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## ROYAL COMMISSION FOR ALULA (RCU) PRESS RELEASE 7 OCTOBER 2019

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# MAJOR EXHIBITION PRESENTING TREASURES OF THE ANCIENT CROSSROADS OF ALULA IN SAUDI ARABIA OPENS AT THE INSTITUT DU MONDE ARABE IN PARIS

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- AlUla is a historically significant desert oasis in the north west of Saudi Arabia.
- AlUla, Wonder of Arabia is the first major exhibition to present AlUla's spectacular nature, archaeological treasures and cultural heritage, taking visitors on a journey through time spanning 7,000 years.
- The Royal Commission for AlUla has announced its Cultural Manifesto, pledging to reinvigorate AlUla as a vibrant, open museum through conservation and developing a unique global destination for heritage, nature and the arts.

**Paris, France, 7 October 2019:** Saudi Arabia's Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) has today opened the **AlUla, Wonder of Arabia** exhibition at the prestigious Institut du monde arabe (IMA) in Paris.

The exhibition is an international collaboration between The Royal Commission for AlUla and the Institut du monde arabe, led by its President Jack Lang. It is supported by the French Agency for the Development of AlUla (AFALULA), led by Gérard Mestrallet.

This exhibition was today formally inaugurated by Saudi Arabia's Minister of Culture and RCU Governor His Highness Prince Badr bin Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Farhan al Saud, Mr. Franck Riester, French Minister of Culture and Mr. Jack Lang, President of the IMA, in front of distinguished guests from the fields of archaeology, arts, culture, and nature who included architect Jean Nouvel and former UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova.

Inspired by the pioneering explorers and archaeologists who came to AlUla to discover and interpret its ancient civilisations, the curators of the exhibition, Doctors Laïla Nehmé and Abdulrahman Alsuhaibani, have worked tirelessly to present AlUla, Wonder of Arabia to the world.

The exhibition introduces visitors to AlUla's spectacular natural beauty and rich cultural heritage through the presentation of rare archaeological objects, immersive multimedia and visuals by renowned photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand.





To highlight its significance as a global destination, the Commission is using this occasion to launch its Cultural Manifesto for AlUla. The Manifesto sets a clear direction for the long term development of the region, articulating the Commission's commitment to sustainable and responsible tourism across what will effectively be a vast open-air cultural experience, enabling exciting journeys of discovery.

The diverse and truly wide-ranging cultural development in AlUla will embrace heritage, nature and a bold mandate for art and cultural production helping to drive a new creative economy in the region.

The Manifesto prioritises the preservation of the region, its history, and the development of skills for current and future inhabitants of AlUla - custodians of AlUla's past, and at the centre of its future as a dynamic economy and society and as a world-class destination.

Among the many new visitor experiences to be developed are the **Black Basalt Museum** - taking its inspiration from AlUla's volcanic rock formations; **Wadi AlFann - the Valley of the Arts** - an ambitious collection of contemporary commissions and sculpture set in AlUla's extraordinary landscape and the **Hegra Museum** - exploring the life and legacy of the Nabataeans who established their principal southern city in the Kingdom.

Located in northwestern Saudi Arabia, and serving as a crossroads between East and West, AlUla has been built by successive societies and civilisations over millennia. The exhibition will take visitors on a journey through the natural and historic wonders of this region by immersing them in AlUla's unique landscape and the ancient North Arabian Kingdoms of Dadan and Lihyān, and the Nabataean city of Hegra, Saudi Arabia's first UNESCO World Heritage Site.

**His Highness Prince Badr bin Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Farhan al Saud** said "The essence of AlUla is the interrelationship between heritage, art and nature. The opening of this exhibition together with the launch of the Cultural Manifesto of AlUla acts as a landmark invitation to the world, to preserve our global heritage, balance ambition with responsibility and deliver the next layer of our story, for future generations to treasure."

**Gérard Mestrallet**, Executive Chairman of AFALULA, the French Agency for the Development of AlUla, said: "The Cultural Manifesto provides an unparalleled opportunity to write a new chapter in the history of AlUla and its people, based on a sensitive and credible cultural development of this unique region as a place of heritage for the world. The intergovernmental agreement signed in Paris in April 2018 between France and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, will reflect this spirit and ensure that AlUla welcomes the world, and the world welcomes AlUla in the years to come."

IMA President and former French Minister of Culture **Jack Lang** added: "Launching such an ambitious invitation here in Paris, an international city of arts and culture is a strong symbol of openness and universality. AlUla is a once-in-a-generation project, and the key to its success is collaborative work and cross-civilizational dialogue, to which we are deeply committed and why the IMA is enormously proud to be hosting this exhibition."





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## NOTES TO EDITORS

### **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 22,561km<sup>2</sup>, includes a lush oasis valley, towering sandstone mountains and ancient cultural heritage sites dating back thousands of years to when the Lihyan and Nabataean kingdoms reigned.

The most well-known and recognised site in AlUla is Hegra, Saudi Arabia's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. A 52-hectare ancient city, Hegra was the principal southern city of the Nabataean Kingdom and is comprised around 100 well preserved tombs with elaborate facades cut out of the sandstone outcrops surrounding the walled urban settlement.

In addition to Hegra, AlUla is home to many fascinating historical and archaeological sites such as: Ancient Dadan, the capital of the Dadan and Lihyan Kingdoms, which is considered one of the most developed 1st-millennium BCE cities of the Arabian Peninsula; thousands of ancient rock art sites and inscriptions; and Hijaz Railway stations.

### **About The Royal Commission for AlUla**

The Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) was established in July 2017 to protect and safeguard AlUla, a region of outstanding natural and cultural significance in North-West Saudi Arabia. RCU has embarked 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.

Since its inception RCU's development work in AlUla has encompassed a broad range of initiatives across archaeology, nature, tourism, culture, education and the arts.

A major programme incorporating extensive archaeological fieldwork and survey of the biodiversity of AlUla is currently underway by RCU, with the support of expert teams from around the globe. The creation of nature reserves and animal conservation initiatives are amongst efforts to protect habitats and safeguard endangered species.

Local skills development for the AlUla community include the Hammayah workshop programme, training male and female citizens in heritage awareness; the Scholarship Programme for AlUla students to study at world-leading institutions abroad and the training of local tour guides, the 'AlRowah' group in AlUla; as guardians of AlUla's history.





## **About IMA**

The Institut du monde arabe 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.

## **Venue Information**

1 rue des Fossés Saint-Bernard 75005 Paris

**Métro:** Line 7, Jussieu; Line 10, Cardinal Lemoine

**Bus:** Lines 24, 63, 67, 86, 87, and 89

**Vélib Stations:** nos. 5020, 5019, 502

**Parking:** Maubert Collège des Bernardins

39, bd Saint-Germain 75005

Exhibition galleries (floors 1 and 2)

Opening: Tuesday – Friday: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Saturday, Sunday, and public holidays: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Ticket office closes 45 minutes before closing time

[www.imarabe.org/](http://www.imarabe.org/)

