

Al Ain

دائرة الثقافة والسياحة
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE
AND TOURISM



ABU DHABI TOURIST GUIDE
TRAINING & LICENSING PROGRAMME

10

Section



Al Ain

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1.1 Culture and Heritage Sites

a.Bait Mohammed Bin Khalifa

Bait Mohammed bin Khalifa (BMBK) is an important historical landmark in Abu Dhabi, reflecting the nation's evolving social, historical, and architectural traditions during the 1950s and 1960s. Built in 1958 for Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Nahyan (1909–1979), the father-in-law of the late H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, this home symbolises the UAE's Transition Period (1930s-1960s), a time marked by hybrid architectural styles influenced by oil exploration and economic shifts. The house is an example of traditional architectural styles fused with modern building materials and techniques.

Originally a focal point for the Al Ain community, the conserved BMBK reopened as a vibrant community centre in 2021. Its permanent exhibition offers an overview of the home's history and its role within the Cultural Sites of Al Ain, a World Heritage property. Highlights of the exhibition include:

- **The House & Al Ain World Heritage Site:** An interactive introduction to BMBK's role in the Al Ain UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- **A Glimpse into the 1960s:** An exhibit reflecting the ambiance of a 1960s room, dedicated to Sheikh Tahnoun, son of Sheikh Mohammed.
- **Adapting Building Traditions:** Showcasing Transition Period architecture at BMBK, this exhibit features materials used in construction, the house's cooling systems, and the evolution of house sections like the manama and windows.

- **The Transition Period in Al Ain:** A display on urban transformations in Al Ain, featuring narratives and resident interviews.
- **Conserving the House:** Detailing the preservation process through artefacts and a documentary film.
- **Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa Life & Legacy:** A feature on Sheikh Mohammed's influence during the Sheikh Shakhbut and Sheikh Zayed eras.
- **At the Heart of the Community:** Showcasing BMBK's role in social events, with optical theatres depicting its communal significance.

An outdoor exhibit, The Archaeological Wall, displays BMBK's structural transformations since 1958. Preserved as scientific evidence, the wall provides insights into the design and materials typical of the Transition Period. Archaeological investigations, oral accounts, and aerial photographs helped establish the chronological sequence of its five key construction phases, represented in the exhibit's models.

Now primarily a community centre, Bait Mohammed bin Khalifa offers space rentals for community groups and institutions. Entry to the exhibitions and all areas is free, and reservations can be made by email, phone, or onsite.

For more information, visit:

<https://baitmohammedbinkhalifa.ae>



b.Al Jahili Fort

Al Jahili Fort, a prominent historical landmark in Al Ain, was built by Sheikh Zayed the First in 1891 and completed in 1898. Located in Castle Park, the fort is a symbol of traditional architecture and Abu Dhabi's cultural heritage. Initially, it featured a round watchtower and a square fort with a spacious courtyard surrounded by tall walls. Today, the site includes the round watchtower, the square fort with corner towers, walled enclosures, and a historic mosque.

The fort now serves as a cultural and community centre, featuring several key sections:

Visitor Centre: Provides tourist information, a gift shop, and a coffee shop.

Exhibition Halls: Houses a permanent exhibition about explorer Wilfred Thesiger (known as Mubarak Bin London), who crossed the Empty Quarter Desert in the 1940s, and a temporary exhibition hall hosting events throughout the year.

Old Fort and Circular Tower: The old fort retains three original towers, while the circular tower is a significant national landmark.







Historically, Al Jahili Fort served as a summer retreat for the ruling Al Nahyan family and as a refuge for local residents during periods of political unrest. In the 1950s, the fort became a British military base, later utilised by the UAE Army.

In 2007, a major conservation project preserved the fort, incorporating modern technologies while maintaining its historical character. A new cooling system was installed with chilled water pipes embedded in the walls, helping to maintain a comfortable internal climate. This project earned the prestigious Terra Award in 2016. In 2013, the fort's north gate was reconstructed using archaeological evidence and historic photographs.

Nearby, **Al Jahili Mosque**, an archaeological mosque, contributes to the region's rich heritage. The fort also hosts an audiovisual exhibition that narrates the historical and cultural heritage of Al Ain, featuring multimedia programmes across the rooms of the circular tower. Special effects, music, and poetry are used to tell the story of Al Ain, and the exhibition includes photographs taken by Wilfred Thesiger during his travels.

Efforts to preserve the fort's original architectural design included adding glass walls to the old hallways and using cold-water pipes in the mud layers for cooling. Additional conservation work included reassembling palm trunks on the roofs, rebuilding mud-brick layers, and expanding rooms to accommodate new spaces like the information centre, council, and library.

Entry to the fort is free.

For more details, visit:

[Al Jahili Fort page on Abu Dhabi Culture](#)

[Visit Abu Dhabi - Al Jahili Fort](#)

c.Al Qattara Arts Centre

Al Qattara Arts Centre is located near Al Qattara Oasis in the restored Al Qattara Fort complex in Al Ain. Opened in 2011, it is the first of its kind in the city, providing a space for the UAE community to study and practice arts and culture. The centre features a gallery, library, exhibition hall, and archaeological basement, with regular exhibitions and events that can be explored on the website.

The centre offers a variety of classes, including computing, music, drawing, painting, and Arabic calligraphy, with expert instructors such as Mohammed Mandi, known for his decorative designs on the UAE's bank notes. Temporary exhibitions often showcase modern works, local artists, and mixed media art.

During the construction of the centre, a significant archaeological find was made: a five-metre-long sequence of layers from the late Islamic period to the Iron Age, dating back 3,000 years. A special presentation of this local archaeology is displayed in the basement.

For more details, visit:

[Abu Dhabi Culture - Al Qattara Arts Centre](#)

[Visit Abu Dhabi's Video on Al Qattara Arts Centre](#)



Souq Al Qattara

Founded by Sheikh Shakhbut bin Sultan Al Nahyan in the mid-20th century, Souq Al Qattara is a seasonal market that operates from October to May. It promotes traditional Arabian culture and handicrafts, offering a variety of products including sweets, dates, Arabian coffee, incense, and traditional clothing. Visitors can also enjoy hunting and riding tools, as well as local artworks.

The souq is located in the centre of Al Ain, along the road connecting the Al Qattara and Al Jimi oases. It hosts a range of family activities, such as heritage lectures, arts and culture exhibitions, and opportunities to purchase traditional items. The market, originally a collection of mud shops, was abandoned about 15 years ago following the discovery of oil, but it was later restored by the Department of Culture and Tourism and now serves as a cultural centre.

