

Section 9

# Regions and Islands of Abu Dhabi

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## Section 9: Regions and Islands of Abu Dhabi

Through your work on this section you will be gaining the following Abu Dhabi knowledge:

- Regions and islands of Abu Dhabi including:
  - Abu Dhabi city and islands
  - Al Ain
  - Al Dhafra

You will also be able to:

LO4 Define and locate on a map of Abu Dhabi, the City, Districts and Islands; and give basic information about each

You will gain an overview of the regions and islands of Abu Dhabi while reading this document. In Section 10, you will go on to discover individual sites and attractions within the regions.

The capital of the UAE and the largest of the seven Emirates, Abu Dhabi has three distinct regions:

- The capital, also named Abu Dhabi, a low-lying wedge-shaped island on the north-eastern tip of the Emirate, along with the islands of Yas, Saadiyat and those that make up the Eastern Islands
- Al Ain, the oasis city
- Al Dhafra, where the dunes of the desert meet the waters of the Arabian Gulf

*"Thanks to the competence, love of God, our country's security and stability, endowed wealth, integrated infrastructure and quality services, the UAE turned into the world's renowned destination for tourism, investment and business management: the interface of choice for hosting major cultural events, artistic and sports, in the world."*

HH Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan

# Abu Dhabi City and Islands

## Overview

Abu Dhabi Island, the Emirate's capital, was once a small, ancient settlement ruled by the Al Nahyan family tribe, which still governs today. In the 1930s, the discovery of oil replaced the traditional industries of the region and the city began to expand quickly to cater for the sudden influx of workers and new expatriate residents. The island of Abu Dhabi has changed dramatically to become the lively metropolis it is today, with the most modern architecture and a thriving, multi-cultural society.

## The city centre

Although there is no officially-designated city centre in the capital, the focal point can be found in the north of the city, including the eastern Al Danah district and the Al Hosn district to the west. Here visitors will find lively street life in the form of cafés, restaurants and shops.

Sitting in Al Hosn district to the west is the oldest building and original protective fort in the UAE, Qasr Al Hosn. The Bani Yas tribes originally built this fort in the 18th century as a watchtower, looking over coastal trade routes and protecting their community which had settled in the area. Qasr Al Hosn is a reminder of the heritage and history of the city of Abu Dhabi before the skyscrapers and people made the city the bustling capital it is today.

Please see Section 10: Culture and heritage sites for Abu Dhabi, for more on this remarkable coral and sea stone watchtower and refer back to Section 3 for a reminder on the Bani Yas tribes.

The World Trade Centre (WTC) also lies in this area; an Abu Dhabi landmark designed by one of the British stars of the architecture world, Foster and Partners. The 320-metre-tall, mixed-use building towers over the streets and provides visitors with amazing photo opportunities as well as a shopping centre, souk and The Courtyard by Marriot Hotel.

There are plenty of shopping opportunities in the city centre. Large malls host top international brands while smaller boutiques and back-street shops offer opportunities for large and smaller purses and differing tastes. Please see Section 10: Shopping in Abu Dhabi for further details of the range of shopping opportunities in Abu Dhabi.

Iconic luxury hotels and mid-priced apartments provide plenty of places to stay in the heart of the centre of Abu Dhabi for visitors not wanting to miss any of the action. Surprisingly, there are also plenty of green shady spaces for visitors to relax and the city's central beach to cool off in the Arabian Gulf.

Read on to find out about the city's parks and green spaces and see Section 10: Iconic landmarks for more information on the luxury hotels in Abu Dhabi.



Qasr Al Hosn

## The Corniche

Running the entire width of the north end of the island is 1st Street or the Corniche Road, one of the most well-known roads in the Abu Dhabi capital. Before the discovery of oil and expansion of the city, the Corniche area was where fishermen lived because of its proximity to the Arabian Gulf.

The Corniche pedestrian promenade and cycle zone follow the Corniche Road and provide visitors with 8 kilometres of reclaimed, highly-landscaped waterfront to enjoy. The dedicated cycle paths and pedestrian walkways help visitors and residents travel easily with plenty of parks, cafés and restaurants, and the Blue Flag, guarded Corniche Beach along the way.

One of the best ways to explore the Corniche is to rent a bicycle and use some pedal power! There are several stations where visitors can pick up or drop off bikes along the 8km cycleway.

Government authorities in Abu Dhabi are expanding the western edge further in line with the Emirate's Plan Abu Dhabi 2030. The Abu Dhabi Corniche Project's 16,000 square metre new development will improve the sector between Al Khaleej Al Arabi and 32nd Street which will feature a new no-car zone with shops, cafes and restaurants.

Other developments along the Corniche waterfront include plans for sports and leisure activity areas for beach volleyball, football, and water sports. There will also be new affordable stores and local and international food and beverage outlets offering a choice of snacks and dishes. Completing the development are plans for a beach walk way which will stretch the entire length of the public section of Corniche Beach.



Corniche Beach

The Corniche Beach is one of the highlights of this area. Beachgoers can rent sunbeds and beach towels from Bake UAE and enjoy the clean waters of the Blue Flag beach and its facilities. Please see Section 10: Sites and attractions - Water for further details of this and the other beaches in Abu Dhabi.

