His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the eldest son of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, was born at Qasr Al Muwaiji in 1948, and spent much of his youth here.

The skills and values that he learnt here would serve him well throughout his leadership. As President, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan has led the Nation in a period of great transformation: broadening global horizons, investing in development, and empowering the citizens of the Emirates.

Today at Qasr Al Muwaiji, you can explore the structures and history of the fort, and learn about the upbringing, life, and achievements of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa.
The oasis city of Al Ain lies in a distinctive landscape. It is bounded by the Hajar Mountains to the east and the rolling dunes of the Al Rub’ al Khali (the Empty Quarter) to the west. With its numerous oases, fed by groundwater and the run-off from mountain springs, Al Ain is a natural haven on the fringes of the desert. People have come to Al Ain for thousands of years, drawn by the fresh water, verdant environment, and its location at the cross roads of key trade routes. People began to settle among the oases and strong communities developed.

The inhabitants of Al Ain constructed aflaj, or irrigation channels, which brought water long distances and distributed it around the oases, enabling more farms and plantations to thrive. This intricate network demonstrates the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the people of Al Ain that allowed their communities to survive and flourish.

Many of the village communities and the vital aflaj in Al Ain were guarded by watchtowers and forts. Border disputes and skirmishes were frequent, making the forts and watch towers essential for the protection of Al Ain and its resources. The construction of impressive forts was also a means of demonstrating authority in the oases.

From the late nineteenth century, Sheikh Zayed the Great (1835-1909) and his sons built many forts in Al Ain, including Qasr Al Muwaiji, to protect their people and as a symbol of their power. Its transformation was initiated by the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan who, as the Ruler’s Representative in Al Ain, set about helping Al Ain to modernise, without losing sight of its heritage and traditional values. Sheikh Zayed’s close connection with Al Ain continued throughout his life. He passed on his regard and fondness for the oases to his son, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa, who was born and raised here.
Qasr Al Muwaiji has stood as a guardian for around a century. It was built during the time of Sheikh Zayed the First by his son Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed bin Khalifa (1856-1945).

Later Sheikh Khalifa’s son, Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa, lived at the fort. This impressive structure was used as a diwan (a council or seat of governance) and as a place for the community to congregate.

Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan married Sheikha Hessa the daughter of Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa. Soon afterwards, in 1946, Sheikh Zayed was appointed as Ruler’s Representative in Al Ain, and moved to Qasr Al Muwaiji.

The fort became his diwan and family home. During his time here, Sheikh Zayed made many additions that reflected Qasr Al Muwaiji’s growing importance. The diwan complex doubled in size, and the kitchens and guest rooms were enlarged to accommodate the increasing number of visitors to the fort.
Planning Your Visit

Qasr Al Muwaiji offers a range of areas to explore and enjoy.

1 Entrance Gate
As you approach Qasr Al Muwaiji, admire the impressive exterior of the fort and its surroundings. Passing through the gate, you are following in the footsteps of countless others who have come to the fort over the last 100 years.

2 Exhibition Space
Through a range of exhibits, you can discover the story of Qasr Al Muwaiji’s transformation and the achievements of the young boy, born here, who would become a great leader: His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the Nation.

3 North-west Tower
This was the home of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and his family during their time at Qasr Al Muwaiji. In these rooms you can see evidence of the development of the tower and discover what life was like at the fort.

4 Courtyard
In the courtyard, you can experience the authenticity and atmosphere of Qasr Al Muwaiji. See close-up the traditional architecture and the meticulous conservation work that has protected and preserved the fort for the future.

5 South-east & North-east Towers
The south-east tower was originally defensive, and the north-east tower originally residential. Here you can explore the rooms of the towers, restored to be much as they would have been in the earliest days of Qasr Al Muwaiji.

6 Mosque
Archaeologists have discovered that there has probably been a mosque at Qasr Al Muwaiji since it was first built. The building that you see today is a reconstruction of the mosque which stood here during Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan’s time at Qasr Al Muwaiji.

