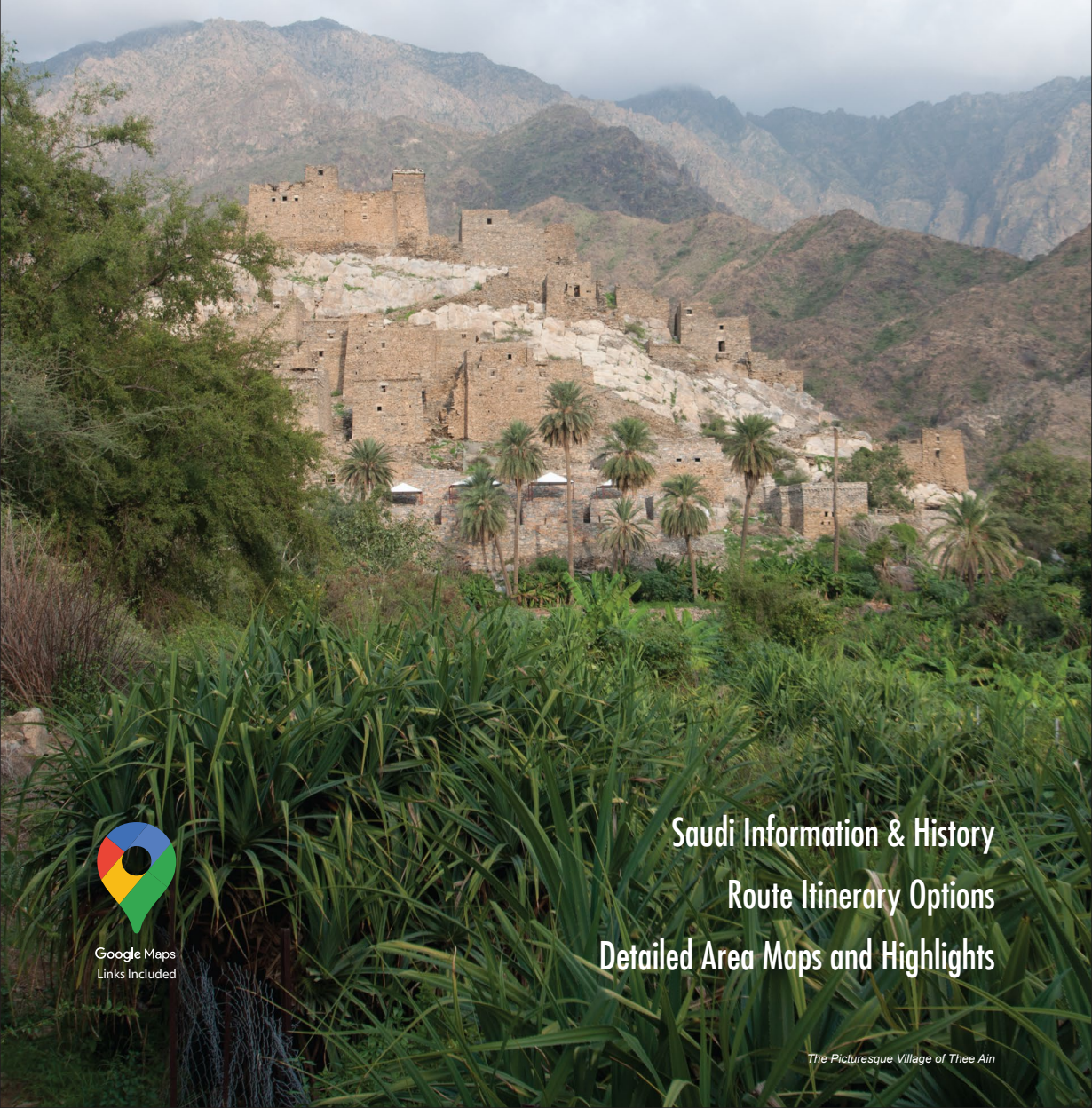




Saudi Arabia

The Roadtrip Guide



Google Maps
Links Included

Saudi Information & History
Route Itinerary Options
Detailed Area Maps and Highlights

The Picturesque Village of Thee Ain



alsadu weaving.

UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage
Traditional woven textile made by
Bedouin women featuring geometric
designs combined to flow in rhythmic
repetition and symmetry.

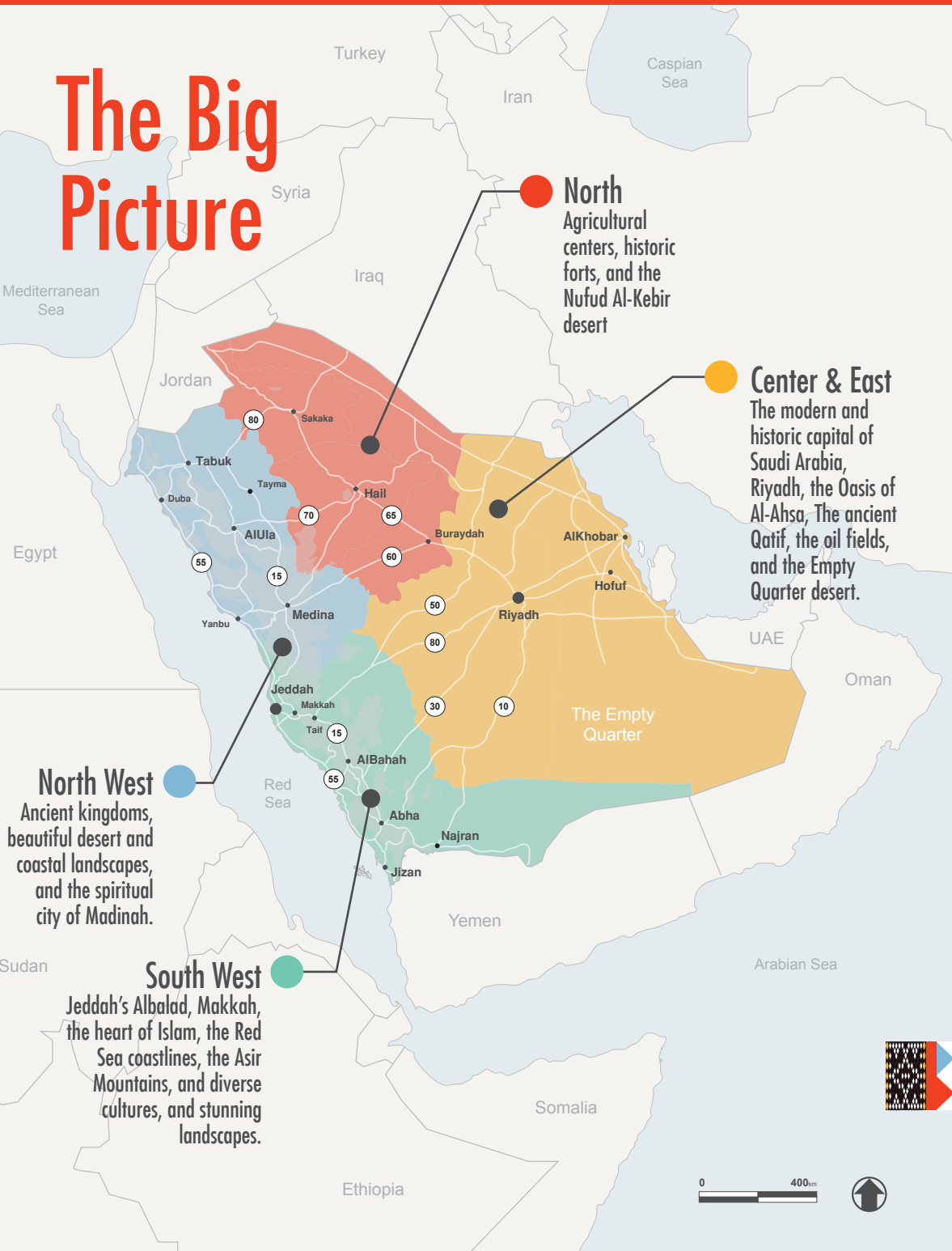
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Welcome to Saudi Arabia

So you took the plunge and decided to explore Saudi. So how do you plan a trip in such a diverse place with so much to see? In a country where public transport is quite limited? You get a car and some fellow travellers and drive of course! The roadtrip guide provides simple info on how to make the most out of the experience. **Safe Travels!**

The Big Picture



THE WHY

Renewed local interest and the opening up of independent tourism in Saudi of course! While there are a few great websites out there that do essentially the same thing, they are more blog than guidebook. Loving both Google Maps and graphic design, I wanted to do something more visual and linked to history.

THE HOW

Keep it simple

Saudi is a big place and no guide can cover everything. The guide is more of a **starting point** for exploring the country and not a checklist. It is designed for people who are not afraid of exploring on their own, so **do your research**. Google Maps and Translate are your best friends on the road!

Accessible locations

As most people have **smaller cars** and very **limited public transport**, they can only reach places that are easily accessible so I have limited the guide to locations near roads.

Be patient

Saudi is just opening up to tourism so things might be a bit of a mess. Travellers have reported closed sites, missing roads, or conflicting info, but they also rave about the kindness and hospitality they encounter.

GUIDE STRUCTURE

Background

An overview of the main history and experiences in Saudi Arabia

Itineraries

Different time based route options to explore the country by car

Detailed Areas

Each area map will show route, main cities/towns, and points of interest.

Access Tips and Download Google Map locations from arabiantrails.com

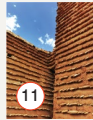
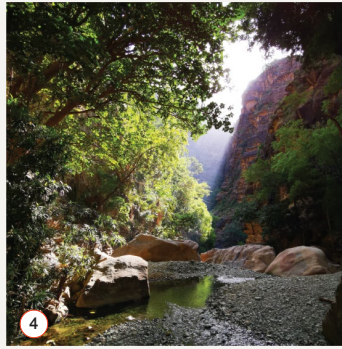
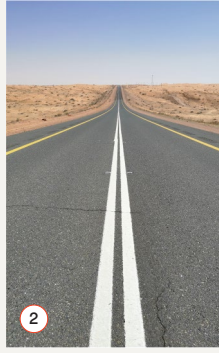
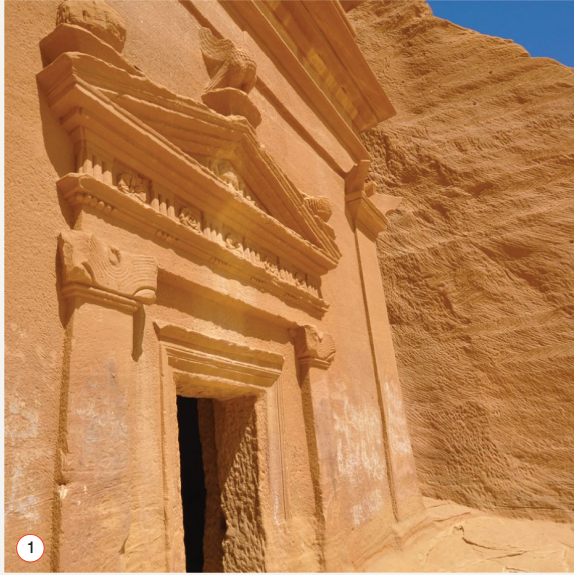
THE WHO

It's always good to put a face to the words. My name is Turki Shoaib and I'm one of those culturally confused Saudis who grew up abroad and lived in different countries. I'm an avid backpacker, photographer, and graphic designer who loves to travel and explore different cultures.



Saudi Arabia Highlights

A photo based overview of some of the main sites and experiences the country has to offer. This section is nowhere close to covering all the amazing places you will see during your visit, but it's a visual guide to give you a feel for the the different areas in the country.



1. Hegra (Mada'in Saleh), AlUla
2. Highway, Hail
3. AlAmarah Palace, Najran
4. Wadi Lajab, Jizan
5. Museum, Abha
6. Jahfah Fort, Rabigh
7. Fayfa, Jizan

8. Wadi Alfawarah, Makkah
9. Wadi UlJizil, AlUla
10. Majroor Performers, Taif
11. AlJahmah Village, Abha
12. Taif Rose Festival
13. Monkeys in AlHada
14. AlBalad, Jeddah

History

In Pre-Islamic Arabia, Nomadic tribes and settled communities developed into distinctive civilizations that thrived in the Arabian Peninsula. Information about these communities is limited and has been pieced together from archaeological evidence, accounts written outside of Arabia, and Arab oral traditions which were later recorded by Islamic historians. The timeline below highlights the main historic periods of Saudi Arabia while the following sections provide more depth on the ancient civilizations as well as the major trading routes in the region.

Historic Milestones

The Age of Kingdoms 1000BC to 700AD

Adummatu (AlLuf)
Kinda (South/Center)
Tayma (Tayma)
Dedan/Lihyan/Nabataeans/Romans
(North West Arabia)

The Islamic Empire 632 to 1258AD

The Caliphs, Umayyads, and Abbasids expanded the empire to the rest of Arabia as well as areas to the east, west, and north. The Empire later lost territory to the Mongols and later fragmented

Ottoman Empire 1517 to 1918AD

The Red Sea and the Persian Gulf were absorbed into the Ottoman Empire. Claimed sovereignty over the interior. The Sharifs still ruled Hejaz

The Ancient World 8000 to 2000BC

AlMagar (Majran Region)
Uboid and Dilmun (Eastern Province)
Midian (Tabuk Region)

The Rise of Islam 624 to 632AD

Lakhmids and Ghassanids in the North and East Islam in Meednah (Yathrib). Expanded to West Arabia, including areas in UAE and Oman.

The Sharifs of Makkah 10th to 15th Century AD

Ruled the Hejaz with allegiance to one of the Islamic empires. The remainder of Arabia reverted to traditional tribal rule.

Saudi Arabia 1932AD

After the defeat of the Ottomans, the two kingdoms of the Hejaz and Mejd were united as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

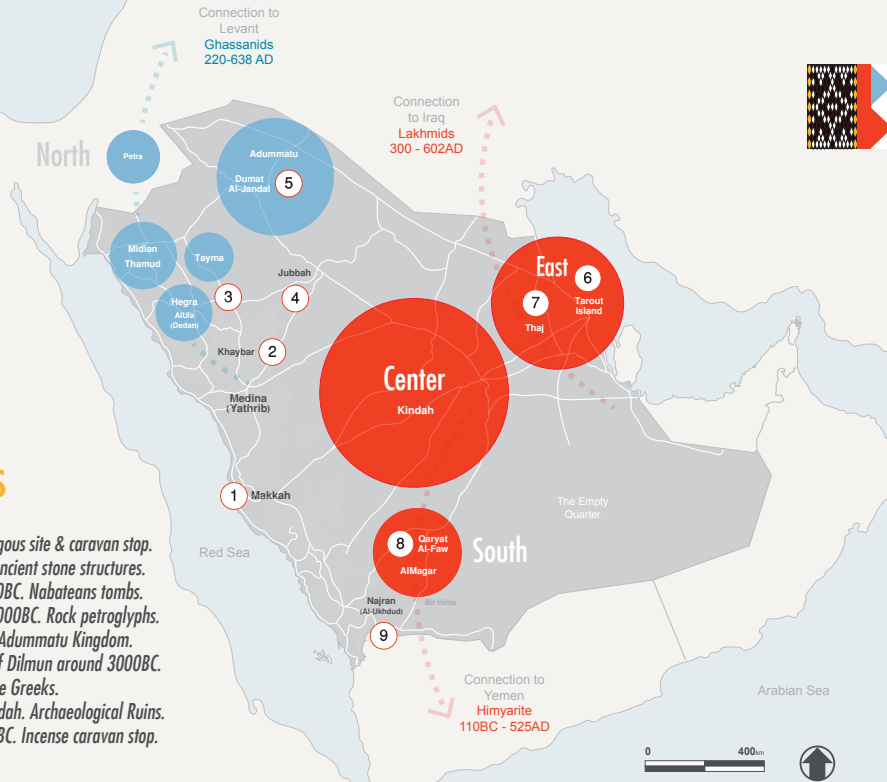
Ancient Kingdoms

Evidence of human habitation in the Arabian Peninsula dates back to 120,000 years. The information in this section provides a brief overview of the area's ancient kingdoms and settlements over time. It is meant to be a starting place for your own research.