## Al Bateen

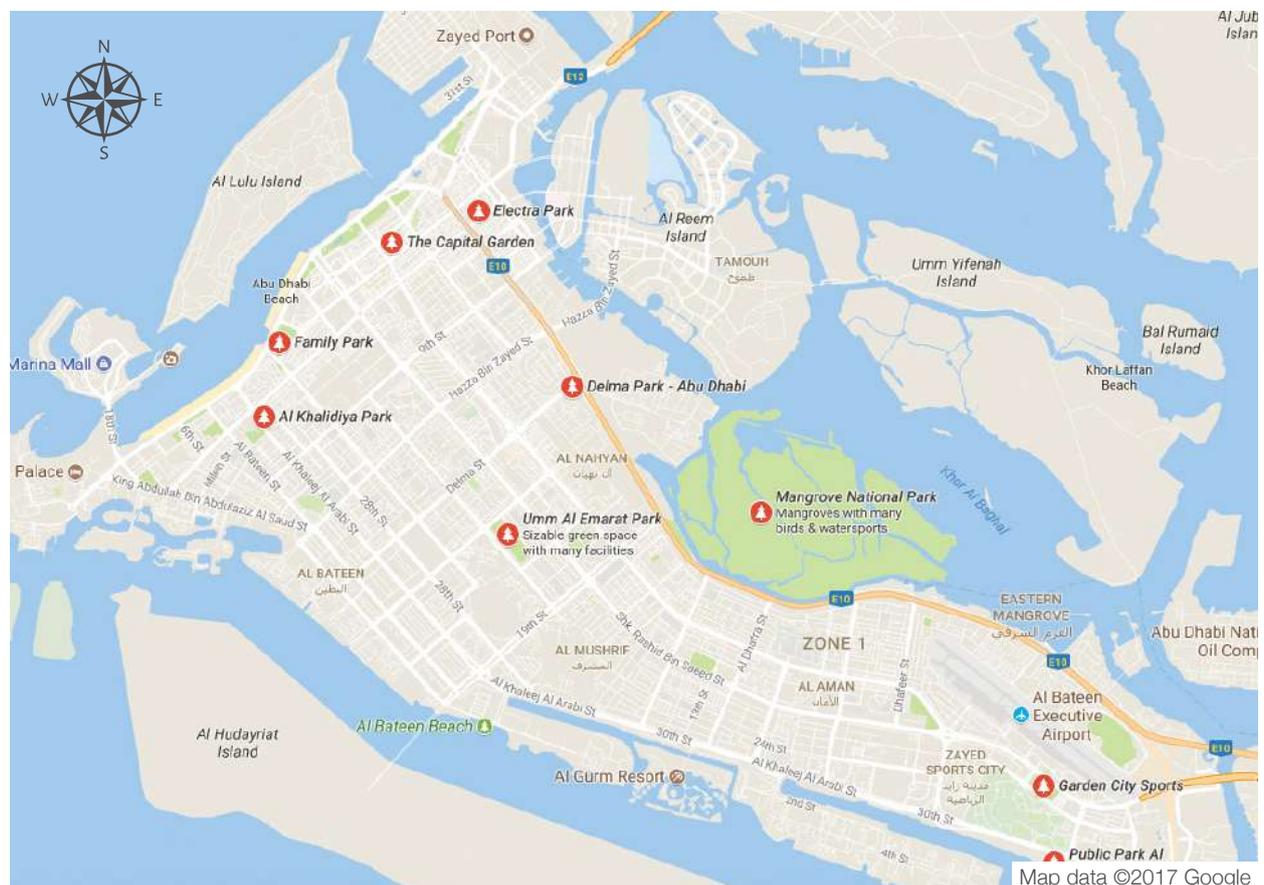
Al Bateen is the historical quarter of Abu Dhabi and is located on the north west of the island. Al Bateen hosts royal palaces and courts, the Crown Prince Court, Al Bateen Palace and Al Mushrif Palace.

## Al Qana in Bain Al Jessrain

Being an exclusive waterfront destination, the Al Qana Bain Al Jessrain will bring a new social dining and entertainment description to Abu Dhabi. The tourist destination stretches on approximately 2.4km and is constructed along the Khor Maqta waterfront. The destination is built in that one gets to experience the beautiful views of Sheik Zayed Grand Mosque. The Al Qana has seven regions that offer the best experiences for visitors. The regions are marina views, the community convenience, cinema experience, fun and activity region, fitness and wellbeing, aquarium exploration, and the socialization and dining section.

## Parks and gardens in Abu Dhabi city

Luckily for residents and visitors alike, there are plenty of places to keep cool and in the shade in the bustling city centre. Abu Dhabi boasts some excellent parks and gardens for visitors to chill out and children to play. Look at some of the best the city has to offer.



## Heritage Park

Located opposite Mina Port in Corniche East, this is one of the city's most attractive green spaces. It is free to enter and features two car parks, fountains and green lawns with a fort sitting on top of a small mound. Adults can have a barbeque in designated areas while children play in a sand pit with a climbing frame!

## Formal Park

A little further down from Heritage Park in Corniche East is free-to-enter Formal Park with its maze and evening fun fair with rides and inflatable slides! Formal Park also features a walled garden, cool fountains and an exercise track around the perimeter. This green space is popular with families barbecuing and playing badminton in the paved area.

## Family Park

A free green space that is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week in Corniche Central and has a lot to offer families. This includes cycle hire, skateboarding and BMX ramps as well as a farm and a theatre! Lounging around on the grass is also popular here. For children, there is a good play area and children's fun area. The park also has a café which serves children's favourite snacks and drinks.

## Capital Garden

The entrance to this large park is on Muroor Road near Khalifa Street and is decorated with large coffee pots! Green spaces and shaded areas in the park are good for runners and people wanting to get out of the sun. There is a children's playground featuring a mini climbing wall, near the mosque at the left of the entrance. There is a café and vending machines for those looking for refreshment. This park charges AED 1 to enter although there is no charge for children under 10.

## Al Khalidiyah Park

This space, located between 30th and 16th Streets, features a shaded playground for little ones and a fun fair. Runners like it here as it's on a slight incline giving them challenge. There are no barbecue facilities but the Sinbad Café, vending machines and an option to picnic by the fountain under the trees provide plenty of food options. This park charges AED 1 to enter and children under 10 are free.

## Umm Al Emarat Park

Located on 15th Street in the Mushrif area, this is a space for residents and visitors alike. Umm Al Emarat Park is a large green area with a huge lawn and great attractions. There is a wisdom garden in memory of HH Sheikh Zayed, an amphitheatre seating 1,000, and an animal barn operated in partnership with Emirates Park Zoo. In addition, there is a botanical garden, a tropical shade house, a children's park and an evening garden, together with dining facilities. This popular park also hosts weekly film screenings suitable for all members of the family. The park charges AED 5 to enter and children under the age of three go free. The park has its own dedicated website:

<http://www.ummalemaratpark.ae/> and it opens daily from 08:00 - 00:00.

## Lake Park

Situated on the east side of the Corniche, this beautiful space has a lake with a 15m fountain at the centre. The free park is open 24 hours a day and features a children's play area and a café - Café Layali Zaman.

## Al Khubeirah Garden

A restful and shady garden space on the west end of the Corniche, Al Khubeirah Garden is a favourite spot for adults to relax and read on benches. There are swings and park toys for children. This free park, opposite Starbucks and Spinneys, is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## Bainunah Park

Opposite the Intercontinental Hotel on King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Street is a space known as Bainunah Park. It is free to the public and open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The narrow space has a bike track that runs alongside it, shaded by palm trees. There are no children's facilities, although there are several fountains that children may enjoy to cool off.

## Al Bateen Beach Park

The grassy area adjoining Al Bateen Beach features a modest-sized shaded children's playground with swing and a slide. Pedalos can be hired on the beach itself. There is even a place to buy jacket potatoes at the kiosk. The beach park is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is free to all.

