

The Saudi Cultural Landscape ▶ 1-2

A Strategic Vision for Building a Creative Future

Customs

Industrial

Culture



Report Themes



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03. Key Stakeholders and Their Roles in Saudi Arabia's Cultural Ecosystem

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Culture as a Driver of Sustainable Development

The cultural sector is a key driver of development in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, forming an essential part of Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to promote the national identity, diversify the economy, and enhance the Kingdom's cultural standing on the global stage.

The Importance of the Cultural Sector in Saudi Arabia



Strengthening national identity

- The cultural and artistic heritage of the Kingdom reflects the rich historical depth and diversity of customs, traditions, and arts.
- It plays a key role in preserving architectural heritage, traditional crafts, and popular folklore, including poetry and storytelling.



Diversifying the economy and supporting tourism

- The cultural sector contributes to diversifying income sources through creative industries such as arts, media, film production, and music.
- It also supports cultural tourism, with heritage sites, such as Diriyah Historic Centre, Al-Ula, and Historic Jeddah, attracting millions of visitors annually.



Creating job opportunities and supporting talents

- The sector unlocks wide opportunities for entrepreneurs, artists, and creatives, contributing to the development of a sustainable economic environment.
- Cultural authorities provide support for training, education, and entrepreneurship in creative fields.

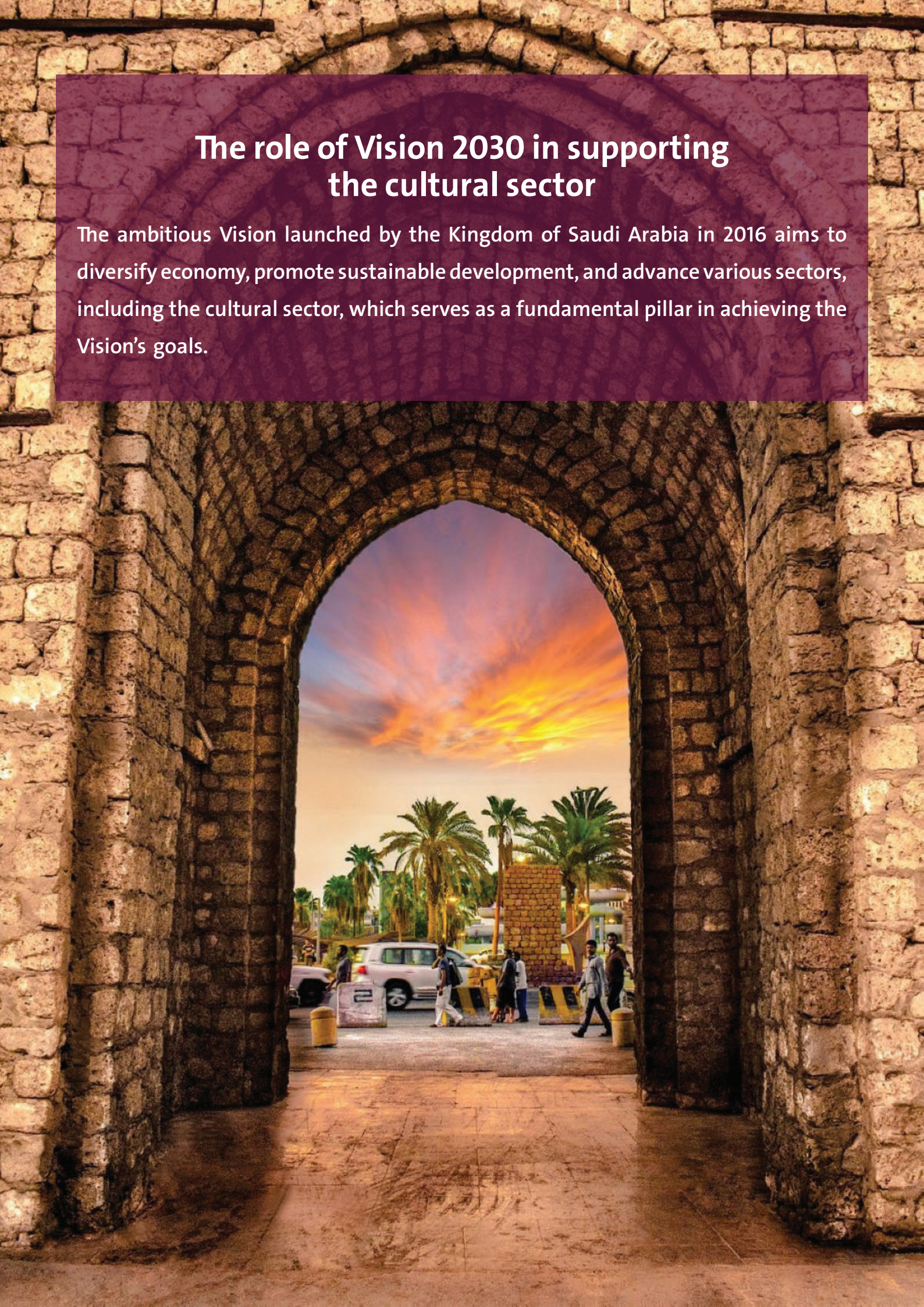


Promoting global cultural connection

- The Kingdom hosts international cultural events and festivals, including but not limited to: **the Red Sea International Film Festival, Diriyah Biennale, and Riyadh Season**, which foster cultural exchange and openness to other cultures.
- It encourages intercultural dialogue through arts, literature, and music.

