



Ras Al Khaimah

Introduction

Arabic for the “top of the tent,” Ras Al Khaimah is the northernmost emirate of the seven United Arab Emirates (UAE). His Highness Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi has been the ruler of Ras Al Khaimah since 2010 and is dedicated to making Ras Al Khaimah a vibrant home for both Emiratis and expatriates from around the world. As a testament to the emirate’s evolving economic, social, and cultural opportunities, Ras Al Khaimah has enjoyed a notable increase in its population and is expected to grow to over half a million residents by 2015 (Ras Al Khaimah Free Trade Zone, 2009).

History and Culture

The history of Ras Al Khaimah, previously known as Julphar, dates back to the third millennium B.C. (Sabry, 2013). In fact, Ras Al Khaimah’s settlements extend back to the Bronze Age, meaning that it has fostered societies for over 7,000 years without interruption (see Government of Ras Al

Khaimah, 2014 for more information). Located on the trade route from Europe to Asia, the emirate was a stopping point for tradesmen from around the world. In addition to being a hub of international trade, Ras Al Khaimah has historically sustained fishing, pearl diving, and copper smelting communities.

Because of its strategic maritime location, Ras Al Khaimah has seen many visitors and conquerors over the centuries. In the eighth century, the Islamic Empire made its way to Ras Al Khaimah, shaping its people in ways that are evident in the city’s modern society. Although British influence significantly affected the political situation of the present-day UAE in the 19th and 20th centuries, the Islamic character of this emirate has endured. Thus, Ras Al Khaimah’s landscape showcases mosques and architecture with a distinctly Arabian flare, while its local peoples often dress traditionally: men wear white kanduras, and women don black abayas and shaylas.





In the midst of its scenic beaches, deserts, mountains, and mangroves, Ras Al Khaimah offers a range of sites that capture its historic identity. Forts, ruins, and the National Museum paint an engaging picture of Ras Al Khaimah's past. Currently, five daily calls to prayer echo through Ras Al Khaimah's streets while Emirati culture thrives in various souks, which are open-air markets that offer patrons an array of clothing, housewares, furniture, and jewelry options.

Although Ras Al Khaimah is a modern emirate in many respects (e.g., infrastructure, business and industry, recreational opportunities), its people continue to retain traditional activities—such as falconry and camel races—in their cultural celebrations. In addition, the emirate hosts a number of annual festivities, including the Annual Ras Al Khaimah Fine Arts Festival, the Ras Al Khaimah Half Marathon, the UAE Awafi Festival, and the Terry Fox Run.

Ras Al Khaimah owes much of its diverse geographic and cultural landscape to its residents. While less than 20% of the UAE's residents are Emirati citizens, the highest concentration of Emiratis, about 40%, reside in Ras Al Khaimah (Ras Al Khaimah Free Trade Zone, 2009). In addition to the local population, people from across the Arabian Peninsula, India, the Philippines, Europe, and the Americas contribute to the cultural dimensions of the emirate.

Though home to a range of nationalities, Ras Al Khaimah has preserved ties to its Arab roots. Accordingly, Arabic remains the UAE's official language, yet residents of

Ras Al Khaimah interact in Arabic, English, Indian, and Filipino dialects. Ras Al Khaimah also offers a spectrum of cuisines, and even Emirati fare has Indian, Egyptian, and Turkish influences. Local favorites include chicken schwarma, biryani, falafel, and fresh juices. Ras Al Khaimah's architecture represents a similar fusion of cultures, as it incorporates contemporary building media and Arab design elements such as arabesques, geometric patterns, and Islamic calligraphy. Thus, Ras Al Khaimah's vibrant 21st century culture complements its rich history.

Geography and Climate

Ras Al Khaimah shares borders with four of its fellow emirates (Sharjah, Fujairah, Umm Al Quwain, and Dubai) as well as with the Omani enclave of Musandam. Ras Al Khaimah and its ports are the UAE's closest locations to Iran, which is 80 kilometers away via the Strait of Hormuz. The emirate also sits in proximity to several Gulf Cooperation Countries, including Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, and Bahrain.

A network of highways connects Ras Al Khaimah with other emirates and places the city center only an hour's drive from Dubai. Meanwhile, the UAE's position at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and Africa also makes Ras Al Khaimah a strategic crossroads for trade and travel.

Because of its warm climate and physical beauty, much of life in Ras Al Khaimah centers on the outdoors. Ras Al



Khaimah is the fourth largest emirate of the UAE, with a location that affords its residents and visitors access to mountain climbing, mountain biking, kayaking, and fishing. Ras Al Khaimah lies between the base of the Hajar Mountains—with their wadis and oases—to the east and the Arabian Gulf to the west. There are many places in the emirate from which an observer can see both mountains and shoreline, which plays host to starfish, sea turtles, crabs, rays, and other wildlife.

