



Heritage and Homes

Explore old houses, learn about the early days of the ruling Maktoum family and visit the Heritage and Diving Villages

This leaflet takes you on a walk around the Shindagha Heritage Area where the Maktoum family first settled. Find out about the Maktoums, Stamps and Coins, Calligraphy and Pearl Diving – as well a little historical background to the British in Dubai

Shindagha Heritage Area

The Shindagha Area by the Creek was settled early in the history of Dubai and is now being developed as a Heritage Area to provide visitors with an insight on life before the rapid developments driven by the oil wealth. There are a couple of museums here as well a Heritage and Diving Villages.

The first building you might notice is a watch tower. The Al Shandagah Watch Tower was built in 1939 and restored by the Dubai Municipality in 1994. This is one of three watchtowers that used to guard Dubai.

Early settlers

When the Al Maktoums settled by the mouth of the Creek in the early 19th century they built homes using mud bricks (guss) and roofed with palm fronds.

Rooms usually opened onto an airy central courtyard restricted to family use.



Al Shindagha Watch Tower

Male guests were entertained in a separate majlis (meeting room). Later gypsum, stone, coral and shells were used. The width of the early rooms was limited by the wood available and averaged 3.5m. Chandal (mangrove) poles used for roof structures were obtained locally or imported.

After the tower continue walking along the creek and visit the various Heritage Houses that are open to the public.

One of the Heritage Houses that has been restored has an exhibition that explains the methods of reconstruction and the principles of traditional architecture.



Restored Heritage House

Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum House

*Opening times Sat – Thur 7.30 – 21.00
Fri 15.00-21.00. Admission 2Dhs. No
credit cards. Al Ghubaiba Metro Station*



Courtyard of Sheikh's House

Born in 1878, Sheikh Saeed bin Maktoum ruled Dubai from 1912 – 1958. The Shindagha House was originally built in 1886 at a strategic position on the mouth of the Creek by Sheikh Maktoum bin Hasher Al Maktoum, Sheikh Saeed's father, and served as a home to his extended family. It is a traditional coral brick structure built around a large courtyard and was probably one of the first houses in the area to have the Iranian inspired wind towers.

At that time the house was surrounded largely by sand and palm trees.

It is in the Maktoum family compound that the current Sheikh Mohammed grew up. They lived in four small rooms with thick coral walls, low doorways and small windows – there was no electricity in the early days of his life and the toilet was a hole in the floor leading to a pit. It remained their home until Sheikh Saeed's death in 1958 when it was abandoned and became derelict until its restoration.

The house is now a museum and houses photographs, stamps and currency. There is a gallery showing the currency used during the development of Dubai and another gallery does the same for stamps. The coins and stamps show the use of British Stamps overprinted with Rupee as well as the use of the Rupee as currency at times in the development of Dubai.

A more detailed description of the British role is at the back of the leaflet.

The photographs displayed in the Sheikh's house show Dubai in the 1950s, 1960's and 1970's and are fascinating. They seem to come from another era with souks, craftsmen, fishing, camel racing and general local scenes around the Shindagha area – there is not a skyscraper in sight. Another gallery contains photographs of Sheikh Saeed and his family – again it is difficult to appreciate that these were taken comparatively recently. Although the Heritage House Museum in Al Ras is better at showing the Gulf lifestyle, this museum is worth visiting just to look at the photographs that demonstrate just how quickly this area has changed.

A further house has also been restored further along the promontory that of Sheikh Obaid bin Thani and dates from 1916.

Sheikh Obaid bin Thani House

*Opening times Sat – Thur 8.00 – 10pm
Fri 16.00 -22.00. Admission Free.*



Courtyard of Sheikh Obaid's House

The lower section of the house has some information on Culture and Religion, whilst upstairs there is an excellent exhibition on calligraphy. This illustrates the difference between various types of Arabic Calligraphy.



Square Kufic



Mohaqqaq Script

Heritage and Diving Villages



Heritage Village

Along the Creek from these houses are the Heritage and Diving Villages which aim to show how Emiratis lived in the past. There are three areas to explore. The 'Desert Area' has a Bedouin tent, camels and goats. The 'Heritage Area' has some early houses and displays of traditional crafts. The final area is the Diving Village. The villages are open all day, but there is little to see unless you choose the right time to visit e.g. evenings and during the religious and the shopping festivals. During most of the day the areas are not in full operation. When it is staffed you can see craftsmen at work and try some traditional foods.



Traditional houses in the heritage village

In the Diving Village there are some small boats and information on the pearling industry. Again, at times this is staffed with craftsmen.



The Diving Village

Along the creek in front of these heritage villages are a number of restaurants that are very popular in the evenings and serve Arabic/Lebanese food.

This whole area is undergoing a restoration and further houses are being restored

Area Information

Access - Driving –there is a large car park behind the Heritage Village area just before you enter the Shindagha tunnel. **Metro** - use Al Ghubaiba station on the Green Line.

If you are joining from Walk 2, then turn right once you leave the Abra and walk along the Creek and just past the Al Ghubaiba Marine station you will see the Watchtower ahead.

