

Discover

Asir



Asir: A Pocket Guide

Saudi
Welcome
to Arabia

You've arrived!

We're so happy you made it to **Asir**. Saudi is full of wonder and adventure, is here to help you make the most of your time in this beautiful mountainous region. Use it to learn common expressions, find out more about local activities, get important phone numbers and so much more. As you flip through its pages, you'll discover what locals wear, how they eat (and where) – plus many recommendations for activities that will take you all over Asir. Finally, flip to the back of the book for a calendar of events, kids' page and checklist of sites.

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

- Critical Information
- Transportation and Lodging
- Local Fare
- Activities
- Planning Toolkit

[Click here](#)

to download the Visit Saudi app

A young girl with dark hair is smiling and adjusting a yellow headscarf adorned with orange and yellow flowers. She is wearing a black long-sleeved blouse with intricate, colorful embroidery in red, green, and yellow. The background shows a blurred stone building with white window frames. A teal brushstroke is visible in the top left corner, and a green patterned brushstroke is behind the text.

01

Critical
Information

Critical Information

Welcome to Asir!

Smell the sharp, sweet scent of coniferous forests, gaze upon awe-inspiring views from atop mountains and feel the relief of cooler temperatures in Saudi's southwest province of Asir. The unspoiled wilderness throughout this mountainous region is begging to be explored, especially in Asir National Park, which is home to more than 300 bird species. Traverse the park's nature and camping trails by foot, or spend the night under the stars at one of its more than 60 campsites. As you continue your journey through Asir, immerse yourself in local culture at Al Muftaha art village, or shop in vibrant traditional markets in the capital city of Abha or its sister city, Khamis Mushait.



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

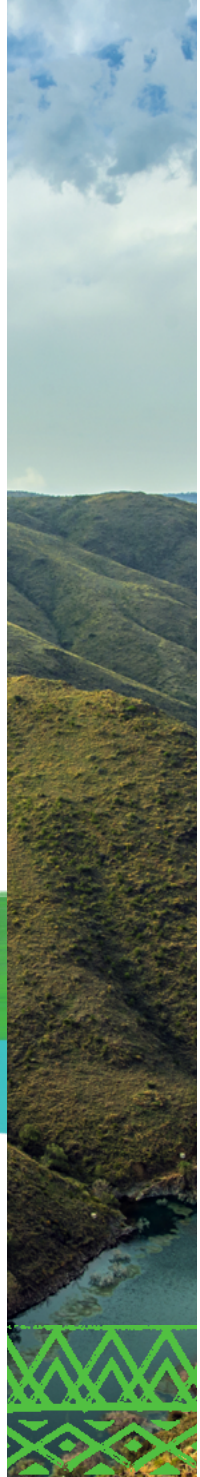
Min fdlek = Please

Eewa = Yes

La = No

Shukran = Thank you

Afwan = You're welcome



What to Wear in Saudi

As a tourist, you are not expected to wear the same attire as locals, or to cover up to the same extent, but it's highly recommended that you dress modestly.

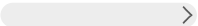
TRAVEL TIP

When visiting religious sites such as mosques, all visitors must remove their shoes and women must cover their hair. Consider packing a scarf for this purpose.



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



02

Transportation
and Lodging

Transportation and Lodging

Transportation in Asir

It's simple to get around the region.

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 Enterprise and Budget. Pick up your car at Abha International Airport or another location in the region.



Ride-Sharing Apps: Preorder a car through apps such as Careem, Uber or 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 to go anywhere in Abha.



Lodging

Accommodations in Asir

While you probably know where you're staying, you may find yourself wanting to sleep one night at a hotel that's closer to an activity you've booked, or perhaps you're looking for an unconventional lodging experience. If so, you're in luck. In Asir, there's no shortage of places to stay.



Hotels: Take your pick from the iconic Abha Palace Hotel (\$\$), with its glass pyramid, large spa and easy access to the city's cable cars; the tranquil Blue Inn (\$), which features a garden and terrace and is only about a kilometer from Al Muftaha Village ; or the business-friendly Azd Hotel (\$\$), located just one kilometer from Abha's city center.



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 a variety of unique vacation rentals like chalets, farms and tents located in and around Asir.