## Khalifa Park

Just off Salam Street, this is one of the city's larger parks and a major landmark. Inspiration for the gardens has been drawn from Arabic and Islamic architecture and from the world's great gardens. The landscape boasts canals, fountains, lakes and waterfalls. You can tour by hopping on the miniature railway. With play equipment for children, picnic facilities, a garden centre, café and an outdoor auditorium, it is a popular spot in the cooler evenings and during weekends.

## Al Fayah Park

The 12.5-hectare park opposite the Hilton Capital Grand hotel is due to open in 2017. Commissioned by the Salama Bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation and designed by Thomas Heatherwick, Al Fayah (meaning shade in Arabic) will feature shaded gardens and raised walkways 20 metres high that will frame the views of the iconic Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque. The architectural design will look like the cracked earth of the desert, contrasting with the green of the gardens below.

**DID YOU KNOW? Thomas Heatherwick is the man behind London's double-decker bus reinvention and the London 2012 Olympic cauldron! <sup>1</sup>**

## Al Nahyan Park

The Park offers many activities for both adults and children alike. In addition to a bicycle path, a playground with lots of slides, a basketball area, as well as a green area for families to watch the kids play, families can enjoy this park. Children can jump in the water fountain and play on the water playground area. It is free and open on a 24/7 basis.

## Further your knowledge

Read The National Newspaper's interview with the architect Thomas Heatherwick here

<https://www.thenational.ae/uae/environment/putting-other-parks-in-the-shade-1.604579>

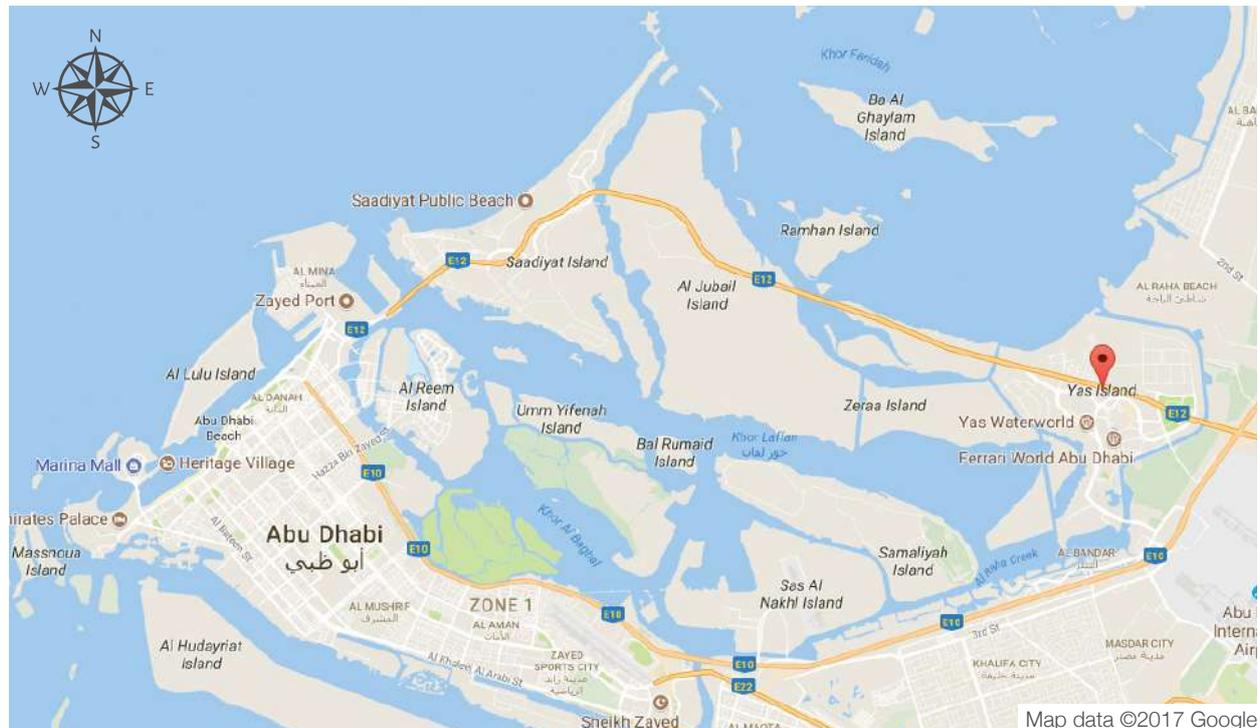
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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/environment/putting-other-parks-in-the-shade-1.604579>

# Yas Island

## Overview

Yas Island lies to the east of Abu Dhabi city and is a popular destination for both business and pleasure visitors alike. In 2009, the World Travel Awards named Yas Island as the world's leading tourism project. Aldar Properties started the Yas island project in 2006, with a vision to make the island a complete entertainment destination with leisure facilities, hotels and shopping completed in phases by 2018.



## Sites and attractions

When visitors arrive, they have a range of fantastic attractions, hotels and sport and leisure facilities to explore and enjoy.

The following is an overview of what to see and do on Yas Island, although Section 10 will give more details of the island's main sites, attractions, activities and experiences.

## Yas Marina Circuit

Yas Island has been home to the Formula One Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, held annually in November at the Yas Marina Circuit, since 2009. The F1™ track holds the record for the longest straight section of any current Formula 1™ circuit. Twenty-one bends and turns pass around the Marina and, spectacularly, actually underneath the Yas Viceroy Hotel.

## Yas Marina

Yas Marina has many modern facilities and has become a popular destination in its own right. Waterside restaurants and fitness facilities mean visitors do not need to be on a boat on the water to enjoy a day or evening here.

## Ferrari World Abu Dhabi

Designed for visitors with an appetite for speed and G-force, Ferrari World Abu Dhabi is home to Ferrari-themed rides and attractions, including the world's fastest rollercoaster, the highest loop on any roller coaster in the world and a new ride that features a vertical climb and an epic zero-gravity fall!

## **Yas Waterworld**

Forty-five slides, rides and attractions with something suitable for all ages, Yas Waterworld offers four levels of thrill and fun. From rides for little ones to flow-boarding and surfing for water sports fans looking to gain new skills, leading up to a tornado group waterslide for those with no-fear!

## **W Abu Dhabi Hotel**

This hotel has been built on land and over water, in equal measures. W Abu Dhabi is the island's premier, iconic five-star hotel and its architectural centrepiece. Its interior design is inspired by fishnet, representing Abu Dhabi's culture, contrasted with modern sleek lines and, outside, the iconic gridshell exterior lights up the skyline with its Light-Emitting Diode (LED) canopy. Straddling the Yas Marina Formula 1 Circuit, guests of the W Abu Dhabi are able to watch the race and practice races from the hotel itself.

