



The decision to build in this place is brave and will allow Sharaan to be revealed on a world-wide scale.

Jean Nouvel

French architect who will design Sharaan Resort

News Saudi Arabia

How Al-Ula is evolving to attract visitors

- 111** The number of tombs in Madain Saleh
- 2 million** The number of visitors the Royal Commission aims to attract by 2035
- 38,000** The number of jobs that will be created
- 120 billion** The cumulative economic impact it will have in Saudi riyals



The Al-Ula region is a natural crossroads. Positioned on the ancient incense route between Southern Arabia and Egypt, it became a hub of commercial and cultural exchange, its cities and oases stopping-points for traders of frankincense, myrrh and other precious commodities.



Tantora is a sundial located in Al-Ula's old town. It has been used by the local population for hundreds of years as both a mode of telling time and a marker for the changing of the seasons.



Dedan (Al-Khurybah): Situated on the edge of the oasis, not far from Hegra, the ancient North Arabian capital of the Dedan and Lihyan kingdoms was one of the most developed cities of the Arabian Peninsula. It is home to ancient rock inscriptions.

2008 Al-Ula's Madain Saleh is designated a Unesco World Heritage Site, the first for Saudi Arabia.



July 2017 The Royal Commission for Al-Ula is established to protect and preserve its ancient heritage and natural landscapes and to pave the way for tourism coinciding with Vision 2030's goals. It launches an archeological survey, and sites such as Madain Saleh are closed until a conservation and development plan is established.



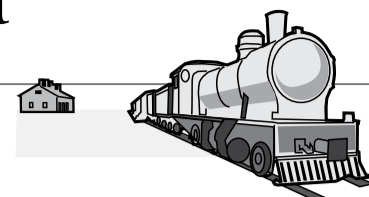
April 2018 On Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to Paris, the Royal Commission signs an agreement of cooperation with France to develop its tourism and culture sector.

December 2018 Winter at Tantora, a festival named after a sundial in Al-Ula's Old Town, is launched on Dec. 20, opening up the sites for two month's worth of weekend events with performers such as Andrea Bocelli.

September 2018 The first phase of an international scholarship program begins for 1,000 students to train them in tourism and archeology, with places in the US, UK and France.



2019 Famous guests such as Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, and boxing legend Floyd Mayweather visit Al-Ula during the Winter at Tantora festival.



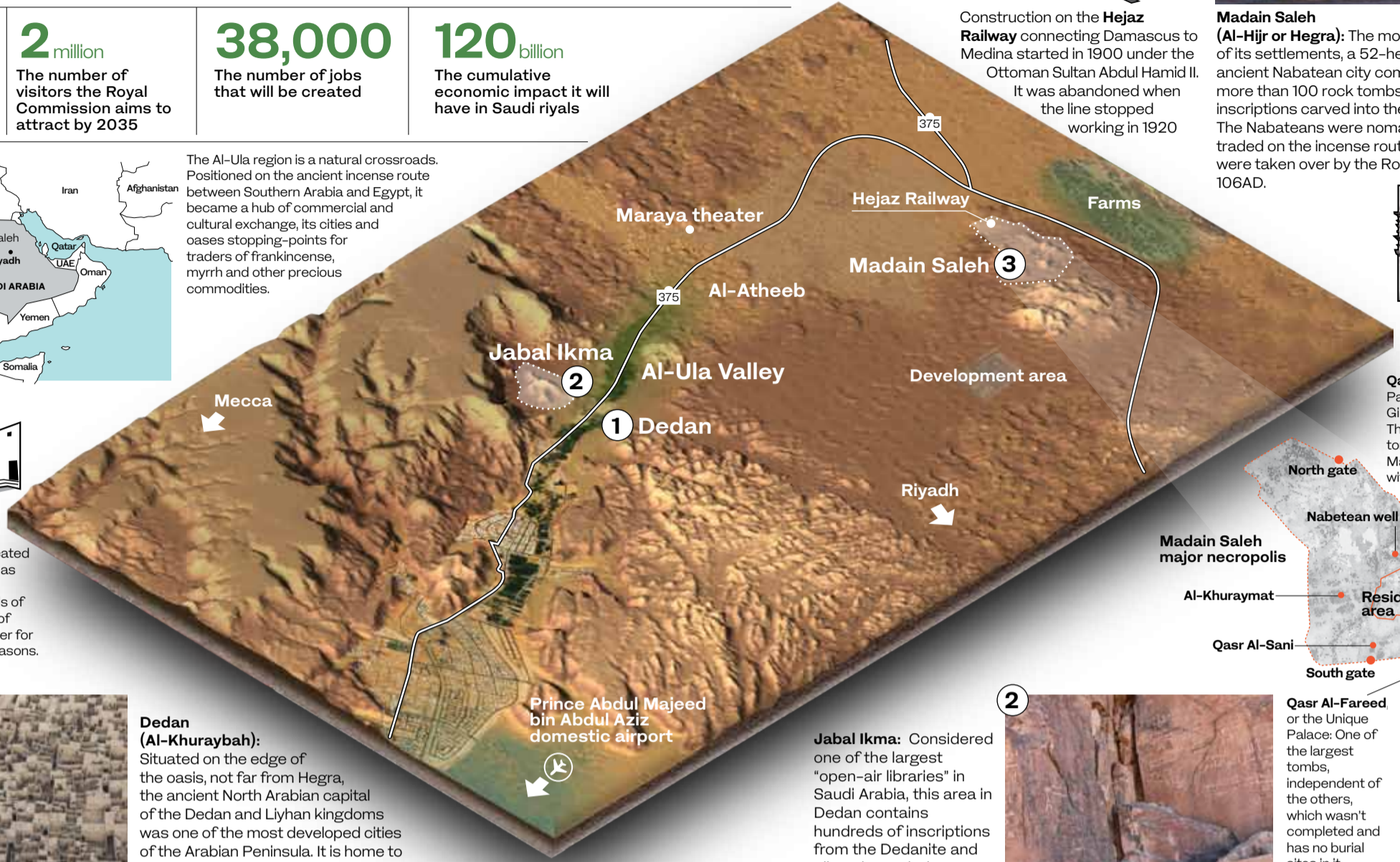
Construction on the **Hejaz Railway** connecting Damascus to Medina started in 1900 under the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II. It was abandoned when the line stopped working in 1920.



