

# مَرْحَبًا أَلْفَ مَرَّةً

Aseer the Region of a 1000 Welcomes



WORLD REGION OF GASTRONOMY  
ASEER CANDIDATE 2024

Friends, family, and travelers along the way, are all honored with the same greeting in Aseer: Marhaban Alf مَرْحَبًا أَلْف (a thousand welcomes).

From the peaks of its mountains, to the blades of its valley grass, Aseer tells its ancient tales over whispers of coffee aroma, delighted tongues tickled by Sidr سِيدْر honey, and welcomes you to share your own history while seated by the steeply terraced mountainsides overlooking wheat, barley coffee, vegetables, fruits, and palm trees, perched on handmade stools flecked with geometric designs in brightly colored hues.

Aseer: The Region of a 1000 Welcomes

Our welcome is not a slogan emblazoned on a mile marker; it's a testament to our people, our history, and our connection to the land. We greet each other with peace in our hearts, and welcome all to our tables.

"1000 welcomes" encompasses the concept of the year of our award.

1000 welcomes to new ideas

1000 welcomes to new opportunities

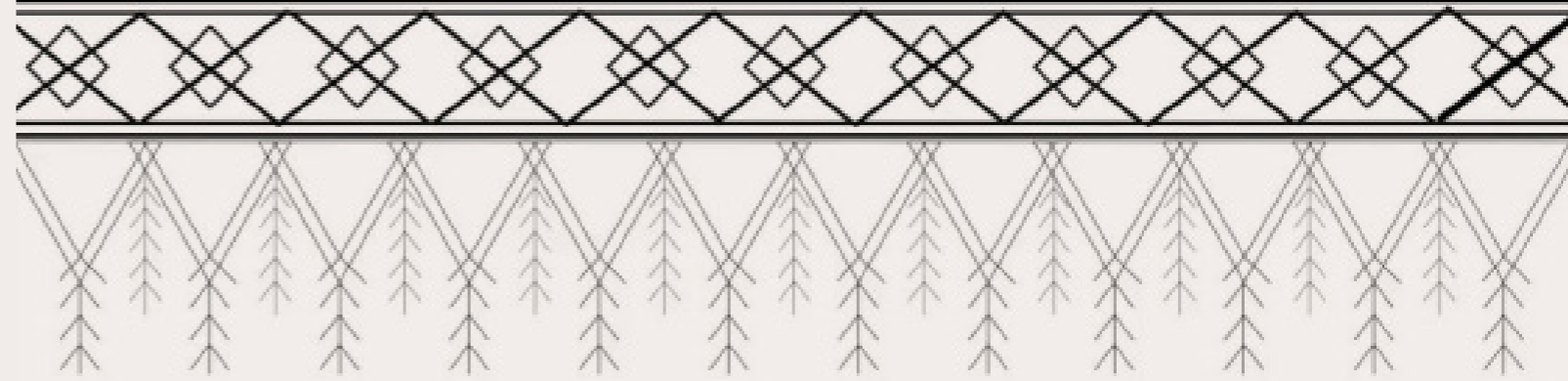
1000 welcomes to old and new visitors



# Table of Content

Foreword	06	Collaboration with the Platform	70
Introduction	08	Governance Structure	72
The Gastronomy of Aseer	12	Communication and Marketing	73
Tourism in Aseer	46	Sustainability and Legacy	74
Our Festivals	52	Economic Provision	76
Our Theme	58	Partners and Stakeholders	78
Our Objectives	60		
Our Focus Areas and Initiatives	62		





## Foreword

We are delighted to take part in this ambitious plan to drive Aseer's long-term economic, environmental, and social progress over the upcoming years. The gastronomy strategy put forth fully integrates with the mission and framework of the Kingdom's Vision 2030. "The Region of a 1000 Welcomes" is an invitation for the local, regional, and global communities to be a part of inspirational, empowering, and sustainable movement.