## **Yas Plaza Hotels**

Other options to stay on the island are provided by six Yas Plaza hotels. These include:

- Crowne Plaza
- Staybridge Suites
- Radisson Blu Abu Dhabi
- Park Inn
- Rotana
- Centro

## **Yas Mall**

Four hundred brands and a 20-screen cinema mean that Yas Mall is the region's biggest indoor family entertainment centre. It is popular for families and visitors escaping the heat as well as fans of retail therapy!

## **Warner Bros.™ World Abu Dhabi**

Opened in 2018, Warner Bros.™ World Abu Dhabi is the home to almost 30 thrill rides, family attractions and live entertainment. It has six themed zones including Gotham City, Cartoon Junction and Bedrock. There is an interactive indoor experience featuring some of the world's most popular characters including Bugs Bunny, Scooby-Doo and Batman. Fred and Wilma of The Flintstones can be seen roaming around.

## **CLYMB**

CLYMB Abu Dhabi was opened in 2020 and it provides the world's widest flight chamber and tallest indoor climbing wall. The flight chamber provides visitors with the opportunity to experience skydiving within the safety of a chamber.

## **SeaWorld Abu Dhabi**

SeaWorld Abu Dhabi is set to open on Yas Island by 2022. Located to the northeast of Ferrari World Abu Dhabi, it will be the first SeaWorld without orcas.



Yas Marina

## **Boats, cruises and seaplanes**

Operating from Yas Marina are Jalboot Marine, Captain Tony's and Azure Marine charter boat companies. Seawings seaplanes operate 20-minute Abu Dhabi tours.

## **Yas Links Golf Club**

Ranked as the world's 24th best golf course outside the USA in 2012, Yas Links is a traditional 18-hole links course designed by Kyle Phillips.

## **Yas Beach**

Free to the island's hotel guests, with shuttle bus transportation services, Yas beach provides fun for all ages. The beach features a new lounge area with pool and private cabanas. Water sports and daily Mangrove Tours are catered for by aquatic group Noukhada. A shaded children's pool entertains little ones, keeping them cool and out of the sun.

## **Etihad Park**

Considered as the region's largest multi-purpose indoor arena positioned on the vibrant waterfront of Yas Bay, Etihad Arena is the Middle East's largest state-of-the-art indoor entertainment venue. It hosts a huge range of events, from electrifying concerts, exhilarating sports and sophisticated corporate functions, to intimate community celebrations. One of the famous events held at the arena is UFC Fight Island™ series, which in 2020 has two consecutive UFC numbered pay-per-view events have been held in the same city outside of Las Vegas. The Fight Island is situated within a dedicated 'safe zone' - a 6 square km stretch of Yas Island will be locked down and surrounded with borders and police checkpoints, to ensure restricted entry and protect residents. 2,500+ UFC personnel, event staff and Yas Island employees will be housed within the Safe Zone for the duration of the event, to ensure the safety of all.

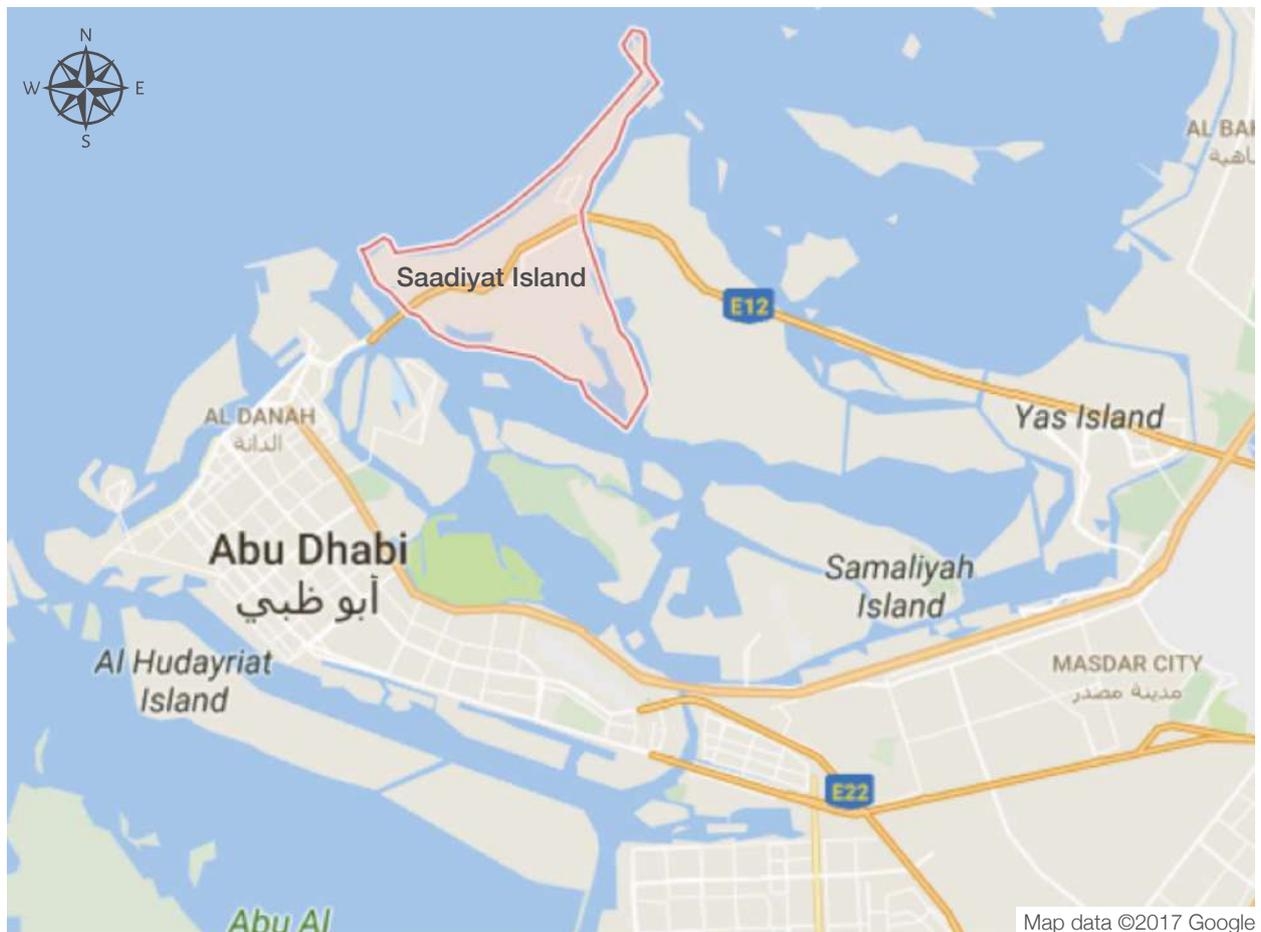
Refer to Section 10 to find out more detail on sites and attractions that feature on Yas Island

# Saadiyat Island

## Overview

Saadiyat means happiness in Arabic, so Saadiyat Island means the island of happiness! A large, low-lying island, 500 metres off the coast of mainland Abu Dhabi island and located 15 minutes' drive from Abu Dhabi city centre and roughly 20 minutes away from Abu Dhabi International Airport, Saadiyat is easy to reach for visitors wishing to take advantage of its sites and attractions.

