

# list

TRAVEL • EXPLORE • ENCOUNTER



## The Launch Issue

+ Saudi Arabia and Beyond:  
An invitation into a world  
of travel and culture

### HOME & AWAY

Dreamy escapes  
+ staycations

### THE LOCAL'S LIST

The ultimate  
Abha guide

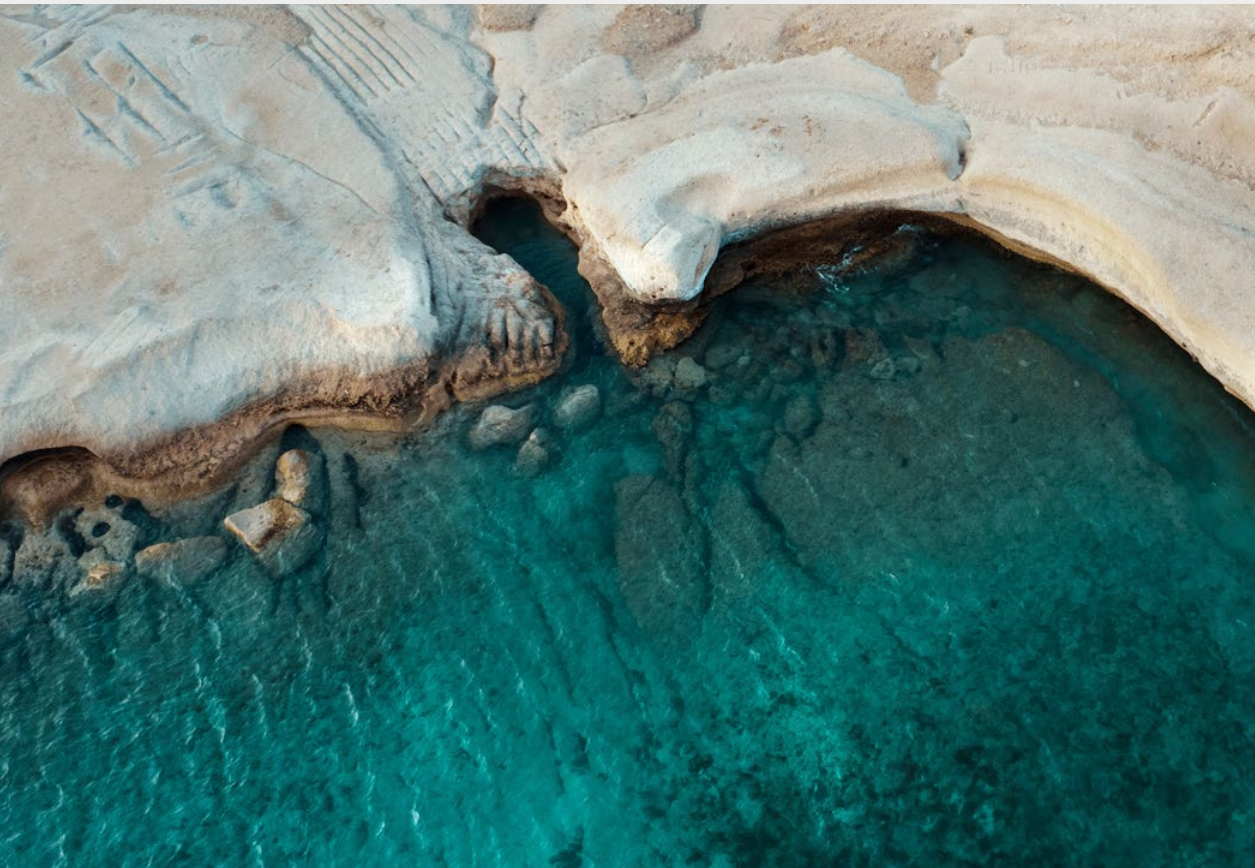
### SAUDI ART

An insider's look  
at the scene

### ADVENTURE

A cyclist travels  
through Saudi





**ARYAM ALALYANI**  
Abha, Saudi Arabia

Aryam is Abha's resident treasure hunter and storyteller. When she isn't busy capturing the charm of Abha's cosy cafés, she's sniffing out the picturesque city's best-kept secrets. She writes with a contagious passion for her hometown that will make you fall in love with Abha again and again (p.78).



