

Studying in Saudi Arabia

A guide for international students & families — how Saudi higher education works, the student visa and Iqama, fully-funded government scholarships, English research, and the rules.

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FULLY-FUNDED SCHOLARSHIPS, ENGLISH RESEARCH, TAX-FREE

Saudi Arabia is emerging fast as an education hub under **Vision 2030**, offering **fully-funded government scholarships (free tuition, stipend, housing, airfare), English-taught research at KAUST and KFUPM, and no income tax**. Over 120,000 international students now study there. Your **university sponsors your student visa**, which becomes an **Iqama (residence permit)** on arrival. This guide walks it in **ten steps**.

General guidance, not legal or immigration advice. Saudi rules are changing rapidly under Vision 2030; tuition, scholarships, and requirements vary. The details here are recent examples and **must be confirmed with the Study in Saudi platform, your university, and the Ministry of Education**.

Understand Why Students Choose Saudi Arabia

WHAT TO KNOW

Saudi Arabia offers **fully-funded government scholarships** (often making study free), **world-class English-taught research** (KAUST, KFUPM), **no income tax**, and a **rapidly modernizing society under Vision 2030** — with generous support for international students.

BY THE NUMBERS

Fully-funded

government scholarships

English research

KAUST, KFUPM

Tax-free

+ Vision 2030

HOW TO HELP

Weigh Saudi Arabia's **generous funding and strong research** against a conservative social context — for funded STEM/research especially, it's outstanding value.

GOOD TO KNOW

Many public universities admit international students **on a scholarship that makes tuition free** — plus a stipend, housing, and airfare.

Understand the System

WHAT TO KNOW

Leading universities include **King Saud (KSU — Riyadh)**, **King Abdulaziz (KAU — Jeddah)**, **KFUPM (Dhahran — global top 100, energy/engineering)**, and **KAUST (Thuwal — English, research-only)**, plus the Islamic University of Madinah and private universities (Alfaisal, Prince Sultan, Effat).

BY THE NUMBERS

KSU / KAU

public giants

KFUPM

top-100, energy/eng

KAUST

English research (grad)

HOW TO HELP

Choose by field and level — **KAUST/KFUPM** for English-taught research and STEM, **KSU/KAU** for breadth, private universities for English undergrad — and confirm accreditation.

WATCH OUT

KAUST is an English-medium, research-only graduate university with generous funding — **KFUPM** is a global top-100 for energy and engineering.

Get the Student Visa & Iqama

WHAT TO KNOW

You **don't apply alone**: after admission, your **university sponsors your student visa through the Ministry of Education**. After arriving, you complete a **medical exam and receive your Iqama (residence permit) — typically within 90 days**. Bring a valid passport (6+ months), acceptance letter, medical report, and police clearance.

BY THE NUMBERS

University sponsors

via Ministry of Education

Iqama

within 90 days

Medical + police

clearances

HOW TO HELP

Let your **university sponsor your student visa** (via the Ministry of Education), then complete your **medical exam and Iqama** within 90 days of arrival.

GOOD TO KNOW

The student visa **becomes your Iqama** after arrival — complete it promptly (typically within 90 days); it's renewed annually.

Apply to Universities (or KAUST)

WHAT TO KNOW

Apply **directly to each university or to KAUST** — there's no single national portal (though the "Study in Saudi" platform helps). The main intake is in **autumn** (on the Hijri calendar); KAUST runs its own cycle. Start **9–12 months ahead**, as major scholarships have firm deadlines.

BY THE NUMBERS

Apply directly

or via Study in Saudi

Autumn intake

(Hijri calendar)

9–12 months ahead

for scholarships

HOW TO HELP

Apply **directly** to universities or KAUST for the autumn intake, starting **9–12 months ahead** to meet firm scholarship deadlines.

GOOD TO KNOW

Major scholarships have **firm, early deadlines** — start 9–12 months before your intended intake.

Plan for Tuition & Scholarships

WHAT TO KNOW

The headline: study can be **free**. Many public universities (KSU, KAU, KFUPM) admit international students on a **Saudi Government Scholarship** — **free tuition plus a stipend, housing, and airfare**. **KAUST** fully funds graduate students (tuition, ~\$20,000–30,000 stipend, housing). Private universities ~SAR 40,000–80,000/year.

BY THE NUMBERS

Public + scholarship

free tuition

KAUST

fully funded (grad)

Private

~SAR 40k–80k/yr

HOW TO HELP

Pursue the **fully-funded Saudi Government Scholarship** (free tuition, stipend, housing, airfare) or **KAUST/KFUPM funding** — or budget private-university fees if self-funding.

GOOD TO KNOW

The **Saudi Government Scholarship** (across many public universities) covers tuition, a stipend, housing, health insurance, and travel — making study effectively free.

