

Discover

Al Ahsa



Al Ahsa: A Pocket Guide

Saudi
Welcome
to Arabia

You've arrived!

We're so happy you made it to **Al Ahsa**, in Saudi's Eastern Province. Al Ahsa is full of wonder and adventure, and this guidebook was designed to help you **make the most of your time here**. Use it to **learn common expressions**, scope out upcoming events, **find important phone numbers** and so much more. As you flip through its pages, you'll discover food you'll want to try and learn about the region's diverse cultural offerings. You'll also find recommendations for indoor and outdoor activities in and around Al Ahsa and tips on where to shop. Finally, flip to the back of the book for a checklist of **must-see spots**, space for you to take notes and travel games for your children.

Your Saudi adventure begins now. Enjoy every magical moment of it. Happy travels.

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01

Useful
Information



Useful Information

What to Wear in Saudi

Traditional Saudi clothing is worn out of love and pride by locals. Traditionally, women wear an abaya (a long robe or cloak that covers the whole body) over their everyday clothing, and men wear a thobe (a long-sleeved, gownlike garment); however, not all Saudis wear traditional clothing all the time. As a tourist, you are not expected to wear the same attire as locals, or cover to the same extent, but it's highly recommended that you dress modestly. For example, loose-fitting clothing that covers the elbows and ankles is recommended for both men and women in public.

Numbers to Know

Before you dive into our guide of Jeddah, take note of these important numbers just in case you need any assistance along your way.

TRAVEL TIP

When visiting religious sites, women must cover their heads, so it's a good idea to bring a scarf with you.



EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Police: 911

Ambulance: 997

Civil Defense
(e.g. fire, natural disasters): 998

Traffic Accidents: 993

Highway Patrol: 996

Coast Guard: 994

Tourism Hotline: 930



Welcome to Al Ahsa!

Taking a trip to Al Ahsa in eastern Saudi means being transported to a lush green landscape a world away from undulating sand dunes and arid desert plains. Nestled between Riyadh and Dammam and stretching into the Empty Quarter, Al Ahsa (a UNESCO-listed site) is home to one of the world's largest natural oases. At the oasis, you'll find natural springs fringed by date palm groves, verdant farmland and some of the region's finest dates, as well as a string of stunning historical sites.



But first, a bit about the language: Arabic is the official language of Saudi Arabia and the primary language used in all dealings and public transactions. English serves as an informal second language and is spoken by much of Saudi's population. All road signs are bilingual, showing information in both Arabic and English.



TRAVEL TIP

Common Expressions

Salam Alaykum = Hello/Hi

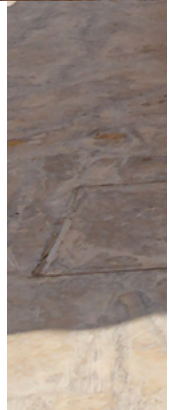
Min Fdlek = Please

Eewa = Yes

La = No

Shukran = Thank you

Afwan = You're welcome





02

Transportation

Transportation

Transportation in Al Ahsa

It's easy to get around this province.



TRAVEL TIP

Leaving the airport? Follow signs to pick up your rental car, look for a line of local taxis or order a car through a ride-sharing app.



Rental Cars: Choose from a host of car rental companies, including Sixt, IDrive and Budget. Pick up your car at the airport.



Ride-Sharing Apps: Preorder a car through apps such as Careem, Uber and Bolt. Each service averages about SAR30 (about **US\$8**) per 15-minute trip.



Taxis: Local taxis are easy to find – just look for a queue of green cars. The base fare is **SAR5** (about **US\$1.33**), and after that you'll pay SAR2 (about **US\$0.50**) per kilometer.



Where to Stay

Accommodations in Al Ahsa

While you probably already know where you're staying, you may find yourself wanting to spend one night at a hotel that's closer to an event you're attending, or perhaps you're looking for a less traditional lodging experience. If so, you're in luck. In Al Ahsa, there's no shortage of places to stay.



Hotels: Enjoy luxury and sweeping city or oasis views in the centrally located InterContinental Al Ahsa, old-world charm at Al Koot Heritage Hotel or modern suites at the Best Western Premier Al Ahsa Grand Hotel in downtown Hofuf.



Unique Stays: Want to stay somewhere truly original? Download Gathern to your mobile device (available in the App Store for iOS and Google Play for Android). Use this app to find unique vacation rentals, including chalets, farms and tents located in and around Al Ahsa.

