

Al Dakhiliya

Al Dakhiliya – from Forts to rock climbing

Mountains, handicrafts, wadis and places of historical interest are the main features of Al Dakhiliya, which is famous as a trading region between the coast and the interiors and for Nizwa, its administrative capital, which is a verdant oasis.

Nizwa Fort, which was completed in the 1650s, is among Oman's largest and oldest forts as well as one of the most visited national monuments. This historical edifice is an example of the ingenuity of Omani architecture. Set amid plantations of date palms, was built by Imam Sultan bin Saif Al Yarubi. It took 12 years to build and to prevent marauders from looting Nizwa's abundant natural wealth, as well as to protect its strategic location on the crossroads of vital caravan routes. Nizwa Fort is characterised by its height, solid fortification and unique location in the middle of Nizwa town. Its walls are rounded and robust to withstand barrages of mortar fire and feature a maze of rooms, high-ceiling walls, doorways, terraces, narrow staircases and corridors.

The most striking feature of the ramparts is the central tower, soaring 35 metres above the rest of the fortification, which allows stunning views of Nizwa and the surrounding areas.

Given its pivotal place in Nizwa's history, this majestic edifice was among the first to be renovated by the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture as part of its far-reaching drive to preserve the Sultanate's rich heritage. Used as a seat of government in its time, it is still used for meetings between the people and the Ruler's representative each month.

Another landmark nearby is the recently refurbished Nizwa souk. Browse shops and stalls to appreciate Nizwa's well-known silver jewellery or watch expert craftsmen in action as they fashion khanjars and a range of other artefacts.

The weekly (Friday) markets with goat and cattle auctions are much like traditional auctions that take place elsewhere in Oman, especially on the eve of Eid festivities.

Bahla is a small town situated a few kilometres from Nizwa and is shrouded in mystery and superstition. Surrounded by a 12-kilometre wall, the historic Bahla Fort with 15 gates and 132 watchtowers is one of the oldest forts in the country, with some parts dating back to the pre-Islamic period. The fort and the surrounding area is on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites and has undergone major restoration.

The other famous landmark in this region is the Jabrin Fort, which is considered one of the finest and most picturesque structures of its kind. Built in the mid-1600s the fort was not conceived as a fortification, but as a palace for the imams and is an example of Islamic architecture with wooden inscriptions and paintings on the ceiling. Consisting of three floors and 55 rooms, one of the most interesting features of Jabrin Fort is the Falaj Jabrin, the ancient system of irrigation, which flows through its ramparts.

The Al-Jebel Al-Akhdar or 'Green Mountains' enhance Al Dakhiliya's natural beauty, which at 2,980 metres is the highest in Oman. The mountain range acquired its name as the slopes are covered with vegetation throughout the year. With its many sheer rock faces, trekking trails, wadis and cave systems, it is the perfect destination for outdoor enthusiasts.