

Qasr Al Hosn: A Historic Landmark

Welcome to Qasr Al Hosn, the ancestral home of the Al Nahyan and the oldest building on Abu Dhabi Island. A seat of rule and a fortified stronghold, a family home and a centre for the community, an emblem of the emirate of Abu Dhabi: Qasr Al Hosn has more than one story to tell. It is a place of many layers and many secrets awaiting discovery. Over the course of its history, Qasr Al Hosn has evolved with Abu Dhabi, responding to the needs of its rulers and its people.

Our story begins in Liwa, an arc of oases that fringe the northern edge of the Rub Al Khali desert, the 'Empty Quarter'. This is the ancestral home of the Bani Yas, the most numerous tribal confederations in the Al Dhafra region.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the Bani Yas already presided over what is today the emirate of Abu Dhabi. Their reach extended from their heartland, the inland oases of Liwa, across their traditional grazing lands to the Gulf coast.

The Bani Yas moved with the seasons. Spreading out from Liwa, they went in search of freshwater holes and pastures or to trade the dates harvested in the oases. They would also visit Abu Dhabi Island to fish, dive for pearls and collect salt. It was an efficient and sustainable way of life.

Having for centuries, visited Abu Dhabi Island Yas, under their ruler Sheikh Dhiyab bin Issa, established a permanent settlement here in the early 1760s. To protect the growing community and the burgeoning pearling industry, they built a watchtower and a fort around it.

The Bani Yas eventually moved their seat the Bani of rule from Al Dhafra to Abu Dhabi Island. But there was no single reason behind the move. It was a combination of factors— geographical, political and economic – that made the new coastal home a wise and strategic choice. The move also reflected the Bani Yas' deep understanding of the opportunities that lay on the coast, knowledge of which had developed over thousands of years.

Based on Abu Dhabi Island, the Bani Yas, the chosen leaders of the people, built Al Hosn as an expression of their rule. The new defensive structure, established in around 1795, was significant enough to protect the settlement that was emerging around its walls.