



Pearl merchants residence



The round tower of the fort



Location of the Town of Jazirat al-Hamra

Government of Ras al-Khaimah



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Jazirat al-Hamra



Jazirat al-Hamra



Decorated window

Jazirat al-Hamra ("Red Island") is the last authentic and traditional town still standing in the United Arab Emirates. Once a small island, its inhabitants subsisted on maritime and pearl trading before they abandoned their houses in the middle of the 20th century, when the rush to modernize started.

An undisturbed picture of life before the discovery of oil was left behind and preserved until today. This is a unique area for Ras al-Khaimah and the whole of the country. Jazirat al-Hamra shows all elements of a traditional town, including a fortress for defence purposes, a small market ("Suq"), several mosques and a variety of house types. These range from simple buildings to ornate houses with courtyards which belonged to rich pearl merchants.

Jazirat al-Hamra is one of the best places to study traditional coral-stone architecture, used along the coast of the Arabian Gulf.

More than a hundred houses, many built in a traditional style, still remain. Although some have started to collapse, others are in relatively pristine condition. One should walk carefully through the streets, peering into courtyards which offers interesting insights into the social life of yesteryears. Several coral-stone houses will reveal beautiful plaster decoration along their walls and in niches. The old town of Jazirat al-Hamra represents a fascinating look into the past, which has mostly been lost forever elsewhere in the UAE. During a visit to the area one should not miss the outstanding buildings described below :

The Fort — Little of the fort survived but we know that it had a rectangular layout with two impressive towers on opposite sides. Both are still visible today, one rectangular and one round, giving testimony to the former defensive character of the fort. The rectangular tower is easily accessible and offers a beautiful view over the town.

The Wind Tower House — Close to the former seashore lies an impressive compound consisting of several houses with wind towers. They are grouped around a courtyard and were occupied by a number of wealthy families belonging to the same clan. Some years ago this complex attracted Dubai Television and was used as a perfect set for the production of a historical drama.

The Mosque with a special Minaret — Of the several mosques this one is outstanding due to its special minaret. Situated close to the market area and former seashore, it captured the cool breeze coming in from the sea. Its minaret



The windtower house seen from the fort



Plan of Jazirat al-Hamra with main attractions.

is built in a unique conical form which can also be found on the other side of the Gulf.

A Pearl Merchants Residence (Ahmed al-Omran House) — Built for a rich trader and pearl merchant, the main house reflects the wealth and importance of its owner. The reception room ("Majlis") is located on the upper floor and decorated with splendid ornamentation. High niches with artistically designed arches run along the walls, showing elements of traditional Gulf architecture, which blends Arabian and Indian influence. But their purpose was more than pure ornamentation. They were also used for ventilation and served as sophisticated wind catchers. Concealed slits at the bottom of the niches caught the breeze, while keeping the sun and heat out.