

HISTORY

Saudi Arabia traces its roots back to the earliest civilizations of the Arabian Peninsula. Over the centuries, the peninsula has played an important role in history as an ancient trade center and as the birthplace of Islam, one of the world's major monotheistic religions.

Since King Abdulaziz Al-Saud established the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, its transformation has been astonishing. In a few short decades, the Kingdom has turned itself from a desert nation to a modern, sophisticated state and a major player on the international stage.

The Beginning of an Agricultural Society

The first concrete evidence of human presence in the Arabian Peninsula dates back 15,000 to 20,000 years. Bands of hunter-gatherers roamed the land, living off wild animals and plants. As the European ice cap melted during the last Ice Age, some 15,000 years ago, the climate in the peninsula became dry. Vast plains once covered with lush grasslands gave way to scrubland and deserts, and wild animals vanished. River systems also disappeared, leaving in their wake the dry river beds (*wadis*) that are found in the peninsula today.

This climate change forced humans to move into the lush mountain valleys and oases. No longer able to survive as hunter-gatherers, they had to develop another means of survival. As a result, agriculture developed – first in Mesopotamia some 8,000 years



The magnificent ancient Nabatean tombs at Madain Saleh are a must-see for visitors

ago, then the Nile River Valley, and eventually spreading across the entire Middle East.

The development of agriculture brought other advances. Pottery allowed farmers to store food. Animals, including goats, cattle, sheep, horses and camels, were domesticated, and people abandoned hunting.

These advances made intensive farming possible. In turn, settlements became more permanent, leading to the foundations of what we call civilization – language, writing, political systems, art and architecture.

An Ancient Trade Center

Located between the two great centers of civilization, the Nile River Valley and Mesopotamia, the Arabian Peninsula was the crossroads of the ancient world.

Trade was crucial to the area's development; caravan routes became trade arteries that made life possible in the sparsely populated peninsula.

The people of the peninsula developed a complex network of trade routes to transport agricultural goods highly sought after in Mesopotamia, the Nile Valley and the Mediterranean Basin. These items included almonds from Taif, dates from the many oases, and aromatics such as frankincense and myrrh from the Tihama plain. Spices were also important trade items. They were shipped across the Arabian Sea from India and then transported by caravan.

The huge caravans traveled from what is now Oman and Yemen, along the great trade routes running through Saudi Arabia's Asir Province and then through Makkah and Madinah, eventually arriving at the urban centers of the north and west.

The people of the Arabian Peninsula remained largely untouched by the political turmoil in Mesopotamia, the Nile Valley and the eastern Mediterranean. Their goods and services were in great demand regardless of which power was dominant at the moment – Babylon, Egypt, Persia, Greece or Rome. In addition, the peninsula's great expanse of desert formed a natural barrier that protected it from invasion by powerful neighbors.



Archeological site in Al-Jouf

The Birth of Islam

Around the year 610 AD, Muhammad, a native of the thriving commercial center of Makkah, received a message from God (in Arabic, Allah) through the Angel Gabriel. As more revelations bid him to proclaim the oneness of God universally, the Prophet Muhammad's following grew.

In 622 AD, learning of an assassination plot against him, the Prophet led his followers to the town of Yathrib, which was later named Madinat Al-Nabi (City of the Prophet) and now known simply as Madinah. This was the Hijrah, or migration, which marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

Within the next few years, several battles took place between the followers of the Prophet Muhammad and the pagans of Makkah. By 628 AD, when Madinah was entirely in the hands of the Muslims, the Prophet had unified the tribes so successfully that he and his followers reentered Makkah without bloodshed.

The Islamic Empire

Less than 100 years after the birth of Islam, the Islamic Empire extended from Spain to parts of India and China. Although the political centers of power had moved out of the Arabian Peninsula, trade flourished in the area.

Also, a large number of pilgrims began regularly visiting the peninsula, with some settling in the two holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. These pilgrims facilitated the exchange of ideas and cultures between the people of the peninsula and other civilizations of the Arab and Muslim worlds.

The emergence of Arabic as the language of international learning was another major factor in the cultural development of the Arabian Peninsula. The Muslim world became a center for learning and scientific advances during what is known as the "Golden Age."