The role of Vision 2030 in supporting the cultural sector

The ambitious Vision launched by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2016 aims to diversify economy, promote sustainable development, and advance various sectors, including the cultural sector, which serves as a fundamental pillar in achieving the Vision's goals.



1 Elevating culture as a key driver of development

- The Vision aims to make culture a way of life for all members of society by encouraging greater participation of citizens and residents in cultural and artistic activities.
- It also seeks to provide a supportive environment for creative individuals and artists, helping showcase national talent and foster innovation.

2 Promoting national identity and preserving cultural heritage

- Vision 2030 supports numerous programs aimed at safeguarding national heritage and Saudi traditions, as well as restoring historical sites such as Diriyah, AlUla, and Historic Jeddah.
- It also seeks to increase the number of Saudi cultural sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

3 Establishing and developing cultural institutions

- The Ministry of Culture has established eleven specialized cultural commissions, each working to develop the cultural sector based on modern frameworks.
- Major projects have also been launched, such as the Saudi National Opera House and the Royal Arts Complex, to support arts and entertainment.

4 Transforming Saudi Arabia into a global cultural destination

- Investing in major cultural events such as the Red Sea International Film Festival, Riyadh Season, and Diriyah Biennale.
- Hosting international exhibitions and attracting artists and creative individuals from around the world to enhance cultural exchange and openness to other cultures.

5 Empowering cultural and creative industries

- Vision 2030 encourages the growth of cultural industries such as cinema, arts, publishing, music, and design, strengthening culture's role as a thriving economic sector.
- The Kingdom has launched initiatives to support entrepreneurs and young talents in the cultural field, including the Cultural Scholarship Program and specialized training centers.



The Impact of Saudi Vision 2030 on the Development of Arts, Heritage, and Culture in the Kingdom

Enhancing the
cultural infrastructure



Reviving national heritage



Developing the cultural economy



Promoting cultural diversity



Encouraging Artistic innovation and creativity





Key Stakeholders and their Roles in Saudi Arabia's Cultural Ecosystem



Elevating culture as a key driver of development

The Ministry of Culture was established in 2018 and is responsible for the cultural landscape in the Kingdom both locally and internationally. The Ministry is committed to preserving the Kingdom's historical heritage while striving to build a rich cultural future where various forms of culture and arts can thrive. It also contributes to achieving the main pillars of Saudi Vision 2030: a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation. On March 27, 2019, the Ministry of Culture announced its strategy, which embodies its mission and aspirations, reflecting its strategic objectives: culture as a way of life, culture for economic growth, and culture to enhance the Kingdom's international standing.

Cultural Authorities

Cultural authorities are responsible for managing the Saudi cultural sector across its various specialties and fields. **Each of the eleven authorities focuses on developing one or more specific cultural sectors.** They possess legal personality as public entities, with financial and administrative independence, and are organizationally linked to the Minister of Culture.



The Authority is dedicated to develop the fields of literature, publishing, and translation in the Kingdom. It aims to regulate the publishing industry, including supporting authorship and protecting the writers' rights. It also creates a stimulating creative environment for literary production and translation, provides training, and generates investment opportunities in these sectors.



The Authority aims to develop the film sector and the cinematic production environment in the Kingdom, in addition to motivating and empowering Saudi filmmakers within the industry. It seeks to attract investments and nurture local talent in film production, achieving a global presence for Saudi cinematic content in line with the targets of Vision 2030.



This Authority is responsible for all types of performing arts, including theater, dance, shows, opera, ballet, and more. Its key responsibilities include activating theaters across the Kingdom, ensuring the quality of content presented, encouraging the production of theatrical performances and performing arts, and promoting performing arts culture as an integral part of the national cultural identity.



The Authority aims to establish a professional music industry in the Kingdom encompassing all aspects of musical art. It is also responsible for issuing licenses for activities related to the music sector and creates a comprehensive database for the Saudi music sector to support its development and sustainability.



The Authority is responsible for supporting efforts to develop Saudi national heritage and raising awareness and interest in it, while ensuring its protection from extinction. It also encourages individuals, institutions, and companies to produce and develop heritage content, ensuring the sustainability of cultural heritage and its transmission to future generations.



The Authority aims to develop the museum sector in the Kingdom across its various types by updating the regulations and systems related to museum management. It also seeks to create a sustainable environment that encourages investment in the museum field, contributing to enriching museum content and enhancing its role within society.



The Authority aims to develop the library sector in the Kingdom and enhance its services by upgrading public libraries and their infrastructure. It also creates a stimulating environment for reading within Saudi society through initiatives that encourage book engagement and promote a culture of knowledge across all segments of the population.