During the summer months of June to September, temperatures and humidity are quite high, the former reaching 45°C at times. Rain arrives in the winter months and all but disappears by May. Thus, the majority of the year offers residents a warm, sunny climate with minimal rainfall.

Government Structure

The states that today constitute the United Arab Emirates—Ras Al Khaimah, Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Sharjah, and Umm Al Quwain—unified in 1971 and 1972 after Britain’s withdrawal from the region. In early 1972, under the rule of Sheikh Saqr bin Mohammad Al Qasimi, Ras Al Khaimah became the last emirate to join the federation.

Since 2010, Ras Al Khaimah has been ruled by His Highness Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi, (Salem, 2010). Sheikh Mohammed bin Saud Al Qasimi, the eldest son of His Highness Sheikh Saud, is the emirate’s crown prince.

His Highness Sheikh Saud is also a member of the Supreme Council, a body that is made up of the rulers of the UAE’s seven emirates. The ruler of Abu Dhabi is the president of the Supreme Council, while the ruler of Dubai is the prime minister and vice president of the UAE.

Economy

Exercising full authority over Ras Al Khaimah’s internal affairs, fiscal policy, and economic development, His Highness Sheikh Saud and Ras Al Khaimah’s government work for the realization of a diverse and expanding economy. Unlike some of its companion emirates, Ras Al Khaimah is not rich in oil or gas reserves. Despite this, the emirate has successfully focused on the development of other sectors of its economy, including industry, tourism, and real estate, in addition to trade and commerce. Ras Al Khaimah’s leadership pursues both economic expansion and diversity: None of the emirate’s GDP components exceeds 20% of the whole (Investment and Development Office, 2010b).

Many of the emirate’s industries are related to building. Ras Al Khaimah boasts the biggest rock quarry in the Gulf region, which holds high-quality limestone and clay deposits that are the key to the local cement and ceramics industries, the Ras Al Khaimah Cement Company and Ras Al Khaimah Ceramics. The Ras Al Khaimah Cement Company started operations in the 1970s and is the largest producer of cement in the UAE today, while Ras Al Khaimah Ceramics is the leading

ceramics producer worldwide, exporting to over 160 countries (RAK Ceramics, 2012). Representing another of Ras Al Khaimah's major industries, Julphar is the first pharmaceuticals and medical supplies firm in the region and sells its products globally.

Additionally, Ras Al Khaimah's Free Trade Zone strives to contribute to the international investment appeal of Ras Al Khaimah by serving the logistical and financial needs of its various clients. Ras Al Khaimah is also home to five ports that make it a hub for maritime business (Investment and Development Office, 2010a).

Education

As part of bolstering its economy and securing its future, Ras Al Khaimah is making strides in cultivating its educational landscape. The Ras Al Khaimah government has prioritized education and educational reforms. The emirate is interested in developing a knowledge-based economy, and part of this effort involves improving the educational sector to ensure that its schools produce capable and ambitious graduates. To this end, the Al Qasimi Foundation has taken steps to improve the pedagogy of Ras Al Khaimah's teachers and to foster original research within and about education in the emirate. Additionally, the Foundation supports a number of programs to prepare Emirati students for university studies overseas.

Ras Al Khaimah is home to well over 100 schools, approximately 90 of them public and 24 private. While private schools operate in different languages and employ various curricula, public schools in the UAE conduct courses in Arabic through secondary school. Ras Al Khaimah also hosts a range of universities,

including the local Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) Men's and Women's campuses, Ras Al Khaimah Medical and Health Sciences University, Ittihad University, and the American University of Ras Al Khaimah (AURAK).

The Ministry of Education (MoE) oversees the education sector of emirates in the UAE (with the exception of Abu Dhabi). In Ras Al Khaimah, the MoE is supported by the Ras Al Khaimah Educational Zone, a government body that supervises and implements federal and local policies and that supports these policies. A notable reform policy offers a network of new schools called "Madares Al Ghad" or "Schools of Tomorrow." These schools employ Western teachers in order to improve the English skills of their students. At the same time, these schools' facilities receive upgrades related to their computer labs and libraries.

Other education initiatives in Ras Al Khaimah and the UAE include:

- Determining and increasing the effectiveness of different school and curricula models
- Improving the English language proficiency of Emirati secondary school graduates
- Effectively using technology in educating students
- Advancing research at the higher education level and incorporating its contributions into successful decisions and practices

For more information on Education in the UAE and Ras Al Khaimah, please see the Al Qasimi Foundation's Education Fact Sheet and other research publications.





