

Saudi Arabia

This guide is compiled from the IAM Country Guide for reference only. Customs regulations change frequently; please consult your Seapoe relocation consultant for the latest requirements before shipping.

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Documents

Documents required for importing used household goods, personal effects, and related shipments.

For Foreign Residents and Expatriates

- Copy of passport with entry visa page
- Original bill of lading (OBL) or air waybill (AWB)
- Detailed and valued inventory (in English or Arabic)
- Packing list
- Purchase receipts for all electrical and electronic appliances (if unavailable, ZATCA will assess local market value)
- Certificate of insurance, if applicable
- Letter of authorization attested by the Saudi Chamber of Commerce (for government employees, the seal of the government agency suffices)
- Copy of Iqama (residence permit) or Saudi National ID (*Bataqa*)

For Diplomats

- All documents listed above
- Copy of diplomatic ID and passport
- Customs duty and inspection exemption certificate from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (without this, the shipment is subject to physical inspection and full duty payment)

Specific Information

Duty rates by category (when exemption does not apply):

All incoming shipments are subject to rigorous full physical inspection by ZATCA customs officers. Members must advise clients to expect this and to ensure inventories are accurate and complete.

- Electrical and electronic appliances: 5%
- Audiotapes, videotapes, CDs and DVDs: 5%
- Furniture: 15%
- Goods manufactured in Saudi Arabia (similar items): 5-15%

Items valued over SAR 10,000 (approximately USD 2,700) are subject to customs duty and payment assessed on CIF value. If purchase receipts for electronics are unavailable, customs will assess based on local market value.

All containerized shipments must be loaded on pallets or in lift vans. Improper stowage results in penalties from the seaport authority.

The owner of the goods must be physically present in Saudi Arabia at the time of customs clearance. The shipment cannot be cleared in the owner's absence.

The letter of authorization must follow a format provided by the destination agent. It must be

attested by the Saudi Chamber of Commerce (or sealed by the relevant government agency for government employees).

ISPM 15 compliance is required for all solid wood packing materials.

Duties & Taxes

Duty-free personal effects exemption: Persons relocating to Saudi Arabia on a valid work visa or Iqama may apply for a personal effects exemption on genuinely used household goods. This exemption is not automatic -- the customs broker must apply for it as part of the clearance process, and ZATCA decides based on documentation. If goods do not qualify, duty rates on household items are typically 5% to 15% of CIF value depending on category.

VAT: Saudi Arabia levies 15% VAT on all imports as of July 2020, calculated on the CIF value. VAT applies even to goods that are exempt from customs duty. Personal household goods may receive favorable treatment during clearance in practice, but clients should budget for the possibility of VAT being assessed. Goods cannot be cleared until VAT is paid.

Prohibited & Restricted Items

Prohibited Items

The following are strictly prohibited. Importing prohibited items may be treated as a smuggling attempt and may result in immediate confiscation, heavy fines, and/or imprisonment.

- Alcoholic beverages of any kind, and food products containing alcohol (including vanilla extract, flavoring extracts, cooking wines, and similar products)
- Books, wine-making kits, or other items used in the preparation or manufacture of alcoholic beverages
- Narcotics, illegal drugs, and unidentified medicines
- Pornographic materials and literature, including fashion magazines depicting people in underwear or swimwear
- Any books, materials, or items pertaining to religions other than Islam
- All games of chance and gambling paraphernalia, including chess sets, dice, and backgammon [Note: enforcement of chess prohibition has been inconsistent in practice; verify with destination agent]
- Weapons and firearms of any kind -- real, ornamental, antique, or decorative -- including guns, ammunition, fireworks, and spears [PERMIT REQUIRED for authorized import; unauthorized import treated as smuggling]
- Military uniforms or military equipment of any kind
- Radio transmitters, communication equipment and devices, including VHF, marine band, police band radios, and walkie-talkies [PERMIT REQUIRED]
- Stuffed animals (taxidermy), statues, figurines, carvings, or objects depicting human or animal forms
- Pork and pork products, and any foodstuffs containing pork
- Animal skins in commercial quantities
- Products from endangered species protected under CITES [CITES]
- Counterfeit goods

Restricted / Dutiable Items

The following categories are subject to customs duties and/or censorship review:

Exposed film (prints, slides, negatives), records, books, magazines, photographs, and other printed materials are subject to censorship review. Personal computers, USB drives, hard disks, smartphones, mobile phones, audio/video media (CDs, DVDs, VHS cassettes), and any items that store data or information are similarly subject to review.

To reduce clearance time, all items subject to censorship should be packed separately in clearly marked cartons and identified on the inventory. Where possible, censorship-sensitive items

should be sent by air rather than included in a sea freight container.

If items are confiscated after censorship review, a penalty is charged to the consignee: approximately USD 135 per CD or VHS tape confiscated, and approximately USD 14 per book confiscated. Delivery of censored articles may incur additional charges.

Books and used clothing in reasonable personal-use quantities are exempt from duty.

Firearms and weapons require a permit. See Prohibited Items for unauthorized weapons.

Consignment Instructions

Recommended: Contact the destination agent to ensure all requirements have been met prior to import, especially for differences regarding air and sea shipments.

All shipments are subject to rigorous full physical inspection. The destination agent and the consignee should anticipate this and ensure inventories are detailed, accurate, and consistent with actual contents.

The owner of the goods must be present in Saudi Arabia at the time of customs clearance. Pre-arrival or agent-only clearance is not possible. Plan shipment timing accordingly.

All items subject to censorship review (electronics, media, books, printed materials, films) must be packed separately in clearly marked cartons and identified on the inventory. These items may be removed from the container for review, extending clearance time. Consider shipping these items by air separately to avoid delays to the main household goods shipment.

Containerized shipments must be on pallets or in lift vans. Improper stowage results in seaport authority penalties.

Saudi Arabia has three major ports of entry for household goods: Jeddah Islamic Port (west coast), King Abdulaziz Port in Dammam (east coast), and dry port facilities in Riyadh. Processing times vary by port.

15% VAT applies to all imports. Clients should budget for both any applicable customs duties and VAT at time of clearance.