TRAVEL TIP

Check out special hotel packages on visitsaudi.com





03

Restaurant
Intro

Food

Taste of Al Ahsa

Al Ahsa isn't that far from the Arabian Gulf, so you'll want to sample the seafood. But it also offers a wide range of traditional fare, international cuisine and, of course, dates. Here are some tasty suggestions:

Dar Basma

For an authentic dining experience, head to Dar Basma and indulge in traditional Saudi cuisine, including soups and jareesh, with a modern touch. Regional décor complements the regional fare.

AlKeet Restaurant

With a vast menu featuring Asian, Italian and Indian spins on the day's fresh catch, Alkeet's ambience is hip and refreshing. The restaurant is open for lunch at noon every day.

Maestro Pizza

This exceedingly family-friendly establishment features unique thin-crust pizzas, including the El Taco Chicken, which is topped with crumbled nachos. If that doesn't thrill the kids, order the Smiley Potatoes, which resemble tater tots, but in the shape of, you guessed it, a smiley face.

Bharat Indian Kitchen

Here, diners can savor classic Indian food — tandoori, curry, biryani and masala — with some distinctly Saudi touches. Case in point: the Awsal Tandoori, which is described as meat marinated with an Arabic spice mixture, according to the chef's special recipe, and grilled in the tandoori oven.

MUST TRY: DATES

Dates are an iconic symbol of Arabian hospitality. The nutritious fruit has been a staple of the Saudi diet since ancient times. You can find them stuffed with nuts or candied fruits, mashed and baked into pastries and cookies, and even incorporated into savory rice dishes; however, many Saudis say that eating dates unadorned remains the best way to appreciate them. Tip: Al Tayar Dates in Aljafir offers a vast array of date and date-and-nut combinations that you can try before you buy.





04

Outdoor
Activities

Outdoor Activities

Outdoor Activities in Al Ahsa

Get a breath of fresh air and enjoy some remarkable views while embarking on some of the best outdoor activities in and around Al Ahsa.

Al Ahsa Oasis

A desert oasis of shady palm groves and crystal-clear springs, Al Ahsa Oasis stands as a dazzling haven against the harsh and untamed plains of the Rub Al Khali (Empty Quarter). For millennia, Al Ahsa's fertile land made it a hub for traders and caravans crossing the region's ancient trade routes, forging links across the Arabian Peninsula and beyond, and providing a stopping place for early pilgrims en route to Makkah.

Today, a visit to Al Ahsa Oasis offers entry to a picturesque world of sweeping greenery, sand-toned hamlets, vibrant markets and evocative historical sites. Tour its network of artesian springs, wells and canals, which bubble water into the surrounding farmland, and take a dip in the refreshing waters. While you're in Al Ahsa Oasis, don't miss a chance to tour one of the area's many date farms and sample a khalasah date, which locals proudly proclaim is one of the world's best.

Al Ahsa's Natural Springs

You can't visit Al Ahsa without seeing some of the region's **100**-plus natural springs, which spill hot, warm and cold water across the land. The most popular sites include the bustling Al Jawhariah, Um Sab'ah and Al Khodoud springs, but be prepared for crowds. The mineral-laced springs are said to have therapeutic properties, so you will often spot people taking a restorative dip and even drinking from them.



Outdoor Attractions for the Whole Family

For family fun in and around Al Ahsa, check out these attractions.

Al Qarah

Al Qarah stands about **75** meters tall — and the view from the top of this mesa over the **30,000**-acre oasis below is not to be missed. The climb to the top is easy enough for beginners, but the craggy limestone peaks are also well worth scaling if you're a more advanced climber. Explore the network of caves that carve out snaking pathways flanked by soaring tawny walls, and pay a visit to the Land of Civilizations museum to learn about the area's millennia-old history.