Urban Planning

With a population of well over 400,000, Ras Al Khaimah has continued to grow in terms of people and commercial development. Many residents of Ras Al Khaimah live in the heart of the city and others in one of the growing communities farther south. Currently, Ras Al Khaimah offers an array of professional and recreational amenities but does not suffer from traffic congestion or the frenzy of much larger cities. It is important to note, however, that many residents of Ras Al Khaimah commute to Dubai each day or to Abu Dhabi to work during the week and return home for weekends and holidays. While many residents of Ras Al Khaimah find owning cars to be a key to mobility, the city does offer affordable taxis and limited shuttle buses as an alternative to vehicle ownership for those whose commitments are centered in Ras Al Khaimah. In addition, the city center integrates retail, office, dining, and residential spaces with the result that a pedestrian lifestyle is possible in many locations.

A recent study conducted in Ras Al Khaimah in partnership with the Al Qasimi Foundation (ICOS, 2014) indicates that many residents are aware and supportive of the city's development. Appropriately, Ras Al Khaimah's strategic urban planning remains a priority for the emirate's Project Management Office (PMO), a sector of the Ras Al Khaimah Municipality. Ras Al Khaimah's PMO approaches new residential, commercial, and recreational building according to a process that begins with appreciating local context—

how urban design interacts with the historical character, natural resources, and community aspirations of places within the emirate. Furthermore, the inter-relationships among neighborhoods, blocks, streets, and landscapes also receive consideration throughout development projects in Ras Al Khaimah, which is widely considered to be a family-oriented place. Urban planning in Ras Al Khaimah takes into account the region's attractiveness as a tourist destination, industrial center, and business community. Currently, the PMO is preparing for a revitalization of the Old Town district.

For more information on urban planning and development issues in Ras Al Khaimah, please see the Al Qasimi Foundation's Urban Planning Fact Sheet and other research publications.

Public Health

The UAE government is committed to the World Health Organization's Constitution, which maintains that healthcare is a basic right, and is one of 58 nations that have universal healthcare programs. In the UAE, public healthcare services are administered by three discrete regulatory bodies: the Health Authority – Abu Dhabi (HAAD) in the capital, the Dubai Health Authority (DHA) in Dubai, and the Federal Ministry of Health in the northern emirates, including Ras Al Khaimah. These authorities plan and implement

policy and infrastructure changes to improve the state of public health and to reduce the cases of chronic disease and premature mortality in the Emirates.

Although the UAE's government has prioritized public health issues, the country has experienced an increase in chronic, preventable, life-style related health problems among its population since the discovery of oil. Specific concerns include cardiovascular diseases, injuries from traffic accidents and occupational hazards, respiratory illnesses, and diabetes. Genetic diseases such as Down's Syndrome and thalassemia are also higher in the UAE relative to other countries.

Health officials are attempting to address these challenges through medical and social research, health infrastructure expansion, and efforts to shift inaccurate or impractical attitudes among the population, attitudes that often lead to overmedication rather than utilizing preventative medicine. One of the two largest research-generating bodies in the health field is the Ras Al Khaimah Medical and Health Sciences University (RAKMHSU). RAKMHSU represents the first comprehensive medical sciences training facility for both UAE nationals and expatriate students.

Since 2010, three new government hospitals have been built in the emirate (Sheikh Khalifa Hospital, Al Nakheel Hospital, and Abdullah Rashid Omran

Hospital in Humraniya). In addition to this, recent years have seen the set-up of small mobile medical units to cater to patients in remote areas of the emirate. Government hospitals are open to holders of government health cards, and to non-card-holders for emergencies only. Services in government hospitals are offered free of charge to Emirati citizens with government-issued health cards, while expatriate residents are charged nominal, subsidized rates for consultations and treatments.

Despite the new services offered and hospitals constructed, Ras Al Khaimah experiences shortages in facilities and in medical staff. According to representatives of the Ras al Khaimah Primary Health Care department, many of the clinics are in need of updating their medical tools and equipment, as well as improving the general state of medical buildings, including their ventilation and air conditioning systems. The conditions of the older, outdated government facilities mean that private health care options are, as in other emirates, more popular options.

For more information about public health in the UAE and Ras Al Khaimah, please see the Al Qasimi Foundation's Public Health Fact Sheet and other research publications.



Resources

Organizations & Websites

Emirates Natural History Group

Government of Ras Al Khaimah ("About Ras Al Khaimah")

Ras Al Khaimah Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture (Arabic)

Ras Al Khaimah Department of Economic Development

Ras Al Khaimah Free Trade Zone ("About Ras Al Khaimah")

Ras Al Khaimah International Airport

Ras Al Khaimah Investment and Development Office

Ras Al Khaimah Municipality (Arabic)

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism ("About Ras Al Khaimah")

UAE Ministry of Education (Arabic)

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