This Authority is dedicated to the care and development of the architecture and design sector, supporting practitioners and specialists working in the field to enhance the quality of creative outputs. The Authority also promotes the exchange of knowledge and best practices in architectural engineering and design, aligning with the Kingdom's cultural identity and the aspirations of its future vision.



The Authority plays a key role in developing the visual arts sector in the Kingdom and supporting its practitioners, including artists and specialists. It also develops educational and training programs related to visual arts and offers scholarships to outstanding artistic talents to nurture their abilities and refine their skills.



The Authority aims to regulate the culinary arts sector by establishing standards and mechanisms for classifying restaurants, dishes, and chefs, in addition to setting regulations and requirements related to the field. It also documents Saudi and international cuisines by recording and publishing recipes in accredited sources. Furthermore, the Authority promotes Saudi cuisine locally and internationally through specialized festivals and events, while encouraging academic research and studies to advance culinary arts and innovate new dining experiences in the Kingdom.



The Authority aims to elevate the fashion sector in the Kingdom, which is considered a cornerstone of local culture and a valuable treasure due to the Kingdom's vast area and the diverse customs and traditions across its regions. The Authority is committed to strengthening heritage and national identity, contributing to meeting global demands, and positively impacting the national economy. The Authority's mission is to empower the fashion sector, work on its development, and achieve its growth to become sustainable, inclusive, integrated, and supportive of local talents, expertise, and competencies.



Cultural Development Fund

The Fund was established to develop the cultural sector and achieve sustainability by supporting cultural activities and projects. It aims to facilitate investment in cultural activities, enhance the sector's profitability, and empower stakeholders to engage in cultural enterprises. The Fund plays an active role in achieving the goals of the National Culture Strategy and the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030.





The Role of Cultural Commissions in Promoting Saudi National Identity

1



Transforming Saudi Arabia into a Global Cultural Destination

- Establishing regulatory and legislative frameworks to support arts and culture.
- Enhancing the business environment to attract investment in cultural sectors.
- Developing professional and training programs for cultural and artistic talents.

2



Promoting National Identity and Cultural Heritage

- Documenting and digitizing Saudi heritage to ensure its preservation.
- Launching restoration and rehabilitation projects for heritage and historical sites.
- Promoting Saudi cultural heritage both locally and globally.

3



Supporting the growth of creative industries

- Encouraging cultural entrepreneurship.
- Providing financial and logistical support to artists and creators.
- Facilitating access to local and global markets for cultural products.

4



Organizing cultural events and festivals

- Hosting major cultural festivals such as Riyadh Season, Winter at Tantora, and Historic Jeddah.
- Launching platforms for visual arts, theater, and music performances.
- Supporting the production and distribution of Saudi films and creative content.

5



Promoting Reading and Publishing

- Organizing local and international book fairs.
- Supporting initiatives that aim to publish books and enhance their accessibility.
- Empowering Saudi authors and publishing houses to develop rich cultural content.

6



Integrating Culture into Education

- Developing educational curricula focused on heritage, arts, and music.
- Offering training programs for school and university students in cultural and artistic fields.
- Establishing specialized academies in arts such as theater, music, and design.

7



Expanding International Partnerships

- Strengthening cultural cooperation with global organizations and institutions.
- Organizing joint events with other countries to promote cultural dialogue.
- Supporting Saudi participation in international cultural exhibitions and forums.

8



Empowering Women in the Cultural Sector

- Encouraging women's participation in arts, music, and creative fields.
- Providing scholarships and training programs to enhance women's skills in cultural and artistic domains.

9



Supporting digital arts and technological creativity

- Empowering Saudi talents in digital art and graphic design.
- Supporting the production of video games and interactive experiences inspired by Saudi culture.
- Promoting the integration of artificial intelligence into arts and creative sectors.

10



Expanding the creation of museums and cultural exhibitions

- Building national and specialized museums to preserve heritage and arts.
- Organizing international art exhibitions to showcase the work of Saudi artists.
- Developing virtual museums to provide digital access to Saudi heritage.

11



Folk Heritage Protection

- Registering Saudi cultural elements with UNESCO to preserve them.
- Hosting events that spotlight traditional dances and folk music.
- Supporting folk groups and initiatives dedicated to cultural heritage.

12



Advancing the theater and cinema landscape in Saudi Arabia

- Launching training programs for theatrical and cinematic talents.
- Supporting Saudi film production through funding programs and partnerships with global platforms.
- Establishing performing arts centers to enrich the theater experience in the Kingdom.



13



Promoting Saudi culture globally

- Organizing Saudi Cultural Weeks in world capitals to introduce Saudi art to global audiences.
- Participating in international book fairs, art exhibitions, and music festivals.
- Hosting global cultural exhibitions in the Kingdom to foster cultural exchange.

14



Developing policies for protecting cultural intellectual property

- Ensuring the protection of Saudi artists' rights across all cultural sectors.
- Establishing new regulations to protect the intellectual property of literary and artistic works.
- Supporting the production of original content and safeguarding intangible heritage.