Throughout the year, Souq Al Qattara hosts a variety of celebrations, including the Traditional Handicrafts Festival, UAE Flag Day, and National Day festivities. Every Thursday and Friday evening from November to May, visitors can enjoy folklore shows and traditional dance performances.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Souq has a specialised shop dedicated to Al Khoos, a traditional women's handicraft involving the creation of baskets and mats by braiding dried palm fronds.

For more information, visit:

[Abu Dhabi Culture - Souq Al Qattara](#)

d.Qasr Al Muwaiji

Qasr Al Muwaiji, a historical fort located in Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, was built in the early 20th century by Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed bin Khalifa. It stands as a symbol of the region's history and culture, located within the UNESCO Al Ain World Heritage Site.

Key Timeline:

1946: The late H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan became the Ruler's Representative in Al Ain and made Qasr Al Muwaiji his home and diwan, where he would receive guests and hear the concerns of the community.

1948: The late H.H. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who served as President of the UAE, was born at Qasr Al Muwaiji.

1966: Sheikh Zayed became the Ruler of Abu Dhabi and moved to Abu Dhabi City. The fort was later used for a date plantation, with structures demolished over time.

2008: The Department of Culture and Tourism began archaeological research and conservation work at Qasr Al Muwaiji. An early coin dating back to 1897 was discovered, which helped confirm the fort's construction period.

2015: After restoration, the fort was reopened as a museum with a permanent exhibition, designed to complement the original structure without affecting its historic integrity.

The museum is split into two main sections: a glass-walled structure within the courtyard and a tour through the rooms of the north-west tower. One section, "The President of the Nation," focuses on Sheikh Khalifa's life, education, and interests, including falconry, with personal items like his falconry equipment displayed.

The museum also features interactive elements, such as a table exploring the fort's history and its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Visitors can enjoy the site with free admission and complimentary audio guides.

Fun Fact:

British explorer Wilfred Thesiger stayed at Qasr Al Muwaiji during the late 1940s as a guest of Sheikh Zayed.

For further details, visit the [official Qasr Al Muwaiji page](#).



e.Ai Ain Camel Market

Al Ain Camel Market is located east of Jebel Hafit in Al Ain, the second-largest city in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. It is thought that Al Ain has the largest camel population in the UAE.

In Section 5: Emirati Culture and Traditions, much is discussed about the significance of camels in UAE history and culture. Visitors who wish to understand the importance of camels in the region's history and culture should visit the Al Ain Camel Market. Even today, camels remain an essential part of Arab culture and are used for milk, meat and racing.

The market operates 24 hours a day, daily.

Entry to the market is free for the general public, but organised tour group are charged AED 30 per person. The busiest time is early in the morning, shortly after opening, when trading peaks, and mock races are sometimes held to train camel jockeys. Other animals, such as goats and sheep, are also sold at the market, with traders from across the Middle East coming to buy and sell animals.

The market is an excellent photo opportunity, but visitors must request permission first and be ready to negotiate if vendors request money for photos (AED 10 or AED 20 is an acceptable rate). Visitors should agree on any fees upfront before entering animal pens, even if vendors are particularly enthusiastic.

Various types of camels can be seen and bought at the market, with prices ranging from AED 300 to AED 55,000 depending on the type and age of the animal. The most expensive camels are the long-legged, tan-coloured racing camels. Other camels include black show camels and females with large, round stomachs used for milk production. From small, baby camels with big eyes and unsteady legs to noisy breeding bulls showing their teeth, there is much to see.

Visitors are often offered the chance to hand-feed camels, hold newborn lambs, or try fresh camel milk, but prices must be negotiated for these experiences. Visitors should arrange onward transportation in advance, as taxis are limited in the area. Alternatively, a trip to the market can be combined with a visit to the nearby Bawadi Mall, where popular shops and brands can be found.

For more information, visit [Visit Abu Dhabi - Al Ain Camel Market](#).

f. Al Foah Date Factory

Al Foah, established in 2005 and headquartered near Al Ain International Airport, is the world's largest date company and operates as a subsidiary of Senaat, owned by the Abu Dhabi Government. Each year, the company exports approximately 80,000 tonnes of dates, 90% of its production, to 48 countries, with the UAE, India, and Oman among its largest markets. Al Foah offers a variety of date products, including stuffed dates, date syrup, and date halwa, catering to both bulk buyers and the luxury market.

In 2014, Al Foah pioneered the use of automated sorting machines for dates, capable of handling up to six metric tonnes per hour. During peak harvest season, from August to October, the factory operates 24/7. In 2016, Al Foah opened a library at its headquarters to support the learning of employees, suppliers, and clients, with resources available to those awaiting transactions on-site.

Date palm farming originated in the Middle East over 8,000 years ago, spreading to regions like North Africa and North America. The versatile date fruit can be eaten ripe, semi-mature, or dried, and is traditionally used to break the Ramadan fast. Dates are known for their health benefits, offering antioxidants, fiber, potassium, iron, and vitamins A, E, and C.

Al Foah also operates the world's largest organic date farm in Al Ain, covering 634.6 hectares and featuring 63,000 organic date palms certified by ECOCERT and UAE Organic. The farm boasts over 147,000 date palms across nearly 100 different varieties.

For more information, visit the [Al Foah website](#).

g.Al Khaznah Tannery

“Abu Dhabi’s rich cultural offering invites visitors from all walks of life to enjoy authentic experiences. Al Khaznah Tannery will allow visitors to witness the art of producing hand-made sustainable leather goods, the process of which carries great significance within the Emirati heritage.”

Al Khaznah Tannery, Abu Dhabi’s only leather processing facility and one of the UAE’s most advanced, offers visitors a unique opportunity to witness the traditional and sustainable process of leather production, a practice with deep roots in Emirati heritage. Situated in the desert between Abu Dhabi and Al Ain, the tannery was established in 2007 by the Abu Dhabi government. It combines innovative technology with artisanal techniques to craft a variety of leather goods, including clothing, accessories, furniture, and decorative wall panels.

Skilled Craftsmanship and Multicultural Workforce

The tannery employs skilled artisans from various countries, such as Egypt, Sudan, the Philippines, India, and Iraq, who contribute to producing bespoke leather items that often take up to ten weeks to complete. This craftsmanship reflects the skill and precision required in leatherwork, making Al Khaznah’s products both distinctive and high-quality.

Sustainable Practices and Eco-Friendly Processes

Al Khaznah primarily processes camel leather but also uses locally sourced goat, sheep, and cow skins to reduce environmental impact. The tannery’s commitment to sustainability includes using natural, metal-free products that comply with REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation, and Restriction of Chemicals) standards for human health and environmental safety. Instead of harmful chemicals, it employs natural oils from sustainable vegetable extracts to soften leather.

