

Visit Saudi

NATURE & ADVENTURE

From vast desert to colourful reefs, rugged mountains
and lush wadis, discover the real Saudi

A line of off-road vehicles, including ATVs and dune buggies, is parked on a sandy path in a desert canyon. The vehicles are equipped with large, treaded tires and roll-over protection structures. Some have orange flags on poles. The background features towering, layered sandstone rock formations. The sky is clear and blue. In the top left corner, there are horizontal brush strokes in teal and purple. The text 'Visit Saudi' is overlaid in the top right, with 'Visit' in a simple sans-serif font and 'Saudi' in a large, elegant script font. The website 'visitsaudi.com' is at the bottom left.

Visit
Saudi

visitsaudi.com

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Created by Time Out Saudi and ITP Media Group on behalf of Saudi Tourism Authority

SAUDI ADVENTURE

Much more than the desert landscapes it is renowned for, Saudi offers spectacular diversity across land, sea and air



VOLCANOES, SKI SLOPES AND PRISTINE BEACHES

There is an unexpected world of adventure to explore in Saudi

With your coat zipped up to the top, hat pulled down tight over your head and gloves covering your hands, you breathe in and take in your surroundings.

A blanket of white snow as far as the eye can see, and a pristine piste of fresh virgin snow beneath you.

You see a puff of vapor as you exhale. Your breath visible in the freezing air.

And you're off. Slaloming past the snowboarders as you ski down the world-class slopes towards the frozen

“There is more beachfront and coast in Saudi than Egypt, Peru, Portugal or the United Arab Emirates.”

lake below.

You're not on the slopes or the Alps, though. Despite the ski lifts all around you and the mountain resort you're speeding through blizzard conditions toward, you're not in Colorado either.

This is Saudi. Not in a far off post-apocalyptic future, but in just a few years' time, (yes, really).

In March 2022, Trojena was unveiled as part of the \$500bn Neom megadevelopment. Neom is an entire city being built in the northernmost point of Saudi and Trojena will be a ski





Dammam beach

resort in the district.

Visitors will also be able to enjoy sailing on a manmade lake, mountain biking in summer months, and more adrenaline-fuelled mountain sports at 2,600m above sea level.

It sounds fantastical, and it is, but not beyond the realms of possibility in a country with such a rich and varied geography as Saudi.

Think Saudi is all barren

desert and skyscraper cities? Think again.

For starters it has more than 2,600km of coastline. That means there is more beachfront and coast than Egypt, Peru, Portugal or the United Arab Emirates.

Then there are the mountains. Two peaks in Saudi measure at 3,000m, making them higher than peaks in Brazil or Germany.

Looking for a volcano?

Yes, Saudi has them, too. Both active and extinct.

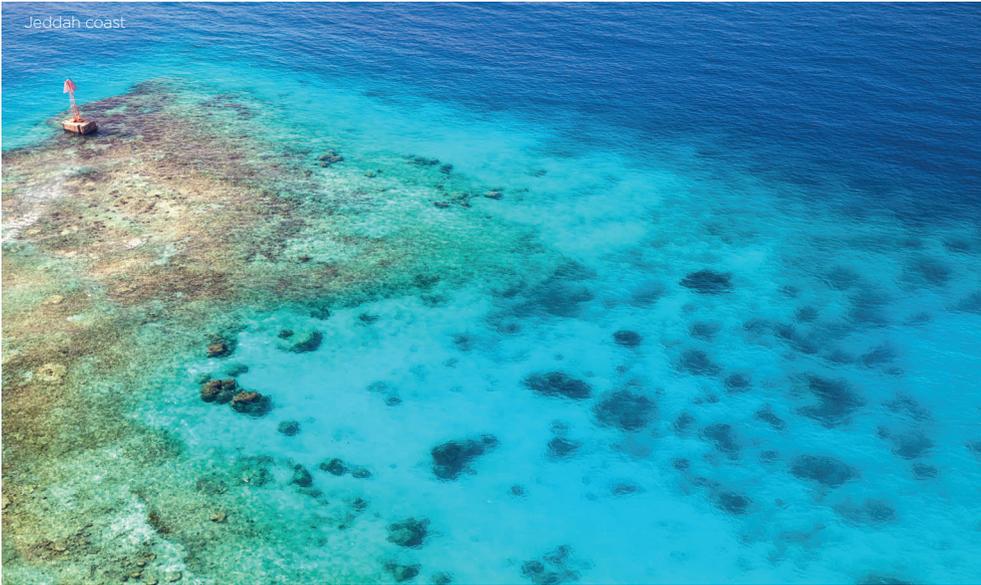
Getting the picture yet? Saudi has a terrain and landscape far more varied than first considered. Which is not to say it does not have desert. Both barren landscapes and beautiful dunescapes. But there is much more besides.

Pack this guide and head off to explore this unique, diverse and complex country.



Riyadh skyline

Jeddah coast



Coasts with the most

Saudi has two coastlines: the Red Sea to the west and the Arabian Gulf on the east. As with the landscapes, the seas are replete with wildlife.

There are nine species of turtle, fifty species of shark including the spectacular whale shark, and hundreds of varieties of fish to be seen by keen divers and snorkellers, not to mention dolphins and dugong.

The Red Sea in Saudi has four times the number of coral species than found in the Caribbean, and the area of Umluj in the Tabuk region is dubbed “the Maldives of Saudi” for its bountiful, colourful reefs teeming with fish.

Jeddah is the major coastal city on the west coast. However, with more than 1,700km of sea front stretching along the Red Sea border there are many beach

resorts and rocky coves to explore, with more opening each month.

A trio of cities: Al Khobar, Dammam and Jubail, all have watersports and diving opportunities in the Arabian Gulf over on the east coast.

Mountains and valleys

The scale of the mountains and even volcanoes in Saudi is surprising for those that think the entire country is one large desert.

While the ski resort of Neom may still be some years away until completion, there are plentiful mountains in which to explore.

The cities of Tanomah, with its waterfall and juniper-clad peaks, and Abha, famed for the cable car rides above green hills, are mountainous developments in the southwest that beg to be hiked and explored.

Between Abha and Jeddah

is perhaps the most surprising sight in Saudi for its lush green landscape.

The Al Baha region sits more than 2,500m above sea level and has a considerably cooler and more forgiving climate than other parts of the country, and is home to over forty lush forests and verdant valleys.

The diverse line-up of cities, towns and villages of the Hejaz area, which includes Jeddah, Makkah, Tabuk, Yanbu and Taif, and the Hijaz mountains are some of the least heralded yet most rewarding sites for tourists in the world.

Not to mention the Asir Mountains in the south, which sit within Asir National Park that is home to more than 300 bird species and has a staggering 60 campsites from which to base yourself for easy exploration – the stargazing is also amazing.





Saudi dunes



Wahba crater

in fact, that you shouldn't attempt to explore its reaches alone. A guide or experienced convoy is required.

Visit beyond the trodden path, however, and you will see towering sand dunes more than 300m high and the breathtaking landscape that defines the nation.

Desert landscapes

Then, of course, there are the deserts. That cannot be forgotten or understated.

The shifting sand of the Al Nafud Al Kabir Desert in the north covers more than 103,600sqkm (greater than the size of South Korea) and consists of magnificent red rolling dunes.

Then there is the legendary Rub' al Khali (The Empty

Quarter). This vast desert stretches as far as the United Arab Emirates and covers more than 650,000sqkm. You could place France inside it and still have room around the edge. The enormity makes it one of the largest continuous bodies of sand in the world, and has fascinated visiting adventurers and Bedouins for generations. So large and imposing is it,

Incredible sights

Besides the vast deserts, soaring mountains and stretching seas there are locations of unique fascination to see.

One of Saudi's most recognisable attractions is Jebel Fihrayn. Also known as the Edge of The World it is Saudi's own Grand Canyon. Once an ocean bed, it is an escarpment with a



300m-high cliff looking down into sandy canyons and dried riverbeds – the perfect Insta-friendly image.

In the north of Saudi a fortune is being spent promoting AlUla as a tourist destination. Without spending a cent, it would still be fascinating.

Thousands of years of human civilisation can be witnessed in this living museum. Otherworldly rock formations rise from the ground and the sandstone

formations give the impression of a sculpture park as much as a deserted landscape.

It is proof that deserts are not just dunes, and the sandstone rock formations fascinate geologists and archaeologists.

