



## EXPERIENCING ARAB CULTURE LIVING IN THE UAE

It is one thing to visit a museum to learn about a culture and another to live in and absorb it. And while the shared culture of the Arab nations may be visible to a new comer here in terms of dress or terrain, long time residents have slowly taken in elements of Arab culture and made it a part of their life. Whether its is the food, the clothing or the language, the culture of a place seeps into its residents and evolves over time into a new way of life.

### Speaking the language of the people

Most Arabic speakers can tell where in the Arab world a person is from their dialect of Arabic. Yes, the Arabic language has many different dialects – *Fusha* or the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), Levantine, Egyptian, Moroccan or Maghrebi, the Gulf or Khaleeji and many others. The formal Modern standard Arabic is very different from the street accent here in the UAE. Even though most of these dialects can be remarkably different, native Arabic speakers will easily understand each other. The spread of Islam in the region can be credited for the spread of the Arabic language but the different dialects add to the intricacies.

**Ghada Maklad** who teaches Arabic language with the Eton institute and often at Outpost Iraq Dubai's Arabic classes at Shell's DWTC office says that teaching Arabic language in this region has been an amazing experience for her. Ghada hails from Egypt and ever since she started teaching Arabic, it has only made her more aware of the diversity of culture in the region not only from around the world but also the Arab nations. Some of her students learn Arabic for business purposes while others do it simply to understand the culture of the region.

Outpost Iraq Dubai's Community and Events Coordinator, **Amena Sumar-Ansari** who has lived in three Gulf countries over the years, tells us that Egyptian cinema and television has also had a significant impact on the spread of Arab culture in the region. Ghada confirms that the Egyptian dialect can owe its popularity to the cinema and television shows.

### Third Culture Kids and Identity

Third culture kids are children who spend a substantial number of their formative years in a culture that is different from the culture of their parents. In a place like the UAE, you may find that children have a much broader understanding of what is 'normal' and living here makes them believe that they are a part of larger shared culture. Many children grow up with a sense of belongingness to the UAE and its culture even though their passports may say something else about their identity.

### Cuisine and Arab Hospitality

Living in the UAE, it is highly likely that you are familiar with Arabic cuisine which consists of a variety of regional cuisines. Whether it is Dates, Arabic coffee, Falafel, Labneh, Shawarma, Hummus, Luqaimat or Kanafa - all these foods have found a place in the diets of the many who live in the region. All of these foods and dishes come from different Arab countries and each country has their own version of some of these popular dishes. What is the correct pronunciation for *Kanafa* or is it *Knefe*? Much deliberation has happened amongst groups over cuppas of *Karak chai*! These Arab dishes have also travelled the world over and permeated the kitchens and hearts of many!

Come Ramadan, and we all learn what it is to observe a fast from sunrise to sunset from those fasting around us. It is often the best time to experience Arab hospitality and generosity in the region. **Sara Amiri**, Health Manager for Shell UAE tells us that Arab hospitality and generosity is the one thing about her culture that she would like to preserve. She tells us that in old times, the doors of people's homes would always be open to visitors. It was customary to welcome a guest with Arabic coffee and dates. The *Majlis* or seating area of the house is still used to welcome visitors in the house for coffee and conversation.

Whether it is this element of hospitality and generosity or the region's focus on family values, if you have lived in the UAE, you would definitely not leave without a bit of Arab culture in you!