



# HERITAGE TRAIL

*One hundred years on from the founding father of the UAE's birth, we reflect on Sheikh Zayed's commitment to preserving the country's proud heritage.*

While the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan was without doubt a visionary who determinedly set the UAE along the path of modernisation, he was also incredibly passionate about preserving the country's rich cultural heritage.

Believing that the nation's proud historical past is intrinsically linked to its future, Sheikh Zayed once said: "A nation without a past is a nation without a present or a future. Thanks to God, our nation has a flourishing civilization, deep-rooted in this land for many centuries. These roots will always flourish and bloom in the glorious present of our nation and its anticipated future."

Sheikh Zayed had a strong passion for anything with which a trueborn Arab is identified such as falconry, riding Arabian thoroughbred camels and horses and mastering archery. An active supporter of the first archaeological excavations in the emirates over 50 years ago, he was responsible for the founding of the Al Ain Museum, the oldest in the UAE, at the time of the creation of the Federation.

Upon his personal initiative, the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeology Survey was set up in 1992 and Sheikh Zayed followed its >





**Above:** Zayed National Museum will be the centerpiece of Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Cultural District

**Above right:** Sheikh Zayed with a young Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

findings closely. Peter Hellyer, Executive Director of ADIAS at the time of Sheikh Zayed's passing, said: "He believed, deeply, that it was important that the people of the United Arab Emirates knew about their past, cherished it and learned lessons from it."

"Without his consistent interest in and support for the investigation of, and preservation of, the cultural heritage of the country, including its archaeology, much that is now known would have been lost, or would not have been discovered, and the country itself would have been poorer for the lack of it."

The founding father of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed's lifelong commitment to heritage and culture is remembered and celebrated in many ways today. Each year, thousands of visitors flock to the annual Sheikh Zayed Heritage Festival, in Al Wathba, which showcases the diversity of the UAE's traditions and also serves as an educational platform.

Today, we also look forward to the completion of the Zayed National Museum, which will be the centerpiece of Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Cultural District when it opens. The UAE's first national museum, it will bring the UAE's rich history to life and highlight the life and achievements of Sheikh Zayed, the history of the region and its cultural connections across the world.

While showcasing Sheikh Zayed's story, the museum will also "stand as a symbol of the modernity of the UAE, and its rapid progression over the years". The ultra-modern design of the building draws inspiration from falconry, a powerful symbol in the UAE and part of its cultural heritage and way of life.

An avid falconer himself, Sheikh Zayed once said: "We are keen on maintaining genuine traditions and our heritage regardless of how far we have stepped towards the field of civilization. Falconry is an important sport and a way to learn patience and endurance."



A believer in international and inter-governmental cultural dialogue, Sheikh Zayed also built cultural connections with countries around the world. Just last month Sheikh Zayed's commitment to heritage and culture was acknowledged further afield – with a gallery within the British Museum, London, renamed in his honour. 'The Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan Gallery for Europe and the Middle East' explores the history of farming in the Middle East and the resulting social, cultural and economic progress that formed the modern world.

His Excellency Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of the Department of Culture and Tourism Abu Dhabi and Hartwig Fischer, Director of the British Museum, attended the gallery renaming ceremony at the British Museum. They were joined by His Excellency Saif Saeed Ghobash, Under-secretary of DCT Abu Dhabi, His Excellency Sulaiman Hamid Al Mazroui, UAE Ambassador to the United Kingdom and Sir Richard Lambert, Chairman of the Trustees of the British Museum.

"In this year, the Year of Zayed, as we come together as a nation to celebrate the legacy of the founding father, we see no more of a fitting tribute to his cultural vision for the UAE and his mission to build bridges between nations across the world," said HE Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak. "The renaming of this gallery, one that explores the history and heritage of the Middle East, and the lasting impact that an industry can have on the world, highlights the significant role that Sheikh Zayed played in the preservation and protection of our unique cultural heritage, and his understanding of its vital importance in the development of a thriving society."†



## WORDS OF WISDOM

TO QUOTE SHEIKH ZAYED BIN SULTAN AL NAHYAN ON HERITAGE:

*"There is no glory without the glory of the country and its citizens. We have to be proud of our forefathers, who were able to face the harshness of life with a strong will and dedication to shape a better collective future"*

*"We should preserve our traditions and national heritage. We should stick to our roots and our Arab and Islamic traditions"*

*"Arab oil can never be dearer than Arab blood"*

*"The new generation should be aware of the suffering of their ancestors. This awareness will provide them with drive, firmness and solidarity in order to complete the epic of construction and development initiated by our fathers and ancestors"*

*"By following this sport [falconry] we are, after all, induced to remember our genuine Arab traditions and to hold fast to our ancient virtues and moral code"*

(Source: Father of our Nation: Collected Quotes of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, published by Books Arabia)