The tannery's additional eco-friendly practices include:

- **Carbon Reduction:** Using carbon dioxide in the tanning process to reduce atmospheric CO2.
- **Water Recycling:** Recycling and reusing 80% of water utilised during production.
- **Waste Repurposing:** Transforming waste into organic fertiliser.
- **Biodegradable Leather:** Producing leather that biodegrades within four months if disposed of in a landfill.

Visitor Experience

Visitors to Al Khaznah Tannery can observe the leather-tanning process firsthand and browse exclusive leather items crafted at the facility's boutique. This immersive experience allows visitors to appreciate the artistry involved in leather production while learning about sustainable practices integral to Emirati heritage.

For more details, visit the [Al Khaznah Tannery website](#)



h.Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Mosque: A Monument to Faith and Architecture

The Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Mosque, also known as the Al Ain Grand Mosque, is a monumental masterpiece of Islamic architecture and one of the most prominent in the UAE. Named after the late Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the former Ruler of Abu Dhabi, it stands as a symbol of faith, heritage, and modernity. Since opening in April 2021, the mosque has become a key landmark, attracting visitors with its stunning architectural features and tranquil ambiance.

The mosque's design is grand and intricate, featuring a vast dome measuring 86 metres in diameter, which shelters the main prayer hall beneath it. The interior of the dome is adorned with Quranic verses and intricate Arabic calligraphy, creating a spiritually enriching atmosphere. The mosque can accommodate approximately 20,800 worshippers in both indoor and outdoor spaces, making it one of the largest mosques in the UAE.

The mosque is further distinguished by its four impressive minarets, each soaring to a height of 60 metres, inspired by the historic Great Mosque of Samarra. The complex also includes facilities such as classrooms, ablution areas, and service blocks, ensuring both functionality and comfort for visitors.

A unique aspect of the mosque is its harmonious blend of contemporary design with historical elements. Nearby, a 1,000-year-old mosque from the Islamic Golden Age serves as a reminder of the deep-rooted Islamic heritage that continues to influence the region. The mosque also holds significant cultural importance, as prayers were offered by the late H.H. Sheikh Tahnoun bin Mohammed Al Nahyan shortly after its inauguration, enhancing its spiritual and cultural relevance.

Visitors to the Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Mosque experience not only a space for worship and reflection but also a deep connection to the rich history and cultural values of the UAE.

Resources:

[Visit Al Ain - Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Mosque](#)

[Abu Dhabi Magazine - Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Mosque](#)



1.2 UNESCO Heritage Sites

a. UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Al Ain

A United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural (UNESCO) World Heritage Site is a place listed by the organisation as being of ‘special cultural or physical significance’. When sites are nominated to be listed as a World Heritage Site, they must meet UNESCO’s criteria of being of ‘outstanding universal value’.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site is a place recognised for its “outstanding universal value.” In Abu Dhabi, several World Heritage Sites are located in the Al Ain region, including the Al Ain Oasis, Hafit, Hili, Bida Bint Saud, and the Oases Areas. Al Ain, known as the “Garden City,” was the first region in the UAE to be listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2011.

These sites, dating back to the Stone and Bronze Ages, showcase the transition from nomadic to settled communities. Key features include stone tombs (circa 2500 BC), wells, and adobe buildings, as well as the ancient falaj irrigation system in Hili. These sites highlight the adaptability of early communities to the harsh desert environment.

Visitors will gain insights into Abu Dhabi’s cultural traditions, shaped by desert and oasis environments.

Further Your Knowledge

[UNESCO Information about the Al Ain UNESCO Sites](#)

[Visit Abu Dhabi’s UNESCO Sites page.](#)



c.Ai Ain Oasis

Al Ain Oasis is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Al Ain, the first site in the UAE to be listed. This oasis complex consists of 17 components spread across the city, covering over 8,000 years of history. It includes a mix of archaeological sites and cultural landscapes, such as the Al Ain oases, which collectively tell the story of human ingenuity in creating sustainable living environments in the desert. The history of Al Ain's oasis is a testament to how early communities overcame the harsh desert conditions, developed irrigation systems, and shifted from a nomadic to a settled lifestyle. This transformation allowed the area to become a key stop on trade routes connecting ancient civilisations such as Mesopotamia, Persia, and the Indus Valley.

The Al Ain Oasis, the largest of the six oases in the city, was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2011. It covers over 3,000 acres and contains more than 147,000 date palms, with approximately 100 different varieties. Local farmers continue to cultivate the date palms, which provide a shaded area for visitors to enjoy the oasis's cool, serene environment, away from the heat of the city.

The Oasiscape

The late H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founder of the UAE, wanted the oasis to be maintained and improved so that future generations of Emiratis and visitors to Abu Dhabi could enjoy and learn from it.

The Oasiscape is an innovative initiative to guide visitors through the oasis, highlighting its importance as both a cultural and ecological landscape. Created to preserve the tranquility of the oasis while integrating modern developments, the Oasiscape connects historical and contemporary elements of Al Ain. Visitors can explore the Eco-Centre, which offers interactive exhibits explaining the oasis's unique environment and its role in sustaining life in the desert. The Oasiscape also features the Miniature Oasis, a scaled model that demonstrates how the oasis functions, with replicas of irrigation systems and water channels that have been used for centuries.



Gardens of the Oasis

The Oasis Garden is composed of three distinct layers: the Pre-Oasis Garden, the Orchard Garden, and the Symbolic Garden. The Pre-Oasis Garden contains crops such as wheat and medicinal plants, while the Orchard Garden focuses on fruit trees and sugar cane. The Symbolic Garden, the tallest layer, offers shade and shelter for the crops below, providing a sustainable farming method that has supported the oasis's community for centuries.

Opening Hours

The oasis is open daily from 9 am to 5:30 pm. Restaurants, cafes, and shops are open from noon to 9 pm. Admission is free.

For further details, visit the [Abu Dhabi Culture Website](#) or the [Visit Abu Dhabi Website](#).

Explore the Oases of Al Ain: A Natural Retreat

For more beautiful oases in Al Ain, visitors can explore Al Hili Oasis, a serene location known for its lush greenery and historical significance. Situated in the foothills of the Jebel Hafit mountain, it offers a peaceful retreat with a rich cultural heritage. Another stunning oasis is Al Qattara Oasis, famous for its date palms and traditional irrigation systems, providing a glimpse into the region's agricultural history. Lastly, Al Jimi Oasis offers scenic views and is known for its unique blend of nature and local heritage, making it a perfect spot for those seeking tranquillity and a deeper connection with the landscape.