15



Empowering traditional crafts and handicraft industries

- Establishing markets for artisans to promote and sell their products locally and globally.
- Developing training programs to preserve and pass on traditional crafts.
- Supporting Saudi female artisans in marketing their work internationally.

16



Fostering Cultural Research and Studies

- Funding Research on Saudi History and Culture
- Supporting researchers in literature, heritage, and cultural anthropology.
- Publishing annual reports and studies on culture's impact on the economy and society.





National Culture Strategy



The National Culture Strategy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a comprehensive roadmap for development of the cultural sector that was launched by the Ministry of Culture in March 2019 as part of the broader framework to achieve the goals of Saudi Vision 2030. This strategy aims to strengthen national identity, make culture a way of life, contribute to economic growth, and enhance the Kingdom's international standing.



The objectives of the strategy

- **Culture as a way of life:** Promote cultural engagement across all regions of the Kingdom, ensure equal opportunities for participation, and foster positive societal values.
- **Culture for economic growth:** Increase the cultural sector's contribution to GDP, support SMEs, and stimulate the creative industries.
- **Culture to enhance Saudi Arabia's international standing:** Strengthen cultural exchange with other nations and position the Kingdom as a leading global cultural destination.

Cultural Sectors

The strategy identified 16 key cultural sectors, including:



Books and Publishing



Theater
and Performing Arts



Visual Arts



Music



Films



Culinary Arts



Architecture and
Design Arts



Fashion



Literature



Libraries



Museums



Heritage



Language and
Translation



Cultural and Heritage
Sites



Natural Heritage



Festivals and
Cultural Events

Programs and Initiatives

The strategy encompasses a range of programs and initiatives, including:

- **National Cultural Awards:** Established to honor creative talents across various cultural fields.
- **"Culture Gate" Platform:** A comprehensive digital hub providing detailed data on the Saudi cultural sector.
- **Talent Development Programs:** Designed to nurture creative skills across all age groups.

Key Cultural and Artistic Initiatives Supporting the National Identity and the Development of the Cultural Sector

Saudi Arabia seeks to strengthen and preserve its national identity through a range of initiatives, highlighting its rich heritage and history while developing the cultural sector. Below are some of the key initiatives:



1. Diriyah Historic Project

- It aims to restore and develop the historic area of Diriyah, the birthplace of the First Saudi State, and transform it into a prominent cultural and tourist destination that highlights the national identity and heritage.
- The project features museums and interactive exhibitions that document the Kingdom's history and showcase its cultural evolution.



2. AlUla Project

- The Royal Commission for AlUla is committed to developing the historic region of AlUla and its archaeological sites, such as Madain Saleh, transforming it into a global cultural destination.
- The project reflects the Kingdom's rich heritage and reinforces the national identity by showcasing the ancient history of Saudi Arabia.



3. Winter at Tantora Festival

- A cultural festival held in AlUla region, featuring musical performances, art exhibitions, and heritage-based events.
- It contributes to raising awareness of Saudi heritage and culture by offering artistic programs that blend authenticity with modernity.



4. "Books for All" Initiative

- This initiative aims to promote reading and culture by organizing book fairs, workshops, and cultural seminars, thereby supporting national identity through spreading cultural and intellectual awareness.
- It also highlights local cultural production and Saudi content.





5. "Culture and Heritage Days" Initiative

- This initiative combines art exhibitions, heritage workshops, and folk performances to introduce the public to the national heritage across various regions of the Kingdom.
- It contributes to raising awareness of local heritage and strengthening community ties by celebrating traditional practices and customs.



6. "Cultural Houses" Initiative

- This initiative aims to facilitate access to information resources, promote cultural and community engagement, develop human capabilities, and strengthen national identity.
- As part of Saudi Vision 2030, the goal is to open 153 cultural houses across the Kingdom by 2030, aiming at attracting one million visitors annually.

7. The National Digital Museum and Digital Heritage Projects

- This initiative focuses on transforming Saudi heritage into digital content accessible to the public online, making national culture more interactively available.
- It allows citizens and international audiences to explore Saudi heritage and contributes to the preservation of intangible heritage through digitization.



8. National Cultural Seminars and Conferences

- These events bring together academics, intellectuals, and artists to discuss topics related to national identity, heritage, and innovation in cultural fields.
- They promote constructive dialogue and the exchange of expertise, contributing to the development of cultural policies that support and strengthen national identity.

9. Youth and National Talent Support Initiatives

- These include training programs, art competitions, and creative grants organized by cultural commissions to support a new generation of Saudi talents and creative individuals.
- Such efforts help pass on heritage and national identity to future generations while fostering a spirit of creativity and innovation that harmonizes with tradition.



10. Participation in International Exhibitions and Festivals

- The Kingdom organizes and participates in international exhibitions and festivals that showcase Saudi culture and heritage, including participation in global cultural weeks.
- These participations help enhance the Kingdom's global image and highlight the national identity by presenting Saudi heritage and arts on an international scale.



