2026 EDITION

A PRACTICAL GUIDE BY SENT

The Saudi Import Playbook

The complete guide to importing goods and clearing customs in Saudi Arabia

2026 Edition · Prepared by Sent — licensed customs clearance (ZATCA Licence No. 6833), operating at all nine Saudi ports

Who this guide is for

You import goods into Saudi Arabia, or you are about to start. This guide walks the full journey in plain language: what to prepare, which approvals and documents you need, the deadlines that matter, what you will really pay, and the mistakes that delay most shipments. It reflects the rules as of mid 2026.

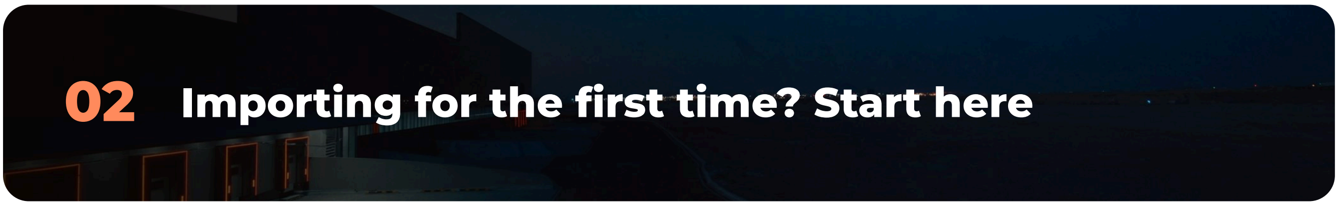
The information in this guide is for general awareness. Regulations and government procedures may change without prior notice. Please verify with the competent authorities, or contact the Sent team, before making any import decision.

01 The journey at a glance

Every import follows the same path. Delays happen when a step is done late, or out of order.

Register as importer	**Approvals SABER / agency**	**Ship clean docs**	**Fasah pre-arrival**	**Customs & inspection**	**Pay duty & VAT**	**Release cargo free**	**Transport to your door**

The most important idea in this guide: the first four steps decide your clearance speed. If they are done early and correctly, clearance is fast. If they are late, your cargo waits at the port, and waiting at the port costs money.



02 Importing for the first time? Start here

If this is your first shipment, do these six things in order before you pay any supplier:

1. **Get your commercial registration (CR)** with an activity that covers importing.
2. **Open your account on Fasah**, the national platform where all customs work happens, and complete your ZATCA importer registration.
3. **Register for VAT** if your yearly sales pass SAR 375,000. Without it you cannot recover the VAT you pay on imports.
4. **Check what approvals your product needs** — SABER certificates, or permits from the competent authority for your product type (see the table in the next section).

5. **Request a freight quote** that shows the full landed cost: freight, clearance, duty, VAT, fees and inland transport.
6. **Send your documents to your customs broker before the goods ship** — not after they arrive. This one habit prevents most first-shipment disasters.

03 Before you ship: approvals by product type

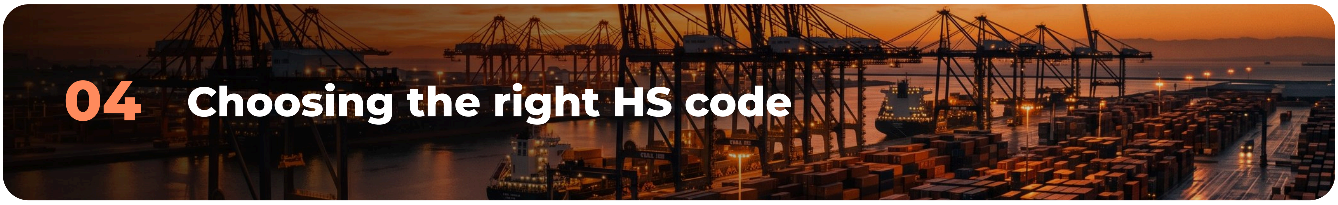
You need a Saudi company to import. The importer on the declaration must be a business registered in Saudi Arabia, with a customs registration at **ZATCA** and an account on Fasah.

