



Saudi Arabia

CAPITAL

—

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

—

CURRENCY

—

Guide version: V2 draft**Disclaimer**

This Country Guide reflects information believed to be correct at the time of publication. Regulations, procedures and charges are subject to change. IAM does not accept liability for errors, omissions, inaccuracies or misinterpretations in this guide. The information provided should not be considered as having been provided or sanctioned by the customs authorities of the country or territory concerned.

Important Note

Regulatory updates since 2016 IAM baseline: Saudi Arabia introduced 15% VAT on imports in July 2020. Customs administration is now handled by ZATCA (Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority), which replaced the Saudi Customs Authority. The GCC tariff system adopted a new 12-digit HS classification in January 2025. Pet imports are now permitted through the MEWA Anaam electronic platform -- the IAM baseline stating "Pets cannot be imported at this time" is outdated. All shipments are subject to rigorous inspection. The importation of prohibited items is treated as a potential smuggling attempt and may result in confiscation, heavy fines, and imprisonment.

Overview

Duty-Free Eligibility

Duty-free personal effects exemption: Persons relocating to Saudi Arabia on a valid work visa or Iqama may apply for a personal effects exemption on genuinely used household goods. This exemption is not automatic -- the customs broker must apply for it as part of the clearance process, and ZATCA decides based on documentation. If goods do not qualify, duty rates on

household items are typically 5% to 15% of CIF value depending on category.

VAT: Saudi Arabia levies 15% VAT on all imports as of July 2020, calculated on the CIF value. VAT applies even to goods that are exempt from customs duty. Personal household goods may receive favorable treatment during clearance in practice, but clients should budget for the possibility of VAT being assessed. Goods cannot be cleared until VAT is paid.

Documents

For Foreign Residents and Expatriates

- **Copy of passport with entry visa page**
- **Original bill of lading (OBL) or air waybill (AWB)**
- **Detailed and valued inventory (in English or Arabic)**
- **Packing list**
- **Purchase receipts for all electrical and electronic appliances (if unavailable, ZATCA will assess local market value)**
- **Certificate of insurance, if applicable**
- **Letter of authorization attested by the Saudi Chamber of Commerce (for government employees, the seal of the government agency suffices)**
- **Copy of Iqama (residence permit) or Saudi National ID (*Bataqa*)**

For Diplomats

- **All documents listed above**
- **Copy of diplomatic ID and passport**
- **Customs duty and inspection exemption certificate from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (without this, the shipment is subject to physical inspection and full duty payment)**

Household Goods — Specific Information

All incoming shipments are subject to rigorous full physical inspection by ZATCA customs officers. Members must advise clients to expect this and to ensure inventories are accurate and complete.

Duty rates by category (when exemption does not apply):

- Electrical and electronic appliances: 5%
- Audiotapes, videotapes, CDs and DVDs: 5%
- Furniture: 15%
- Goods manufactured in Saudi Arabia (similar items): 5-15%

Items valued over SAR 10,000 (approximately USD 2,700) are subject to customs duty and payment assessed on CIF value. If purchase receipts for electronics are unavailable, customs will assess based on local market value.

All containerized shipments must be loaded on pallets or in lift vans. Improper stowage results in penalties from the seaport authority.

The owner of the goods must be physically present in Saudi Arabia at the time of customs clearance. The shipment cannot be cleared in the owner's absence.

The letter of authorization must follow a format provided by the destination agent. It must be attested by the Saudi Chamber of Commerce (or sealed by the relevant government agency for government employees).

ISPM 15 compliance is required for all solid wood packing materials.

Prohibited / Restricted Items

Prohibited Items

The following are strictly prohibited. Importing prohibited items may be treated as a smuggling attempt and may result in immediate confiscation, heavy fines, and/or imprisonment.

