street, Cross 1/2/3.

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Tel: (966) (13) 864-1960

It is a 250-bed hospital, with emergency services available 24-hours per day/seven days per week.

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

The King Faisal Hospital in Riyadh, opened in October 2009, offered Saudi Arabia's first helicopter medical evacuation service. Tel: (966) (11) 464-7272 ext. 33333 or 31448

SOS International: Tel: 0044-2080-762-8133

Air Response: Tel: 001-303-858-9967

Air Medical Services: Tel: 001-305-359-4730

Air Ambulance Network: Tel: 001-727-934-3999

Recommended Insurance Posture

The Embassy and Consulates recommend that travelers review medical insurance options prior to traveling to country.

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Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/saudi-arabia?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001.

OSAC Country Council Information

Saudi Arabia has three Country Council programs:

Riyadh OSAC Chair is Ron Hindmand (Tel: (966)11241-2800 ext. 1901; rhindmand@vinnellarabia.com).

Jeddah OSAC Chair is Ryan Corley (Tel: 012 691 5380 x2311; Cell +96650 508 35648; osac.jeddah@gmail.com).

Dhahran OSAC Chair is Hirath A. Ghori (Tel: (966) 500 658657; osac-ep@googlegroups.com).

To reach the OSAC Near East Team, email OSACNEA@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

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Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Riyadh is located at Collector Road M, Riyadh Diplomatic Quarter

Hours of Operation: 0800-1700, Sunday-Thursday

Embassy Contact Numbers

Tel: (966) (11) 488-3800

Fax: (966) (11) 483-0773

Website: <http://riyadh.usembassy.gov/>

Nearby Posts

Consulate Dhahran: <http://dhahran.usconsulate.gov/>

Consulate Jeddah: <http://jeddah.usconsulate.gov/>

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Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

People traveling to the Kingdom need to take precautions similar to those taken when visiting any country with large metropolitan areas. Visitors should also remain cognizant that Saudi Arabia remains a very conservative country, and understanding Saudi culture can assist visitors in blending in during their time in country.

Be observant; know what belongs and does not belong in your neighborhood or your surroundings. Do not lead surveillance to your residence or workplace and avoid setting patterns in your daily life. Carry fully-charged cellular telephones at all times. Be wary of diversions. Maintain a low personal profile by not doing anything that draws attention to yourself.

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