

## Al-Ahsa, SAUDI ARABIA

## Handicrafts and Heritage Industries in Al-Ahsa



Handicrafts and heritage industries in Al-Ahsa are of considerable significance to the local population as they are one of the most significant kinds of cultural heritage that constitutes the city's identity and have been sustained over successive generations, from parents to children. They are a result of human interaction with the natural environment and its adaptation to human needs, whether through the use of products or trade.

In addition, given the succession of civilizations that passed through Al-Ahsa on the one hand, and its strategic location as an important trade entre between the countries bordering the Arabian Gulf, Sindh, and India on the other, distinction and diversity in handicrafts and heritage industries such as carpentry, blacksmithing, hand embroidery, pottery, weaving, and goldsmithing emerged from the exchange of experiences.

The government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been keen to direct all its relevant government sectors with great interest in supporting everything that would preserve the cultural heritage and the heritage in general and its continuity, as well as supporting and enhancing the field of creativity in handicrafts and folk arts.

As a result of this interest, and in order to further the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's objectives, the Al-Ahsa Municipality established the "Artisans Market" project, which brings together numerous artisans in a variety of handicrafts in order to support and preserve local folklore, and to serve as a major tourist destination for those seeking to acquire heritage and cultural products.

The project was inaugurated on March 4, 2020 (corresponding to the Gregorian date), under the patronage of Royal Highness Prince Saud bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Governor of the Eastern Province, and Prince Badr bin Muhammad bin Jalawi Al Saud, Governor of Al-Ahsa.

The craftsmen market building is distinguished by its local heritage color, of which the elements and vocabulary reflect the components of Al-old Ahsa's local architecture, a reference to the historical and cultural depth of



the concept of its establishment.

The craftsmen market is located in Hofuf, which is of historical importance to Al-Ahsa. The market has an area of 12,000 square meters and consists of 98 craft shops, support service facilities, and squares for celebrations, events, various cultural activities, and folklore.



Moreover, the most iconic festival is the Al-Ahsa Creative Festival of Handicrafts and Folk Arts, which attracts more than 40 folk crafts and 12 folklore every year. Additionally, this festival allocates a portion of the craftsmen's market to establish a special academy for handicraft instruction by highly experienced craftsmen.

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The market's stores for selling handicrafts and folk artifacts are



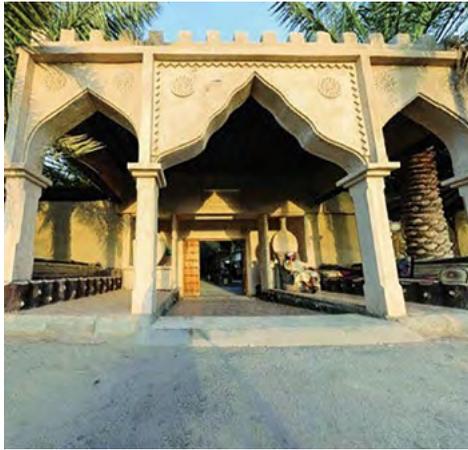


organized in rows. The most significant of these marketable handicrafts and heritage items for which Al-Ahsa is famous is the weaving of hand embroidery (*bisht*), made with dexterity, accuracy, and ingenuity. This hand embroidery is entirely handmade. Additionally, the crafts include weaving, goldsmithing, carpets, wickerwork, and leather industries, as well as the vital pottery industry that once defined Al-Ahsa in the Arab world.

More specifically, the pottery industry is more than 150 years old and is considered the most important ancient industry of Al-Ahsa. The oldest factory of pottery vessels, the “Grash Factory,” is located near the famous Al-Qarah Mountain in Al-Ahsa. The factory has become a heritage tourist landmark that is visited by both locals and tourists from other areas.

Al-Ahsa Municipality, represented by the World Heritage Office and the Community Partnership, is eager to promote the establishment of such projects in order to secure the appropriate environment for craftsmen, encourage them to continue creating and marketing their works, and support tourism to reach the form that corresponds to the size of the importance of those works. It also emphasizes the role of community partnership in the operation of the Academy of Craftsmen by private institutions as an extension and participation of national efforts in heritage and culture preservation.

All of the above efforts stem from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s vision



of preserving the Kingdom's heritage and diverse cultures, in order to enhance the historical and heritage status of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's cities, including Al-Ahsa. In fact, Al-Ahsa has achieved successive global achievements since joining the UNESCO Creative Cities Network and being registered as a World Heritage site. The city was also selected as the capital of Arab tourism for the year 2019, which resulted in its inclusion in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's largest palm oasis.

The team of Creative city in  
Al-Ahsa Municipality