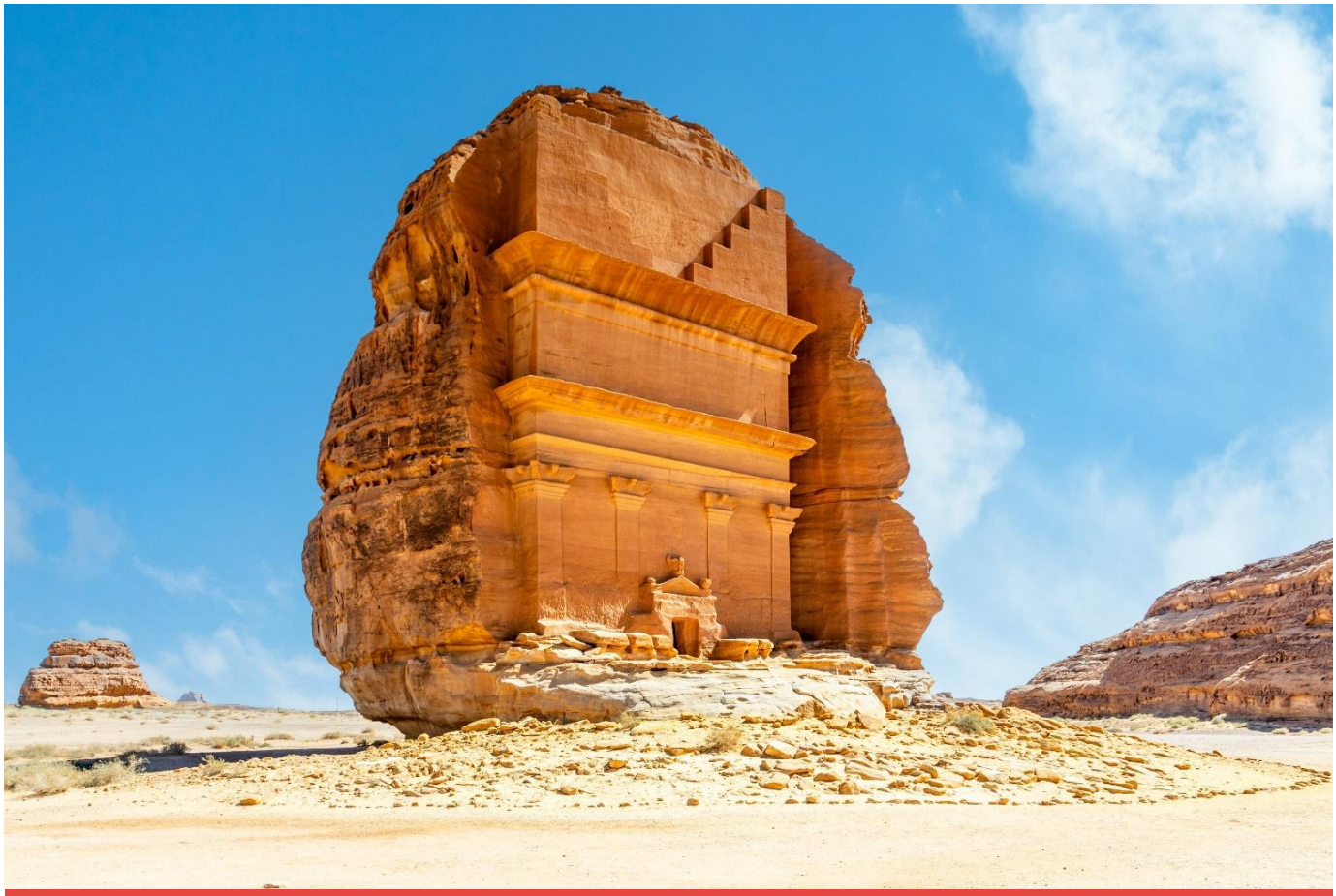


SECRETS OF SAUDI ARABIA

Classic Tour | 11 Days | Physical Level 1

Riyadh – Buraidah – Ha'il – AlUla – Medina – Haramain Railway - Jeddah

The winds of change are blowing through Saudi Arabia, which only recently opened to non-pilgrims. Discover ancient fortresses, camel markets and UNESCO World Heritage Sites in its vast deserts, then experience the cosmopolitan comforts of its cities and high-speed Haramain Railway bullet trains.