An essential and fundamental contribution that Aseer's thriving culture shares is its cuisine. For generations, it has provided a rich, historical, and authentic culinary experience to those lucky enough to live in or visit the region. In Aseer, the natural landscape has defined the region's identity. Because of this, paired with the strong roots and strength of its people, the region's traditional flavors and rich resources have been preserved. Each family has passed down unique recipes and preparation methods, using both ingredients and processes that are native to their community. This initiative will provide a platform to ensure Aseer's growth perpetuates these abundant cultural traditions.

Participating on an international level as a World Region of Gastronomy will increase the understanding of the unique connection Aseer and Saudi Arabia have to the world.

The gastronomic strategy has the potential to enhance the experience of the local community's daily life over the coming years. The development of Aseer's citizens' creativity will be strengthened by investing in and supporting gastronomic and cultural activities. This will be accomplished by creating an ecosystem that facilitates progress through collaboration between culture, industry, artists, and local governments. All the stakeholders involved in Aseer's development will be committed, enthusiastic, and innovative, thus enabling the region to realize the full potential of its people and establish its position as an international gastronomic destination while growing environmental sustainability.



# Introduction

We have more than 34 million stories that span across the largest part of the Arabian Peninsula. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is comprised of 13 distinct provinces that embody rich diverse textures and hues of dialects, traditions, cultures, music, and art that collectively contribute to the vibrant and rich identity of the country. We continue to explore the 13 regions of our nation, and view them as a rich multi-sensory tapestry, each with threads that are as strong and bold as they are diverse. We delight in the existence of all of the Kingdom's regions: Riyadh, Mecca, Medina, Tabuk, Al Jawf, Northern Borders, Eastern Province, Qassim, Hail, Aseer, Najran, Jizan, and Al Baha.

Aseer, the protagonist in our tale, occupies an area of 76,693 square kilometers in the highland region south of the Hejaz; its capital, Abha **أَبْهَا**, lies at an elevation of about 8,000 feet (2,400 meters). Subregions in Aseer are formed by the oasis cluster of Najran **نَجْرَان**—a highland area north of Yemen—and by the coastal plain, the Tihamah **تِهَامَة**.



Although geographically named only 150 years ago, Aseer's namesake is the ancient Aseer tribe, the largest in the region. The heritage, dialect, traditions, and cuisine of Aseer are shaped by its lineage, and honored by an estimated population of 2,211,875 (2017).

Topography of any nation will contribute to the taste and texture of a land. Aseer's Sarawat سروات mountains are a metaphor for its history of authenticity. Local flavors are woven out of a traditionally intangible heritage of folklore and ancient melodies. Dating back to over five centuries, Aseer's distinct architecture is vividly displayed in its 4,275 villages. With prominent rock art of the pre-Islamic era, our 651 historical sites have been inscribed in the National Inventory of Archeology, Most notably is Jerash, a cultural epicenter for travelers in ancient time, and as a pilgrims' route in its more contemporary storyline.



Much of our rich legacy is recognized by our distinctive colorful geometric motifs, but few admirers actually know as Al-Qatt Al-Aseeri القَطُّ العيسيري, found throughout Saudi Arabia in traditionally decorated homes and historical buildings is actually based on the culture and colors of Aseer's natural terrain and vegetation. The Al-Qatt Al-Aseeri القَطُّ العيسيري art has become one of the most significant international arts registered on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in UNESCO since late 2017.



Coffee farming has been practiced in Aseer for decades, and the cultivation has not changed over time. Elders in the region ensure the maintenance of their traditional practices, and their continuity. Thanks to regional and governmental support, an agricultural and horticultural renaissance has been greeted with great enthusiasm. The region's coffee production is prolific: Each coffee tree grows triumphantly and voraciously, producing between 8 to 10 kilograms of coffee beans. Over 20,000 coffee trees produce more than 250 tons of green coffee and over 80 tons of pure dry coffee. Aseer's coffee crop highlights a fundamental fact about this region: Aseer is one of the most vital natural environments in the Kingdom.