The more temperate climate makes it one of the more agricultural corners of Saudi with more than two million date palms and over 200,000 citrus trees flourishing in AlUla's oasis.

No introduction to the varied landscapes of Saudi would be complete without mention of the Wahba Crater. Once believed to be created by a meteor strike, but actually a prehistoric volcanic eruption (possibly the only thing cooler than a meteor) it is a crystal lake inside a volcano, flanked by a forest, and above crystal-clear water.

Anywhere else in the world, and possibly before long, it would be packed with social media influencers.

So, there you have it, Saudi offers a hugely varied landscape brimming with the possibility for adventure and exploration. Land, sea and air, as this guide shows, are all possibilities for intrepid travellers, first-time visitors, even social media stars.

What more could you want?

Adventure doesn't mean following the well-trodden path. It means going where few have stepped before. Make no mistake, tourism in Saudi is going to surge in the

years ahead.

Many will be attracted to cities and the luxury hotels and resorts popping up around the country. But for those looking to look just a little further there are untrodden paths to explore.

Under sea, mountain high. In deserts and on ski slopes. Observing animals in their natural habitat or racing over dunes in a 4x4.

What are you waiting for? A kingdom of adventure awaits you.



Desert hedgehog



Hamadryas baboon



Caracal wild cat



Arabian wolf

ANIMAL KINGDOM

Just as the landscapes of Saudi are far more diverse than many people realise, so too the wildlife has some surprising inhabitants.

Arabian spiny-tailed lizard: One of around 30 species of lizard found in Saudi this may be the most common and easiest to spot. Not in the least because they can grow in size to almost a metre. There are also more than 30 snake species reported in the country.

Hamadryas Baboon: Wild baboons travel in packs in the mountain regions near Taif and Abha. Intelligent and sociable they seek out water and have defined hierarchies.

Desert hedgehog: Smaller than most hedgehogs (they could fit in a human hand, but don't) they're only made cuter when they start to move around at surprising speed. Up to 19kmph over short distances, apparently.

Arabian wolf: Lone hunters that mainly move at night, this cousin of the grey wolf can grow up to 1.5 metres in length. Spotted most often on the desert regions of Najd and Tabuk.

Wild cats: Not as famed as the big cat species of Africa, Saudi can lay claim to being home to several species of wild cat. For our reckoning, the sand cat, found in the western regions of Saudi, is the cutest out there. Despite a thick coat it is the only feline species to live entirely in the desert. The caracal is another cat found in the region, notably the Jabal Shada and Riyadh reserves. Identified by the distinctive black ears they have been in the region since ancient times

SAUDI OUTDOORS

From sand skiing to dune bashing, desert hikes and stargazing, Saudi has everything an intrepid explorer could want, and more



THE SAFE OUTDOORS

Getting out to enjoy the trail is a thrill, but be sure to be safe



Let us be perfectly clear about this – outdoor adventures don't need to be dangerous. In fact, they really shouldn't be.

Films, "influencers" and even the occasional historical novel make camping, surfing, mountain hikes and desert treks sound like a quest for survival.

“You can enjoy the great outdoors without taking any risks.”

But it doesn't need to be that way.

You can enjoy the great outdoors and even thrilling landscapes and new situations without taking any risks. As the boy scouts say, “just be prepared.”

Check out these tips to stay safe on adventures in Saudi.

Get checked

Whether land, sea or air – whatever environment you are going to be in make sure you check your equipment before departing. Be certain that torches have batteries, phones or GPS devices have plenty of charge and everything is maintained and in working order. There is no point getting deep into the Empty Quarter only to find you don't have poles in your tent bag. Similarly, if you are going Scuba diving give tanks and masks a once over before getting on a boat.

Tell a friend

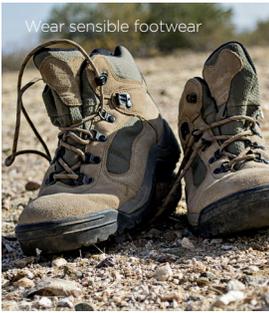
The vast desert landscapes that make up much of Saudi are beautiful, but notoriously unforgiving to new travellers.

Whether you're heading to a well-known camp or looking to explore a little further be sure to tell somebody before

you go. In an ideal world you will drive over dunes, spend a night under the stars and return without incident. But even the most experienced of travellers can have

mechanical trouble. If you tell somebody roughly where you are going and what time you expect to return then they can make a report if you don't turn up.





Wear sensible footwear



Be sure to protect yourself from the sun

Feet first

Do. Not. Wear. Sandals. Or. High. Heels. When. Climbing. A Mountain. A walking boot or supported trainer with a closed toe and heel support are essential on rocky trails or steep climbs.

Weather report

It is Saudi, so it is going to be hot, right? Wrong. When the rain falls in wadis and mountainsides it is possible to have flash flooding in all parts of Saudi and it has had fatal consequences in the past. Snow is also possible on higher ground.

Before going away check weather forecasts and look at sea temperatures and tides before going to sea.

Environmentally aware

Whether 10 metres below the sea's surface or far into the desert dunes you are a guest in a different environment. Observe wild animals with caution, but don't bother them and stay a respectful distance away. Do not dig up plants or trees, coral or anything else.

Also, never leave litter or waste in the place you visit - clean up after yourself.

Stay healthy

Of course, you hope nothing dangerous happens and the trip doesn't end in injury or distress. But accidents do happen.

From a grazed knee to a serious injury, you should be prepared. Any self-respecting adventurer on any level of expedition needs to have

a well-maintained first aid kit with plasters, painkillers, bandages and insect repellent. Always take fresh drinking water wherever you go. Buy travel insurance!

Wear sunscreen

A no-brainer in sunny climes, forget sun protection and suffer the consequences later.



Dune bashing in the desert



Mountain climbing

TECHS APPEAL

Use these apps and gadgets for more tech support on your outdoor adventures.



Strike a pose:

GoPro continues to set the standard for action cameras. The Hero 10 Black is a best-in-class waterproof and rugged camera that can take the punishment you dish out and still return top-quality photos and video. www.amazon.sa



Map it:

Gaia is an app that turns your smartphone into a high-functioning GPS device. It has dozens of pre-programmed hikes in Saudi and you can also use it to devise your own, measure distance, altitude, elevation and track weather. It even finds you fishing hot spots. www.gaiags.com



Look to the stars:

Out in the desert away from a city glow the stars at night are beautiful. Augmented reality in the Night Sky app lets you identify stars, constellations, planets and thousands of manmade satellites in the night sky. *IOS and Android*

Watch out:

Garmin's Fenix 7 Sapphire Solar is the ultimate wearable smart device for adventurers. Rugged, solar-powered and with a long-lasting battery it is built to survive anywhere. Plus the mapping technology uses GPS to track you wherever you go. Different modes for climbing, trail running, swimming, cycling and much more will track your every movement and keep you safe and well-informed. www.garmin.sa



SAUDI ADVENTURE DIRECTORY

Essential contacts to help plan your next trip to the great outdoors

Staying at one of Saudi's many premium hotels the concierge will probably be able to recommend tour operators, dive centres or booking services to help arrange your adventure.

However, if you're making planning arrangements yourself check out these handy contacts.

ABHA

Sport Flying Club

Specialising in aerial adventures such as paragliding and tandem flights over mountain terrain. A fascinating way to see a different part of Saudi in a very different way.
Abha, www.fly.com.sa, (+966 53 025 0000)

AL KHOBAR, AL JUBAIL AND DAMMAM

Adventure Khobar

This adventure all-rounder provides variety and intrepid discovery at sites up and down the east coast. Consider it a first port of call for horse riding, scuba diving, quad bike adventures, boat trips, desert camps, watersports

and much more besides. Introductory sessions or equipment rental for more advanced adventurers can all be arranged and there is a professional set up making it easy for tourists and residents to get all the information that they need.

Al Jubail Express Road, Khobar, www.adventurekhobar.com, (+966 50 322 2972)

Bateel Diver

Beginner courses, specialty training, professional instructor training and as much underwater training as you could hope for. There are also regular dive and snorkel boat trips to some of the east coast's best dive spots, as well as equipment rental and sales for divers of all levels of ability.

