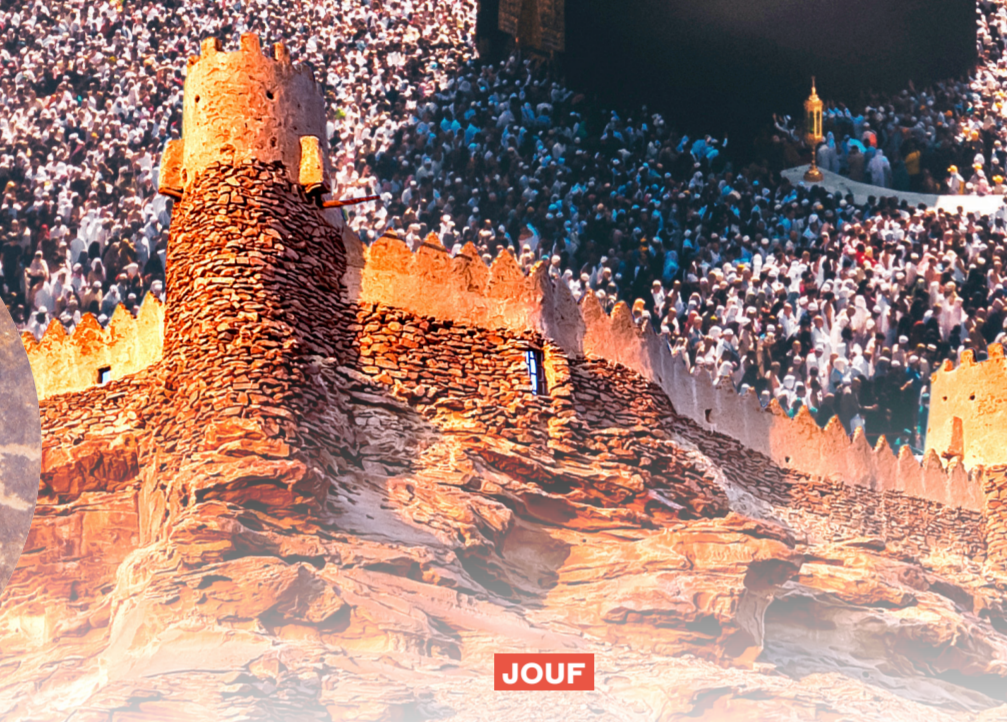


# This is our Kingdom



HAIL



JOUF



QASSIM

**TABUK**  
Governor: Prince Fahd bin Sultan  
Population: 949,612  
Area: 146,072 sq km

**JOUF**  
Governor: Prince Faisal bin Nawaf  
Population: 531,952  
Area: 100,212 sq km

**HAIL**  
Governor: Prince Abdulaziz bin Saad  
Population: 731,147  
Area: 103,887 sq km

**QASSIM**  
Governor: Prince Faisal bin Mishaal  
Population: 1.4 million  
Area: 65,000 sq km

**NORTHERN BORDERS**  
Governor: Prince Faisal bin Khaled bin Sultan  
Population: 380,051  
Area: 127,000 sq km



RIYADH

**RIYADH**  
Governor: Prince Faisal bin Bandar  
Population: 8.6 million  
Area: 412,000 sq km



**CUSTODIAN OF THE TWO HOLY MOSQUES, KING SALMAN BIN ABDULAZIZ AL-SAUD**

**CROWN PRINCE AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN**



TABUK

**MADINAH**  
Governor: Prince Faisal bin Salman  
Population: 2.2 million  
Area: 151,990 sq km

**MAKKAH**  
Governor: Prince Khaled Al-Faisal  
Population: 9 million  
Area: 153,148 sq km

**AL-BAHA**  
Governor: Prince Hussam bin Saud bin Abdulaziz  
Population: 497,068  
Area: 36,000 sq km

**JAZAN**  
Governor: Prince Mohammed bin Nasser  
Population: 1.6 million  
Area: 40,457 sq km

**ASIR**  
Governor: Prince Turki bin Talal  
Population: 2.3 million  
Area: 81,000 sq km

**NAJRAN**  
Governor: Prince Jalawi bin Abdulaziz  
Population: 608,467  
Area: 360,000 sq km

**EASTERN PROVINCE**  
Governor: Prince Saud bin Naif  
Population: 5.1 million  
Area: 672,522 sq km



EASTERN PROVINCE



AL-BAHA

## COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF SAUDI ARABIA

Established by King Abdulaziz in 1953, the Council of Ministers consists of the monarch, who serves as prime minister, the crown prince, who is deputy PM, and Cabinet ministers. Today, the Kingdom's 24 ministries are responsible for drafting and overseeing the implementation of internal, external, financial, economic, education, and defense policies, and general affairs of the state.



- ENERGY MINISTER**  
Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman
- MINISTER OF INTERIOR**  
Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Naif
- MINISTER OF SPORT**  
Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal
- MINISTER OF THE NATIONAL GUARD**  
Prince Abdullah bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz
- FOREIGN MINISTER**  
Prince Faisal bin Farhan
- MINISTER OF CULTURE**  
Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan
- MINISTER OF COMMERCE, ACTING MINISTER OF MEDIA**  
Majid bin Abdullah Al-Qasbi
- MINISTER OF EDUCATION**  
Mohammed Al-Asheikh
- MINISTER OF MUNICIPAL AND RURAL AFFAIRS, AND HOUSING**  
Majid Al-Hogail
- MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT, WATER, AND AGRICULTURE**  
Abdulrahman Al-Fadley
- MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**  
Ahmed Al-Rajhi
- MINISTER OF FINANCE**  
Mohammed Al-Jadaan
- HEALTH MINISTER**  
Fahad Al-Jasajif
- MINISTER OF ISLAMIC AFFAIRS, DAWAH AND GUIDANCE**  
Sheikh Abdulatif Al-Asheikh
- MINISTER OF JUSTICE**  
Walid Al-Samaani
- MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND MINERAL RESOURCES**  
Bandar Al-Khorayef
- MINISTER OF HAJJ AND UMRAH**  
Tawfiq Al-Rabiah
- MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**  
Abdullah Al-Sweha
- MINISTER OF TRANSPORT AND LOGISTIC SERVICES**  
Saleh bin Nasser Al-Jasser
- MINISTER OF INVESTMENT**  
Khalid Al-Falih
- MINISTER OF TOURISM**  
Ahmed Al-Khateeb
- MINISTER OF ECONOMY AND PLANNING**  
Fadel Al-Ibrahim

ARAB NEWS

*The Voice of a Changing Region*

Friday, September 23, 2022 - [www.arabnews.com](http://www.arabnews.com)

# This is our home

Special commemorative issue  
marking Saudi National Day 2022





# Spotlight Saudi National Day 2022

DESIGN

## Many hues of a changing Kingdom

Identity of 92nd Saudi National Day epitomizes the aspirations of the country's communities, their unity and belonging

Nada Alturki Riyadh

**The slogan for the 92nd Saudi National Day, "It is our home," and the promotional designs commissioned to mark the occasion reflect the aspirations, unity and belonging of communities throughout the country, the company behind the campaign told Arab News.**

"The Gathering KSA" was one of the first Saudi companies to launch public events in the Kingdom, including its collaboration with the General Entertainment Authority (GEA) when it introduced the National Day

Out in 2017.

Sadeem Al-Hosainy, CEO of The Gathering KSA, says the slogan and overall design, which features a man and woman against the backdrop of a Saudi flag, highlight unity, safety, aspiration, wisdom, loyalty, belonging and family.

"This is the core of the achievements because, without (our men and women), we can never rise in our country," Al-Hosainy told Arab News.

The promotion also highlights the many giga-projects launched under Vision 2030, including the NEOM smart city, the AMAALA luxury tourism resort, and Diriyah Gate.

"We wanted something very simple, that can transmit people's

### SYMBOLISM OF COLORS

- Ambition
- Safety
- Growth
- Optimism
- Success
- Determination
- Wisdom
- Loyalty



values. We wanted to represent this in a single key visual, so people can see the vision of Saudi Arabia, where we reached at this point, and our plan in the future," she said.

The Gathering KSA is an experience-driven event and entertainment company founded by Al-Hosainy, her sister Saja, and fellow entrepreneur Haifa Alsharif in 2016. The GEA was established in the same year, and soon approached The Gathering about a collaboration.

Before "It is our home" was

**Sadeem Al-Hosainy said that she wanted to transmit people's values through the Saudi National Day slogan.**

AN photo by Abdulrahman Alsalem

coined, Saudi National Day was marked under the slogan: "Our determination will take us to the summit."

Al-Hosainy said the new slogan reflects the changes taking place in Saudi society and the pride many feel about the Kingdom's ongoing transformation.

"We created this slogan because it's very near to our heart, and this is something that we really appreciated during the coronavirus pandemic, appreciating our country, our homes," she said.

"There is a huge difference between a house and a home. That's why this slogan is very sentimental and can touch people's hearts."

CULTURE

## A creative scene shaped by KSA's heritage and rich history

Nada Alturki Riyadh

As Saudi Arabia celebrates its 92nd National Day, its creative scene is flourishing as never before.

A glimpse into the not-so-distant past would show film sets interrupted by police inquiries demanding that productions be shut down. Fast forward to today, and local filmmakers are backed by generous support from the General Entertainment Authority, Ithra, the Red Sea Film Festival, and countless other institutions, whether governmental or private.

The talent and passion has always been there. But now, artists are receiving the backing and opportunities to raise the cultural scene in the Kingdom to a new level.

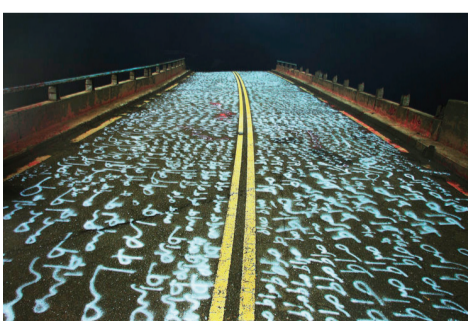
"Saudi Arabia is currently living a golden age in all cultural and social aspects under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The openness we are witnessing has reflected positively on all arts, and this contributes to our development as visual artists and raises the ceiling of challenges and expectations," contemporary artist Saad Howede told Arab News.