Nothing speaks more vividly about our land and our people than sharing the tales of our food and relevant culinary practices. Throughout the region of Aseer, our history and customs may differ slightly from family to family, but our gastronomic traditions, and the importance we place on them, remain steadfast. Various flavors and spices awaken our senses as we greet the new day at breakfast, usually enjoyed well before sunrise. Throughout the day, small bites and beverages are served, before welcoming a core meal, like haneeth حنيد، a divine companion of the afternoon prayers. Bread, tea, qishra coffee قَهْوَة القِشْر،

brewed from the dried and aged coffee cherries, as well as light meals such as Al aseeda القَصِيْدَة, follow the afternoon prayers and are offered as snacks and palate cleansers. As night whispers, the final meal is prepared and enjoyed.

Amidst global commitments to technology, business, and modernity, the traditions of gastronomy have not been compromised in Saudi Arabia, and no region more dynamically adheres to the traditional values and commitment to authenticity and sustainability than Aseer. From valley roots to mountain peaks, Aseer's diverse cuisine's tales are told, embraced, and of course, enjoyed.

Agriculture plays an important economic role for the local communities; the sale of products in the markets and supports self-sufficiency. The region boasts a plethora of culinary products. Honey, for example, is used in abundance. Wheat, barley coffee, vegetables, fruits, and palms contribute to the wealth of crops grown on the steeply terraced mountainsides. Aside from agriculture, our region's economy is based on the raising of cattle, sheep, goats, camels and fishing industries. Our land is as important to our inhabitants and merchants, as it is to the pilgrims who travel through.

Our farm-to-table philosophy is not a modern retelling of gastronomy; it is a bespoke celebration of our history, a command of our roads well-worn with traveled spices and coffee beans, and hues painted across pottery and, adorned on our walls. Our stories, like our practices, continue to be told.



## The Gastronomy of Aseer

Language can disrupt. Music can distract. But food – food connects. Food unites. Food reflects and inspires. You can travel east to west in a small wooden cup. You can rise and fall with just a hint of chili pepper. Just one bite can transform your present into your past. Flavors, sweet, sour and savory, can help you recall delicious moments. These connections are found through the culinary offerings of this region, one whose diverse landscape is best illustrated by its gastronomy.

In the culture of Aseer, meals are usually prepared in large quantities as they are always shared with extended family and friends. This practice also illustrates an essential aspect of Aseer's gastronomy: social interaction.

Meals traditionally begin with the phrase Bismillah بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ (in the name of God) and end with Alhamdulillah الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ (praise be to God). Local ingredients are used to add warmth, along with love, to the culinary experience. After all, gastronomy connects people to their heritage, families, and communities.





## Agricultural Products

With gorgeous deserts, lush plains, rocky mountains, green hills and forests, Aseer's geography is as varied as its cuisine is rich. Far from the cliché that the Kingdom is all desert, the region receives up to 500 mm of rain each year, which allows for a fertile and responsive land. Aseer's diverse terrain is also celebrated in its agriculture. The region is recognized for its honey, coffee, dates, wheat and barley, in addition to, various fruits including apples, bananas, pomegranates, grapes, figs, and strawberries. Traditionally, agriculture was the main economic activity of the locals. Specializing in seasonal fruits, vegetables, and coffee production, agriculture now counts as a key social value in the region. Because the importance of organic farming is improving the quality of production, a number of farmers have begun to switch and go as far as obtaining relevant certification. Government support and the promotion of agriculture in Aseer has increased, especially as far as coffee cultivation. The farmers' dedication, the diverse vegetation, our natural pastures, and livestock, have all collaborated to support sustainable food cultivation in the region. Here below we highlight the stars of our agriculture.





## Honey

The climate of Aseer enables the region's agricultural prosperity resulting in enormous organic honey production throughout the year. According to the Ministry of Environment, Water & Agriculture the number of beekeepers recorded was about 5,660 with 778,164 kg of honey produced.

Honeybees in Aseer produce multiple kinds of honey: a rich and distinctively dark brown honey from bees that feed on thorny plants and trees, a pure and rich type of honey known for its unique taste and medicinal qualities extracted from the nectar of the Al-Sid **السدر** or lote tree, and a honey is produced via bees feeding on multiple kinds of flowers called Al-mujra **المجرى**. A specific type of Mujra honey, which has both an exquisite flavor and creamy white color, produced as bees feed on the plant Alwysaya **الوشاية**, is the most expensive honey in the region.