Refreshments – There are several restaurants and cafes along the Creek as you walk past the Heritage areas. There is also a restaurant along the creek between the Marine station and the Abra station.



Toilets – The cafes and restaurants have toilets for clients.



A short historical note aims to help explain the role of the Rupee and the use of British Stamps seen in Sheikh Saeed's House.

Historical background – Role of Britain in the Gulf

The East India Company based in Delhi set up trading contacts in the Gulf area as early as 1616 and one of its main trade routes through to India was via the Persian Gulf. In 1646, a commercial treaty was signed between Oman's Imam and the East India Company.



Trade is still important to Dubai

The inhabitants of the Gulf were numerous tribal groups such as the Bani Yas, based around the Liwa oasis and later Abu Dhabi (founded in 1761). The Al Bu Said, based around Muscat (this dynasty was established in 1747) and the Qawasim who were based in Ras al-Khaimah. The last were a maritime tribe and controlled ports on both sides of the Gulf.

When Napoleon Bonaparte took Egypt in 1798 and planned to move on to Muscat to use it as a base for attacking the British in India, the British felt they had to move to protect their route to India. They allied themselves with the Al Bu Said and supplied them with arms to help repel the French. This antagonised the Qawasim and they began to attack some of the rich vessels taking cargoes of tea and silk from India to Britain. These attacks led to the area being known as the Pirate Coast.



Sacking of Ras al Khaimah by a British fleet in November 1809 -Sharjah Art Museum

The British led a campaign against them with many attacks in the early 19th Century, which culminated in 1819 with Royal Navy destroyed the fortresses at Ras al Khaimah and Lingeh and the destruction of the Qawasim fleet. More recent research has shown that the Qawasim were less responsible for the piracy that the British proclaimed. Following this destruction, the first of the Maritime Truces was signed in 1820 – a “General Treaty of Peace with Arab Tribes” which guaranteed peace and British protection for 150 years – thus started the British involvement in the politics of the area.

The decline of the Qawasim was hastened by the growth of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. In 1833, about 800 people from the Al Bu Falasah tribe of the Bani Yas left Abu Dhabi and settled near the Creek in Dubai. Al Fahaidi Fort dates from about 1800 and was used by the Ruler of Dubai.



Al Fahaidi Fort in Dubai

They struggled to establish the new sheikhdom – with competition from the

Qawasis in the north and Abu Dhabi in the south. They succeeded and it is the same family that ruled then – the Maktoums – that still rule Dubai today.



His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum – current Rule of Dubai

In 1835, the rulers of Sharjah, Dubai, Ajman and Abu Dhabi signed an inviolable truce under British Pressure that outlawed acts of war at sea during the pearling season. This was made year round in 1843, it became the Perpetual Treaty in 1853. This truce, established peace and abolished slavery and renamed the Pirate Coast the Trucial Coast and the contributing sheikhdoms became known as the Trucial States.



Trucial States Flag 1960

The Trucial States were never official British Colonies, but they were protected by the British, with the British representatives often called on to mediate at times of tribal conflict.

In 1892 Great Britain signed exclusive treaties with the rulers of the Trucial States banning them from making deals with other countries without British consent and in exchange the states would be further protected and the states defended. This situation remained for some time and at the end of the First World War, Britain was in a position of unprecedented power in the region.

The decline of the British Empire after the second World War – especially after Indian independence in 1947 drove great changes in the Gulf. The Trucial Oman Scouts (a defence force – not a group a scout group for boys) was set up in 1951 and the following year a Trucial States Council was formed that discussed common problems and interests. The big changes started in 1967, when the labour government under Harold Wilson decided that cash strapped Great Britain had to make big savings in defence. He announced that Britain's military presence east of Suez was to be scrapped by the end of 1971. This spelt the end of British Protection in the Gulf and led to the formation of the UAE.

Until 1947, the Trucial States were administered as part of India. Following India's independence they were administered directly by the British Foreign office, though still using Indian currency. Until 1947, the Trucial States used the postage stamps of British India. From then until the mid 1960s stamps of the British Postal Agencies in eastern Arabia were used.



A 1956 1/6d stamp overprinted with RUPEE.

These were just British stamps overprinted with the value in annas (1/16th of a rupee) or rupees. Trucial State stamps were used in the early 1960s. Seven palm trees were used in the lower value stamps and the higher value stamps show a picture of a boat "Al Boom". These were soon withdrawn and the Emirate of Dubai issued its own stamps until they were replaced by the UAE stamps.

After independence in 1971, the United Arab Emirates issued their own stamps around in 1973, showing a dhow, a palm tree, oil rig and camels.

The India rupee was extensively used as currency in the countries of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula as well as other areas controlled by the British and governed from India. In 1959, the Gulf Rupee was introduced by the Indian Government as a replacement for the Indian Rupee for circulation exclusively outside of the country. In 1966, India devalued the rupee and to avoid the devaluation several states adopted their own currencies. Qatar and most of the Trucial States adopted the Qatar and Dubai riyal, whilst Abu Dhabi adopted the Bahraini dinar. These currencies continued to be used in the Region until the UAE released its own currency in 1973.