

'Top 5 Tips'

Women Doing Business

in the

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

These 'Top 5 Tips' from Almanar Consultancy are for women visiting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) for the first time. They cover the basic information a female business visitor requires in the following five areas:

1. Visa application
2. Clothing
3. Business presentation
4. Miscellaneous practical issues
5. Recommended resources

Advice specific to your personal, professional, or business needs, and detailed cultural and economic orientations can be obtained from Almanar Consultancy by contacting Dr Fiona Hill fiona@almanarconsultancy.com

Mobile +61(0) 401 081 677 Tel. +613-5678 7757

1. Visa Application

Complete your visa application form with the following key points in mind:

- The visa application form officially is in Arabic and so it reads from right to left.
- **Religion** should be stated or you risk your application being rejected outright.
- **Qualifications** requires only your highest qualification and where it was gained.
- **Relationship** refers to the close male relative accompanying you. If you are travelling alone, or with a male colleague, it is best to write 'Not Applicable'.

- **Purpose of Travel** should be marked as 'Visit' if you are entering the KSA on business.
- **Name and address of company or individual in the Kingdom** is your sponsor's name and address.
- Ensure that you sign and date the application form.
- Ensure that your passport has more than 6 months until expiry and **no** evidence of travel to Israel.

In addition to the visa application form, the Saudi Consulate requires a letter on your business letterhead wherein your title/role in the business is stated along with the nature of the business, and the reason for your intended visit to Saudi Arabia, along with your request for the issuance of a business visa in your name. Keep it simple.

This letter must be stamped and signed by a Chamber of Commerce in your State. We highly recommend the Australia Arab Chamber of Commerce (AACCI) which has officers ready to assist you in Sydney CBD, North Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide CBD and Port Adelaide.

IMPORTANT: Your application can only be presented to the Consular Section of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia after you receive your visa authorization number from the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Saudi Embassy will not accept your application until this number is received by them from Riyadh.

2. Clothing

In all Arab countries you may dress as you do anywhere in the world when on business – with the exception of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In KSA, in addition to your usual clothing, you must wear the *abaya* - a loose black coat - whenever you are in public and from the moment that you arrive in the country.

You can purchase an *abaya* and a long black head scarf at an Islamic clothing shop before you leave home, but better to get one in a shopping mall or market place in an Arab Gulf city where the range of choice is greater and more in keeping with local fashion.

The *abaya* is a long, flowing and roomy black coat that usually is closed with press-studs or Velcro down the front. It is NOT a dress. Many have colourful trim and adornment, which recently is acceptable in Saudi Arabia. Be sure to choose one that sweeps the ground rather than ankle length, because while it may seem more practical to you, a short *abaya* is considered *gauche* by the Saudis (and you risk amused whisperings about 'Harry Potter' behind your back).

Non-Saudi non-Muslim women are not obliged to cover their heads, however you **must** have the scarf with you at all times in case the need arises (for example if entering government buildings or a mosque, or if challenged by a religious zealot). At official functions you may choose to cover your head and this will be appreciated as a gesture of respect, although not covering is **not** disrespectful.

You will quickly note that Saudi women wear their *abaya* and headscarf with ease and elegance, but when in exclusively female company they prefer to uncover their heads and most often discard the *abaya* also. When going out in public, Saudi females are dressed under their *abaya* in long sleeves, long skirts or pants, and modest necklines.

Here are two examples of how you might choose to wear the *abaya*.



In mixed company at
Chamber of Commerce



At a private party in Jeddah

Key considerations when choosing your wardrobe for KSA are as follows:

- Contrary to what many intercultural etiquette guide books tell you, Saudi Arabia is a geographically diverse country that experiences all four seasons. In the winter it rains and is cold and often very windy, and in parts there is sometimes light snow. Summers are very hot and dry in the central region, and hot and humid along the coastlines. Spring and autumn are temperate.

- DO NOT rely on the *abaya* to cover you completely since much is revealed when you walk or are outdoors (coastal regions are particularly breezy).
- Formal dress is best for meetings.
- Open toed heels are acceptable.
- Day and evening clothes should cover legs, chest and upper arms, even for private or women-only events where the *abaya* is not worn.
- Jeans, T shirts, sneakers and similar casual clothing is good for site visits and leisure time.
- A sun hat is very handy.
- Bathers/togs/swimmers might be useful.
- Sunglasses are essential (Saudi Arabia is very bright!)

Currency

There are ATMs at shopping centres and petrol stations in the major cities of KSA, but they do not always work, so I recommend you carry extra cash in AUD or USD or SR (Saudi Riyal). Credit cards are accepted in most major locations, but not everywhere, and occasionally the telegraphic system does not operate well. Saudi Riyal for incidental expenditure and gratuities is handy, and is best obtained either in the Arab Gulf region before arrival into KSA, or in the major airports of Saudi Arabia.

Travel Insurance

It is highly recommended that you purchase adequate travel insurance to cover the entire period of your absence from Australia.

DFAT Travel Advisory

The DFAT Travel Advisory for KSA has not changed much for at least 2 years, but recently advises of the incidence of H1N1 virus in the KSA.

You should register with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT) advisory service via www.smarttraveller.gov.au.