- Alcoholic beverages of any kind, and food products containing alcohol (including vanilla extract, flavoring extracts, cooking wines, and similar products)
 - Books, wine-making kits, or other items used in the preparation or manufacture of alcoholic beverages
 - Narcotics, illegal drugs, and unidentified medicines
 - Pornographic materials and literature, including fashion magazines depicting people in underwear or swimwear
 - Any books, materials, or items pertaining to religions other than Islam
 - All games of chance and gambling paraphernalia, including chess sets, dice, and backgammon
- [Note: enforcement of chess prohibition has been inconsistent in practice; verify with destination agent]**

- Weapons and firearms of any kind -- real, ornamental, antique, or decorative -- including guns, ammunition, fireworks, and spears **[PERMIT REQUIRED for authorized import; unauthorized import treated as smuggling]**
- Military uniforms or military equipment of any kind
- Radio transmitters, communication equipment and devices, including VHF, marine band, police band radios, and walkie-talkies **[PERMIT REQUIRED]**
- Stuffed animals (taxidermy), statues, figurines, carvings, or objects depicting human or animal forms
- Pork and pork products, and any foodstuffs containing pork
- Animal skins in commercial quantities
- Products from endangered species protected under CITES **[CITES]**
- Counterfeit goods

Restricted / Dutiable Items

The following categories are subject to customs duties and/or censorship review:

Exposed film (prints, slides, negatives), records, books, magazines, photographs, and other printed materials are subject to censorship review. Personal computers, USB drives, hard disks, smartphones, mobile phones, audio/video media (CDs, DVDs, VHS cassettes), and any items that store data or information are similarly subject to review.

To reduce clearance time, all items subject to censorship should be packed separately in clearly marked cartons and identified on the inventory. Where possible, censorship-sensitive items should be sent by air rather than included in a sea freight container.

If items are confiscated after censorship review, a penalty is charged to the consignee: approximately USD 135 per CD or VHS tape confiscated, and approximately USD 14 per book confiscated. Delivery of censored articles may incur additional charges.

Books and used clothing in reasonable personal-use quantities are exempt from duty.

Firearms and weapons require a permit. See Prohibited Items for unauthorized weapons.

Vehicles

Vehicle Documents

- **Certificate of title / vehicle registration (from country of origin)**

- **Saudi Arabian Standards Organization (SASO) conformity certificate (may be obtained in Saudi Arabia; see below)**
- **Police clearance / de-registration certificate from the country of origin**
- **Proof of ownership (purchase invoice or equivalent)**
- **Original bill of lading**

Specific Information

Saudi Arabia applies a customs duty of approximately 5% on imported vehicles, based on the final assessed CIF value.

Vehicles must be left-hand drive. Right-hand drive vehicles are not permitted.

Only one vehicle may be imported per foreign resident.

Vehicles older than 5 years from the date of manufacture are not permitted for import.

No personal items may be left inside the vehicle during shipment. Any contents found inside will be subject to separate customs treatment and may cause delays.

The SASO conformity certificate verifies that the vehicle meets Saudi standards. It can be obtained locally in Saudi Arabia after arrival, but SASO may require modification or replacement of certain components to meet local standards, at the owner's expense. There is also a risk that the SASO application is rejected entirely, in which case the vehicle must be re-exported at the owner's expense. Members should advise clients of this risk before committing to vehicle import.

Pets

Requirements

- **Import permit obtained in advance via the Anaam electronic platform (Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture -- MEWA), valid for 30 days from date of issue**
- **ISO-compliant microchip (ISO 11784/11785, 15-digit non-encrypted chip) -- must be implanted before vaccination**
- **Rabies vaccination certificate (administered at least 30 days before travel; remaining vaccine validity must be at least 6 months at time of import; vaccination administered no more than 6 months before travel per PetTravel guidance)**
- **Veterinary health certificate issued by an accredited veterinarian and endorsed by the government veterinary authority of the originating country**

- **Additional vaccination records: dogs require DHLPP (Distemper, Hepatitis, Leptospirosis, Parainfluenza, Parvovirus) plus Bordetella, valid at time of import and administered at least 2 weeks before export; cats require FVRCP (Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia), valid and administered at least 2 weeks before export**
- **Copy of owner's passport and Iqama (or national ID)**
- **Clear photograph of the animal**
- **Pet must enter through the port specified in the import permit**

Specific Information

Correction to previous guidance: Pets can now be imported into Saudi Arabia. The IAM 2016 baseline stating otherwise is outdated.

The import permit must be applied for through the Anaam electronic platform (anaam.mewa.gov.sa) before travel. The permit is valid for only 30 days from issuance, requiring close coordination between the permit date, veterinary procedures, and the actual travel date.

