

## The Royal Galleries



Accessed by an easily defended, steep and narrow stairway, the reception area and royal guest rooms are situated in the secure reaches of the first floor. The rooms on this floor, now referred to as the Royal Galleries, are decorated in period style with Persian carpets, silk cushions and mandus adorned with intricate brass-work. The Royal Galleries are replete with the accoutrements of wealth – porcelain, precious objects and rare pieces of Bedouin silver jewellery. In mint condition, these treasures are displayed museum-style behind glass.

A large room that would appear to be the main majlis once served as a mosque, evidenced by a small prayer niche (mihrab). The prayer hall constitutes a significant architectural element of An N'aman Castle as its mihrab indicated the direction of Mecca (qibla) and therefore governed the orientation of the building and formed the central axis of the architecture. Set within a tall rectangular panel and consisting of three progressively recessed niches, the mihrab features a mantle decorated with a row of four tiny arches, supporting a geometric pattern of triangles and ribbed diamonds extending into rising columns of diamonds that diminish in size like ornaments on a crown.



The niche shelves, recesses and doorways are decorated with a pattern of scalloped and straight pre-cast stucco mouldings. Rows of ogee-headed blind windows set within a rectangular recess pierced by a slit-vent are found in all the rooms on the first floor. This decoration is richer in the prayer hall where a particularly striking feature is large recessed window in the northern wall crowned with a row of crenellations with a gun slot aimed at the main gate.

## The Expectation of a Refined Lifestyle

One of the most aesthetically appealing corners of the castle is the stairway on this floor that leads to the roof. Under a ceiling of polished teakwood, the stairs are patterned with light and shadow from window screens designed in patterns of repeating diamonds. The staircase is bordered by a low wall with arches stepped in a graduated rhythm. The recurrence of the

diamond motif in the geometric embellishment of windows and the artistry of the elegant ogival arch in framing niches and offsetting windows throughout the Castle attest to the expectation of a refined lifestyle.

## A Horse would be waiting....

An N'aman is a distinctly aristocratic castle, yet comfortable and inviting; nevertheless, in days of yore it had to be strongly fortified and equipped with clever devices to safeguard the inhabitants against enemies. The interior plan includes a machiulation or 'murder hole' above the lintel of the entrance door and dead ends to mislead the invader along with escape routes for residents. In a hidden area off the Imam's room is an alcove with a narrow opening in the floor below which is a dark chamber in the southeast tower. This disguised a safe passageway to the ground, where a horse would be waiting for a rider who could mount and speed away.



## The Rooftop and the Towers

An N'aman Castle is one of the many strongholds in Oman where the visitor is invited to access the rooftop. The open rooftop court is bordered by a parapet from which sentinels could survey the terrain in all directions. All four external walls have battlements with curved merlons. One of the walls, partially restored, shows the original rock and mud masonry under the saruj cladding making it apparent that the building is constructed with 'random stones, lime and mud mortar with a thick juss render'. (ibid p 207)

Crowning each of the two diagonally positioned towers of the castle are rounded domes, both with an unusual spool-like



structure on top. Though prevalent in religious architecture, the dome is an unusual feature for an Omani fortification and therefore has special aesthetic value in this context. Inside, the towers are fully restored including dressing the ceilings with polished kandal wood poles and date palm matting.

## Princes of the Past and Present

Stationed above the wall in the far seaward corner of the roof is a unique structure, a small room made for rest and contemplation as befits a country retreat.

This lofty perch, accessible only by ladder, and overlooking a vast realm of palm trees, is open for sea breezes to flow through. This is undoubtedly where princes of the past found peace in dangerous times.

The Castle continued to be used by Princes the Royal House and their families until recent times; and its conversion into a tourist attraction has not diminished the Castle's aura of majestic repose. The rural environment of this stately mansion remains fundamentally unaltered as the lush palm orchards still thrive in the warm sunshine and fertile soil of the vast Batinah Plain.

