

Unit 10: Community and Homelife

Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

Be aware of the following

- Practical information on ground and air transportation in Saudi Arabia
- Means of implementing Islamic law in Saudi Arabian society

Identify

- Guidelines concerning dress, photography, restaurants, shopping and communications technology in Saudi Arabia
- Religious morality police
- Jidda
 - Dhahran

Realize

- Lack of traditional "Western" recreation and leisure pursuits in Saudi Arabia
- Saudi Arabian attitudes to domestic help and manual labor
 - Respect given elderly in Arab circles

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1. Transportation and Travel

a. Driving Saudi Arabia's transportation system has undergone remarkable development in the past two decades. The Kingdom now has over 30,000 kilometers of paved roads and over 60,000 kilometers of unpaved roads.



This network connects all the cities and main towns and even extends to some remote settlements. People who dwell in the steppe lands still do without roads. However, it is not difficult to make your own way in such areas, provided that you recognize and avoid soft ground. The newer roads are in excellent condition, except for some in al-Asir Region.



There, flash floods rush through the wadis (normally dry water courses) during the rainy season and destroy pylons, bridges, and roadbeds. Apart from domestic travel, cross-border traffic has likewise benefited from expansion of the highway system. All-weather roads link Saudi Arabia to most neighboring countries; Oman and South Yemen are the exceptions. The road to Bahrain passes over a 25 kilometer causeway, which was opened in 1986.

Driving in Saudi Arabia used to be a very hazardous and nerve-wracking activity. In the mid 1970s, the importation of vehicles increased along with per capita income. A large percentage of the Saudi population purchased cars or pickup trucks and started driving for the first time. Many of these new drivers had no concept of lane markings, traffic signals, speed limits, and safe driving practices. Some

even used their vehicles for reckless stunts. At one point,
the

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traffic fatality rate for the Kingdom was 13 deaths per day. This picture has improved considerably over the last decade.

U.S. military personnel are allotted, on a pro-rata basis, sedans and jeeps for official and personal use.

Driving in Saudi Arabia is much more of an adventurous undertaking than in the United States since Saudis drive considerably faster and more unpredictably than American drivers.



One must learn to drive by "instinct" and make much more effort to judge the intentions of other drivers and pedestrians.

As mentioned previously, women are not allowed to drive within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Otherwise, all drivers are required to have a Saudi license, which takes about one month to obtain. Possession of a valid U.S. or international license will simplify that process and also sanction driving in the interim for diplomatic personnel.

New personnel may bring vehicles into the Kingdom. However, they should consider the following points before arranging any shipment. There is an import ban on pickup trucks and certain American and British cars. Personnel assigned to DAO should contact the Embassy's Administrative Officer for specifics. For rare makes, spare parts will be difficult to obtain, as will maintenance and repair services.



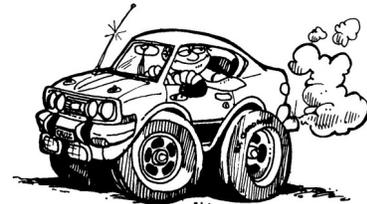
The surface of any vehicle will sustain considerable wear because of the environment--scorching sun, blowing sand, high humidity along the coasts, and debris from construction and uncovered trucks on the highway.

There are a large number of new and used car dealers in Riyadh and the other large cities. One can obtain Japanese-made passenger cars and pickups for a reasonable price.

Any vehicle purchased in the Kingdom must be registered. If a dealer is involved in the sale, he will probably expedite that process for a small fee. The registration should be kept with the vehicle at all times. In the event of a serious accident, wait at the scene until the police arrive. Be prepared to accompany them to the local station for detention, pending investigation, determination of responsibility, and assessment of compensation. Auto insurance is not required by law. However, it is advisable to have maximum third-party liability coverage.

Good highways exist between major cities, but any local excursions into the desert must be done by jeep; and even then, you run the danger of getting stuck in the sand unless you are familiar with the area and the jeep trails.