Source:

[Al Hili Oasis.](#)

[Al Qattara Oasis.](#)

[Al Jimi Oasis.](#)



d.Bida Bint Saud

Bida Bint Saud is a UNESCO World Heritage Site located 15 kilometres north of Al Ain, along the E95 road. It is home to a series of ancient burial chambers or tombs that are positioned both at the base and the summit of the Qarn Bint Saud rock formation, which is easily visible from the road. The Qarn is 800 metres long, 25 metres wide, and 40 metres high.

The tombs at the base of the Qarn date back to approximately 3000 BC and are characterised by round, single chambers, similar to the ones found at the foot of Jebel Hafit. These are known as the “Hafit Tombs” and were originally shaped like domes or beehives.

At the top of the Qarn, there is a collection of tombs from the Bronze and Iron Ages (circa 2000 to 300 BC). These tombs contained various artefacts, including bronze and ceramic objects, although most of these items have been removed over time. Other items discovered at the tombs, believed to date from later periods, include:

- Pottery and stone containers
- Blades
- Swords
- Arrowheads
- Beads and jewelry

DID YOU KNOW?

Excavations at the site have yielded artefacts, including double-edged swords up to 40 cm in length!

The presence of these burial sites suggests a long history of settlement in the area. Evidence of this can also be found one and a half kilometres to the west, where a 3000-year-old falaj (irrigation system) was discovered. The falaj was used to channel water to the area for irrigation purposes. Near the falaj, the remains of a public building were uncovered, thought to have been a **majlis**-a gathering space or council area where local leaders likely held public meetings and managed the distribution of water.

The site also features a large central courtyard with the remnants of 12 pillars, which would have supported a roof covering. This area likely served as the main structure, while smaller storage rooms around the courtyard housed containers used for storing and distributing water from the falaj system.

The significance of the falaj is twofold. First, it highlights one of the earliest examples globally of this type of irrigation system. Second, the falaj system and the availability of water enabled the shift from a nomadic lifestyle to a more settled existence, allowing people to cultivate land and establish permanent communities. This development played a significant role in the broader history and development of the region.

For more information, visit the official [Abu Dhabi Culture Website](#) or [UNESCO's World Heritage Sites Page](#).



e.Hili Archaeological Park

Hili Archaeological Park is located approximately 12 kilometres north of Al Ain, near the village of Hili. The park is well known internationally and easily accessible, attracting many visitors due to its fascinating archaeological sites set within a relaxed, beautiful garden environment.

The Government of Abu Dhabi developed the park around the archaeological sites to highlight ancient monuments and make them easily accessible to the public. The area is surrounded by gardens that are perfect for picnics, offering visitors a peaceful atmosphere to enjoy the surroundings.

The settlement and tombs date back to the third millennium BC and were first discovered in the 1960s when archaeologists began their research. The majority of the towers and tombs found in Hili date from the Umm an-Nar period, which spanned from 2500 to 2000 BC. This period is named after Umm an-Nar Island off the coast of Abu Dhabi, where similar settlements and cemeteries from the same time were first uncovered.

The earliest archaeological digs at Hili revealed the remains of a Bronze Age tower dating back to around 2500 BC. The tower, which was round and constructed of mud bricks, was used as a small fortress built around a water well. The existence of these towers indicates that Al Ain had already begun to develop into an important trade and economic hub during the Bronze Age.

In 1985, a falaj (irrigation system) was discovered near Hili Archaeological Park, which dates back to around 1000 BC. This is one of the oldest known examples of the falaj irrigation system in the world. The discovery of this system shows that settlers in the area employed advanced engineering techniques, developed over centuries, to manage the scarce water resources of the region. Artefacts found at the site, including pottery and vessels, as well as the remains of the tower and falaj system, provide archaeologists with a clear understanding of how the ancient inhabitants of Hili farmed, traded, and survived.

The Hili Tombs

The largest stone tomb discovered at the site is known as Hili Grand Tomb. It is 2.5 metres high and 8 metres across. Inside, the tomb contains six stone chambers, likely used to bury groups of people from the nearby settlement. The tomb was in poor condition but was restored so visitors could experience its original structure.

At the entrance to two other tombs, engravings of animals and humans are visible. Outside one circular tomb, a pit grave containing the remains of hundreds of people was discovered. This pit dates to the end of the Umm an-Nar period (2500-2000 BC).

DID YOU KNOW?

Excavations at Hili revealed that people buried in the tombs had high levels of malnutrition, which caused significant dental issues.

For further information, visit the official [Abu Dhabi Culture website](#).

