



## **RAS AL KHAIMAH: A DESTINATION OF THE FUTURE**

***Focused on Nature, Sustainability, Accessibility and Responsible Tourism***



Ras Al Khaimah is a unique destination that offers visitors the chance to experience natural beauty and diverse landscapes. From the majestic Hajar mountains to the pristine beaches and the Al Wadi Desert and Nature Reserve, there is no shortage of outdoor activities and natural attractions to explore in the Nature Emirate.

On a mission to not only protect its natural assets, but also engage the growing cohort of responsible travellers, Ras Al Khaimah has set its sights on becoming a regional leader in Sustainable Tourism by 2025. With sustainable, balanced, and focused developments at the heart of its strategies, the Emirate's ambition is to nurture a tourism industry that is economically, environmentally, socially sustainable and supports liveability for its citizens and workforce, while conserving and enhancing its unique environment.

In 2023, Ras Al Khaimah achieved Silver Certification under EarthCheck's Sustainable Destinations program – a first in the Middle East. EarthCheck's rigorous process involves monitoring and auditing across 10 sustainability indicators – from energy and water consumption to waste management, carbon footprint analysis and community engagement. The Emirate outperformed the baseline average in three significant areas, reporting a performance that was better by 23% in energy consumption with savings of 12.4 gigajoules since 2021, 29% in greenhouse gas emissions equating to a saving of 1.8 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, and 61% in waste output, leading to savings of 420 million litres since 2021.

### **A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY**

Created in partnership with **EarthCheck**, the world's leading scientific benchmarking, certification, and advisory group for travel and tourism, Ras Al Khaimah's sustainability strategy goes far beyond promoting recycling or eliminating single use plastic - often the go-to for many. **Sustainability is at the heart of everything it does**; it places all aspects - environment, culture, conservation and liveability - at the centre of its investment and development strategy. This approach is key to its strategy to drive **overall sector growth and attract over three million visitors by 2030**, underscoring its leadership in conscious tourism and aligning with its identity as a nature destination with a desire to progress, grow and evolve.



## **Key Pillars:**

### **Sustainable Development**

Sustainable, balanced, and focused developments are at the heart of the Emirate's strategies. With this in mind, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA) has applied a **mindful approach to new hotel developments**, consulting with hospitality partners to ensure **thoughtful development and a measured pipeline** to avoid rapid, less well-planned expansion and overcrowding.

As the licensing authority for all new hotel developments, RAKTDA is also able to set guidelines and protocols to regulate sustainability standards and work closely with hotels to ensure sustainable practices. This **'Green Hotel Rating'** is an initiative that aims to achieve 100 percent integrated sustainability in all of Ras Al Khaimah's hotels.

An example of this in practice is **Wynn Al Marjan Island**, the region's first integrated resort scheduled to open in 2027, which will be developed to the highest standards of sustainability. Wynn Resorts is known for its pioneering approach to sustainability and energy efficiency, with a target of achieving 50 percent renewable energy by 2030 and net zero by 2050. It has already implemented robust waste management programs at its properties, diverting between 26 percent and 100 percent of waste from entering landfills, as well as reducing water consumption and investing in new waste-to-energy solutions.

### **Natural Conservation**

Spanning an area of over a thousand acres, **Al Wadi Nature Reserve** is a protected area, home to Arabian oryx and gazelles as well as a fragile ecosystem home to desert vegetation, flowers and trees. The spiny-tailed lizard, rodents, small mammals, foxes, owls and wild cats also find their place in the natural, protected area.

### **Cultural Conservation**

The integrated approach also includes cultural conservation. In addition to being the most fortified Emirate, with multiple forts due to its importance as a trade route, Ras Al Khaimah is home to **four culture and heritage sites which are on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List**. The Authority has established a long-term investment plan to protect and enhance these and other key cultural projects. This includes **Suwaidi Pearls**, the only pearl farm in the UAE which still cultivates local pearls, all done by hand to preserve the Emirate's culture and traditions. It has also embarked on a three phased restoration program at **Al Jazeera Al Hamra**, abandoned in the 1960's and one of the last surviving pearl diving and seafaring towns of the Arabian Gulf. Scheduled to complete in 2025, experts are working in line with UNESCO guidelines to restore the village, using traditional and sustainable materials, to potentially make it accessible to the public as an attractive tourist destination.

