



# What is the Neom Project?

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Saudi Arabia's plan to build a futuristic city in the middle of the desert is continuing apace. Named the Neom Project, the metropolis will cost around \$500 billion to construct and aims to utilise cutting-edge technology alongside renewable energy sources to become a blueprint for the cities of tomorrow.

Although still in its development phase, the city already has a functional airport, offices and homes for the staff who live in them. It's part of the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Saudi Vision 2030 project, which is geared towards making the country more economically diverse and weening it off its dependence on fossil fuels.

## The way of the future

The architects behind the city envisage it as a futuristic hub for sustainable living, medical science and artificial intelligence. It will be located in the middle of the Saudi desert, not too far from the Red Sea, and is set to take up 25,000 square kilometres and house around a million residents.

In September of last year, three major contracts were distributed to firms building residential homes for 30,000 workers. While it's still quite some distance from reaching fruition, the Saudi government are hoping it will be fully operational by 2025, although that timetable will be contingent on attracting foreign investment, something which has so far eluded other major projects in the country.

## AI in the desert

One of the hallmarks of the new city will be its emphasis on scientific and technological progress. [Artificial intelligence has come a long way in the 2010s](#) and the Neom Project plans to harness all of those advances, with a projected higher population of robots than humans.

Those behind the initiative have also announced that Neom will boast flying taxi cars, robotic housemaids, artificial precipitation, a replica of the moon and holographic teachers in the city's schools. While those ambitious ideas may still be decades away from realisation, there are other more attainable targets also in the pipeline. For example, the Crown Prince hopes to make Neom the country's epicentre of medicine and healthcare.

## An emphasis on medicine



At present, Saudis spend an estimated \$12.5 billion on foreign healthcare abroad, so the development of Neom is intended to help to redirect some of that capital back into the country. As well as state-of-the-art hospitals and medical facilities, the city's planners also promise to offer residents and visitors the chance to create a digital twin, duplicating their genetic makeup to deliver enhanced treatment and implement preventative measures.

“At the point of entry, everyone – both Neomians and visitors – will have the opportunity to have a digital twin of themselves created,” [explained Dr Maliha Hashmi](#), an executive director of the project. “This will lead to personalized and precise medical treatment. General treatment pathways will be removed and everything will be catered to a person's specific genomic profile. These methods exist today, but simply haven't been brought to scale at this level yet.”