- Discover cosmopolitan Riyadh and bustling Jeddah
- See the once-forbidden holy city of Medina
- Explore the rock-cut tombs of Hegra
- Admire the natural beauty of Elephant Rock
- View Jubbah's UNESCO-listed rock art
- Take a bullet train from Medina to Jeddah
- Have dinner with a businesswoman and her family in Jeddah

TOUR MAP



CLASSIC TOUR INCLUSIONS:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English-speaking Local Guides
- Saudi Arabia e-visa fees for New Zealand passport holders
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Safe and secure with IATA

The only things you may have to pay for are personal expenditures e.g., drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, meals not included, early check in or late check out and other items not specified on the itinerary.

CLASSIC TOURS:

These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of Saudi Arabia on an excellent value group tour whilst travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully inclusive basis, so you'll travel with the assurance that all your arrangements are taken care of. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts and local guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

PHYSICAL LEVEL 1:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

'Secrets of Saudi Arabia' is rated as a **physical level 1** tour. A reasonable level of fitness is required, and you should expect to be on your feet for much of the day. You'll be getting on and off coaches, trains or boats and walking around the sights, often including steps, plus occasional longer walks.

- There will be sightseeing on foot for both short and extended periods of time, often on uneven surfaces.
- There will be some extended drives, especially from Jubbah to AlUla (5 hours) and AlUla to Medina (4 hours). Comfort breaks will be arranged.
- You will be required to get on and off trains without assistance.

Of course, our National Escorts and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

If you require any more information about the pace of our tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

JOINING YOUR TOUR:

The tour is 11 days in duration including international flights or 9 days in duration based on 'Land Only'.

Travellers booked on a 'Land Only' package, the price includes your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to our reservations team.

Join the tour on Day 2 in Riyadh and end the tour on Day 10 in Jeddah. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Days 1-2: Arrive Riyadh Meals: D

Fly to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's dynamic capital city. Transfer to the hotel ahead of this evening's welcome dinner.



Destination Information

Riyadh – The birthplace of modern Saudi Arabia, Riyadh and nearby Diriyah have always been the seat of power in this region. It is the largest city on the Arabian peninsula, with a population of 7 million. It is a fascinating, many-layered metropolis blending modernity and tradition; impressive skyscrapers grace the skyline, while historic sites like Diriyah offer a glimpse into the city's deep-rooted heritage.

Day 3: Riyadh & Diriyah Meals: B, L, D

Head to the outskirts of Riyadh to visit Diriyah, the original capital of the Saudi dynasty. Uncover the secrets of its UNESCO-listed At-Turaif district, known for its mesmerising maze of traditional Najdi mudbrick architecture. The citadel here was the centre of power for the House of Saud in the 18th and early 19th centuries; this emirate was the first unifying power in the Arabian Peninsula.



Return to Riyadh for lunch. Pay a visit to the National Museum to learn more about the rich tapestry of Saudi history before exploring the nineteenth-century Masmak Fort. Finally, explore the alleyways of the Souq Al-Zal, one of Riyadh's oldest traditional markets.

Destination Information

At-Turaif District, Diriyah – Dating back to the 15th century, At-Turaif in Diriyah served as the political and cultural heart of the first Saudi state, offering a fascinating glimpse into the nation's heritage. Its well-preserved Najdi architecture evokes the essence of a bygone era.

National Museum of Saudia Arabia – A captivating repository of the nation's history and cultural evolution. Architecturally stunning, the museum features state-of-the-art exhibits and artifacts spanning millennia of Arabian history.

Souq Al-Zal – This traditional souq offers a vibrant atmosphere and a kaleidoscope of goods, from handcrafted items to spices and textiles.

Day 4: Ushaiger Heritage Village Meals: B, L, D



Depart Riyadh and drive two hours north to the captivating Ushaiger Heritage Village, a labyrinth of charming side streets, palm groves and historic Najdi architecture that evoke the essence of old-world Saudi Arabia. Visitors can explore the interiors of these ancient homes.

Continue two hours to Buraidah and check in at your hotel.