11. Quality of Life Program

- Launched in 2018, the program aims to improve the lifestyle of individuals and families, and develop the cultural and entertainment infrastructure in the Kingdom.
- The program includes the establishment of recreational and cultural facilities, and the expansion of museums, theaters, and art centers, with the goal of positioning the Kingdom as a cultural and tourist destination.



12. Launch of Movie Theaters

After a 35-year ban, the first movie theater in the Kingdom was opened in 2018. Plans are underway to open more cinemas across various Saudi cities, with the aim of enhancing the cultural and entertainment sector.



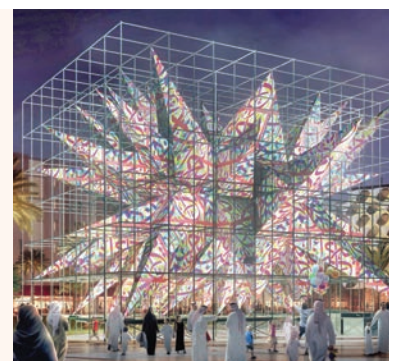
13. “Hawi” Initiative

This initiative aims to develop the hobby sector in the Kingdom by establishing and organizing clubs and hobby-related activities, while enhancing community participation in cultural and recreational events.



14. Riyadh Art Project

This project aims to transform Riyadh into an open-air art gallery by installing over 1,000 artworks across the city, including sculptures, murals, and interactive art installations.





**United Nations
Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization**

Saudi Arabia's Global Position: Registering Cultural Elements and Sites with UNESCO as a Model for Future Cultural Empowerment

The Kingdom seeks to solidify its cultural standing globally by preserving its tangible and intangible heritage and registering it with prestigious international organizations such as UNESCO. The inscription of Saudi cultural elements and sites on the World Heritage List represents a significant strategic step that reflects the richness and authenticity of the Saudi cultural landscape and enhances its international presence.

The impact of these efforts extends beyond merely documenting and preserving heritage; they also serve as a fundamental pillar for empowering culture in the future by strengthening national identity, expanding cultural exchange with the world, and supporting the creative economy by positioning culture as a vital and sustainable resource.



Elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage Inscribed on the UNESCO List



Al-Ardah Al-Najdiyah (Saudi Ardah)

Al-Ardah is a symbol of national identity and tribal unity. In 2015, the Saudi Ardah was registered on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list as the first independent Saudi heritage element inscribed globally. The Ministry of Culture (Heritage Authority) is responsible for preserving and supporting this art form, and the National Center for Saudi Ardah was established to document and transmit it to future generations.



The Majlis (Social Gathering Councils)

The Majlis is the traditional place where community members meet to discuss daily matters, welcome guests, and resolve disputes. It is a fundamental element that reflects the values of hospitality and social interaction in Saudi culture. In 2015, the Majlis was registered on the Intangible Cultural Heritage list as part of a joint nomination with Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, and Oman. The Majlis represents an important cultural and social space, with cultural authorities in the Kingdom overseeing the continuity of its traditions, including King Abdulaziz Historical Center's documentation of Saudi historical councils. The Community Arts Council and the Ministry of Culture strengthens the role of the Majlis in preserving oral heritage such as storytelling and Nabati poetry.



Al-Mezmar Dance

Al-Mezmar dance is a popular collective performing art native to the Hijaz region in western Saudi Arabia. It is often performed at weddings and national celebrations to strengthen bonds of joy and solidarity. In 2016, Al-Mezmar was inscribed by UNESCO as a Saudi intangible cultural heritage element. Folk Arts Associations and the Ministry of Culture oversee the transmission of Al-Mezmar performance skills to younger generations, while also supporting local Al-Mezmar groups at national festivals.



Falconry (Al-Bayzara)

Falconry is a longstanding traditional practice involving the breeding and training of falcons for hunting, deeply rooted in the heritage of the Bedouin cultures of the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries where falconry has been passed down through generations as both a hobby and an ancient source of livelihood. The element “Falconry – a Living Human Heritage” was inscribed on UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage list starting in 2010 as part of an international joint nomination led by the UAE, which initially included eleven countries; Saudi Arabia later joined this nomination. In 2016, UNESCO recognized falconry as a broader shared heritage encompassing 18 countries, including Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Falcons Club plays a key role in preserving the heritage of falcon hunting and organizing annual events and exhibitions, under the supervision of the Heritage Authority, to ensure the continuity of this traditional practice and to document its traditional knowledge.



Al-Qatt Al-Asiri Art

Al-Qatt Al-Asiri is a traditional decorative art unique to the Asir region in the south of Saudi Arabia. Practiced by women for hundreds of years, it involves adorning the interior walls of homes with vibrant geometric patterns. In 2017, Al-Qatt Al-Asiri was inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list, recognizing its artistic and social significance. The Ministry of Culture (through the Heritage Authority), in collaboration with fine arts associations in Abha, is responsible for preserving this art form. Al-Qatt Al-Asiri Museum was established to exhibit artworks by female artists and to teach the younger generation the traditional techniques of this craft.