The main aim of the Saadiyat Island project is to become Abu Dhabi's future Emirati and international cultural centre. It is being led by TDIC, the tourism asset management and development arm of the Department of Culture & Tourism (DCT). Working with a number of government agencies TDIC are creating an integrated project, in a fairly short period of time. Saadiyat Island aims to become a premier tourist attraction for culturally-motivated visitors to the Emirate. The commercial, residential, and leisure project is already well underway on Saadiyat and scheduled for completion in 2020.



## Sites and attractions

The island is expected to attract visitors mainly to its Cultural District which will include museums designed by super-league 'Starchitects' Norman Foster, Jean Nouvel, and Frank Gehry. Already built is the island's temporary exhibition space, Manarat Al Saadiyat, which showcases the exciting future cultural institutions planned for the island. Further information on some of these buildings and the architects who created them is given in Section 12: Architectural styles in Abu Dhabi.

Key tourist and cultural authorities throughout the Emirate are focusing on increasing international cultural exposure to the region by hosting a calendar of major international exhibitions while the buildings are being developed. This will make Saadiyat Island a destination firmly placed on both the international cultural map and calendar!

The main districts being developed on the island are:

### **Saadiyat Cultural District**

The cultural heart of Saadiyat Island featuring Louvre Abu Dhabi, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and Sheikh Zayed National Museum

### **Saadiyat Beach District**

A tourism destination featuring the Saadiyat public beach, the Saadiyat Beach Club, nine kilometres of pristine beaches and a Gary Player-designed golf course

### **Saadiyat Marina District**

The island's commercial hub featuring a large marina as well as commercial and retail space

### **Saadiyat Promenade District**

This is designed as a family destination and resort, featuring a beach and walk ways with entertainment and leisure facilities including a number of places offering something to eat and drink

### **Saadiyat Lagoons District**

This district is planned to feature plush residential housing and a mangrove tidal lagoon system

### **Saadiyat Retreat District**

Unusually, the Retreat district will not feature any high-rise construction. It is the location of the Jumeirah Saadiyat Island Resort and will also house boutique hotels and luxury waterside homes

### **Saadiyat Reserves District**

Again, low-rise residences will feature in this district as well as a unique tidal golf course which will be built in the salt flats. At low tide, the creeks will be dry, but as the tide rises, the sea will fill them.

You will discover more detail about Saadiyat Island's sites and attractions in Section 10.



Saadiyat Beach Golf Club

### **The Dock (outdoor Cafés)**

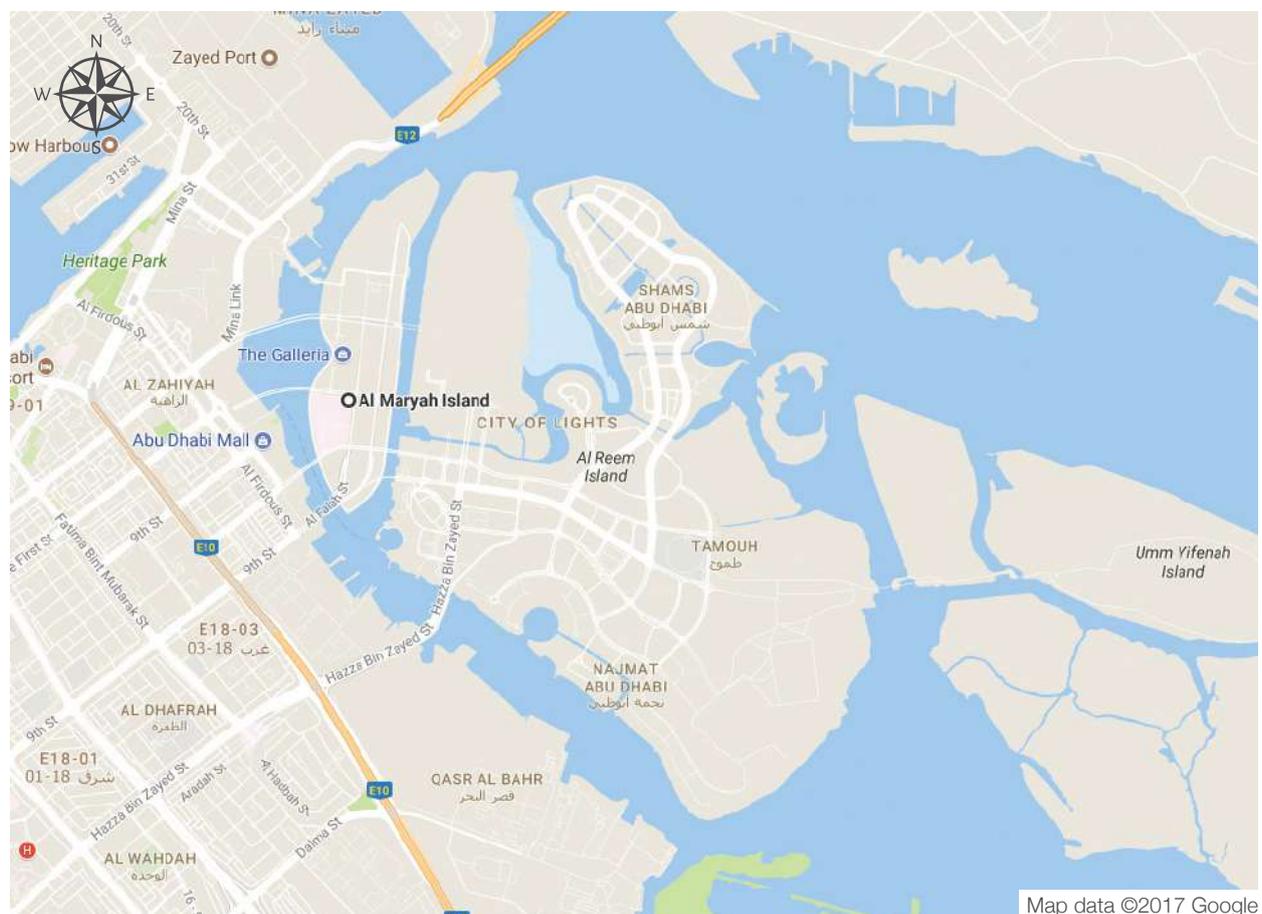
The Dock is a new retail destination at The Cultural District on Saadiyat Island, developed by Aldar Properties. The destination in its first phase is comprised of 22 single-story retail units built from modern customized shipping containers. The location boasts beautiful views of the Abu Dhabi coastline, the recently completed dock walkway, and a public park all within walking distance of The Louvre Museum