An individual may import a maximum of 2 dogs and 2 cats every 6 months. The microchip number must appear on all documents.

Dogs are significantly restricted. Only dogs classified as working dogs -- watchdogs, guard dogs, seeing-eye/guide dogs, and hunting dogs -- may be imported. The purpose must be stated in the veterinary certificate and may require prior authorization from the Saudi embassy or consulate in the originating country. Small companion dogs and many common breeds do not qualify as "working dogs" and may be refused entry. The following breeds are specifically banned by Saudi veterinary authorities: Lancashire Heeler, Swedish Vallhund, Mastiff/Old English Mastiff, Neapolitan Mastiff, Bullmastiff, Newfoundland, Great Dane, Leonberger, Hovawart, Boxer, Bulldog/English Bulldog, Rottweiler, Bull Terrier, Staffordshire Bull Terrier, Dandie Dinmont Terrier, Japanese Akita, Chinese Spitz, Affenpinscher, and Griffon Bruxellois. Members should verify the full current breed list and working dog classification with MEWA before advising clients.

Saudi nationals and Arab nationals wishing to import a dog require prior authorization from local police to verify housing conditions.

Cats are generally accepted with the correct documentation and no working-classification restriction.

Rabbits, birds, and exotic animals are not permitted for personal import. All animals must be free of external parasites and show no signs of contagious disease.

Pet imports are administered through MEWA (mewa.gov.sa). Requirements change regularly; always verify current rules with MEWA and the originating country's veterinary authority before booking.

Consignment Instructions

Recommended: Contact the destination agent to ensure all requirements have been met prior to import, especially for differences regarding air and sea shipments.

All shipments are subject to rigorous full physical inspection. The destination agent and the consignee should anticipate this and ensure inventories are detailed, accurate, and consistent with actual contents.

The owner of the goods must be present in Saudi Arabia at the time of customs clearance. Pre-arrival or agent-only clearance is not possible. Plan shipment timing accordingly.

All items subject to censorship review (electronics, media, books, printed materials, films) must be packed separately in clearly marked cartons and identified on the inventory. These items may be removed from the container for review, extending clearance time. Consider shipping these items by air separately to avoid delays to the main household goods shipment.

Containerized shipments must be on pallets or in lift vans. Improper stowage results in seaport authority penalties.

Saudi Arabia has three major ports of entry for household goods: Jeddah Islamic Port (west coast), King Abdulaziz Port in Dammam (east coast), and dry port facilities in Riyadh. Processing times vary by port.

15% VAT applies to all imports. Clients should budget for both any applicable customs duties and VAT at time of clearance.

Cultural & Other Information

Saudi Arabia (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia -- KSA) is the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula and the world's largest oil producer. The capital is Riyadh; Jeddah is the main commercial and port city. Arabic is the official language. The currency is the Saudi riyal (SAR), pegged to the US dollar at approximately SAR 3.75:1.

Saudi Arabia is undergoing significant social transformation under Vision 2030, the government's reform and economic diversification program. Notable changes include the opening of cinemas in 2018 after a 35-year ban, permission for women to drive and attend public events, the

development of major entertainment venues, and a growing expatriate and tourism sector. Saudi Arabia was awarded the 2034 FIFA World Cup. While social liberalization is ongoing, the Kingdom remains governed by Islamic law, and customs regulations reflect religious and cultural values -- the prohibition on alcohol, pork, and non-Islamic religious materials is strictly enforced regardless of the nationality of the importer.

Reference links:

- [OpenFactBook -- Saudi Arabia](#)
- [Wikipedia -- Saudi Arabia](#)
- [SASO -- Saudi Arabian Standards Organization](#)
- [MEWA -- Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture \(Pet Imports\)](#)
- [Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)

Quick Links & Resources

- [Find Movers in Saudi Arabia](#)
<https://iamovers.mobilityex.com/index.html#/search?loc=Saudi+Arabia&lat=23.8859&lng=45.0792&range=50&assocs=800&fvw=c&ctry=Saudi+Arabia>
- [Foreign Embassies in Saudi Arabia](#)
<https://www.embassypages.com/saudiarabia>
- [Saudi Arabia's Embassies Abroad](#)
<https://www.mofa.gov.sa/en/Pages/default.aspx>