King Faisal Ibn Abd Al Aziz, Al Mazruiyah, Dammam, www.bateeldiver.com, (+966 55 820 2000)

Dana Beach Resort

A one-stop shop for beachside activity in Khobar. Overnight stays might be recommended to get the most out of all the adventure available here. Watersports and experiences on offer include parasailing, jet skis,

fly-boarding and banana boats. You can even become a marina member and berth your boat. A dive school is also present for divers.
Half Moon Beach, Al Khobar, www.dbr.sa, (+966 13 899 9900)

Intercontinental Al Jubail

The popular hotel in the industrial city is right on the beach and offers watersports and boat trips.
Tareeq 101, Al Jubail, www.ihg.com, (+966 13 356 4000)

Rose 8th Charters

Charter a boat and groups can be taken out into the sea for a day of fishing. Equipment, tackle and expertise are all offered and there are options to keep catch and cook up what you land at sea.
Fanateer, Al Jubail, www.fishingbooker.com

Sunset Beach Resort

The waters at this east coast beach club are calm, but the activities are adrenalin-pumping. Look out for water-skis, jet skis and banana boats - boat cruises and fishing trips are also available.
Sunset Blvd, Al Khobar, www.sunset-beach.com

ALULA

The Helicopter Company

The discovery flights over AlUla are managed and operated by The Helicopter Company. Tickets can be bought at www.experiencealula.com. While the AlUla flights are the most tourist-friendly in Saudi, a variety of private and business charters are also available.

The premium company offers customised private charters all around Saudi.

King Khalid International Airport, Riyadh, www.thehelicoptercompany.com.sa

The Warrior Group

In partnership with the Royal Commission for AlUla, The Warrior Group designed and built some of the rockface attractions at the popular site. That means zip-lining, rock climbing, abseiling and a via ferrata. The adventure specialists have worked on projects across the region.

The Adventure Hub, AlUla, www.experiencealula.com, (+966 92 002 5003)

JEDDAH

Al Haddad Scuba

Boat trips, fishing and scuba diving excursions from a marina in Jeddah out into the Red Sea. There are also snorkelling and watersports options as well as introductory dive lessons and a shop for stocking up on any essential kit you might need.

Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Street, Jeddah, www.haddadscuba.com, (+966 56 020 7606)

Deira Tours

An inbound tour operator which organises desert trips and scuba diving experiences. Whether you are looking for the Red Sea or the Red Dunes, Jeddah or Riyadh it promises to arrange all essentials for your trip.

Al Amir Muhammad Ibn Abdul Aziz Branch, Al Faysaliyah, Jeddah, www.deira.com.sa, (+966 12 663 8491)

Dream Drivers

A dive operator with access to multiple boats and making trips to dive sites at locations around the Red Sea coast and further offshore. The boat charters cater to groups of more than 100 people, but smaller craft of just two or three people can also be arranged if preferred.

Al Ahlam Marina, South Obhur, Corniche Road, Jeddah, www.dreamdiver.sa

Hope of Spring

A comprehensive dive company offering a range of courses. Top ups, refreshers, theory, in-pool and at-sea lessons can be arranged. Look out for the many trips for qualified divers as well.

Obhur Al-Shamaliyah, Jeddah, www.hopespringdive.com, (+966 56 222 0007)

Jeddah Red Sea Fishing

You need more than a rod to go fishing. Thankfully a fishing trip operator can set you up with a boat, captain, equipment and, crucially, expertise on where to find the very best fishing hot spots in the Red Sea.

Durrah Beach, Madinah Highway, Dahaban, www.fishingbooker.com

Oia Brach Club

A luxury beach club and resort with all the style and finesse of a premium Mediterranean resort. Leave the poolside cabanas and step into the sea for sailing, kayaking and even a floating water park.

984 Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Street, Obhur, www.oiaibeach.com, (+966 55 532 5649)

Mövenpick Jeddah Al Nawras

A private island hotel resort with watersport offerings that are ideal for families.

North Cornish Road, Near Al Nawras Square, Jeddah, www.movenpick.com

Red Sea Marina

The self-titled boating centre of Jeddah has everything you need to know about taking to the Red Sea. Be it boat charters, berthing or sales it is a hub for pleasure sailing in the area.

North Obhur Creek, Jeddah, www.redseamarina.com, (+966 50 461 3063)

Silver Sands

Windsurfing, sailing, fishing - this is a Jeddah beach club ideal for people who want to be active. There are also coral reefs and a small island to swim to.

Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Street, www.silversandsksa.com/beach (+966 55 446 6023)

Saudi Safari

Quad bike rides, sand skiing, rock climbing, VIP desert safaris and boat trips off the Jeddah coast are offered.

Bahara, Jeddah, www.saudisafaris.com, (+966 92 003 3630)

NATIONAL

Bird Tour Asia

An international tour operator which organises ornithological expeditions all over the continent. A trip is already planned for 2023 for keen twitchers to see and photograph the vast variety of birds across Saudi.

*Various locations,
www.birdtourasia.com,
(+44 7813 338 321)*

Discover Saudi

A traditional travel agency in an emerging market. Expect an increasing number of experiences and tours to be offered by this forward-looking travel firm.

*Various locations,
www.discoversaudi.sa*

Hala Yalla

A home-grown Saudi app specialising in offering ticketing solutions and bookable experiences all over the country. Bike rides, plane trips, snorkelling, concerts and more can be booked directly on the app.

www.halayalla.com

Hike Mania Club

More than 1,000 trips, 35,000 adventurers and more than 25 hiking locations. If hiking Trips as varied as an Abha adventure or a dawn desert hike are must-tries.

www.hikemaniacclub.com

Saudi Arabian Hot Air Ballooning Federation

Working towards making Saudi an important location for hot air ballooning in the region and the world at large.

www.sahab.gov.sa

Trojena by Neom

The ski resort is some years away from being ready to accept visitors, but you can track the progress and marvel at lush artist's impressions as it is being developed.

*Coming in 2026, Neom,
www.neom.com*

RIYADH

Al Athriyah Club

Gyrocopter trips, powered parachute experiences and microlight flights in the desert outside Riyadh.

*Al Athriyah, Riyadh,
@alathriyah_club, (+966 50
2252 238)*

Camel Steps

A tour operator with both cultural and adventurous excursions. While there are trips to see museums and cultural attractions there are the usual Red Sands tours and trips to the Edge of the World as well.

Alarid, Riyadh, www.camelsteps.com, (+966 53 212 3111)

Fly With Captain Abdulmosin

Booked through the Hala Yalla app this is an opportunity to take flight and also instruction from an aviation expert above the Saudi desert.

*Thumama National Park, Riyadh,
www.halayalla.com,
(+966 800 1111 805)*

Ghazi Tours

While there are trips to typical destinations such as the Edge of the World and Red Sands, this operator also takes travellers out to Tabuk, Al Ahsa and Farasan Island.

*Various locations,
www.ghazitours.com,
(+966 53 074 5553)*

Saudi Arabia Tours

Award-winning tours that include desert safaris, wildlife tours, night trips, caves, mountains, cities and stargazing experiences are all offered and highly-rated.

*Olaya St, Riyadh,
www.saudiarabiatours.net*

Saudi Aviation Club

Amateur pilots can get vital airtime and organise hangar space. It's also the hub for aviation sports and model aircraft flying in Saudi.

*Uthman Ibn Affan Road, Riyadh,
www.sac.com.sa, (+966 92 001
1582)*

Saudi Hirat

A seller of scuba equipment, particularly underwater scooters. Training and PADI dive trips are also offered.

*King Abdulaziz St, Al Khobar,
www.saudihirat.com, (+966 13
899 7823)*

Palms Land Tours

One of the most prolific tour companies in Saudi has trips in all corners of Saudi. From mountainous Abha to the Red Sand dunes.

*Riyadh, www.pltksa.com,
(+966 50 050 3998)*

Paragliding with Captain Saad

Another Saudi Aviation Club member providing tandem aerial experiences above the Al Thumama dunes.

*Thumama National Park, Riyadh,
www.halayalla.com*

Riyadh Hiking

Picking up in Riyadh and taking hikers to the desert or the Edge of the World this is an all-inclusive tour operator.

Riyadh, www.riyadh hiking.com

SAUDI AIR ADVENTURE

From magnificent hot air balloon rides and zip lining,
to helicopters and bird watching - discover the Saudi skies



NEW HEIGHTS

Flying experiences will let you see Saudi as never before



Air Arabia A320-200

Perspective is an interesting thing. You might think you know a place. Maybe you have seen it a thousand times. Look at it from just a slightly different angle, however, and it is like seeing it for the very first time.

