



# MARK

## to Fujairah's Forts

IF YOU SCRATCH THE SURFACE OF THE UAE, YOU MAY WELL BE AMAZED AT HOW MUCH THERE REALLY IS RIGHT UNDER OUR NOSES

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**T**he casual visitor to the Emirates could be forgiven for believing that there is not an odd lot to see in the country, that the main cities that dominate the UAE manage to undergo its treatment both to residents and overseas travellers alike.

I never fail to be surprised by experiences living in the UAE who occasionally rub off to the peaks of their or the mud at Al Madaya, seriously believing that they have experienced off-road conditions, not how appear to go out of their way to acquire a set of tires that can be found almost everywhere off the main highways.

The Fujairah, for instance. An over-the-hill one can be taken driving up old roads — developing beds — and exploring some of the most of the villages in the Emirates and that will take you to an old world charm — and you don't even need a four-wheel drive to reach more of them. In fact it is all too easy to

find that until about six years ago, these roads were often the only means available for transport.

Starting off from Dubai or Sharjah, you need to get on to the Al Dhaid road — more like suggested for Musai and Fujairah. Don't forget to look to your right, then after Interchange 8 to see the Sheikh Mohammed — that strange arrow pointing into the sky, stuck in the middle of nowhere, to celebrate Sharjah being chosen as the Arab cultural capital for 2016. Some of the most high on a granite base of 600 sq metres, it was built here not just to be seen from miles around. Nowadays the base is only covered in graffiti, but lighting has been installed to illuminate the monument at night.

Let's head on, though, and make our first stop at a tiny village called Madaha, some miles before you get to the town of Musai. Look out for a left turn signposted to Madha. Here you cross a bridge over Wadi Hiji, which used to be the principal track for getting from Dubai to Fujairah before the arrival of the tarred road, historically cut the journey time. Some days and turn left at the roundabout before driving further down to the very end of the road. You will be passing beautiful wide and panoramic views of plants

and you'll see a few palm trees up a track that for a further 100 metres and ahead of you is a small marketplace to which you can easily climb and which offers fabulous views over Wadi Madaha.

Back to the main road and on to Musai where we make a right turn at the roundabout. If instead you were to turn left here up the Dhaid road, you would come to the famous Masai Water bottling plant. Also on your right which offers views to visitors, just as long as you look to the horizon. Musai is where the scenery picks up, for from here on you are right in the mountains with wide ranging evergreen and fertile valleys of scrub and bushes breaking up the sea beauty of the rock face.

Along here on you pass through the so-called Fudai Market — which is a small open market on the bank — a lovely collection of shops and stalls selling fresh produce, fruit and vegetable stalls and (some would say) delicious plastic groceries, signs and bench beds for those planning a day by the sea. A further drive on, look out for a track off to the village of Bahala — a long point of Bahala where you can find a 100-year-old fort towering above Wadi Hiji, which is currently being restored by the municipality.

It was built from stone, stone and mud by the Ash Shamsan tribe and although standing empty, apart from the occasional remnants of modern day construction, it is nevertheless worth a visit.

Of course, we shouldn't miss out on Paganah Fort itself, located near the centre of Fujairah town. Follow signs for Paganah's Museum and you will see the fort standing grandly to one side in the middle of a plain where a heritage centre is being put together from the ruins of old mud-brick. It's the kind of fort that had it been located in Switzerland, the Swiss would surely have said to admire the fort's construction! Unfortunately, however, it never appears to be open — it is still worth walking — or driving — around it.

Leaving the fort still late... As you leave Paganah, turn left to follow the main road and head towards the village of Bahala. In the way, it is still a straight direction, over the mountains and over a small dam and keep driving for nearly a mile from the main road turn-off. Right at the very end of the track you come across Bahala Fort — otherwise known as the Palace of Wadi Hiji.

This was once the ancestral home of

Fujairah's ruling family and it must have been a formidable fortress with its two towers and narrow windows facing into a central courtyard. The Fujairah Heritage Department has already carried out a fair bit of reconstruction work here, but when I spoke to the In-charge, Mr. Hassan — there is no wilder that to the past in months there can't have been more than a structure to have made their way out here at all. Unsurprisingly, given that he also lives here (in a flat purchased by a donor's generosity), he is only too happy to show visitors around and will go to great lengths to show you the rooms where donors are left to entertain for three weeks so their jinnah

back out along channels cut into the floor to run into a vat below, the vertical pillars that you can't get access to the upper rooms and into the central dome that was built to measure the time in sunlight. Allow an hour to look around if you have time to spare when you visit!

Don't take someone's agent making an escape from town on a trip out to the Fujairah, who will suggest something a little different? In what just change your view on what the Emirates have to offer and what so few, still, have actually come to discover.

[www.fujairah.gov.ae](http://www.fujairah.gov.ae)

