

## China southern operates inaugural flight to Riyadh

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**Riyadh: China Southern Airlines, a leading Chinese airline, launched its inaugural flight from Beijing Daxing International Airport to King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, capital of Saudi Arabia, the latest regular direct passenger flight service linking China and Saudi Arabia. The Beijing-Riyadh flight, utilizing an Airbus A330-300, will operate on Tuesdays and Saturdays.**

More regular non-stop flights between the two countries have further promoted people-to-people as well as economic and trade exchanges. In 2023, over 30,000 Saudi citizens traveled to China and hundreds of thousands of Chinese people went to Saudi Arabia for tourism and business, said Chinese Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chen Weiqing in a recent interview with local media.

One of the goals of Riyadh's Vision 2030 plan is to position Saudi Arabia

as one of the top holiday destinations globally and China is an important market for Saudi Arabia. It hopes to increase the number of Chinese tourists to 3.9 million annually by 2030, and position China as one of its top sources of tourism.

In August 2023, Saudi flag carrier Saudia began its first flights to Beijing from Riyadh and Jeddah, which was regarded as a step towards Saudi Arabia's ambitious economic diversification agenda and attracting more Chinese vacationers to the Kingdom. To help Chinese tourists, Saudi Arabia's King Abdulaziz International Airport now has signs in Chinese.

Saudi Arabia's King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh has signs in Chinese, February 2024. /CGTN reporter Shen Shiwei  
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As Saudi Arabia was officially granted Approved Destination Status by China last September, which allows Chinese citizens to travel to Saudi Arabia in group tours, more direct flights are needed.

This February, a delegation from Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation visited China and inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Civil Aviation Administration of China, which paved the way for more air transportation collaboration.

Within the legal framework, more Saudi Arabian and Chinese airlines plan to expand air routes, both for travelers and cargo. Saudia Cargo has expanded its Chinese network with two weekly flights to Shenzhen, a major e-commerce center, from March. China Eastern Airlines plans to launch Shanghai-Riyadh direct flights on April 27, alongside China Southern Airlines' plan of commencing direct flights between Shenzhen and Riyadh from June.

By then, increased direct passenger flights connecting the major Chinese metropolises of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen with Saudi Arabia's capital city of Riyadh and coastal city of Jeddah, will be in operation.

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