Muslim scholars, such as physician Ibn Sina and historian Ibn Khaldun, made major contributions in many fields, including medicine, biology, philosophy, astronomy, arts and literature.

Many of the ideas and methods pioneered by Muslim scholars became the foundation of modern sciences.



Modern mosque on the Red Sea in Jeddah



Ruins of Diriyah, capital of the first Saudi state and the ancestral home of the Al-Saud family

The Islamic Empire thrived well into the 17th century, when it broke up into smaller Muslim kingdoms. The Arabian Peninsula gradually entered a period of relative isolation, although Makkah and Madinah remained the spiritual heart of the Islamic world and continued to attract pilgrims from many countries.

The First Saudi State

In the early 18th century, a Muslim scholar and reformer named Shaikh Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahhab began advocating a return to the original form of Islam. Abdul-Wahhab was initially persecuted by local religious scholars and leaders who viewed his teachings as a threat to their power bases. He sought protection in the town of Diriyah, which was ruled by Muhammad ibn Saud.

Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahhab and Muhammad bin Saud formed an agreement to dedicate themselves to restoring the pure teachings of Islam to the Muslim community. In that spirit, Ibn Saud established the First Saudi State, which prospered under the spiritual guidance of Abdul-Wahhab, known simply as the Shaikh.

By 1788, the Saudi State ruled over the entire central plateau known as the Najd. By the early 19th century, its rule extended to most of the Arabian Peninsula, including Makkah and Madinah.

The popularity and success of the Al-Saud rulers aroused the suspicion of the Ottoman Empire, the dominant power in the Middle East and North Africa at the time. In 1818, the Ottomans dispatched a large expeditionary force armed with modern artillery to the western region of Arabia.

The Ottoman army besieged Diriyah, which by now had grown into one of the largest cities in the peninsula. Ottoman forces leveled the city with field guns and made it permanently uninhabitable by ruining the wells and uprooting date palms.

The Second Saudi State

By 1824, the Al-Saud family had regained political control of central Arabia. The Saudi ruler Turki bin Abdullah Al-Saud transferred his capital to Riyadh, some 20 miles south of Diriyah, and established the Second Saudi State. During his 11-year rule, Turki succeeded in retaking most of the lands lost to the Ottomans. As he expanded his rule, he took steps to ensure that his people enjoyed rights, and he saw to their well-being.

Under Turki and his son, Faisal, the Second Saudi State enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity, and trade and agriculture flourished. The calm was shattered in 1865 by a renewed Ottoman campaign to extend its Middle Eastern empire into the Arabian Peninsula. Ottoman armies captured parts of the Saudi State, which was ruled at the time by Faisal's son, Abdulrahman. With the support of the Ottomans, the Al-Rashid family of Hail made a concerted effort to overthrow the Saudi State.

Faced with a much larger and better equipped army, Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al-Saud was forced to abandon his struggle in 1891. He sought refuge with the Bedouin tribes in the vast sand desert of eastern Arabia known as the *Rub' Al-Khali*, or 'Empty Quarter.' From there, Abdulrahman and his family traveled to Kuwait, where they stayed until 1902. With him was his young son Abdulaziz, who was already making



The historic Masmak Fortress in Riyadh holds a special significance for Saudis

his mark as a natural leader and a brave warrior.

The Modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The young Abdulaziz was determined to regain his patrimony from the Al-Rashid family, which had taken over Riyadh and established a governor and garrison there. In 1902, Abdulaziz – accompanied by only 40 followers – staged a daring night march into Riyadh to retake the city garrison, known as the Masmak Fortress. This legendary event marks the beginning of the formation of the modern Saudi state.

After establishing Riyadh as his headquarters, Abdulaziz captured all of the Hijaz, including Makkah and Madinah, from 1924 to 1925. In the process, he united warring tribes into one nation.