TRAVEL TIP

[Click here](#)

To check out special hotel packages on visitsaudi.com





03

**Local
Fare**

Typical Meals in Saudi

What You Can Expect to Eat in Asir and Elsewhere

Food is a focal point of travel, especially when you take time to get to know a place through its cuisine. When you travel to Saudi, your taste buds won't be disappointed at breakfast, lunch or dinner (or dessert). Here's what you might be served at each meal — no matter what corner of the country you find yourself in.

Breakfast

Kick off your day with a traditional Saudi breakfast. Opt for a classic, simple spread, such as flatbread, cheese and date jam, or try a savory shakshuka or sweet Saudi banana masoub (similar to a banana bread pudding).

Lunch

This is the main meal of the day in Saudi. Traditionally a cold, liquid yogurt called laban is consumed at lunch (especially in central Saudi). In addition to drinking laban, midday is the ideal time to try some of Saudi's most popular entrees, including its national dish: kabsa (usually made with basmati rice, meat, vegetables and a mixture of spices, served on a communal plate).

Dinner

In contemporary homes, where both men and women work outside the home, dinner is served late and is a lighter meal, often sandwiches, a Western-style dish, or a hearty soup or stew.

Beverages

As a Muslim country, alcohol is not served in Saudi, but that doesn't limit the available beverage offerings. Some favorites include fresh juices — everything from hibiscus to orange and mango — and nonalcoholic juice cocktails, as well as qahwa (coffee) and all types of tea.



Taste of Asir

This region offers its share of local flavors and can't-miss international cuisine. From an incredible Italian meal to a supreme Saudi dinner, here are some of the best bites in the area.

N Lounge(\$): Deemed the “best restaurant in Abha” by at least one reviewer, this mostly Italian eatery features traditional dishes including spaghetti Bolognese, fettuccine Alfredo, lasagna and an assortment of pizzas, plus an extensive breakfast menu (and even a breakfast dessert menu!).

Nahran at the Abha Palace(\$\$): Opt for the best of traditional Arabian cuisine infused with culinary ideas from around the globe at this serene restaurant situated on the fifth floor overlooking Lake Saad.

The Revolving Restaurant at the Assalam Palace Hotel (\$\$): In the heart of downtown Abha, you'll find the modern and elegant Assalam Palace Hotel. There is perhaps no better place to take in Abha's many sights than from its rotating restaurant high above the city. Plan on a large selection of Saudi and international favorites.

Craving Club (\$): A great spot for meat lovers, options here include T-bone steak, ribeye, applewood “bb-back” ribs and beef short ribs. There's a good selection for the whole family, too, with seafood, pizza, pasta and burgers, plus a menu just for the kids.

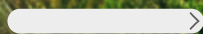


Can't-miss local dish: Jalamah. The southwest province of Asir is rightly famed for many things — stunning national parks, verdant forests and breathtaking mountain views. But when it comes to food, the one dish that everyone talks about is the regional speciality known as jalamah: young lamb and onions cooked in an aromatic gravy flavored with cardamom, coriander, cinnamon and black pepper.



04

Activities



What to See and Do

Asir National Park

Consisting of 4,500 square kilometers stretching all the way to the Red Sea coast, this was Saudi's first national park when it opened in 1980. The area around Soudah is all about hiking trails over misty, sweeping valleys pocked with little villages and stepped fields, with lots of campsites, picnic spots and lookouts. Look up for glimpses of the eagles and griffon vultures that cruise the air currents, or to spot the migratory birds that regularly pass through.

Soudah

At 3,000 meters, perched on the side of Saudi's highest mountain, juniper-covered Soudah is the unofficial outdoor adventure capital of Saudi. Part of the vast Asir National Park, with its network of hiking routes, this is an area of cool mountain air, wild nature and mist-cloaked valleys. While hiking and guided camping trips are quintessential activities, the area is also filled with ancient tribal culture — especially at the historic village of Rijal Almaa west of Soudah.

Baboon Watch

During the wet season, many hamadryas baboons move in packs to mountainous areas, such as the Asir mountain region near Taif and Abha. Mature male baboons are easily recognizable by their long silver hair and pink faces. These creatures are highly intelligent and were once considered sacred.

EXPLORE PACKAGES

Go on a three-day trip to Soudah to enjoy hiking, camping, beautiful sunsets and more.

