

RED, WHITE, & BLUE *SEA SANDS SERIES*

AN AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES NEWSLETTER

• *October - December 2017* •



*U.S. EMBASSY
RIYADH*

American Citizen Services Public Hours:
Sunday - Thursday, 1:00pm-3:00pm
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*U.S. CONSULATE
GENERAL JEDDAH*

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GENERAL DHAHRAN*

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Letter from the Minister Counselor



Sean Murphy is the new Consul General in Riyadh and Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs in Saudi Arabia. He arrived in the Kingdom in August 2017.

It is my pleasure to introduce myself to the American community in Saudi Arabia. I would also like to express my gratitude to my predecessor, Virginia Ramadan, for all the good work she did on behalf of American citizens during her time in Riyadh.

I have spent the bulk of my career in Latin America, as Consul General in places such as Mexico City and Havana, but this is my third assignment in the Middle East. I served as Consul in Kuwait from 2002-2004 and served as Consul General in Cairo for the three years prior to my assignment in Riyadh. I am very familiar with the particular challenges the American community faces in this part of the world. I look forward to working with the American Citizen Services teams at the Embassy and at the Consulates General in Jeddah and Dhahran, to provide American citizens world-class routine consular services, such as passports and reports of birth abroad, while also paying close attention to the security and emergency preparedness concerns that are particularly acute in this region. With this later point in mind, I strongly encourage all American citizens to carefully review the recently-updated [Travel Warning for Saudi Arabia](#).

I am very pleased to be in Saudi Arabia and look forward to meeting and working with many of you over the next two years. And thank you for what you do every day representing the best of our country to the people of Saudi Arabia.

Sean Murphy

RIYADH ROUND UP

ACS TOWN HALL



The American Citizen Services (ACS) unit in Riyadh hosted their annual Town Hall for U.S. Citizens on September 21st. With the school year starting in the Kingdom and everyone returning from summer vacation, the ACS unit wanted to take the time to reconnect with U.S. citizens in the district and introduce ourselves to new arrivals.

The event was kicked off by a speech from the Acting Deputy Chief of Mission, John Godfrey, followed by an introduction of the new Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs, Sean Murphy. The Embassy's Regional Security Office gave an update on the security situation in Saudi Arabia and discussed the importance of emergency preparedness. The ACS team gave an overview of the services we provide to U.S. citizens and the evening wrapped up with a panel discussion on the current economic climate in Saudi Arabia. Participants on the panel included the Embassy's Deputy Economic Counselor, the U.S. Department of Treasury Financial Attaché, an Officer from the Foreign Commercial Service, and the Chairman of the American Business Group of Riyadh (ABGR).

WARDEN CRISIS EXERCISE

Crisis preparedness is one of our top priorities. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates would play a key role in assisting U.S. citizens in the event of a crisis in Saudi Arabia. In an effort to strengthen our response to an emergency overseas, the ACS unit in Riyadh held a Warden Crisis Exercise on October 17th. At the event, our Wardens heard from the Chargé d'Affaires, Chris Henzel, and then were led through a table-top crisis management exercise by our new Consul General, Sean Murphy. Mr. Murphy led the wardens through various crisis scenarios in which the Embassy may ask for their assistance, and answered questions about the Embassy's role versus the Warden's role in possible emergencies. A huge thank you to all the Wardens who participated in this event.



We are working to improve our current Warden System and this meeting was an important step in that direction. What is a warden?

- A private American citizen resident in a foreign country who volunteers to assist consular sections in disaster preparedness, welfare & whereabouts, and alerting fellow Americans to emergency situations.
- Wardens often have close ties to the U.S. expat community; therefore they are often the fastest and most effective route to distributing information to Americans and are essential when normal communication channels fail.
- They facilitate distribution of routine administrative information (changes in section work hours, procedures, embassy closures, and voting information) of interest to the U.S. private community
- Wardens provide important, timely safety and security information, which might include the times and locations of upcoming local demonstrations, areas of potential unrest due to local celebrations or elections, or information about a specific medical issue.