Dedan (AlUla)



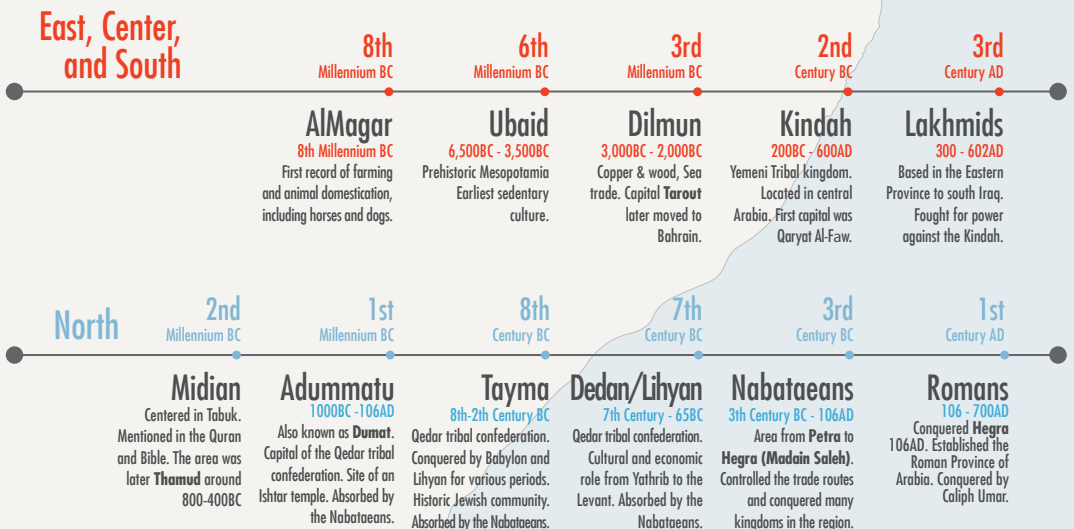
Hail petroglyphs



Ancient Cities

1. **Makkah** About 2000BC. Religious site & caravan stop.
2. **Khaybar** Possibly 5000BC. Ancient stone structures.
3. **Hegra (Mada'in Saleh)** 300BC. Nabateans tombs.
4. **Jubbah (& Shuwaymis)** 8000BC. Rock petroglyphs.
5. **Dumat Al-Jandal** 1000BC. Adummatu Kingdom.
6. **Tarout** 5000BC. First capital of Dilmun around 3000BC.
7. **Thaj** 300BC. Connection to the Greeks.
8. **Qaryat Al-Faw** 200BC. Kindah. Archaeological Ruins.
9. **Ragmat/AI-Ukhdud** 4000BC. Incense caravan stop.

Civilization Timelines



*Circles are only representative and do not reflect an exact place or size. *Dates are approximate based on internet sources.

Exploring the Incense Route

The Nabataeans, a nomadic Arab Bedouin tribe, emerged as a distinct civilization and political entity from 400BC to 106AD when it was annexed by the Roman Empire. The kingdom spanned from southern Levant to northern Arabia and centred around managing a trading network of frankincense, myrrh, and spices that brought considerable wealth and influence from across the ancient world. The Nabataeans lost power with the spread of maritime trade and Christianity.

The Lost Port

The location of the Nabataean/Roman port of *Leuke Kome* is disputed as written history does not mark its exact location. Possible sites include between *AlWajh & Umluj* near Hegra and *Wadi Ainomah* in Tabuk, which possibly includes Nabataean ruins.

Notable Caravan Stops

1. The Nabataean Kingdom (North West)

The Southern capital of the Nabataean Kingdom. *AlUla* (Dedan/Lihyan), *Tayma*, and *Dumat Al-Jandal* (Dumatha) were all conquered by the Nabataeans and have interesting remains.

2. The West

Few remains are left in this area but the caravan stops still remain, spotlighting terrain and distances travelled by the camel caravans. Of note is the paved camel trail near *Jarab*, Ruins near *Tabalah*, and the wells near *Madan* (Banat Harb).

3. The South

With four archaeological sites in the area (the ruins of *Jarash* near *Abha*, *Ragmat* (AlUkhudud) in *Najran*, the wells and petroglyphs in *Bir Hima*, and the ruins of *Qaryat Al-Faw*, there is much to explore in this area.

4. The Center and East

While many of the stops have become thriving cities, of note are the ruins at *Uqayr* which is possibly the historic port of *Gerrha* and the remains at *Thaj*. Finally, the village of *Yarbin* on the edge of the Empty Quarter highlights the remoteness of the trade route.



Note: This has been a difficult page to put together as information from different sources provide conflicting details. That said, I have tried to put together a map that is indicative of the early Nabataean incense routes before its expansion and decline.

Reference: Frankincense, Myrrh, and Spices, Bradley Hull. Trans-arabian routes of the pre-islamic period, Daniel Potts.

Hegra (Mada'in Saleh), AlUla



Dumatha, AlJouf



Leuke Kome, Tabuk



Gerrha, Eastern Province



The Caravans of Arabia

As maritime travel was initially dangerous because of reefs, lack of harbors and piracy, crossing through the Arabian Peninsula by camel caravans was the safest option for trade. Nabataean caravans ranged from one to two thousand camels and were organized with a leader, guides, armed escorts, to support traders from South Arabia who covered the costs. The route likely formed a zigzag pattern with route selection depending on the time of year, availability of water, danger of raiding, and anticipated tribute payments or taxes.

The route initially started with two main paths (See Map above), northwest through the Hejaz towards Egypt and the Levant and another leading to the northeast towards the Persian Gulf and Babylon. It later expanded between the two paths and along the Red Sea. Upon entering the relative safety of Nabataea, caravans were received at the fortified cities of Hegra or Dumatha. The Nabataean kingdom also maintained a trade colony or presence in all the major stops on the peninsula as well as in Europe, Africa, and India.



Itineraries

Possibly the hardest part of planning a trip is deciding what to see and what to miss, so I've provided different route options to help you explore the country by road based on the amount of time you have. As Saudi has two main urban axes that cross over periodically, it shouldn't be hard finding a route that suits your needs. I have also added a mixed itinerary that utilizes both driving and flights. Again, these routes aren't set in stone and things change or might be closed for development. Please do your research so you won't be disappointed.



If you are looking for history, then head anywhere in the country! You can't throw a rock without hitting something old! Of note is the UNESCO sites of AlUla and Jeddah, but every region in the country has its fair share of historic sites, some going back thousands of years.



If you like the sea you might want to stick to the Red Sea coast, for diving and snorkelling go north, for coastal landscapes and Islands go south (until the Red Sea Project is finished).



If you like mountains, you should definitely head south west. There are great opportunities to hike, camp, and see village life in areas that are 3000m above sea level.



If you like canyons and rugged desert landscapes, the north west is where you should be.



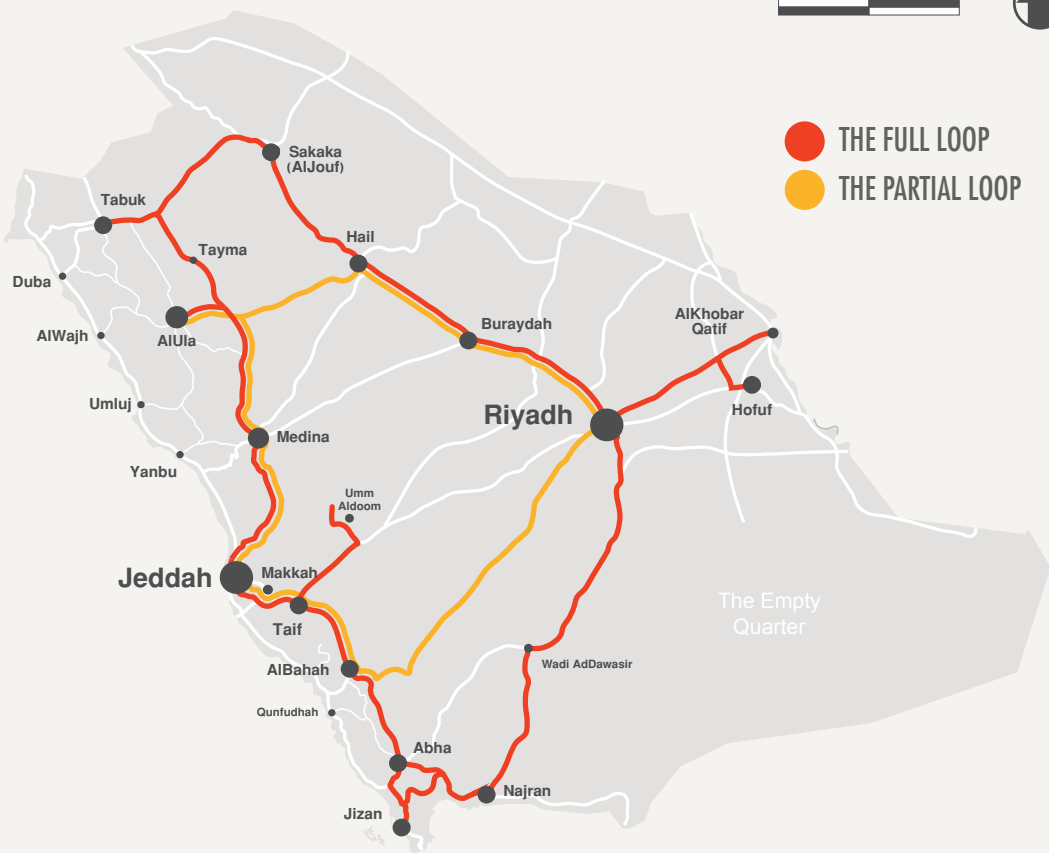
If you like traditional Bedouin desert lifestyles and mud villages head to the center.



If you like oasis towns head to the Eastern Province and the areas of Hofuf and Qatif. That said, the country is covered with ancient towns that depended on farming such as AlUla, Tayma, and Dumat Al-Jandal in the north, Najran in the south, and the whole plateau north of Riyadh.



- THE FULL LOOP
- THE PARTIAL LOOP



THE FULL LOOP (21 DAYS)

Start from either Riyadh or Jeddah. This is a rough guide as there is so much to explore so add days as needed. I have limited driving to 6 hours maximum per/day (d) and have included approximate distances by hour (h). This road trip does not include your days in Riyadh/Jeddah. Daytrip to AlKhobar and Qatif from Riyadh.

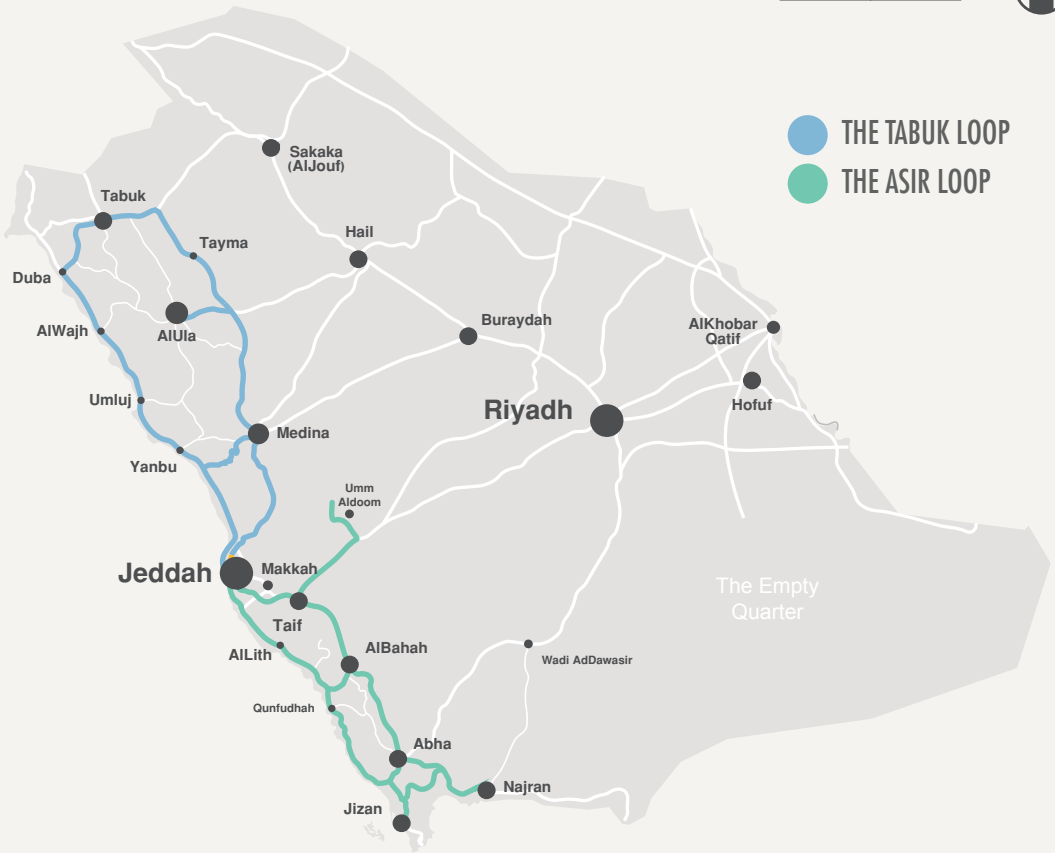
Starting in Riyadh, head North West to Buraydah (3.5h), explore then head to Hail for the night (2.5h, 1d), then Sakaka (3.5h, 1d) to reach Tabuk (4.5h, 2d). From here, you can add additional days exploring the coast or the nearby desert. Next head South to Tayma (2.5h) on your way to AIUla (2.5h, 2 days) then Medina (3.5h, 1d) to reach Jeddah (4h, 3d).

From Jeddah head up to Taif in the mountains via the bypass road (2h) as Makkah is restricted to Muslims. Base out of Taif (2d) to visit the Wabah Crater and do some exploring and hiking in the area. From here, head South to AlBahah on the tourist road (3.5h, 1 day) and visit Thee Ain Village, then head further south to Abha (5h, 1d) to visit Rijal Alma Village and AlSoudah mountain. From here head down to the coast to visit Jizan (3h, 2d) (Farsan Islands, Wadi Lujab, and Fayfa). Continue on to Najran (5h, 1d). Heading North you will skirt the edge of the Empty Quarter desert to reach Wadi ad-Dawasir for the night (4h). The next day, head to Riyadh to finish your road trip (6h).

