

Information about Dhahran and Al Khobar

Introduction

Dhahran is a city in eastern Saudi Arabia and its oil capital. Dhahran lies about 14 kilometers south of Dammam which is the administrative capital of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom's major commercial port along the Arabian Gulf. The King Fahad International Airport, nearly 40 kilometers outside Dammam is one of the main gateways to the Eastern Province. Ten kilometers to the east of Dhahran lies the commercially bustling city of Al Khobar, a favorite shopping destination for visitors to the area. Al Khobar is home to two large shopping malls (Al Rashid Mall and Dhahran Mall) and hundreds of shops, parks and restaurants.

Dhahran sits inland from Dammam and Khobar, atop a broad and flat hill (elevation 146 feet). The hill is the surface expression of the Dammam Dome and is where the first oil explorers in Saudi Arabia struck commercial oil deposits in 1938. In the course of the discovery of oil, an "oil town" slowly took form near the apex of the dome. Today Dhahran includes the Saudi Aramco headquarters, facilities and company housing. Housing developments and suburbs have sprung up around the Saudi Aramco facilities mainly triggered by generous company home ownership programs for its Saudi Arab employees. Dhahran is also home of the King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals, the "MIT of Saudi Arabia", a large US Consulate compound and a Royal Saudi Airbase. A second large university, King Faisal University, is situated along the coast between Dammam and Al Khobar. Just north of Dammam is the lush mega oasis of Al Qatif which is home to several cities, towns and villages. At the end of a spit to the northeast of Qatif is the Saudi Aramco refinery of Ras Tanura and another company town.

The Dammam-Dhahran-Khobar tri-city area is linked to the island nation Kingdom of Bahrain by an impressive 26 kilometer long causeway.

Activities in the Eastern Province

The weekend is Thursday and Friday. Business firms and banks are open on Thursday morning. Almost all banks offer 24-hour ATM card service. Most shops and companies begin their workday at 9:00 and close around 1:00PM or 2:00PM. They then re-open at 4:00PM or 5:00PM and the shops stay open until 10:00PM or 11:00PM. All places of business will close five times a day for prayer. The prayer times change daily and are published in the local newspaper. During Ramadan, the shops are closed (grocery stores are open) during the day, open at 9:00 or 10:00PM and close at 1:00 or 2:00AM.

Here you will find some items typical of the region, e.g., handicraft and gold. Also there are items imported from India, Pakistan, the Far East and Europe. Many items, especially gold, are less expensive. The souq is where you will find fabrics, clothing, shoes, spices and household items.

Be sure to ask for a discount in all small retail shops. The only shops with fixed prices are groceries stores, the European / American stores (such as British Home Stores) and some shops in the large malls. However, no one is offended if you ask for a discount and sometimes you'll be surprised.

The traditional souqs still expect the customer to haggle over the price. Don't be inhibited. Take your time, keep cool, and enjoy tea if it's offered. Bargaining is a social event. Returns and exchanges are not allowed in many stores. Few stores have dressing rooms for women to try on clothes. If you ask before you buy it, you may get permission to return it if it does not fit. Please bear in mind that clothing sizes do vary between European and US standard sizes.

The following links will direct you to popular malls in eastern province:

<http://www.dhahranshoppingcity.com/>

<http://www.alrashidmall.com/royal-doulton/index.htm>

http://www.abdulla-fouad.com/fouad_center.htm

Weather

Dhahran weather information is available through this link:

<http://weather.msn.com/local.aspx?wealocations=wc:SAXX0021>