Madain Saleh (Al-Hijr or Hegra): The most famous of its settlements, a 52-hectare ancient Nabatean city comprising more than 100 rock tombs with inscriptions carved into the facade. The Nabateans were nomads who traded on the incense route until they were taken over by the Romans in 106AD.



Qasr Al-Bint or Palace of the Girl/Daughter: The largest tomb facade in Madain Saleh, with 31 tombs.



1

2

3

DESIGNS FOR THE FUTURE

Al-Ula project brings ancient world to a global audience

Resort, nature reserve and archaeology to generate \$32 billion and draw 2 million visitors

Mo Gannon and Noor Nugali Al-Ula

Jean Nouvel, the French architect who designed Louvre Abu Dhabi, will build a resort in the mountains of Al-Ula as part of a plan launched on Sunday night to transform the home of ancient civilizations into a destination for visitors from around the world.

The plan for sustainable development of the region, which includes the Sharaan Resort and a designated nature reserve, was launched by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the governor of the Royal Commission for Al-Ula, Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan, at a groundbreaking ceremony at the Maraya theater.

The mirrored concert hall was built for the Winter at Tantora festival, which has brought visitors to the untouched area every weekend since December, giving them a taste of what's to come.

"The decision to build in this place is brave and will allow Sharaan to be revealed on a world-wide scale," Nouvel said during a presentation at the launch.

Several hundred guests were welcomed in the concert hall, including Prince Abdul Aziz bin Turki Al-Faisal, Princess Reema bint Bandar and Yanni, who performed at the Winter at Tantora festival last weekend.

The charter for Al-Ula was presented on a stage made of sand, with a multimedia sound and light show involving local men and women, the "guardians" of

Al-Ula. The rocks of Al-Ula, visible through glass at the back of the stage, served as a backdrop.

Al-Ula is home to spectacular sandstone rock formations and the archaeological site of Madain Saleh, the largest Nabatean settlement south of Petra that contains the ancient civilization's rock tombs with their carved facades. In 2008, it was designated as Saudi Arabia's first Unesco World Heritage site.

The Sharaan Resort will include residential estates, a summit center, a spa and restaurants. It will be accompanied by the 925-square-kilometer Sharaan Nature Reserve.

Both take their names from the surrounding canyon with its ancient rock formations. The reserve will conserve and restore the region's natural desert habitats, including the Arabian leopard, with the help of local rangers trained by international experts.

While the details of the plan are new, it is very much in keeping with the Crown Prince's Vision 2030, which aims to develop the Kingdom's tourism sector and provide the younger generation with the skills that they need for the future as it diversifies the economy away from its dependence on oil.

The vision pledges to preserve cultural sites, creating a living witness to our ancient heritage.



In the thickness of the rock, everything is possible, everything is stable and protected, as if weightless.

The vision also pledges to celebrate the country's national identity by preserving its cultural sites, making them accessible and building world-class museums to "create a living witness to our ancient heritage."

The Royal Commission for Al-Ula was created for this purpose in 2017, and the French Agency for Al-Ula Development was established last July, after Paris and Saudi Arabia signed a bilateral agreement during the Crown Prince's visit in April last year.

The commission aims, by 2035, to attract 2 million visitors to the area, creating 38,000 jobs and generating \$32 billion (\$32 billion).

The commission has already launched a scholarship program to train Saudi students in the US, the UK and France in the fields of tourism and archaeology; this year, it will add architecture and environmental planning to the mix.

The Hammayah program will

Elephant Rock, above left, towers over the sands in a landscape of rocky red monoliths in Al-Ula. The Maraya's mirrored concert hall, above center, was built for the Winter at Tantora festival, which has brought visitors to Al-Ula every weekend since December. Yanni, left, who was at the launch on Sunday.

also provide up to 2,500 opportunities for local men and women to get involved in a community effort to preserve the wonders of Al-Ula.

There are only so many architects in the world who have the power to draw visitors on the strength of the building alone, and Nouvel is one.

Just ask anyone who has stood under Louvre Abu Dhabi's 7,500-ton geometric canopy, inspired by a grove of palm trees and designed to cast dappled light onto the water and walkways below, in what he called the Rain of Light.

Nouvel's architecture is rooted in the local context, and so with the Al-Ula resort, he will take inspiration from the surrounding rocks. "In the thickness of the rock, everything is possible, everything is stable and protected, as if weightless," Nouvel explained.

"Rock is an absolutely fantastic material because of its inertia. To put yourself in rock is to protect yourself. To protect yourself from extreme temperatures, to protect yourself security-wise.

"We've chosen to live in these rocks once more. To be able to frame the Sharaan landscape at different heights is amazing, discovering the distant horizons, discovering the different qualities of light, and all this in total thermal comfort."

There is already a link between Nouvel and Al-Ula: A number of ancient treasures from the area are now on display as part of the Roads of Arabia exhibit in Louvre Abu Dhabi. But the Sharaan Resort, which is scheduled for completion in 2023, is a link that is even closer to home.