## Mamsha Al Saadiyat

Mamsha is home to the beautiful white sandy beach called Soul Beach and has a wide range of community facilities, including shops, entertainment outlets and places to eat.

## Al Maryah Island

Al Maryah Island is on the east coast of Abu Dhabi and is fast becoming Abu Dhabi's new Central Business District with leisure and entertainment facilities now being developed. With stunning sea views, the five-star Rosewood and Four Seasons Hotels are luxury options for visitors and, alongside them, The Galleria shopping centre has over 130 international brands, 50 of which were a first in Abu Dhabi. Cleveland Hospital is clearly visible on Al Maryah Island. You will have read about this hospital in Section 2: General knowledge.



## Al Reem Island

Located on the eastern side of Abu Dhabi Island, Al Reem Island is rapidly developing into an upmarket suburban residential area. Retail and dining options can be found within Shams Boutik with its eye-catching Sun and Sky Towers at each end.

Other dramatic features found on Al Reem Island are the three striking Gate Towers joined by a parapet sitting horizontally on top. The design is based on the United Kingdom's ancient monument of Stonehenge. During your work on Section 2: General knowledge, you will have noted that Paris-Sorbonne University (PSUAD) is situated on Al Reem Island.

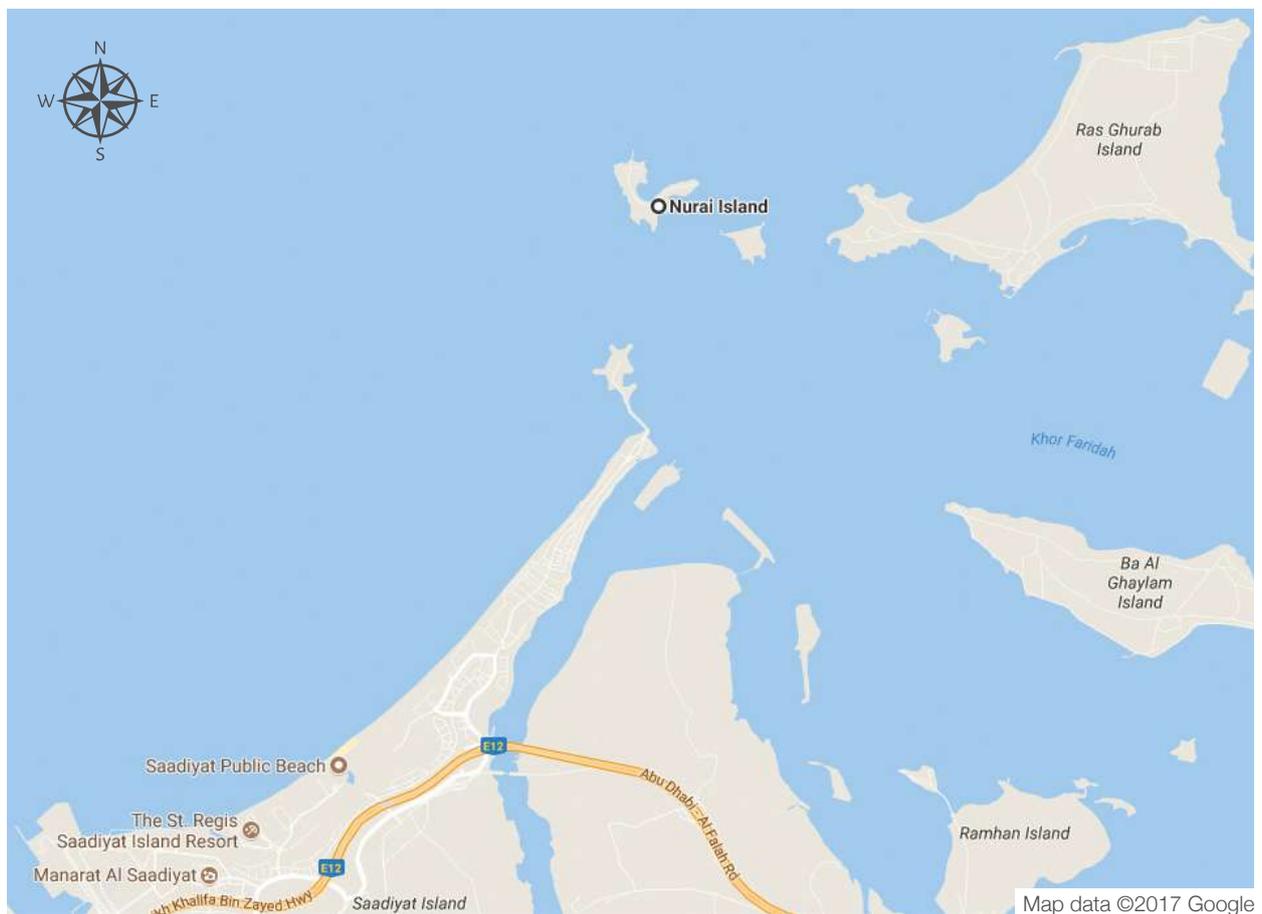
## Al Fay Park

It is a wide-ranging park that has numerous activities that are favorable to all people. It is a beautiful retreat destination that offers relaxation and the best experiences over. It is among the first of its kind in the emirates of Abu Dhabi. It is surrounded by grasses and bushes that are unique and found only in the region. The landscape is striking and provides a cooling atmosphere which makes it even more attractive.

It sits in an area of approximately 27500m<sup>2</sup> in Al Reem Island. The Park was designed by the famous Danish designer stars SLA. It symbolizes the nature and culture of Abu Dhabi. It is the initial biodiversity park in the United Arab Emirates.