[Click here](#)

to see tour details and to book this package on visitsaudi.com

Rijal Almaa Village

Venture to Rijal Almaa and marvel at the architecture of this village's solidly built hillside fortresses. Though the village flourished more than 350 years ago, it remains intact and has even earned a spot on UNESCO's tentative list for inclusion as a World Heritage Site. The blocky stone buildings with brightly colored shutters are still populated by members of the indigenous Asiri tribe. Here, the annual Flowerman Festival showcases the tribe's culture, including the men wearing intricate flower wreath crowns. Head to the village museum for a treasure trove of art and history — a repository of photographs, artwork and archaeological artifacts.



Cable cars

If you love cable cars, Abha is for you. There are four routes that operate at different times of the year, and each is its own high-rise adventure. The Abha Palace Hotel Station is suspended 300 meters up. It takes travelers over a lush family park and to the top of Green Mountain in the city. Al Jadidah Station is 400 meters above the New Abha Resort, offering a bird's-eye view of rolling hills and Lake Saad, while the Soudah Station travels to the top of Saudi's tallest peak. At more than 3,000 meters high, it showcases mountain vistas that will blow your mind. Finally, Al Habala Station spans 600 meters and visits Al Habala "hanging village," first constructed about 400 years ago.

Jabal Thera (Green Mountain)

One of Saudi's more curious landmarks is Jabal Thera. Better known as the Green Mountain, this peak in the south of Abha is illuminated at night by neon green lights that emit a warm emerald glow across the city. Cable cars are the best way to get to the summit, where you can enjoy panoramic views from a Lebanese restaurant and cafe with a terrace.



Shada Palace

Showcasing the traditional architecture of Asir, this palace-turned-museum was built in the 1820s as a residence for royals and officials. Inside the mud-walled fortress, visitors can view an assortment of local crafts and household items. Climb to the top to see Shada Palace's open roof that's surrounded by high walls built for privacy — which is also the reason for the palace's lack of windows. While much of Abha's architecture is more modern, Shada Palace offers a glimpse of the area's history.

Caves of Shada Mountain

Drive north through the scenic Sarawat Mountains toward Al Baha and the Shada mountain formation, or Jabal Shada, for a trip through history. The area, composed of giant granite rocks, dates back hundreds of millions of years, to before the Cambrian Period. While there, visitors may stumble upon exotic grottos and caves that are the result of erosion that has taken place over centuries. Although the caves were created by geological phenomena, they happened to suit humans and were therefore used as dwellings. Engravings left behind by early civilizations have been found in the caves, giving archaeologists and researchers insight into the past. While exploring — and possibly staying in — the caves, consider sampling the region’s signature honey and ghee dish along with freshly baked bread and local Shadawi coffee.

Al Muftaha Village

Abha’s bohemian arts center, Al Muftaha Village is a beautiful little quarter around a mosque covered in calligraphy. Local creativity shines in this village that dates back 260 years. Find little galleries showcasing the colorful work of regional craftspeople and artists. Discover walls with bright murals, many incorporating the geometric patterns traditionally used to paint homes in the area. Venture into the small museums on either side of the mosque to learn the story of Abha’s artistic heritage, including how the quality of murals in a family’s home used to be instrumental in defining its social status.

DISCOVER ABHA: ONE-DAY PACKAGE

Curious to see more? Explore Abha alongside a professional tour guide, visiting heritage sites and landmarks including Al Muftaha Village, Soudah and Rijal Almaa Village.

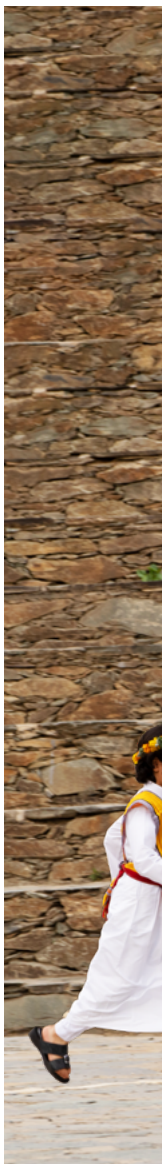
[Click here](#)

To see tour details and book this one-day trip on visitsaudi.com

The Hanging Village of Al Habala

The hanging village of Al Habala is as fun to travel to as it is to explore. The village is composed of a series of sandstone homes perched on the ledge of a cliff and was built almost 400 years ago by the Qahtan tribe, who reached the secluded spot by rope ladder. (The village’s name comes from “habal,” the Arabic term for rope.) They lived here self-sufficiently as terrace farmers until the 1980s. Today, there’s a cable car to the village from May to October, and visitors are greeted at the top by Qahtani men wearing traditional flower garlands, which are similar to the flower crowns worn by men in the Asiri tribe.





