

# WHERE DO SAUDI TOURISTS GO?



The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest country on the Arabian Peninsula. It occupies an area of 2.24 million sq km and its population is about 25.6 million. Once an underdeveloped desert kingdom now Saudi Arabia is one of the wealthiest nations in the region thanks to vast oil resources.

It has to be admitted that Saudis are fond of traveling. In fact, recent estimates claim that some 5 million tourists are expected to leave the Kingdom for their holiday this summer. According to said Dr. Nasser Al-Tayyar, chairman of the Al-Tayyar Group of Companies: "Last year, Saudi tourists spent around SR60 billion during their summer holidays abroad but this year their expenditures are likely to increase by another eight percent due to an increase in fares, accommodation, travel and transport rates as a result of the appreciation of foreign currencies." The most popular destinations among Saudis are Egypt and Malaysia. "Malaysia has become the preferred choice of Saudis since it is an Islamic country which is an ideal resort for a family holiday. It also fulfills the needs of the Kingdom's tourists by way of excellent shopping facilities, theme parks and privacy during their stay." said Dr. Nasser Al-Tayyar. Last year most of Saudi tourists, some 70 percent, traveled to countries within the region. But this year the number of people interested in going to places such as South Korea, China, New Zealand and Australia has risen. Rich Saudi tourists prefer going to countries such as Switzerland, France, Austria and Italy.

Local authorities would welcome an increase in domestic tourism. In fact, the Supreme Commission for Tourism has launched a number of programs to encourage domestic tourism. Some regions organize summer festivals to attract more domestic tourists. Important tourism attractions are the country's historical and archaeological sites such as Madain Saleh, Khaibar and ancient forts.

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