Product approvals come before the purchase order, not after. Most standardized products are certified through **SASO**'s **SABER** platform: regulated products need a product certificate (PCoC, valid 12 months), and every shipment needs a shipment certificate (SCoC) that customs checks electronically. But **SABER** is not the whole story — several product families answer to their own authority:

Product type	Competent authority
Food and beverages	Saudi Food & Drug Authority (**SFDA**)
Medicines and pharmaceuticals	SFDA
Medical devices	SFDA
Cosmetics	SFDA
Telecom and wireless devices	Communications, Space & Technology Commission (**CST**)
Chemicals	Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources, and the competent authorities per chemical type
Plants, seeds and live animals	Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture (**MEWA**)
Standardized products (electronics, toys, building materials...)	SASO — via the **SABER** platform

This table covers the most common categories, not every case. Restricted goods can require prior permits from other authorities. Check your product's requirements before you buy — or ask **Sent** to check them for you.

Sources: SASO / SABER platform · SFDA · ZATCA import instructions — July 2026



04 Choosing the right HS code

The HS code is the single number that decides your duty rate, which certificates apply, and whether your shipment matches its paperwork. Saudi Arabia uses a **12-digit** tariff. It is also where most importers go wrong. Four rules:

- **Do not rely on your foreign supplier's code.** Their code follows their country's tariff, and it is wrong for Saudi Arabia more often than it is right.
- **Check the Saudi Integrated Customs Tariff** for the exact 12-digit code and duty rate before you price an order.
- **For complex goods, get the classification confirmed in advance** rather than discovering a dispute at the port.
- **Know the cost of a wrong code:** duty differences collected later, possible fines, a failed **SABER** certificate match, and a delayed release.

Not sure about your code? Sent's clearance team classifies it for you as part of the free pre-shipment document check.

Source: ZATCA Integrated Customs Tariff (12-digit, HS 2022) — July 2026

05 Documents that clear

Customs asks for three core documents: a **commercial invoice**, a **transport document** (bill of lading by sea, airway bill by air), and a **certificate of origin**. Product-specific approvals ride on top. Saudi Arabia has cut physically required papers from twelve to two — the rest moves electronically through **Fasah** — which means the numbers on your documents must match to the digit. A mismatch between invoice, certificate and declaration is the modern version of missing paperwork.

The physical rule that surprises importers: since 8 May 2025, containerized imports must be loaded on **pallets** (with exemptions for bulk, heavy machinery and oversized cargo). Tell your supplier before they pack.

Source: ZATCA import instructions · Saudi Ports palletization mandate, May 2025

06 The clock rules

Saudi clearance is built on one idea: the paperwork travels before the ship. Three deadlines matter:

- **48 hours before arrival** — clearance documents complete on Fasah.
- **Sea freight, since 29 October 2025** — the manifest and the full customs declaration must be submitted in advance, with every document and approval attached. Late filing carries penalties.
- **On arrival** — under the Kingdom's clearance programs, complete and correct declarations are decided fast; incomplete ones queue for review or inspection, each adding days and fees.

Screening is automated: a risk engine connected to 26 government agencies scores every declaration. Accurate paperwork and a clean record put you in the fast lane. In short: fast clearance happens at your desk two weeks early, not at the port.

Source: ZATCA — Advance Cargo Information rules for sea ports, effective 29 October 2025

07 What you will pay — with a worked example

Three government amounts, all driven by your HS code: **customs duty** (5% baseline for most goods from outside the GCC; some protected food and agricultural products reach 40%; many essentials duty-free), **VAT at 15%** on the CIF value plus duty, and the **customs services fee** of 0.15% of CIF (minimum SAR 15, maximum SAR 500).

Worked example — a SAR 50,000 shipment at 5% duty

Value of goods	SAR 50,000
Freight + insurance	SAR 5,000
CIF value	**SAR 55,000**
Customs duty — 5% of CIF	SAR 2,750
VAT — 15% × (55,000 + 2,750)	SAR 8,662.50
Customs services fee — 0.15% of CIF	SAR 82.50
Total government charges	**≈ SAR 11,495**

And the charges nobody warns you about: beyond duty and VAT, ports and terminals charge their own fees — container demurrage and ground rent, storage, handling, inspection and re-inspection charges. They vary by port, terminal and shipment, and they grow every day cargo stands still. Ask for them explicitly in any freight quote, and clear fast so they never accumulate.