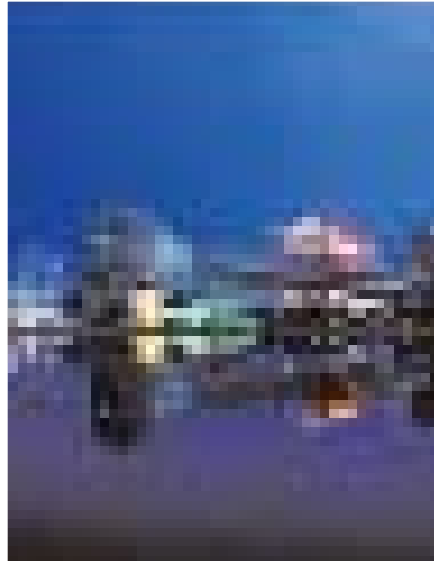
On September 23, 1932, the new country was named the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, an Islamic state with Arabic as its national language and the Holy Qur'an as its constitution.

King Abdulaziz (1932-1953)

The legendary King Abdulaziz, also known in the West as “Ibn Saud,” was a remarkable leader of imagination and vision who set the new Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the road to modernization.

During his rule, King Abdulaziz started building the country's infrastructure. He established roads and basic communications systems, introduced modern technology, and improved education, health care and agriculture.

Although King Abdulaziz never traveled beyond the Arab world, he was a highly sophisticated statesman. Foreign leaders and diplomats who met with him came away



Modern Jeddah at night



King Abdulaziz, the founder of Saudi Arabia

impressed by his integrity and honesty. He was famous for dispensing with diplomatic niceties in favor of frank discussion.

He was just as well known for keeping his promises, whether given to a Bedouin or to a world leader. These qualities enhanced his stature as a reliable and responsible leader dedicated to peace and justice.

King Saud (1953-1964)

Abdulaziz's eldest son Saud acceded to the throne upon his father's death in 1953. He continued King Abdulaziz's legacy, creating the Council of Ministers and establishing the Ministries of Health, Education and Commerce.

One of King Saud's greatest successes was the development of education. Under his rule many schools were established, including the Kingdom's first institute of higher education, King Saud University, in 1957.

King Saud also made his mark globally. In 1957, he became the first Saudi monarch to visit the United States. In 1962 he sponsored an international Islamic conference that would become the Muslim World League, headquartered in Makkah.

King Faisal (1964-1975)

King Faisal bin Abdulaziz was a visionary innovator with a great respect for tradition.

He initiated the first of a series of economic and social development plans that would transform Saudi Arabia's infrastructure, especially industry, and set the Kingdom on a path of rapid growth. King Faisal also established the first public schools for girls in the Kingdom.



King Saud bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud



King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud

In foreign policy, King Faisal showed a firm commitment to the Islamic world. He was a central force behind the establishment in Jeddah in 1971 of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), a group of 56 Islamic countries that promotes Islamic unity and cooperation.

Throughout the turbulent period of the 1960s and 1970s, which included two Arab-Israeli wars and the oil crisis of 1973, King Faisal was a voice for moderation, peace and stability. He was assassinated March 25, 1975.

King Khalid (1975-1982)

Khalid bin Abdulaziz succeeded King Faisal in 1975. King Khalid also emphasized development, and his reign was marked by an almost explosive growth in the country's physical infrastructure. It was a period of enormous wealth and prosperity for Saudi Arabia.

On the international stage, King Khalid was a prime mover in forming the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981, which promotes economic and security cooperation among its six member countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

King Fahd (1982-2005)

Under King Fahd bin Abdulaziz, who adopted the title Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, Saudi Arabia continued its tremendous socioeconomic development and emerged as a leading political and economic force.

King Fahd was central to Saudi Arabia's efforts to diversify its economy and promote private enterprise and investment. He



King Khalid bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud



King Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud

restructured the Saudi government and approved the first nationwide municipal elections, which took place in 2005.

One of King Fahd's greatest accomplishments in Saudi Arabia was a series of projects to expand the Kingdom's facilities to accommodate the millions of pilgrims who come to the country each year. These projects involved major expansions of Islam's two holiest sites, the Holy Mosque in Makkah and the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, as well as airports and seaports.

In the international arena, King Fahd worked actively to resolve regional and global crises. These crises included the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the Lebanese civil war in addition to conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Somalia and Kashmir.

As Crown Prince in 1981, he proposed an eight-point plan to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and give the Palestinians an independent state. The plan was considered one of the first attempts to find a just and lasting settlement that took into consideration the needs of both the Arabs and Israel. It was unanimously adopted by the Arab League at a summit in Fez, Morocco in 1982.