Yellow Lake

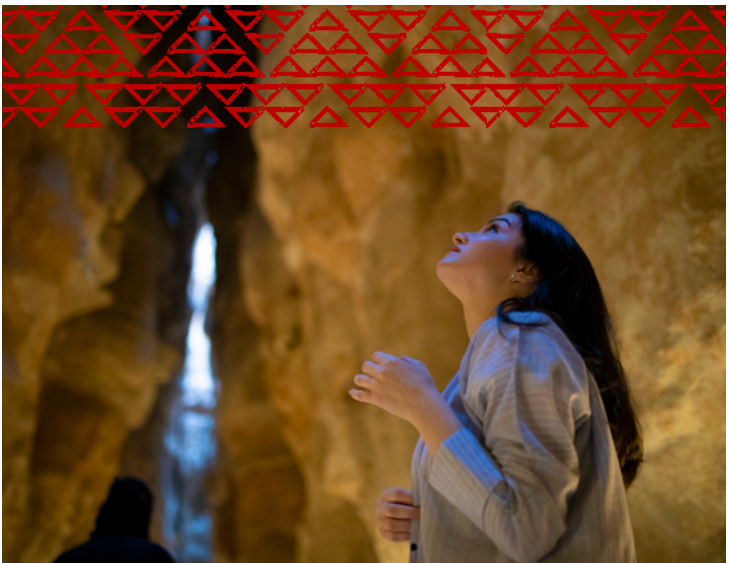
On the outskirts of Al Ahsa, this striking lake is hemmed in on all sides by lofty sand dunes and fringed by a thick ring of ferns. Stretching **12** kilometers across the dunes, the lake is a popular spot with families and the perfect place to enjoy a shoreside picnic, kayak the placid waters or go bird-watching (keep an eye out for moustached warblers, Kentish plovers and greater spotted eagles in the winter). Tip: There are no roads leading in, so an SUV is essential. For the best experience, hire a guide to get you there and show you the best off-road spots.

Uqair Beach

If you're seeking seaside activities, head to scenic Uqair Beach. On the water, you can jet ski, surf, sail and fish. On the shore, choose from activities such as dune bashing and camel riding.

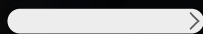
King Abdullah Environmental Park

One of the largest parks in the Eastern Province, this family-friendly spot features water fountain light shows, playgrounds, mazes, a theater, restaurants, green spaces and even a football stadium.



05

Indoor
Sites



Indoor Activities

Indoor Activities in and Around Al Ahsa

Al Ahsa is a vibrant land port and trade hub with a long and storied history. Once a vital stop for merchants and caravans journeying the region's ancient trade routes, it also provided a gateway for early pilgrims crossing the Arabian Peninsula into Makkah. The area's archaeological sites display traces of human settlements all the way back to the Neolithic period, making it a haven for history buffs. Here are our picks for some of the area's best cultural experiences.

Dougha Handmade Pottery Factory

For generations, local potters have been crafting works at the Dougha Handmade Pottery Factory, one of the oldest of its kind in the region. Try your hand at creating something of your own at the wheel, or pick up a souvenir to take home.

Ibrahim Palace

Ibrahim Palace was built almost **500** years ago and is considered an architectural masterpiece. With a mix of military and traditional Arabic design, it once served as an army base but today is open to visit. Inside, Al Qubba mosque is still in use, and the small museum has a collection of artifacts and photographs.

MUST-SEE: JAWATHA MOSQUE

Built by the indigenous Bani Abd Al Qays tribe, the Jawatha Mosque dates back to the seventh year of hegira and is thought to be the first developed in Saudi's Eastern Province. While most of the original building has been lost, a restoration process means that prayers can once again be held there five times a day. All visitors are welcome.



Indoor and Outdoor Activities

Fun for the Whole Family in and Around Al Ahsa.

From educational activities to athletic pursuits, there is plenty to do for family members young and old in Al Ahsa.

Al Ahsa Archaeological and Heritage Museum

Opened in **1983**, Al Ahsa Archaeological and Heritage Museum in Hofuf contains archaeological pieces and other treasures spanning Al Ahsa's long history. Each room is dedicated to a different era, from the Stone Age to the Dilmun period to the Babylonian and Assyrian eras. Historical items on display include **1,400** antiquities, photographs, coins, manuscripts and other documents, and the museum also hosts regular lectures. The first room visitors enter houses Stone Age items from **5000 B.C.** Visitors can also see a history of the geology of the region beginning millions of years ago, and learn about the commercial and agricultural importance of the area and of the wider Arabian Gulf.

Jawatha Park

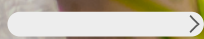
Located near the historical mosque of the same name, this green area features many facilities and recreational activities for all ages and covers about **2** million square meters. (One recent visitor to the park said that one day was not enough time to do everything there is to do in Jawatha Park.) The park's tranquil lake, which extends over **15** square meters, attracts many families. But the park also features many interactive and slightly less exposed activities, such as gliding, go-karting, paintball and mini golf. Children can enjoy the playgrounds dotted all over the grounds and the amusement park.