Howede is the co-founder of Wasm Studio, a creative art space, along with fellow artist Hmoud Al-Attawi.

The rich history of Arabia greatly influences his work, as he draws inspiration from the people, their heritage, and how cultures intersect. The significance of cultural heritage in shaping a creative scene is stressed by many Saudi artists.

"Memory is the treasure of nations," Howede said. "Any nation or culture that has no roots is a weak, dormant nation that has no future."

Saudi artist Abdunasser Gharem, founder of Gharem Studio and Edge of Arabia, told



Arab News: "We have dreamed of what is happening now, but there was no infrastructure. Now, we have a lot of art events, art entities, like Diriyah Biennale, AlUla's DesertX... the Islamic Biennale is going to be at the end of this year. What's happening now is really a cultural boom and it's become part of our daily life."

One of the most significant changes for creatives in the Kingdom has been new legislation making it far easier to stage concerts, exhibitions and other



**Top: Saudi artists are bringing new perspectives to both the local and global art scenes. Above and left: Abdunasser Gharem fuses Islamic and modern motifs.** Supplied

performances. Saudi residents were once prohibited from entering spaces such as AlUla, which has now become home to various music festivals, cultural

events, and tourist attractions.

"We are living in a grand narrative. It's an enlightenment now, socially and culturally. What we need from artists is for them to go back to their cultural resources and roots," Gharem said. "We were away from our cultural resources for ages."

"I think the Saudi art scene is unique when it comes to its development and growth. The art grew organically and the artists formed groups to support each other," calligrapher Lulwah Al-Homoud told Arab News.

"This happened with very little support — without infrastructure — and now the country is working hard to establish real institutions to support the art."

The focus on supporting creativity has even brought Saudis closer to home. Comedian Mishal "Mesh" Samman began his work as a stand-up as an expat, but has recently returned to experience



**Above: Telfaz1111 CEO Alaa Fadan is delivering Saudi content to an international audience.** Supplied

the newly established scene in his homeland, where public entertainment was once shunned.

"I see on a daily basis that all the opportunities are here. That's why I came back to Saudi Arabia, because I see that hope. That hope was never there when I was here (before)," Samman told Arab News. "Saudi Arabia is positioning itself to be a fantastic conduit for all of these things."

Recent government support has enabled local talent to thrive in the film production industry, too, said Alaa Fadan, CEO of Saudi production company Telfaz11.

"We are seeing the ecosystem evolving all around us, unfolding right before our eyes, making it easier for players in this industry to push forward with confidence that they can thrive," Fadan told Arab News.

Telfaz11 rose to prominence through its YouTube channel, and now has shows released on Netflix and other platforms. Fadan believes that with the creativity, passion and support that exists in the Kingdom, Telfaz 11's content can be a match for anything produced elsewhere in the world.

"Our culture is rich and our stories are tremendously interesting, and the world hasn't had the chance to hear or be introduced to them properly yet," Fadan said.

Cinemas only reopened in Saudi Arabia on April 18, 2018. That same day was coincidentally filmmaker Afnan Bawayan's first time on a film set.

"I remember the first day we shot, police came and shut us down," she told Arab News, adding that there was an issue with a permit that was later resolved. By the end of that same year, she said, police actually closed off a public road so that a film shoot could take place.

"It's a very different feeling (now), from being afraid of what you're doing to feeling really supported in what you're doing," Bawayan said.

# Saudi National Day 2022



Saudi folklore music and dance combines poetry, song, drumming and movement and is found in various forms across the Kingdom, where different styles and histories create fresh sounds across the provinces. Ministry of Culture

## CULTURE

# The soundscape of Saudi Arabia

Diverse music traditions reaching into antiquity have influenced the Kingdom's identity and modern youth culture

Rawan Radwan Jeddah

**Folk music traditions in Saudi Arabia are diverse and complex, combining distinctive tones, rhythms and melodies with poetry, percussion, and dances that have been passed down through generations.**

Over the centuries, poets and musicians have traversed the Arabian Peninsula and the wider Middle East, exchanging and combining modes of expression through song, music and dance.

The contemporary soundscape echoes these ancient traditions, expressed through popular rhythms and songs that emerged from classic literature, epics, and heroic poems, mirroring the history, values, norms, and consciousness of society.

Since pre-Islamic times, singers and reciters have helped spread poems among tribes. This practice found its way to the courts of the caliphs, where celebrated singers set poems to melodies and performed for private audiences.

With time, the courts disappeared, but the practice remained. Nearly all melodies from the region fall within the esthetic principles of the centuries-old maqam system, a hallmark of Middle Eastern music. It describes a series of modes or scales and a way of improvising and forming melodies within those modes.

Maqam scales usually have seven notes that repeat at the octave, while a few extend beyond eight notes. Though there is no harmony, harmonic intervals can sometimes be heard for a moment or two in passing.

While visiting the Hijaz in 1814, Swiss orientalist Johann Ludwig Burckhardt documented the region's distinctive musical notation in his book, "Travels in Arabia," where he described performances by women separated into two choirs, each featuring six, eight or 10 individuals. One group would begin singing and chanting, while

the other repeated after them.

In the Hijaz, there is rich musical culture based on song traditions that have more complex melodies than elsewhere in the Kingdom, expressed using instruments such as the oud, qanun, nay (the flute), and more recently, the violin.

For centuries cities like Makkah and Madinah had a musical life that rivaled or even surpassed those of neighboring Arab cities, such as Baghdad and Cairo, where music at royal courts was plentiful.

The migratory lifestyle of the Bedouin discourages excess baggage, including musical instruments, so these communities tended to stick to simple rhythms, with the beat counted by clapping or striking together everyday implements that formed the basis of the music.

Drums were and still are considered an orchestra in themselves, as most Saudi and Gulf folk music uses shallow frame drums held in the left hand and struck with the right in a unique multi-toned rhythm.

Another layer of percussive sound in Saudi music is clapping and dance, the latter of which falls into two categories. The first encompasses steps in unison, such as the dance of "Al-Dahha" in the north, and "Al-Khatwa" in the southwest.

The second is a freestyle dance, often performed solo or in pairs, by dancers twirling colorful bisht (cloaks), such as the "Majroor" in Taif and the "Yanbaawi" and "Mezmar" in the western region.



Today's Saudi scene (above) fuses heritage with modern sounds. Talal Maddah (bottom) was a pioneer in Saudi music from the mid-1950s. Supplied

Blending elegiac poetry with singing, drumming, and slow, majestic movements, the "Ardah," an old war dance that later became one of peace and celebration, is now an iconic part of traditional Saudi Arabian culture.

The poems sung are patriotic, and their dignified, masculine, and proud movements tell a historical tale of bravery, resilience and continuity. Over in the Kingdom's Eastern Province, folk arts are

derived from the region's rich traditions of pearl diving, seafaring, oasis agriculture, and long-distance trade. There are date-harvest songs in Al-Ahsa, and shepherding songs from the southwest.

These traditions did not appear in complete isolation, however. Trade caravans, pilgrimages, and the search for new pastures carried traditions across great distances, blending cultures and spreading influences.

"If you look at the map of Saudi Arabia, you will find that it is surrounded on all sides by different musical and lyrical (traditions in countries," Abdullah

## TYPES OF FOLKLORE DANCE PER REGION

**Najd:** Samry.

**Northern regions:** Al-Dahha and Rafihi.

**Eastern regions:** Al-Nahama and Mawwal Al-Baharah (sailors).

**Western regions:** Al-Khabeiti, Al-Majs, Al-Sahbah, Al-Danat and Al-Majroor.

**Southern regions:** Al-Khattwa, Al-Masha, and Al-Zamil.

Thabit, a Saudi poet and writer, told Arab News.

"You have Yemen from the south, Iraq and the Levant, Turkey from the north, Gulf countries from the east, and Egypt and Sudan from the west. Regions were influenced by their surrounding regions over centuries."

It is not immediately clear to the untrained ear what constitutes a definitive Saudi style, distinct from its neighbors, but common across the Kingdom's provinces.

Thabit says the modern musical style that can be described as distinctly Saudi Arabian was

developed by Tariq Abdel-Hakim, commander-in-chief of the Kingdom's Army Orchestra in the Saudi Army Band, and the composer of the national anthem.

The contributions of Abdel-Hakim, who died in 2012 aged 92, were considered a turning point for music in the Kingdom, as he transferred Saudi music from the aural melody to written musical notation on sound scientific foundations.

"It was his student, Omar Kadras, who tried to mesh between the rhythm and sounds of folklore, giving birth to a new sound in Saudi music," said Thabit.

"Talal Maddah, a pioneer in Saudi music known as The Earth's Voice, was the first to sing Al-Mkblahah, or long songs. Mohammed Abdo then contributed to popularizing the new form of music, but you will find that before this new and matured form of music, it was greats such as Hisham Al-Abdali, Hasan Jawah, Abdulrahman Muezzin Platin, who was also a muezzin at the mosque, and more who made it popular."

In the second half of the last century, the artistic movement expanded, with the emergence of several composers, such as Siraj Omar, Kadars, and many singers, led by Maddah, Abdo and Abu Bakr Salem, then Abdul Majeed Abdullah, Abadi Al-Jawhar, Rabeh Saqr, Rashid Al-Majed, and others.

"Women's voices also appeared with them, although they are unfortunately very limited, such as Ibtisam Lutfi, Etab, Sarah Qazzaz, and Toha, who were closer to popular singing," said Thabit.

Today, Saudi music encompasses everything from jazz, hip-hop and rap to techno and rock 'n roll, with many of these genres incorporating aspects of folklore traditions, such as Majed Al-Eisa's songs "Lifestyle Samry," "Lehe" and "Hawages."

While these traditions are colorful and lively, Saudi youth are also drawn to foreign music genres. Jara, one of Saudi Arabia's youngest big-name performing artists, made waves when her rap single "966" was released in 2020, while hip-hop artist Quasai continues to make his mark a decade after his first release.