Destination Information

Ushaiger Heritage Village – Bedouins first settled here some 1,500 years ago, when it was a popular stopping point for pilgrims travelling to Mecca. Now, the city is a living museum, with just a small, friendly community still resident here. Look out for the brightly painted doors and intriguing triangular windows, along with the beautiful white embellishments (shuraf) that top each building.

Day 5: Buraidah Camel Market & Ha'il Meals: B, L, D



Head to Buraidah to experience the hustle and bustle of the world's largest camel market – a truly immersive experience, where prized Arabian camels command astounding prices.

Continue to Ha'il, stopping en route to see the oasis city of Fayd, once an important stop on the Hajj route from Baghdad to Mecca. Admire Hutaymah Crater before checking in at your hotel in Ha'il.

Destination Information

Buraidah Camel Market – The world's largest camel market is a bustling spectacle of tradition and modern commerce. The market draws traders and enthusiasts in search of the finest camels. Amidst the lively auctions, visitors witness the timeless allure of camel trading, a deeply ingrained aspect of Saudi heritage.

Hutaymah Crater – This 600-metre-wide crater of volcanic origin makes for a fascinating photo opportunity and offers stunning views of the surrounding landscape.

Ha'il – Surrounded by desert landscapes, Ha'il is a blend of tradition and modernity. Renowned for historical sites like Qishlah Fortress and Ibrahim Palace, the city weaves together historic charm and contemporary development

Day 6: **Ha'il & Jubbah** Meals: B, L, D



Explore the historical treasures of Ha'il. Stop for a photo at the formidable Qishlah Fortress before driving through the red sands of the great Nafud Desert to visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Jubbah. Discover its rich variety of rock art dating back some ten thousand years, with petroglyphs depicting camels, archers, chariots, kings and more.

Enjoy a refreshing lunch beneath the date palm trees of a local farm before continuing to AlUla. Once sated, continue to your accommodation in AlUla, home for the next two nights. Please note that this drive takes approximately five hours, plus comfort breaks.

Today's sightseeing concludes with Elephant Rock where you'll sit back and enjoy the sight of Al Ula's most famous geological rock formation looming over you.

Please note the rock-art sites at Jubbah are spread out and require you to walk between them. Accessing some of the rock-art sites requires walking up as many as 70 steps via steel walkways and may be difficult for anyone with mobility challenges.

Destination Information

Qishlah Fortress – Built in the late 19th century, this imposing structure stands as a testament to the region's history.

The Nafud Desert – The Nafud is a huge desert in the northern part of the Arabian peninsula. Its brick-red sands have borne witness to ancient trade routes and nomadic migrations throughout history.

Jubbah – A captivating gallery of prehistoric petroglyphs, dating back thousands of years. These ancient carvings are a vivid tableau of the region's cultural and natural history, showing hunting scenes, wildlife and symbolic motifs.

Day 7: AlUla & Hegra Meals: B, L, D



Explore the wonders of AlUla, once a crossroads of ancient civilisations. The region offered rest for merchants on the historic caravan routes between Egypt and Arabia. Begin with an exploration of AlUla's atmospheric Old Town. Wander through its labyrinth of narrow streets, mudbrick houses, and imposing fort, and feel the vivid history of a once-thriving settlement along ancient incense routes.

Later, join a two-hour 'hop-on' coach tour of Hegra, formerly known as Madain Saleh. Founded by the Nabateans in the first century AD, Hegra was functionally the southern capital of the same nomads who built Petra in Jordan. Marvel at the grandeur of the site's rock-hewn tombs, dating back two thousand years. Dozens of well-preserved tombs stand amid the stunning desert landscape, carved into its dramatic cliffs and rock formations.

Please note: The Royal Commission restricts independent visits to the Hegra site. Touring here is strictly on a shared hop-on, hop-off coach basis, with rawis (storytellers) at each site.

Destination Information

AlUla – AlUla is a historic and enchanting oasis in northwestern Saudi Arabia, surrounded by impressive sandstone mountains. Rich in archaeological wonders, its ancient tombs, rock art and historic structure evoke a timeless allure.

Hegra (Madein Saleh) – This UNESCO-listed archaeological marvel is the Saudi answer to Petra. Established by the Nabateans in the first century, it was built to protect the Nabateans' long-distance caravans, which brought precious goods from southern Arabia to Petra in Jordan. It is famous for its beautiful tombs and monumental structures, carved into the rose-red cliffs.