Perhaps the greatest international crisis of King Fahd's rule occurred when Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. The King played a key role in putting together the international coalition that drove Iraqi forces out of Kuwait.

King Fahd was also concerned with humanitarian issues. Under his rule, Saudi Arabia provided humanitarian aid to numerous countries, including Somalia, Bosnia and Afghanistan, as well as countries suffering from natural disasters, such as earthquakes (Turkey in 1999, Iran in 2003) and the Southeast Asian tsunami in 2004.

King Abdullah (2005 -)

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz acceded to the throne after the death of King Fahd on August 1, 2005. He is also Commander of the National Guard, a position he has held since 1962.



*Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques
King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz*



King Abdullah presides over the Council of Ministers, also called the Cabinet

King Abdullah was born in Riyadh in 1924, and received his early education at the royal court. Influenced by his father King Abdulaziz, he developed a profound respect for religion, history and Arab heritage. His years spent living in the desert with Bedouin tribes taught him their values of honor, simplicity, generosity and bravery, and instilled in him the desire to assist in the development of his people.

King Abdullah's first official visit to the United States was in 1976 when, as prince, he met with President Gerald Ford. Since then, he has made a number of visits to the United States, including visits to President George W. Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas in 2002 and 2005.

As Crown Prince, he also traveled widely in the Kingdom and inaugurated a number of projects throughout the country. In 2005 he closely monitored the election process for the country's municipal councils.

His international diplomacy reflects Saudi Arabia's leadership role in defense of Arab and Islamic issues and for the achievement of world peace, stability and security.



King Abdullah greets a young Saudi girl

Peace in the Middle East and the plight of the Palestinians are of particular concern to King Abdullah. His proposal for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, presented at the Beirut Arab Summit in 2002, has been adopted by the League of Arab States and is known as the Arab Peace Initiative.

King Abdullah has been unwavering in his condemnation of terrorism and extremism on numerous occasions over the years. In 1997, he warned of the dangers of militancy in an address to the 11th Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in Tehran. At the International Counterterrorism Conference in Riyadh in February 2005, he called for greater international cooperation to fight terrorism.

Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz

When he became King in August 2005, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah appointed his brother Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz as Crown Prince. Crown Prince Sultan is also Minister of Defense and Aviation and the Inspector-General.

Prince Sultan was born in Riyadh in 1928, and, like his brothers, received his early education in religion, modern culture and diplomacy at the royal court. After serving as Governor of Riyadh Province from 1947 to 1953, he became the Kingdom's first Minister of Agriculture. In 1955, he became Minister of Communications, and contributed greatly to the development of the Kingdom's road, rail and telecommunications networks. He has been Minister of Defense and Aviation since 1963.

Prince Sultan serves as chairman of a number of organizations, including the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD), the Saudi Arabian Railways Organization (SRO) and the Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Charity Foundation.

He has made a number of official visits overseas, and led the Saudi delegation to the 40th, 50th and 60th sessions of the UN General Assembly in 1985, 1995 and 2005. During official visits to the United States in October 1995, February 1997, and November 1999 Prince Sultan met with President Bill Clinton.



Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz

GOVERNMENT

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a monarchy with a political system based in Islam. Its rules and regulations are gov-

erned by the Holy Qur'an and the teachings and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, known as the Sunnah, which call for peace, justice, equality, consultation, and respect for individual rights.

There are 22 government ministries. The country is divided into 13 provinces, with a governor and deputy governor in each one.

Executive

The Saudi head of state and the head of government is the King, who is also the country's prime minister and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The King ensures that Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) is applied. All government officials, agencies and the ministers are responsible to the King. The King appoints the Crown Prince, who assists him in his duties. The Crown Prince is also the country's deputy prime minister.

The current head of state is King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz. He is known as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. The current Crown Prince is Sultan bin Abdulaziz, who is also the Kingdom's Minister of Defense and Aviation, and Inspector-General.

Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers, also called the Cabinet, advises the King and facilitates the country's development. It represents 22 different government ministries and meets every week. The Cabinet is presided over by the King or his deputy. Established in 1953 by King Saud, the Cabinet was restructured by King Fahd in 1993.