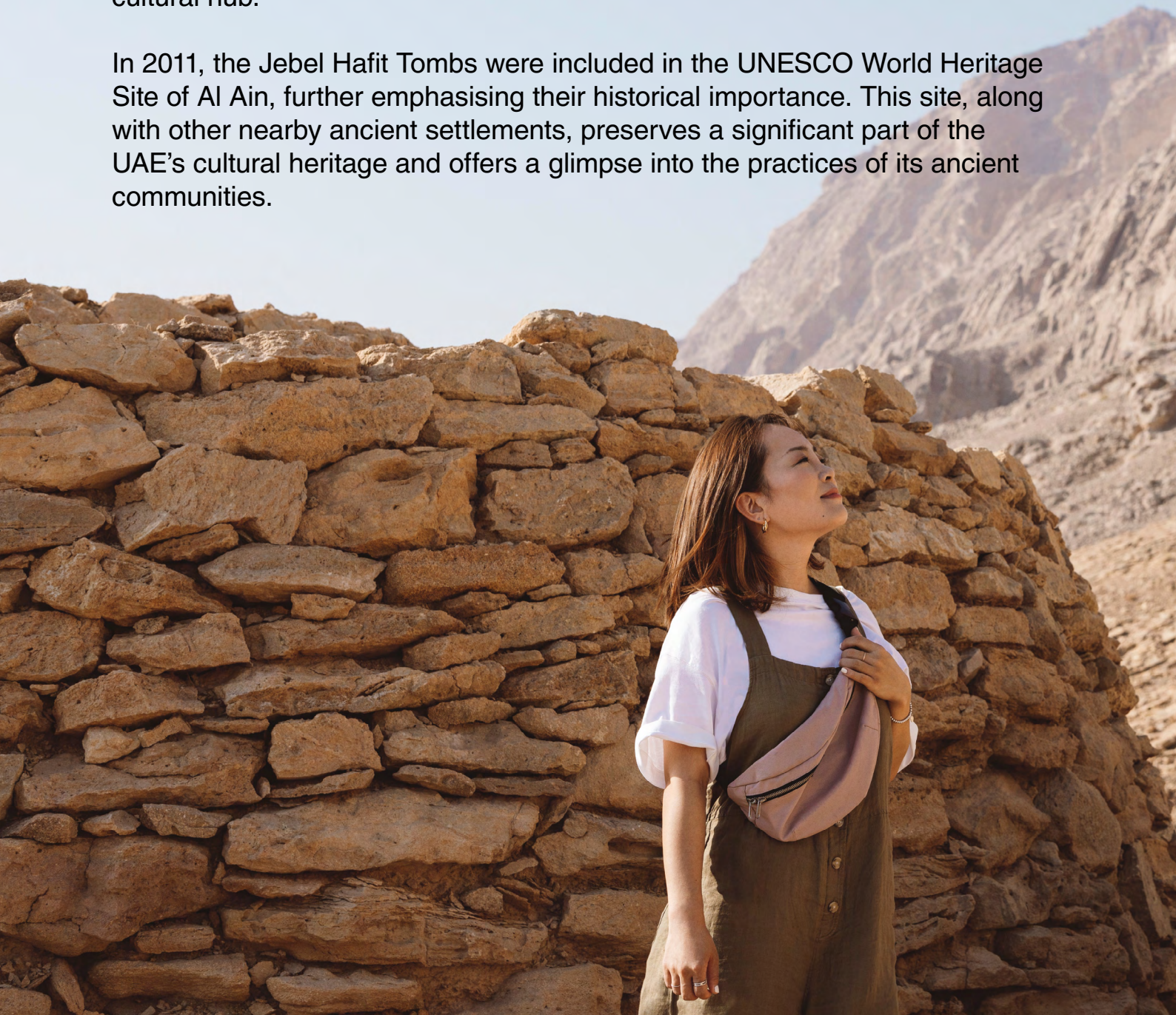


f. Jebel Hafit Tombs

The Jebel Hafit Tombs, located at the base of Jebel Hafit near the Omani border in eastern Al Ain, are an archaeological site of hundreds of prehistoric tombs dating from around 3200 to 2700 BC. These tombs, attributed to the early Bronze Age and known as the Hafit Period, were excavated in the 1960s by Danish archaeologists at the invitation of the late H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the UAE's first president.

Constructed from roughly cut stones in a beehive shape, many tombs were looted in antiquity but originally contained ceramic vessels, beads, and bronze or copper objects buried with the deceased. Artefacts from the tombs reveal that the region's early inhabitants, while largely nomadic, began forming settled communities and cultivating crops. These discoveries provide insight into early life in the region and underscore the area's role as a trade and cultural hub.

In 2011, the Jebel Hafit Tombs were included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Al Ain, further emphasising their historical importance. This site, along with other nearby ancient settlements, preserves a significant part of the UAE's cultural heritage and offers a glimpse into the practices of its ancient communities.





1.3 Family Attractions

a. Al Ain Zoo

Located at the base of Jebel Hafit in the eastern region of Al Ain, Al Ain Zoo is the largest zoo in the Middle East, spanning 900 hectares and home to over 4,000 animals. This renowned family destination houses around 200 species, many of which live in enclosures that mimic their natural habitats. Approximately 30% of these species are considered endangered, highlighting the zoo's critical conservation role.

Visitors can enjoy a variety of unique experiences, including encounters with zoo "celebrities" such as Zaafarna the giraffe, Liwi the zebra, Jambo the gorilla, and Qais the leopard. Additional activities include camel rides, reptile interactions, and feeding opportunities with animals like giraffes, penguins, and budgies. A complimentary train ride also allows easy access around the zoo's many exhibits.

Al Ain Safari

Al Ain Zoo is also home to Al Ain Safari, the largest man-made safari in the world, which opened in 2016 and covers 217 hectares along the Jebel Hafit foothills. The safari showcases African wildlife, including species like African lions, white rhinos, and giraffes, in a meticulously crafted desert landscape. Guests can choose between private SUV tours (for groups of up to 6) and larger truck tours (for groups of up to 22), which last about 45 minutes. Exclusive experiences like "Dinner with the Lions" provide visitors with a gourmet dining event in close proximity to lion habitats, combining local flavours with scenic wilderness views.



Sheikh Zayed Desert Learning Centre

The Sheikh Zayed Desert Learning Centre, within Al Ain Zoo, is an educational and interactive facility honouring the UAE's founding father, the late H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. This sustainably designed centre features five interactive galleries:

- **Sheikh Zayed Tribute Hall:** Highlights his conservation efforts.
 - **Abu Dhabi's Desert Over Time:** Focuses on the region's natural and cultural history.
 - **Abu Dhabi's Living World:** Examines local ecosystems and biodiversity.
 - **People of the Desert:** Provides insights into Bedouin life.
 - **Looking to the Future:** Showcases Abu Dhabi's future developments.
- Additionally, the Visions of the Arabian Desert theatre offers a virtual flight through the desert's history.

The SZDLC is the first UAE building to earn a five-pearl sustainability rating and also holds LEED Platinum certification. Admission to SZDLC is included with Al Ain Zoo entry tickets.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Al Ain Zoo is the largest zoo in the Middle East and home to over 4,000 animals.
- More than 30% of the zoo's animal species are endangered, according to the IUCN's Red List.
- Al Ain Safari is the largest man-made safari in the world, featuring African wildlife on 217 hectares.
- The zoo collaborates with global conservation organisations to run educational programmes and initiatives to protect endangered species.

For more information, visit [Al Ain Zoo on Visit Abu Dhabi](#) or the official [Al Ain Zoo website](#).



b.Green Mubazzarah Park and Hot Springs

Green Mubazzarah Park and Hot Springs, located at the base of Jebel Hafit mountain in Al Ain, is only a ten-minute drive from Al Ain Zoo. This 160-hectare oasis, considered one of the greenest areas in the UAE, is nourished by natural geothermal springs that continuously bring water to the surface, sustaining its vibrant greenery.

The park's hot springs emerge from deep within the earth at temperatures between 40 and 45°C. Formed by tectonic activity over thousands of years, these mineral-rich waters are believed to offer therapeutic benefits, much like many hot springs worldwide.

Development and Popularity

The late H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the UAE's founding father, envisioned and initiated the development of Green Mubazzarah as part of his mission to "green the desert". Since its opening in 2004, the park has become a popular destination for residents and visitors, especially on weekends and public holidays.

Facilities and Activities

The park includes a man-made lake and various amenities, such as camping areas, barbecue spots, fishing zones, camel and horse-drawn carriage rides, and a mini-market. For a small fee (AED 5), visitors can access one of four indoor pools, with separate pools available for men, children, and women over 12. Overnight accommodation is offered in one- or two-bedroom chalets operated by Danat Hotels.