Day 8: Medina & Bullet Train to Jeddah Meals: B, L, D



Spend the morning driving approximately 4 hours through a landscape of desert and mountains to reach Medina, the second holiest city in Islam. While non-Muslims cannot enter the mosques, visitors can now explore some of the previously forbidden central areas. See the battlefield site of Jabal Uhud and admire the façade of the mosque where Islam's Last Prophet, Muhammad, is buried.

Visit the attractive Ottoman railway station and see the Hijaz Railway memorabilia.

Finally, experience the sleek Haramain Railway. Board the bullet train from Medina to the vibrant city of Jeddah on the shores of the Red Sea. This modern, air-conditioned train travels at 186 mph, covering the 260 miles to Jeddah in less than two hours. Check in to your hotel in Jeddah before dinner.

Destination Information

Medina – As the second most sacred city in Islam after Mecca, Medina's very streets exude a spiritual ambience. Previously off-limits to non-Muslims, the heart of the city has now been opened up to all visitors, with the exclusion of the mosques themselves. Please note that conservative dress such as an abaya (cloak) is still required in Medina, including a hair covering for women.

Haramain High-Speed Railway – The high-speed railway was launched in 2018 to link Medina, Jeddah and Mecca. The modern, air-conditioned trains travel at an average speed of 186mph. Travellers are permitted one suitcase up to 66x55x35cm, plus one small bag. Travellers will need to pass through security before boarding.

Day 9: Jeddah

Meals: B, L, D



Known as 'the Bride of the Red Sea', the coastal city of Jeddah has been the port for Mecca for centuries. Begin at the House of Islamic Art, home to a vast collection of beautiful artistic pieces. Later, take a drive along the spectacular Corniche and admire the gleaming façade of the Floating Mosque, built on stilts over the waves of the Red Sea.

This afternoon, discover Jeddah's UNESCO-listed Old Quarter, Al Balad, home to ornate houses built of coral stone. Look out for the beautiful Roshan-style bay windows, overlaid with intricate wooden latticework.

Finally, settle down for a farewell dinner with a local host and enjoy an insight into modern family dynamics in Jeddah. Your host, a female entrepreneur, will be pleased to talk about her life as a Saudi businesswoman after dinner.

Destination Information

Jeddah – This ancient city was originally a trading port on the Red Sea, later serving as a gateway for pilgrims on their way to Mecca. It is a city of contrasts, fronted by a gleaming, manicured Corniche along with the charming historic quarter of Al Balad.

House of Islamic Art – This recently-opened museum is home to six halls, showcasing Islamic arts and crafts from a variety of countries. Exhibits range from elegant calligraphy and extravagant manuscripts to sumptuous textiles and ceramics.

Al Balad Quarter - Jeddah's Old Quarter, Al Balad, is another of Saudi Arabia's many UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It is celebrated for its coral-built homes, decorated with elaborate wooden balconies and intricate window covers. Its warren of atmospheric streets are a delight to explore on foot.

Days 10-11: Departure Meals: B

Transfer to the airport in accordance with the time of your flight home, arriving the following day. Should you wish, this tour can usually be combined with a departure of our popular *Journey through Jordan* tour - please ask your reservations consultant for details.

SAUDI ARABIA TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISAS:

New Zealand passport holders must obtain an e-Visa in advance to travel to Saudi Arabia. For Wendy Wu Tours group tours, the cost of the e-Visa is included and we will send you an application pack 6-10 weeks prior to departure.

Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back in New Zealand.

Please note the visa procedures and requirements may change at any time. These changes are often made by the relevant embassy or consulate; Wendy Wu Tours acts as a third party and has no influence on the process of a visa.

INSURANCE:

We strongly recommend that you take out a policy as soon as you pay your deposit. Wendy Wu Tours cannot in any way be made liable for any additional cost incurred by the customer on any tour due to the customer not having adequate travel insurance.

We also encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the original.

EATING IN SAUDI ARABIA:

Saudi Arabian cuisine is considered symbolic of its hospitality and plays an integral role in Saudi culture. Food is generous and may seem excessive; this generosity is a hallmark of Saudi culture.

