

Expat Life in Saudi Arabia

While some destinations aren't a big adjustment for Westerners. [Saudi Arabia](#) is not one of those destinations. With significant differences stemming from the strong influence of Islam, many Westerners often face [culture shock when moving abroad](#) to Saudi Arabia.

However, expat life in Saudi Arabia doesn't have to be such a surprise. By taking the time to [research and plan ahead](#), you can ensure a smooth transition to your new environment. You'll even discover how to make your time abroad a comfortable and rewarding experience.

Here are 3 things you can do before you arrive to make your transition into expat life easier.

1. Become Familiar with Islam

First, it is absolutely necessary that you become familiar with Islam, the state religion of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This connection is uniquely strong in Saudi Arabia because it is the only Islamic country to claim the holy text, The Quran, as its constitution. Therefore, religion is more than just a cultural influence: it is a way of life in Saudi society.

Daily life is influenced heavily by Islamic observances. For instance, Muslims are called to prayer five times a day, and these prayers last about thirty minutes. [Shops are required to close and sales stop during prayer time](#), and as an expat you'll constantly be checking your watch to make sure you have enough time to finish a purchase or coffee before the next call to prayer.

Islamic observances will also dramatically influence an expat's daily experiences. Don't be surprised to find that there little to do as far as entertainment. [As one expat wrote](#), "Movie theaters are not allowed, and the major recreation in Saudi involves hanging around malls and boating. In some cities football (soccer) stadiums have games, but women are not allowed to attend these games."

2. Special Considerations for Women

If you're a woman moving to Saudi Arabia, preparations must be made to wear [the abaya](#) at all times outside of your private home. This long, loose-fitting cloak is worn over the entire body with a headscarf. This cloak should cover all of your body, including your ankles. This is done in observance to the Quran. Some expats recommend wearing leggings or pants under the *abaya* to ensure your ankles are covered.

There is minimal interaction between men and women. In Saudi Arabia, men and women are kept very separate from each other in restaurants, walking down the street, even in cars (women must be seated in the backseat away from the man, who must be related to the women to travel together in a car).

3. Find Western-Style Housing

Finally, to make the transition to Saudi life easier, try to live in a Western Style compound. Compound life can be similar to living an "international country club" lifestyle within a gated community. The amenities will vary from compound to compound but most will include swimming pools, restaurants, laundry services, hair salons, playgrounds, and bus services.

In addition, Western-style housing communities may feature Arabic classes, grocery stores, and golf courses. For many expatriates who have come from a western country to Saudi



Arabia, the compound brings a comfortable feeling of home. If you have a [personal effects insurance plan](#), you can feel safe about your belongings, too.

Finding a job in Saudi Arabia can be challenging. Expats are seeking work opportunities in places that are different and often more underdeveloped than their home country. Learn more about [finding a job in unexpected locations](#).