"Using sounds from the region is simply a way to celebrate my heritage which feeds into the concept of exporting our beautiful culture," Saud Al-Turki, an Alkhorab-based record producer, told Arab News.

"As a producer, I never wanted to feel restricted in regards to the sounds that I could tap into. In my opinion, connecting with a global audience is more impactful. The beautiful thing about Saudi sounds is that you can hear the inspiration from different parts of the region depending (on) where you are geographically."

Before the Kingdom began opening up in 2016 and started to promote creative industries and youth participation, Al-Turki says artists found it difficult to experiment with musical styles.

"Back then, there was no support from government entities and big corporations. On the contrary, they did not receive the same acceptance, respect and support that current artists are receiving."

Today, Saudi Arabia embraces both the diversity of world music and its own musical heritage.

"We should never forget where we come from," said Al-Turki.



# Saudi National Day 2022



WORLD EXPO 2030

## A challenge embraced with total commitment

More than 60 countries, organizations and communities have offered support for Saudi Arabia's bid to host Expo 2030

Rebecca Anne Proctor Dubai

**Toward the end of March this year, as the huge gates that served as Expo 2020 Dubai's entrances closed for the last time, those who had worked tirelessly to create the award-winning Saudi pavilion were all too aware of the possibility that the Kingdom itself might host the World Expo in 2030.**

Speaking on March 28 during the closing ceremony for the Saudi pavilion, Fahd Al-Rasheed, the CEO of the Royal Commission for Riyadh City, said: "Millions of people who visited the award-winning Saudi pavilion got a glimpse of the future that the Kingdom and its capital are building. Today is just the start of showing what Riyadh has to offer for Expo 2030."

He added: "Saudi Arabia is a young country and Riyadh's renewal is powered by the energy and relentless ambition of its youth. The world needs that kind of optimism about the future now more than ever."

Saudi Arabia submitted its bid for the World Expo 2030 in October last year, in a letter sent by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the Bureau International des Expositions, the international organizing body for world expositions since 1931.

According to the Saudi Press Agency, the letter stated: "We live in an era of change and we face an unprecedented need for humanity's collective action."

The crown prince's words were echoed in the theme of the Kingdom's bid: "The Era of Change: Leading the Planet to a Foresighted Tomorrow."

Saudi Arabia's desire to host World Expo 2030 goes hand in hand with Saudi Vision 2030, which was unveiled by the crown prince in 2016 and aims to diversify the Saudi economy and develop the nation's tourism and recreation sectors. Expo 2030 is scheduled to begin on Oct. 1, 2030, and continue until April 1 the following year.

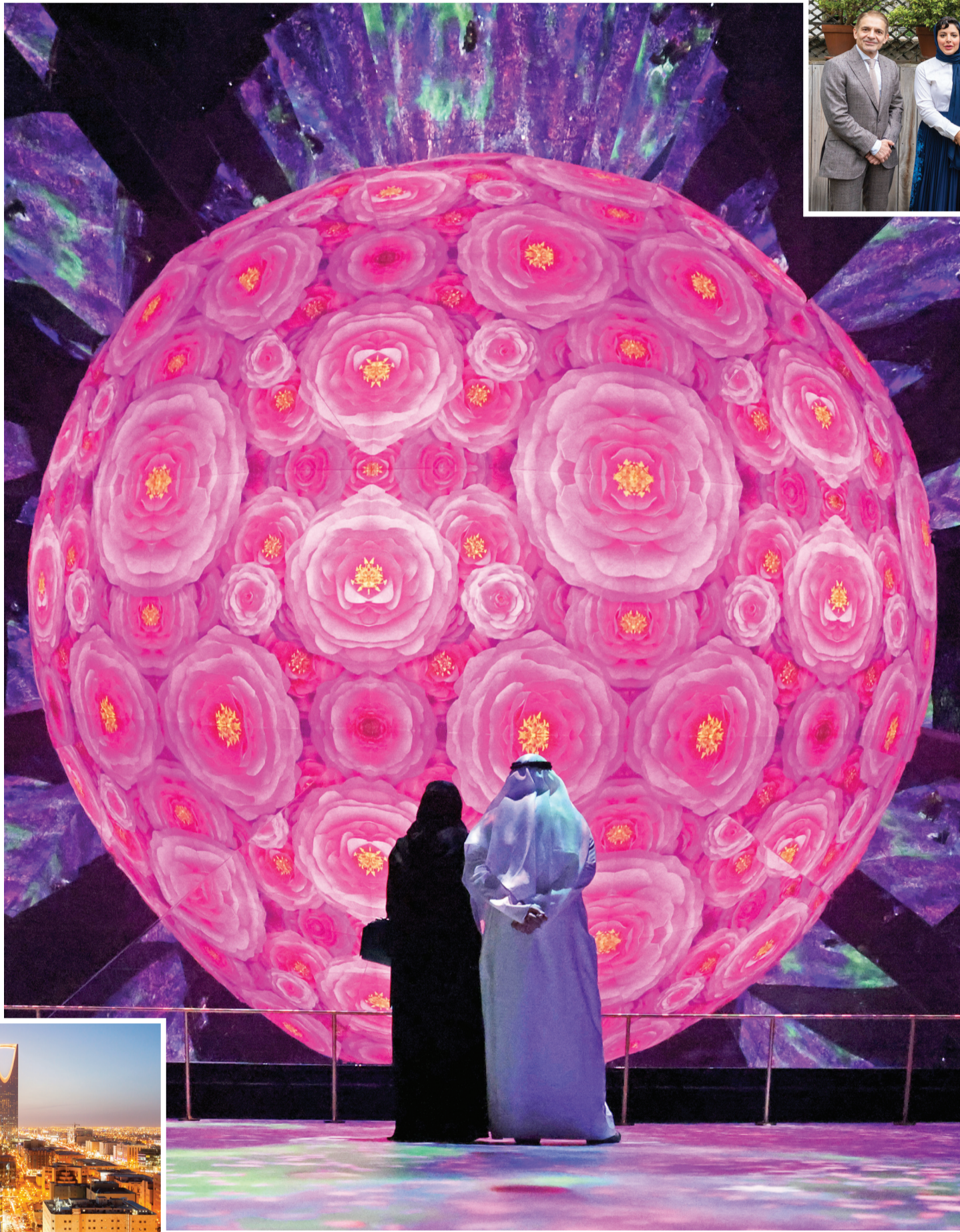
As the crown prince noted in his letter to the BIE: "The World Expo 2030 in Riyadh will coincide with the culmination of the Kingdom's Vision 2030."

If Saudi Arabia is selected to host the event, authorities plan to turn Riyadh and the rest of the country into a world-class venue for global culture, connectivity and climate action.

"The BIE is pleased to receive this letter of candidature from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the fifth country to seek the organization of World Expo 2030," Dimitri S. Kerkentzes, the secretary general of BIE, said in response to the formal application.

"The strong interest in hosting World Expo 2030 attests to the global desire to reconnect with each other and to build a future that is more sustainable, by fostering innovation and cooperation."

The Kingdom is up against



The Saudi pavilion in Dubai (main, bottom). (Inset) Al-Rasheed submits Riyadh bid dossier to Kerkentzes. Shutterstock, AFP, BIE



### SAUDI PAVILION AT EXPO 2020 DUBAI FACTS

# 13k

square meters

# 650

Saudi-manufactured solar panels

# 4.6

million visits

# 3

Guinness World Records

forward-thinking vision and growing openness to the world. It earned numerous accolades for its design and architectural vision.

Second in size only to the pavilion of the host nation, the UAE, the Kingdom's attraction covered 13,000 square meters and included the longest interactive water curtain.

It also boasted the largest interactive light floor and the largest interactive digital screen, for which it was awarded three Guinness World Records.

Exhibitor Magazine gave Saudi Arabia an award for the best pavilion in the category of large suites. It also received a Platinum Certificate in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design from the US Green Building Council, honoring the structure as one of the most sustainable in the world.

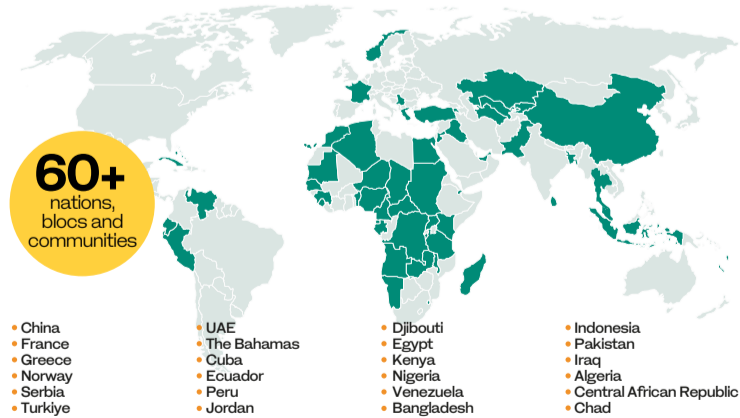
One of Expo 2020 Dubai's most praised pavilions, it had logged a record 4.6 million visits by the time the event ended.

"The impressive footfall at the Saudi Pavilion demonstrates the world's great interest in the Kingdom and the transformation it is undergoing under the leadership of King Salman bin Abdulaziz and HRH Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman," Al-Rasheed said in his speech at the closing ceremony.

Earlier, he had announced that, as part of the nation's Expo 2030 bid, Riyadh will build "one of the world's largest public transport networks, one of the largest urban parks, a massive urban-greening project, and turn the entire city into an open art gallery without walls."

He added: "As a first-time competitor, Saudi Arabia's candidature represents an important and symbolic challenge for our nation and one that we will embrace with full commitment."

### SUPPORT FOR SAUDI ARABIA'S WORLD EXPO 2030 BID



bids from Italy, South Korea and Ukraine. If successful, it will become only the second country in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia region to host a World Expo in the event's near-180-year history.