Another keystone of Saudi hospitality is the serving of *gahwa*, or Arabic coffee, brewed with added spices such as cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, or saffron. It is usually served without sugar, but this can be added; milk and cream are not typical. Arabic coffee was added to UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2015.

Dishes in Saudi Arabia vary from region to region, but may include rice, chickpeas, lamb, or beef; typical spices include cinnamon, cumin, cardamom and star anise. Rice may often be topped with raisins or fried onions, or nuts. Foods such as tamiyah (falafel) and kibbeh (deep-fried croquettes made of ground meat and bulgur wheat) are popular meze or side dishes across the country.

Do be aware that **Islamic law forbids pork and alcohol, and these rules are strictly observed in Saudi Arabia**. Any meat served is required to be considered 'halal'; butchered in a specific manner and must be blessed before it can be eaten.

DEVELOPMENT IN SAUDI ARABIA:

All our suppliers meet local safety standards at a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday, so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your guide.

APPROPRIATE DRESS:

In Saudi Arabia, especially in religious sites, both men and women should dress in conservative, non-revealing clothing. Full-length trousers with a shirt or t-shirt for men; and trousers or skirts well below the knee with a top that covers the shoulders and upper arms for women. Women should also carry a 'modesty shawl' in their daypack – this could be a sarong or light scarf – which they can wear over their shoulders and heads to feel more comfortable while sightseeing at religious sites.

There is no legal requirement for women to wear an *abaya* – a long black cloak – although many choose to do so. When visiting religious sites in Medina and Jeddah, as well as the camel market in Buraydah, dress code is stricter – women are expected to wear a headscarf and a long skirt or loose long trousers that cover the legs, men must not wear shorts, and long sleeves are required for both men and women.

ACCOMMODATION:

Saudi Arabia has only recently opened its doors to general tourism. As such, there are limited hotel options in some areas, and you may find that some staff are newer to the industry than others. However, Saudi Arabia's reputation for hospitality is excellent.

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family-run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all typical amenities.

Hotels on our tours are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between New Zealand and the Middle East. All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort/Local Guide.

GUIDES:

Saudi Arabia is a large and varied country, and each area is best explored with a guide based locally for the most comprehensive knowledge and insights on local culture, history and customs. In order to comply with Saudi Ministry of Tourism guidelines, you will have a different local guide for each region visited on this tour. If you have travelled on a Wendy Wu tour before, this may differ from the National Escort arrangements you are used to, however please rest assured that this will not affect the overall tour itinerary.

TIPPING POLICY:

Tipping while on holiday is common in most parts of the world and Saudi Arabia is no exception. However, it is not always clear who it is appropriate to tip and how much. Furthermore, travellers may not have the right amounts of cash available at the right time. In order to avoid any inconvenience Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy where a stated amount is given to your national escort at the beginning of your tour and tips are disbursed to local guides and drivers throughout your tour. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the national escort.

If you are travelling in a smaller group with local guides only, then tipping is paid in each destination. To be fair to the guides we ask for slightly higher amounts per traveller with small groups.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy but we do recognize that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

TRANSPORT:

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. However, minibuses may be used for smaller groups (under 10 passengers). Roads in the Middle East have generally improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times.

National highway speed limits are slightly higher than in New Zealand.

Construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the itinerary are approximations only.

VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

Wendy Wu does not give specific health advice, but we do recommend you see your doctor at least six weeks prior to travel for advice and to allow time for any necessary vaccinations. Please remember to take your itinerary with you. Safe travel has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.safetravel.govt.nz

ITINERARY CHANGES:

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate; in these circumstances, we will make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE:

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.safetravel.govt.nz as in the event of an emergency, New Zealand Consular assistance will be more readily available.

Up until the day you travel, it is vital you keep up to date and familiarised with the entry requirements as these can change at short notice. You are personally responsible for completing any entry forms, conducting any covid tests (if necessary), etc and adhering to countries' specific entry requirements. You can also access the New Zealand Government's travel advisory service for up-to-date information about your destination on the same website.

AFTER YOUR BOOKING:

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive an email with your confirmation invoice, along with a link to our website where you can find your visa information (if applicable) and other important information. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2 weeks prior to departure.

Updated: November 2026