Spun around a spoon is everyone's favorite way to eat honey, but Aseeris usually enjoy honey with tea, spread on bread with ghee, or as a daily medicinal ritual to strengthen immunity and connect with the land. The recognition of the importance of the

practice of beekeeping, as well as maintaining its sustainability, is part of the work of various local entities in the Aseer region. The local branch of King Khalid University has not only set up a special unit for research on bees and honey production, but has also launched a number of programs to grow the local beekeeping industry. The Beekeepers Association of Aseer is committed to the prosperity of the beekeeping and honey business. The association is an active participant in festivals inside and outside Saudi Arabia, and offers training courses in the essential practices of beekeeping. The association also boasts a group of women who are skilled in manufacturing honey products and derivatives.



## Grapes

Although a handful of grapes can gently rest in the palm of your hand, the soft and sweet flavorful grape holds a powerful legacy all over the world, and throughout history. Aseer's Sarawat mountains annually produce over 2,800 tons of grapes. Since ancient times, the grape has been exported from the region as a cash-crop and economic mainstay. Because of its rich fertile soil, Aseer is now home to many non-indigenous grape varieties. Throughout the mountainous region, grapes from Jordan as well as France and Italy now thrive.

Because much of the Aseer region's crops depend on the rainy season, production can be limited in some seasons. With sustainability and innovation in mind, the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture launched the first phase of the "Rehabilitation of Agricultural Terraces and Rainwater Harvesting Techniques" initiative.

This ground-breaking effort promotes the use of modern irrigation techniques, including drip irrigation. These practices allow farmers to cultivate large areas of fertile land. Additionally, this entire initiative, throughout the southwest regions of the Kingdom has assisted in the rehabilitation of agricultural terraces and promoted the shift from traditional agriculture to organic farming in Aseer.

With national support, and the harmony of ancient and modern methods, the grand seasonal celebration in Mawen, entitled "Festival of Grapes and Seasonal Fruits" welcomes thousands of visitors annually.



## Pomegranates

Brimming with edible rubies, the pomegranate holds its own magical history, and the Al-Baha region celebrates its majesty every year. With over 1000 farms devoted to its cultivation, the pomegranate is one of the most prominent and widespread fruits in the region. The Al-Baha Pomegranate Cooperative Society proudly boasts the sweet nectar in other regional centers including Harir, Bani Adwan, Ma'shouka, Bani Kabir, and Berrahh, where more than 200,000 pomegranate trees produce over 30,000 tons of pomegranate annually.

thanks to the fruitful harvest, the Al-Baha Pomegranate Cooperative Society was established. The association's mission successfully turned their regional festival into a national event, and a Kingdom-wide commitment to the cultivation of superior quality fruit.



## Prickly Pear البرشومي, AlBarshome

Purple, plump, and juicy rounds stand proud and ready as they line the streets displayed for visitors and locals alike. Al-Barshome; the prickly pear, a summer delicacy, is more than just a fruit for people of Aseer, it is an agricultural dance whose harvest is part ancient ritual and part handicraft.

Lining the roads, each vendor's display is more fantastic than the next, but it is the fruit mongers that truly take center stage. Annually, youths gather near park gates throughout the Aseer region to exhibit their offerings plucked from the local cactuses, and valleys.

Protected deep within thickets of thorns, prickly pear is still harvested by traditional means. Two long thin wooden sticks are fashioned together to create a v-shaped unit. This unique, albeit simple design, allows for quick and safe collection. Once plucked from the bushes, the fruits are placed in water for approximately 15 minutes, which allows the thorns to soften and release their clutches from the beloved prickly pear.

The final gesture in prickly pear collection is the most prized, as the young farmers pridefully cut the fruit in half and present the fruit for guests to enjoy their beauty, and to taste their juicy core.

The sweet flesh is described as the perfect blend of flavors, reminiscent of watermelon and raspberry, with a delicate scent similar to cucumber.

This regional prickly pear grow on plate-edges of the Nopales cacti, and boast more than 200 different species, many of which are inedible. Cylindrical and pear-shaped, the pre-harvest fruit contains thorns along the outer crust. Like many other fruits, the peel and pulp of this fruit evolves from shades of green at the beginning of the season, into juicy warm yellow and red gradations at the height of ripeness.