Saudi Arabia has earned significant support for its bid from more than 60 countries and organizations, including China, France, Turkiye, Greece, Armenia, Cuba, dozens of African nations, and the Organization of Islamic

Cooperation.

During a meeting in July between French President Emmanuel Macron and the Saudi crown prince, the former "expressed the support of France for Riyadh's candidacy to welcome Expo 2030."

In June, the intergovernmental Caribbean Community, which represents 15 member states, announced its support for the Saudi bid.

During a meeting in May in Riyadh with Adel Al-Jubeir, the Saudi minister of state for foreign affairs, Vladimir Gonzalez, the

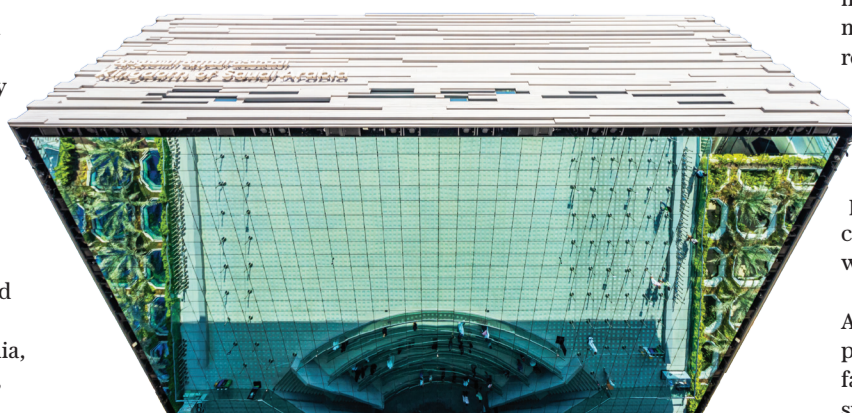
Cuban ambassador to Saudi Arabia, "officially communicated the support of the Republic of Cuba for the Saudi candidacy to host" Expo 2030.

Yet another show of support came from the Republic of Cape Verde. President Jose Maria Neves made the announcement on Aug. 3 during a meeting in the capital, Praia, with Ahmed bin Abdulaziz Qattan, adviser to the Saudi royal court.

Despite a two-year delay because of the coronavirus pandemic, Expo 2020 Dubai proved a huge success, attracting more than 24 million visitors in six months. It had three subthemes, reflected by the three districts at the expo site: Mobility, Sustainability and Opportunity.

In keeping with the Kingdom's increasing focus on progress and growth over the current decade, the Saudi pavilion was in the Opportunity District.

Designed by Boris Micka Associates, the Kingdom's pavilion consisted of an unfolding facade akin to an open window, symbolizing the Gulf nation's



## Saudi National Day 2022



1

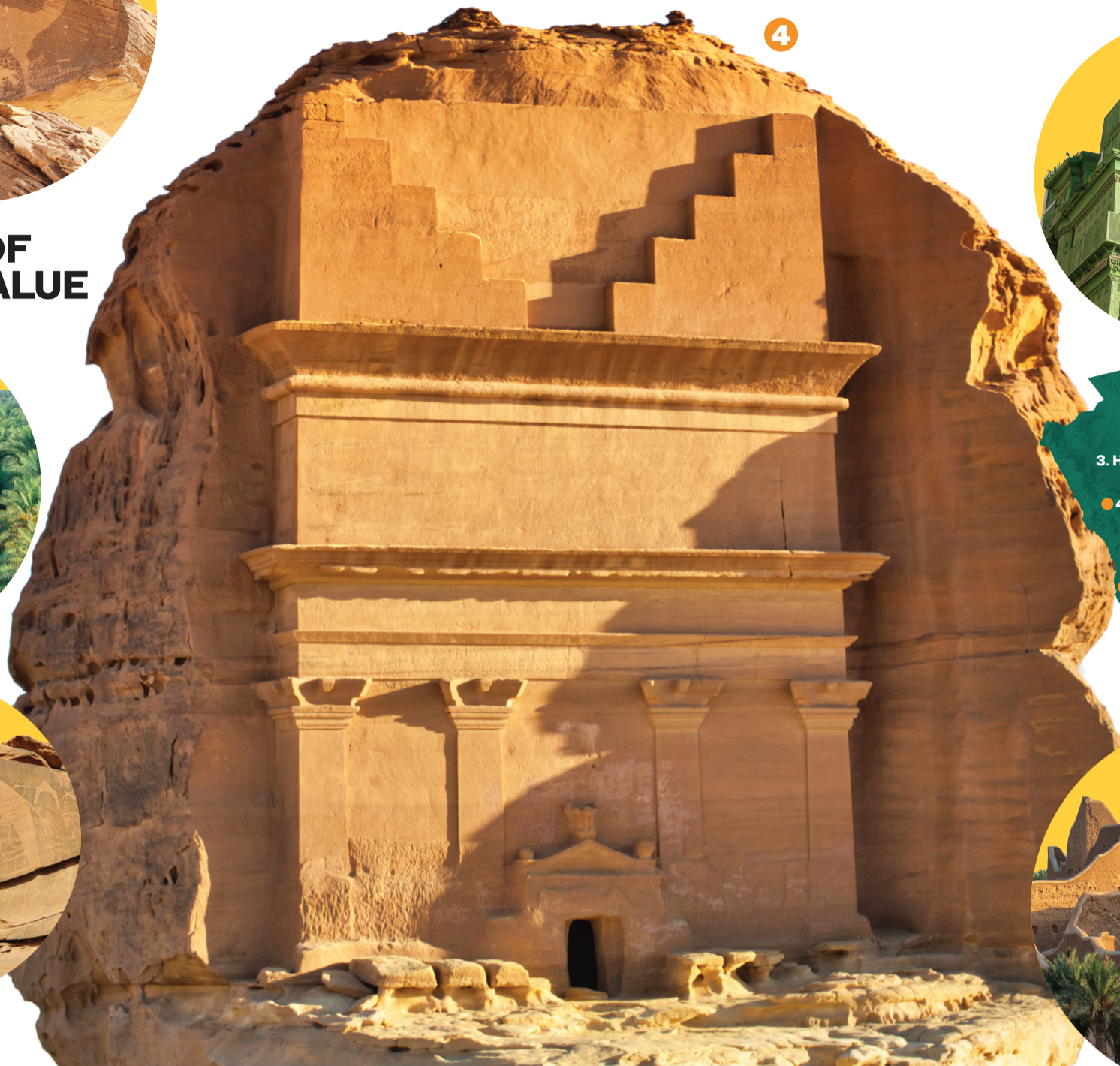
## SIX SITES OF UNIVERSAL VALUE



2



3



4



5



3. HAIL: ROCK ART

4. ALULA: HEGRA

2. AL-AHSA OASIS

6. DIRIYAH: AT-TURAIIF

5. HISTORIC JEDDAH

1. HIMA CULTURAL AREA



6

## HERITAGE OF SAUDI ARABIA

# Welcome to the crossroads of ancient civilizations

From prehistoric times to the early 20th century, priceless pieces of the past are helping to shape the Kingdom's future

Jonathan Gornall London

**Even as Saudi Arabia writes the next chapter in its story, the Kingdom is rediscovering a past destined to play a central role as it opens up to the outside world.**

As a striking symbol of this, a monumental sandstone statue, unearthed by archaeologists at the ancient city of Dadan, in the AlUla valley, went on display at the Louvre in Paris this month.

The loan of the statue, of a king or a priest and dated to between the fifth and third centuries B.C., is a product of the long-term partnership between the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) and the French Agency for AlUla Development, set up in 2018 "to strengthen Saudi cultural and historic outreach and make the AlUla region a world-class destination."

But although the archaeological revelations emerging from AlUla are astonishing, Saudi Arabia has a wealth of other cultural gems for visitors and citizens to enjoy.

Since 2008, the Kingdom has had six sites of "outstanding universal value" inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Ten more are being considered for nomination, including the Al-Faw archaeological area at the northwestern edge of the Empty Quarter, a site of human occupation from prehistoric times.

There is no shortage of locations from which to choose, with more than 10,000 historical sites on Saudi Arabia's National Antiquities Register.

Each of the six World Heritage Sites is one piece of a fascinating mosaic that shows not only that

Saudi roots run far deeper than many might have imagined, but also that Saudi heritage is a vital component in the story of human history.

And this is living history. Each site will play - and in some cases is already playing - a crucial role in the opening up of the Kingdom as a destination for cultural tourists.

One of the most breathtaking of the UNESCO properties is the Hegra archaeological site, centerpiece of plans by the RCU to develop the spectacular landscape of the AlUla region, with its lush oasis valley and towering mountains, as a major destination.

The ancient city of Hegra was the southern capital of the Nabataeans, who also built Petra, in modern-day Jordan. Yet the astonishing collection of over 100 hand-carved rock tombs is merely the tip of an archaeological iceberg.

A dozen international archaeology teams are now exploring the past cultures of AlUla and the nearby Harrat Khaybar volcanic field, from prehistory to the early 20th century. The sheer volume of the finds already documented is astonishing, and is prompting a radical rethinking of the prehistory of the Arabian Peninsula.

One team, from the University of Western Australia, has spent the past four years identifying and cataloguing all the visible archaeology of AlUla county and the nearby Harrat Khaybar volcanic field. The tens of thousands of structures found, most between 4,000 and 7,000 years old, tell a story of a landscape and a climate that was once lush and temperate.

In all, the Aerial Archaeology in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia project has identified 13,000 sites in AlUla and an extraordinary 130,000 in Khaybar county, dating



Mysterious structures up to 8,000 years old around AlUla. Below: A statue unearthed at the ancient site of Dadan now on display at the Louvre in Paris.

from the Stone Age to the 20th century, with the vast majority from prehistory.

A "core" 3,300 square meters area of AlUla was surveyed separately by UK-based Oxford Archaeology which, working with staff and students of King Saud University in Riyadh, identified another 16,000 archaeological sites.

Hugh Thomas, a senior research fellow at the University of Western Australia, told Arab News that in the past archaeologists had concentrated on the Fertile Crescent. "But as we do more and more research, we're realizing that there was so much more here than small, independent, communities living on nothing much and not doing much in an arid area.

