



Souq Al Qattara

Al Ain's extraordinary portal to a simpler time



Souq Al Qattara is one of those rare occasions where during the UAE's Cultural Season, the opportunity for family members to familiarise themselves with the traditional Arabic world meets good old fashioned entertainment. This picturesque Souq in the heart of Al Ain is currently home to an eight months

long initiative under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Sultan bin Tahnoon Al Nahyan, to promote traditional Arabian cultural and handcrafted products, as well as performers and artisans themselves.

Lasting from October to May, the Cultural Season is put together by the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture



Authority (TCA), who often gift us with the most extraordinary events. This year TCA invited local families to come and admire a wide array of cultural and heritage activities such as the traditional UAE folk dances. The dancers come to the Souq Al Qattara to perform the majestic Al Ayala, also known as "stick dance", or the children's Al Yola, and both are a piece of UAE heritage that is fascinating to behold. Elsewhere at the Souq, families can find out all about rope making or authentic building techniques.

Open Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, the Souq is also, an extraordinary shopping ground, home to eighteen different shops that offer traditional Arabic coffee, dates, honey, spices and Luqaimat (which is deliciously sweet and crunchy dumplings served with date syrup and sesame seeds that everyone needs to try), to name a few exquisite culinary products that get featured. Visitors can also purchase women's and men's traditional clothing, various utensils, camping, falconry equipment and many more items, whilst enquiring with the merry and hospitable artisans about how things are made and/or used.

The focus of the weekend's activities at the Souq Al Qattara is the Traditional Handcrafts Market which is a modern Friday market incorporating thirty stalls built in traditional palm lattice structures that reflect the atmosphere of each handcraft. A special Handcrafts exhibition is put together in the adjacent Qattara Art Centre at the impressive Al Qattara Fort and features crafts

such as Talli embroidery, Khos palm strand braiding and Sadu weaving – all wonderful handcrafts perfected by the talented Emirati women over many years.

The art centre has a traditional Arabian facades look which fits the overall evocative atmosphere of the Cultural Season and the Handcraft Festival, yet inside there are modern state-of-the-art facilities where one can try their hand at painting & drawing, paper quelling, punch craft, jewellery making, calligraphy, photography or even piano or oud lessons (oud is a particularly interesting pear-shaped string instrument that produces calming, some say even healing sounds) for the little ones. Hundreds of exhibits and workshops are hosted at the Al Qattara Fort yearly, which also offers a café and a library for moments of leisure.

One of the exhibitors at the National Traditional Handcraft Festival at Souq Al Qattara are Hina and Leena Mushfiq

who have shrewdly observed that festivals like these are a stepping stone for home-based business entrepreneurs, whilst Westerners can become acquainted with the traditional hand, food and handicraft. Everything in Souq Al Qattara is ancient and traditional, but also has a little modern craft with it. Another great benefit of the Souq, in addition to boosting local economy and helping visitors of all ages expand their horizons, is that it could one day possibly attract tens of thousands of people like Qasr Al Hosn Festival in Abu Dhabi does or Dubai's world-famous Global Village, with which it shares similar traits.

However, unlike Global Village that features the traditions in a clearly newly built and post-modern environment, Souq Al Qattara provides a High Definition insight into the Arabian past every step of the way, and as such represents one of the more unique experiences the UAE should treasure and promote. An ancient oasis of knowledge, trading and tradition.