## Nurai Island

Nurai Island is situated to the east of the Abu Dhabi city coastline, just a 10-minute boat ride from Saadiyat Island. Inspired by the Arabic word 'nur' meaning 'light', Nurai Island is a stunning piece of paradise. It is the perfect retreat for those looking for peace and tranquillity, complemented by unparalleled and uninterrupted Arabian Gulf views. The island is also home to Zaya Nurai Island, a unique, boutique private island resort with a 32-bed, all-villa hotel and five food and beverage outlets.

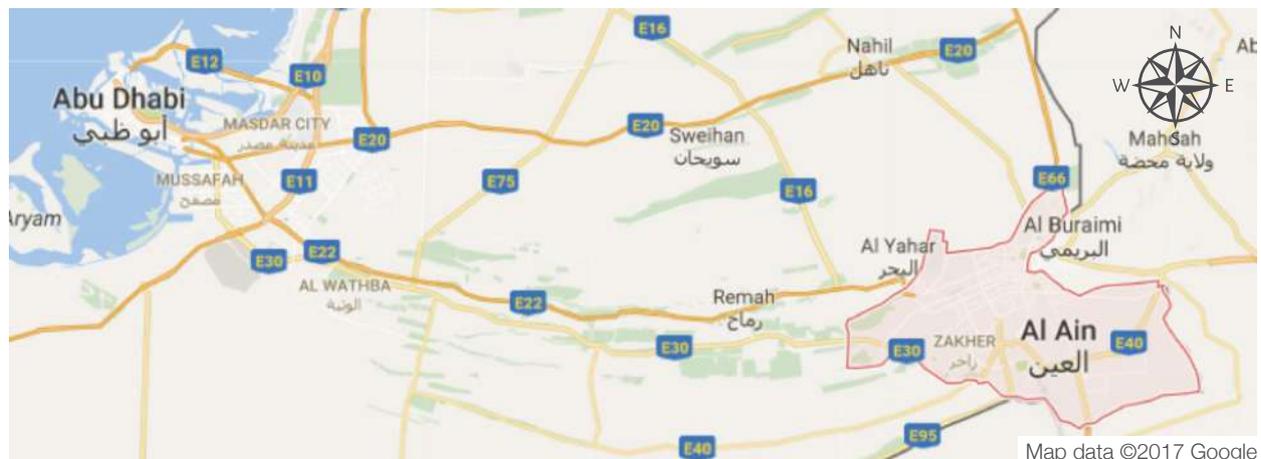


# Al Ain

## Overview

Al Ain is the second largest of Abu Dhabi's cities and a destination on the culturally- and historically-motivated visitor's map. Al Ain also provides a welcome retreat from the humidity of Abu Dhabi city for visitors and residents alike. Al Ain means 'the spring' in Arabic.

Al Ain is located a 90-minute drive eastward along the E22 from the Island of Abu Dhabi. It is a lush city of oases, situated on the old caravan route from the UAE to Oman, near the border with Oman. The oases have provided a vital source of water, food and shelter for inhabitants and travellers through the generations. The late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founder of the UAE, was raised in Al Ain and its unique landscape and culture made its mark on his character. He had a passion to protect Abu Dhabi's history and cultural heritage.



## Culture and heritage sites

Al Ain is well known for its rich culture and heritage, including Abu Dhabi's UNESCO World Heritage Sites, consisting of six of the seven oases, as well as the archaeological sites of Hafeet, Hili and Bida Bint Saud. In the oases, the ancient *falaj* water channel irrigation system was used to sustain vital crops such as date palms. Over 100 species of date palms were not only cultivated for nutritious and high-energy food but the wood was used for building and the fronds for weaving Arish traditional buildings (*Barasti*) and household items. As the palms grew so well in the lush oases, the people of the city and surrounding areas were able to generate income for their communities by cultivating and selling the dates and the palm trees' by-products.

As well as the oases, Al Ain had important forts that housed royalty and protected the lush area from bandits. Three of the most important forts in Al Ain have recently been restored to their former glory:

- Qasr Al Muwajji, home to the ruling Al-Nayhan family for generations where Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed was born
- Al Jahili Fort, built to protect the neighbouring oasis and date palms, and as a summer palace for the royal family
- Al Qattara Fort, now an arts centre and gallery

You will find out more about Al Ain's culture and heritage, and its sites and attractions in Section 10.

## Attractions and activities

There are many attractions for the adventure enthusiast including a visit to drive, cycle or climb Jebel Hafeet, Abu Dhabi's highest peak! The Mercure Hotel perches on the top of the mountain and is a favourite destination for visitors. At the base of Jebel Hafeet sit the mineral springs and park of Green Mubazzarah. Those who like water adventures can take advantage of Wadi Adventure near Jebel Hafeet, which offers a range of water activities including rafting, surfing and kayaking. Those visitors who have a need for speed can visit the international-standard go-karting circuit, Al Ain Raceway. The raceway hosts the Rotax Max World Karting Finals and provides high-octane fun.

Visitors partial to shopping can take advantage of the six malls in Al Ain and they can also spend some quality leisure time in the vast number of coffee shops and shisha cafes in and around the city.

In Section 10, you will gain detailed knowledge of the main sites, attractions, activities and experiences available in Al Ain and a more in-depth look at the rich culture and heritage sites here, including the UNESCO World Heritage sites themselves.



Trekking in Jebel Hafeet

# Al Dhafra

## Overview

Al Dhafra (previously known as Al Gharbia) is Abu Dhabi's region where vast desert meets the sea. It makes up two-thirds of Abu Dhabi's entire land mass and features hundreds of kilometres of coast, beaches and islands. Al Dhafra is becoming increasingly popular for visitors with a sense of desert and island adventure and an appreciation of stunning natural and historical sites and features.



Dune bashing

## Liwa City

The oasis town of Liwa sits at the entrance to the *Rub Al Khali* (The Empty Quarter). This important town contains a huge date-palm oasis, with more than 100,000 trees. It is sustained by a plentiful supply of water from the underground springs of the Liwa Oasis. The plantation has been formally recognised as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS). Liwa has its very own Date Festival each July where prestigious prizes are awarded to growers of the finest specimens of the desert fruit.

It takes approximately three hours to drive to Liwa from Abu Dhabi city.