"The reality is that in the Neolithic period

these areas were significantly greener, and there would have been really sizeable populations of people and herds of animals moving across these landscapes."

More evidence of Saudi Arabia's prehistoric past can be found in the world's largest and most impressive collections of Neolithic rock carvings, or petroglyphs, located at two sites 300 kilometers apart in the Hail province,

together adopted by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2015.

Together, the twin sites tell the story of over 9,000 years of human history, from the earliest pictorial records of hunting to the development of writing, religion and the domestication of animals. The rock art in the Hail region is regarded as one of the world's most significant



collections, "visually stunning expressions of the human creative genius by world standards, comparable to the messages left by doomed civilizations in Mesoamerica or on Easter Island ... of highest outstanding universal value."

Saudi Arabia's other UNESCO sites include the most recently inscribed, the Hima Cultural Area, listed in 2021. This also consists of a substantial collection of rock art images, made over a period of 7,000 years by armies and travellers who passed this way along an ancient desert caravan route in the southwest of the country.

Historic Jeddah, inscribed by UNESCO in 2014, was established in the seventh century as a major port on the Red Sea, and grew rapidly as the gateway for pilgrims to Makkah who arrived by sea. Jeddah, which developed into "a thriving multicultural centre," was "characterized by a distinctive architectural tradition, including tower houses built in the late 19th century by the city's mercantile elites," many of which can still be seen today.

Al-Ahsa, a "serial cultural landscape" in the Eastern Province, is home to the world's largest, and almost certainly oldest, oasis, a sprawling collection of 12 separate elements and 2.5 million palm trees, scattered over a total area of 85 square kilometers.

Listed by UNESCO in 2018, Al-Ahsa "preserves material traces representative of all the stages of the oasis history, since its origins in the Neolithic to the present."

Pride of place in the hearts of Saudis goes to the At-Turaif district of Diriyah, which is considered the birthplace of

the Kingdom and was listed by UNESCO in 2010.

Nestling in a bend of the Wadi Hanifa, a few kilometers north-west of the modern metropolis of Riyadh, are the preserved remains of a breathtaking collection of mudbrick palaces, houses and mosques, "the pre-eminent example of Najdi architectural style, a significant constructive tradition that developed in central Arabia ... and contribute to the world's cultural diversity."

First settled by the ancestors of the House of Saud in the 15th century, in the 18th century the oasis of Diriyah became the capital of the First Saudi State, established in 1744.

Diriyah was destroyed in 1818 after a six-year campaign by a vengeful Ottoman Empire, alarmed by the challenge posed by the First Saudi State to its grip on Arabia and the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah.

The At-Turaif district, left in ruins by the Ottomans, would never be occupied again. But, carefully preserved and protected, it is now the jewel in the crown of one of Saudi Arabia's largest mega-projects - the development of the wider area by the Diriyah Gate Development Authority as "one of the most amazing cultural gathering places in the world."

The \$50 billion plan to transform Diriyah into a global historical, cultural and lifestyle destination will create 55,000 jobs and attract 27 million visitors every year. They will be able to immerse themselves in the history and culture of a Kingdom that, in less than 300 years, has grown from an idea born in a small desert community to become one of the world's most influential nations.

# Saudi National Day 2022



The stunning landscape of AIUla, a mix of dramatic rocky outcrops, ancient settlements and verdant oases, is at the heart of Saudi plans to develop the region as a global destination rich in wildlife and historic and cultural significance. Shutterstock

The birth of two cubs last month is the latest success for a world-leading captive-breeding program that will eventually result in Arabian leopards being reintroduced into their natural habitat at a reserve in AIUla.

## REWILDING ARABIA

# Paradise regained: The big cats are back where they belong

Leopards are at the forefront of plans to protect and regenerate Saudi Arabia's stunning landscapes and diverse wildlife

Jonathan Gornall London

It's not every day that one government takes the trouble to congratulate another on the birth of a pair of cats.

But a very special message last month from the US embassy in Riyadh celebrated the arrival not of two ordinary felines, but a pair of female leopard cubs, symbols of one of the most ambitious captive-breeding programs in the world. "Congratulations Saudi Arabia on your newest and most adorable residents," the American mission wrote on Twitter on Aug. 18. The Royal Commission for AIUla, it added, "is doing an impressive job working to save the critically endangered Arabian leopard."

It certainly is. The RCU was established in 2017 to preserve and develop AIUla, a region of outstanding natural, historic and cultural significance in northwestern Saudi Arabia, as a global destination that people will come to live, work and visit.

Since then, it has launched a range of initiatives in fields including archaeology, tourism, culture, education and the arts "reflecting a commitment to meeting the economic diversification, local community empowerment, and heritage-preservation priorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 program."

Part of the heritage of AIUla, and Saudi Arabia in general, is the

Arabian leopard, which graced the wild landscapes of Saudi Arabia for millennia.

Images of the animal, dating back to between 6,000 and 11,000 years ago, can be found among the thousands of petroglyphs hand carved into the rocks in Saudi Arabia's Hail region, which was adopted by UNESCO in 2015 as a World Heritage Site of "outstanding universal value."

After centuries of persecution at the hands of farmers and hunters, and the steady loss of habitat to modern development, the Arabian leopard is currently classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as "critically endangered" — just one short step away from extinction in the wild.

Sightings of this magnificent animal are incredibly rare. There could be fewer than 100 in the entire Arabian Peninsula, where they are found mainly in the Dhofar mountains of Oman. In Saudi Arabia, the leopard is feared to be all but extinct.

The RCU plans to change that by breeding sufficient numbers of the animal in captivity for eventual release into the mountains of AIUla, a natural habitat they once roamed for thousands of years.

The two cubs born last month were the latest of 18 bred so far at the RCU's Arabian Leopard Breeding Center in Taif.

AIUla is home to five nature reserves, covering an area of 12,500 square kilometers, all of

which are regarded as possible future habitats for Arabian leopards.

Anticipating the release of the first leopards into the wild in 2030, the RCU is busy reintroducing native plants to the area to provide food for the herbivores that are the leopard's main prey.

Hundreds of animals, including the Arabian oryx, sand gazelles, and Nubian ibex, have already been released into the reserves, where they are establishing sustainable colonies.

The Arabian leopard might be the dramatic face of the Kingdom's commitment to the conservation and regeneration of its landscapes and wildlife, but it is just one of the many beneficiaries of the country's rewilding initiatives.

There are currently 14 protected landscapes in Saudi Arabia, covering an area of more than 82,000 square kilometers — almost the size of its neighbor,



There are 14 protected landscapes in Saudi Arabia, covering an area of more than 82,000 sq. km. — almost the size of its neighbor, the UAE.

Working with King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, NEOM, the sustainable city on the Red Sea coast, has created a protected coral garden at Shushah Island to showcase reef restoration and develop conservation solutions.



the UAE. Under the recently launched Saudi Green Initiative, plans are underway to designate up to 30 percent of the Kingdom's territory — more than 640,000 square kilometers — as protected areas.

Existing protected areas are already home to a bewildering array of wildlife, including the Arabian wolf, striped hyena, red-necked ostrich, Arabian oryx, reem gazelle, Idmi gazelle, baboon, caracal, and many types of birds, such as osprey, houbara bustard, and pink-backed pelican, and three different species of fox — red, sand and Ruppell's.

In Saudi Arabia, development is proceeding hand in hand with conservation. For example, a commitment to environmental sustainability is woven into the DNA of the Red Sea Development Company, which was set up in 2018 to develop a flagship international tourism destination covering an area of 28,000 square kilometers, on the nation's west coast.

The region is home to rare species, including dugongs, wildcats, and green and hawksbill turtles. A lagoon at the heart of the project contains 175 species of coral and 195 species of fish. It is a vital habitat for endangered seabirds, such as the sooty falcon and crab plover.

"Preservation of these habitats and species is central to the project's development as 75 percent of the islands will be left

untouched, with nine designated as special conservation zones," the RSDC said.

Nature is also an overriding concern at NEOM, another of Saudi Arabia's megaprojects on the Red Sea. Here, even as the dream of creating a completely sustainable destination for the world takes shape, the top commitment is the preservation of 95 percent of the beautiful environment in which it will be set, from its crystal-clear seas and pristine beaches to the awe-inspiring deserts and mountains.

The waters off most of Saudi Arabia teem with precious wildlife, including five species of turtle. Three of them — Olive Ridley, loggerhead and the leatherback — are designated as vulnerable. Two — the green and hawksbill — are regarded as endangered.

Off the country's Arabian Gulf coast, the islands of Karan and Jurayid are primary, and protected, nesting sites for the hawksbill and green turtles, which also thrive in the Red Sea at Ras Baridi, Farasan Island, Shakir Islands, Ras Al-Shaab, Jabal Hassan and Sanafir Island.

# Saudi National Day 2022



**OSPREY**  
A large bird of prey, regarded as a flagship species for conservation in the Farasan Islands Marine Protected Area, a collection of more than 120 coral islands off the southwestern tip of Saudi Arabia.



**ARABIAN ORYX**  
Once hunted to extinction in the wild, the captive-breeding program behind the successful recovery of the Arabian Oryx is the inspiration for the efforts to return the Arabian leopard to the wild in Saudi Arabia.



**GOLDEN JACKAL**  
More common in Iraq and northern Arabia, this jackal is extremely rare in Saudi Arabia, where it is thought to be restricted to the east of the country in and around Hofuf in Al-Ahsa Oasis.



**PINK-BACKED PELICAN**  
The pink-backed pelican is another resident of the Farasan Islands, which have become an important nesting site for this striking summer visitor to Saudi Arabian waters.



**HONEY BADGER**  
Although shy and rarely seen, as many as 10,000 honey badgers are thought to live across Saudi Arabia. They are found in habitats such as wadis, mountains and sand-gravel deserts.



**BLACK-WINGED KITE**  
A once-rare visitor to Saudi Arabia that is becoming more common, this beautiful predator has been sighted numerous times in the Eastern Province, most recently in August 2022 at Sabkhat Al-Fasil lagoons near Jubail.