The seat of the Saudi parliament, the Majlis Al-Shura (Consultative Council), in Riyadh

The Cabinet consists of the Prime Minister (the King), the Deputy Prime Minister (the Crown Prince, who currently is also a Minister with portfolio), 21 other ministers with portfolio and seven ministers of state.

It is responsible for drafting and overseeing implementation of the internal, external, financial, economic, education and defense policies as well as the general affairs of the State.

The Cabinet is the final authority for financial, executive and administrative matters. Its resolutions are non-binding unless agreed upon by a majority vote. In case of a tie, the prime minister casts the tie-breaking vote. It functions in accordance with the Basic System of Governance and is advised by the *Majlis Al-Shura* (Consultative Council).



Inside the Majlis Al-Shura

Majlis Al-Shura (Consultative Council)

The *Majlis al-Shura*, or Consultative Council, is a legislative body that advises the King on issues that are important to Saudi Arabia. It is a modern version of a traditional Islamic concept – an accessible leader consulting with learned and experienced citizens – which has always been practiced by Saudi rulers.

The Consultative Council currently consists of 150 members appointed by the King for a four-year renewable term. Based on their experience, members are assigned to committees. There are 12 committees that deal with human rights, education, culture, information, health and social affairs, services and public utilities, foreign affairs, security, administration, Islamic affairs, economy and industry, and finance.

Originally restricted to discussion of regulations and issues of national and public interest, the mandate of *Majlis Al-Shura* was broadened in 2004 to include proposing new legislation and amending existing laws without prior submission to the King. It has always been able to request that government officials participate in key meetings and apply for access to government documents.

On April 7, 2003 the *Majlis Al-Shura* became a full member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

Provincial System

Saudi Arabia is divided into 13 provinces. Each province has a governor, a deputy governor, and a provincial council.

These councils deliberate on the needs of their province, work on the development budget, consider future development plans, and monitor ongoing projects. The governor and deputy governor of each province serve as chairman and vice-chairman of their respective provincial council.

Each council consists of at least ten private citizens. As with the *Majlis Al-Shura*, members of the council participate in committees that focus on various issues of interest to the province. The councils issue reports that are submitted to the Minister of the Interior, and then passed on to the appropriate government ministries and agencies for consideration.

The provincial council system is the result of bylaws established by King Fahd in 1992. These bylaws divided the country into 13 provinces and defined their administrative structure, how they would be administered, and the responsibilities of the governors and other regional officers. In 1993, King Fahd named 210 members to the provincial councils.

In 2005, municipal elections were held for half of the members of each of the 178 municipal councils in the Kingdom. The remaining half of the council members and the mayor are appointed.



Members of the Majlis Al-Shura are appointed by the King for four-year terms

JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Since Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state, its judicial system is based on Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) for both criminal and civil cases. At the top of the legal system is the King, who acts as the final court of appeal and as a source of pardon.

The Saudi court system consists of three main parts. The largest is the *Shari'ah* Courts, which hear most cases in the Saudi legal system. The *Shari'ah* courts are organized into several categories: Courts of the First Instance (Summary and General Courts), Courts of Cassation and the Supreme Judicial Council.

Supplementing the *Shari'ah* courts is the Board of Grievances, which hears cases that involve the government. The third part of the Saudi court system consists of various committees within government ministries that address specific disputes, such as labor issues.

In April 2005, a royal order approved in principle a plan to reorganize the judicial system. The reorganization includes the establishment of specialized courts as well as a Supreme Court.

Shari'ah (Islamic Law)

Shari'ah refers to the body of Islamic law. It serves as a guideline for all legal matters in Saudi Arabia. In the *Shari'ah*, and therefore in Saudi Arabia, there is no difference between the sacred and the secular aspects of society.

Muslims derive *Shari'ah* law primarily from the Holy Qur'an and secondarily from the *Sunnah*, the practices and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad during his lifetime. The third source is *Ijma'*, the consensus of opinion of Muslim scholars on the principles involved in a specific case occurring after the death of the Prophet. *Qias*, analogy, is the fourth source of law.

Shari'ah presumes that a defendant is innocent until proven guilty, and only in serious crimes or in cases of repeat offenders is one likely to witness severe punishments.



Clock tower in Riyadh's historic Qasr Al-Hokm district