## Improvements

The Ministry of Tourism represented by the Department of historical sites development has done many different work to preserve this historic landmark and highlight the contents of the rare collection for various visitors. Such as implementation of the comprehensive maintenance to the building, strengthening of electrical energy and using modern lighting that are commensurate with historical sites. As has also, implemented historical exhibition which tells the history of the fort, cultural historical icons for Barka in order to highlight the heritage and traditional crafts which are

famous for their wilayat, as was recently completed the service facilities to implement of administration office, restrooms, visitor cafe and gift shop of Omani craft products. In addition, expanding car parking, improvements of internal and external premises fort.

Opening Hours  
Sunday- Thursday  
7:30 Am - 2:30 Pm

## An N'aman Castle

Beauty has an address

[www.omantourism.gov.om](http://www.omantourism.gov.om)

Visitor assist 80077799



SULTANATE OF  
oman

Ministry of Tourism



## An N'aman Castle

Three and a quarter centuries ago, the journey by camel or horse between Muscat and the Ya'ruba strongholds at Rustaq and Al Hazm was long and arduous. Stationed half-way between Rustaq and Muscat, An N'aman Castle

was built in the late 17th Century as a country retreat and also served as a rest house for the Imams of the Ya'ruba Dynasty on journeys to and from their capital at Rustaq.

## In a Golden Era

The 17th Century was a golden period in the history of Oman. It was an age of unprecedented prosperity under the command of the Imams of the Ya'ruba Dynasty (c.1624-1743), when the nation became a great naval power with a vast commercial dominion stretching from Oman all the way to the outer waters of Zanzibar; and from the Red Sea to the Indian coast of Coromandel.

By 1650, the Ya'ruba had ousted the Portuguese from Oman after almost 150 years of cruel occupation, chasing them in the Gulf and down the Eastern coast of Africa.



## A Country Retreat for the Royal Family

The construction of An N'aman Castle, is said to have taken place circa 1691-1693 in the time of Imam Bil'arub bin Sultan al Ya'rubi who reigned from his seat at Jabreen Castle. An N'aman

Castle is thought to have been built on the initiative of Imam Bil'arub's brother, Saif bin Sultan.

## Set within a sea of palm trees

Saif bin Sultan, who eventually succeeded his brother as Imam, was a man of vision who built a powerful merchant fleet and made a fortune through overseas trade. One of Imam Saif bin Sultan's projects was the greening of the country for agricultural produce; and he is said to have been responsible during his lifetime for over one-third of the trees in the land. At his command some 6,000 date palms and 3,000

coconut palms were planted to the west of An N'aman Castle in the fertile soil of the Batinah plain. Today a sea of palm trees still drifts for miles in the direction of the setting sun.

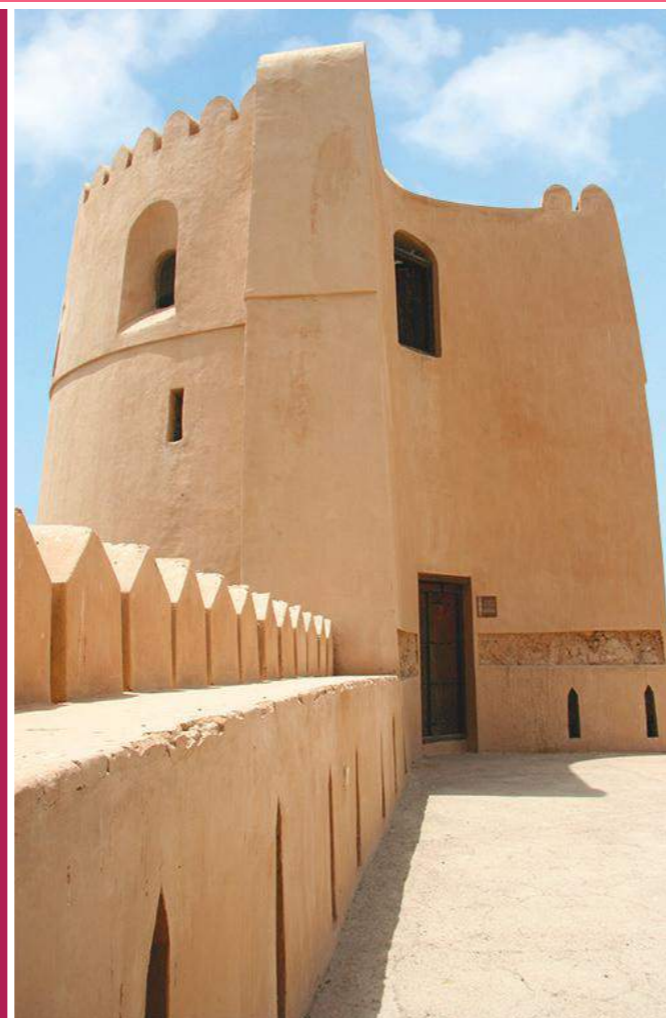
Ref - Costa, Paolo M, 'Bayt Na'man, a seventeenth century mansion of the Batinah', The Journal of Oman Studies, Vol. 8, Part 2, Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, Sultanate of Oman, 1985, p 195,

