

DESERT ISLANDS

Fact Sheet

General

- Tourism Development & Investment Company (TDIC), a master developer of cultural, residential and tourism assets in Abu Dhabi is the master developer of the Desert Islands tourism destination.
- Desert Islands comprises eight natural islands that include a nature reserve of *Sir Bani Yas Island*, the historical *Dalma Island* and the untouched *Discovery Islands*.
- The nature-based destination is situated in the Arabian Gulf, approximately eight kilometres from Abu Dhabi's western coastline (Al Gharbia region) and a 250 kilometre drive from Abu Dhabi City.
- Sir Bani Yas Island, which is at the heart of the Desert Islands project, is linked to the mainland via Desert Islands' boat service and an 8 seated seaplane service operated in partnership with Empire Aviation; this flight takes approximately 50-minutes and includes of scenic flight over the island before landing. Desert Islands also provides weekend flights to and from the island on its 50 seated Dash 8 plane operated by Abu Dhabi Aviation; this voyage takes 25 minutes from Abu Dhabi Airport.
- Managed sensitively, with respect for local culture and traditions, Desert Islands provides a significant economic boost to the Western Region (Al Gharbia) and nationals residing there, by increasing employment, education and investment opportunities.

Sustainability

- TDIC aims to make Desert Islands a model of sustainable development that will meet the needs of the present without compromising future needs.
- The master planning of Desert Islands has been subject to intense sustainability governance including landscape, water, coastal, energy and cultural heritage management, as well as land and marine ecology.
- The overall energy strategy for Desert Islands is under development jointly by TDIC and Masdar, the Abu Dhabi Government's advanced energy and sustainability initiative responsible for developing renewable energy strategies for the Emirate.
- Expanding on the late Sheikh Zayed's eco-philosophy, the late President of the UAE, TDIC plans to utilise alternative energy solutions such as wind on Sir Bani Yas.
- Sir Bani Yas Island operates one of the Middle East's largest wind turbines. It stands 65 metres high, has three rotor blades each with a 52 metre wing span and a production capacity of 850 kilowatts per hour (equivalent to what is required to power 30-40 households)

Dalma Island

- Dalma Island is a true symbol of UAE heritage mirroring an authentic Arabian lifestyle in a genuine environment.
- Dalma Island is approximately 33 square kilometers in size and is situated about 32 kilometers offshore.
- The island's name is said to originate from the Arabic phrase 'Dal Maa' meaning 'bucket of water' - a phrase often heard from merchant sailors, who used the island as a stopping point to replenish their ship's fresh water supply.
- Historical maps referred to Dalma as 'Pearl Island' because it was known as the region's centre of pearl diving and trade.
- Dalma Island's first inhabitants date back nearly 7,000 years and the island boasts the oldest known permanent settlement in the United Arab Emirates.
- 5,000 people still live on Dalma Island, majority are local Emiratis.
- Many Dalma residents are grass farmers, and export most of the crops to feed the animals in the Arabian Wildlife Park on Sir Bani Yas Island.
- Approximately 200 freshwater wells once existed on the island, which until the 1950s provided Abu Dhabi main land with its freshwater supply.
- The first part of the Desert Islands to open, the Desert Islands Education Centre on Dalma Island, provides education to locals who lives on the island to become part in the growing tourism industry, on and off the islands.
- In an effort to create social sustainability and a competitive workforce, the Desert Island Education Centre offers the island's local inhabitants a range of vocational education opportunities to meet the needs of the emerging tourism industry.
- 500 students are presently enrolled at the centre, 95% of which are UAE nationals.
- Desert Island Education Centre offers courses from UK accredited organisation "City & Guilds" which have been extremely successful, with recent exam passing rates at 100%.
- In the past year a total of 40 students who completed courses at the centre have become employed with some holding key roles at the Sir Bani Yas airport.

Discovery Islands

- Discovery Islands is comprised of six natural islands that are home to vibrant marine life and untouched animal habitats.
- Located 8 to 20 kilometers from the mainland, the islands have never been occupied.
- The islands serve as nesting grounds for migratory birds and turtles. During the past years a number of research programmes have been carried out to document breeding of animals on the islands.
- TDIC is keen to ensure that any developments adhere to strict environmental standards, and that the islands remain protected natural animal habitats.
- While the research is being undertaken, no developments will commence on the islands, they will remain undisturbed to ensure the continuation of marine & bird life.
- Bird and marine life may be observed by tourists from a safe distance, under the supervision of trained nature guides.