THE PARTIAL LOOP (14 DAYS)

For those of you with limited time, you can do a quick loop as follows: Jeddah to Taif/AlShafa (2d), to AlBahah (1d), to the Lower Tihama Plains (1d), then back to Jeddah.

The Partial Loop can be further adjusted by crossing the country from the center to the west and vice versa. Roads from Hail lead to both AIUla and Madinah. Roads from Buraydah also lead directly to Madinah. From Riyadh roads lead directly to Taif, AlBahah, and Abha.



- THE TABUK LOOP
- THE ASIR LOOP

THE TABUK LOOP (7 DAYS)

Starting from Jeddah head north towards Madinah (4h, 1d) and explore the city (entry into the Prophets mosque for non-Muslims is not allowed). Head north to AlUla (3.5h, 2d) stopping at old Khaybar dam and village on the way. From there, head to the ancient city of Tayma (2.5h) and then to Tabuk (2.5h, 2d). Explore the area including Madyan and Wadi Tayyib Al Ism then head south on the coastal road to Duba (2h), add a day here to visit the beautiful Wadi Disah, then on to Umluj (3h, 1d) which is a quaint fishing town, then Yanbu's old town (2h), to return to Jeddah (3.25h).

THE ASIR LOOP (9 DAYS)

The Asir loop generally follows the Full loop with slight variations. Head up to Taif via the bypass road (2h, 2d) as Makkah is restricted to Muslims only. Visit the Wabah Crater. From here, head South to AlBahah on the tourist road (3.5h, 1 day) and visit Thee Ain, then head further South to Abha (5h, 1d) to visit Rijal Alma village and Soudah mountain. From here, head down to Najran (3h, 1d) then directly to Jizan (5h, 2d). Take the coastal road up to AlQunfudhah (4h, 1d) and explore some of the lower plain valleys. Finally, head back to Jeddah (5h) with a short stop at Allith hot springs (1d).

MINI TABUK LOOP (4 DAYS)

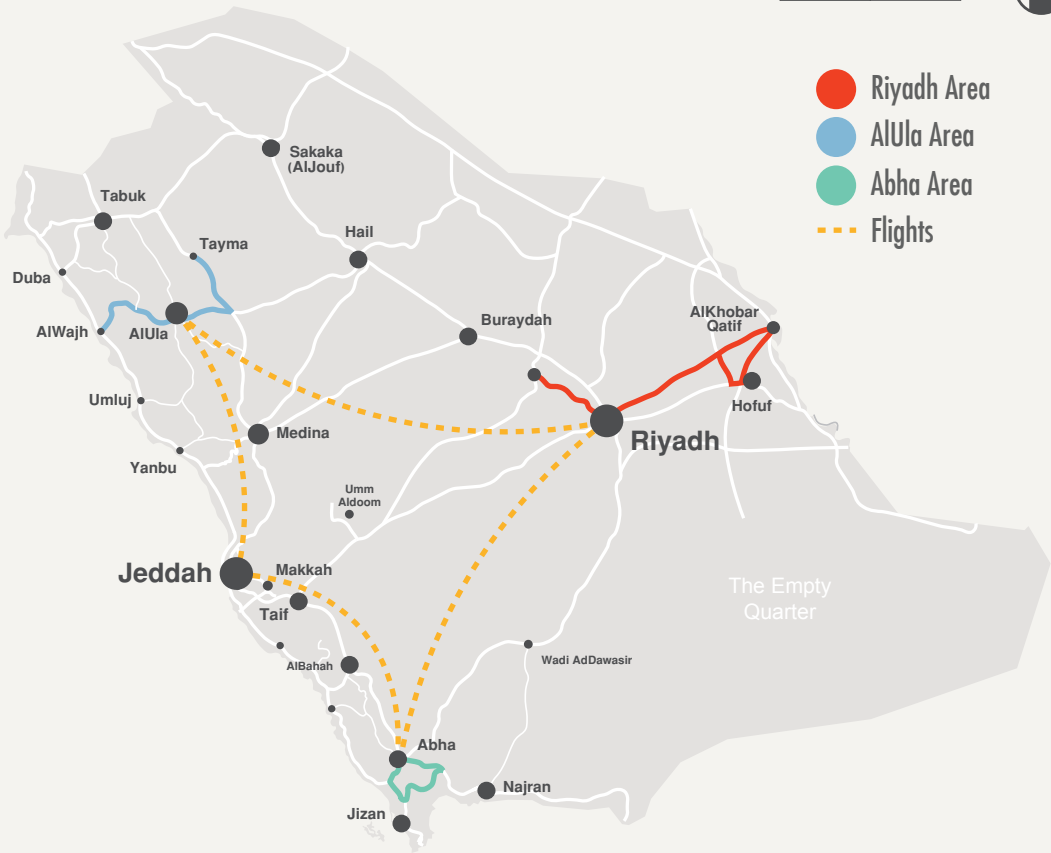
If you have limited time, you can do a quick loop as follows: Jeddah to Yanbu then Madinah (4h, 1d). Then AlUla (3.5h, 2d), to AlWajh and Umluj (4.5h, 1d), then back to Jeddah.

MINI ASIR LOOP (4 DAYS)

For a shorter trip you can do: Jeddah to Taif/AlShafa (2d), to AlBahah (1d), to the Lower Tihama Plains (1d), then back to Jeddah.



- Riyadh Area
- AlUla Area
- Abha Area
- Flights



THE FLYING LOOP (12 DAYS)

If you can afford to fly or have limited time, start from either Riyadh or Jeddah. This is a rough guide as there is so much to explore so add or reduce days as needed. I have limited driving to 6 hours maximum per/day (d) and have included approximate distances by hour (h).

Spend your first day exploring Riyadh and visiting the AdDiriyah District and old town (1d). on your second day rent a car or join a tour to visit the sand dunes and the Edge of the World and for sunset (1d). On your next day rent a car and head to the villages of Ushaiqer and Shaqra (5h driving roundtrip, 1d). Next head to AlKhobar to visit Tarout Island in Qasim and Ithra and spend the night (4h, 1d).

The next morning head to Hofuf and explore then head back to Riyadh (2.5h, 3.5h, 1d). Catch a flight directly to AlUla and explore the area including Tayma (5h roundtrip, 2d). From Alula rent a car to visit AlWajh for a day of diving on the Red Sea (5h roundtrip, 1d). Head back to AlUla to catch your flight to Jeddah and do some exploring (1-2d depending on flights). Next catch another flight to Abha and explore the city including Rijal Alma Village and AlSoudah Mountain (1-2d). From here head down to the coast to Fayfa and Addayer (3.5 hours one way, 1d). Then back to Abha to catch a connecting flight home via Jeddah or Riyadh.

MINI FLYING LOOP (5-7 DAYS)

If you have limited time, you can do parts of either the East, North, or South legs of the above itinerary, depending on if you like sea, mountains, desert, or history.

Note: While this is the shortest loop you can do, it all depends on planning as flights and car rentals need to be organized in advance and your day-to-day exclusions will need to be timed. That said, with a little flexibility you can do a lot in a very short amount of time.



Center & East

The Center and East of Saudi are distinctly different but equally interesting, with lots to see and do. Riyadh, the capital and birthplace of Saudi Arabia is a mix of Bedouin culture, tribal values, and rapid modernization, while the UNESCO Heritage oasis site of AlHasa and Qatif are host to some of the world's oldest civilizations.

Top 5 Experiences

I've always put off making 'Top' lists as everyone is different. That said, I keep getting asked to do one so I will give it a go, but will do it my way with a mix of my favorite main sites and off the beaten track stops.

Ithra Library



- 1 While old Diriyah in Riyadh is an amazing area, I honestly prefer Historic Riyadh around the **Masmak Fort**. It's not as pretty but feels really real with regular people and markets.
- 2 One of my favourite areas in Saudi and a UNESCO Heritage site, The **AlHasa Oasis** is an amazing place with a lot of history and culture. Definitely don't miss the Hasawi red bread made with dates. **(See detailed walking guide of Hofuf on page 16).**
- 3 If you are an ancient history lover then the ancient Kingdom of **Dilmun** from the 3rd millennium BC will be interesting. This includes most of the Eastern Province and places like **Hofuf, and Taruot and Darin** in Qatif.
- 4 For something modern, visit **the library at Ithra (Alkhubar)**, which really impressed me. While the building is world-class and highlights culture in a way that is impressive, the library stands out as an inspiring place and an oasis of calm in Saudi Arabia.
- 5 Though relatively new, the **Pigeon Towers at AdDilam** are iconic structures that are worth the long drive over. What makes it even more interesting is that is right next to the historic Khafs Dagrah Spring and settlement that goes back thousands of years.



Ushaiqer and Shaqra, near Riyadh, are restored Najdi towns are well worth a visit. (See detailed walking guide on page 17)

Ushaiqer



Tarout Island



Ithra



Buraydah

In Qatif visit **Tarout fort**, the ruins in **Darin** and the old town on the mainland. In AlKhobar definitely visit **Ithra Cultural Center**, one of the most impressive modern buildings in Saudi.

Qatif

AlKhobar

Ushaiqer

Shaqra

Hofuf

The Ibrahim Palace

Riyadh

Masmak Fort



In Riyadh, visit The **Masmak Fort** and the **National Museum**. **AdDiriyah District** (Turaif and Al Bujairi), (See detailed guide on page 15), The **Skybridge** at Kingdom Tower. Around Riyadh: **Edge of the World** for sunset. The **Red sand dunes** (Quads). The **Caravan Camel Trail** and **Heet Cave**.

Edge of the World



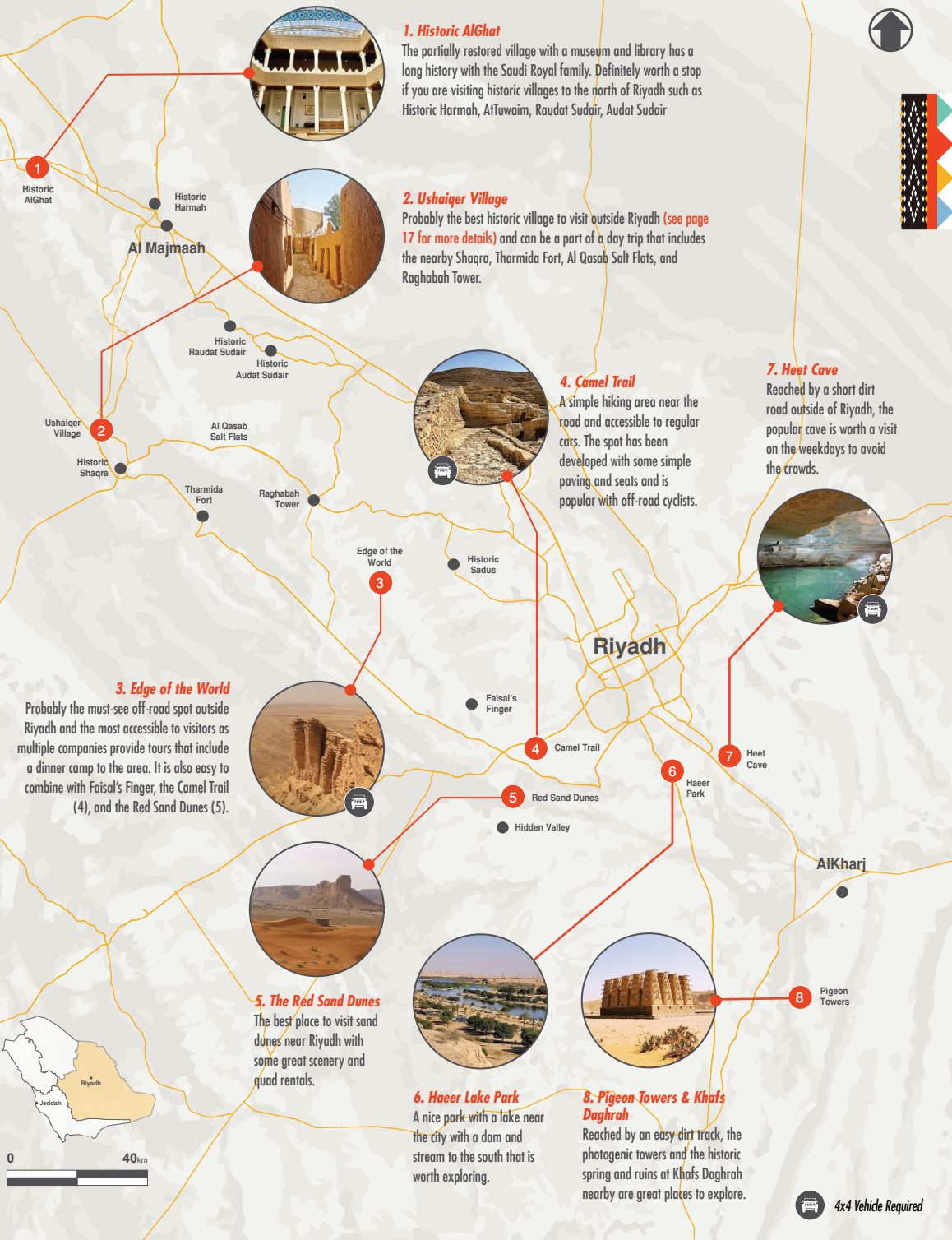
Visit the **Ibrahim Palace**, **AlAmiriyah School**, **Jabal Qarah** (rock formations), the old **AlQaisariyah Market**, and **Craftsmen Market**. (See detailed walking guide of Hofuf on page 16)

Wadi AdDawasir



Center & East Food Tips

Riyadh is packed with amazing restaurants so there are lots of choices. I've been visiting **Najd Village** for years and it doesn't disappoint. If you are in **Hafuf** definitely try the famous Hasawi red bread at **Alrubai'e** or **AlKhaddood Bakeries** (plain or stuffed with cheese and topped with date syrup). Other favourites are **Bayt Jaddi** (Grandad's House), **Alfreej Restaurant**, and the trendy **Dar Basma**.



1. Historic AlGhat

The partially restored village with a museum and library has a long history with the Saudi Royal family. Definitely worth a stop if you are visiting historic villages to the north of Riyadh such as Historic Harmah, AlTuwaim, Roudat Sudair, Audat Sudair

2. Ushaiger Village

Probably the best historic village to visit outside Riyadh (see page 17 for more details) and can be a part of a day trip that includes the nearby Shaqra, Tharmida Fort, Al Qasab Salt Flats, and Raghabah Tower.

4. Camel Trail

A simple hiking area near the road and accessible to regular cars. The spot has been developed with some simple paving and seats and is popular with off-road cyclists.

7. Heet Cave

Reached by a short dirt road outside of Riyadh, the popular cave is worth a visit on the weekdays to avoid the crowds.

3. Edge of the World

Probably the must-see off-road spot outside Riyadh and the most accessible to visitors as multiple companies provide tours that include a dinner camp to the area. It is also easy to combine with Faisal's Finger, the Camel Trail (4), and the Red Sand Dunes (5).

5. The Red Sand Dunes

The best place to visit sand dunes near Riyadh with some great scenery and quad rentals.

6. Haer Lake Park

A nice park with a lake near the city with a dam and stream to the south that is worth exploring.

8. Pigeon Towers & Khafs Daghrah

Reached by an easy dirt track, the photogenic towers and the historic spring and ruins at Khafs Daghrah nearby are great places to explore.

