

## Discover Abu Dhabi – Where Tradition Meets Modernity

By

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### Abstract

Abu Dhabi City is the commercial and cultural center of the United Arab Emirates. It also serves as the headquarters of the Federal government, office of the President of the United Arab Emirates, and seat of the Federal Supreme Council. It is an aspiring global financial center, a growing innovation hub, a leading energy producer, and a world-class tourist destination and cultural center. With its rich cultural heritage, resplendent landscapes, impressive museums, contemporary architecture, and vibrant food attractions, Abu Dhabi remains a must visit destination when one is on a leisure or a business trip to the UAE. Places to visit in Abu Dhabi offer the perfect experiences to people of all ages. If one is looking for a more traditional and conservative experience than a modern and cosmopolitan one, Abu Dhabi as compared to the other six Emirates is a better choice.

Abu Dhabi is the perfect example of cultural tourism. The convergence between tourism and culture, and the increasing interest of visitors in cultural experiences, bring unique opportunities to discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions here. These attractions encompass arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs, and traditions.

### Keywords

Abu Dhabi, Culture, Grand Mosque, Heritage

## Culture

*“Without culture, and the relative freedom it implies, society, even when perfect, is but a jungle. This is why any authentic creation is a gift to the future” by Albert Camus.*

Culture is a reflection of a community or a nation which strongly influences in shaping the national interests and priorities contributing to its strong foundation. The culture of Abu Dhabi is firmly rooted in the Islamic traditions and Arab heritage and its foremost message of peace. The way of life of Abu Dhabi is built upon cultural values of diversity, inclusivity, and tolerance. Abu Dhabi culture is renowned for its lifestyle, art, and architecture. It is a place where history is respected, diversity is celebrated, and modern perspectives are embraced. Emirati culture is a blend of Arabian, Islamic and Persian cultures with influences from the cultures of East Africa and Indian Subcontinent.

Abu Dhabi contributes to nearly two-thirds of UAE’s economy and serves as a vital business hub centered on oil and infrastructure. Yet, the true essence of Abu Dhabi lies not just in its economic strength, but in its rich multifaceted culture, deep-rooted traditions, and warm hospitality. Its impressive architecture, social norms, and festivals reflect the profound influence of Islam and Arabic customs. Thus Abu Dhabi has been termed as the “cultural heart” of the United Arab Emirates.

A mix of international influences paired with loyalty to local heritage has resulted in a welcoming capital city that boasts a charming mix of new and old. The emirates’ many heritage sites and iconic cultural landmarks highlight time-honored traditions. Precious artefacts uncover the tracks of the Bedouins (nomadic Arab people) who traversed the area for centuries, taming the landscape and making the emirate what it is today.

Whether you want to soak up ancient sights in Al Ain and at Qasr Al Hosn or immerse yourself in culture at Louvre and the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, Abu Dhabi is filled with timeless traditions and magical wonders! Desert safaris, belly dancing and Arabic poetry are some of the main attractions in the culture of UAE. The Arabs have prided themselves to be the best poets of the world in historic times and rightfully so. Al-Ahallah performance reflects traditional poetry in Emirati culture. It involves a circle of singers that perform

mesmeric chanting, with call-and-response form, rhythmical sounds and movements with canes. The influence of Emirati culture also shines through in the art of Al Lewah, a cultural expression, often regarded as a game among sailors, and discover the instruments that bring it to life.



**Image 1: Desert Safari**

The preservation and promotion of its history, culture and natural wonders in a rapidly growing economy has allowed modern artistic expression to blend with human values of inclusivity, diversity and harmony in Abu Dhabi. This is particularly evident at Louvre Abu Dhabi, the first museum in the world to explore their shared humanity by highlighting similarities across civilizations. The museum has laid the groundwork for a new type of cultural collaboration centered on the creation of the first universal museum.

The emirates' commitment to tolerance and interfaith harmony is also seen in the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, a masterpiece of modern Islamic architecture and design, open to people of all faiths and beliefs. The newly opened Abrahamic Family House, where a church, mosque and synagogue share the same grounds welcomes visitors and offers a range of

experiences, from guided tours to immersive journeys of understanding, brotherhood and coexistence.