**FENNEC FOX**  
Very little is known about this secretive creature, which until recently had last been seen only in the northeast, near the border with Kuwait. Lately, however, several have been photographed near Tabuk in northwestern Saudi Arabia.



**BABOONS**  
Humans aside, the hamadryas baboon is Saudi Arabia's only primate. It is concentrated in large numbers along an 800 km stretch of the Sarawat mountains, running from the border with Yemen to Taif.



**ARABIAN WOLF**  
A subspecies of the grey wolf, widespread across the northern hemisphere, the Arabian wolf is found in small numbers across Saudi Arabia but more commonly in the mountains along the Red Sea coast.



**GOLDEN EAGLE**  
This spectacular bird of prey is widespread across the northern hemisphere. Saudi Arabia is one of its southernmost outposts, in which it breeds and lives all year round, mainly in the northwest of the country.

## PROTECTED LANDSCAPES, SAFEGUARDED SPECIES

Animals and their habitats are thriving in 14 nature reserves, and dozens more are planned

**AL-TUBAYQ**  
12,105 sq. km.  
Rugged mountain landscapes home to animals including ibex, reem gazelle, Arabian wolf, fox, cape hare, and species of reptiles and birds.

**HARRAT AL-HARRAH**  
13,775 sq. km.  
Saudi Arabia's first protected area; home to animals including reem gazelle, Arabian wolf, red fox, sand fox, striped hyena.

**AT-TAYSIAH**  
4,272.2 sq. km.  
Good vegetation cover with more than 50 species of flora ideal for breeding birds; home to animals including Arabian wolf and houbara bustard.

**AL-KHUNFAH**  
19,339 sq. km.  
On western edge of the Great Nafud Desert; home to animals including reem gazelle, Idmi gazelle, foxes, houbara bustard.

**NAFUD AL-URAYQ**  
2,036.1 sq. km.  
Formerly an ancient hima, a protected grazing pasture for camels; home to reintroduced houbara bustard and other birds attracted by plentiful vegetation.

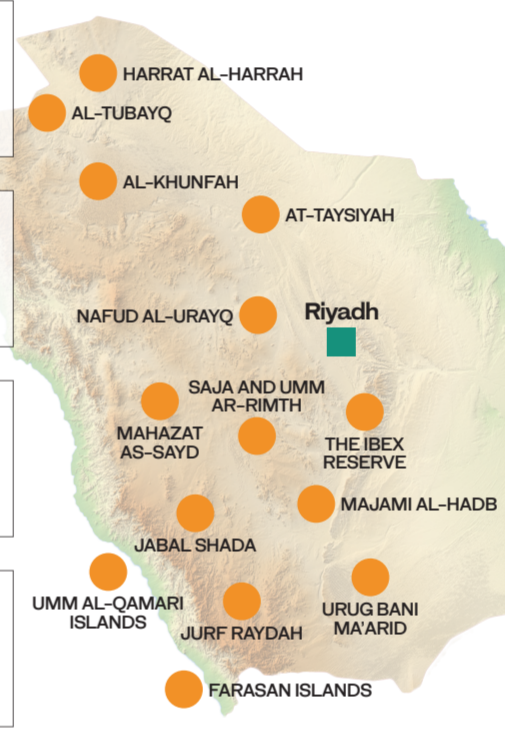
**MAHAZAT AS-SAYD**  
2,553 sq. km.  
Natural "laboratory" protecting vegetation on verge of extinction; home to animals including Arabian oryx, reem gazelle, red-necked ostrich.

**JABAL SHADA**  
68.62 sq. km.  
Mountainous, up to 2,200 meters above sea level; home to key predators including striped hyena, Arabian wolf, foxes, caracal and, possibly, Arabian leopard.

**UMM AL-QAMARI ISLANDS**  
4.3 sq. km.  
Two reef limestone islands; home to a vast variety of coral species, marine invertebrates and many species of seabirds, waders and coastal birds.

**FARASAN ISLANDS**  
5,408 sq. km.  
More than 84 islands in the Red Sea; home to animals including Farasan Idmi gazelle, white-tailed mongoose and many bird species, such as osprey and pink-backed pelican.

**JURF RAYDAH**  
12,787 sq. km.  
Steep slopes in Sarawat Mountains; home to animals including baboons, Arabian wolf, striped hyena, caracal, and several native bird species.



**THE IBEX RESERVE**  
184.9 sq. km.  
Large rugged plateau in the Tuwaiq mountains; home to animals including the wild Nubian ibex, rock hyrax, foxes and Idmi gazelle.

**SAJA AND UMM AR-RIMTH**  
6,528.2 sq. km.  
Medium vegetation cover, low hills, and exposed gravel plains and valleys; home to small mammals, including the Saudi Arabian gerbil, and reintroduced houbara bustards.

**MAJAMI AL-HADB**  
2,256.4 sq. km.  
Volcanic mountains and sandy desert plains; home to reintroduced species once common in the area, including Ruppell's fox.

**URUG BANI MAARID**  
12,787 sq. km.  
High sand dunes and limestone plateau, rich in plants and trees; home to animals including Arabian wolf, sand cat, sand fox and striped hyena.



**STRIPED HYENA**  
Spotted in many parts of the country, other than the central deserts, and preferring rocky areas close to water, the hyena is nevertheless considered an endangered species with a small population in Saudi Arabia.



**CARACAL**  
Secretive and nocturnal, sightings of Saudi Arabia's second-largest wild cat are rare but the animal is commonly found among the wadis, mountains and foothills along the western side of the country.



**GREEN TURTLE**  
Green turtle numbers have been falling in the Red Sea but key nesting grounds on islands off northwestern Saudi Arabia have been declared safe havens in a joint conservation initiative by NEOM and King Abdullah University of Science and Technology.



**WHITE-TAILED MONGOOSE**  
Found predominantly in the southwest and the Farasan Islands, but as far north as Makkah, the thriving white-tailed mongoose frequents wooded wadis, coastal plains and can even be glimpsed in urban gardens.





Irrigation farm fields near Hail (main) ensure that the Kingdom's agricultural landscape remains fertile and flourishing. Getty Coffee farmers in Jazan (bottom) bring identity and status to the entire region. Mohammed Albajjan

#### AGRICULTURE

# Diverse terrain makes Kingdom a fertile land for many crops

Saudi Arabia has one of the world's most diverse natural landscapes. With 2m sq. km of arable land, the Kingdom is home to a wide array of crops ranging from palm trees, fruit and olives to coffee beans, rice, lentils and more

Nada Hameed Jeddah

#### Palm trees — growth, vitality and prosperity

Although climate change poses a threat to agriculture around the world, the variable climate across the Kingdom makes it ideal for cultivating palm trees.

Palm trees symbolize the history, heritage, generosity and hospitality of the Saudi nation and its culture, and are also a natural resource for one of the most popular ancient fruits in the world, dates.

According to the International Dates Council, there are 200 million palm trees worldwide, occupying 1.23 hectares of land and producing 9.5 million tons of dates annually in 40 countries.

The Saudi National Center for Palms and Dates announced recently that according to the International Trade Center, the Kingdom in 2021 ranked first internationally among 113 countries in date exports, with a value with SR1.2 billion (\$323.4 million).

The 333 million palm trees in the Kingdom represent 27 percent of the world total, with 1.54 million tons of dates produced annually through 13 regions distributed over 123,000 agricultural holdings.

"This distinguished achievement and the great level of excellence that the Kingdom has reached in date exporting is due to the efforts made throughout the years by the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture," Bashar Al-Koraie, CEO of the

Zadna dates company, told Arab News.

Saudi Arabia exports over 300 types of dates to different countries, including the US, Europe, East Asia, the MENA region and Gulf states.

Al-Koraie said that the most popular types of dates in the Kingdom are majdool, khudari, khlas, sukkari, shishi, safawi, sufri, sagee, ajwa, barhi and anbara.

The palm and date sector in Saudi Arabia is worth about SR7.5 billion, which is 12 percent of the total agricultural output and 0.4 percent of the total non-oil gross product.

The three most important

administrative regions for date production in the Kingdom are located in the center, east and west of the country, represented in the city of Qassim, Al-Ahsa — known as "The Mother of Palm Trees" — and Madinah.

Dates from Qassim province are exported to more than 74 countries around the globe. The region produces more than 300,000 tons of dates annually.

"The Kingdom's Vision 2030 gave palm trees and dates sector great attention through its development and sustainability, and it has also implemented programs to develop the sector as it has raised the overall rate of the country's gross domestic product," Al-Koraie said.

Jouf is home to more than 984,000 palm trees, with the region producing more than 70,000 tons of dates of different varieties annually.

The trees produce a special type of date, known as "Helwat Al-Jouf," or "the sweet of Al-Jouf."

This large, dark and extra-sweet fruit retains its quality and can be stored for up to five years. It is usually served in winter and is used in a variety of traditional Arabian desserts.

The Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture's palm trees and the date sector are now supported internationally as the Kingdom succeeded in registering dates as an "unusual fruit" with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. The FAO has also approved Saudi Arabia's proposal to declare 2027 as the "International Year of Dates." MEWA's palm and date

germplasm bank has been listed in Guinness World Records for the largest number of palm varieties, with 127 national types.

To support Saudi palm farmers and help them expand their agricultural businesses, the National Center for Palms and Dates launched a new e-platform, Mozare3, early in August.

The platform aims to be the first and leading supporter in developing and increasing farmers' production, while contributing to the sustainability of the palm and dates sector.

#### Coffee beans — the Kingdom's green gold

Coffee and dates are two iconic products and a famous Saudi combination. Coffee is embedded in the Saudi values of hospitality, music and poetry to such an extent that it is recognized as a core element of Saudi heritage.

Saudi Arabia is ranked 50th in the world in terms of the quantity of coffee beans production. Almohaad Al-Marwai, co-founder and CEO of the Arabian Coffee Institute, told Arab News that the types of coffee beans in the Kingdom are yet to be determined.