You see light where it had previously only been dark. What was barren becomes beautiful. What was unknown is now obvious.

That is what it can be like to see Saudi from the sky. It is like discovering the country anew.

Landing at one of Saudi's many airports gives a

“You see light where it had been dark. What was barren becomes beautiful. What was unknown is now obvious.”

moment of exploration when a snatched view through a plane window shows a city in a new light. The twinkling lights of the evolving skyline at night or an attempt to identify landmarks in the day. Things just look different from above.

Don't wait until your next departure flight or return trip, though. Aerial explorers have plenty of opportunities and modes in which to get up, up and away and see Saudi from the sky. Can't wait to broaden your horizons and expand perspective? Check out these places, experiences and tours in Saudi.

FLYING EXPERIENCES

Learn to fly with the Saudi Aviation Club

Have you ever driven a car not to get somewhere, but just because you enjoy driving? Amateur pilots feel the same way about flying.

From the first tentative steps, learning the principals of aviation in a classroom, to group flying and eventually taking to the skies for a solo flight, the process is far more than a profession. It can also be a rewarding hobby.

The Saudi Aviation Club is a hub for flight enthusiasts in Saudi. Whether you are a professional flier looking for a different experience, or a newbie looking to earn your wings, it runs courses, manages sport-flying events and even provides aircraft management, maintenance, hangaring and much more for people who have taken the leap and own light airplanes and gyrocopters.

The Saudi Aviation Club operates two locations: Thumamah Airport, which is around 60km north of Riyadh, and the Al Mindassah Aerodrome is just over 40km north of Al Madinah.

Paragliding over the Al Thumama dunes

If you're not ready to start piloting your own aircraft yet, then taking to the skies with a member of the Saudi Aviation Club might be a good option.

Captain Saad is an award-winning aviator with more than 18 years of flying experience. Starting from 250SAR you can have a



Saudi aviation club



Paragliding in Saudi

paragliding experience to remember as you soar above the dunes below.

Many have camped, quad-biked and dune bashed in the Thumama National Park, but this takes adventure to the next level. *Thumama National Park, Riyadh. Book at www.halayalla.com*

Fly With Captain Abdulmosin

Take a classic handglider design and then add a motor

so you don't need to worry about catching a thermal uplift, and you basically have a microlight.

It is a stunning way to travel and Captain Abdulmosin offers flights above the Thumama National Park. It provides a hybrid experience of a private flight in a light plane with the mobility and freedom of a skydiver or parachute jump.

The trips can be booked



through the Hala Yalla app and, as an added bonus, experienced pilot Captain Abdulmosin also offers microlight delta training.

It is an excellent first step into becoming a pilot (consider it the go kart to a sports car's private jet) and is likely to give you the aviation bug. 360-degree views of the stunning desert and parklands below with a smooth take off and landing from the smart microlight machine.

Thumama National Park, Riyadh. Book at www.halayalla.com

Paragliding with Sport Flying

As it is in Saudi's most mountainous region it is only natural that Abha has high-altitude things to do.

How does flinging yourself from a mountain-side and feeling the rush of wind in your hair sound? Actually, you will be strapped to an experienced paragliding pilot, so it is not as crazy as it

sounds. Adventure company Sport Flying Club organises thrill-of-a-lifetime tandem paragliding jumps above the region's lush mountains.

It is a side of Saudi few have seen, even those who have spent their entire lives in the country.

Paragliding uses no engine, just the wind currents and skill of the professional pilots who can take you higher or lower with a few tugs on the cords while you concentrate on taking Insta-worthy pictures and watching the spectacular mountain scenery.

www.fly.com.sa

Helicopter flights in AIUla

See one incredible sight after another from your seat in the world's most exciting mode of transport: the helicopter.

Starting at Elephant Rock (Jabal Al Fil), crossing above the UNESCO World Heritage site of Hegra and even the remnants of the Hijaz Railway

it is a must-do if you have the funds available.

The 30-minute flight also takes in AIUla Old Town and heritage sites Jabal Ikamah and historic Dadan.

The heritage and natural attractions are, in a word, breathtaking and especially when so high above. Not forgetting that a helicopter flight above an empty concrete car park would be exciting because the transport is so cool.

AIUla. www.experiencealula.com

Strap yourself into a powered parachute

Over on the east coast of Saudi is the city of Khobar and it is rich with adventure possibilities. Being by the coast it obviously has diving and watersports, but aerial enthusiasts are also catered to.

Prolific experience provider Adventure Khobar offers unique powered parachute rides – basically a metal frame fitted with two seats and a propeller suspended from a colourful parachute.

Don't worry, there is a pilot, so all you have to do is sit back and take in the views from 200 metres up in the air. A smooth take-off and landing can make it as exhilarating as a skydive, especially as the experience lasts for ten to 15 minutes and you get a sustained view.

Winding back and forth it is possibly the closest thing to simulating bird flight (if you can forget the whirr of the engine behind you) and will give you ultimate selfie opportunities from up above the Arabian Sea.

www.adventurekhobar.com

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Brave the zip line on the Harrat Mountain

This might be a blink and you'll miss it experience, but also one of the biggest thrills available in the Middle East. Unlike many of the flying experiences, where training and skill is needed, this only takes the bravery required to take a leap off the side of a mountain

The safe and secure harness takes care of the rest as you zip 1.5km at speeds of more than 100kmph. Best of all it is a solo experience, so nobody will hear your screams or see that you actually had your eyes closed the entire time.

For those brave enough to look around during the country's fastest, longest and most thrilling zipline will be afforded an incomparable view of some of Saudi's most incredible vistas from the air. No engines, no fancy technology and close enough to make out individual rocks and feel the speed it is an experience like no other. www.experiencealula.com

Experience the canyon hammock in Alula

The phrase via feratta is an Italian description that literally translates as "iron path" and is an adventurous step towards free climbing and advanced mountaineering, even if you have never climbed before.

Put simply, it's a vertical and high-rising challenge up the side of a mountain. Strapped into a harness, the intrepid can complete a cliff



face obstacle course across a stunning canyon.

There are a few ladders to climb and bridges to cross on a picturesque route. Most exciting of all is the "hammock net" hangout dangling 200 metres up a vertical cliff drop. Not for the faint of heart! www.experiencealula.com

Dangle from a cliff in AlUla

Adventure Hub at AlUla is home to many a thrilling experience and little more so than an abseil down the side of a mountain.

Up in the air you will need a strong nerve and a head for heights to take on the challenge. Strap on your helmet, step into the harness and then safely lower yourself down a towering cliffside.

Anybody who thinks this doesn't deserve to be in the Air adventures section of this Time Out guide has never

leaned backwards on a cliff with only a rope between them and gravity.

www.experiencealula.com

Take a cable car in Abha

Beyond the better-known cities of Jeddah, Riyadh and Makkah there is much to see in Saudi. Abha is a cultural gem on the southern end of the Red Sea coast and is part of the mountainous region of Saudi.

It is a fascinating and lesser seen side of Saudi and a must for adventurers. Somebody in Abha has also got into cable cars in a big way. There are four routes that operate at different times of the year and each is a high-rise adventure providing remarkable views of a very different side to Saudi than the big-business cities and desert retreats that most people know.

The Abha Palace Hotel Station is suspended 300



Abha cable cars

metres up and takes travellers over a lush family park and to the top of Green Mountain in the city.

The Al Jabidah station is 400 metres above the New Abha Resort and takes in some rolling hills and Lake Sadd, while the Soudah Station travels to the top of Saudi's tallest mountain peak.

At more than 3,000 metres high it showcases stunning views and even cross clouds and mountainside vistas that will blow your mind.

Finally, the Al Habala Station spans 600 metres and visits the Al Habala "hanging village" first constructed around 400 years ago.

Stargazing at Moon Mountain

You can have a sky adventure with both feet firmly planted on the ground if you are prepared to use a little bit of imagination.

Rather than taking to the

skies, look to the stars for one of the more magical desert experiences in all of Saudi. If you have never experienced a starry, starry night outside of a town or city, then forget everything you know about the constellations.

A blanket of pitch-black sky, without the ambient light of a manmade conurbation, shows stars to be much brighter and in relative high definition.

Just a couple of hours' drive north of Jeddah is the astrologically named Moon Mountain.

The surface itself has a distinctly lunar appearance and gives a good replica of striding across the moon's surface.