4x4 Vehicle Required

Riyadh Day Trips Village/Hiking Guide

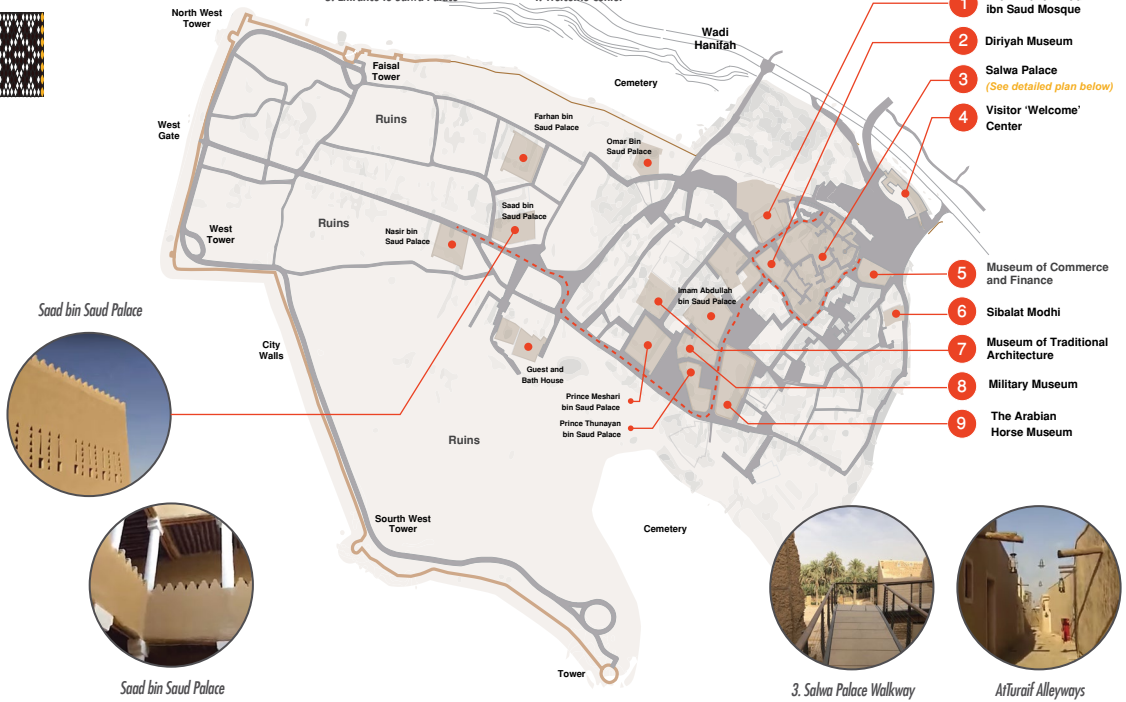
This page includes some of my favourite sites around Riyadh (up to 2.5 hours). While this doesn't cover everything, it will give you a place to start, so do your research and explore. Locations can be found on Google Maps, that those that require a 4x4 vehicle have been marked with an icon.

AtTuraif District UNESCO Site

The UNESCO site of At-Turaif was founded in the 15th century and was the original home of the Saudi royal family and the country's first capital but was abandoned after being overrun by the Ottomans in 1818. The site represents the architectural style of Najd and has been beautifully restored and organized as a tourist destination with many museums. Due to the development of the Diriyah area, the site isn't always open so check before visiting.

Disclaimer

As with other sites, the map is indicative as it was created using satellite images. So until I can pass by again and check, some of the smaller paths might not be correct. Also keep in mind that the site is not always open so call before you visit.



Salwa Palace Walking Guide



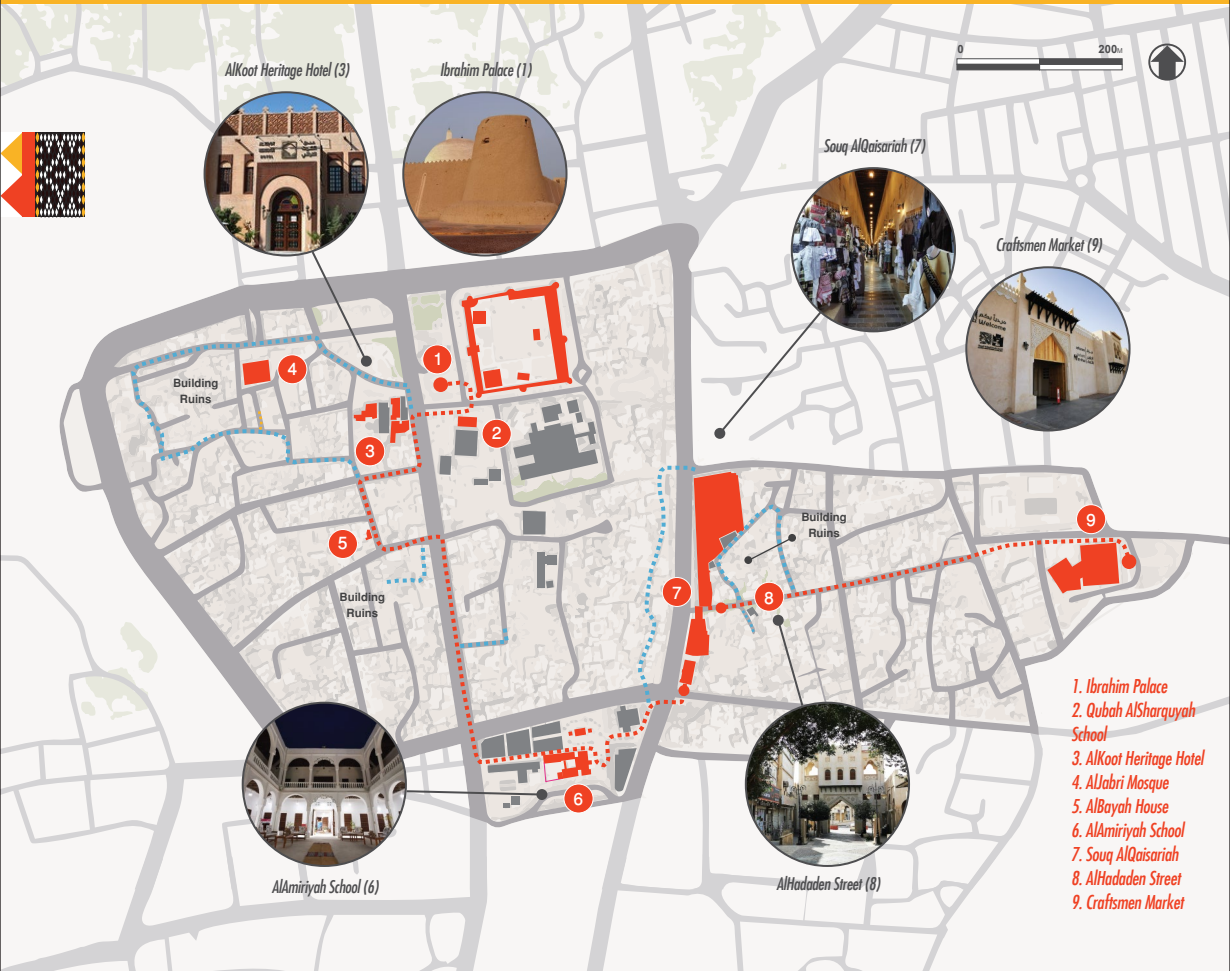
Visiting the AtTuraif District

Located across Wadi Hanifah from AlBujairi's park and restaurant area, AtTuraif is definitely one of the main sites you should visit in Riyadh and will be even more impressive with the completion of the ongoing Diriyah Gate Project.

After visiting the visitor center head to the Salwa Palace and walk through the group of buildings (see 3 on Main Map, and the detailed map to the left). The path is easy to follow and includes information for various areas and viewpoints and exits to the south west of the palace. From here head back to the main path and visit Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Mosque (1), the Diriyah Museum (2) and some of the other museums such as the Museum of Traditional Architecture (7), the Military Museum (8) and the Arabian Horse Museum (9) along the way. Finish your walk at the impressive Saad bin Saud Palace and the nearby restored guesthouse and baths. Heading back, take your time wandering around the old streets near Imam Abdullah bin Saud Palace and the area to the south east of the Salwa Palace. Keep in mind that some areas could be closed during your visit.

Historic Hofuf Walking Guide

AlHofuf, located in the largest Oasis in the world and a UNESCO heritage site, is one of my favorite cities in Saudi. The historic center still has a pedestrian feel about it as well as a distinct culture. The area was originally a part of the ancient Kingdom of Dilmun and a stop on the incense Route. The amount of springs and canals in the area is absolutely crazy! There is nothing like it in Saudi so definitely worth a visit.

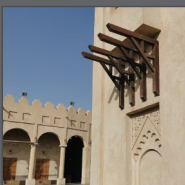


1. Ibrahim Palace
2. Qubah AlSharquyah School
3. AlKoot Heritage Hotel
4. AlJabri Mosque
5. AlBayah House
6. AlAmiriyah School
7. Souq AlQaisariah
8. AlHadaden Street
9. Craftsman Market

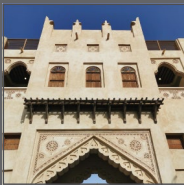
Ruins of Historic House



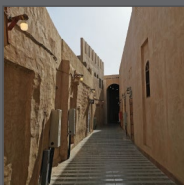
Souq AlQaisariah



Souq AlQaisariah



Old Alleyways



Hofuf Walk Details

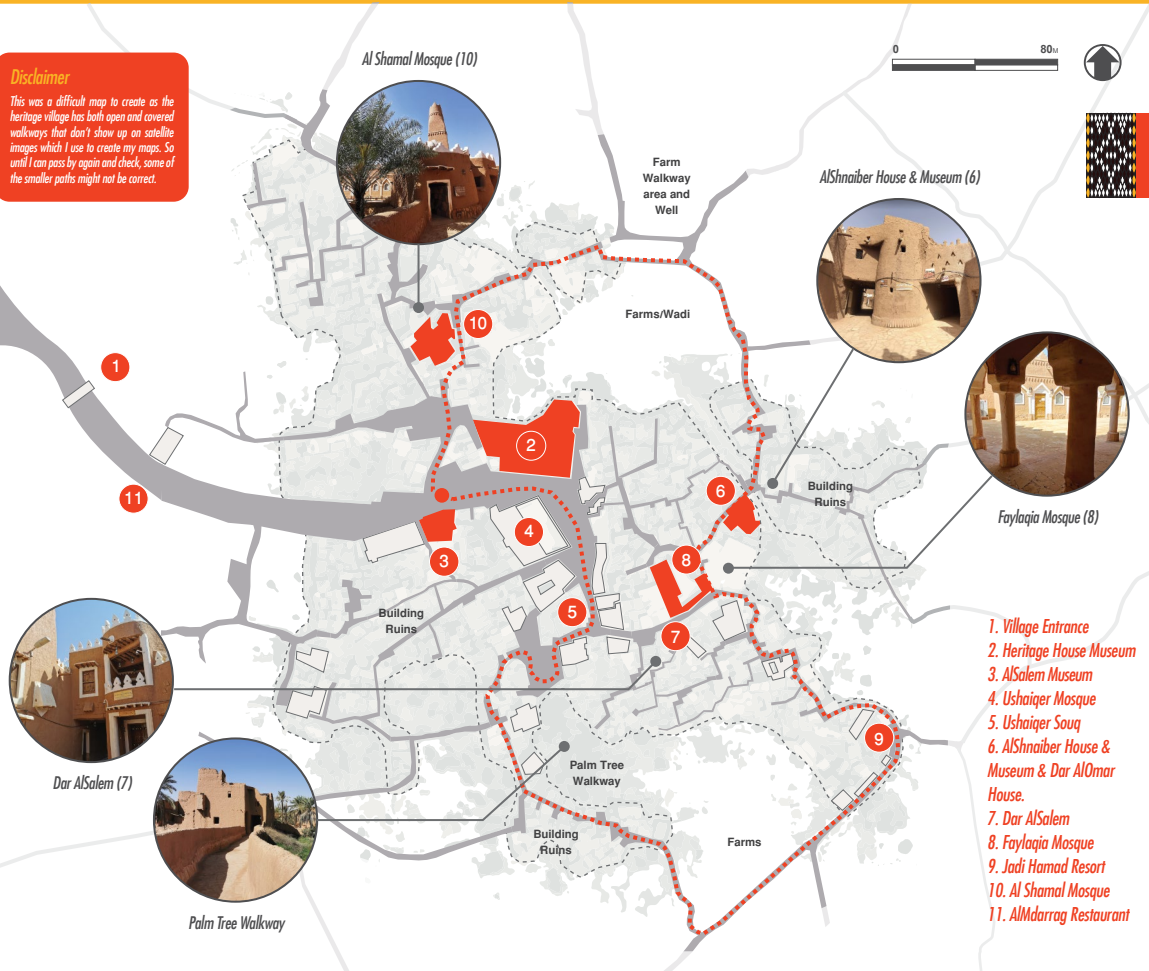
Start the walk at the Ottoman Ibrahim Palace (1556AD) (1). From there head south to the nearby Qubah AlSharquyah School (1610AD) (2), then cross the street and take a look inside the AlKoot Heritage Hotel (3) and the nearby Dar Basma Restaurant. From there you have two choices, head directly to the historic AlBayah (AlMulla) House (5) where King AbdulAziz stayed, or follow the blue alternative route to see the AlJabri Mosque (1475AD) (4) and the historic AlKoot Neighbourhood and old ruins. From AlJabri head to the main road then south past local shops to the beautiful AlAmiriyah School (6). From here head northeast and cross the road to reach the restored Souq AlQaisariah (7) south entrance and get lost in the narrow covered stalls and stunning architecture. Alternatively you can follow the blue path north to explore another old area and enter the Souq from the north gate. In the souq don't miss the historic AlSaid Coffee shop. Finally head east on the historic AlHadaden (Blacksmith) Street (8) that is worth some exploration to finally reach the Craftsman Market (9).

Ushaiqer Village Walking Guide

If you're going to visit one village in the north of Riyadh, it's probably going to be Ushaiqer with its early restoration work and human scale. The photogenic village is easy to explore, is surrounded by some pretty farms, and hosts various heritage museums and homes that are easily accessible to the public. That said, the main issue when visiting the village is the lack of a simple guide to help you get a sense of what is there, so here it is!

Disclaimer

This was a difficult map to create as the heritage village has both open and covered walkways that don't show up on satellite images which I use to create my maps. So until I can pass by again and check, some of the smaller paths might not be correct.

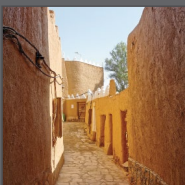


1. Village Entrance
2. Heritage House Museum
3. AlSalem Museum
4. Ushaiqer Mosque
5. Ushaiqer Souq
6. AlShnaiber House & Museum & Dar AlOmar House.
7. Dar AlSalem
8. Faylaqia Mosque
9. Jada Hadad Resort
10. Al Shamal Mosque
11. AlMdarrag Restaurant

Covered Walkways



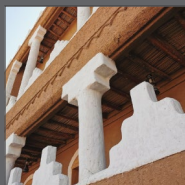
Village Streets



Farm Walkway



Heritage House Museum



Ushaiqer Heritage Village

While still a very pretty village, like most of the villages in Saudi, many of the houses and farms have been abandoned and are falling apart. Hopefully with time more will be done to protect this incredible resource.