We are currently looking for volunteers to serve as Wardens in the following compounds: Arizona, California, Nakhla, Nakheel, Kingdom, Salwa, KAPSARC, and Green City. If you are interested, please email RiyadhACS@state.gov for more information.

Happenings in Jeddah

A Successful Hajj

According to the Saudi Arabian government and local hajj travel agencies, 2,352,122 pilgrims performed hajj this year between August 30 and September 4, including 20,283 American citizens and legal permanent residents. Between the arrival of pilgrims in late August and their departure following the hajj, Jeddah consular officers and American Citizen Services (ACS) locally employed staff, in coordination

with the Marine Security Guards at post fielded hundreds of phone calls from American citizens. Consul General Matthias Mitman greeted hundreds of American pilgrims arriving in Jeddah to perform hajj on Wednesday, August 30th at King Abdulaziz International Airport while U.S. Consulate General Jeddah staff handed out cards with emergency contact information for U.S. citizens.



Town Hall for U.S. Citizens

The Jeddah consular section hosted a Town Hall for U.S. citizens at the U.S. Consulate General on Tuesday, October 10th. Consul General Matthias Mitman, Consular Chief Johann Schmonsees, and ACS Chief Jason Gallian addressed the community and gave an overview of services that we provide to U.S. citizens living in the consular district. The American citizens in attendance were given the opportunity to ask questions, which covered a range of topics from the new American school to social security. Jeddah ACS looks forward to holding these Town Halls semi-annually.



Consul General Matthias Mitman answers questions from U.S. citizens at the Town Hall at the U.S. Consulate General Jeddah.



American Citizen Services staff assisted in facilitating the Town Hall at the U.S. Consulate General Jeddah. Their expertise has assisted countless U.S. citizens in the Jeddah consular district.

DHAHRAN NEWS

CONSUL GENERAL RACHNA KORHONEN WELCOMES WARDENS

On September 27th over 40 American Citizens Services (ACS) wardens attended the monthly Warden Wednesday Meeting at the U.S. Consulate General in Dhahran. Rachna Korhonen, who recently took the reins as the new U.S. Consul General (CG), welcomed the wardens and thanked them for their support (picture below). Rachna is a career member of the U.S. Foreign Service and the first woman to be appointed to the position of U.S. Consul General in Dhahran. The ACS wardens mingled with the CG and Consular Officers and engaged in a lively discussion about issues that impact American citizens and their families living in the Kingdom.



ACS TEAM LEVERAGES INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR CRISIS PREPAREDNESS

Given the evolving security situation in the Eastern Province, the ACS team conducted several tests of its Warden Messaging System (WMS) utilizing a wide variety of technology tools. The ACS team has taken an innovative approach to crisis management and crisis preparedness by employing a potpourri of technology, partnerships, communication strategies, and crisis exercises. The ACS wardens, who support our mission in promoting the safety and welfare of American citizens in the Eastern Province, play an important role in our crisis management efforts. In recent weeks, we have sent out a survey to all ACS Wardens, tested the emergency messaging system, and put in plans for a crisis management tabletop exercise for all wardens. Plans are afoot to build a warden skills/resources database and utilize Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for crisis management.

DHAHRAN ACS STEPS-UP OUTREACH SERVICES ACROSS THE EASTERN PROVINCE

Over the last quarter, the Dhahran ACS team stepped up their outreach services by traveling to the International Schools Group (ISG) in Jubail and several Aramco locations in the Eastern Province (picture below). The team was warmly welcomed at all the locations. "Aramcons" turned out in significant numbers to renew their U.S. passports, apply for new passports and Consulate Report of Birth Abroad certificates, and get their documents notarized. Deputy Consular Chief Brian Santhumayor took the opportunity to encourage all Americans living in the Eastern Province to register in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) and take advantage of the free online resources provided by the U.S. government.