Here you will see a blanket of stars and a clear moon. Take a blanket to sit on, a delicious picnic and just stare up at the vast expanse of the universe while experiencing

complete silence and serenity.

Book through a licensed tour company.

Parasailing in the Gulf

Some might consider this more of a watersport than an aerial adventure, but we're listing it here for the 'para' rather than the sailing aspect.

Dana Beach Resort in Half Moon Bay is one of a select few places in Saudi to offer this fun activity.

As you're tethered to a speedboat you won't fly too high, so it is seen as a step towards more altitude-busting activities. It is not a tandem activity, meaning you're up there by yourself sailing in the sky over the Arabian Gulf.

The resort also offers the sport of flyboarding, which looks like an aqua jet pack that propels into the air through water jets. Fun!

Khobar. www.dbr.sa

EYES ON THE SKIES

Frolic with falcons

Maybe the most iconic of all air activities in Saudi is one that is merely observed from the ground.

Falconry has been popular in the Arab world for generations and continues to be practised as a cultural activity and a sport.

Central to much of that in Saudi is the Saudi Falcon Club. The club aims to preserve and celebrate the heritage of falconry in Saudi and in March of 2022 signed a major deal with culture, entertainment, sports and tourism company Sela to create an exhibition centre and entertainment complex to further the activity. International falconry festivals and exhibitions are already part of the Saudi Falcons Club purview and the investment will see that continued.

The King Abdulaziz Falconry Festival is a major event on the international falconry calendar and takes part in the club's grounds in Riyadh. The festival includes hunting demonstrations, speed races and even falcon beauty competitions.

While there are pop-up events and celebrations at places across Saudi, it is more common to witness falconry as part of a tour operator setting.

Adventure Khobar is typical of the type of tour on offer. You will be picked up and taken to a desert retreat near the east coast and be able to witness a falconry display and try flying a falcon yourself as you learn about



Falconry demonstration



Arabian green bee-eater

this ancient Bedouin practice. Typically, on most tours, there will be a chance to speak to the falconers and even pose for photos with the birds.

Birding in Saudi

It is not a sport, but some people do compete. It's not aerial, but you need to keep eyes on the skies. It's niche, but everybody has done it at some stage. Welcome to birdwatching in Saudi.

More than 500 species of bird have been found in Saudi. Website www.saudibirding.com has documented many of the best spots and typical sightings for years. With trip reports, location guides and even tailored tour packages it is an excellent starting point for birding enthusiasts. See also www.birdsofsaudiarabia.com

for a wonderful resource on the hundreds of birds to see in Saudi.

ONE TO WATCH

Up, up and away in a beautiful balloon

Step back paddleboards, sorry unicycles, good try supercars - the most Instagrammable mode of transport will always be the humble hot air balloon.

Especially when there are world record-breaking numbers of them up in the air at the same time.

That's what happened when the AlUla Skies festival put on a show in March 2022. The glow show saw hot air balloons light up the night sky to provide a spectacular display for spectators out



AlUla balloon festival

“The most Insta-friendly mode of transport will always be the humble hot air balloon.”

in the desert. It was all accompanied by a musical soundtrack provided by the renowned Saudi-born DJ Jamal Mohammed.

Other balloon experiences at the festival included tethered and non-tethered flights. The untethered flights

saw guests and pilots up early for a dawn trip up into the desert sky.

Although a regular hot air balloon home doesn't seem to exist in Saudi at the moment, it is emerging as a popular activity.

Saudia Airlines has confirmed a three-year sponsorship deal for the AlUla Moments festival - due to return in February-March 2023 - and that will mean the balloon activities will return as well.

Furthermore, the Saudi Hot Air Ballooning Federation, Sahab for short, is working hard to make the sport a key part of life, and tourist attraction, in the country. For enthusiasts, it offers training, flight centres and activities at locations across Saudi.

BIRDS OF SAUDI

Arabian Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris melanocephala*)

Philby's Partridge (*Alectoris philbyi*)

Arabian Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos dora*)

Yemen Thrush (*Turdus menachensis*)

Yemen Serin (*Serinus menachensis*)

South Arabian Wheatear (*Oenanthe lugentoides*)

Yemen Warbler (*Sylvia buryi*)

Arabian Waxbill (*Estrilda rufibarba*)

Arabian Serin (*Serinus rothschildi*)

Yemen Linnet (*Carduelis yemenensis*)



South Arabian Wheatear

SAUDI SEA ADVENTURE

Offering some of the best diving on the planet, deep dive
or snorkel your way around Saudi



UNDER THE SEAS

The Arabian Gulf and Red Sea offer an abundance of wildlife well worth travelling to explore

There are probably as many reefs off the Saudi coast as the waters off the rest of the countries touching the Red Sea combined. And, unlike the other shores, they are relatively unexplored.

In fact, the sea on the east, the Arabian Gulf, and the west, the Red Sea, give visitors to Saudi a real opportunity to be some of the first to experience and discover awe-inspiring sites beneath the waves. To see the plethora of aquatic life you need only grab a mask and snorkel, throw on a couple of flippers, and waddle off the beach and into the Red Sea to feel like you have swam into a technicolour world as impressive as anything Avatar 2 could offer.

“There are numerous wrecks off either coast home to a variety of sea life, some cute, some a little scary.”



All in waters that for most of the year are as warm as a nice bath. For the more adventurous, and PADI trained, a scuba trip will

open up more of the world at sea. There are numerous wrecks off either coast, some deliberate, some stricken vessels that have become home to a variety of sea life, some cute, some a little scary.

Staying on top of the waves and Saudi is fast becoming more intrigued with adventure sports, with kite surfing, wind surfing, jet skiing, and blown-up bananas being dragged by a speed boat being spotted more frequently off the coast.

But where can you go and what can you do to enjoy water-focused activities in a country that is predominantly covered by desert?

Check out our guide to just some of the water adventures you can enjoy in Saudi's Red Sea and Arabian Gulf waters.



DIVING

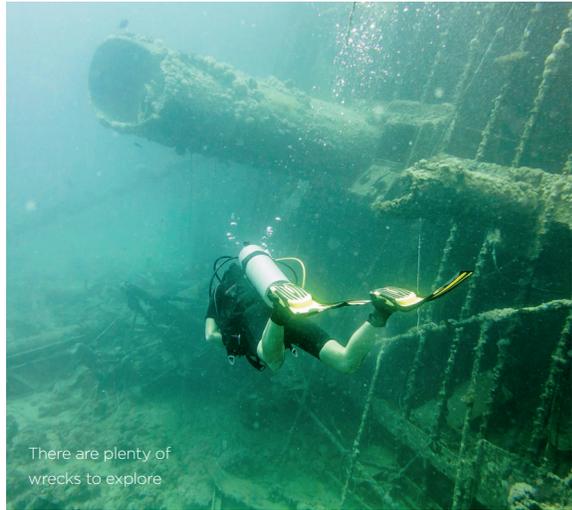
Red Sea

The coastal city of Jeddah is the country's premier destination for divers visiting Saudi. The Red Sea off the coast of Saudi is one of the great unexplored diving sites in the world. What's more, with the sea temperature staying between 25-35°C, diving is realistically considered to be a year-round activity over here.

There are many sites of note and keen divers don't need to hop on a plane to log dive time. The Ann Ann is the largest shipwreck in Jeddah and may even be the most challenging. The ship, which sunk in 1977, stands virtually upright, meaning the bow is visible from just five meters beneath the surface and the stern can be seen from depths of greater than 32m.

Divers are warned to be cautious when swimming through the open galley, captain's room and electric room, which now are occupied by tuna, bluestripe snappers and blue-spotted stingrays. Whitetip sharks have been known to visit the Ann Ann wreck.

The site is a two-hour drive from Jeddah and is in the area known as the 26-Mile-Reef. The wreck is badly broken and described being only fit for experienced divers, so be warned if you are new to the hobby. Also off the coast of Jeddah is Boiler Wreck, which is considered one of the best dive sites in the region. As it sits at a depth of between four and 18 meters below the surface of the Red Sea, the Boiler Wreck is a good site



There are plenty of wrecks to explore

for less-experienced divers to gain some vital underwater time. While the area is shallow enough for newcomers, it has enough to keep even the most advanced divers coming back for repeat swims. Bulk out your logbook with several trips and always be sure to find something new.