7 Qasr Al Muwaiji Landscape
Qasr Al Muwaiji has a deep-rooted connection with the surrounding landscape. The contemporary water feature is inspired by a centuries-old relationship between Jebel Hafit, the aflaj water channel system and the Al Muwaiji Oasis around Qasr Al Muwaiji. The distinctive arrangement of palm trees on the grounds also pay homage to the adjacent Al Muwaiji Oasis.

Timings
Monday: Closed
Saturday – Thursday: 9am-7pm
Friday: 3pm-7pm
(Hours subject to change on official UAE holidays)

Amenities and parking
Parking including disabled access is available on-site for the public, tours and school groups. Parking arrangements for school and large tour groups must be made in advance.

Guided and self-guided tours
A variety of tours are available including options for families, tourists and school groups. Advanced bookings are required for schools and groups larger than 10. Audio guides are also available until one-hour before closing time at the reception desk.

Contact
Please visit our website www.qasralmuwaiji.ae or call +971 3 767 4444 for further information.

Visitors are reminded not to eat or drink inside of the exhibition building.
Photography is allowed inside the exhibition building. However, please resist touching the glass exhibition panels.
A    The Sheikh’s Palace
Learn about the generations of great leaders who lived at Qasr Al Muwaiji.

B     The Interactive Table
Explore the century-long history of the fort - its development, role and significance.

C     President of the Nation
Celebrate the achievements of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who was born and raised here.

D    Poem Wall
Reflect upon this poem honouring His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan and his leadership, written by his brother, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nayhan.

E     Archaeology of Qasr Al Muwaiji
Discover the archaeology of the fort and the clues it provides about life at Al Muwaiji in the past.

F     North-west Tower
This was the home of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and his family during their time at Qasr Al Muwaiji. In these rooms you can see evidence of the development of the tower and discover what life was like at the fort.

G    Points of Interest
Discover additional information about various aspects of Qasr Al Muwaiji’s history, architecture and development throughout the site.
Qasr Al Muwaiji as you see it today is the fruition of the work of a range of individuals, including archaeologists, conservators, architects, historians, and curators.

One of the primary aims of this project is the preservation of the fort. This is the most recent phase in a series of restorations that have taken place at Qasr Al Muwaiji since the 1970s. It was important that the previous work – which has become an intrinsic part of the fabric and history of the fort – was respected. The conservation team employed traditional methods and materials, such as mud brick and palm products, to renew the structure of Qasr Al Muwaiji, and left as much as possible in place.

Alongside the conservation work, archaeologists have carried out extensive excavations at Al Muwaiji. They unearthed traces of agricultural activity at the oasis from the eighteenth century as well as evidence for different phases of construction at the fort. Archaeologists will continue to dig at Al Muwaiji, discovering new material and building on our understanding of the oasis and the fort.

The exhibition space was designed by internationally renowned architects. Its elegant simplicity complements the traditional structure of the fort. The architects worked closely with the conservation and archaeology teams, using the latest technology to ensure the protection of the archaeology and structures of Qasr Al Muwaiji.
His Highness Sheikh Khalifa spent his formative years at Qasr Al Muwaiji. Here, he would observe, and later assist his father in his duties as the Ruler’s Representative in Al Ain.

Qasr Al Muwaiji was a place of learning for the young His Highness Sheikh Khalifa, where he would come to understand the importance of negotiation, generosity, and respect for Emirati traditions and values.

At Qasr Al Muwaiji today, you can learn more about the life and leadership of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa. The exhibition celebrates his achievements: from the young man supporting the work and vision of his father to the internationally esteemed leader that he became.

The exhibition also explores the archaeology, history, development, and restoration of the fort, and the close and long-standing relationship between the ruling family and Qasr Al Muwaiji.
A Brother’s Tribute

This poem written by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nayhan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, is in the form of the classical Arabic ode, or qasida. In Arabic qasida means ‘intention’. This type of poem has a single presiding subject, logically developed and concluded often written in praise of a nobleman. This qasida uses traditional imagery to describe the poet’s brother, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, as a great warrior and leader, tireless in his efforts to realise the dreams and aspirations of his people.