A BUSY QUARTER KEEPS THE ACS TEAM ON THEIR TOES

The ACS team experienced a spike in both non-emergency citizen services and emergency citizen services. By utilizing a flexible and adaptive model for staffing and scheduling, the team was able to keep the wait-time for ACS appointments to next business day. The team forged new relationships and enhanced existing relationships with the local Saudi authorities and other entities. With help from our colleagues across mission Saudi Arabia and in Bahrain, the team was able to successfully resolve several welfare and whereabouts cases and enable the safe return of an incarcerated American to the U.S. The ACS Team has stepped up their efforts to provide information about resources available to American women and children in domestic abuse cases. The feedback has been very positive. The ACS team also successfully repatriated in a short time-frame the remains of three Americans who passed away in Eastern Province. This was made possible with the active cooperation and collaboration of the local Saudi authorities, hospitals, employers, and a number of other entities. In the coming months, the Dhahran ACS team will endeavor to scale new frontiers with its outreach programs.

SOCIAL SECURITY SERVICES

As of October 1, 2017, the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh and the U.S. Consulates in Dhahran and Jeddah can no longer accept telephone calls, emails, or walk-in consultations regarding Social Security issues. For those individuals residing in Saudi Arabia who have need of these services provided by the Social Security Administration (SSA), you must contact the SSA Federal Benefits Unit (FBU) located at Embassy Rome. For more information on their services and how to contact them, please visit their webpage. You can also reach them by phone at +39-06-4674-5929 or email FBU.Rome@ssa.gov.

Please note that if you are already receiving SSA benefits payments, there will be no change in the method of distribution of those payments.

For comprehensive information on SSA's services abroad, please visit SSA's webpage [Service Around the World](#).

For more information on Social Security benefits, please visit the [Social Security Administration's website](#).



TRAVEL WARNING



The U.S. Department of State's travel warning for Saudi Arabia has been updated. You can find it at travel.state.gov.

EMERGENCY PLANNING

Whether traveling or living outside of the United States, it is always important to be prepared for a potential crisis. A crisis could manifest in various forms, such as a natural disaster, civil/political unrest, a major pandemic, or a terrorist attack. These events have the potential to cause major airport shutdowns, disruption and hardships for U.S. citizens, and even injury and death. Here are some tips about what you can do to prepare yourself and your family for a potential crisis:

MAKE A PLAN

- Make a family communication plan. The plan should include alternative means of communication in case phones are not working. Establish meeting points where your family can convene safely in an emergency. Be sure to include your children in the planning.
- Have a two week supply of food (non-perishable) and water for each member of your household – don't forget your pets! Emergency kits should also include medical supplies, clothing, sources of electricity, flashlights, radio, first-aid kit, and communications equipment. Don't forget games/activities for children. Check your kits at least annually.
- Keep a list of your emergency contacts handy.
- Have an exit strategy! Know how you'll get out of harm's way without needing to rely on assistance – a crisis may prevent or delay emergency responders' ability to get to you.



KNOW YOUR SURROUNDINGS

- Monitor your local news. Stay up to date on issues and changes happening in country.
- The **U.S. Department of State's travel website** provides up-to-date information about country specific threat, crime and safety, health, and visa information.
- Be sure to know how to get around – a crisis event may make some roads unpassable or unsafe. Get a current map that you can use if you don't have access to the internet.
- You can review the different warning sirens used in emergencies in Saudi Arabia on the **General Directorate of Civil Defense's website**.

BE PREPARED TO LEAVE

- Make sure your passport has plenty of validity. We recommend at least 6 months and two or more blank pages. Don't forget to check your children's passports! You can find information about renewing passports on **our website**.
- Be sure your iqama is also valid.
- Create an emergency go-bag for each member of your family that includes your passports, birth abroad certificates for children born overseas, cash in the local currency, cell phone with charger, copies of personal documents (school documents, medical records, etc), and extra clothing. If you have pets, be sure to have their vaccination records.
- If you take medication, make sure to have at least seven days' worth at any given time and have a copy of your prescriptions handy.