The Miss Marie, in the Jeddah Port Area, is a coaster that sunk stern first, as it is tough to reach it is a particularly unspoilt wreck. The Cable Wreck, formerly known as the Staphonos, sunk in 1978 and was carrying construction materials such as steel beams, cables, and chain link fences. On calm days it can be explored by all levels of divers, but rough days it is best left to those who are more experienced.

Two hundred miles from Jeddah is Yanbu, another popular dive region in western Saudi.

Despite this, it is still an area that is relatively

unexplored, compared to global tourist hotspots.

Seven Sisters dive site in Yanbu is an area known for its hammerhead sharks, but visitors are just as likely to spot pickhandle barracuda, tiger sharks, yellowfin tuna, and red snappers.

Beginners can find a handful of dive centres offering lessons in Jeddah and the surrounding areas, while PADI-qualified divers can contact the dive centres to arrange excursions, equipment and a thriving local community.

Hope of Spring (www.hopespringdive.com) in Jeddah is Saudi's first PADI dive resort and offers in-pool and in-sea diving training, experienced underwater guides, refresher courses and equipment hire. Trips to various sites come with recommendation of animals to look out for (including whale, shark and whale shark-spotting dives).

There are five species
of turtle in the Red Sea



Those who have the diving bug will want to splash the cash as well as the water and a dive centre-cum-shop such as Al Haddad Scuba in Jeddah is likely to become a regular haunt. Not only does it offer lessons and organised dive trips, but it also acts as a shop for you enthusiasts to stock up on kit.

Arabian Gulf

On the other coast, and a three-and-a-half-hour drive by car or an hour by plane

from Riyadh, are the triple diving hubs of Dammam, Al Khobar and Dhahran.

Half-Moon Bay is the most famous site, it has the advantage of being shore accessible, meaning you don't need to charter a boat to make the dive. The intriguing site is home to an artificial reef, several submerged buses, jeeps, cars, and large tyres in an underwater navigation course layout. While not strictly natural, it does have an underwater

theme park feel and there is plenty to explore.

Jubail, an hour north, is best known as an industrial city. However, it also offers intimate diving experiences. Divers here tend to head for Fanateer Reef as well as Jana Reef and Jana Wall, both part of Jannah Island. Divers making a trip between July and September have the magical opportunity to see a whale shark while they're out in the water. A must for the lifetime bucket list.

SNORKELLING

Visitors to Saudi who are not qualified to dive, don't have the time to go on a course, or simply don't fancy being so far under the sea can still see the varied sea life.

The crystal-clear waters of the Red Sea means you can just pull on a mask and snorkel and see a myriad of fish and coral reef just moments off the shore.

Red Sea

Any of the resorts and beach clubs that cling to the coast of Jeddah will have scores of sea life just a short paddle from its shores.

La Plage Resort is located at the Jeddah Creek entrance, and this location means there are loads of fish species swimming in and out of the creek waiting for your fancy new underwater camera. Divers can see passing manta rays, blue spotted rays, groupers, sea turtles, clownfish, box fish, and more. The site is well maintained and suitable for all levels.

Silver Sands beach resort has a beautiful coral reef and a small island within a two minutes swimming distance away. The resort allows guests on a day pass.

South of Jeddah is Jabal Al Lith, and the small island's



white sands border shallow blue waters, perfect for snorkelling and swimming. It is a well-known site for spotting whale sharks and large fish of multiple varieties.

Going north of Jeddah is Umluj. The small north-western town is part of the Red Sea Project, which is looking to create a premier resort destination.

Three hundred species of hard coral grow off the coast here, which is four times the number of species found in the Caribbean - along with green and hawksbill turtles, dolphins, dugong, and over 1,200 species of fish many of which are not found anywhere else on Earth. The region is dubbed the "Maldives of Saudi" and visitors to the Jabal Hassan islands will see some outstanding coral reefs during dives.

In Umluj, snorkellers may also spot playful wild dolphins - if lucky.

Also north of Jeddah is Yanbu and the dive site Abu Galawa, which offers snorkellers a gorgeous underwater world dotted with colourful coral, schools of barracuda and lots of hammerheads, as well as other species of sharks.

Arabian Gulf

On the Arabian Gulf coast the snorkelling sites are best reached by boats. Al Jubail has several options with trip to the best spots, including islands of Juraid, Kran, Krayen and Jana.

The visibility is not as good on the eastern coast of Saudi as the Red Sea but there are still plenty of sights for the snorkeller. And, the Arabian Gulf is quite shallow and has a comparatively high salinity making it a unique environment to swim.

Outdoorsy tour company Khobar Adventures offers private and shared boat charters to Jana or Juraid Island. A captain will guide you to areas of particular interest and you can dive straight off the side of the boat in search of fish. It is a good introduction for beginners as life jackets are provided, so even less proficient swimmers can join in safely.





Dugong can be seen - if lucky

FISHING

Rea Sea

The reefs in the Red Sea provide food and shelter to more than 1,200 fish species and about ten per cent of these species are only found in this body of water. The Red Sea also has a high salinity level of around 40 per cent, five per cent higher than the average global salinity level, giving the fish caught a unique flavour.

The Rosewood Jeddah (www.rosewoodhotels.com) hotel offers a six-hour boat trip. On this voyage guests enjoy a trip to a beautiful coral reef island, Bayada Island, 24km from Jeddah, and can choose from a range of activities including fishing and swimming. The nearby Al Murjan Beach Resort Jeddah also offers fishing expeditions from the hotel.

Captain Mohammed and his team at Jeddah Red Sea Fishing (www.fishingbooker.com) offer a six-hour or eight-hour excursion on a 29' skiff boat that accommodates up to four anglers. They say that they will take customers to the local reefs giving them the chance to target wrasse, coral trout, giant trevally, sailfish, barracuda, and all kinds of groupers. Depending on what fish you want to catch, you can use the technique of trolling, jigging, handlining, and bottom fishing. All you need to bring is snacks and sun protection.

Arabian Gulf

Over on the eastern shores there are options for fishing direct from land or taking a boat out. A number of hotels



Sport's fishing is increasingly popular



Jet skiing

“The Red Sea has a salinity level of around 40 per cent... giving the fish caught a unique flavour.”

in the Al Jubail, Damman, and Al Khobar offer trips out for guests wanting to cast a line.

Rose 8th Charters offers a range of aquatic activities out of Al Jubail, welcoming clients onto the water for a day of diving, snorkelling, and fishing. Captain Rashed says they can offer the best sportfishing Saudi has to offer, with a huge variety of prestigious species found in the warm sheltered waters. The Rose 8th is a 28' boat with room on board for

Aerial view of Jeddah corniche



up to five guests. Captain Rashed says they split the day between jigging and casting for grouper, snapper, and other reef and bottom fishing favourites, and trolling for king mackerel out on the open waters. They offer a six, eight and 12-hour trip.

The corniche in Al Khobar is a very popular fishing spot with anglers casting out straight from the shore.

BOAT CHARTERS

For the people who are feeling less active, chartering a boat is a more sedate way to explore one of Saudi's coasts.

Red Sea

A yacht can be chartered for a weekend break with Red Sea Marina (www.redseamarina.com), this allows for snorkelling trips, sunset cruises or dolphin watching. For a bit more of

an adrenalin-fuelled trip they also offer a speed boat if you want to see the Jeddah coastline from the water.

For an extended trip at sea there is the option of a Red Sea Cruise on which you'll enjoy private dining, rooms overlooking the sea, large auditoriums for dance and theatre productions, markets with sundries and souvenirs, and on most of the ships, health and wellness facilities, swimming pools, and recreation areas.

Arabian Gulf

Many of the hotels in the eastern cities offer boat trips. The InterContinental Al Jubail offers trips out to the islands off its coast.

It's the islands that are the huge draw on the eastern coast for boat charters. A number of these islands have also become nesting areas for migratory birds such as flamingos, and white-cheeked

terns, as well as turtles. The Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu and the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation cooperate to take care of these animals.

WATER SPORTS

Saudi's western and eastern shores include many lagoons and bays of various depths and sizes, which combined with stable winds, regular afternoon sea breezes and warm temperatures all year round, means they are the ideal destination for all kinds of water sports and levels of ability, from professionals to beginners.

As the country increasingly looks to attract tourists, a number of luxury resorts and private beach clubs offer water sport attractions. There are also ladies-only beaches and separate areas where women and families can enjoy the sea in private.



Rea Sea

As Saudi opens more to the world the variety of activities on offer will no doubt rapidly increase, but at the moment the majority of water sports are linked to international hotels and popular beach resorts.