Sources: ZATCA customs services fee structure (effective October 2024) · trade.gov Saudi Arabia tariff guide — July 2026

08 How long things really take

Typical ranges when documents are complete, from **Sent**'s clearance experience. Complex and regulated goods take longer — plan for the upper end.

Stage	Typical duration
SABER product registration (and similar agency approvals)	1 – 5 working days
Certificate of conformity issuance	1 – 7 working days
Customs clearance after arrival, documents complete	24 – 72 hours
Additional inspection, where required	Per the competent authority

These are operational estimates, not official commitments. The single biggest lever on every line: complete, matching documents submitted before arrival.

The seven mistakes that delay shipments

1. **Wrong HS code** — wrong duty, failed certificate match, likely inspection, possible fines.
2. **Doing SABER after shipping** — goods arrive before their certificate and wait at your expense.
3. **Missing the pre-arrival deadlines** — the slow lane by design; for sea freight, penalties too.
4. **Documents that do not match** — values, weights or descriptions differing across papers.
5. **Missing agency approvals** — SFDA, CST or other permits not attached to the declaration.
6. **Origin problems** — missing or unattested certificates of origin where required.
7. **No pallets** — loose-loaded containers break the May 2025 rule before customs even opens your file.

New rules many importers have missed (2025–2026)

- **12-digit HS codes** (January 2025) — recheck every product's classification.
- **Pallets required** for containerized imports (May 2025).
- **Advance manifest and declaration mandatory for sea imports** (October 2025) — with penalties for late filing.
- **New customs and bonded-zone rules** (from 26 June 2026) — bonded storage up to 5 years and expanded bonded-zone activities.
- **Ministry of Industry product declaration** required in the SABER file for 135+ industrial product classes (from 18 June 2026).

The pre-departure checklist

☐ CR active · ZATCA and Fasah registrations current · VAT registration if required

☐ HS code confirmed on the 12-digit Saudi tariff — duty rate known before ordering

☐ SABER done, and permits from the competent authority for your product type in hand

☐ Invoice, packing list, transport document and certificate of origin matching exactly

☐ Supplier briefed: pallets, correct shipping marks

☐ Fasah filing planned ≥ 48h before arrival; advance declaration for sea freight

☐ Budget: duty + 15% VAT + 0.15% services fee + port and terminal charges

☐ Truck and warehouse booked for release day

Why importers work with Sent

Sent is a Saudi logistics company that runs the whole import journey as one operation: sea and air freight, customs clearance, land transport, warehousing and last-mile delivery, on one technology layer with one team accountable end to end. Most providers hand your file to an outside broker at the port; **Sent** clears in-house, under its own licence.

- ✓ **ZATCA Customs Clearance Licence No. 6833**
- ✓ **In-house clearance team — never an outside broker**
- ✓ **Door-to-door service, factory to final delivery**
- ✓ **One direct point of contact for your account**
- ✓ **Coverage of all nine Saudi ports**
- ✓ **Sea, air and land freight**
- ✓ **Free pre-shipment document check**

Scan to get a quote or a free document check

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the way forward...

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VERIFIED & ACCOUNTABLE

Licenses, Certifications & Memberships

Sent operates as a fully licensed Saudi logistics company. Every service in this guide is delivered under the following registrations, licences and memberships.

ZATCA Customs Clearance License

No. 6833

Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority (ZATCA)

Saudi Freight Forwarding License

No. 42/00005058

Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services

Transportation License

No. 38/00017851

Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services

Commercial Registration (CR)

No. 2052103580

Ministry of Commerce

JCtrans Global Logistics Network — Member

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A vetted membership in one of the world's largest freight forwarding networks

Issuing and accrediting bodies: Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority · Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services · JCtrans Global Logistics Network

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