Entry to Green Mubazzarah Park is free, though fines are enforced by Al Ain Municipality for littering and unauthorised fires. The Green Mubazzarah Chalets are available for booking through the [Danat Hotels website](#).

DID YOU KNOW?

Greenest Spot in the UAE: The park's year-round greenery is maintained naturally by geothermal springs.

The Vision of the Late H.H. Sheikh Zayed: During its construction, Sheikh Zayed had a live satellite link to the site while he was in Switzerland.

Popular Local Getaway: It's a favoured spot for family gatherings, barbecues, and camping.



c.AI Ain Adventure Park

Al Ain Adventure Park, situated at the foot of the 1,240-metre Jebel Hafit Mountain, is the first Middle Eastern facility offering white water rafting, kayaking, surfing, and wakeboarding. The park includes 1.1 kilometres of whitewater channels for rafting and kayaking, a surf pool with waves reaching over three metres every 90 seconds, and a wakeboarding zone with challenging obstacles. It also features a two-level airpark, a zip line, a climbing wall, a temperature-controlled family pool, and a children's splash pad. Additional amenities include food and beverage facilities, making it a complete adventure and family-friendly destination.

For up-to-date details, including special packages and availability, visit [Al Ain Adventure Park's website](#).







d. Al Ain Classic Cars Museum

The museum showcases an impressive collection of vintage and classic cars, offering visitors a unique look at vehicles from the 20th century. The museum features a diverse range of cars, including rare European, American, and Arab models, and highlights the evolution of automotive design as well as the growth of the car industry in the UAE. Visitors can explore meticulously restored vehicles and learn about the history of car collecting in the region. The museum also hosts special events, such as classic car shows, making it a must-visit for enthusiasts. Located in central Al Ain, it provides an intriguing glimpse into the world of classic automobiles.

For more information visit: [Al Ain Classic Cars Museum](#) - [Al Ain Classic Car Museum Website](#)

1.4 Outdoor Adventure – Land / Desert

a. Al Ain Safari

Al Ain Safari offers several unique tour and wildlife experiences designed to bring visitors up close with diverse animal species in a naturalistic, African-inspired environment. Here are some popular tour options and experiences:

1. **Group Safari Tour:** Guests can join a group on a 26-seat safari truck, accompanied by a knowledgeable guide who provides insights into the animals and ecosystems. This tour follows a specific route that brings visitors close to prominent animals, including giraffes, zebras, lions, and ostriches. The tour's open design ensures that visitors have an immersive and panoramic view of the landscape.
2. **Private SUV Safari:** For a more personalised experience, visitors can book a private SUV tour, where an expert guide drives guests through exclusive parts of the park. The SUV allows close-up viewing of animals, including proximity to the lion enclosure, providing a rare opportunity to observe these big cats in their habitat.
3. **Night Safari:** Al Ain Safari also offers a night safari option for those interested in exploring the park after dark. This tour offers a unique perspective on animal behavior at night and gives adventurers the chance to experience the atmosphere of an African safari under the stars.
4. **Walking Tours and Animal Encounters:** Visitors can enjoy walking tours through specific zones within the safari, allowing for closer interactions with smaller animals and access to feeding times. Guests may also participate in encounters with selected animals, under the guidance of the safari's expert staff.

5. **Dining Experiences:** One of the park's exclusive offerings includes dining experiences within the safari environment, allowing visitors to enjoy a meal while overlooking the landscape or near animal enclosures. This provides a blend of luxury and adventure for a memorable experience.

DID YOU KNOW?

Visitors to Al Ain Safari are guided entirely by Emirati tour guides, adding a rich layer of cultural context and heritage to the safari experience.

For more information on tours, activities, and prices, visit the [Al Ain Zoo website](#).



b.Arabian Nights Village

The Arabian Nights Village is a purpose-built desert retreat offering an immersive experience into Emirati culture and traditions, with a range of desert-based activities for guests. Located in the Razeen area of Al Khatim on the Abu Dhabi-Al Ain highway, it is accessible from Abu Dhabi, 50 km from exit 59 on Route 22. Established in 2012, the village accommodates both private guests and corporate groups, catering to day visitors as well as overnight guests.

Access and Accommodation

Transport Options:

Transfers are available daily from Abu Dhabi, departing at 3 PM from Khalifa Park behind the Park Rotana complex. Confident 4x4 drivers may also drive directly to the village.

Accommodation Choices:

- Bedouin Tents (Bayt Al Shaaer).
- Palm Houses (Bayt Al Bahar).
- Desert Houses (Bayt Al Bar).
- Fort Tower (Al Manha).

Activities

Guests can participate in an array of adventurous activities:

- **Desert Safaris:** Licensed drivers lead day and night safaris.
- **Dune Bashing:** Experience an adrenaline rush in Toyota Land Cruisers.
- **Quad Biking and Fat Biking:** Off-road cycling for the energetic.
- **Sand Surfing and Sledding:** Slide down sand dunes for a unique thrill.
- **Swimming Pool:** Free for overnight guests; available for day guests at a small charge.

Dining and Entertainment

- **Al Maqam Restaurant:** Named “gathering place,” this buffet-style restaurant features a palm-thatched terrace and majlis-style seating on the floor. Dinner is served outdoors at 7 PM, with food stations offering Emirati, Arabic, and international dishes.
- **Evening Entertainment:** Enjoy performances by musicians, belly dancers, and falconry displays, as well as henna art and bread-making demonstrations.
- **Drinks and Shisha:** Soft drinks are complimentary, with alcohol available for an additional fee. Shisha pipes are available for rent.

Guest Tips

Al Maqam Restaurant: The dress code is conservative but allows appropriate swimwear at the pool. Loose-fitting clothes are ideal for activities, with hats recommended for sun protection. Winter evenings can be cool, so a light jacket or cardigan is advisable.

DID YOU KNOW?

The village has no televisions, allowing guests to fully disconnect and enjoy the serene environment.

For the latest rates on accommodations and activities, visit the [Arabian Nights Village website](#).

c.Jebel Hafit

Jebel Hafit is Abu Dhabi's highest mountain, located on the border with Oman, though its peak is within Abu Dhabi. This 1,249-metre-high mountain can be reached via the E40 road in the Al Ain district.

Ancient Burial Tombs: At the mountain's base, over 500 ancient burial tombs, some dating back more than 5,000 years, have been discovered. Many of these tombs are dome-shaped, and the area, excavated by archaeologists, has been recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Mercure Grand Jebel Hafit Hotel: Situated approximately 915 metres up the mountain, this unique mountain oasis offers breathtaking views of Al Ain. The hotel organises activities to explore the mountain, and visitors heading to the summit are advised to bring a jacket, as temperatures can be significantly cooler.