Tanomah

With its stone houses and minarets, the high-altitude city of Tanomah is encircled by juniper trees and craggy peaks, with a cascading waterfall right in the middle of the city. To the west, the area around Al Sharaf Mountain is a draw for hikers, birdwatchers and rock climbers, with its reddish peaks home to Saudi's first bolted climbing route and many of its rarest bird species.

The High City

Located in front of Asir National Park, this walkable, newly built-up area gives visitors a panoramic view of Abha. It features numerous cafés and restaurants as well as gift shops and other boutiques. Because of its altitude, the High City is often encircled by fog, which makes the spot even more scenic.

Abha Dam Lake

Enjoy the breeze and the beauty of glistening blue water at Abha Dam Lake. Surrounded by trees, this lake is the perfect place to escape for a picnic, hike or a variety of water games. From the lake, soak in the views of Al Sadd Garden, or go for a walk around the water to discover a variety of children's areas, cafes and more. Each summer, Abha Dam Lake also hosts several events during the annual Abha Festival.

Sport Flying Club

Specializing in aerial adventures such as paragliding and tandem flights over mountain terrain, this is a fascinating way to take in a very different view of the Saudi landscape.

SHOPPING IN ABHA

Souq Al Thulatha

While Abha is home to many souqs, each named after the day of the week they are open, Souq Al Thulatha (the Tuesday market) is one of the best known in Asir's capital city. Find Asir honey, regional fruits, herbs, handwoven baskets, textiles, clay pots and jewelry in this one-of-a-kind market.

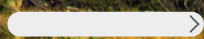
Souqs in Khamis Mushait

Khamis Mushait, Abha's sister city, with its spice and silver souqs, is perfect for picking up a souvenir or two. It used to be a small agricultural market town, but it has expanded with more than 1 million people now residing in the city.



04

**Planning
Toolkit**




Planning Toolkit

Take Note!

Use this page to take notes and to check-off some of the must-see spots you just read about.

YOUR ASIR CHECKLIST

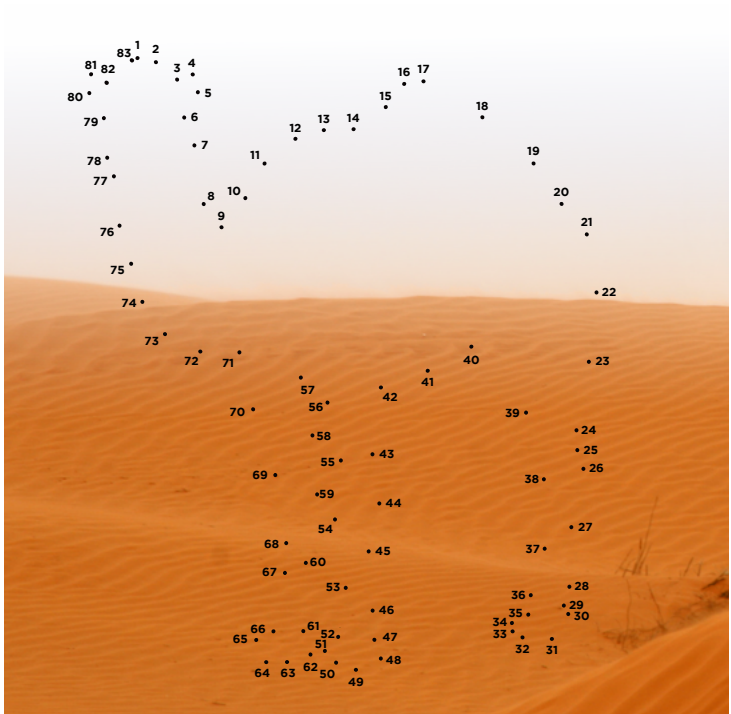
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/>  See Jabal Thera (Green Mountain) | <input type="checkbox"/>  Discover Al Muftaha Village |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  Ride a cable car | <input type="checkbox"/>  Explore Shada Palace |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  Meet the Flower Men | <input type="checkbox"/>  Shop in one of Asir's traditional souqs |
| <input type="checkbox"/>  Journey to the hanging village of Al Habala | |



Kids & Adult Page

Travel Games for Your Adventure

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