Electronic

KSA is imposing new rules regarding the carrying of electronic devices on both departures and arrivals. All electronic devices must be submitted for check before you reach the immigration section in all KSA airports.

Electronic devices include:

- * mobile phones with camera and memory card
- * flash disks/ USB sticks
- * external hard drives
- * laptops and notebooks
- * iPods, itouch and mp3 players with memory cards

A special USB device will be inserted into the electronic devices that you are carrying in order to scan the contents of your laptop/ phone etc. and take a copy of all videos and picture files (e.g. jpg, bmp, avi files). The copied files will be recorded and stored on a main server in KSA.

Devices containing nude pictures and 'offensive material' will be confiscated immediately. There will be no fines, however refusal to surrender your devices will send you to jail first and deportation later.

Laptops with pirated software will also be confiscated.

Photography

Common sense prevails here, surely? Do not point your camera at the tanks and guns outside 5 Star hotels and other places where foreigners congregate, nor at signs of poverty (not all Saudi citizens are wealthy). Most Saudi females will not permit you take their photograph and you should **always** ask permission before you pull your camera out.

Mobile Phones

Saudis are slightly averse to making long distance calls to non-Saudis and so a local Saudi Mobile phone number is an excellent investment, particularly for extended visits of 5 days or more.

Medications

All personal prescriptions should be carried with relevant literature. Most medications and toiletries are safely and readily available in KSA, with the exception of tampons.

Physical Activity

Recreational Facilities (pool, gym, sauna) at hotels in KSA generally are either off-limits to female guests or schedule female-only hours. You may be invited to private weekly sports games (mixed gender) by your local Saudi or expat colleagues. You may swim, snorkel or dive in the Red Sea at private beaches owned by hotels or your Saudi colleagues.

Tipping

It is common practice to tip waiters, porters, drivers, 'minders', and other service providers, at your discretion.

Business Presentations

These general recommendations for presenting your business are offered after close observation of many trade missions into KSA over several years, and through discussion with Saudi business people.

- Prepare a succinct, informative, and attractive Power Point presentation (**max 5 minutes**) to deliver at business meetings.
- Present material that is designed specifically for the KSA market and **NOT** for **any** other markets in the region.
- Use Arabic **only** if you can pronounce and/or spell it properly.
- Create English/Arabic business cards. They are common currency and indicate your intention to invest time and effort in the region.
- If your business is in food, be aware of all Halal regulations for KSA.
- Promotional literature and presentations about your business should highlight industry memberships and any awards received.
- Photographs depicting your business operations should only show single sex (preferably male) images, or female hands, backs of heads, silhouettes etc.
- Consistently and repeatedly point to the exceptional and outstanding quality and integrity of Australian products and services by reference to Australia's reputation for world class standards, innovation, organic or natural products, and so on. Speak about what makes Australia special and unique in the world, not just your particular product/service/expertise.
- Provide your key prospects in KSA with the local Austrade officer's contacts for follow-up of any matters after your departure.
- Make **voice** contact with **all** business prospects before or immediately post departure (within a fortnight).

Resources

These few resources are recommended for the general orientation of visitors to the KSA. Many more in-depth and analytical resources for business, cultural and political interest are available in the public domain.

www.saudia.com	Contemporary information and business data
www.saudinf.com	Saudi Ministry of Culture & Information
www.meed.com	Arab Region business intelligence
www.gulfbusiness.com	Business monthly with regional coverage
http://english.aljazeera.net	Qatar-based Arab online news service

Girls of Riyadh Alsanae, Rajaa 2007 (English version) Penguin

Basically a familiar story of romance and relationships, this book gives depth and form to people who have for so long been cast either as alien exotics or victims. Set in a conservative society, however, this book has caused a lot of fuss.

Lonely Planet Guide to Saudi Arabia Ham, Anthony; Brekhus Shams, Martha; Madden, Andrew 2004 Lonely Planet.

Empathetic and well written tourist experience of Saudi Arabia, despite being by necessity superficial and thereby often missing the real meaning of social acts and, of course, being considerably limited by its male-only perspective.

The Kingdom

Lacey, Robert 1982 Fontana Paperbacks

Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists, and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia Lacey, Robert 2009 Viking

The classic, essential-reading first tome (over 700 pages) by Lacey now has its long anticipated sequel that reviews the past 30 years of domestic politics in the Kingdom.

My Desert Kingdom Koolmees, Jill 2004 Bantam

Australian Jill and her husband spent a year in the Eastern Province where she taught English to Saudi ladies. This book is based on life in an expatriate compound and in the Saudi female-only classroom, on touring with her husband, and on articles from the English language newspaper. It is engaging and insightful.

Behind the Veil Laube, Lydia 1991 Wakefield Press

The title lacks imagination, but this entertaining account by an Australian nurse in a hospital outside Medina offers valuable observations on the more conservative Saudi mores and behaviour, and is often available in second-hand bookshops.

The Veiled Kingdom Bin Ladin, Carmen 2004 Virago

Carmen - the ex-wife of one of Usama Bin Laden's brothers - gives a compelling account of life 'chez Bin Laden' with details of interest to female readers in particular. It is not as sensational as you might expect, and offers many insights into life for wealthy Saudis.