Best Visiting Times: Winter afternoons are ideal for clear views, while summer visits are better in the evenings when temperatures are lower. At night, the mountain offers a spectacular view from Al Ain City, with its winding, illuminated road to the summit shining in the distance.

The Mountain Road: The 11.7-kilometre road to the summit is known for being one of the best driving and cycling routes in the UAE. International magazines and websites have praised it as an outstanding road for driving. The ascent has two lanes, while the descent has one, with 21 bends ranging from sweeping turns to sharp hairpins. Although visibility is excellent and the road is smooth, drivers must remain cautious, as authorities enforce traffic laws strictly, with fines of AED 1,000 for unsafe driving, including sudden swerves.

Source: General knowledge of Jebel Hafit and [Al Ain tourism](#) websites.





Jebel Hafit Desert Park (UNESCO Heritage Site)

Jebel Hafit Desert Park is part of the Cultural Sites of Al Ain, the UAE's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. This site is recognised for its Outstanding Universal Value, showcasing prehistoric cultures from the Neolithic to the Iron Age. Located at the base of the rugged Jebel Hafit Mountain, the park offers visitors a chance to experience the area's rich history and landscapes, just a one-and-a-half-hour drive from Abu Dhabi.

Activities and Archaeology: The park's nine-kilometre stretch is ideal for family-friendly exploration. Visitors can hike, mountain bike, ride horses or camels, and encounter archaeological remnants from the Neolithic era, including the 5,000-year-old Jebel Hafit Tombs, which were excavated in 1959 under the guidance of the late H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the UAE's Founding Father.

Camping Options: The park caters to various camping preferences:

- Basic Camping: Bring your own gear.
- Fully Serviced Camping: Stay in Bedouin-style tents with breakfast included.
- Five-Star Bubble Glamping: Air-conditioned, furnished tents provide a luxurious camping experience.

Source: [Visit Abu Dhabi](#)





Pura Eco Retreat, Jebel Hafit Desert Park

Pura Eco Retreat in Jebel Hafit Desert Park offers unique accommodations amidst scenic mountain views, with free private parking and diverse breakfast options. Guests can dine at the on-site restaurant with international cuisine and enjoy a barbecue area. Bicycle rentals are available for easy exploration of the surroundings. The nearby Hot Springs Green Mubazzarah is 21 km away, and Al Ain Oasis is 22 km from the retreat. Al Ain International Airport is 45 km away.

Accommodation Types: Pura Eco Retreat offers three types of lodging to suit diverse preferences:

- **Sky Bubbles:** Modern bubble tents allow stargazing with expansive windows for abundant natural light.
- **Skylight Domes:** Chic domes with modern interiors provide a luxurious glamping experience.
- **Heritage Tents:** Rustic tents blend with the desert landscape, evoking a sense of adventure and exploration.
- **Public Campsites:** For those wanting to create their own camping experience, the public campsite allows visitors to set up tents, campers, or other equipment, with public lavatories available for convenience.

a.Shopping Malls

Al Ain offers a range of shopping malls and souks for shoppers seeking both traditional and luxury items (please refer to Section Six for more on souks and traditional shopping in Abu Dhabi). Recent expansions and new openings have added to the variety of shopping options in the city. The five main shopping malls are Al Ain Mall, Al Jimi Mall, Bawadi Mall, and Hili Mall.

Makani Mall Al Ain

Makani Mall Al Ain **previously known as Al Ain Mall** opened in 2001 and features around 350 stores and 60 cafés and restaurants. It is known as the “ever-active mall” for its year-round promotions and luxury prize campaigns.

In 2011, the mall nearly doubled in size after a major expansion, adding top entertainment facilities, including Al Ain’s first full-sized ice rink with real ice, a bowling and billiards centre, and the Grand Cineplex.

Al Jimi Mall

Originally built in the early 1980s as a vegetable and meat market, Al Jimi Mall now offers a wide variety of shopping, dining, and entertainment options. The mall also features a children’s play area and an outdoor “Retail Park” concept with several dining outlets.

Bawadi Mall

Opened in 2009, Bawadi Mall has over 400 stores featuring both international and regional brands. Located on the gravel flats of Khattam Al Shikla near Mezyad, the mall offers various dining options, a food court, and extensive family entertainment, including a ski village, roller coaster, an eight-screen cinema, and a 16-lane bowling alley.

Hili Mall

Hili Mall is a boutique shopping centre with over 120 shops across three levels. Located in Al Ain's Hili district, it is linked to the five-star Hili Rayhaan Hotel by Rotana. The mall offers a premium selection of fashion, electronics, home goods, dining options, and family entertainment.

b.Souks

Al Ain is home to several traditional souks, offering an authentic glimpse into the culture and history of the region. These souks provide a unique shopping experience, where visitors can find a mix of local products, handmade crafts, and traditional Emirati items.

Al Ain Souk (Central Market)

Located in the heart of Al Ain, Al Ain Souk, also known as the Central Market, is one of the city's oldest and most vibrant traditional shopping destinations. Here, visitors can browse stalls filled with spices, textiles, perfumes, incense, and traditional handicrafts. The souk offers an opportunity to experience Emirati culture, as local merchants often engage in friendly bargaining, creating an interactive and lively shopping experience. From oud (traditional perfume) and handmade jewelry to fresh produce and dried fruits, Al Ain Souk is a place to find authentic local treasures.

Source: [Visit Abu Dhabi - Al Ain Souk](#)

Souk Al Qattara

Situated near Al Qattara Fort, Souk Al Qattara is a renovated traditional market that combines cultural activities with shopping. This souk is known for its heritage-inspired design and serves as a hub for local artisans, who showcase and sell handicrafts, pottery, textiles, and jewelry. Souk Al Qattara also hosts events like the Al Ain Traditional Handicrafts Festival, providing insights into Emirati craftsmanship and heritage. The market operates primarily on weekends, attracting visitors interested in arts, crafts, and historical culture.

Source: [Visit Abu Dhabi - Souk Al Qattara](#)

Souk Al Bawadi and Souk Al Qaws

Located within the Bawadi Mall complex, Souk Al Bawadi and Souk Al Qaws blend modern convenience with traditional style. Souk Al Bawadi offers over 50 stores featuring traditional items, such as abayas, oud, and spices, while Souk Al Qaws provides a more modern selection, including electronics, fashion, and accessories. Together, these souks create a unique shopping experience that combines the old and new, making it a popular destination for both locals and tourists.

