

## ABU DHABI

### Area

77,700 sq km (30,000 sq miles).

### Population

3,754,000 (official estimate 2002).

### Capital

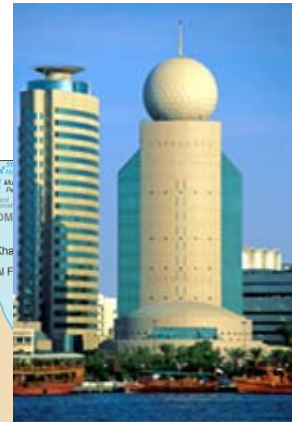
Abu Dhabi.

### Language

Arabic is the official language. English is widely spoken and used as a second language in commerce.

**Religion** Mostly Muslim, of which 16 per cent are Shiite and the remainder Sunni.

**Time** GMT + 4.



Abu Dhabi is the largest of the seven emirates making up the United Arab Emirates and constitutes nearly 80% of the nation's total land area including nearly 200 islands. The cities of Abu Dhabi and Al Ain, are the two largest in the emirates. While Abu Dhabi is a vibrant and captivating city with an impressive skyline, parks and gardens, luxury hotels, palatial villas and mansions, wide boulevards and beaches, Al Ain, the Garden City of the UAE, has an abundance of greenery with well-maintained parks and gardens. The oasis city, 148 kms from Abu Dhabi, also has a history dating back to 4 millennium BC.

As the Capital of the UAE, this emirate is the centre of government and business life in the UAE. HH Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan is the Ruler of Abu Dhabi and has been President since 1971. All the embassies are based here. The parliamentary buildings in which the federal Cabinet meets, most of the federal ministries and institutions, the foreign embassies, state broadcasting facilities, and most of the oil companies are also located in Abu Dhabi. The emirate is also the home of Zayed University and the Higher Colleges of Technology.

Abu Dhabi's oil wealth has been wisely utilized to encourage a healthy trade and commerce atmosphere, including those apart from oil industries. State-of-the-art communication services and transport, the presence of all the international luxury hotel chains, rich shopping malls, cultural centres and events have made the emirate a favourite destination for visitor and home to many nationalities.



For an average tourist, this is one of the safest tourist destinations in the world with some of the best facilities. Activities range from shopping in the upmarket shops to haggling in the souk (market), travelling in an air conditioned limousine to riding a camel in the desert, dining in five-star luxury to sampling Bedouin hospitality under the night sky.

The City of Al Ain is situated in the Eastern Region of Abu Dhabi. It is blessed with substantial groundwater resources which feed into numerous artesian wells and is now one of the greenest areas in Arabia. This is also a cultural and educational centre and site of the UAE's first university, the UAE University, which includes among its many faculties, a vibrant medical school. Internal transport is facilitated by a superb road network and Al Ain is connected to the outside world through Al Ain International Airport.

#### Cultural Destinations:

White Fort - One of the landmarks of Abu Dhabi, The Al Hosn Palace, commonly known as the White Fort, dates back over 200 years. Home of the former ruling family it is the oldest building in Abu Dhabi. The Palace is also home to the Cultural Foundation where many interesting exhibits of traditional artefacts and photographs are displayed. The courtyard and tile work over the main gate are particularly beautiful.

Heritage Village - The village is situated in the middle of Abu Dhabi and is a living exhibition of the lifestyle and traditions of Bedouin and other culture's.

Hili Gardens - Impressive ancient tombs, some more than 4000 years old, is of interest here.

Liwa Oasis - About a five hour drive from the city of Abu Dhabi is Liwa, one of the largest oasis in Arabia and a gateway to Rub Al Khali or Empty Quarter. The place makes a refreshing change with freshwater pools and date plantations. It is also home to the Bedu people, known for their hospitality.



Jabel Hafit - Close to Al Ain, is this craggy mountain rising steeply from the surrounding desert. An area noted for its flora and fauna (it is one of the last remaining habitats of the rare Arabian tahr), the mountain can be accessed by excellent roads which wind its way right up to the summit, providing a panoramic view of the Empty Quarter. Also of interest are the numerous caves, sites of archaeological excavations, and Ain Al Fayda, a top health resort located over a natural hot spring.

Al Ain Museum - Location within the confines of Al Jahili fort, the nation's largest museum is divided into ethnological and historical sections. Interesting displays include Bedouin artefacts, archaeological excavations of 2700 BC, 500 BC stone instruments and relics dug up from Fossil Valley.

Al Ain Zoo and Aquarium - The 1969 zoo houses an extremely large and varied collection of wildlife from all over the world. The zoo is also well known for its display of Arabia's indigenous wildlife, which includes the spectacular Arabian oryx.

Qattarah Oasis - This small, beautiful sylvan oasis studded with date palms and fruit orchards and located on the edge of Al Ain is noted for its archaeological sites. Some of the ancient relics found here, including beautiful gold jewellery, have been displayed today in the Al Ain museum.

#### Articles and resources

"Abu Dhabi Do", Guardian

<http://travel.guardian.co.uk/countries/story/0,7451,1435554,00.html>

British Embassy <http://www.britain-uae.org/>

Emirates Tourism Information <http://www.uae.org.ae/tourist/contents.htm>

Lonely Planet Guide:

[http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/middle\\_east/abu\\_dhabi/index.htm](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/middle_east/abu_dhabi/index.htm)