



Practical Resources for Teachers, Students & Expats

The Complete Expat Guide to

Living & Working in Saudi Arabia

Everything you need to know before you make the move, from someone who has lived it for 10+ years.

- 10+ Years of Real Expat Experience
- Salary Ranges & Negotiation Tips
- Housing, Culture & Daily Life
- Savings Strategies That Actually Work
- Common Mistakes Expats Make

Salary Ranges for Educators

Position	Monthly Salary (SAR)	Approx. CAD
ESL Teacher (Private School)	8,000 to 10,000	\$3,000 to \$3,700
ESL Teacher (International School)	10,000 to 15,000 or more	\$3,700 to \$5,500
ESL Teacher (University)	15,000 to 20,000	\$5,500 to \$7,400
Technical Institute Instructor	16,000 to 25,000	\$5,900 to \$9,300
Senior Teacher / HOD	18,000 to 25,000	\$6,700 to \$9,200
Academic Coordinator	20,000 to 28,000	\$7,400 to \$10,400

Note: These salaries are approximate ranges, not fixed figures. Actual pay varies with the employer, the city and your qualifications. Exchange rate approximated at 1 SAR = 0.37 CAD. Rates fluctuate, so check current rates before negotiating.

School salaries vary a great deal. Pay depends on the type of school, whether you teach primary, middle or high school, and your qualifications. Many private schools pay around SAR 8,000 to 10,000 a month, even for ESL teachers. Good international schools can reach SAR 15,000 or more, although that figure often includes benefits. At the top British and American curriculum schools, teachers with a PGCE and a teaching licence can earn more again. University, senior teacher and head of department ranges are more consistent. Before you accept a school offer, ask the school what is included in the total and speak to teachers already working there.

Technical colleges and institutes, including those that teach military students, tend to sit at the higher end of the market, with some positions paying more than universities. These roles are fewer and can come with stricter requirements. Research the specific employer and confirm the figures in writing before you rely on them.

The monthly figures above are all-inclusive, meaning housing and transport are already counted in them. As a guide, housing is usually worth about three months of salary a year and transport about 10% of your annual salary, so a good part of the total is allowance rather than basic pay. Some employers provide accommodation instead, either in a compound or in a local neighbourhood. In that case there is no housing allowance, because the housing itself is the benefit, so ask which arrangement applies to your offer. Annual flights are a common part of expat contracts, but they come from your contract rather than from Saudi labour law, so they only apply if they are written in. Under a family contract this is commonly return tickets for two adults and two children, and under a single contract it is one return ticket for you. Most employers give you the choice of having the tickets bought for you or receiving the cost of the flights as a payment. Confirm in writing who is covered and which option applies to you. When you compare offers, make sure you compare like with like, and ask for the basic salary and each allowance to be set out in writing.

Section 3: Arriving in Saudi Arabia

Your First Week Checklist

- Collect your work visa documents and keep copies of everything
- Report to your employer HR department on day one
- Begin Iqama processing: your employer handles this but follow up regularly
- Get a Saudi SIM card: STC, Mobily, and Zain all offer good coverage
- Open a Saudi bank account: Al Rajhi, SABB, and Riyadh Bank are popular with expats
- Download essential apps: Absher (government services), Tawakkalna, Careem, HungerStation
- Get familiar with your neighbourhood and nearest essentials
- Connect with other expats: Facebook groups and compound communities are helpful

Phone and Internet

STC, Mobily and Zain are the three main providers. Smaller providers include Virgin Mobile, Lebara, Salam Mobile, Friendi Mobile and Red Bull Mobile, which can be cheaper, so compare plans and coverage in your area. On arrival you can buy a prepaid SIM using your visa number and passport details, which is the usual way to get connected in your first days. A monthly postpaid plan is only available once you have your Iqama, so most new arrivals stay on prepaid until it is issued and then switch if they want a postpaid plan. For home internet, STC, Mobily, Zain, Salam and GO all offer fibre, although which of them is available depends on your building and neighbourhood. Ask your landlord, compound manager or HR which provider serves your building before you sign up, and check whether your employer already provides internet as part of your housing.

Getting Around

Saudi Arabia has changed significantly in recent years. Uber and Careem (the regional equivalent) operate widely in all major cities and are reliable and affordable. Many expats never need to drive.

If you plan to drive, your home country driving licence is valid for a limited period. You will eventually need to convert it to a Saudi driving licence. Your employer or HR department can guide you through this process.

Driving, Car Care and Emergencies

If you buy a car, expect to drive far more than you did back home, so service it more often. Oil changes and tyres need attention sooner than you might expect, and regular servicing with a mechanic you trust is cheaper than a breakdown. If you buy second hand from a private seller, always have a mechanic inspect the car before you pay. For repairs you can choose original parts or cheaper aftermarket parts, and labour is cheaper than in most Western countries, but the quality depends entirely on who does the work.

Vehicles must pass a periodic technical inspection called **Fahas** to keep their registration valid, so check the current requirements for your car. Driving styles can feel assertive compared with home, so drive defensively. If you are in a minor accident, the **Najm** app is the official way to report it for insurance purposes, and the report is normally needed to make a claim. Download it before you need it.