**SARAH KHAN**  
New York, US

Sarah has reported from seven continents for the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and many other publications. While she's lived in six countries, her childhood in Jeddah has been the source of some of her most foundational memories (p.28). She returned to the Gulf as editor-in-chief of *Condé Nast Traveller Middle East*, but is now back in New York City, where she's a contributing editor at *Condé Nast Traveller* and *Robb Report*.



**IBRAHIM SARHAN**  
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Ibrahim is a photographer with a passion for capturing Saudi's raw beauty and unique cultures. Armed with his camera and an unrelenting sense of curiosity, he travels far and wide to document the untold stories of the people and the places that make up the captivating kingdom (p.78).



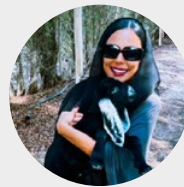
**PAUL HENDERSON**  
London, UK

A *British GQ* in-house writer and editor for 18 years, Paul specialises in motoring, travel, sport and health and fitness, as well as food and drink. He has written cover stories on David Beckham, Lewis Hamilton and Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson, with the latter letting slip that he might run for the next US presidency, causing a viral tsunami (he didn't). A regular Middle East visitor, Paul has written on Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Qatar – but thinks Saudi has the greatest roads (p.96).



**KATE HAZELL**  
Dubai, UAE

Originally from London, Kate has worked in Dubai's publishing industry for almost two decades, styling, editing and writing for titles such as *Harper's Bazaar Arabia*, *Sorbet* and *Esquire Middle East*. Kate has dressed and interviewed everyone from Naomi Campbell and Gwyneth Paltrow to Chris Evans and Liam Hemsworth – and thinks her AIUla wardrobe edit (p.42) would suit them all. 🌟



**PRINCESS RAGHAD ALSAUD**  
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

A seasoned traveller, photographer and savvy businesswoman, Princess Raghad is always on the move. She's an art enthusiast who finds peace and balance through yoga. A true Jeddawi at heart, she knows how to navigate the city's many secret spaces and takes pride in sharing them with others (p.32).



## PSARAGORA by Meraki

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# Growing up in Saudi

New York-based travel editor and writer Sarah Khan reflects on a childhood spent in Jeddah and how much things have changed in the place she called home

— TEXT  
Sarah Khan

Muted rays of sunshine melted into the sand around me as I hurtled down the dune one final time. I collapsed in exhilarated bliss at the bottom of the slope, a dusty cloud of contentment after hours of sandboarding. This afternoon had already shaped up to be one of the most memorable days of my life – and the sun hadn't even set yet. That night, after roasting marshmallows around a bonfire and watching a traditional Saudi sword dance after dinner, I drifted off to sleep on a cot lit softly by the moon, the wind whistling through the sand like the notes of a lullaby.

The third-grade desert campout was a seminal moment in the elementary school career of most students at Jeddah's North Campus School. Kindergarten, first, and second grades passed by in anticipation of the big night amid the dunes, and the final two years were spent reminiscing about it. Three decades later, I remember that one evening more vividly than I do most of my twenties. Some people like the beach, and others prefer the mountains, but when presented with a choice of scenic natural environs, my heart will always lure me toward a desert. This lifelong affinity for the dunes can likely be traced back to that singular night under the stars, and a sense of wonder and curiosity that continues to define me today.

I owe so much of who I am now to the 11 formative years I spent in Jeddah in the 1980s and Nineties. I like to say my childhood unfolded at 30,000 feet; most of those flights were aboard Saudia planes taking off from Jeddah's King Abdulaziz International Airport. I grew up crisscrossing the globe, thanks to my father's career as an engineer for Saudia, and visiting the offices of *Arab News* and *Saudi Gazette* with my mother, a journalist. In the ultimate tribute



"I owe so much of who I am now to the 11 formative years I spent in Jeddah in the 1980s and Nineties"





to their influence on my life, I’m now a travel journalist, reporting from seven continents for publications around the world.

