

Qasr Al Hosn

Fort to reveal its cultural treasures

2,000 pupils to visit during festival

Stronghold to help youngsters develop better understanding of their history and heritage

Lindsay Carroll

ABU DHABI // About 2,000 local schoolchildren are expected to visit the second Qasr Al Hosn Festival next month, as part of its cultural and educational programme.

The pupils from schools in Abu Dhabi are to take part in workshops on heritage and culture during the annual event, which starts on February 20. The festival is a way to cultivate a sense of Emirati heritage in young people, organisers said.

They will also be able to see parts of the historic inner fort, some of which will be open to visitors for the first time in years.

Organisers hope the opportunity to see the continuing restoration of Abu Dhabi's oldest building will bring more visitors this year. About 55,000 people visited last year.

"The festival is an opportunity to learn about the status of Qasr Al Hosn in the history of our country," said Butti Al Muhairi, a member of the festival organising team.

"This festival really aims at enriching values" of Emirati heritage, he added.

The inside foyer of the fort will be partially open for guided tours and during educational programmes for children. Visitors will also be able to tour the National Consultative Council chamber next to the fort walls.

"For the first time, visitors will

have the opportunity to learn about this preservation and conservation project," Mr Al Muhairi said.

The event will be divided into four sections commemorating different local landscapes: marina, desert, oasis and Abu Dhabi island. Each section aims to educate visitors about one of those landscapes and how they relate to traditional ways of life – such as methods of transportation, hunting, diving and dhow building.

About 200 local university students will work as festival guides.

A historical exhibit in the centre of the fort complex is to showcase oral narratives, and the Cultural Foundation next to the fort will host live performances, poetry recitals and a film series. There will also be a "contemporary" take on Emirati coffee traditions, where visitors can learn about history and taste or buy types of coffee.

Faisal Al Dhaheri, spokesman for the Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority (TCA Abu Dhabi), called the festival "a symbol of development of Abu Dhabi and more than two and a half centuries of Arab culture".

The festival's largest attraction is Cavalia, a show created by Cirque du Soleil co-founder Norman Latourelle, who said he had incorporated Emirati traditions and culture into the production for the festival. Shows start on February 22.

Cavalia aims to show the relationship between humans and horses, Mr Latourelle said. Fifty horses will be brought to Abu Dhabi from Perth, Australia, where the production is now being shown.

"Cavalia is an ode, a recognition of what the horse has accomplished over the past 5,000 years," Mr La-

tourelle said, calling it a combination of equestrian and performing arts. He added that the production hoped to "marry" the show with Emirati culture.

The annual festival is held under the patronage of Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme

Commander of the Armed Forces, and is being organised by TCA Abu Dhabi.

The event runs until March 1 and is open to women and children only on February 21.

Entry to the fort is free. Tickets for Cavalia start at Dh250 for adults and Dh150 for children. Platinum

tickets are available for Dh695, and include a reserved seat in the first five rows and a stable tour.

More information is available on the festival website at www.qasral-hosnfestival.ae, or on the event's Facebook and Twitter pages.

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The second Qasr Al Hosn Festival includes Cavalia, a show celebrating the relationship between man and horse over 5,000 years. Delores Johnson / The National