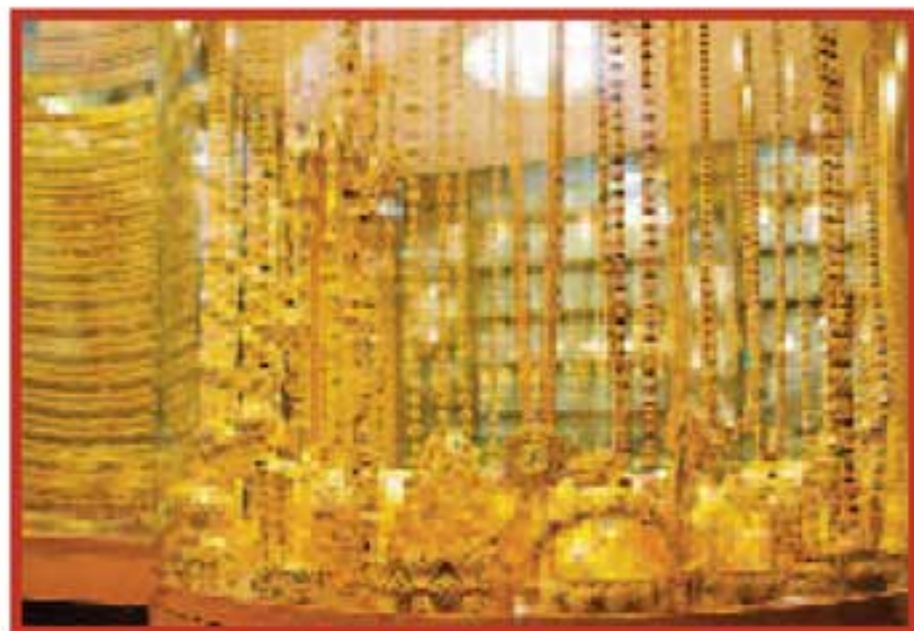


# Saudi Arts & Crafts

Saudi Arabia is a country rich in traditions and culture. The Bedouins of Saudi Arabia created amazing techniques and products for daily life in the desert. Bedouins' skilled and stylized craftsmanship greatly contributed to Saudi Arabia's cultural significance.

## Weaving

Weaving, called sadu, in Arabic, is considered a folk art. Arabic tribal weavings originated from daily needs in desert life. Weavings include interior tent walls (up to 40 feet), tent dividing curtains, rugs, blankets. Textiles were made for Bedouins' personal use - they were not made to be sold. Weaving techniques and patterns identified the regions of the Bedouin tribe. The main weaving materials were from sheep, camels, goats, and cotton. Designs were often of broad vertical or horizontal stripes, braiding or leather were often added for decoration. Other typical Bedouin designs were repeating a pattern in geometric shapes. The most common were red, black and white.



## Jewelry

Jewelry is a way to express one's personality, however in Saudi Arabia, jewelry means much more. Jewelry represents a woman's marital status, as well as her social and economic class. Jewelry also represents a woman's personal wealth; she can keep or sell the jewelry at her own discretion. Stylistic features on jewelry also identify a woman's background - urban, Bedouin, villager. Urban women prefer jewelry made of gold, with fine detail and precious stones. Bedouin women's jewelry was mostly of silver, brass, copper, beads and stones. Bedouin women often beaded their own jewelry. Silver jewelry in Saudi Arabia shows marvelous examples of silversmith work (done by men) that had magnificent motifs, and techniques. Bells and coins are also a major element in jewelry. Today, gold jewelry is preferred over the silver jewelry of the past. Factory jewelry has all but replaced traditional Bedouin jewelry.

## Basketwork

Basketwork is used for a multitude of products in Saudi Arabia. The most common fibers for basket material are the date palm leaf, and grasses from specific areas of Saudi Arabia. Basketry creates many fine items such as, floor mats to sit on, dining mats to serve food from, fans, brooms, bowls, bread baskets, egg baskets, and other containers. Different regions use different colors and patterns to mark their basketwork. Baskets are constructed with leather reinforcements to be durable and often have decorative leather tassels. Container baskets can take many shapes, such as a pot with a lid, or cone shaped basket. Basketwork also uses many colors and patterns for identification and decoration.



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## Prayer Rugs

The Arabic word for a prayer rug is sijada. Prayer rugs are usually designed so that the rug has a definite top and bottom. At the time of prayer, the rug is placed on the ground with the top pointing towards the direction of the holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Prayer rugs are typically 3 feet long and are made of silk or cotton. Prayer rugs are usually adorned with geometric designs, flowers, arabesque, or images of Islamic landmarks such as the Ka'aba in Mecca. After prayer, the prayer rug is immediately folded or rolled, and put away for the next use. This ensures that the rug remains clean, as instructed by Islamic law.



## Incense Burners

The Arabic word for incense burner is mibkharah. Traditionally, the burner was made of wood or clay, and is decorated with mirrors and brass nails, and often painted with bright colors. Incense is greatly used in homes in Saudi Arabia. Most incense burners today are made of metal and have more modern styles. The actual burner is made of a sheet of metal. Incense, or Oud in Arabic, is an aromatic sap found in trees. The sap or resin is sometimes mixed with spices, seeds, roots to create different scents. Traditionally, the incense is powdered and burned with charcoal in the burner.

## Woodwork, Arabic Doors and Window Shutters

The craft is called Al-Nijarah (carpentry), it is one of the oldest traditional crafts of Saudi Arabia. The doors are made of thin, narrow strips of wood. The carpenter incises the wood with highly decorative geometric patterns. The patterns are then painted in bright green, red, yellow, blue. Another common style of decoration is to scorch designs into surfaces with a hot iron. These doors also had intricate locking systems, where by sets of vertical pegs were aligned with slots in specific combinations to lock the door. The pegs were lifted by a key to open the door. The locks were also highly decorated.



## Prayer Beads

The bead industry in Saudi Arabia is very important – most active in the holy cities of Mecca and Madinah. Prayer beads in Arabic are called sabha, and are made from a variety of materials such as colored glass, precious stones, and also amber. Expensive prayer beads can even be encased with gold. Each sabha will usually contain 33 beads to be used to count different prayers in Islamic tradition. Sabhas can be found in almost all Souks and jewelry stores.