Meet the Financial Requirement

WHAT TO KNOW

For **scholarship students**, **funding is covered** (stipend, housing, insurance, travel). **Self-funded** students show proof of funds for tuition and living (living costs from ~SAR 2,500/month). There's **no personal income tax**. Confirm exactly what your scholarship covers before you commit.

BY THE NUMBERS

Scholarship

covers funding

Self-funded

show proof of funds

No income tax

in the Kingdom

HOW TO HELP

If on a **scholarship**, funding is covered; if **self-funding**, prepare proof of funds for tuition and living — and confirm exactly what any scholarship includes.

GOOD TO KNOW

Confirm **what your scholarship covers** before committing — government scholarships are generous but terms vary by university.



Meet Language Requirements

WHAT TO KNOW

Most undergraduate teaching is in **Arabic**, but **KAUST, KFUPM, and private universities teach widely in English** (and English is common in medicine, engineering, sciences, CS, and business). For English programs you prove English (e.g., IELTS 5.0+/TOEFL 500+); Arabic-taught programs need Arabic.

BY THE NUMBERS

Arabic

much undergrad teaching

English

KAUST, KFUPM, more

Proof

IELTS/TOEFL

HOW TO HELP

Confirm your program's language — choose **English-taught** study (KAUST, KFUPM, private, or medicine/engineering) or prepare **Arabic** for Arabic-taught programs — and prove English where required.

GOOD TO KNOW

KAUST, KFUPM, and private universities teach widely in English — the main English-medium routes; much undergraduate teaching elsewhere is in Arabic.

Prepare for the Move

WHAT TO KNOW

After arriving, complete your **iqama, medical exam, and banking**. Be prepared for a **conservative society** — modest dress, prayer times, no alcohol — amid ongoing Vision 2030 reforms; many universities have **separate campuses for female students**. Saudis are known for warm hospitality.

BY THE NUMBERS

Iqama + medical

first tasks

Conservative society

modest dress, no alcohol

Warm hospitality

toward students

HOW TO HELP

Complete arrival admin (**iqama, medical, banking**), and prepare for a **conservative but welcoming society** — modest dress, prayer times, no alcohol, often gender-separate campuses.

WATCH OUT

Society is **conservative** (modest dress, prayer times, no alcohol), with ongoing reforms — many universities have separate campuses for female students. Plan accordingly.

Understand Work Rules

WHAT TO KNOW

Focus on your studies: student work options are **restricted**, and scholarship students are primarily expected to study — confirm the current rules with your university before any paid activity. Scholarships are designed so you don't need to work.

BY THE NUMBERS

Work

restricted — confirm

Scholarship students

expected to study

Confirm

before any work

HOW TO HELP

Treat work as **restricted**: confirm the rules with your university, and note that scholarships are designed to cover your costs so you don't need to work.

WATCH OUT

Confirm the **current work rules** with your university — scholarship funding is designed so you can focus on studies.

Thrive & Work After Study

WHAT TO KNOW

Vision 2030 is creating strong opportunities in **innovation hubs** like **Riyadh and Dhahran** (energy, tech, AI, finance, healthcare). International graduates can explore internships and roles as the Kingdom actively recruits global talent — confirm the current post-study work-visa pathway.

BY THE NUMBERS

Vision 2030

Riyadh, Dhahran hubs

Sectors

energy, tech, AI, finance

Post-study

confirm work pathway

HOW TO HELP

Leverage Vision 2030's **innovation hubs** (Riyadh, Dhahran) and the Kingdom's push for global talent, and confirm the current **post-study work-visa pathway** if you want to stay.

GOOD TO KNOW

Saudi Arabia is **actively recruiting global talent** under Vision 2030 — confirm the current post-study work-visa process for your field.

Studying in Saudi Arabia: The Essentials

A snapshot — rules are changing fast under Vision 2030, so confirm everything with the Study in Saudi platform, your university, and the Ministry of Education.

The system

King Saud (KSU), King Abdulaziz (KAU), KFUPM (top-100, energy/engineering), KAUST (English research-only graduate university), Islamic University of Madinah, and private universities (Alfaisal, Prince Sultan, Effat).

Visa & Iqama

The university sponsors your student visa via the Ministry of Education; on arrival, complete a medical exam and receive your Iqama (residence permit, within 90 days), renewed annually.

Tuition & scholarships

Often free: the Saudi Government Scholarship (many public universities) covers tuition, stipend, housing, and airfare; KAUST/KFUPM fully fund graduate students; private ~SAR 40k–80k/year.

Money & language

Scholarships cover funding; self-funded students prove funds (living from ~SAR 2,500/month); no income tax; teaching in Arabic, with English widely at KAUST, KFUPM, and in STEM (IELTS/TOEFL).

Context & after

A conservative but welcoming society (modest dress, prayer times, no alcohol; often gender-separate campuses); post-study opportunities in Riyadh/Dhahran — confirm the work pathway.

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