Source: [Visit Abu Dhabi - Souk Al Bawadi and Souk Al Qaws](#)

Souk Al Zafarana

Souk Al Zafarana is a hidden gem in Al Ain, known for its unique offering of aromatic spices, herbs, and perfumes. Located in the Al Zafarana area, this souk attracts visitors with its vibrant selection of traditional goods. It is an excellent place to find locally sourced spices, herbs, and essential oils, as well as perfumes and incense, which are an integral part of Emirati culture. Souk Al Zafarana is particularly popular for those looking to take home the rich fragrances and flavours that define the region's culinary and cultural identity.

Source: [Visit Al Ain - Souk Al Zafarana](#)

These souks in Al Ain offer a diverse and immersive experience, allowing visitors to explore traditional Emirati culture through local products, crafts, and an engaging shopping atmosphere.



a.Festivals

Al Ain, known for its rich cultural heritage and vibrant traditions, hosts a variety of festivals throughout the year that showcase the city's history, culture, and modern-day vibrancy. These festivals are an excellent way for both locals and visitors to experience the spirit of the city and the UAE as a whole. Here are some of the key festivals celebrated in Al Ain:

Traditional Handicrafts Festival

The Traditional Handicrafts Festival celebrates the UAE's rich tradition of craftsmanship and is an important event in the cultural calendar. Held annually in Al Ain, the festival showcases the skills of local artisans who create handmade items such as pottery, textiles, metalwork, and wood carvings. Visitors can interact with the artisans, watch demonstrations, and purchase unique handcrafted goods. The festival serves as a cultural bridge, highlighting the UAE's heritage while preserving traditional craft techniques for future generations.

Source: [Visit Abu Dhabi - Traditional Handicrafts Festival](#)

Al Ain Book Festival

The Al Ain Book Festival is a celebration of literature, bringing together authors, publishers, and book lovers from across the region and beyond. The festival includes book launches, author readings, panel discussions, and workshops, making it a perfect event for literary enthusiasts. It provides a platform for writers to share their work and for readers to engage with both local and international authors. Held annually, the festival promotes the importance of reading and fosters a culture of learning and creativity in Al Ain.

Source: [Visit Abu Dhabi - Al Ain Book Festival](#)





MOTN Festival

The Mother of the Nation Festival (MOTN Festival) is an annual event celebrating the legacy of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, the Mother of the Nation. It honours her contributions to the UAE and highlights the empowerment of women, family values, and Emirati culture.

Festival Highlights:

- **Cultural Performances:** Traditional music, dance, and theatre performances showcase Emirati heritage.
- **Art and Craft Exhibitions:** Local and international artists display contemporary and traditional art, alongside crafts such as pottery and textiles.
- **Workshops and Activities:** Hands-on workshops teach traditional Emirati skills, including calligraphy and weaving.
- **Culinary Delights:** Visitors can enjoy a variety of traditional Emirati dishes from food stalls.
- **Family-Friendly Fun:** The festival offers activities for all ages, making it a perfect family event.

The MOTN Festival is a celebration of the UAE's values of family, unity, and the empowerment of women, providing a platform to recognise their role in the nation's progress.

For more information visit: [MOTN Festival in Al Ain](#)

a. Al Ain Sportplex

Al Ain Sportplex is a leading sports and recreational facility in Al Ain, offering a range of world-class amenities for both athletes and the local community. It hosts sporting events, fitness programmes, and recreational activities.

Facilities:

- Indoor Arenas for basketball, volleyball, and handball.
- Football Fields with both grass and artificial turf.
- Tennis Courts with hard and clay surfaces.
- Swimming Pools for lap swimming and recreation.
- Fitness Gym with cardio and strength training equipment.
- Running Tracks for sprints and long-distance running.
- Cycling Tracks for outdoor cycling.

Events and Programmes: The Sportplex hosts sports events and fitness programmes such as swimming lessons, boot camps, and yoga sessions. These activities cater to all ages and fitness levels.

Family Focus: The facility is family-friendly, with spaces for children and outdoor areas to relax and unwind.

Location: Conveniently located in Al Ain, the Sportplex is easily accessible, with nearby attractions like Al Ain Zoo and Jebel Hafit.

Source: [Al Ain Sportplex](#)

Al Ain Raceway

Located near the Sportplex, **Al Ain Raceway** offers a thrilling karting experience. The track is suitable for both beginners and experienced racers and hosts go-kart competitions and driving events. The Raceway is a popular destination for motorsport enthusiasts.

Source: [Al Ain Raceway](#)

Al Reef Centre

Al Reef Centre is located within the Al Ain Sportplex and serves as a popular shopping and cultural destination. The centre features local markets, offering a range of goods including fresh produce, traditional handicrafts, and regional products. It provides visitors with a blend of modern and traditional experiences, making it a cultural hub within the Sportplex.

Source: [Al Reef Centre](#)



b.Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium

Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium is one of the UAE's premier sports venues. Known for its modern and innovative design, it is home to Al Ain Football Club and has hosted numerous high-profile matches and events.

Facilities:

- **Football Field:** The stadium features a FIFA-approved pitch, making it ideal for international football matches, as well as local league games and tournaments.
- **Seating Capacity:** With a seating capacity of 25,000, it offers a vast space for spectators, making it one of the largest football stadiums in the UAE.
- **Architectural Design:** The stadium's distinctive design, inspired by the shape of an open palm, is a key architectural feature that stands out in the city's skyline.
- **VIP and Hospitality Areas:** The stadium is equipped with luxury suites and hospitality lounges for premium guests, ensuring a comfortable experience during major events.
- **Lighting and Technology:** It features cutting-edge LED lighting and a high-tech audio-visual system, offering an enhanced viewing experience. The stadium also has a large video scoreboard and modern facilities for media and broadcasting.
- **Accessibility:** With excellent transport links, the stadium is easily accessible to both locals and visitors.

Events:

Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium hosts a variety of sports events, including domestic and international football matches, particularly those of Al Ain FC. It also accommodates concerts, cultural events, and community gatherings.

Notable Features:

- **Grass Pitch:** A world-class grass pitch maintained to FIFA standards, suitable for international competitions.
- **Community Focus:** Beyond football, the stadium is a community hub for various sporting activities, concerts, and large-scale events.
- **Location:** Located in Al Ain, it is easily accessible from major routes and serves as a landmark for sports fans visiting the city.

The stadium is also an important landmark for visitors to the UAE, reflecting the country's commitment to world-class infrastructure and sporting excellence.

Sources:

[Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium – Al Ain Club](#)

[Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium – Visit Abu Dhabi](#)



Abu Dhabi Tourist Guide
Training & Licensing Programme

Al Ain