HOW CAN THE U.S. EMBASSY & CONSULATES ASSIST IN A CRISIS ABROAD?



We can distribute important information to U.S. citizens. The Department of State is bound by the “No Double Standard” policy which states that if there is threat information that the Department feels should be distributed to employees, the information must also be distributed to all affected U.S. citizens. There are lots of ways to keep informed about what is happening.

- **Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP):** Enroll online with the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh (or Consulates in Jeddah/Dhahran depending on where you live) through the U.S. Department of State’s Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). Through STEP you will receive emails from us about current safety conditions as well as receive emergency messages.
- **Social Media:** Follow us on Twitter @KSA_ACS for up-to-date information, particularly in an emergency.
- **Warden Program:** Wardens are volunteers who can facilitate communication between the Embassy and the local U.S. expat community in the event of an emergency. Area wardens share information about changes in threat information and services and help coordinate accountability and evacuations.

We can provide passport services. In an emergency, the Embassy/Consulates can issue emergency travel documents.

We can provide financial assistance. In certain situations the Embassy/Consulates can provide small loans to assist with repatriation to the United States.

We can assist with evacuations. In the event that the Embassy evacuates, U.S. citizens may also be provided evacuation assistance at a reimbursable cost.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON WHAT WE CAN AND CAN'T DO IN A CRISIS, VISIT [TRAVEL.STATE.GOV](https://travel.state.gov).

Ever wonder what we do in a crisis?

HERE'S HOW CONSULAR AFFAIRS RESPONDED TO THE RECENT HURRICANES

HURRICANE ASSISTANCE

U.S. Department of State | Bureau of Consular Affairs



The safety and security of U.S. citizens overseas is one of our highest priorities. During Hurricanes Irma, Jose, Maria, and their aftermath, we provided emergency consular services to U.S. citizens in need and updated information to U.S. citizens in the area through security and emergency messages on TravelGov's social media sites, travel.state.gov, and Embassy websites.



More than **2,600**
people evacuated



Responded to over **2,800**
inquiries on the welfare and
whereabouts of American citizens



Posted 175
Facebook messages
reaching people
2.1 MILLION
times



663 messages
tweeted reaching
people
11.95 MILLION
times



Deployed **67**
consular employees
to support hurricane
response efforts in
the Caribbean



58,568 views on
travel.state.gov
hurricane crisis
page



SAUDI ARABIA WEATHER ALERT

As winter nears in Saudi Arabia, so does the chance for flooding. In past years, the country has seen heavy rainfall, high winds and rough seas around this time. Rainfall can lead to flooding and create dangerous situations that have resulted in casualties in the past. High winds may also carry dust, limiting visibility. Travel by car may be unsafe in such an event, and flights may be cancelled.

This is a good time to weatherproof your home, clear drains and gutters, and dig your umbrellas and rain boots out of the closet. Heavy rainfall can cause water levels to rise quickly, resulting in flooding in the streets and in homes.

The national weather authority in Saudi Arabia is the **Presidency of Meteorology and Environmental Protection** and you can track your city's weather forecast by visiting their website.

All Americans are urged to assess their emergency preparedness. It's best to be prepared for inclement weather by organizing a kit in a waterproof container that includes a supply of bottled water, non-perishable food items, a battery-powered or hand-crank radio, any medications taken regularly, and vital documents (especially your passport and other identification). The **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** has additional tips on their website.

Conditions and weather patterns may change quickly. Monitor radio, other local media, and online weather information services to be aware of any weather developments. In the event of serious weather conditions, please be sure to inform family and friends of your whereabouts and remain in close contact with your employer, tour operator, hotel staff, transportation providers, and local officials for evacuation instructions during a weather emergency.

ARE YOU PREPARED?