### **Attractions with Purpose**

Under its strategy, all upcoming attractions will be purpose built with sustainability standards and processes. The Emirate has committed AED 500 million for the development of over 20 purpose-driven tourism projects that will enhance its natural environment, including sustainable accommodation on Jebel Jais. **Saij Mountain**



**Lodge** will open in 2024, a protected and sensitively managed mountain resort featuring eco-friendly lodges made from natural and sustainable materials.

### **Community and Liveability**

In addition, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Authority is embracing the concept of **liveability**. This includes engaging with the local community, staging over 50 events a year such as the RAK Art Festival, the RAK Half Marathon, Ras Al Khaimah Championship and various other sporting events, and introducing RAKFAM, a series of initiatives aimed at enriching connectivity, community life and facilities for tourism sector employees in the Emirate.

Thanks to its focus on employee well-being, the Authority was named one of the 2022 **Top 10 Great Places to Work in the Middle East** – the highest placed government entity – as well as one of the Best Workplaces for Women and a Great Place to Work in 2021, the first and only organization in Ras Al Khaimah to be awarded this certification.

### **OUR JOURNEY TO BECOMING REGIONAL LEADER IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM BY 2025:**

The process began with the signing of the “**Sustainability Pledge**” at the 2021 Global Citizen Forum from the Authority and its partners across government and industry, under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Saud Bin Saqr Al Qasimi, UAE Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah, before establishing the benchmarks that progress would be measured against.

In June 2022, the Emirate launched its **Sustainable Tourism Strategy Implementation Plan** which comprised two sustainability programmes rolled out in partnership with EarthCheck:

- **The Destination Certification Programme:** a framework for Environmental, Cultural, Social and Economic (ECSE) performance. In November 2023, Ras Al Khaimah attained EarthCheck’s Silver Certification, making it the first destination in the Middle East to earn this level of recognition for sustainability.
- **Tourism Business Accreditation Programme** (‘Responsible RAK’): A white-label program for businesses, with a platform to input their sustainability benchmarking data and submit necessary supporting documents based on metrics such as energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, potable water consumption, waste sent to landfill and social – Emirati (local) employment, gender parity. Over 30 hotels and attractions are part of the programme and over 20 tourism businesses have already achieved the Responsible RAK Silver Certification.

In parallel, the Emirate is embracing **accessible tourism** and pivoting towards more inclusive and sustainable travel. People with disabilities and special needs spend approximately USD \$8 billion on tourism services annually, and the World Health Organisation estimates the number of people with disabilities will double to 2 billion by 2050. The Authority has engaged with accessibility experts to map out the consumer journey from the eyes of the traveller with a determined spirit and asked how we can truly embrace this important travel audience.



## **WHAT'S NEXT?**

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority understands that sustainability is not a one-time agenda. It's a continuous process that requires a long-term commitment. Therefore the Authority is dedicated to continuing to enhance the Emirate's sustainable credentials for the long term:

- Year 1-4: **EarthCheck Gold certification**
- Year 5-9: **EarthCheck Platinum certification**
- Year 10-14: **EarthCheck Master certification**

**-ENDS-**

### **About Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA)**

The Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA) was established in May 2011 under the government of Ras Al Khaimah. RAKTDA aims to develop the Emirate's tourism infrastructure and establish Ras Al Khaimah as a world-class destination for leisure and business travel, creating sustainable investment opportunities and enhancing the quality of life for its residents. In order to achieve its goals, the Authority has a government mandate to license, regulate and monitor the Emirate's tourism and hospitality industry.

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