



CONVERSATIONS ON EMIRATI AND ARAB CULTURE

We spoke to Hessa Abdullah to find out more about the intricacies of Arab culture and Emirati Culture.

Outpost: What do you love about Arab Culture?

Hessa: Arab culture is a very diverse and authentic one. I could tell you where an Arab is from, just from their speech. There are different dialects, perfumes, spices and music that each country in the Arab region is distinguished by. The people here come from different ethnicities, colours and religions.

Outpost: Can you tell us how Emirati culture is different or similar to the culture of other Arab countries?

Hessa: Each country in the Arab region has its own characteristics. Some were affected by colonialism while others thrived under the influence of foreign trade. For UAE, it was a mixture of both. The UAE was colonized by the British and the Portuguese for many decades before the final withdrawal of the forces in 1971 and the establishment of the federal state. Due to its strategic location, the UAE was a route for travelers from land and sea. This meeting point of people from different Arab countries, Africa & India in the east influenced the cuisine, wardrobe and art in the region.



Ayala dance. Photo courtesy: alshindagha.dubaiculture.gov.ae

While the UAE shares the language and culture of modesty and generous hospitality with the rest of the Arab region, it has its distinct dances such as *Ayala* (performed with sticks) and *Harbia* (performed with guns), spices, fabrics and perfumes fashioned by imported *Oud* from India.

People of the UAE are mainly divided into two sections. First are the ones referred to as the people of the land, mainly *Bedouins* who were nomads moving from one piece of land to the other, looking for a source of water and food. They settled near oases. The second are the Pearl divers and fishermen referred to as the people of the sea.

Outpost: In today's ever-changing modern world, what is the one thing from your culture you would like to preserve?

Hessa: One thing that I would like to preserve are the handicrafts of the Emiratis.

Emiratis fashioned many things out of palm trees. Their houses were made of the palm branches, their hand fans made of strong dried leaves of the palm tree, or as the natives called them *Khous*, in addition to different house hold items like mats then dyed in different colors.

Telli is another Emirati craft made using a tool that looks like a metal with a cushion on top called "*Kajojah*" to hold the threads in place and make metallic embroidery to be used for traditional clothing.

Sadu is another traditional craft fashioned by handwoven threads using wools to create patterns that can be used for clothing, carpets or tents.



Clockwise from left: Khous, Telli, Kajojah and Sadu. Photo courtesy: Al Gadheer UAE Crafts