06

Shopping



Shopping

Shopping Adventures in Al Ahsa

Al Ahsa is a curious mix of old and new when it comes to shopping. The famed Souq Al Qaisariya should be your first stop for souvenirs — you're sure to find things for yourself and others. But on a very hot day, nothing beats the ease and convenience of a shopping mall, and Al Ahsa has no shortage of them.

Souq Al Qaisariya

Al Ahsa's colorful, bustling, open-air Souq Al Qaisariya originated around **1822**, though some historians argue the souq is actually **600** years old. Either way, it is one of the oldest markets in Saudi. Its mazelike alleyways are packed with more than **420** stores selling traditional handicrafts, spices, oils and local perfumes. Break up your browsing with a visit to the souq's tea and coffee shop to refuel on Arabic coffee and watch the merchants go about their day. Vendors sell everything from bright tea pots and chests to prayer beads, abayas, yashmak veils, incense and knives newly forged by blacksmiths. Popular food offerings include vacuum packs of dried fish and shrimp, often eaten with spicy dip.

Al Ahsa Mall

One of the several shopping malls in the area, Al Ahsa Mall contains a wide variety of shops and boutiques. Find clothing, accessories, shoes, cosmetics and much more from both local and international brands here. One well-known shop in the mall, Centrepoin, is described as the region's "largest fashion destination," offering clothing for men, women and children as well as home furnishings.

Al Othaim Mall

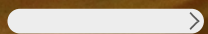
At **60,000** square meters, this mall is home to more than **300** shops, including family favorites Crocs and Skechers, in addition to a series of outstanding restaurants. (Note: The mall also offers free phone charging stations and wheelchairs.)



The background of the page is a close-up photograph of a plate of braised chicken feet. The chicken feet are cooked in a dark, glossy sauce and are piled on a light-colored plate. The lighting is warm and focused on the food. Overlaid on the top left is a teal brushstroke, and a larger orange brushstroke covers the top right and center, containing the text.

07

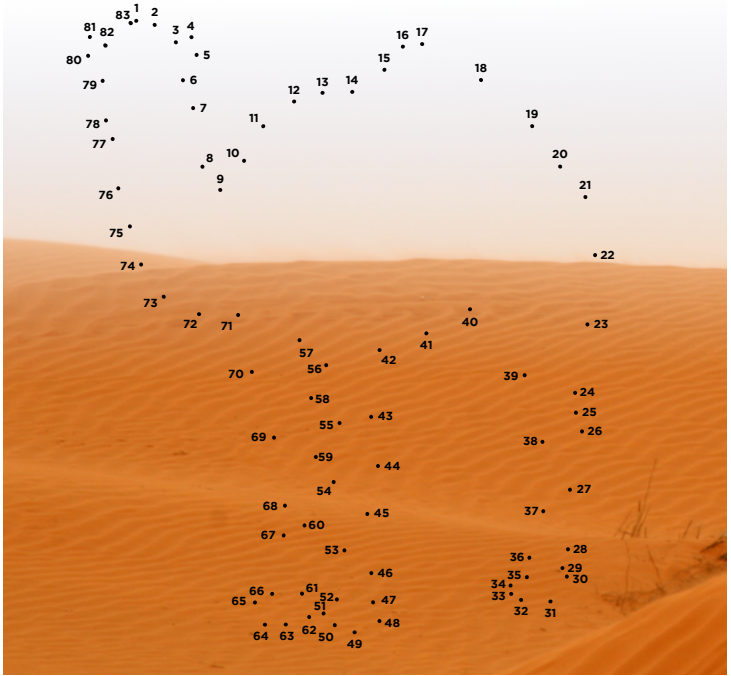
**Notes and
Checklist**



Kids Page

Travel Games for Your Adventure Connect The Dots for a SAUDI Surprise

Connect the dots for a picture of one of the region's most revered animals. Want more info about what your picture depicts? Turn this page upside down.



You drew a dromedary, also known as an Arabian camel, which has one hump and can reach up to **2** meters tall. For more than **3,000** years, camels have been a part of life on the peninsula.





Saudi

Welcome
to Arabia