

AL DHAFRA WATER FESTIVAL RETURNS TO MIRFA BEACH WITH 11 BOAT RACES

· Over 4,000 sailors, athletes and heritage guardians will give their best for a share of AED 25 million cash awards!

· 111 sailing boats registered for the first time Delma to Mirfa, 125 km sailing race!

Al Dhafra Water Festival is about to dock on Mirfa's public beach this April 20 - 29, 2017 for the ninth year. While registration is still open for the various beach and water competitions, organisers already announced a record number of participants: over 4,000 competitors of at least 20 different nationalities. Over the nine days festival, they will all be battling the waves and the winds for a podium place and awards that surpass AED 25 millions in total!

Organised by the Cultural Programmes and Heritage Festivals Committee - Abu Dhabi, in partnership with the Abu Dhabi Sailing and Yacht Club, Al Dhafra Water Festival will include 11 boat races, kite surfing and swimming competitions, beach volleyball and football contests as well as a souk, heritage exhibitions, live shows and entertainment and a children's village.

"Al Dhafra Festival is meant to preserve and revive Emirati marine heritage. It also increases economic opportunities for Mirfa, through the traditional souk set up on the beach throughout the festival, with shops run by local residents, but especially by promoting Mirfa as a tourist destination," said Obaid Khalfan Al Mazrouei, Director of Al Dhafra Water Festival.

The festival takes place over 20,000 square meters of Mirfa's white sandy beach, right next to the four-star Mirfa hotel, which is fully booked during the festival with tourists from all over the UAE and beyond, coming here particularly for the watersport events.

"This year, the festival offers several new surprises, starting with the name. Until now, it used to be known as Al Gharbia Watersports Festival, which has been changed to Al Dhafra Water Festival, following a new decree that was recently issued by the President of the United Arab Emirates, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in his capacity as Ruler of Abu Dhabi," stressed Mr. Mazrouei.

"The decree amends the names of the Eastern and Western regions of Abu Dhabi emirate. Thus, the Eastern Region has been renamed Al Ain Region and the Western Region is now called Al Dhafra Region".

"Other events include traditional dress and cooking competitions, but also a new sailing race," he added.

The star attraction of this year's festival is the long-distance 60 feet category sailing race, organised for the first time. The 125 kilometres race will start from Delma island and will end on the shores of Mirfa beach.

"We have 111 sailing dhows and over 3,000 sailors registered in for the race. They are all making their way to Delma island now, ahead of the strong wind announced for this weekend. Based on the weather forecast, we plan to have the race on either Sunday or Monday next week," revealed Majed Ateeq Al Muhairi, Chief
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2017

Executive Officer at the Abu Dhabi Sailing and Yacht Club.

The race is expected to start at 6 am, with the first boats crossing the finishing line around 2 pm.

"As the sailors will be located on Delma island, we will also organise a heritage souk there as well. People may take the ferry from nearby Jebel Dhana to Delma island to visit us," he pointed out.

The first competition of the festival, taking place this weekend, April 21 - 22, will actually benefit from strong wind - the Kite Surfing Competition, organised with the help of Emirates Kiteboarding Committee. Hundreds have already registered for the spectacular kite surfing event, which usually displays some of the most stunning water acrobatics.

"Through all the watersport competitions and events, Al Dhafra Water Festival preserves and encourages our coastal heritage, particularly among the younger generations. Year after year the organisers attract ever more participants, and for the Kite Surfing Competition we now have over 600 participants. In the first edition there were only 60," said His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamdan bin Mohammed Al Nahyan, Chairman and Former of Emirates Kiteboarding Committee.

According to him, there will also be a Stand Up Paddling competition this year.

Al Dhafra Water Festival is free to visitors. Beach events will take place daily from 5 PM till 10 PM.