Start your walk near the AlSalem Museum (3) (and public toilets which was a surprise). Head south passing the Heritage House Museum (2) and the village main Mosque (4) to reach the quaint souq (5). From here enter the village to your right heading west. This will lead you through some of the older areas to a pretty section overlooking mostly abandoned farms and palm trees that surround the village. From here head back to the village passing the Jada Hadad Resort (9) to reach the Faylaqia Mosque (8) and take a look inside. This area has various heritage museums, try Dar AlSalem and AlShnaiber Museum (7, 6) to get a feel for village life. Next head out of the village again to an area with easy accessible farms and a well. Head east to finish your walk at the pretty AlShamal Mosque (10).



North

The North of Saudi goes back in time well before the first millennium BC, including Adummatu, Nabataeans, and Romans and the UNESCO ancient rock petroglyphs near Hail and an uncountable number of historic towns and forts between Riyadh and Buraydah that are definitely worth exploring to get a feel for desert life back in the day.

Top 5 Experiences

I don't think I've done this area justice as it's not as touristy as other areas in the country due to distance. While the next page outlines the main sites, the following 'Top Five' list highlight places I personally found interesting.

Jubba Petroglyphs



- 1** Definitely visit **Marid Castle in Dumat Al Jandal**, a historic site like no other as there has been civilization over civilization at this location for millenniums. Don't miss the wells and Palm groves near the farms in the back. (See detailed map of Dumat on page 20)
- 2** You can't visit the North without stopping at The UNESCO listed ancient rock **petroglyphs in Jubba**. The site is huge and in multiple locations, sadly when I visited only the main area was open to the public.
- 3** **Maqsora Alswailem**, a historic fortified residence of the AlSwailen Emir of AlBukayriyah near Buraidah. It includes various buildings including a coffee market and a unique traditional well.
- 4** **Jibal Hibran near Jubba** with its simple petroglyphs overlooking the Nafud Desert and the Oasis of Twaren near Hail are two easily accessible locations to hike and explore.
- 5** **Al Musawkaf Traditional Market and Festival** in Unayzah was a famous market in Najd that goes back hundreds of years. The present market was rebuilt in early 2000 and still has an old school vibe.



In Sakaka/Dumat Al Jandal in the Jouf Region, visit **Za'abal Castle**, **Rajajil columns**, **Marid Castle**, the old walls, **Al-Jouf Museum of Archaeology and Folklore**, **Omar Mosque**, **Dumat AlJandal Lake**, and **Jabal Kiyal**. A bit further away near Al Qurayyat see **AlKaaf fort**.
(See detailed map of Dumat on page 20)

Za'abal Castle

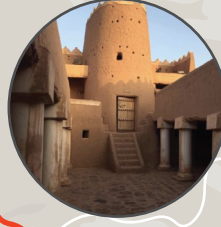


Marid Castle



Sakaka
(AlJouf)

A'Arif fort



In Hail, check out the **ancient rock petroglyphs** near Jubbah (See detailed map on page 21). Also visit **A'Arif fort**, **Barzan Castle**, and **Qishlah Castle**. Finally, **Jibal Hibran** is a great place to hike and has some stunning scenery. South of the city visit the impressive ruins of the Abbasid oasis town of **Fayd** on the Kufi hajj caravan route.

Tayma

Hail

AlUla

Fayd

(See detailed map on page 22)

Maqsora Alswailem



Buraydah

Around the area, you can visit the **Heritage Village** at Uyun Al Jawa, **Maqsora Alswailem** in Bukairyah, and the **Mansour Palace** in Al Awsajiyah. On the way to Hail, stop at **Fayd Fort** just off the main road.

Ushaiqer

Medina

Yanbu



North Food Tips

While there is the standard fare of restaurants in the area, ranging from Arabic to fast food, a lot needs to be done to develop more diverse options, **Al Turathi Restaurant in Hail** is the exception as it is part museum and part local Najdi restaurant in a traditional styled building.

Dumah Al Jandal Historic Area Guide

Adummatu, known as Dumat (possibly from the son of Ismael/Ishmael), is located on the intersection of several ancient trade routes linking Mesopotamia, the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula. It was said to be the site of an important temple dedicated to Ishtar. Dumat was the capital of the Qedar tribal confederation and has continuously been inhabited since before 1000BC. Throughout the ages it has been ruled by its own Kings and famous Queens, Nabataeans, Romans (106AD), and finally Muslims (633AD).

Marid Castle



Omar Mosque



Marid Castle

Because of its defensive location, the castle has gone through various stages of construction. Sadly, almost no ancient archaeological remains have yet to be found from any ancient era. The castle has two sections, a residential and governance area and a raised military area with high walls and four towers.

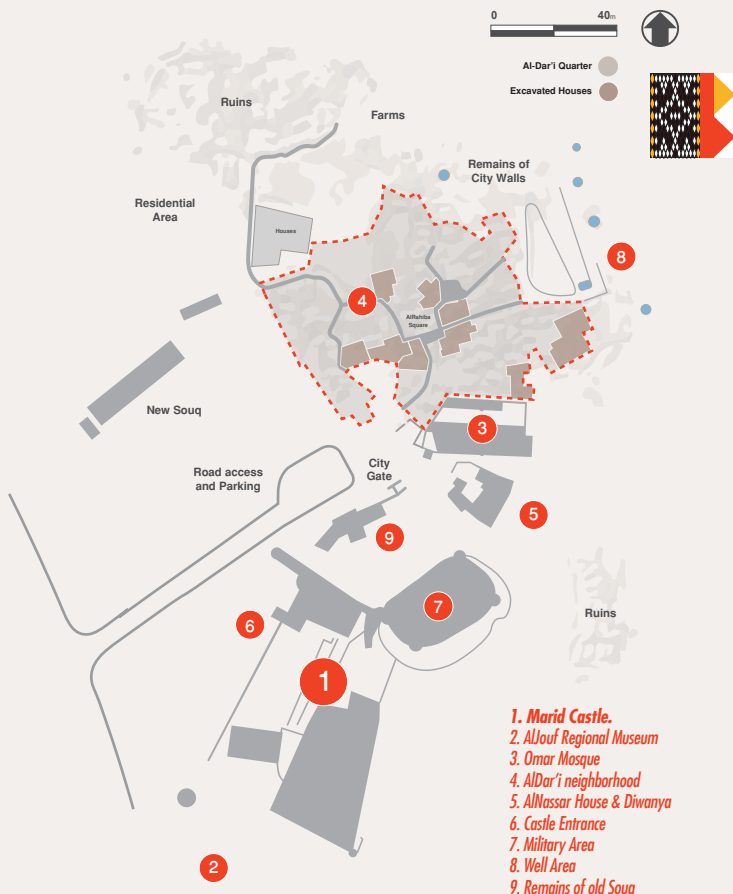
The Souq

In the past, the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula met at markets for connect and trade, with the souq at Dumat being one of the most famous. Sadly, most of the original buildings have been demolished but a new area was built that houses an artisan center.

Omar Mosque/Temple

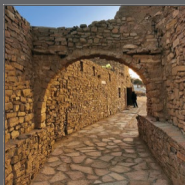
The mosque has a traditional layout with a second small prayer room. This location, or inside the castle, could be the site of the temple of Ishtar, as it was common practice to repurpose religious buildings after conquest.

*Dumat al-Jandal. 2800 years of History in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Guillaume Charloux, Ramola Loreto
Rehabilitation of Dumat al-Jandal Archaeological Site, Hissah Obaid Alshammari*

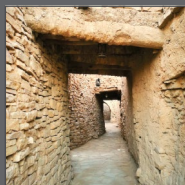


1. Marid Castle.
2. AlJouf Regional Museum
3. Omar Mosque
4. AlDar'i neighborhood
5. AlNassar House & Diwanya
6. Castle Entrance
7. Military Area
8. Well Area
9. Remains of old Souq

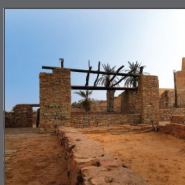
Main Gate



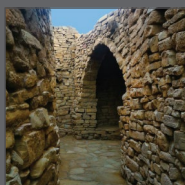
Upper Floor Connection



Main Well



Square Open Space



Al-Dar'i Quarter (17th-18th Century AD)

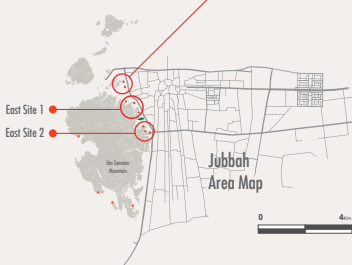
Each residential area consists of a group of irregular dwellings that sometimes connect over narrow streets and passageways with flat roofs, connected by a network of winding alleys, and small squares and were protected by a stone wall with rectangular towers.

Al-Dar'i Quarter is the oldest residential area in Dumat and has five gates leading to the castle and the surrounding areas and farms. The main gate is located on the south side, topped by circular arches. The restored AlNassar House was built later than the original settlement and differs in scale and proportions. It now houses a cafe. Each house had a courtyard or (Housh), sometimes separate entrances for men and women if space allowed (as the present homes represent the late Islamic period where mixing wasn't encouraged), a Majlis, various family/sleeping rooms, a bathroom, and storage.

Jubba Rock-Art UNESCO Site

Located on the ancient trade routes, Jubba in Hail lies on an ancient lake bed that measures around 80sq/km that is now surrounded by the Nefud Desert and has hosted settlements since the stone age. The sandstone mountains of Umm Sinman to the west is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and includes a large amount of rock art (petroglyphs) and inscriptions starting from the 1st millennium BC that are definitely worth a visit. A second less developed site is located near Shuwaymis, 250km to the southwest.

Two free-standing staircases have been built to allow access to some of the more impressive petroglyphs including the King/warrior/deity, human figures, camels, lions, demons, and ostriches.



Main Petroglyph Site

There are three main developed areas at Jabal Umm Sinman that includes around 18km of rock faces surrounded by a fenced buffer zone. The north most is usually open and entrance is free.



Reference: *Rock Art in the Hail Region of Saudi Arabia*, Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, 2013 /2014

Petroglyphs Cluster

Shuwaymis Sites

The harder to reach Shuwaymis sites of Jabals al-Manjor and Raat, reached by a dirt road, have long been abandoned, but they like Jubba, have been in use since the Stone Age and were densely settled around the Holocene period, as shown by the abundance of archaeological evidence. This includes numerous burial sites, other stone structures, stone implements, and extensive and impressive rock art. The complex probably includes some of the most spectacular petroglyphs in northern Saudi Arabia. As of writing, the sites were fenced and closed to the public but include a tourism office.

Timelines and Excavations

Evidence has been found of four major phases of human settlement at Jubba. However, the only evidence for permanent occupation is from the latest phase. Stone Age (Middle Palaeolithic or Mousterian) stone implements were found at different sites on and around Umm Sinman but none of the rock art can be attributed to this period. Later Neolithic (10,000 BC) settlements are more abundant in the area and are linked to some of the existing rock art. Limited archaeological excavations have been carried out at both the Jubba and Shuwaymis sites, highlighting the wealth of history that has yet to be discovered.

In addition to the rock art, stone cairns, tombs, and possibly religious structures have been found in the area on top of hills or on their slopes, especially in the Khaybar lava plains south of the Shuwaymis site where there is an abundance of stone structures such as pendants, kites, and mustatils that link to the civilization in Khaybar.

Historic Fayd Darb Zubayda

The Abbasid town of Fayd is the halfway point between Kufa and Makkah and an important caravan stop on Darb Zubayda (see Page 29). The historic town is located on the road between Hail and Buraydah and has been mentioned by historians such as Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta. It was famous for the abundance of water, pastures, and a large vibrant market. The site is definitely worth a visit if you are in the area.

Disclaimer

The map is only indicative as it was created using satellite images and has yet to be checked on location. Also, keep in mind that the site is not always open so check before you visit.

2. Inner Fort Wall and Town



3. Khrash Mosque



- Mosque 3
- Main Entrance (Outer fortress) 4
- Main Town (Excavated Area) 5
- Site Entrance 6



- 1 Qaser Khrash (Outer fortress)
- 2 Inner Fort

Additional Ruins

The remains of two villages were also identified and are located to the west and north-west of the Fort. The areas are fenced and excavations have shown the remains of buildings including a mosque, streets, water containers, ovens, wells and canals connecting to the nearby wadi. Remains of glass and pottery were also found.

Town ruins in the fortress



Birkah (Pool)

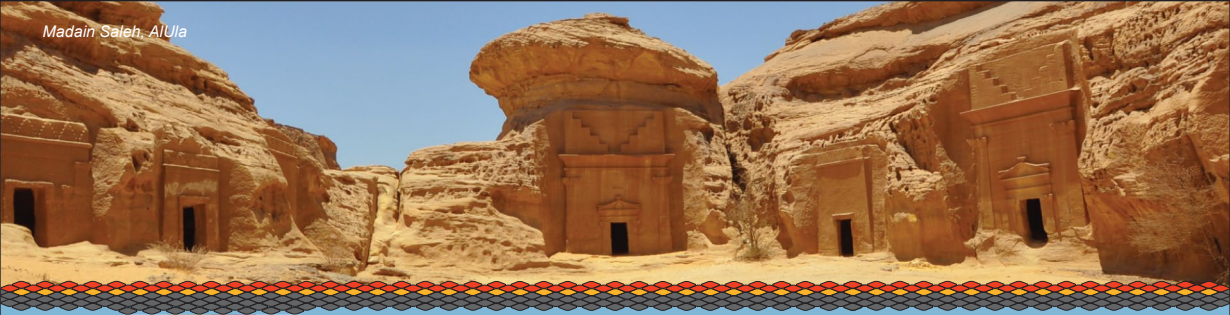
Path of Darb Zubayda



Exploring the Historic Qaser Khrash

I have chosen the Fayd stop in the northern area of Darb Zubayda because of its unique preserved setting and accessibility to regular cars from the main highway.

The Fayd stop has been developed for tourism though most of the town has still not been excavated. That said, its historic significance and remains warrant a visit. The site is well signposted and is easy to get around. On entering the site, head to your left to visit the mosque remains (3) then head to the nearby main gate (4) of the fortress and explore the main town area (5) where you can still see ovens, stone water basins, columns, and parts of the water system. As most of the excavations and restorations are in this area, it gives the best feel for life in the fort 1200 years ago. Heading back to the entrance you can head north to access the inter-fort and palace area. Finally, head further north to visit the octagon Birkah (pool) and water system. Also, don't forget to visit the nearby site museum that is accessible from the main road.



North-West

The North-West is the must visit area of Saudi Arabia and included the country's premiere tourist site, UNESCO's Madain Saleh and AlUla. But looking deeper you will find amazing history at Tayma and Median, two of the oldest settlements in the Arabian Peninsula, and of course the beautiful desert landscapes around Tabuk and the coastal towns of the Red Sea.

Top 5 Experiences

This was definitely a hard one to put together as there are so many great experiences in the region. While the next page outlines the main sites, the following 'Top Five' list highlights places I really loved.