## Rub Al Khali and the Liwa Desert

The *Rub Al Khali* or Empty Quarter is renowned for being the world's largest uninterrupted sand mass and features the world's highest dune, known as Tel Moreeb. This huge expanse of ever-changing and endless dunes was brought to international attention by the British explorer, Wilfred Thesiger, when he crossed the Empty Quarter twice with his Emirati and Omani companions in the 1940s and '50s. The Empty Quarter is Abu Dhabi's epicentre for desert activities such as dawn dune walks, camel trekking, dune bashing (dune driving in 4X4 vehicles), falconry shows and campfire barbecues. It is becoming a popular destination for visitors wanting to get away from it all and thrill-seekers alike.

The five-star resort of Qasr Al Sarab, otherwise known as the Mirage Palace, resembles an old Arabian fortress and is located in the Liwa Desert and specialises in desert activities. Further information on this resort is given in Section 10: Iconic landmarks.

Aside from the Liwa Date Festival already mentioned, Al Dhafra has many events and festivals throughout the year, such as:

- Tel Moreeb Festival held in January which is the desert hill climb event for all desert driving enthusiasts
- The annual Al Dhafra Festival featuring camel beauty contests
- Al Dhafra Watersports Festival, an annual event featuring dragon boat racing, kite surfing, dhow racing and swimming events and activities

## Sir Bani Yas Island

Sir Bani Yas Island lies 170km southwest of Abu Dhabi and is recognised as part of the region of Al Dhafra. It is a natural island and one of the eight islands that make up the 'Desert Islands' in Al Dhafra.

Sir Bani Yas is a stunning reserve and nature-lover's paradise. It features the Arabian Wildlife Park which spans over half the island and is home to more than 10,000 free-roaming animals including the Arabian Oryx, gazelles, giraffes, hyenas and cheetahs. Tours of the park are available in 4x4s with expert guides.

The island is also the destination for the Desert Island Beach Stopover, a dedicated beach for cruise passengers where guests can enjoy purpose-built beach and water sports facilities and restaurants on the island's shores.

For guests wishing to stay a while longer, there are three Anantara Hotels Resort & Spa retreats on the island:

- Desert Islands Resort & Spa by Anantara
- Anantara Al Yamm Villa Resort
- Anantara Al Sahel Villa Resort

Guests at the Desert Islands Resort & Spa can discover the UAE's only Christian monastery on one of their cultural tours. The monastery was believed to have been built around 600 AD and abandoned in 750 AD. The site was excavated in 1992.

You will discover more of Al Dhafra's desert and island charms and more detail of those mentioned in this section within Section 10.



Cheetah

# Knowledge Bank: Regions and Islands of Abu Dhabi

## Abu Dhabi City and Islands

### The Corniche

- Ten kilometres of reclaimed, highly-landscaped waterfront
- Dedicated cycle paths and pedestrian walkways
- Bike hire for eight kilometres of cycle paths
- Corniche Beach

### Yas Island

- An emerging entertainment destination
- Located within a 20 minute drive of the UAE capital

Home to:

- Yas Marina
- Yas Marina Circuit
- Yas Viceroy Abu Dhabi
- Ferrari World Abu Dhabi
- Yas Waterworld
- Yas Links Golf Course
- Yas Beach
- Yas Mall
- Yas Plaza
- Etihad Park
- Etihad Arena
- Warner Bros. World Abu Dhabi
- CLYMB

### Saadiyat Island

Located 500 metres off the coast of mainland Abu Dhabi island, a 15-minute drive away from Abu Dhabi city centre and 20 minutes from Abu Dhabi International Airport

The main districts being developed on the island are:

- Saadiyat Cultural District
- Planned museums to be built by the stars of the architectural world here include:
  - Zayed National Museum
  - Louvre Abu Dhabi
  - Guggenheim Abu Dhabi
- Saadiyat Beach District
- Saadiyat Marina District
- Saadiyat Promenade District
- Saadiyat Lagoons District
- Saadiyat Retreat District
- Saadiyat Reserves District
- The Dock (Outdoor Cafés)

Other Saadiyat Island attractions and landmarks:

- Manarat Al Saadiyat
- The UAE Pavilion
- Saadiyat Beach Golf Club
- The St Regis Saadiyat Island Resort, Abu Dhabi
- Park Hyatt Abu Dhabi
- Saadiyat Beach Club
- Saadiyat Public Beach

### **Natural treasures:**

Hawksbill sea turtles nest along Saadiyat Beach every year. They are listed as critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List. The turtles have decreased by up to 80 per cent worldwide due to poaching and intention or unintentional destruction of their natural habitat to make way for construction.



Hawksbill Turtle

The Tourism Development & Investment Company (TDIC) in Abu Dhabi began its Hawksbill Turtle Conservation Programme in early 2010 and now over 650 eggs have successfully hatched on Saadiyat Island.

### **Al Maryah Island**

Al Maryah Island features:

- The Galleria shopping mall
- Rosewood Hotel
- Four Seasons Hotel
- A pedestrian promenade which surrounds the island
- Abu Dhabi Global Market Square
- The Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi
- Al Maryah Central shopping mall – yet to be completed

## Al Reem Island

Al Reem Island features:

- Paris-Sorbonne University (PSUAD)
- Shams Boutik with its eye-catching Sun and Sky Towers at each end

## Nurai Island

Nurai Island features:

- Uninterrupted Arabian Gulf views
- Zaya Nurai Island which is a unique, boutique, private island resort with a 32-bed, all-villa hotel

## Al Ain

- A 90-minute drive from Abu Dhabi city
- One of the world's oldest permanently inhabited settlements, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site

Sites and attractions include:

- Bait Mohammed Bin Khalifa
- Al Jahili Fort
- Al Qattara Arts Centre
- Qasr Al Muwajji
- Al Ain National Museum
- Al Ain Palace Museum
- Al Ain Oasis
- Al Ain Zoo
- Hili Fun-City
- Wadi Adventure
- Al Ain Raceway
- Jebel Hafeet mountain

## Al Dhafra

Sites and attractions include

- Liwa, an historic oasis town, and the surrounding Liwa Desert
- Rub Al Khali (Empty Quarter), the world's largest uninterrupted sand mass
- Qasr Al Sarab or Mirage Palace, a five-star resort in the Liwa Desert
- Events and festivals throughout the year include:
  - January's Tel Moreeb Festival
  - Al Dhafra Festival
  - Al Dhafra Watersports Festival
  - July's Liwa Date Festival

## Sir Bani Yas Island

- Located 170km southwest of Abu Dhabi
- A nature-based destination in the Al Dhafra region

Sites and attractions include:

- Arabian Wildlife Park - 4x4 Nature and Wildlife drive of the park
- Three Anantara Hotels Resorts & Spas' retreats
- Dedicated cruise passenger Desert Island Beach Stopover
- The UAE's only discovered Christian monastery