The OIA Beach Resort (www.oiabeach.com), in Jeddah, offers a variety of unique water sport activities such as sailing and kayaking, as well as an inflatable floating water park.

The family-friendly Mövenpick Jeddah Al Nawras (www.movenpick.com) is located on a private island off the cornice and offers water sport activities.

A stretch of sand on Jeddah's Al Saif beach opened to the public in 2015 and has become a very popular kite-surfing

destination. It is also a popular spot for families to spend a day together. The water is shallow, making it a top place to splash around with the little ones, while the expanse of white sand is a top place to simply fly a more family-friendly kite.

Super Kite Day (www.superkiteday.com) offers kite-surfing lessons and equipment rental in Jeddah. The lessons on offer cater for beginners all the way to advanced kite surfers. As with kite surfing, the Red Sea is also the perfect place to give sports such as wakeboarding and water skiing a go.

Jeddah residents are encouraged to take a membership at one of the numerous beach resorts. There is no shortage to choose from.

Many have chalets and

villas allowing you to extend your stay beyond a day. So, you can try windsurfing in the morning, a trip on an aqua assault course in the afternoon, before ending your day with a sunset splash on a jet ski.

Arabian Gulf

At Dana Beach Resort (www.dbr.sa) day visitors can enjoy the breath-taking Half Moon Bay and take part in a number of water sports - they have doughnuts and bananas, where riders are dragged at high speed behind boats on the inflatables.

For those who want to take control rather than be dragged on an inflatable food item, then there is the opportunity to have a jet ski lesson. And finally, those who want to channel their inner Iron-Man why not try



Mövenpick Jeddah Al Nawras



OIA Beach Resort

fly boarding? Here you are propelled high into the air by high-pressure water jets attached to a jet pack on your back.

The Sunset Beach Resort and Spa in Khobar (www.sunset-beach.com.sa) is typical of the activity-filled resorts opening in Saudi.

There are myriad sea adventures to enjoy. Simple sightseeing cruises, fishing trips and sailing boat trips can be enjoyed, which is all well and good. But for a thrilling adventure look out for jet skis, jet packs and jet boats as well as a variety of floating rides as well.



Flyboarding

SAUDI LAND ADVENTURE

For adrenaline junkies, keen hikers and bikers, and those who love spectacular landscapes, Saudi's mountains, dunes and wadis will fulfil your every wish



BEYOND THE DUNES

Explore Saudi and discover a land of adventure

Saudi provides a land that is very much untouched by tourists. This means tourists on a first visit to Saudi will be truly surprised at how much is on offer.

The landscape is far more varied than the images conjured up in the mind of many when it comes to Saudi.

It's not all deserts, tents billowing in the breeze, camels roaming the lands, with a few cities of gleaming skyscrapers... it does have that, but it also has much, much more.

Visitors will find mountains, and lush, verdant lands that contrast with the barren deserts, and when the rains come, they deposit lakes for the season that offers swimming opportunities for those looking to cool off, or simply look cool on their social media.

These varied landscapes offer a plethora of activities for visitors to Saudi, but what is especially unique in Saudi is how much of the country is, for now at least, untouched by tourists.

You are likely to be among the first visitors to be climbing a certain crag or hiking a trail, some of the hardest bike climbs in the world are in Saudi but many



have not yet attempted to climb them.

Now is the chance to get ahead of the inevitable crowd, be a pioneer and enjoy these pursuits in relative solitude. While, of course, also boasting of your unique feats on social media.

Saudi's Vision 2030 plan, which is looking to enhance Saudi's global image and diversify the economy away from oil, has a number of projects that have land-based sports as a central part of their plans.

For example, Saudi's Royal Commission has sponsored a cycling team that now features the AIUla brand on their shirts.

AIUla is one of the six giga-projects that epitomise Saudi's \$7trillion development

plan. And the Saudi Climbing and Hiking Federation has been busy bolting routes up untouched crags around the country.

Then there is that Middle Eastern staple of desert driving and camping in amongst the dunes.

Saudi offers so many options to really get away from it, get the sand under the feet and tyres to explore and then spend the night gazing at the stars with zero light pollution.

So, from climbing to camping, on two wheels or two feet, Saudi is now sharing some of the world's most beautiful scenes, which appeal to both adrenalin-seeking travellers, or those looking for a more sedate sojourn across the country.



HIKING

Lace up your boots, slap on the sunscreen and get exploring this spectacular, diverse land.

Wahba Crater, Taif

The 4km wide and 250-metres deep crater is a vast hollow with an opaque lake at the centre and on top. The Wahba Crater is on the western edge of the Hafer Kishb basalt plateau, around 250km and a two-hour drive north of Taif, or just over a four-hour drive from Jeddah.

In its centre is white sodium phosphate crystals, which creates a sparkling

“The Edge of the World is a 300-metre high cliff in the Jebel Tuwaiq region, created through the movement of tectonic plates.”

surface that can even be seen from the sky, and the salt-bed transforms into a pearly lake when it rains.

The lowest of the crater is 780 metres and the trek to the bottom takes around 45-60 minutes and the trek to the back up ranging from 60-90 minutes, all depending on fitness levels.

Heritage Oasis Trail, AlUla

The AlUla Oasis offers numerous beautiful spots dotted along its trails. While visitors can explore on their own there are curated guided tours on offer with a local Rawi (guide). The ruins in AlUla are compared to the



Al Habala



Edge of the World

famous ones in Petra, Jordan.

The route takes hikers up Alfath mountain, from the summit of which is a stunning view of the oasis spread along the valley floor. The two-hour trek is not the most strenuous, and six-year-olds, with parental supervision are invited to join the walk.

Wadi Al Disah, Tabuk

Al Disah translates to “the valley of palm trees”, but there is more in this hidden

gem, with the valley also home to sandstone cliffs, tall columns of rocks, and several freshwater springs.

The valley is in the north-western Tabuk province of the country and visitors will find numerous archaeological sites from the Nabataean times. The main entrance to Wadi Al Disah is located about 260km from the city of Tabuk. The trek length is around 15km and is accessible from November to March.

Jebel Fihrayn, Jebel Tuwaiq

Jebel Fihrayn has the rather incredible nickname of the Edge of the World, and yet is possible on a day trip from the capital.

The Edge of the World is actually a 300-metre high cliff in the Jebel Tuwaiq region, created through the movement of tectonic plates. The clear cut it carved revealed layers of sediments that accumulated there when the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula was a shallow tropical sea during the Jurassic period, a mere 150 million years ago, and this means hikers can spot fossils, a vestige of when the region was part of an ocean bed, along the path when they are not looking at the staggering view. While a spectacular view is on offer, the fact you can traverse most of the way in a 4x4 means it is accessible for even the least hardy of hikers among you.

Al Hada Mountains, Taif

The Camel Owners Trail in the Al Hada Mountains was established ten centuries ago and later reinforced with large stones and zigzag architecture during the Ottoman Empire.

The mountain road connects Al Hada city to the other cities of the Makkah Region, and offers spectacular views to visitors. Hikers up the mountain can pass playful baboons and natural rose fields, but there is also a less energetic option: a cable car, the longest in the country, takes visitors right to the top.

The historic hike is a 35-minute drive from Taif city.

CLIMBING

Indoors and out climbing is scaling new heights of popularity in Saudi.

Dyno Gym, Jeddah

Dyno Gym was Saudi's first indoor climbing gym, which opened in January of this year and has become a popular place where new climbers and experienced professionals can meet to share advice and swap stories, making it the ideal place to acclimatise, practice and find out some of the latest routes.

As climbing is a new sport to Saudi even the best-known spots are not well travelled, which means while you will be one of the first to make the climb, it also means there is not as much information and routes are not as clearly defined as they would be in more traditional climbing environments.

For climbing enthusiasts looking to explore there is the Saudi Climbing and Hiking Federation [SCHF], which oversees the development of sustainable competitive and non-competitive climbing activities in the country.

The Federation was formed in 2018 and would be a good contact to make before setting off an adventure. www.climbing.sa

Asir Province

In the 1990s in Wadi Bin Hashbal a handful of US, British and Australian expats explored the climbing in the region. In 1996 Chamonix guides placed hundreds of bolts in an attempt to commercialise it.

The region, which has



Rock climbing in Saudi

“Tanomah is fast becoming a must-visit climbing destination thanks to its easy access to the rock.”

been described as a “granite paradise”, and near the village of Al Gaal features Wadi Tayyah, a Class C technical waterfall canyon that drops more than 5,000 feet in less than a mile and a half.

