

Spotlight

HERITAGE

Jewels of Saudi Arabia's past

Five Saudi sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List tell a story of universal historical importance

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One of the objectives of Saudi Arabia, as set out in the Vision 2030 reform plan that aims to create a more diverse economy, is to open up the Kingdom to visitors as a destination for heritage tourism.

One objective is to increase the number of heritage destinations in the Kingdom from 241 to 447. Among the attractions are sites that date back to prehistory and form key chapters in the story of humankind's evolution and migration out of Africa. Five of the sites, which have been recognized by UNESCO for their "outstanding universal value," are the jewels in the crown of Saudi Arabia's past.



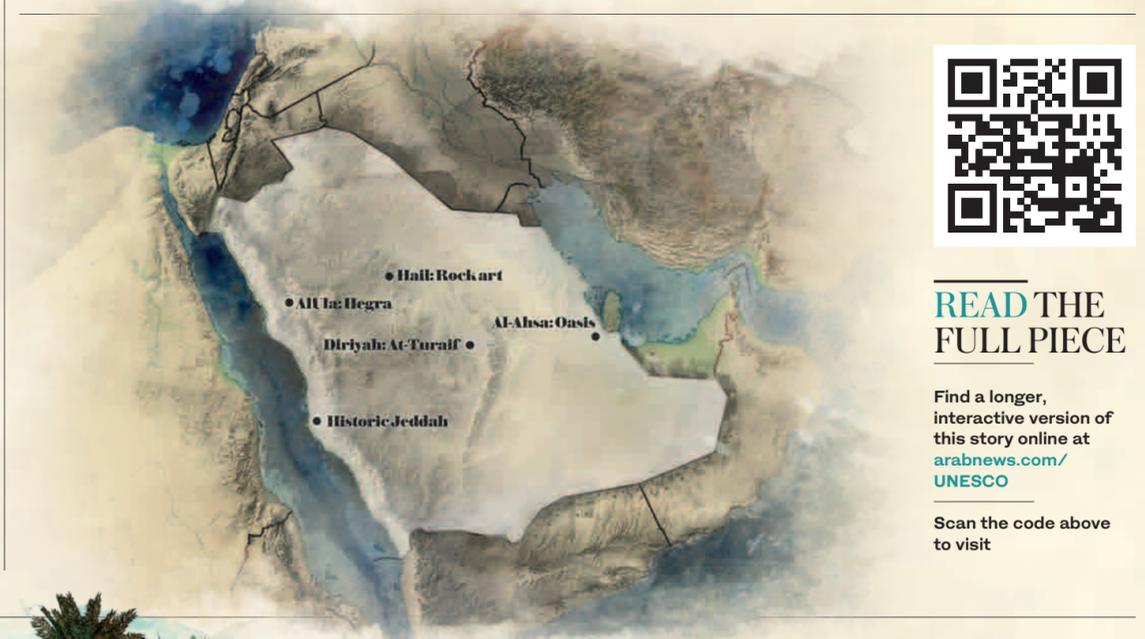
DIRIYAH: AT-TURAIIF
Nestling in a bend of the Wadi Hanifa, in the heart of Riyadh, are the remains of an earlier capital. At-Turaif is a collection of mud-brick palaces,

houses and mosques that became the heart of the First Saudi State, established in the oasis of Diriyah in 1744. When they migrated from Diriyah, the House of Saud's forebears brought the name of their



The mud-brick buildings of At-Turaif became the heart of the First Saudi State.

old home with them. Salwa Palace, on which work began in about 1750, is the largest such structure in the Najd region. Alongside it lie the remains of Bait Al-Mal, the state treasury, built between 1803 and 1814.



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Jeddah's historic heart, Al-Balad, may date back to the 16th century.



2 HISTORIC JEDDAH
Jeddah has been linked inextricably with the Hajj since 647. The old town has managed to survive despite the city's recent rapid

expansion, thanks to the dedication of those determined to conserve its historic heart, known to Jeddawis as Al-Balad. This part probably dates back to the 16th century; implements found in the area suggest it may

have been occupied since the late Stone Age. Jeddah has been influenced by the customs, food, skills and products brought by traders and pilgrims, many of whom chose to settle in the town.

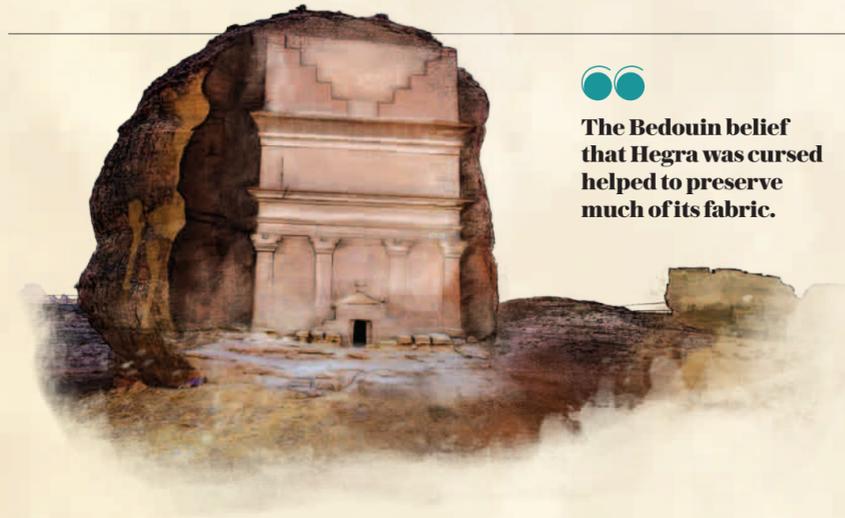


Designs left by ancient peoples in the rocks of Hail region form a magnificent collection.

3 HAIL: ROCK ART
Designs left by ancient peoples in the rocks of Hail region constitute a magnificent collection of carvings. Adopted by UNESCO

as a World Heritage Site of "outstanding universal value" in 2015, the world's most impressive Neolithic petroglyphs can be found at two sites 300 km apart. One site is at Jabal Umm Sinman, near Jubbah, a town

whose origins date back to the dawn of Arab civilization. The other is at Jabal Al-Manjor and Jabal Raat, near Shuwaymis village. Together, the two sites tell the story of 9,000 years of human history.



The Bedouin belief that Hegra was cursed helped to preserve much of its fabric.

4 ALULA: HEGRA
Hegra, on a plain southeast of the Hijaz Mountains, is studded with hills of sandstone, isolated or grouped together to form

massifs. In addition to creating the colossal canvases upon which the Nabataeans carved their story, the winds have also formed strange shapes, such as the three-story rock northeast of the modern town of

AlUla, sculpted over millions of years to resemble an elephant. Archaeologists believe it was the perception of Hegra by the Bedouin as a cursed place that has helped to preserve much of its fabric over the centuries.



5 AL-AHSA: OASIS
Al-Ahsa is associated with the Dilmun civilization that flourished in the third millennium BCE in what is now eastern Saudi Arabia. It is listed by

UNESCO as "the product of the interaction between man and nature." There are more than 2.5 million palm trees in the world's largest and perhaps oldest oasis. The site is composed of 12 separate elements scattered

over 85 sq km. Occupied for at least 8,000 years, Al-Ahsa has survived the rise and fall of great powers, outlasting the Chaldeans, the Achaemenids, Alexander the Great and the Roman and Ottoman empires.