INTERNATIONAL SCAMS

DON'T BE A VICTIM - STAY A STEP AHEAD OF THE SCAMMERS

Crooks use clever schemes to defraud millions of people every year. They often combine sophisticated technology with age-old tricks to get people to send money or give out personal information. They add new twists to old schemes and pressure people to make important decisions on the spot. Here are some common types:

Identity Theft

Someone gets your personal information and runs up bills in your name. They might use your Social Security or Medicare number, your credit card, or your medical insurance — along with your good name.

Imposter Scams

You get a call or an email. It might say you've won a prize. It might seem to come from a government official. Maybe it seems to be from someone you know — your grandchild, a relative or a friend. Or maybe it's from someone you feel like you know, but you haven't met in person — say, a person you met online who you've been writing to.

Charity Fraud

Someone contacts you asking for a donation to their charity. It sounds like a group you've heard of, it seems real, and you want to help.

"You've Won" Scams

You get a card, a call, or an email telling you that you won! Maybe it's a trip or a prize, a lottery or a sweepstakes. The person calling is so excited and can't wait for you to get your winnings.

For more information on different type of scams, what you can do to report them, and how to protect yourself. visit:

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC):

www.consumer.ftc.gov

The Department of State:

travel.state.gov

Tips to protect yourself – and your money – from scams:

- Generally, never send money to someone overseas if you have not met in person – especially if you have met only online.
- Do not disclose personal details over the phone or online – even in your social media.
- Refer someone claiming to be a U.S. citizen in distress overseas to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. See <https://www.usembassy.gov/> for contact details.
- Contact Overseas Citizens Services at 888-407-4747 if someone claiming to be a U.S. citizen overseas says the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate will not help. We can offer tips for verifying if the situation is legitimate or a scam.
- Consider sending money to a person claiming to be a U.S. citizen through the Department of State's "OCS Trust" program, which requires the recipient to show a photo ID to collect the money. Contact the U.S. embassy or consulate nearest the person for more information.
- File a complaint with the FBI at ic3.gov if you have been the victim of an online scam.
- Report scams affecting seniors to the U.S. Senate's Committee on Aging Fraud Hotline at 1-855-303-9470 and read *Fighting Fraud: U.S. Senate Aging Committee Identifies Top 10 Scams Targeting Our Nation's Seniors*.
- Before traveling abroad, research your destination at travel.state.gov/destination to learn about scams common to those locations.
- Be aware that something that seems too good to be true usually is.



UPCOMING CLOSURES

The U.S. Embassy and
Consulates in Saudi
Arabia will be closed:

DEC. 25

CHRISTMAS DAY

JAN. 01

NEW YEAR'S DAY

JAN. 14

IN OBSERVANCE OF
MARTIN LUTHER KING,
JR.'S BIRTHDAY

FEB. 18

IN OBSERVANCE OF
WASHINGTON'S
BIRTHDAY

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KIDS CORNER

Fall Colors

Fall is perhaps one of the most beautiful times of the year in North America. For years, scientists have worked to understand the changes that occur in trees and shrubs during autumn. Although we don't know all the details, we do know enough to explain the basics to help you enjoy nature's multicolored display. Three factors influence autumn leaf color:

- leaf pigments
- length of night
- weather

The timing of color changes and the onset of falling leaves is primarily regulated by the calendar as nights become longer. None of the other environmental influences – such as temperature, rainfall, food supply – are as unvarying as the steadily increasing length of night during autumn. As days grow shorter, and nights grow longer and cooler, biochemical processes in the leaf begin to paint the landscape with Nature's autumn palette.

You can find autumn color in parks and woodlands, in the cities, countryside, and mountains - anywhere you find deciduous broadleaved trees, the ones that drop their leaves in the autumn. Unfortunately, autumn color is not very predictable, especially in the long term. Half the fun is trying to outguess nature! But it generally starts in late September in New England and moves southward, reaching the Smoky Mountains by early November.



United States Department of Agriculture

We ♥ America's National Forests coloring challenge and Grasslands



fs.fed.us  



Forest Service



Share your finished masterpiece with @ForestService
Facebook or Twitter and add the hashtag #ForestCrush