**Image 2: Grand Mosque**



**Image 3: Emirates Palace**

Through Abu Dhabi's archaeological sites, historic buildings, community centers, libraries and museums, the story of the UAE's cultural heritage supporting community engagement and cultural dialogue is well narrated. Abu Dhabi's museums provide a home and place to interpret the historic and pre-historic findings. They help to expand art collections, provide a platform to develop cultural heritage and tourism, and support the transfer of knowledge and professional development. Though Abu Dhabi is a tourist attraction, a modern city with sophisticated high-rise buildings, extensive facilities for entertainment, and beautiful landscape, beneath its ultra-modern image, lies a rich cultural background.



Image 4: Abu Dhabi Skyline

### Touristic Importance

Abu Dhabi's new tourism strategy aims high with targeted investments to boost visitor numbers and solidify its position as a top global travel destination. **H.E. Saood Abdulaziz Al Hosani** from the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism shares the primary goal of this strategy, which is to position Abu Dhabi as a leading global tourism destination. It targets to increase visitor numbers to 39.3 million by 2030, with an average year-over-year growth of 7 percent. This is in line with their commitment to conserving, promoting, and leveraging Abu Dhabi's heritage, culture and tourism assets.



Abu Dhabi offers something for everyone to experience and explore. Located in the calm waters of the Arabian Gulf, visitors find breathtaking landscapes, including islands, desert, mangroves, fossil dunes, oases and wadis (valleys). The emirate also hosts world-class events and entertainment, and is home to thrilling theme parks and attractions, as well as awe-inspiring museums. Abu Dhabi is a luxurious metropolis that is a stylish blend of beautiful cultural monuments and stark 21st century megastructures. It has everything from massive and beautiful mosques, some of the best theme parks in the world, a louvre museum and endless deserts.

Abu Dhabi offers a wealth of traditional experiences that allow visitors to immerse themselves in the rich Emirati culture. Here are some highlights:

- Falconry: Experience the ancient art of falconry, a cherished tradition in the UAE.
- Camel Racing: Witness the excitement of camel racing at the Al Wathba Camel Racetrack, a sport deeply rooted in Emirati culture.
- Al Ain Oasis: Explore the lush Al Ain Oasis, a UNESCO World Heritage site. This tranquil oasis features thousands of date palms and offers a glimpse into traditional irrigation methods.
- Al Jahili Fort: Visit Al Jahili Fort in Al Ain, one of the UAE's most historic buildings. It houses exhibitions and provides insights into the region's history.
- Traditional Markets (Souks): Stroll through traditional markets like the Al Ain Camel Market and the Souk Al Zafarana, where you can find local crafts, spices, and more.

## Conclusion

These experiences offer a unique window into the heritage and traditions that have shaped Abu Dhabi into the vibrant city it is today. While in Abu Dhabi, one needs to visit the nearby Liwa Oasis which is home to some of the largest and most beautiful sand dunes in the world or go for a desert safari. The other option is to just go sunbathing and relax at one of the cafes on Saadiyat Beach. Abu Dhabi has become a center for world-class sporting events such as the Abu Dhabi Golf Championship, the prestigious Abu Dhabi Desert

Challenge cross-country rally and the Formula One Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. Abu Dhabi is rich in natural wonders too. Abu Dhabi, unlike Dubai has preserved its distinct Arabian culture amidst its glitz and glamour. The desert city is also home to some of the most beautiful and rustic old towns displaying its rich desert-trader past. Jump from the gorgeous Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, ride the fastest roller coaster in the world, witness past Arab royalty at the Emirates Palace and more. A visit to Abu Dhabi is no less than a visit to paradise, as you get to see exquisite Arabian culture combined with modern technology.

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## About the Author

Currently residing in Dubai, Nisha is an entrepreneur with an HR, Training Consulting firm. Having versatile experience in hotels, educational institutions, and corporate entities, she has had multidimensional exposure to the different arenas of work. Nisha is a bilingual poet and working in hotels she came across people with different perspectives towards life which she has used in her poems very appropriately. She is associated with multiple literary organizations and moderates many poetry events. She is the Chapter Head, Dubai of the Asian Literary Society.