For camping or off-road travels, it is best to have either a four-wheel-drive or front-wheel drive vehicle. If you are driving in the desert it is the custom to help a person in trouble.



For personal insurance, take along some lumber for traction in soft areas. Driving long distances between cities in Saudi Arabia must be accompanied by careful planning, since service stations and rest stop locations are few and far between. Before departing, inform an associate or neighbor of your general route of travel. In case of a breakdown beyond sight of the highway, stay with the vehicle and attempt to build a signal fire.



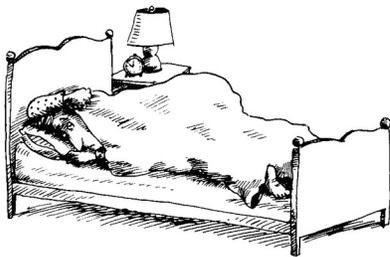
(1) Coping With Emergencies In the course of modernizing the Kingdom, the Saudi government financed the construction of many hospitals and medical centers in Riyadh and other cities. These facilities are staffed by doctors, nurses, and lab techs from various lands--the United States, Western Europe, Lebanon, Egypt, Pakistan, India, and the Philippines. Many of them have equipment of the latest

technology and fairly high standards of practice. The police and rescue units are quite adept at cordoning an area,

diverting traffic, and evacuating casualties whenever catastrophe strikes. There is very little chance that an attaché, while in Riyadh, would have to take charge in an emergency or administer first aid to himself or others.

That picture changes when the linguist travels to visit remote garrisons or other sites in outlying areas. He should ensure that his vehicle is equipped with a first-aid kit and that he knows how to use it. Anything could happen on the highway. Moreover, there may not be a full-service hospital where he is going. The capabilities of the local medical staff may be minimal. The procedures or authorization for evacuation may be in doubt and therefore subject to hindrance.

Remember the following tips for travel. If it becomes necessary to stop your vehicle near the highway, move it behind a hillock or some other obstacle.



That provides protection from truckers, who are inclined to pull off the road to eat or sleep with little concern for who or what may be ahead.

If it becomes necessary to hitch-hike, there should not be much waiting. Most natives and other drivers as well are apt to pick-up people walking or standing near the highway.

Traveling off the main road can be risky. As precautions against break-down or accident, heed the following points. Try to have a second vehicle accompany yours. Take along a tow rope and some lumber for traction. Bring communications and/or signaling equipment. Take along a first-aid kit and plenty of drinking water.



(2) Forbidden Places Do not attempt to enter the holy cities of Mecca and Medina unless you are a Muslim. It

is absolutely forbidden for non-Muslims to set foot in either place.

Do not attempt to enter a mosque. In Saudi Arabia, normally only Muslims may enter a mosque. It may happen that a Saudi will invite you to go to a mosque. In such a case, be sure to remove your shoes before you go in.

b. Public Streets Riyadh has in recent times become the hub of the Kingdom's ground transportation network. The city is ringed and traversed by a number of modern, multi-lane highways.

Cargo trucks transit the Riyadh area as they haul goods from Jordan or the coastal regions. There are no load limits, and so some roads have sustained heavy wear. The Riyadh-Dammam Highway has recently been reconstructed such that it passes sections of two older roads.



Riyadh has public bus service, which provides fairly good transportation around the central part of the city. Even so, few people use it. The same Saudi Public Transportation Company also operates in Jidda and Mecca and provides intercity service as well. Besides the bus line, taxicabs and rental cars are readily available in Riyadh. When using taxis, it is best to settle on the fare in advance. Most "men of affairs" drive themselves or ride with their chauffeur, and so the city streets are often congested.

c. Air Travel Saudi Arabia has three international airports. The ones at Jidda (JID-dah) and Riyadh have ultra modern facilities and occupy vast acreage. The one at Dhahran (dah-RAHN) is undergoing renovations. From any of these airports, there are numerous daily domestic and international flights to Europe and the Middle East and less frequent direct flights to North America and Asia.

