**Press Release**

Paris, 29th of July 2019

**« AlUla, Wonder of Arabia » at the Arab World Institute**

**From October 9, 2019 to January 19, 2020**

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**The French Agency for AlUla development is pleased to announce the upcoming opening, at the Arab World Institute, of an exhibition dedicated to one of the Middle East secret wonder.**

Saudi Arabia has chosen France to showcase, as part of a major cultural, touristic and environmental project, the AlUla region, located in the North-West of the Kingdom. France and Saudi Arabia have undertaken, through an intergovernmental agreement, to co-develop this territory which benefits from outstanding natural and archaeological heritage.

Gérard Mestrallet, Executive Chairman of the French Agency for AlUla development, has declared: « This exhibition, desired and designed by the Royal Commission for AlUla and the Arab World Institute, is a world premiere: the general public will discover, thanks to the exhibition trail, the unique beauty and diversity of AlUla’s landscapes and the splendour of its Nabataean tombs with decorated frontages.»

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**Notes to Editors in chief:**

**About AlUla**

Located 1,100 km from Riyadh, in north-west Saudi Arabia, AlUla is a place of extraordinary natural and human heritage. The vast area, covering 23,301 km², includes a lush oasis valley, towering sandstone mountains, and ancient cultural heritage sites dating back thousands of years to the reigns of the Lihyanite and Nabataean kingdoms. The most well-known and recognised site in AlUla is Hegra, Saudi Arabia’s first UNESCO World Heritage Site. An ancient city that covered fifty-two hectares, Hegra was the principal southern city of the Nabataean kingdom and comprises 94 well-preserved tombs with elaborate facades cut out of the sandstone outcrops surrounding the walled urban settlement. Current research suggests Hegra was the southernmost outpost of the Roman Empire after the annexation of Arabia in 106 CE.

In addition to Hegra, AlUla is home to a series of fascinating historical and archaeological sites, including ancient Dadan—the capital of the Dadanite and Lihyanite Kingdoms—, which is considered one of the most developed 1st-millennium BCE cities of the Arabian Peninsula; there are thousands of ancient rock art sites and inscriptions; and the railway stations of Hijaz.

**About IMA (Arab World Institute)**

The Arab World Institute was established to foster strong and durable cultural ties while developing constructive dialogue between the Arab World, France, and Europe. This multidisciplinary space is the ideal place for the development of cultural projects, in collaboration with institutions, creators, and thinkers from the Arab world. The Arab World Institute is fully anchored in the present. It aims to reflect the Arab world’s current dynamics. It intends to make a distinctive contribution to the institutional cultural landscape. No other organisation in the world offers such a wide range of events relating to the Arab world. Debates, colloquia, seminars, conferences, dance shows, concerts, films, books, meetings, language and culture courses, and major exhibitions all contribute to raising awareness of this unique and vibrant world.

**About the Royal Commission for AlUla**

The Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) was established by royal decree in July 2017 to protect and safeguard AlUla, a region of outstanding natural and cultural significance in north-west Saudi Arabia. RCU is embarking on a long-term plan to develop and deliver a sensitive, sustainable transformation of the region, reaffirming it as one of the country's most important archaeological and cultural destinations and preparing it to welcome visitors from around the world. RCU’s development work in AlUla encompasses a broad range of initiatives involving archaeology, tourism, culture, education and the arts, reflecting the ambitious commitment to cultivate tourism and leisure in Saudi Arabia, outlined in Vision 2030.

**About AFALULA (French Agency for AlUla development)**

The French Agency for AlUla Development (Afalula) was founded in Paris in July 2018 following an intergovernmental agreement signed by France and Saudi Arabia in April of that year. Afalula aims to support its Saudi partner, The Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU), in the co-construction of the economic, touristic and cultural development of AlUla, a region located in the North-West of Saudi Arabia which benefits from outstanding natural and cultural heritage. The agency’s mission is to mobilize French knowledge and expertise and to gather the finest operators and companies in the fields of archaeology, museography, architecture, environment, tourism, hospitality, infrastructure, education, security, agriculture, botany and the sustainable management of natural resources.

www.afalula.com

Press Contact :

**Mathias Curnier** (AFALULA) mathias.curnier@afalula.com, tel: +33 6 77 04 56 18

[afalula.com](https://www.afalula.com/)