Well beyond their harvest pageantry and sweet delicate flavor, the prickly pear has other benefits: it improves digestive and cardiovascular health, strengthens immunity and regulates blood sugar levels.





## Corn

Another major grain crop of the Aseeri region, due to its adaptability to all climates, is corn. Corn has versatility; it can be used as feed for farmers' animals, or, alternately, a fundamental ingredient for people in local dishes. There are two main types of Aseeri corn grown: white and yellow. Both are used to make flour. However, many people in Aseer prefer white corn over yellow, because they believe it is more nutritional.

The corn is eaten fresh, or dried and ground and made into bread. Corn bread also called Musaila **المسبَّله** is cooked as a sweet dish and eaten for breakfast or combined with vegetables and onions and served as a side dish for dipping into Marag **مَرَق** beef stew.



## Coffee

Grown, cultivated, picked, roasted, crushed, preserved and served, Saudi coffee from the region is a feast of flavors, offering a rich and unexpected ride into the past and present. Some cultures rely on the coffee bean alone, but in Aseer, the coffee bean husks are also part of the process. Here they are invited into a mixture of barley and ginger, and enhanced with the unexpected nuttiness of Ajwain seeds بُدُورُ أَجْوَيْنَ. Recognizing the full-bodied base notes this mixture provides, the coffee is paired with a delightfully sweet date variety called, Al Sefri الصَّفْرِي. There is a concept of bitter-sweet tastes in the region which are enhanced through the local variety of Saudi Coffee. The harmony of sip to bite, between coffee and date, is a dance almost as refreshingly mesmerizing as the flavor pairings themselves; when combined with the bitterness of the coffee, this date/coffee combination creates a beautiful balance of flavors.

Coffee is grown in the highland of the Aseer region, particularly in the Hada Mountains in the middle of Tihama Balsamer Arabica. In Saudi Arabia, Hada Mountain is revered as one of the most fertile locations. Those that make this part of the region their home, have spent generations and lifetimes making coffee their legacy.

There are two main varieties of prepared Aseeri coffee that are most notable

### Gisher coffee shells, قَهْوَة القِشِر

which literally means peels, is a beverage made with the coffee shells. This drink is exceptionally popular among Aseeris, as it's believed to have healing properties. To prepare Gisher, a handful of coffee peels should be roasted with dates and cinnamon. Just before it is cooked, other herbs and spices are often added to the mixture.

### Nanakha Coffee, قَهْوَة النانخة

a nourishing herbal coffee made from the seeds of the same name. Nanakha are tiny brown, aromatic seeds that give a pungent and strong flavor. Depending on family tradition or preference, other herbs can be added such as ginger, cinnamon, and cloves.



## Fish

Though agriculture, especially fruits, vegetables, and coffee production are much of the main economic mainstays for Aseer, fishing also contributes to the economy. Fishing is additionally a generational pastime, and Aseeri children as young as 10 are taught to fish. In the coastal cities of Al Birk البيرك and Qahma القحمة, fish is eaten daily. A plethora of markets and fishing centers can be found along the 140 kilometers of Red Sea coastline. The coral trout Najel ناجل and grouper hamour هامور are the most widely enjoyed in the coastal cities, and replace meat in staple dishes like Haneeth حنيذ. Fish are typically fried and cooked in a mud oven and served with bread. The Aseeri people along the coast, despite the local differences, enjoy many of the same dishes and delicacies as their in-land compatriots, but replace all land animals with local fish as the main ingredient.



## Wheat and barley

Because of the fertile land, grain harvesting is a profitable commodity. A variety of grains are grown in Aseer with wheat and barley being the most sought after. Grains have had multiple purposes beyond the dishes they contribute to; this includes their use in trading and bartering. The beauty of growing grains in the south is that farmers can rely mostly on rainwater to irrigate the crops throughout the year. This, counting on rainwater, is not possible in other regions of the Kingdom.