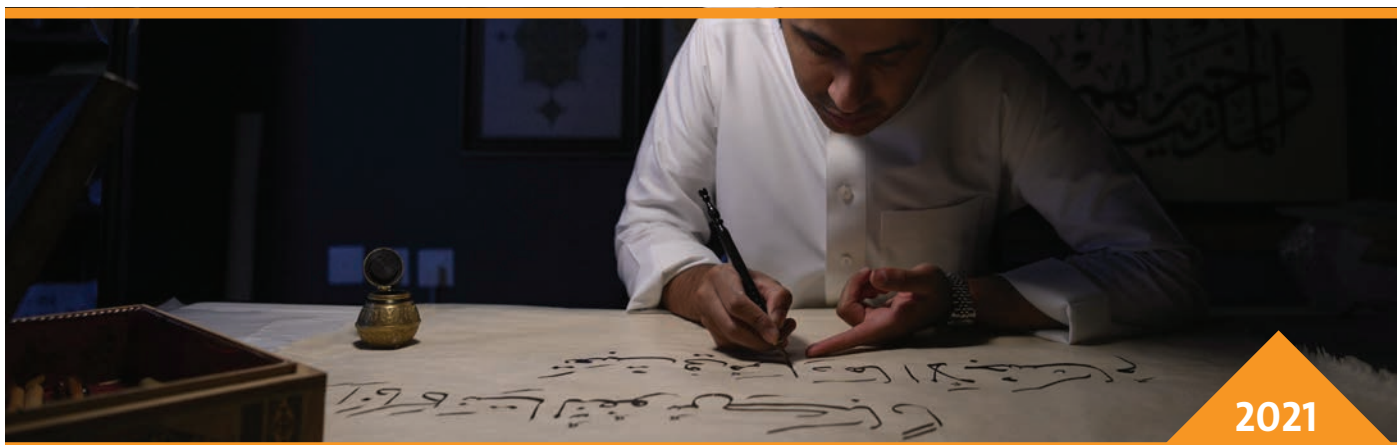
Date Palm Trees

The date palm tree is a fundamental part of the agricultural and social heritage in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, closely linked to numerous agricultural traditions, handicrafts, and ceremonial practices. This heritage encompasses the knowledge and skills involved in cultivating and caring for date palms, producing dates, and utilizing all parts of the palm in traditional crafts (such as using fronds for making baskets, mats, and more). Saudi Arabia participated in preparing a regional dossier to register the heritage of date palms, and in 2019, "Date Palm Trees, Knowledge and Traditions Associated with Them" was inscribed on the Intangible Cultural Heritage list as a joint nomination with 14 Arab countries. The Heritage Authority and the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture oversee the support for date palm cultivation locally and the documentation of traditional knowledge related to it. Additionally, Al-Ahsa Governorate annually hosts date festivals that celebrate and promote this cultural legacy.



Sadu Weaving

Sadu weaving is a traditional craft involving the hand-weaving of fabrics, tents, and mats using sheep's wool, camel hair, and goat hair, decorated with attractive geometric colors and patterns. This craft is closely tied to the Bedouin lifestyle in Saudi Arabia, where Bedouin women wove goat hair tents, decorative pieces, and coverings using a primitive horizontal loom. The "Sadu Weaving" element was inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2020 as part of a joint heritage file between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The Saudi Sadu House and the Cooperative Association for Artisans are among the local bodies dedicated to provide training to female artisans and marketing their products with support from the Heritage Authority. The Sadu pattern gained international recognition when it was used as the emblem for the G20 Summit held in Riyadh in 2020, highlighting this art globally.



Arabic Calligraphy

Arabic calligraphy is a creative practice of writing Arabic letters in inherited artistic styles. It involves mastering various script types, such as (Naskh, Thuluth, Diwani, and Kufic) and adorning manuscripts, architecture, and inscriptions with calligraphic art. Arabic calligraphy is a fundamental element of Arab and Islamic culture and a symbol of the Arabic language identity. Historically, it was used in copying Qur'anic manuscripts and decorating mosques and palaces. Saudi Arabia led the efforts, alongside several Arab countries, to prepare a multinational submission for Arabic calligraphy. As a result, "Arabic Calligraphy: knowledge, skills, and practices" was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2021 in a joint file with 15 countries. King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah), the King Salman Global Academy for the Arabic Language, and the Ministry of Culture (through the "Our Heritage" program) are responsible for preserving and promoting this art. Their efforts include organizing exhibitions, calligraphy competitions, and training programs for the youth.



Arabic Coffee (Saudi Coffee)

Arabic coffee is a symbol of generosity and warm hospitality in Saudi and Arab culture. It was inscribed in 2015 on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage under the title "Arabic Coffee, a Symbol of Generosity," as part of a joint nomination between Saudi Arabia and several Gulf countries. The Heritage Authority (Ministry of Heritage) is responsible for this heritage in coordination with traditional farmers and coffee roasters. In 2022, the Ministry of Culture officially adopted the name "Saudi Coffee" to emphasize the distinctiveness of this element within the Saudi identity. The ministry has also launched several initiatives such as the "Year of Saudi Coffee 2022" and the "Al-Khawlani Coffee Festival" to celebrate coffee culture and support its local cultivation.



