

# CULTURE & ARTS

## An Oasis In Time

Al Ain Times News:

Al Ain is a city of great archaeological importance, and one of the oldest in the Middle East. Unspoilt and unique, a natural oasis, it is also one of the most picturesque cities in the region. Al Ain's long history of plantations and oases is still visible everywhere, and the ruins and restorations of ancient forts and settlements are spread around the city. Surrounded by magnificent red sand dunes and overlooked by the impressive Hajar mountains, Al Ain is home to a wealth of meticulously planned gardens, parks and picturesque of the old world and the new.

With a history that dates back more than four thousands years, Al Ain offers not just a wealth of archaeological evidence, but also insights into ancient life in the region. In Arabic, Al Ain simple means 'spring' and the name was bestowed on the city for the abundance of ground water located in and around the area. This was the basis for the formation of natural oases in the desert, which attracted human settlement as early as 5000 BC, and led to the growth of the Magam civilization. Excavations reveal that the settlers cultivated wheat, barley, pomegranates, sorghum and dates, using the ancient but efficient, underground 'Falaj' – the oldest known irrigation system in the world, traces of which still remain in Al Ain.

Archaeological discoveries indicate a thriving civilization dating back to the Stone and Bronze Ages. Several remains from these

periods can be seen in and around the city. In later years Al Ain became important as a crossroad on ancient trading routes with its abundant supplies of water attracting travelers from afar. Al Ain today is redolent with the essence of old Arabia, with its mud bricks forts, and carefully cultivated palm groves. It is a city that has retained many of the cultural traditions established by its erstwhile nomads, farmers, mountain and desert dwellers and traders. It retains a distinctly Arab character, with tall mineral and imposing date palms soaring upwards. The Al Ain Livestock Market near the Buraimi border of the Sultanate of Oman is colorful marketplace where camels are sold, often with detailed discussions of their merits, attracting Bedouin tribesmen and townspeople from all over the UAE and northern Oman.

Throughout the centuries, Al Ain has remained a most refreshing sight for the weary travelers. In ancient days, you might have traveled across an often harsh landscape to reach Al Ain. Today you can choose to break away, for a while at least, from the hustle and bustle of a busy environment to enjoy a different kind of space. You will have an authentic Arabian experience in an original oasis city. The key figures of the carving are those of a man and woman standing between two Orynx. There are other carvings to be found, including a peacock, a goat, a horse and rider, two cheetahs, a bull, a rabbit, a gazelle and a man with two

sticks. Known as 'Hilis' in reference to the place of their discovery, the figures characterize Al Ain's identity – its rich history, strong family values, and the people's emotional ties with nature.

Al Ain is located inland on the Eastern border on the UAE, at a focal point for journeys by road from other parts of the country, and the neighboring Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Sultanate of Oman. Situated on the edge of Rhub Al Khali, the Empty Quarter, Al Ain has a dramatic natural landscape with towering red sand dunes to the west and north, the impressive mountain of Jebel Hafeet to the south, and rocky gravel plains on the East. The most attractive feature of Al Ain is that with the exception of its hotels, no buildings are more than three storeys high, allowing every one in every part of the city stunning views of the surrounding mountains. Jebel Hafeet at approx. 1160 meters is the tallest mountain in the UAE and major visitor attraction. Spread over approx. 500 sq. kilometers, Al Ain has an international airport of its own as well as superb road network, with easy access to the capital, Abu Dhabi, and the emirates of Dubai and Sharjah. A drive along the Jebel Hafeet Mountain Road, all the way up to the summit of the Jebel Hafeet Mountain, provides some magnificent views across the city and its surroundings. "Green Mubazzarah" the Thermal Springs at the base of the mountain, and the 13 kilometers winding road are all part



of this fascinating road trip.

Al Ain is surrounded by several forts that were first built by settlers to control entry and access to water, and restored by various governing bodies. The old forts have also served as important centers of government. The picturesque Al Jahili Fort is considered one of the most famous historical forts in the UAE. Built in 1891 to defend the city and protect precious palm groves, The Hili Fort near the Buraimi Souk has delightful mud-walled paths that lead out from the back into an adjacent oasis. The Murajib Fort and Park is a small fort located on Al Jimi Street and the restored remains of the fortifications are located within a beautifully landscape garden. The Al Ain National Museum which opened in 1971, has several displays that provide deep insights into the history of the city and the region, with exhibits ranging from discoveries from the Bronze and Iron ages, artifacts reflecting the customs and traditions of the Bedouin people, and displays of state gifts presented to the President of the UAE.

The Museum is situated near the Al Hosn Fort, also known as Eastern Fort, which was built by sheikh Zayed bin Khalifa Al Nahyan built in 1910. The majestic Al Ain Palace Museum has several courts, courtyards and family residences within its premises.

Al Ain offers several indoor and outdoor opportunities for culture, amusement and entertainment. The Al Ain Club houses the Khalifa Bin Zayed Stadium, an indoor sports hall and an Olympic size swimming pool. The Al Ain Zoo has one of the largest animal collections in the region, including the unique sight of penguins in the desert. Al Ain's traditional markets and souqs and modern malls, play an equally important role on every visitor's agenda. While the air-conditioned malls sell branded goods, the open-air souqs feature great bargains in traditional handicrafts. The Hili Archaeological Park is the largest Bronze Age complex in the region. Set in the midst of a beautifully landscape grounds, the park has the 3000 BC Hili Tomb as its centerpiece. There are several oases located around the city: Al Ain, Al Jimi and Al Qattara.

Established as Al Ain Zoo in 1967, it is the largest in the Middle East at 880 hectares. Now known as Al Ain Wildlife Park & Resort, it is a unique desert setting on the edge of



Al Ain, a historic oasis settlement in the United Arab Emirates, the Al Ain Wildlife Park & Resort is a place for people to come and learn about arid land wildlife and conservation through vivid, firsthand experience.

The aim is to evolve the resort AWPR into a showcase for sustainable living in harmony with nature and wildlife that will be known all over the world. As well as creating a highly attractive destination, we are also committed to the increasingly important and never ending scientific challenge of conserving desert animal and plant life.

For more information please visit our website: [www.alaintimesUAE.com](http://www.alaintimesUAE.com)