AlMazam caravan stop

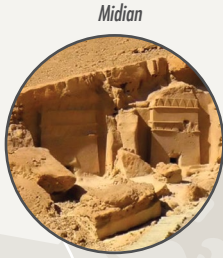


Hejaz Ottoman Railway

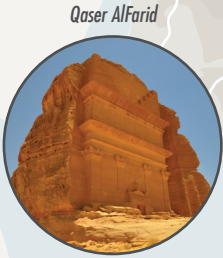
- 1 There is more to **AlUla** than just the ancient tombs of Madain Saleh. The area is an amazing place to explore including the remains of ancient Dedan, a restored old town, deep canyons, and palm groves and farms. **(See detailed map of AlUla on page 25).**
- 2 Walk in the footsteps of Muslim pilgrims and Ottoman soldiers by visiting **AlMazam Castle** Caravan stop and Ottoman Railway stations/bridges on the desert road between AlUla and Tabuk.
- 3 An oasis inhabited since the Bronze Age, **Tayma** is sadly missed by many people. The history here is amazing and while many of the remains are not developed, what you will find is incredibly interesting. **(See detailed map of Tayma on page 26).**
- 4 The Tabuk area has a multitude of amazing sites that go all the way back to the time of Moses. Probably my favourite part is the cliffs that overlook the coastline that includes the canyon of **Wadi Tayyib Ism**, Magna, and the nearby Midian.
- 5 **Wadi Disah** is a beautiful canyon-wadi known for its running water and soaring pinnacles of rock. Definitely a great place to explore if you are Near Tabuk.



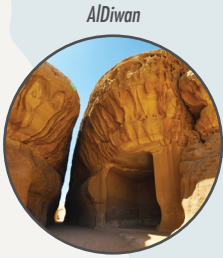
Visit Tabuk's **Ottoman fort** and **Railway Station**, **Midian** (Mugha'ir Shu'ayb, Little Madain Saleh), the canyon hike of **Wadi Tayyib Ism**, **Wadi Disah**, and **AlShug** (the rip) canyon.



Midian



Qaser AlFarid



AlDiwan

Madain Saleh is the main tourist site in Saudi Arabia and contains **131 tombs** as well as a temple known as **the Diwan**. Also located on the site is an **Ottoman railway station**. **AlUla**, known as **Dedan** in ancient times, was an important stop on the Frankincense caravan route. Visit **AlUla old town**, **forts**, **lion tombs**, the **Kharaybah Ruins**, and the **sunset viewpoint** overlooking AlUla. (See detailed map of AlUla on page 25)



Tabuk

Wadi Disah

Duba

AlWajh

AlUla

Umluj

Yanbu

Sakaka

Haddaj Well



Tayma

Hail

The ancient oasis of **Tayma** is one of the **oldest settlements in the Arabian Peninsula**. Definitely read up on it before going and visit the museum. Visit **Tayma fort**, the 2500 year old **Haddaj Well**, **Al-Hamra Palace**, and **Arradam Palace**. (See detailed map of Tayma on page 26)

Medina

Hamidiye Mosque



Medina hosts the **Prophet's Mosque and tomb** (off limits to non-Muslims) and various **Ottoman buildings, mosques, dams, and historic places**.

Jeddah

Makkah

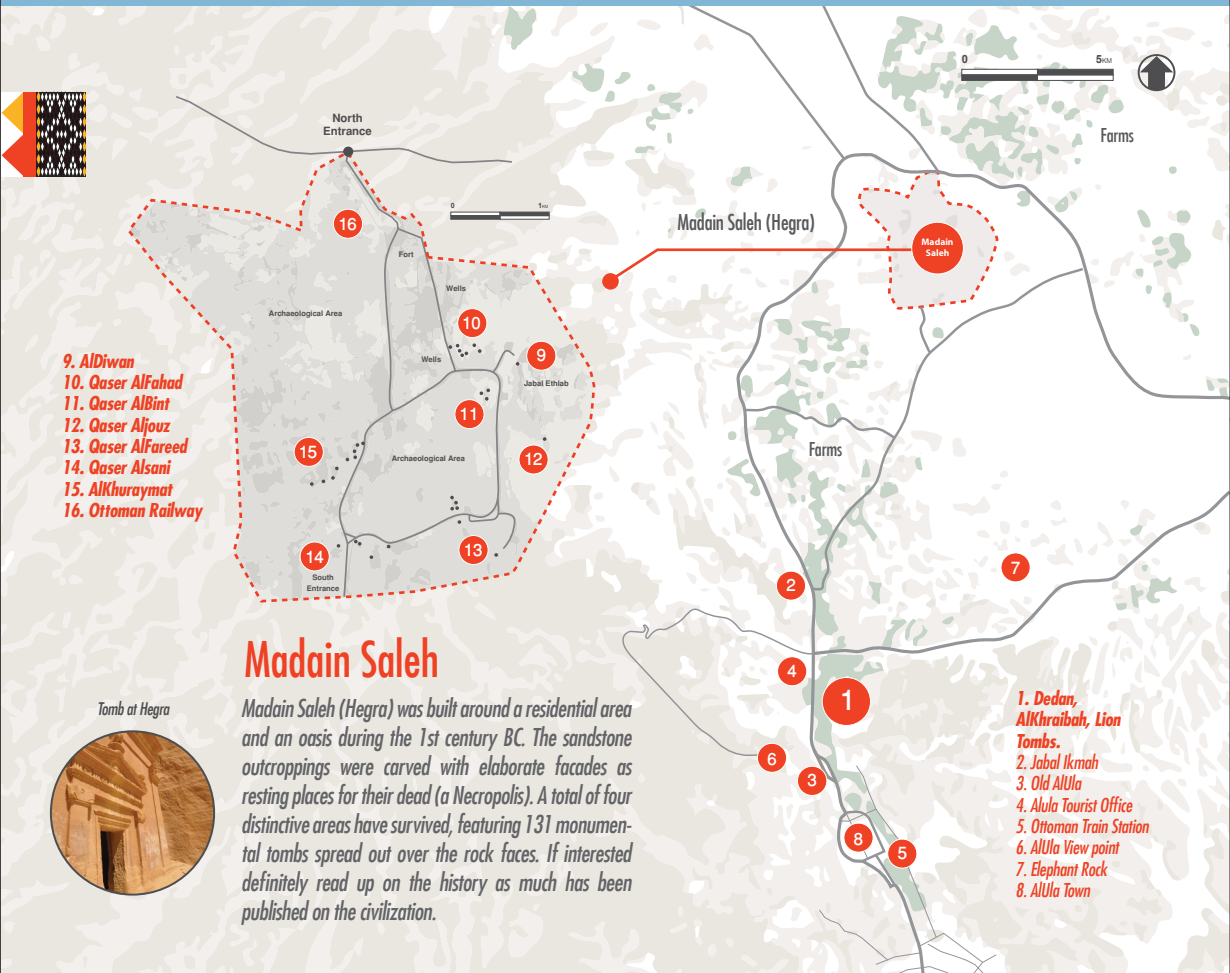
Taif

North-West Food Tips

With all the development in AlUla, there are some good options with more to come. For high-end places try **SASS Cafe**, **Suhail Old Town**, **One O' One Burger**, or **At AlWadi Farm**, near Winter Park. For more traditional cheap local food try **Heritage Garden Restaurant** or **AlUla Heritage Restaurant** in Alula. Keep in mind that some of these spots might only open seasonally.

Hegra/Dedan AlUla Area Guide

AlUla, Saudi's most popular tourist destination is home to two distinct civilizations. The earlier Dedan/Lihyan Kingdom (7th Century to 65BC) and the later UNESCO heritage site of Hegra, also known as Madain Saleh or AlHijr (3rd Century BC to 106AD). Both have interesting remains and are well worth the visit. Additionally, the historic Ottoman railway has a major station on the site. Presently the sites are open to the public but more activities are available during the festival season.



- 9. AlDiwan
- 10. Qaser AlFahad
- 11. Qaser AlBint
- 12. Qaser AlJouz
- 13. Qaser AlFareed
- 14. Qaser Alsani
- 15. AlKhuraymat
- 16. Ottoman Railway

Madain Saleh

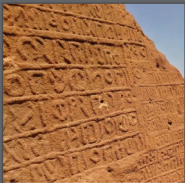
Madain Saleh (Hegra) was built around a residential area and an oasis during the 1st century BC. The sandstone outcroppings were carved with elaborate facades as resting places for their dead (a Necropolis). A total of four distinctive areas have survived, featuring 131 monumental tombs spread out over the rock faces. If interested definitely read up on the history as much has been published on the civilization.

Tomb at Hegra

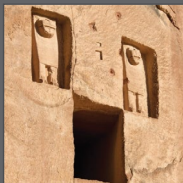


- 1. Dedan, AlKhraibah, Lion Tombs.
- 2. Jabal Ikmah
- 3. Old AlUla
- 4. Alula Tourist Office
- 5. Ottoman Train Station
- 6. AlUla View point
- 7. Elephant Rock
- 8. AlUla Town

Jabal Ikma Inscriptions



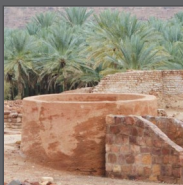
Lion Tombs



Lihyani Stone Head



Stone basin (Mahlab Al-Naqa)



Dedan/Lihyan Kingdom

Dedan and later Lihyan were part of the Qedar tribal confederation. Initially a city state based in Dedan (present day AlUla), Lihyan, the name of the tribe, had a cultural and economic role from Yathrib to the Levant. Parts of Lihyan were later absorbed by the Nabataeans but they gained their independence again after the annexation of Nabatea by the Romans in 106AD. In antiquity, the Gulf of Aqaba used to be called the Gulf of Lihyan, a testimony to their extensive influence.

Remains

While the ruins of AlKhraibah, the Lion Tombs, and inscriptions in different parts of the canyon can be visited, there is much more to the civilization than what is open to the public. The mountains around AlUla host the ruins of temples and stairs carved out of the rock. Hopefully with time more remains will be accessible.

Historic Tayma Area Guide

Throughout the ages, Tayma was considered a commercial and economic center and a meeting point for the ancient trade routes. Its history goes back to the 5th millennium BC and flourished in 2nd millennium BC, as a city state, becoming one of the most important cities in the north of the Arabian Peninsula. Tayma was mentioned in the Assyrian cuneiform, Babylonian, Aramaic, and Nabatean writings and well as in the Bible. Sadly, the main ruins of the historic area that includes the temple and walls are closed to the public.

Qasr AlHamra



Tayma Fort



Qasr AlHamra (4)

The palace dates back to the sixth century BC and was built by the last Babylonian King, Nabonidus as a retreat after the city's conquest and includes a temple and living quarters, and was later expanded with more rooms to the south west.

Tayma Fort (3)

Tayma's Governor's Palace is an impressive mud-brick fort on stone foundations, possibly on the location of a previous fort.

Temple Remains (6)

Excavations have found the remains of a major temple that has been reconfigured during different time periods (Assyrian, Babylonian, Lihyan, and Nabataean). It was later reused for non-religious functions after a new compound was built nearby.

*References: 'Ancient Tayma': an Oasis at the Interface between Cultures-New research at a key location on the caravan road, Arnulf Hausleiter
A religious building complex in the ancient settlement of Tayma during the Nabataean period: changes and transformations, Sebastiano Lara*

Note: This page does not do this location justice as it is impossible to detail even the most basic elements and history of Tayma on one page. Please check the source below for more information.

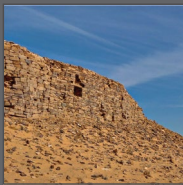


1. Historic Tayma
2. Haddaj Well
3. Tayma Fort
4. Qasr AlHamra
5. Qasr AlRadm
6. Temple Ruins
7. AlAblaq Fort

Haddaj Well



Outer Wall



The Tayma cube stele



Old Tayma



Historic Tayma and Walls

The area contains the remains of many stone structures including temples, palaces, civil buildings, cemeteries, and agricultural facilities such as wells and canals. The area has an inner and outer wall (18.2km long), topped by watchtowers surrounded by walled compounds on the southern and western sides. Excavations have shown multiple settlement stages and have uncovered various artifacts including pottery, tools, human and animal statues, and coins. The interesting Qasr AlRadm and the impressive 6th Century BC Babylonian Haddaj Well are worth visits.

Old Tayma

The Islamic era area center of Tayma is north of the walled historic area. the location includes the Haddaj Well, the Governor's Fort, and a small restored area of the old town that includes a walkway and mud houses surrounded by palm groves. Also don't miss the Tayma Museum to learn more about the city.

Hejaz Railway

Ottoman Era

The Hejaz Railway was built by the Ottomans between 1900-1908 and was planned to run from Damascus to Makkah through the Hejaz region of Saudi Arabia. The goal was to connect Istanbul with Makkah to strengthen political integration and make the Hajj journey safer but construction only reached Madina because of World War I. The railway was repeatedly attacked and damaged during the Arab Revolt supported by the British. Battles were fought at Tabuk, Abu Annaam, Al-Akhdar, Al-Bwair Stations.

Comments
A few of the station names differ depending on the source. Locations are clear on satellite images and are mostly marked on Google Maps if you want to explore. Tracks are easy to follow with a little research. Keep in mind that the majority of the stations/forts are fenced.

 4x4 Vehicle Required



4. Desert Stations and Forts
Driving to or from Tabuk, the paved road follows the train tracks from Khumaisa all the way to AlUla. The stretch includes the iconic AlMuazam station and Hajj caravan fort with a pool that is definitely worth visiting.

2. Offroad Adventure
The offroad stretch between Hadia and Zumurrud is my favourite area as it gives you a feel of what things were like during Ottoman times. It also includes bridge work and a train wreck said to have been caused by Lawrence of Arabia.

5. The Far North
The area south of Tabuk is newly paved and includes a fenced tunnel at Al-Mustabgha with hilltop ruins that is worth exploring. The other stations to the North and South are easily accessible.

3. Easy Access Stations
Another easy area to explore, the AlUla area hosts a major station at AlHijr that is part of the UNESCO site (and tour) as well as an impressive Fort/Station in AlUla town. There are also smaller stations north and south of the city.

1. Around Madina
One of the easiest areas to explore as it includes the beautiful Madinah Railway Station and a few accessible stations on or near the main road. Makkah Station also includes old ruins that are not fenced.

Bwatt Station



Abu Annaam Bridge



Al-Hafeerah Station sign



Makkah Station



Remains of the Hejaz Railway

While there is very little remaining of the actual railway track, you can still see the 39 fenced stations, forts, and water towers along the way as well as various bridges and overpasses over wadi's and embankments. The route is still clear and can be followed for long stretches outside existing cities and towns. The railway was designed to closely follow the Syrian pilgrimage route and you can still see the remains of older forts along the way. The stations at Madain Saleh, Madinah, and Tabuk have been restored and are now tourist attractions. See the map above to know more about which areas to visit.

Historically the Hejaz Railway was made famous by T.E Lawrence (of Arabia) who led efforts to damage the line between Al-Madraj and Hadia Stations with the remains of a derailed train still nearby. He also led an attack on the Abu Annaam Station, killing 70 soldiers and taking 30 prisoners captive, making the sites quite interesting.

South-West

Undoubtedly the most naturally, ethnically, and culturally diverse region of Saudi. From historic cities and forts, to soaring mountain peaks, an unending coastline, waterfalls, coffee farms, and lush wadis full of life. Throw in Jeddah with its UNESCO listed old town, amazing scuba diving, sand dunes, canyons, and historic sights around Makkah, the South West has it all! It took two map pages just to highlight the basics!

