

AAINews

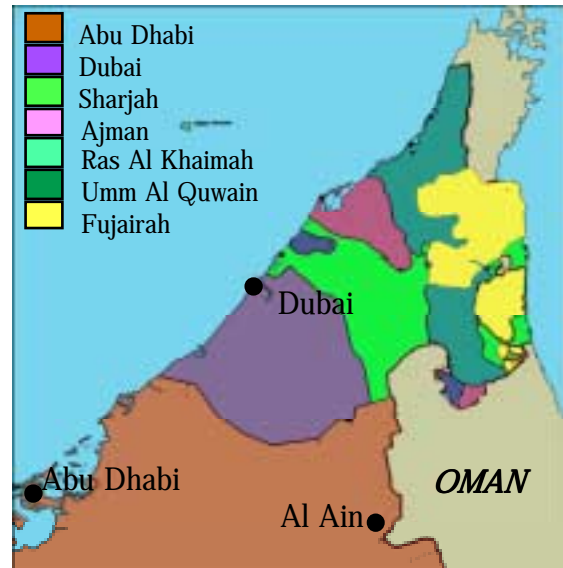
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Recent Development in Al Ain, Abu Dhabi

Al Ain is an oasis town surrounded by desert in the east of Abu Dhabi. Despite being in the middle of a vast desert, the town is surprisingly green (although most of the greenery is connected to life-support machines, or irrigation tubes). This is because Al Ain is the hometown of the current president of the UAE and has always been an important oasis town. Al Ain's "souq" (the market), where local people from UAE and Oman as well as foreign workers gather, is in the center of town. Shopping there is easy as long as one has a car. All sorts of groceries are readily available. Fish comes from Dubai and the Indian Ocean, while some vegetables and fruits are produced around Al Ain and others are imported from neighbouring countries. In big supermarkets, we can even buy tofu (bean curd) and shoyu (soy sauce). Most other Japanese food ingredients including miso (soy-bean paste) can also be obtained in Abu Dhabi or Dubai.



Emirates in the North UAE

When I first arrived in Al Ain in April 1994, my impression was of a quiet university town without the "construction rush" that can be seen in Dubai or in Abu Dhabi (indeed people from Dubai refer to Al Ain as a village.) However, unlike two years ago, there have been a lot of rumours circulating recently regarding various construction plans. These range from 20-storey hotels near the Sheikh Zayed's palace on top of Mount Hafit (a rocky mountain of 1,200 meters in the south of the town) and the development of a spa resort at the foot of the mountain, to the construction of a Sheraton Hotel inside the public park in front of the post office, and the erection of a new shopping mall nearby.

Population flow into Al Ain seems to be increasing every year and maybe this is the motivating factor behind the various development plans. At the same time, water shortages are becoming serious each year and I heard that a water meter will be installed in each household. Some years ago it became impossible for Al Ain to supply its own water, and the town is currently dependent on water supply from sea water desalinization plants in Abu Dhabi. Is it only we foreigners who think that this arid area must now seriously consider the development of water saving irrigation methods in both agricultural development and afforestation plans. (Reported by Shoji in Al Ain)



Animal souq



Modern supermarket in town



Vegetable souq