Also in the Asir province is Al Habala, a tourist site with tram and theme park rides, and way back in history residents of the hanging village raided settlements above the rim and escaped down the 400-foot cliff face using ropes.



Climbers can now pay for a guided trip in the area.

Tanomah is fast becoming a must-visit climbing destination thanks to its easy access to the rock, comfortable camping, comfortable year-round temperatures at 2,000m altitude, and a huge scope for climbing with both sun and shade options at all grades. Wall of Shadows is located in the Al Sharaf park, and only 10 minutes from the centre of Tanomah in the storied Asir Province.

At only a 10-minute walk from the first crag and

parking/camping area it is very convenient. Equipping at the Wall of Shadows was undertaken by the Saudi Climbing and Hiking Federation during the second phase of the Saudi Bolting Project in 2019.

Al Shafa, Taif

The Olympic Crag in Al Shafa was the first professionally-developed sport climbing crag in Saudi. At 2,300m altitude and offering morning shade, Olympic Crag is known as a crag suitable for all seasons.

Be warned, however, the

weather changes fast in these mountains, so pack clothing and equipment for all eventualities.

The granite is said to rival that of Chamonix and there are a variety of routes for intermediate and advanced climbers. It is a couple of hours from Jeddah and 45 minutes from Taif Airport if you're taking internal flights.

The Saudi Climbing Federation completed the development during the first phase of the Saudi Bolting Project. The trail, routes and base of the crag were created in 2018.

CAMPING

Whether you're happy to throw a tent in the back of your car and wild camp or want an organised glamping spot, a night under the stars is a classic Saudi experience.

Al Kharrarah National Park, Riyadh

The park is home to Lake Kharrarah, also known as the "Lake of Liquid Light", which is formed during the rainy season by the abundance of rain that falls.

Many from Riyadh have made it a winter tradition to camp or have a day trip here after the rain, and when the basin is full it is even possible to go for a swim. It is just 45 minutes from the capital. In hotter weather the "lake" evaporates, but the valley is still well worthy of a visit. The park develops a lush green pasture that attracts a variety of birds and wildlife.

Al Thumamah National Park, Riyadh

Another camp spot not far from Riyadh is Al Thumamah, but it is not one for relaxing.

The park, just north of the capital, is an adventure hot spot and visitors can indulge in quad biking, dune bashing, camel rides, and more.

Moon Valley, Jeddah

As the name suggests, the valley, which is actually a stretch of desert, has a distinct lunar likeness.

The camping ground near Jeddah, next to Jabal al Jadib, is home to some frankly bizarre rock formations, which have been described as looking like a sculptor carved



Star gazing

them. They also date back to thousands of years.

The amazing sunsets are only bettered by the magical night sky on offer, campers can spot constellations such as Orion's Belt. Moon Valley campers can also visit the 18th-century Asfan Fort that was built out of the basalt rock found in the valley. The hilltop outpost used to serve as a rest stop for pilgrims on the route between Makkah and Al Madinah.

Jabal Al Lawz, Neom

For visitors wanting a unique camping experience in Saudi, then Jabal Al Lawz mountain at 2,580m above sea level, is known to be blanketed in snow.

Nestled on the Jordanian border, the site is home to archaeological sites that feature pre-Islamic petroglyphs and inscriptions.

Falcon International Camp at Khubayb Al Reem, Riyadh

West of Riyadh the Falcon

International Camp offers traditional style camping where guests sleep in tents in the open desert under a bright night sky.

The camp features tourist-friendly activities such as falconry demonstration, archery experiences and camel rides. Be sure to make reservations before visiting the camp.

The Judah Thumb, Dammam

The "thumb" is about 160km from Dammam near the old town of Judah, and on a clear day it can be seen from a distance of 10km.

It is also often called the "Devil's Thumb", with the nickname said to have come from a nearby troop of Boy Scouts. In what can be described as a remote area, this rock really does stick out like a sore thumb.

The pathway there is not paved, and there are no official campsites. Supplies can be purchased from nearby Judah.



Mountain biking in AlUla

BIKING

Road racing and mountain climbs, there are routes and rides for every level of cyclist in Saudi.

Al Jaadah Pass, Asir

This has been named as the second hardest bike climb in the world.

While the ride is only around 12km long it gains a staggering 5,820 feet with a 14.5 per cent average gradient. #steep. This means it is not one for weekend cyclists, it is more for people who would have a crack at the Tour De France.

Al Jaadah Pass is in the Asir Mountains, which are in the southwest of Saudi, and has the highest concentration of Top 100 World Bike Climbs than any other area in the world.

Wadi Hanifa, Riyadh

The 120km stretch of oasis is for cyclists and pedestrians, and cuts through the middle of Riyadh. It is largely traffic-free early in the morning and



late at night and offers an abundance of green scenery. Numerous cycling groups use it often.

There are several bike rental shops for tourists who left their two wheels at home. Spin, on Al Nahdha Street, Jarir, runs on a mantra of accessible, affordable, and (almost always) available.

AlUla

AlUla has ambitions to become the cycling hub of Saudi. The Royal Commission for AlUla has a partnership with the Australian-based cycling squad Team BikeExchange, with AlUla featuring on their

Tour de France jerseys. The sponsorship is all part of the region's plan to entice more tourists and cycling is an integral part of that. AlUla's "Journey Through Time" 15-year masterplan, which was launched in April 2021, is aiming to completely develop the region as a must-visit destination.

For visitors there is the Cycle Trail, where a pack leader leads a leisurely bike ride crossing through the sand dunes. The 14km trail is suitable for ages 12 and above and lasts between one and a half and two hours depending on the speed and fitness level of the group.

DESERT DRIVING

Part scenic drive and part rollercoaster thrill ride, dune bashing in 4x4s or on quad bikes is one of Saudi's must-try experiences.

Desert Safari by Quad Bike in Riyadh

Saudi Arabia Tours offers a thrilling four-hour quad bike drive from Riyadh.

The rides take place at Red San, almost 80km northeast of Riyadh, and is in an area known as Hidden Valley. The red sand dunes are surrounded by tall mountains which creates the feel of being in a valley.

Dune Bashing in Jeddah

This eight-hour excursion travels across the deserts of Jeddah in a 4x4.

The Your Saudi Arabia run tour gives tourists the opportunity to have a go at sand boarding on the trip, as well as see sunset out among the dunes, before having a traditional dinner.

Al-Shaq mountains, Tabuk

The Tabuk region has been described as the Grand Canyon of the Middle East, so is a destination that definitely needs to be checked off.

Al Shaq means tear or rip and that is exactly what visitors will see: the land ripped apart to create a breathtaking canyon.

The canyon starts as a wadi which suddenly cracks open into a deep canyon. It is actually possible to be at the exact place where the breach appears and stand with feet on both sides of it. A 4x4 is needed to traverse



Quad bike

the sand and big rocks, and allow visitors to properly experience the vastness of this "rip" in the earth.

Al Disah Wadi, Tabuk

The Al Disah Wadi can be listed as one of Saudi's natural wonders. Ideally a proper 4x4 is needed to drive through it, however, it has to be said that in lieu of said 4x4 the landscape in the area is so breathtaking that a trip in a normal car to Al Disah (and back the same way) is also well worth the effort.

The 15km wadi can be accessed from both the east and west. A narrow canyon, which zigzags through a sandstone massif, where

the sheer cliff sides are over several hundred metres high it's a location reminiscent of the landscape seen in a wild west movie.

Yellow Lake, Al Hofuf

This destination is so far off the beaten track that intrepid explorers will need an experienced guide in a 4x4 in order to get to it. Yellow Lake is a lush oasis formed by the runoff of the plentiful artesian springs that supply water to more than 20,000 farms in the area.

The vegetation, rolling hills and wildlife makes the lake a unique destination to experience in Saudi's prolific Empty Quarter.



Al Disah Wadi

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A scuba diver in a black wetsuit with green accents is swimming horizontally in clear, bright blue water. To the left of the diver is a large, vertical coral reef with various types of coral in shades of orange, purple, and brown. The water is very clear, and sunlight filters down from the surface, creating a shimmering effect. In the top left corner, there are two horizontal bars, one orange and one green. The text 'Visit Saudi' is written in a white, elegant script font in the upper right quadrant.

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