Top 5 Experiences

It was an impossible task to choose five places in this region as there are many great experiences. Definitely look through the main sites on the following pages to help you plan. The following list highlights places I personally enjoyed but they only scratch the surface of what is there.

Fayfa, Jizan



AlQahar, Jizan

- 1** Jeddah's UNESCO listed **AlBalad** is a must see when visiting Saudi and one of my favourite places in the country. It's definitely like going back in time. (See detailed map on page 31).
- 2** Exploring the amazing **Fayfa** area, including AlDayar, Harob, AlQahar, and AlReth near Wadi Lajab is not something to be missed when visiting the South. I think the main draw is how unexpected these places are in a mostly desert country.
- 3** **Camping** in AlShafa, Tanoma, AlSoudah, and AlMandaq might not be everyone's cup of tea but all these areas are full of trees and have spectacular views. At the very least, stop and have a picnic and enjoy a short hike in the parks or near one of the many small streams.
- 4** Discovering ancient civilizations on the '**Incense Road**' (see detailed map on page 7) in Najran (See detailed map of AlUkhdu on page 36), Bir Himma, AlFaw (closed), and Jarash.
- 5** Visiting the iconic villages of **Thee Ain** (page 34) in AlBahah and **Rijal Almaa** (page 35) in Abha and their beautiful surrounding areas.



The old summer retreat of Saudi; don't miss the old market, **Wadi Wej**, the monkeys, and **cable car** at **AlHada**, or get off the beaten track and hike around **AlShafa** near Taif. From here the **Wahbah Crater** near Umm Aldoom should not be missed.

Jeddah
Don't miss **AlBalad**, the UNESCO heritage site (see detailed map on page 31), people watching on the **waterfront**, the **Jeddah fountain**, the biggest flag pole, the **fish market**, and tons of great coffee shops and restaurants.



AlBalad



Jeddah Waterfront Corniche



Shada AlAlaa

Base out of Qunfudhah on your way back to Jeddah and explore the lower Tihama plains. Don't miss **Wadi Illeb and Reem**, as well as the **Shada AlAlaa** peak. There are even **hot springs** at **Ahad Tharban** and **AlLith**!



AlShafa



Wahbah Crater



South-West Food Tips

Jeddah is full of great restaurants that can be found by an easy online search. In Taif on the other hand I would recommend **Asel AlMabsur** for the best traditional meatball grills and **Bait AlSaleek AlTaifi** for creamy milk-rice. In **Almandaq** go to **Telvob Musaed** for local rice dishes. Around **AlBahah** region with multiple branches, definitely try the popular **Foul Khaloufa** for breakfast.



1. Wadi Rabigh (& Dam) is an area that is great for hiking with a network of canyons cutting through the volcanic rock. The areas near the train line and the dam are easy 4x4 drives and are worth exploring.



2. Wadi AlFarah is an easily accessible wadi off the road to Madinah near AlAbyar. The area is volcanic so the wadis are more like canyons. Also, visit the nearby Wadi Zee further north for hiking.

1. Wadi Rabigh
2. Wadi AlFatah
3. Wadi Fatimah
4. Wadi Alfawarah
5. Wadi Wej
6. Alkharar Waterfalls
7. Wadi Zee Gazal

Also of Note are:

8. Khulais Fort
Ruins of Ottoman fort that protected the caravans. Easy hike.

9. Barmah Waterfall
Light off-roading but only runs during the rainy season. The area has lots of rock types and is worth the hike even if it is dry.

10. Darb Zubaidah Pool
The last caravan stop before reaching Makkah from Iraq, the pool is over 1000 years old and is fenced but worth a look.

11. Wadi Nemar
At the bottom of Alshafa cliffs the popular off-road wadi has running water and is easy to hike but there might be a lot of people and litter.

3. Wadi Fatimah is the main farming area between Jeddah and Makkah is a great place to explore. The dam area is worth a visit as well as the off-road pools nearby.



4. Wadi Alfawarah east of Jeddah is a great place for a hike during the rainy season as the wadi runs and is full of life. Park near the bridge and hike in or drive in if you have a 4x4.

5. Wadi Wej is a farming area with a running stream that is inside the city of Taif and is more than 30km long. The water can be accessed from multiple spots where you can wade in and explore. The north area away from the city is the cleanest.



6. Alkharar Waterfalls outside Makkah is a local favourite and is great for a moderate hike with some climbing. Accessed by a dirt road, the wadi is pretty and worth the visit alone. The water is seasonal so go in the rainy period.



7. Wadi Zee Gazal (including Jabal Qarnayt) is an area near AlShafa that has some amazing rock formations that are worth exploring and climbing. The wadi is popular in the summer because of the lower temperature.

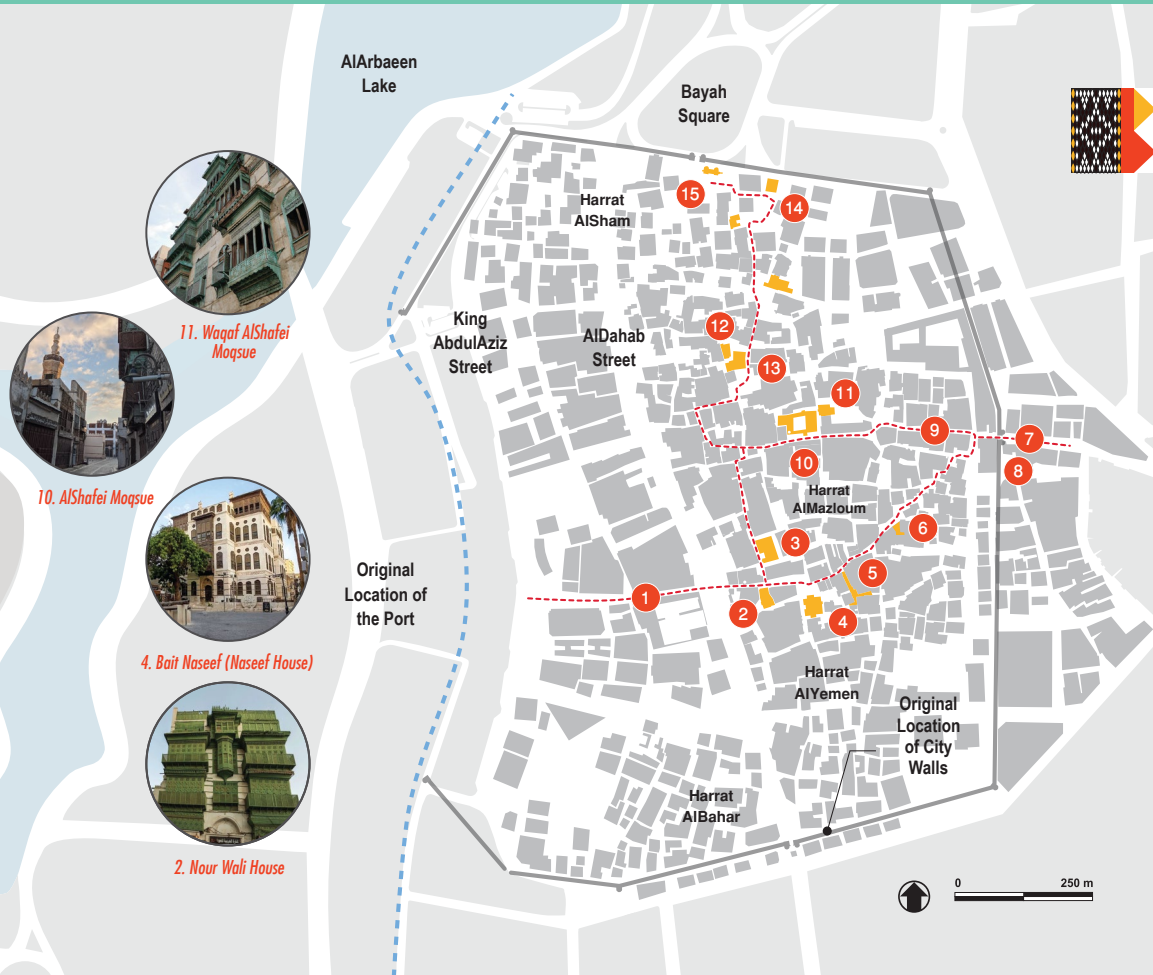


Jeddah Day Trips Hiking Guide

This page includes some of my favourite hiking spots near Jeddah (from an hour to 2.5 hours from Jeddah max). While this doesn't cover everything, it will give you a place to start so do your research and explore. Places that require a 4x4 vehicle have been marked with text or an icon.

AlBalad, Jeddah Walking Guide

While Jeddah has grown over the years, the original old town, known locally as 'AlBalad' still maintains the charm of traditional life in its neighborhoods, ancient souks, and historic mosques. The purpose of this map is to give some general tips on visiting the area on your own. For me, AlBalad is a place to explore and experience. I tend to go twice when I am showing someone around as the calm experience at dawn and the vibrant night are completely different.



1 Where to Start

I usually start at Gabel Street (1) and follow the pilgrim path when they arrived by boat. The port at the time was near AlMahmal Center and has since been turned into reclaimed land. As people left the port they exchanged money or sold gold or silver so the journey starts with the money changers and gold souk, which are still in the same place.

2-5 The Main Souk

Past the AlDahab Street you hit Souk AlAlawi that crosses the town from west to North-East, ending at the Makkah Gate. Don't miss Bait Nour Wali (2) and Bait Jamjoom (3) on your way to Bait Naseef (4) which is open for visits in the afternoon and evening. Next on your right is a small pretty alley (5) with plants and an art gallery that is worth a look. Further up you can also take a look inside the al Matbouli house (6) for a small fee.

6-7 Makkah Gate

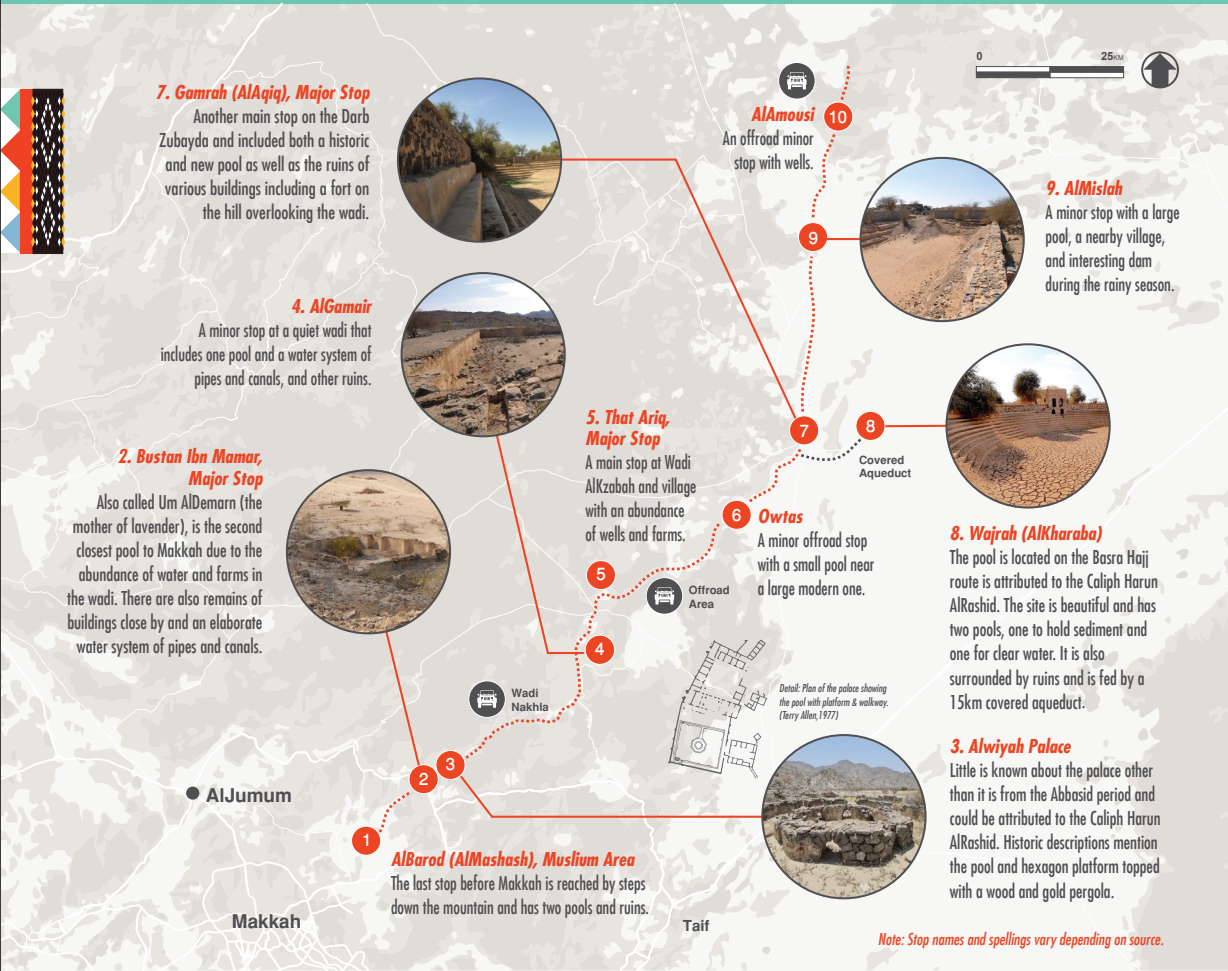
At the end of AlAlawi Souk you will reach the town's Bab Makkah food souk (7) which was originally outside the gates and where the caravans to Makkah provisioned and departed. The date and grain market (8) on your right has a little traditional café that is a great place to take a break and soak in the atmosphere.

8- 14 To the North of AlBalad

This area of town was more affluent and includes many street cafes and little squares. From Bab Makkah, head through Souk AlBadu (9) to reach AlShafei Mosque (10) built in 1250 and it's nearby Waqaf (charitable endowment) (11) with its beautiful green wood lattices. Heading north you will pass various houses and the cool Jedawi café (12) near Bait Baashin (13). End your walk at Bait AlShirbatly (14) and Bab AlMadinah (15).

Darb Zubayda Makkah/Taif

Darb Zubayda, the Kufi pilgrimage route to Makkah, follows the ancient trade route from Mesopotamia and stretches more than 1,400km. It was built by Zubayda bin Jafar, wife of the Abbasid Caliph Harun AlRashid around 800AD. The 'Darb' or trail was marked with milestones, and included 27 major and 27 minor stations with wells, pools, dams, forts, and paved areas. While not all the elements have survived, enough still exist to give a glimpse into the historic Hajj caravan experience.