"The main types are arabica. However, the main varieties are still under DNA studies to determine what the Kingdom produces." Coffee crops are found mainly in Jazan, while there are several coffee plantations in Al-Baha and Abha.

The mountainous areas' humid and cool environment and fertile soil are ideal for coffee cultivation, which depends entirely on seasonal rainwater.

What makes Jazan stand out is the agricultural characteristics

#### FRUITS FROM THE KINGDOM

##### MANGOES



##### BANANAS



##### CITRUS FRUITS



##### FIGS



of its highlands, which features terraces for growing coffee.

With 12 years of experience in the coffee industry, Al-Marwai is also a certified Q Arabica grader, Q Processor and an authorized Specialty Coffee Association trainer.

"Jazan is the only place that uses this coffee farming method in the whole world currently, which plays a major part in the notes and coffee flavor," Al-Marwai said.

Jazan's most popular coffee variety, khawlani, is known as "green gold" and the "pampered tree," and can be found nestled deep in forests on fertile lands.

"The flavor notes of khawlani usually are more of dried fruit, raisins, dates, spicy notes, cardamom, cinnamon and dark chocolate," Al-Marwai said.

"The Kingdom produces around 300 tons currently per season. However, it is expected to go up to 3,000 tons in the coming three years, as the government is taking serious action to ensure the quality and the sustainability of coffee production to be self-sufficient," he added.

"I can see that Al-Baha and Abha have huge potential for cultivating coffee, as they have yielded an amazing coffee crop recently." For centuries, the drink has been central to Saudi Arabia's deep-rooted culture and traditions. Saudi Minister of Culture Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan announced earlier this year that 2022 will be the "Year of Saudi Coffee."

According to recent statistics, domestic production of Arabic coffee in Jazan, Al-Baha and Asir has reached 1,810 tons annually, from 2,535 farms and 398,000 coffee trees.



The citrus of AIUla is distinguishable from other varieties by its quality and taste due to the fertility of the land.



#### DATE PALM TREE FACTS

● Scientists have found fossils of date palms that are nearly 500 million years old.

● Egypt, Iran, Algeria and Saudi Arabia are the largest date producers in the world.

● Dates are rich in calories, iron, potassium, calcium, magnesium, and are a good source of fiber.

Wheat, corn and olive production will all benefit from the Saudi Green Initiative, which will enhance cultivation conditions. Shutterstock

The Al-Ahsa Oasis (top right) boasts 29 varieties of citrus trees. Shutterstock

in the Kingdom annually.

The first mango festival in the region was launched in 2021 under the slogan "Umluj mango worth a try."

Marwan Al-Juhani, owner of Muhammadiah farm in Umluj, told Arab News that watering is crucial for a successful mango crop.

"To get a good mango crop here in Umluj, we need a developed watering system," he said.

Al-Juhani said that each mango tree has to be at least four years old before producing fruit, and the older it gets, the better the crop.

His farm holds 400 mango trees and is a popular destination for visitors and tourists, who enjoy walking through the trees, picking mangoes and eating them on site.

#### The Kingdom's beloved olive basket on the northern borders

With its fertile soil and moderate climate, the northern Jouf region has become Saudi Arabia's biggest producer of olive oil and is home to vast orchards holding millions of trees.

Jouf also has the largest olive farm in the world, which produces 10,000 tons annually of the finest olive oil.

The use of intensive planting methods makes Jouf's olive trees distinctive, with 1,600 trees planted in a one-hectare area. The region is home to more than 18 million olive trees.

Nasser Al-Hamad, owner of the Million Tree Farm, told Arab News: "I am following a high-density groves system in my farm, a more economical and productive model that also delivered high-quality crops and flavor and saves water." The most famous olive trees in

Jouf are those more compatible with automated harvesting styles, such as arbequina, arbosana, koroneiki and oliana.

Al-Hamad said that every 10 kg of olives yields one liter of high-quality olive oil.

Many orchards have automated irrigation pump systems that require only one worker.

The city of Sakaka holds an annual olive festival, one of the biggest in the Kingdom, to support local farmers, olive crops and olive oil production.

#### Diverse climate delivers diverse crops

In light of the global fight against climate change, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman launched the Saudi Green Initiative in 2021 with more than SR700 billion of investment in the growth of the green economy.

This announcement has highlighted the efforts and objectives that will gradually lead the Kingdom to rely on clean energy, protecting the environment and making it a better place for future generations.

As part of the initiative, 450 million trees will be planted, and 8 million hectares of degraded lands rehabilitated by 2030.

Four million mangrove trees have already been planted to contribute to the restoration of the Kingdom's mangrove forest shoreline.

Over the last 15 to 20 years, the value of including suitable native species in amenity landscape schemes has become much more apparent. Known to be cultivated in the Mediterranean basin, figs are now also cultivated in Saudi

Arabia. With demand rising for local produce, farms across the Kingdom are experimenting to see which fruits can be grown.

So far, six types of figs are grown in every region, and over 26,000 tons of figs are produced annually.

A total of \$15 billion will be invested in AIUla master plan to create the world's largest oasis, with over 10 million cubic meters of green and open spaces.

AIUla oasis in the northwest of the Kingdom has an ancient heritage that is not limited to the inscriptions on its mountains or erosion on its rocks, but also its unique nature reflected in its green oasis and rich farms.

According to the Experience AIUla website, the oasis will play a key role in the region's agricultural prosperity.

The oasis is home to over 200,000 citrus trees that thrive in the AIUla desert. It is surrounded by a tall canopy of green palm trees shading the citrus trees from the summer sun.

Within 20 km of the oasis, 29 varieties of citrus are grown, including jaffa, baladi, and abo surra oranges, tangerine, clementines, mandarins, sweet lemons, limes, grapefruits, pomelos, kumquats, citrons and tangerines.

Mubarak Al-Enzi, who has 250 fruit trees in the region, said: "The citrus of AIUla is distinguished from other countries by its quality, taste and variety, and the reason for this is due to the fertility of the land, the abundance of water and the appropriate climate."

The art of nurturing citrus fruits in AIUla had been passed down over generations. "The knowledge of how to cultivate citrus trees is inherited from our ancestors," Al-Enzi said.



SAUDI ARABIA

# Giga-projects redefine image of Kingdom

Development continues apace as Saudi Arabia transforms into a tourism, entertainment and adventure destination



Rawan Radwan Jeddah

A little over six years ago, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced a social and economic blueprint that would transform the Kingdom. The plan, Vision 2030, set out to create a vibrant society, overhaul the nation's economy, and reduce its dependence on oil.

In what was viewed as a turning point for the country, several "giga-projects" were launched to provide a focal point for whole new sectors, driven by technology, innovation and sustainability, to stimulate broader economic growth and develop the Kingdom's digital infrastructure.

## Diriyah

Among these new giga-projects, underwritten by the nation's Public Investment Fund, is Diriyah — the Kingdom's crown jewel — home to the first Saudi dynasty, and a UNESCO World Heritage site, which is undergoing a \$50 billion revamp.

Five years ago, the Diriyah Gate Development Authority was tasked by the Saudi government with redeveloping the "birthplace of the Kingdom" into a world-class and sustainable tourism, entertainment and cultural destination.

Diriyah's mud-brick walls once housed a thriving desert city that was a powerhouse of culture and commerce. The area's Turaif district, with its famous citadel, was the original seat of power for the Kingdom's Al-Saud family. In 1727, the city was named the country's capital, laying the foundations for what would later become a unified Saudi Arabia.

In July 2017, the 11-square-km site became the subject of a painstaking restoration plan aimed at bringing its historical legacy back to life. Situated just 15 minutes' drive from Riyadh, it will feature some of the world's most luxurious hotels and restaurants built in the traditional Najdi architectural style, alongside conservation areas and cultural venues, with a view to attract some 30 million visitors annually by 2030.

Tourists are not the only target market, however. There will be more than 3,000 residential units in the traditional Najdi design and another 300-plus luxury branded residences.

The site will also host a brand new academic institution, King Salman University, which will focus on heritage, culture and the arts, alongside several new cultural institutes specializing in Najdi architecture and mud-brick building, poetry, falconry, Qur'an recitation, local theater, dance, music and the culinary arts.

## Qiddiya

Also under development in the Riyadh region is Qiddiya, the Saudi capital's forthcoming entertainment, sports and culture hub, which will feature theme parks, arenas, outdoor activities and motorsports.

The project is built on five main pillars: Sports and wellness, nature and environment, parks and attractions, motion and mobility, and arts and culture. Owned wholly by the PIF, its objective is to boost the Kingdom's status as a leading tourist destination.

Over a total area of 334 square km and a budget of \$8 billion, construction began in early 2018. The latest contract is a \$750-million joint venture



The Kingdom's giga-projects, like the Red Sea Project, above, and Diriyah, left, will transform Saudi Arabia. Supplied

between ALEC Saudi Arabia Engineering & Contracting and El Seif Engineering Contracting to build the Kingdom's first water park — which is also tipped to be the region's largest.

The Qiddiya Investment Company has also awarded a \$1-billion contract to build Six Flags Qiddiya, which will contain 28 rides and attractions in six themed parks. It is one of the Kingdom's most highly anticipated attractions.

A speed park will include an FIA grade-one racetrack dedicated to all manner of motorsports, as well as a golf course designed by Jack Nicklaus, one of the greatest golfers of all time, open to elite and amateur players alike.

Qiddiya will also feature luxury tented retreats, animal encounters and outdoor adventure and exploration, several arts and culture centers, festival grounds, and a multiplex cinema.



## INNUMBERS

# 6

Number of giga-projects boosting the economy.

# \$2.7bn

Value of TRSDC contracts in 2020

The six landmark projects, below, will prompt \$7 trillion in investment and government spending by 2030. Supplied

## The Red Sea Project and AMAALA

It is not just the Riyadh region that is enjoying a flurry of investment. On the Red Sea coast, two luxurious tourist destinations are under development, both with a strong emphasis on sustainability, conservation, culture and heritage.

Aiming to be a world leader in regenerative tourism, the Red Sea Project is a luxury, sustainable project spanning an impressive 34,000 square km.

