

## The Land of Sand: Saudi Arabia

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Saudi Arabia is officially called KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA. It has been picked up to discuss distinct desert climatic condition and its effect on living of the people. Desert is any large dry area of land with thinly distributed vegetation. It is very important eco-system of the earth. It has distinctive animal and plant world adapted to meet the challenges of deserts.



Saudi Arabia – location

Desert has very low rainfall, about 250mm. or below it. Atacama Desert, in South America, gets on average about 0.8 mm only. Some of these are concentrated in Arctic and Arctic circles. These are cold deserts. The hot or tropical deserts are located between 15° and 30° north and south of equator. In the North are Arizona Desert in North America, Sahara in Africa, Arabia in Saudi Arabia, Thar in India. In the South around the Tropic of Capricorn, there are Atacama in the South America, Kalahari and Nambi and Great Australian Desert in Australia.

Most of us know about desert as hot, arid (dry with very less or no rainfall) regions, large land area covered with sand and sand dunes which keep on shifting. It is true, but add to these that climatic conditions are extreme in all deserts. The difference in

day and night temperatures is large. It may not rain for decades, but when it rains, it may bring flood to the region.



Ship of Desert

Desert terrain may consist of rugged mountains, high plateau or plains. A large number of deserts occupy broad mountainrimmed basins. Surface materials in deserts include bare bedrock, plains of gravel and boulders, and vast tract of shifting sand. When it rains, the streams flow with great velocity and transport mud, sand and rock debris before water disappears through evaporation or absorbed in the sand. Plants are low growing, thorny, small-leaved or leafless with deep roots and other water conserving mechanism. There are plants which come out in short rains, flower, produce seed and disappear in a very short period of time. Cacti, agave are well known plants among other plants. Typical desert animals are insects, reptiles, birds, rodents and a few large mammals. The majority of animals drink water when it is available, otherwise they depend on fluids obtained by eating succulents plants, blood and flesh of their prey, and they too have other ways to conserve water. Most of them are nocturnal. Some of them go to semi-sleep stage for long period of time when weather is not suitable for them. Camel needs special mention, which is called the ship of the desert, as if it is made for the desert only. With its specially designed lips, it can easily graze on thorny bushes; its padded feet it can conveniently walk on sand and hump on the back helps it to live on its fat as a source of energy for pretty long time. Like any other animal of a desert it drinks lot of water when it gets it but can survive without it for a long time. Long and bushy eyelashes give its eyes protection from sand in a dust storm. Like any other desert animal, it sits its back turned towards a dust storm whenever it strikes in a desert.

### **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

Geographically, it is located between 18° N and 39° N latitudes and about 39° E and 60° E meridians. The important point to note is that the Tropic of Cancer passes through it and it is on the Western side of Asian continent. The capital is Riyadh.



Mecca-the holiest Muslim city of Saudi ArabiaThe central plateau rises abruptly and the coastal highland may vary from 1,500m to 3,000m. It has the world's largest continuous sand area of 6,50,000 sq. km. There are no perennial rivers. Sweet water is drawn from under the surface. Only 0.5% land is cultivable with irrigation. It is almost completely a desert. A very small portion of it, near Amen gets less than 480 mm. of rains annually. Most of the other parts hardly get any rain. In winters the temperature may vary between 14° C and 23° C but in summers it may touch 54° C. The natural vegetation is small herbs and shrubs. Cacti, prickly pear are also there. These are used by sheep and goat herds. Date palm is the country's wide spread tree.

General Living is mostly guided by the climate. Gents wear white long flowing robe with a head gear to protect themselves from intense heat of the day, hot winds and dust storms. This dress is known by the name of Thawb. Ladies also put on long clothes with a head cover and a veil on their faces. Their dress is called the Aba. Old type of housing took care of both, heat and dust storm.



Date-palm (Oasis)

Oasis is the fertile places because of the availability of water on the surface. Permanent settlement grows around such places. Caravan stops there to rest and to refurbish its stocks. People grow melons, tomatoes, wheat and barley.

### **Economic Activities**

Saudi Arabia is the historical home of Islam. Mecca and Medina attract Muslim from all over the world. Assembly of pilgrims during Hajj is a life time experience for the Muslims and also to those who watch it on television. Besides a must visit to every Muslim, it is a big-time economic activity every year. Saudi Arabia's estimated petroleum reserves represent one-fourth of the world's total reserves. It provides seventy percentage of total revenue. The country has best quality of iron ore. The industry revolves around these two products. Social Activity is notable in Saudi Arabia. It provides coverage to unemployment, work injury, sickness, maternity, disability, and old age. The system also offers free medicine and medical care to all citizens and foreign residents. It provides free education to all at every stage of learning.

### **Things to Remember**

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- Desert has very low rainfall, about 250mm or below it.
- The hot or tropical deserts are located between 15° and 30° north and south of equator.
- The difference in day and night temperatures is large.
- It may not rain for decades, but when it rains, it may bring flood to the region.
- Plants are low growing, thorny, small-leaved or leafless with deep roots and other water conserving mechanism. There are plants which come out in short rains, flower, produce seed and disappear in a very short period of time.
- The majority of animals drink water when it is available, otherwise they depend on fluids obtained by eating succulents plants, blood and flesh of their prey, and they too have other ways to conserve water. Most of them are nocturnal.