Do not bring to Saudi Arabia any items which are either illegal or considered offensive to Saudis. This refers mainly to alcoholic beverages, books, and magazines of an explicit sexual nature. It also includes materials which are critical of the Arabs, Islam, and Saudi Arabia.

d. Railroads Railroads play a minor role in the Saudi transportation system. One operational line connects Dammam with the inland port of Riyadh. Most of the trains haul cargo, although a passenger train runs once daily in each direction.

2. Public Behavior and Attitudes



When in public, do not demonstrate affection for a spouse or friend of the opposite sex. Saudis never do this, and find such behavior quite unacceptable.

As stated previously, you may occasionally see Arab men walking hand-in-hand with each other. This indicates nothing more than the fact that they are good friends. If you should become good friends with a Saudi and he should reach out and hold your hand, try not to be startled. Accept it as the Saudis' customary demonstration of friendship. Keep in mind also that sexual relations between unmarried persons are strictly against the law in Saudi Arabia.

Do not eat, drink, or smoke in public during Ramadan. Since Moslems are not allowed to eat, drink, or smoke during the daylight hours of this month of fasting, an American should also abstain from these activities in the presence of Saudis in order not to offend them. Also, he or she should avoid doing these things even in private if Saudi visitors or co-workers are present, and certainly should not offer them a cigarette or anything to eat or drink.

Do not openly show anger or curse in any fashion; you can be jailed for this. Do not get overly excited in public or bust out with loud congratulations upon yours or anyone else's good fortune. If you want to celebrate, do it quietly.

Do not touch or pet a dog in front of a Saudi. Dogs are considered unclean by Muslim law. Dogs are not kept as pets and are usually filthy and mangy street roamers, so you probably won't want to touch them.



Do not voluntarily get involved in social incidents or accidents, even to give first aid. This can lead to complications.

Should you accidentally jostle or bump into someone on the street, you should try not to say "Excuse me," since this is considered unnecessary and somewhat odd. Americans seem to be singularly marked by their frequent and fervent use of this phrase at the slightest affront.

And, finally, in any confrontation, however minor, getting a seat in a restaurant, purchasing the last muskmelon, or whatever, you should always cede to age without question. This is a world where it is insulting for a man to be thought younger than he is. Age is considered a sign of dignity, of respect and wisdom, so that old people are listened to and are asked to give advice. Our overwhelming preoccupation with the maintenance of youth seems odd to people of the Gulf region, many of whom are not even sure how old they are.

a. Dress Civilian dress in Saudi Arabia is very informal (almost no one ever wears a tie) and consists of light, summer clothing. You should, however, bring along a sweater or jacket to wear at night during the winter or at various times during the year in the higher elevations such as Taif and Khamis Mushayt. Dress modestly, especially in public. Men should always wear long pants and a shirt, even when it is quite hot. Women should wear long, loose dresses with high necklines and long sleeves. To disregard this convention will offend the Saudis and, in the very conservative areas, could even lead to trouble for you.



Be mindful of the Saudi religious morality police. Their express purpose is to maintain morality. You could be accused or punished in public if an act is regarded as immoral in their eyes.

b. Photography Do not photograph people without their permission (particularly women). Many Saudis associate cameras with the "evil eye." Cameras should not be carried with the cover open and ready for picture-taking. In fact, in some towns, picture-taking of any kind is ill-advised and may result in either your camera or its film being taken away from you.

Before attempting to take pictures at marketplaces or other public places, it is best to ask around and try to learn what the reaction of the local people generally is toward picture-taking.



If you do photograph people, utilize a long range lens (135-200mm) so as not to appear obtrusive. Avoid photographing people while they are praying. If permission is granted to photograph a woman, be sure to include male family members. Children like photographs and will yell "Sura, Sura" (picture, picture). If you have a Polaroid camera, make friends first by giving them a few shots and then use a 35mm camera or other type for your own pictures.