Saudi Khawlani Coffee Beans

Khawlani coffee is a premium type of coffee grown in the mountainous region of Jazan in southwestern Saudi Arabia (the Khulan mountains). It has a history of nearly eight centuries in that area. Khawlani coffee is distinguished by its small beans covered with an oily layer and its unique aroma. It is considered one of the most expensive coffee varieties worldwide due to its limited production and the difficulty of cultivating it on steep mountain terraces. The cultivation of Khawlani coffee is deeply connected to the mountain community's culture in Jazan, where farmers have passed down the skills from generation to generation. It has become the focus of popular festivals and traditional songs. Saudi Arabia successfully registered "The skills and knowledge associated with cultivating Saudi Khawlani coffee" on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2022. The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture are responsible for supporting Khawlani coffee farmers and preserving this agricultural heritage. For this purpose, the annual Saudi Khawlani Coffee Festival is held in Jazan.



Camel Heda'a

Camel Heda'a is an oral heritage art form rooted in Bedouin life, where camel herders chant melodic phrases and calls to communicate with their camels. The camels respond to the rhythm of the Heda'a by adjusting their pace, slowing down, calming, or speeding up, reflecting a deep bond between humans and camels. Heda'a is considered a form of improvised lyrical poetry passed down through generations of herders. Saudi Arabia, in collaboration with the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates, submitted a joint file for this tradition. "Camel Heda'a" was inscribed in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2022. The Saudi Camel Club and the Heritage Commission are responsible for documenting and preserving this tradition, as well as supporting its practitioners — poets and chanters — through annual events such as the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival.



Metal Engraving (Gold, Silver, and Copper)

The craft of engraving on precious metals is a decorative art and traditional industry that historically flourished in Saudi markets and cities. Artisans would engrave floral and geometric designs or beautiful Arabic calligraphy onto metal objects such as daggers, swords, jewelry, and doors. Saudi Arabia, in collaboration with several Arab countries including Yemen, Egypt, and others in the Maghreb region, submitted a joint file to register this traditional craft. As a result, the element titled "Arts, Skills, and Practices Related to Metal Engraving (Gold, Silver, and Copper)" was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2023, as part of a joint file with nine countries. The Heritage Commission supports local artisans in this field through training programs and craft markets. Additionally, the Handicrafts House Program under the Ministry of Culture is dedicated to preserving such traditional crafts and passing them on to a new generation of skilled practitioners.



2023

Harees Dish

Harees is a traditional popular dish widely known in parts of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region. In 2023, the “know-how, skills, and practices associated with preparing Harees” were inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as part of a joint file submitted by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman. The Ministry of Culture (Culinary Arts Commission) oversees the documentation of traditional Saudi recipes, including Harees, and supports initiatives aimed at passing down the cooking skills through television programs and heritage festivals such as the Traditional Foods Festival.