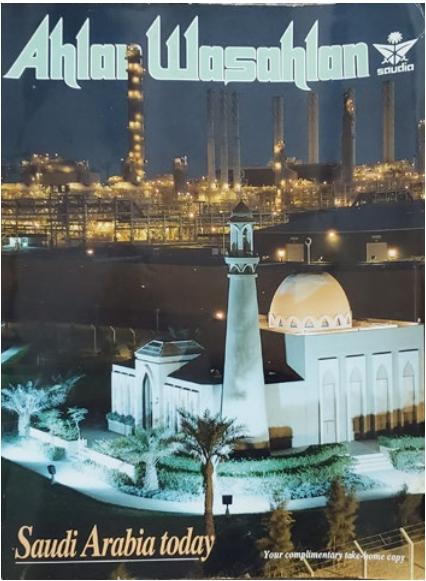
The Jeddah I remember was a charming coastal city, where events such as the star-studded Red Sea Film Festival and an adrenaline-spiking F1 race followed by a Justin Bieber concert were very much not a part of the social calendar. My childhood plays out in my mind in a series of celluloid-style vignettes: gazing at larger-than-life sculptures anchoring traffic roundabouts as we zoomed past; monthly road trips to Makkah and Medina; learning foreign slang from classmates from 50 countries during recess; collecting seashells on the beach with my Girl Scout troop; shopping at the glittering Fitaihi department store; strolling along the Corniche, ice cream in hand, pausing to watch the King Fahd Fountain soar toward the moon; and ordering crispy slices of muttabaq from a food stall after back-to-school shopping at Al Mokhtar.

I’ve gone on to live in six countries on three continents, but Saudi Arabia is perhaps the former home that elicits the most varied reactions. I can track how perceptions have evolved over the decades through people’s responses. Initially, news of my provenance was met with ignorance; later, there was uncertainty — “What’s it really like?”. These days, that question hasn’t changed, but the reason behind it has: with destinations like NEOM and AIUla flickering across billboards in Times Square, people now ask me with renewed curiosity, “What’s it really like?” And the only answer to that question is to see it for yourself.

Today, things have come a long way since a time when the arrival of Coca-Cola in the kingdom was met with such a surge of enthusiasm that purchases had to be limited to one six-pack per family. I’ve returned to my childhood home several times in the last five years, and in each visit I marvel anew. I had once trailed my mother through the maze-like lanes of Balad in the middle of the night with a photographer while she researched a story on Ramadan shopping; 30 years later, during my time as Editor in Chief of *Condé Nast Traveller Middle East*, I returned to the historic district to report a story of my own. I’ve always proudly showed friends my mother’s cover stories from *Ahlan Wasahlan*, Saudia’s in-flight magazine; on a 2017 visit to Makkah, I went to the very atelier my mother had once written about, where the kiswa



"I’ve always proudly showed friends my mother’s cover stories from Ahlan Wasahlan, Saudia’s in-flight magazine"



of the Kaaba is woven with pure gold and silver thread. As I paused to buy an ice cream cone for a nostalgic solo stroll along the Corniche last year, the familiar stepped façade of the Jamjoom Center caught my eye; when I turned in the other direction, there stood the fountain that had loomed so formidably over my childhood.

But what strikes me the most about my recent forays back to the kingdom is that even amid the relentless swirl of changes, so much remains resolutely the same. Jeddah may have welcomed a host of gleaming new attractions, but visually it’s very much the place anchored in my memories, with a comfortingly familiar cityscape and many of the icons of my childhood still intact – including my school and my home in the Saudia City compound. The quintessential sense of Saudi hospitality that made me feel so welcome throughout my time in the country hasn’t changed, except for the fact that so many more people are now fortunate enough to have the chance to experience it. And while the Grand Mosque in Makkah may have expanded since my frequent pilgrimages in the 80s, the sense of peace I always felt there still persists.

What has changed, however, is the sense of boundless opportunity – thanks to new innovations, new attractions and new guests. There are women driving motorcycles and young Saudis, male and female alike, training as tour guides to share their rich culture and storied traditions with the world. Summer tours through Switzerland, spring break in Egypt and regular jaunts to India and the US to visit family may have been par for the course when I was growing up, but at that time, our idyllic life back in Saudi felt like a secret kept from the world. Today, the secret is out. 🌍