Do not photograph airports, post facilities, or government or military installations. Saudi airports are considered military installations. Saudis are very security conscious, and even picture-taking while flying over the country is forbidden.

c. Attitudes Regarding Law, Hygiene, and Environment The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia enforces traditional Islamic law (sharia) for personal, family, and civil matters involving Muslims and for all criminal matters. It also enforces supplementary administrative laws

(tantamount to royal decrees) which regulate matters such as commerce, traffic, and labor. Saudi citizens are generally law-abiding, for they have good reason to be.



Criminal cases are adjudicated rather quickly. Punishments are severe and deterrent, most being carried out in public. Convicted murderers are beheaded; adulterers are crushed with heavy stones. Thieves have their right hands amputated, although this punishment is usually not inflicted for a first-time offense.

There is very little theft in the Kingdom, as there is very little crime in general. Only traffic laws are consistently violated, and most such infractions are ignored by police. In any case, foreigners would do well to abide by all Saudi laws. Wrongdoing could lead to lengthy incarceration and/or deportation, perhaps even public punishment.

The cities of Saudi Arabia are now quite clean compared to conditions in the past and to other cities in the region. In Riyadh, one vast improvement came in the early 1980s when the municipality covered the sewage canal which fronted on the large market area of Batha.

Municipal authorities have more recently made headway in enforcing the use of trash containers in the residential areas of the city. Currently, municipal sanitation crews police the main streets and public areas at dawn and remove the trash to authorized dumps. Were it not for these efforts, the city areas would be extensively littered. Arabs in general are just beginning to understand the rationale for public sanitation. Many of them are still inclined to toss or deposit trash wherever it suits them. The attaché may also witness similar tendencies regarding human waste, especially in bivouac areas or cantonments where latrines are out of service for lack of maintenance.

In the course of modernizing the Kingdom, the Saudi government constructed extensive waterworks. Consequently, there was a vast increase in availability of water in urban areas. This service brought about new habits of personal hygiene.



Due to scarcity of water, the natives of inner Arabia had to forego bathing or to use sand for that purpose. Water was conserved for drinking or performing the obligatory ablution prior to prayer. That ritual cleansing inculcated some hygienic practice, as it involves washing hands, feet, and genital area. However, natives now have the opportunity to bathe completely on a regular basis, and many have taken to that custom.

Automotive and industrial pollution do not pose problems for the residents of Riyadh, yet there are other environmental nuisances. Wind and occasional rain deposit a considerable amount of sand and dust, while sandstorms bring larger quantities. Even with daily cleaning, surfaces inside buildings quickly acquire a layering of reddish-brown dust. The strong winds which originate in distant regions also bring in diseases.

The Saudis well recognize which elements of the environment can be controlled and which cannot. The municipality of Riyadh has prohibited the use of vehicle horns in the vicinity of hospitals and other areas. Actually, Saudis are not inclined to use horns much, as are Egyptians and other Arabs. Consequently, the streets of Riyadh are relatively quiet.



d. Attitudes Toward Others The coastal areas of Arabia have throughout history witnessed the arrival or passage of foreign merchants and travelers. The interior, in contrast, has for long periods been isolated. Prior to the "oil boom," the inhabitants of inner Arabia were very suspicious of foreigners.

That attitude has moderated somewhat over the last two decades and, with some natives, has given way to curiosity. However, the original suspicion has been manipulated by opinion leaders who seek to instill the following belief.

As Muslims, the people of Saudi Arabia are superior to all non-Muslims. As Arabs, they are superior to all non-Arab Muslims. As Saudis, they are superior to all other Arabs. This attitude is consistent with both traditional notions of tribal nobility and new-founded notions of Saudi nationalism. However, it also derives from a defensive outlook on the Kingdom's demography.

Many educated Saudis indeed see themselves being engulfed by hordes of foreign workers of various nationalities. The propaganda of Saudi superiority serves to bolster self assurance, yet it complicates relations with foreigners.

Regarding Westerners, and Americans in particular, those relations are further strained by ambivalent attitudes. Saudis, like other Arabs, admire the achievements of Western culture and the technical expertise of Westerners. At the same time, they criticize Western culture for its permissiveness and morale depravity, and they see Westerners as lacking true intellection and true salvation.