The Red Sea Development Co., established in 2018, is fully owned by the PIF. Directly employing 35,000 people, the project showcases the landscape and rich cultural heritage of the coast.

Occupying an archipelago of more than 90 islands — some of them untouched — featuring dormant volcanoes, deserts and a wide variety of wildlife and mountainous scenery, it will emphasize environmental preservation while relying exclusively on renewable energy sources, with a ban on single-use plastics and zero waste-to-landfill.

The new Red Sea International Airport is already nearing completion, set to open in 2023, while 50 resorts featuring 8,000 rooms and more than 1,000 residential properties are due by 2030.

Last month, the Red Sea Development Co. told Arab News that three of the 22 islands will be complete by 2024, hosting 16 hotels, three to open by next year, including the St. Regis Red Sea Resort at Ummahat Island.

It also announced the opening of its Turtle Bay Hotel and the completion of its 1.2 km Shura Bridge connecting the mainland with its central island hub, and the first inland access roads over 16 km connecting its Southern Dunes resort to the main highway. Around 200 villas and townhouses are now also complete at its Coastal Village.

Further to the north is Saudi Arabia's ultra-luxury wellness retreat AMAALA, tailored for relaxation and meditation and sports enthusiasts. The initial development phase of the site is set to conclude in late 2024 with the opening of nine hotels.

## Asir

Down in the country's southwest, the Kingdom's highest mountain peaks are also getting a revamp. Last September, the crown prince announced a tourism strategy to develop Asir with an investment of \$13 billion, to attract more than 10 million visitors by 2030.

The region's picturesque green mountains, its fair weather, archeological sites, and dense forests that cannot be found anywhere else in the Kingdom, combined with its renowned hospitality, have attracted thousands of tourists in recent years.

New attractions on Asir's mountain peaks will turn the province into a year-round destination, exploiting the tourism potential of its geographic and natural diversity, culture and heritage.

In addition, it will provide new jobs, boost quality of life, and upgrade essential services and infrastructure in the region. The PIF plans to set aside \$3 billion to build 2,700 hotel rooms, 1,300 residential units, and 30 commercial and entertainment attractions in Asir by 2030.

## NEOM

The Kingdom's flagship and arguably its most ambitious giga-project is NEOM, first unveiled in 2017.

Located in the Kingdom's northwest, the futuristic smart city will span 26,500 square km and will be powered entirely by renewable clean energy, providing a model for sustainable living and development.

Three phases of the \$500 billion project are currently underway, including Trojena, Oxagon and The Line.

Trojena, a high-altitude destination nestled between the northernmost ranges of the Sarawat mountains, will offer unique, all-year outdoor sports experiences, including the region's first and only ski resort.

The project will also feature ultra-luxury family and wellness resorts, the region's largest freshwater lake, an interactive nature reserve, and a range of dining and retail options. It is due for completion in 2026.

Oxagon, meanwhile, is a floating industrial and commercial hub, which will incorporate the most advanced technologies, from artificial intelligence to robotics, and will be powered entirely by clean energy.

Finally, The Line, a 200-meter-wide, 170-km-long city that will accommodate 9 million residents, embodies how urban communities will live in the future in an environment free from roads, cars and emissions, offering a new approach to urban design that will run on 100 percent renewable energy and prioritize people's health.

According to the design plan, The Line will have an outer mirror facade that will provide the structure its unique character and allow even its small footprint to blend with nature.

Different from tall buildings, the concept layers public parks and pedestrian areas, schools, homes and places for work. The narrow design is intended to reduce the human-made footprint on the landscape and promote greater efficiency. The city will feature a high-speed rail link with an end-to-end transit time of just 20 minutes.

# Saudi National Day 2022



## Saudi Arabia: A beacon of hope for the whole world

HASAN MASLOOM



Dr. Hasan Masloom is a board certified cardiothoracic surgeon and a member of the Shoura Council of Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula and one of the most consequential, regionally and internationally. Yet, one wonders how this land, with its unfavorable geography, heterogeneous population and long history of conflicts, changed in just a century from an isolated desert chieftaincy into a founding member of the UN and one of the most influential countries in the world.

The chronicles of the Arabian Peninsula indicate the area between the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf has been home to more than two dozen Arab tribes.

Since the dawn of Islam, myriad Muslims have come from the four corners of the world to perform Hajj in the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. Some remained there and resettled in the Hijaz region.

The currents of the Arabian Gulf carried ships laden with pearls and other goods, and enabled the movement of people from far away to the east coast.

Not forgetting the trade caravans that travelled from Yemen to the Levant, and from Najd to Iraq, taking merchants and their merchandise all over. Specific tribes and families were famed for their trans-peninsular trade excursions.

The vast stretch of desert, mostly arid with little or no rain, meant living conditions in Arabia were among the harshest in the world. Those fortunate enough to have sheep, camels or a plot of agricultural land stayed home to rear their livestock or tend their farms.

Those who had money and a talent for trade traveled for commercial gain, while those with no personal belongings moved from one

area to another eking out a living that barely sustained them and their families.

Before the advent of Al-Saud rule, tribes fought each other, villages pillaged one another and tribal chiefs battled for power and dominance over pastures and territories. The conflicts were rampant and, wherever there was a prize, divisive foreign entities lurked on the periphery of the peninsula waiting for a chance to snatch it.

This dreadful state of chaos and conflict continued for hundreds of years — a period of time notorious for abject poverty, ignorance and epidemics.

At the turn of the 20th century, however, the land and its inhabitants were on a collision course with two auspicious events.

The first was the rise to prominence of a visionary leader, King Abdulaziz, who unified an expansive land that had no unifying geography and built a nation from heterogeneous populations that previously had been locked in conflict with each other.

The second event was a gift from the desert, which had forever longed for a drop of water to nourish its crops while it collected tremendous reservoirs of oil in its entrails. A few drilling expeditions later, black liquid began gushing out, ushering in an unprecedented golden age of prosperity for Saudi Arabia.

Not long after, the Kingdom has risen to become a cornerstone of the world's economy and its main supplier of energy. But Saudi Arabia is much more than oil; it is a wide array of natural resources, people and habitats.

From the acacia forests in the Asir mountains to the olive trees of Jouf, from the palm trees of Al-Qassim to the oil-harboring desert in the Empty Quarter, and from the Gulf to the Red

Sea, Saudi Arabia features diverse climates, landscapes and resources.

Forests blossom in the southwest of the country. Unlike the fake oases seen in Hollywood movies, with their serried ranks of date palms and watercourses, Asir's forests are natural, full of trees, shrubs and wild animals that can be seen amid the mountain peaks.

On a recent visit to Jazan with a group of Shoura Council members, I was thrilled to venture through its diverse and fascinating terrain, including the Red Sea, Fifa mountains, Tihama plains and the tongues of desert in between. I tasted its homegrown mango and coffee and the local honey. It was such a delight to get acquainted with the amazing heritage of Jazan and to talk with its farmers, shepherds, fishermen, poets and artists.

Likewise, all provinces of Saudi Arabia exhibit unique historical, geographical and cultural attributes that distinguish them from one another.

Yet, in spite of our diverse backgrounds, we have a consensus to honor and guard our authentic and magnificent heritage in the face of the profane, depraved and false values that swarm around us from elsewhere in the world.

As the descendants of farmers, shepherds, merchants, Bedouin tribes, urban families and all other stripes of society, Saudis take pride in their altruism, courage and compassion. We are a gracious nation that regards hospitality to strangers and charity to the poor as our foremost virtues. As we celebrate the 92nd

National Day of Saudi Arabia, we should not overlook what made us a nation, namely the diversity of our people and the unity of our homeland.

Still, the country required a new vision that challenged the status quo, which was clinging to antiquated and unproductive social and economic structures.

In 2016, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman launched Vision 2030. It represents a huge paradigm shift based on diversification of the economy, opening up to the outside world and tearing down the walls that kept wide swaths of society marginalized for a long time.

Vision 2030 is a massive social and economic reforms program that pledges to purge corruption, entrench meritocracy and provide equitable opportunities across the spectrum of the Saudi people. It behooves us on our National Day to celebrate our diversity and

our Kingdom's vision, while doing our utmost to safeguard a secure and prosperous future, bearing in mind we are stronger together and weaker apart.

Three hundred years ago in Arabia, incompetent governance, scarce resources and non-egalitarian societies resulted in disorder, conflicts and a prolonged period of social injustice and economic stagnation.

Today, Saudi Arabia, with its bold leadership, vivacious forward-looking perspective, diverse heritage and rich resources, is much stronger than ever before.

It is a beacon of hope and illumination to the whole world.

**Saudi Arabia, with its bold leadership, forward-looking perspective and diverse heritage is much stronger than ever before.**

## عرض اليوم الوطني

بمناسبة اليوم الوطني الـ ٩٢ وإسهاماً  
منا في دورنا لتحقيق رؤية المملكة ٢٠٣٠

تفخر شركة الشرييني بالمشاركة في  
احتفالية هذا اليوم بتقديم خصم لكافة  
عملائها من داخل المملكة فقط

**National Day Discounts:**

- 9.2 % on spare parts
- 9.2 % on field service rates
- 4.92 % on new units

**خصومات اليوم الوطني:**

- ٩,٢ % على جميع قطع الغيار
- ٩,٢ % على رسوم الخدمات الفنية
- ٤,٩٢ % على مبيعات الانظمة والمنتجات

**Terms & Conditions apply:**  
Discount is not applicable on Agreement orders.  
Promo code must be mentioned in the PO or via email  
with PO# included. Purchase orders must be received between  
22-Sep-2022 and 22-Oct-2022.

**Promo Code:**  
**NDAY92**

**تطبق الشروط والأحكام**  
الخصم لا يدخل في اسعار الاتفاقيات القائمة  
يجب ذكر كود الخصم في امر الشراء او الايميل  
يسري العرض لمدة شهر على طلبات الشراء المستلمة  
خلال الفترة ٢٢ سبتمبر ٢٠٢٢ الى ٢٢ اكتوبر ٢٠٢٢ فقط