## A fully Fortified Castle

Almost a century after it was built, the castle was renovated by the illustrious founder of Oman's present ruling dynasty, Imam Ahmad bin Said (c. 1749-1783), who fortified the building by extending the walls and adding two defensive towers on a diagonal axis which gave sentinels a 360 degree total firing range.

The grand country house which was originally equipped only with loopholes and battlements thus became a fully fortified castle.

Ibid, p 207



## The Heroic Founder of the Al bu Said Dynasty and his Illustrious Grandson

History relates that Imam Ahmad bin Said stayed at An N'aman Castle while en route between his residence in the capital of Rustaq and Muscat, where he regularly performed administrative duties such as collecting taxes and inspecting the forts. During his short periods at An N'aman Castle, Imam Ahmad bin Said gave audience to people who came from coastal settlements stretching from Musanah to Seeb.

Imam Ahmad, a courageous, wise, and well-loved leader, the hero who united the country and ousted the Persians, traveled at the head of what must have been an impressive procession, as it included more than two thousand retainers, along with scholars, notables and judges. The retinue was heralded by four men on horseback bearing two gold and two silver banners.

Imam Ahmad's sons, Saif and Sultan, lived at the Castle for some time; and Imam Ahmad's

grandson, Sayyid Said bin Sultan, the man who would become one of the greatest Omani rulers of all time, changed the course of history by defeating his cousin and challenger, Badr bin Saif, in a famous duel with daggers said to have taken place at An N'aman Castle. (Ibid, p 196-197)

Sayyid Said bin Sultan (1804 -1856), known as Sayyid Said the Great was an exceptionally wise and commercially astute leader, the architect of a vast Omani trading empire that encompassed the Indian Ocean Rim from the Gulf and Red Sea to the western coast of India and the eastern coast of Africa. Sayyid Said resided mainly in Zanzibar, but ruled from a central power base in Muscat as well. component of its cosmopolitan character.

## Entering the Castle

Amid green fields on a winding road leading to the seashore, this small, regal castle has a striking appearance. Though designed on a square footprint, the three-storey structure has a slender appearance because of its height. It is protected by a crenellated wall with a single point of entry through a heavy wooden door.

The Castle is entered through a carved wooden door under an ogival arch set within an open rectangle of decorative plasterwork. A wide hall leads into five rooms, some with barrel-vaulting. The ground floor rooms are lit from windows

positioned high in the walls that spill shadowed light and cool breezes. The windows are deeply recessed and seem



darkened atmosphere of centuries past, the visitor is aware of the cooing of pigeons or doves, though usually no birds are seen.

The falaj that once coursed through the ground floor from south to north along the western wall through the ablution basins and the bathing areas has been restored. The water channel is, however, kept dry to preserve the mud-based saruj construction (traditional Omani mortar and plaster). Simple, yet sophisticated, the original domestic water system could also be accessed from one of the royal rooms on the first floor.

The ground floor housed the facilities and services required for the daily needs of residents. In the food preparation and domestic working areas there are structures for storing dates and channeling the syrup into jars recessed in the floor. It was in this area that dates, the country's most important food staple, were stacked and syrup was collected. Fittingly, the Castle features a display of illustrated panels on the cultivation and uses of the date palm tree.

On the way to the stairs leading to the first floor, the visitor comes across one of the Castle's many treasures – a large storage chest (mandus) perhaps a hundred years old. Not oiled or polished, the old wooden chest sits in shadows, almost camouflaged. It might once have contained fine clothes, perhaps weapons, blankets, carpets and coins.