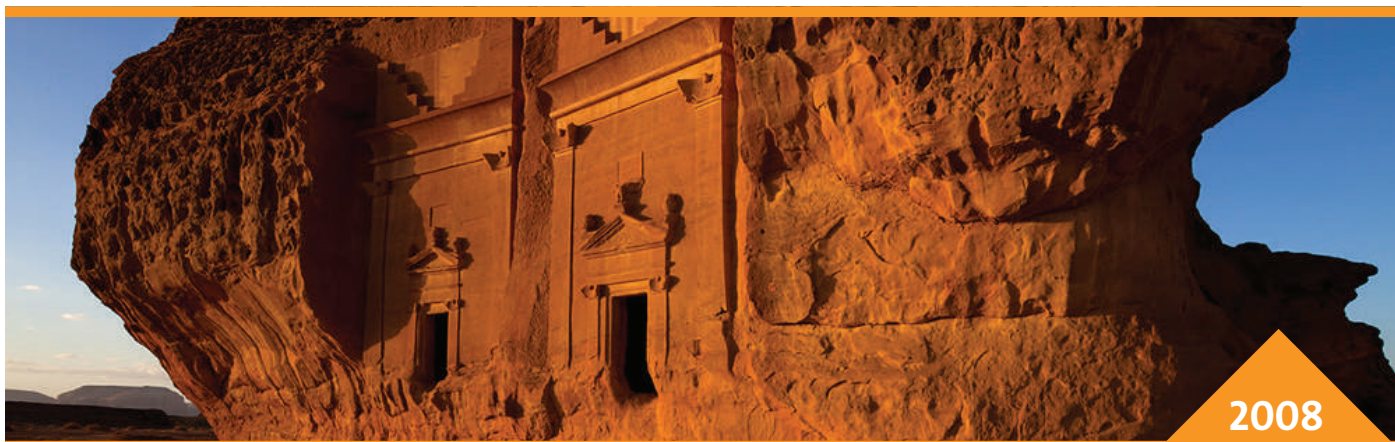
2024

Crafting and Playing the Semsemiah Instrument

The Semsemiah is a traditional string instrument resembling a small lyre, commonly found in coastal communities along Saudi Arabia’s Red Sea, particularly in the regions of Makkah and Jazan. It features five metal strings and is played with a plectrum, producing distinctive melodies that accompany traditional maritime songs. Saudi Arabia collaborated with the Arab Republic of Egypt to prepare a joint submission to register the craftsmanship and musical performance associated with the Semsemiah as intangible cultural heritage. These efforts culminated in the inscription of “The Crafting and Playing of the Semsemiah” on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2024, in partnership with Egypt. The Ministry of Culture, through the Music Commission, oversees initiatives to revive and promote this art form, including support for Semsemiah folk bands in Jeddah and along the western coast, as well as documentation of traditional instrument-making techniques by local artisans.



Cultural and Natural Heritage Sites Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List



Al-Hijr (Madain Saleh) Site

Al-Hijr, located in AlUla Governorate in northwest Saudi Arabia, was the first Saudi site inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2008. The site features monumental remains of the Nabataean civilization, including rock-cut tombs and ancient inscriptions.



Al-Turaif District in Historic Diriyah

Registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2010, Al-Turaif is the historic district that served as the seat of power for the First Saudi State in the 18th century. It includes mud-brick buildings and ancient palaces such as Salwa Palace and the Imam Mohammed bin Saud Mosque.



Cultural Practices Associated with Taif Rose

The Taif rose is a variety of Damask rose renowned in the city of Taif in western Saudi Arabia. Known for its fragrant aroma, it is used to produce some of the finest perfumes and rosewater. The cultivation of this rose and the production of its derivatives, such as rosewater and essential oil, have been integral to the cultural identity of Taif's residents for centuries. In 2024, Saudi Arabia successfully inscribed "The Cultural Practices Associated with Taif Rose" on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Ministry of Culture leads efforts to safeguard this heritage by supporting the annual Taif Rose Festival and documenting traditional farming and distillation methods, in cooperation with local farmers and agricultural institutions.



Henna Tattoo Traditions

The art of henna tattooing is a popular tradition practiced by women during celebratory occasions such as weddings and festivals. Hands and feet are decorated with henna paste in beautiful floral and geometric patterns symbolizing joy and optimism. Saudi Arabia, together with about 15 other Arab countries, jointly prepared a nomination file to register traditional henna practices. UNESCO recognized this element by inscribing the "Customs Related to Henna Tattooing" on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2024 as a multinational file. The Saudi Heritage Authority is dedicated to preserving the symbolic significance of henna, while women's associations organize training courses to develop henna tattooing skills among girls, ensuring the continuity of this traditional art.



Historic Jeddah

The old district of Jeddah on the Red Sea coast was inscribed in 2014. It represents an important historic port established during the era of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan to receive sea pilgrims. The area includes traditional houses, mosques, and markets dating back to the 19th century.



Rock Art Site in the Ha'il Region

This site includes Jabal Umm Sinman in Jubbah and Jabal Al-Manjor in Al-Shuwaymis, Ha'il. It was added to the World Heritage List in 2015. The site contains thousands of Thamudic rock carvings and drawings, some dating back to the 8th millennium BCE, making it one of the most important rock art sites worldwide.



Al-Ahsa Oasis

Registered in 2018 as the fifth Saudi site on the World Heritage List. Al-Ahsa is the largest natural palm oasis in the world. It boasts a rich agricultural and historical heritage spanning thousands of years, including archaeological sites such as historic mud-brick buildings and traditional markets.



Hima Cultural Area

A desert site located in the Najran region in southern Saudi Arabia, containing a collection of rock drawings, inscriptions, and ancient wells along caravan routes, dating back over 7,000 years. Hima was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2021 for representing a living record of ancient human art on the Arabian Peninsula's rocks.



‘Uruq Bani Ma’arid Reserve

A natural reserve located in the southern part of Saudi Arabia on the edge of the Empty Quarter (Rub’ al Khali). It is one of the richest areas in environmental and biological diversity. The reserve is home to rare and endangered species such as the Arabian oryx and the ostrich. It features stunning desert landscapes, sand dunes, and mountain ranges. ‘Uruq Bani Ma’arid was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2023 as the first natural site in Saudi Arabia to be globally recognized, due to its exceptional importance as a unique ecosystem in the Arabian Peninsula.



Al-Faw Archaeological Site

Al-Faw is located southwest of Riyadh near Wadi Al-Dawasir, and it’s one of the most important ancient commercial cities of the Kindah civilization. The site contains exceptionally well-preserved remains including dwellings, markets, wells, tombs carved into rock, and rock inscriptions that document daily life over two thousand years ago. Al-Faw was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2023 for its outstanding cultural value as a living witness to the history of trade and culture in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula.



References



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