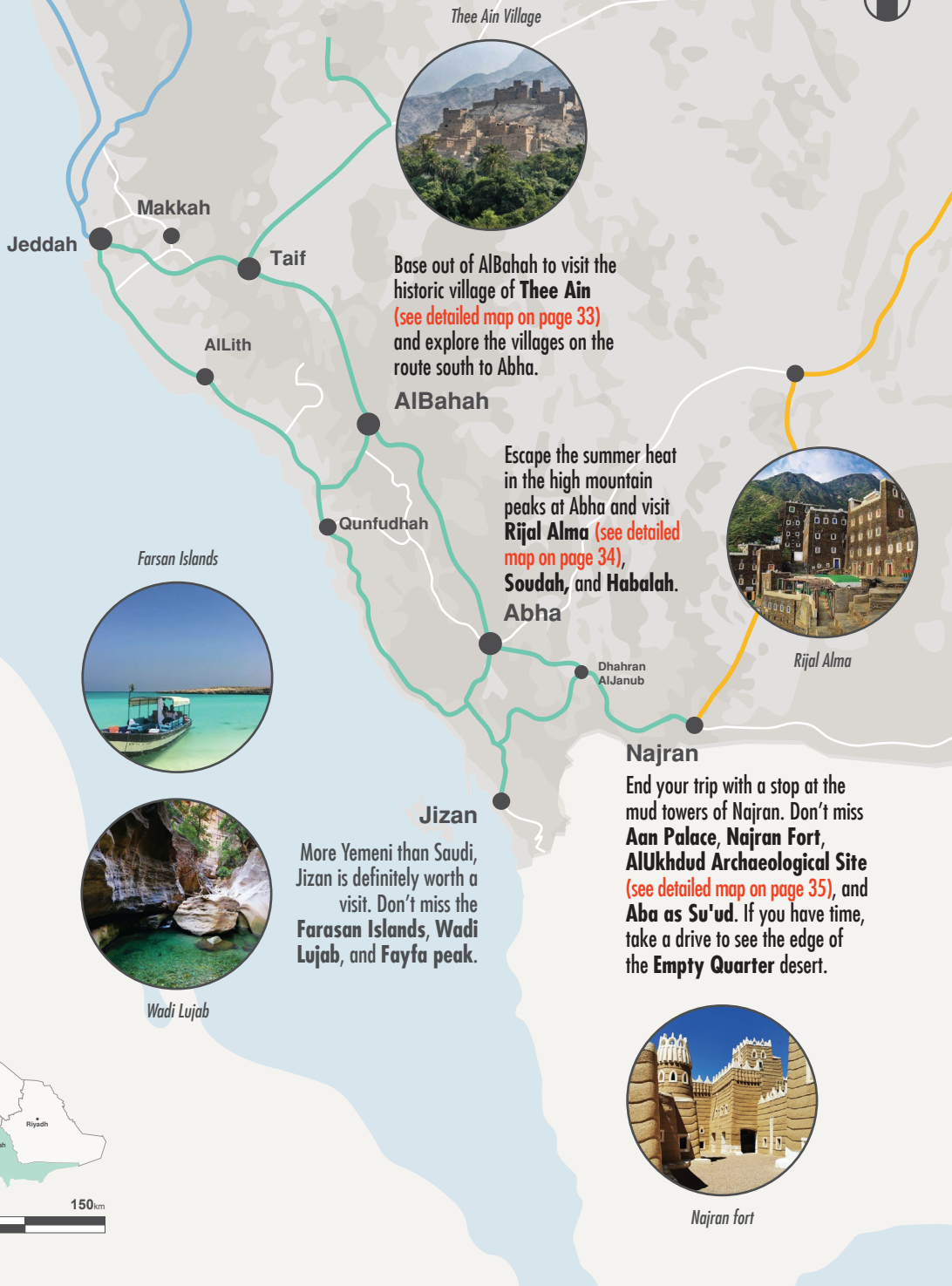
Path of Darb Zubayda



The trail from Makkah to the North of Taif

While there are many segments of the trail that can be explored, I have chosen this stretch due to accessibility to regular cars and Proximity to the main city of Jeddah.

The route consisted of major stations (Manazil) every 50km with minor stops in-between, as this is the daily distance a camel can travel. Start at Bustan Ibn Mamar (2) outside the Muslim area and see the pool and the Alwiyah Palace (3) (both fenced) and explore the wadi until the end of the paved road as there are some interesting ruins and farms around the town of Madiq. Going further up the wadi you will need a 4x4 vehicle or bypass the wadi via AlSail Road to see the minor stop at AlGamair (4) and the major stop at the pretty wadi at That Ariq (5). Here you will need to bypass the offroad area again, either north through the lava plains and canyons or south via Ashayrah which is less interesting. From here the major stop at Gamrah (AlAqiq) (7), the beautiful Wajrah (AlKharaba) (8) with its aqueduct, and AlMislah (9) stops are easy to explore.



Thee Ain Village



Base out of AlBahah to visit the historic village of **Thee Ain** (see detailed map on page 33) and explore the villages on the route south to Abha.

AlBahah

Escape the summer heat in the high mountain peaks at Abha and visit **Rijal Alma** (see detailed map on page 34), **Soudah**, and **Habalaha**.



Rijal Alma

Abha

Dhahran AlJanub

Najran

End your trip with a stop at the mud towers of Najran. Don't miss **Aan Palace**, **Najran Fort**, **AlUkhduh Archaeological Site** (see detailed map on page 35), and **Aba as Su'ud**. If you have time, take a drive to see the edge of the **Empty Quarter** desert.



Najran fort

Makkah

Jeddah

Taif

AlLith

Qunfudhah

Farasan Islands



Wadi Lujab

Jizan

More Yemeni than Saudi, Jizan is definitely worth a visit. Don't miss the **Farasan Islands**, **Wadi Lujab**, and **Fayfa peak**.



South-West Food Tips

While there are local restaurants in the area, cities such as Abha and Jizan have a more independent side. That said I recommend stopping at Amaq on the coast where you can buy your own fish and have one of the traditional stalls cook it for you in a ground oven with fresh bread. If you are near Tanoma try the popular Alkhaima Restaurant and in Abha try AlHesin in the old area.

Thee Ain Village Walking Guide

Probably one of the most iconic villages in Saudi Arabia, Thee Ain, named after the nearby village spring and built on a rocky hill streaked with white marble, is one of the must-visit places on the west coast. The 400-year-old village consists of 49 dwellings and forts at that are surrounded by lush farms famous for bananas, lemon, and pepper. The village has been restored and been developed for tourism so it is easy to visit and explore.

Disclaimer

Another difficult map to create as the heritage village has both open and covered walkways that don't show up on satellite images which I use to create my maps. So until I can pass by again and check, some of the smaller paths might not be correct.



Village Viewpoint (9)



Historic Mosque (6)



Village Spring (4)



Summit Buildings & Viewpoint (7)



Spring Source (5)

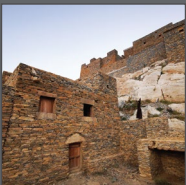


1. Entrance & Parking
2. Tourism Center
3. Mosque and Toilets
4. Spring
5. Spring Source
6. Historic Mosque
7. Summit buildings & Viewpoint
8. Park
9. Village viewpoint

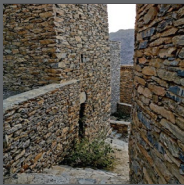
Covered Walkways



Village Streets



Farm Walkway



Heritage House Museum



Thee Ain Heritage Village

While the village has been restored and a park and visitor center have been built, there is still much to be done to make it more interesting as a destination.

The best time to visit the village is around mid-afternoon as the sun sets across from the village and lights it up but as it gets lower, it is obscured by the facing mountain to the west. Season-wise it's cold and dry in the winter while hot with lots of rain and lush vegetation in the summer. For the best views park near the entrance of the village on King Fahad Road and walk back to the bridge to the south-west or drive in and stop at the dirt road directly overlooking the farms and the village near the graveyard (9). In the village, I usually start at the spring (4) and walk the dirt path to the source of the water (5), then head up and see sunset from the top of the village (7). There are two paths up to the top but all involve stairs so it's not handicap friendly. That said there is a service road to the top (if open) and a path to the east that could provide access.

Rijal Almaa Village Walking Guide

Another iconic area in Asir is Rijal Almaa between AlSouda and the coast. The area has shown evidence of habitation since the stone age and was a stop on the ancient caravan routes linking Yemen with the Levant. The main village in the area is also named Rijal Almaa contains around 60 multiple-story stone buildings that have been partially restored and developed for tourism.

Disclaimer

Another difficult map to create as the heritage village is located on multiple levels that don't show up well on satellite images which I use to create my maps. So until I can pass by again and check, some of the paths might not be correct.

Ruins on the East side



Covered walkway (4)



Terraces



Rijal Almaa Museum (2)



Main Square & Amphitheater (1)



Ruins of South-side of the village (5)



Parking (7)

(2)

(3)

(1)

(6)

Ruins

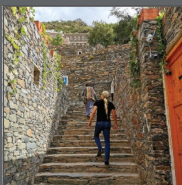
(8)

1. Main Square & Amphitheater
2. Rijal Almaa Museum
3. Handcrafts and Market
4. Link to South-side
5. Spring channel & Ruins
6. Shops and Cafes
7. Parking
8. Additional Street Parking

Window details



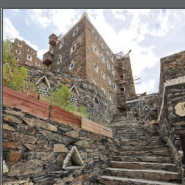
Main Stairs into Village



Rijal Almaa Heritage Village

While the village itself is the highlight of the wadi and is quite impressive, the overall area also hosts many beautiful terraced villages that are worth exploring.

Details of Stairs



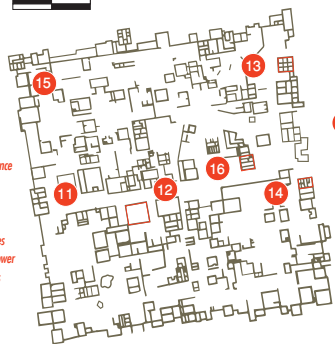
Typical doorway



Historically, the Rijal Almaa area was a strong political power that was involved in early Islamic battles and fought and gained independence from the Ottomans in 1826AD. There fighters were renowned for their fighting skills and bravery both on land and sea. Though a predominately farming area popular with fruits, grains, coffee, and vegetables, the area was also a center of trade due to its location and political strength. The main village itself is beautiful but areas to the south of the main restored area near the water channel and across the road to the southwest have not been restored and are sadly falling apart. The village is easy to navigate with the first three levels being the easiest to explore and include the museum and the link to the south-side of the village. Going further up you get a stronger feel of the terraced village and is worth the climb.

Najran/Ragmat AlUkhudud Guide

From 500 BC to the rise of Islam, Najran/Ragmat grew into a major caravan city connecting the northern and southern parts of the peninsula due to its strategic location, agricultural, and plentiful water. The name AlUkhudud (the trench) is mentioned in the Quran, and describes the martyrdom of the city's Christian inhabitants by the Jewish King of Himyar Dhu Nuwa in 525AD. While the site is now in ruins, enough remains to shine a light on the era and history of the region.



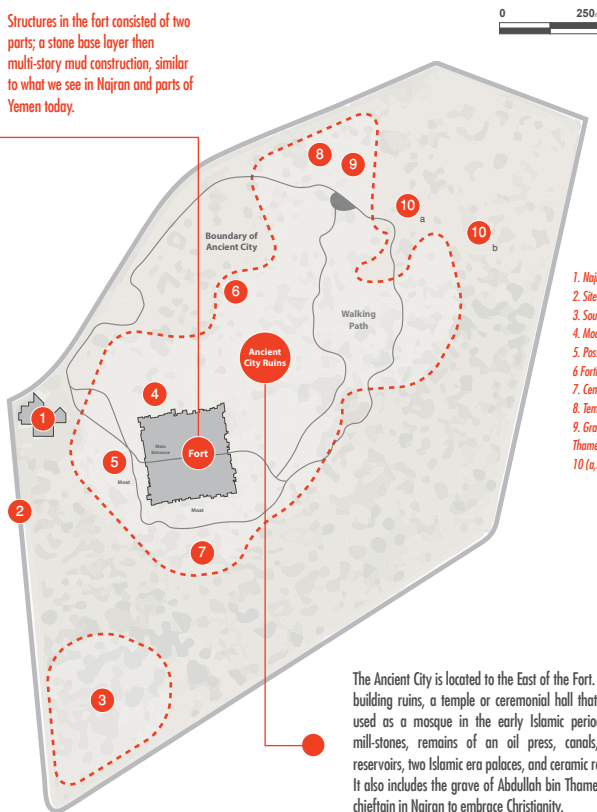
- 11. Main Entrance
- 12. Main path, buildings, and inscriptions
- 13&14. Temples
- 15. Fortified Tower
- 16. Inscriptions

The fortified town includes defensive walls and a large number of ruins. The larger buildings on the main path through the fort were possibly palaces or temples. The excavated buildings in the North East of the fort and South of the East entrance were likely temples based on artifacts and inscriptions found during excavations. Historic writings also mention a domed structure, probably a temple that later became a church. The site was surrounded by a moat which could be the trench mentioned in the Quran when mentioning the AlUkhudud story. The Fort also contains many Musnad, South Arabian, and Sabaeon inscriptions as well as petroglyphs of animal figures such as camels, three horned horses, snakes, and hand prints.

Main Entrance and Path



Temple, Later Mosque



Structures in the fort consisted of two parts; a stone base layer then multi-story mud construction, similar to what we see in Najran and parts of Yemen today.

- 1. Najran Museum
- 2. Site Gate & Parking
- 3. South Ruins
- 4. Moat
- 5. Possible Bridge
- 6. Fortified Tower
- 7. Cemetery
- 8. Temple or Hall
- 9. Grave of Abdullah bin Thamer
- 10 (a,b). Islamic Palaces.

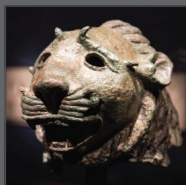
The Ancient City is located to the East of the Fort. It includes building ruins, a temple or ceremonial hall that was later used as a mosque in the early Islamic period, circular mill-stones, remains of an oil press, canals, artificial reservoirs, two Islamic era palaces, and ceramic remains. It also includes the grave of Abdullah bin Thamer, the first chieftain in Najran to embrace Christianity.

*Note: Layouts of the site and Fort are based on Archaeological studies but do not accurately reflect existing ruins
Reference: Archaeological Tourism Assessment and development in Najran, Saudi Arabia. Dr Ali Alotwri*

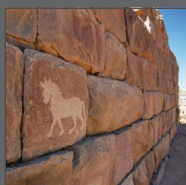
South Arabian Inscription



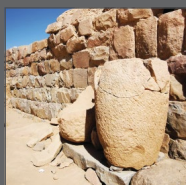
Bronze Lion head



Three horn Horse Carving



Stone Jars

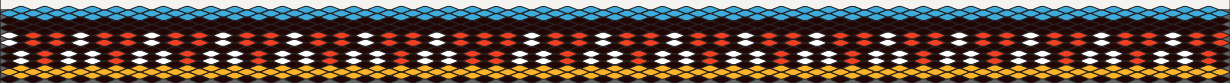


A Stop on the Incense Road

Najran was a focal point of the Nabataean caravans on the Incense Road. South Arabian commodities such as frankincense and myrrh, spices from India, and silks from China, were exported by traders north in two general directions, through the Hejaz towards Egypt and the Levant and northeast towards the Persian Gulf. Cities along this route levied taxes on merchants, and therefore became very wealthy. Ragmat declined in importance as marine trade expanded and demand for frankincense declined.

Excavations

Excavations of the site have uncovered glass, metals, red and green glazed pottery, incense burners, marble lids, bronze artifact, and clay figurines that are similar to those found at other main stops on the caravan route such as Qarriyat AlFaw and Thaj. The abundance of pottery shreds indicates that it was manufactured locally and there was a well-established pottery industry at that time.



Saudi Arabia

The Roadtrip Guide

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