## Dates

One known staple for centuries is the legacy of dates in Saudi Arabia. Aseer's most notable dates can be found in the city of Bisha بيشة. Honoring the city and the fruit, the Bisha Date Festival pays homage to the velvety-sweet soft bisha صيفري بيشة date.



# Livestock

As the primary protein in most Aseeri delicacies, families take great pride in raising their own livestock. Goats, sheep, and camels are used in both everyday life and served during special occasions to honor guests in social events such as Eid عيد celebrations and weddings.



## Alsamn السَّمْن Ghee

Ghee is an essential item in the region's cuisine and consumed as part of a balanced diet. It is a form of highly clarified butter made throughout Aseer. Extracted from the milk of goats, the process is different and sacred for each family and section of the region.

Traditional ghee is heated for longer than other types of clarified butter; this contributes to a stronger and nuttier flavor, as well as a darker hue. Ghee has a higher burning point than butter, which makes it ideal for frying or sautéing foods. Some families choose to continue to conduct the process over an open fire. Today, more modern chefs make use of their stovetop to achieve the same goal.







Traditional Culinary Dishes



## حُبْز المِيفَا Al Mefa Bread

"Never," says Oum Sara at the suggestion of buying bread from a store, and most local Aseeris will agree. Bread is sacred and made at home. Each household embraces and values their sacred connection to one recipe or another ; many have been passed on through generations.

Heralded throughout Saudi Arabia, the Mifa or Tanour bread made by local Aseeri women is made from multiple grains found in the region, and can be eaten at every meal. Its unique sour taste is created through the cultivation of a natural leavening agent extracted from former loaves left in cool, dry places. The dough is portioned and shaped into long oval loaves and

baked in a thick clay-lined barrel kiln. To heat the clay, branches are burned in the center. When the fire dissipates, the dough is placed against the walls to bake for 10-15 minutes. Once baked, loaves are removed from the kiln and served with local honey and special ghee called Hethal or Radhefah جِثَال أو الرَضِيفَة. The unique ingredient in this particular ghee is the quickly toasted wheat flour, heated with charcoal, and mixed in while the ghee is melted. Mefa is also enjoyed during the ritual breaking of the fast, called Iftar, during the holy month of Ramadan. As in so many recipes, a slight change in the preparation creates a whole new experience. Mefa bread becomes Alkhobz Alhilo when ghee replaces yeast in the recipe.





# Haneeth حَنِيدٌ

"When we have guests over," local restaurateur Ali Ramzy comments, "my grandfather cooks them a meal with his own hands from scratch." we only serve homemade food." Haneeth is one of the dishes that Aseeris most enjoy preparing for guests. Local freshly cut meat, usually sheep or goat take center stage for a feast that is just as grand to prepare as it is to taste. The meat is first prepared using traditional methods to ensure it will be crispy and fully cooked. Each detail is essential.

Ancient methods of preparing food are well maintained and still celebrated in the region, by visitors and locals alike. Once a spot has been selected, the ground that will serve as the heating vessel is prepared. A hole is dug deep enough in the earth to retain heat. Kindling is prepared and put into the ground. Once the kindling becomes fierce, leaves from Marakh مرخ, Galaf غلاف, Salaa سلع are placed on top of the embers to serve as insulation. The leaves keep the meat from direct contact with the heat, and provide even cooking. Just as the ground reaches optimum temperature, the fresh meat is cut into large pieces and placed into the hole on top of the warmed leaves. The steps for cooking the entire sheep/goat in the prepared hole is as follows: a layer of leaves, then a layer of meat, and so on, until the final layer reaches ground level. The meat tastes smoky, and the tender texture creates the most delicious dish.



## Mabthooth المَبْثُوثُ

Another very important regional dish is Mabthooth. Kholood recalls fondly all her memories of Mabthooth, which she learned how to prepare from her mother. It is a simple dish with few ingredients, but, as in the case of many of our traditional dishes, the process of creating and sharing it offers the truest reward for this, one of our Aseeri comfort foods.

Mabthooth's creation begins when whole wheat flour is formed into clumps by gradually adding water droplets. Once the dough forms, buttermilk is brought to a boil with a teaspoon of salt. When the liquid reaches a rolling boil, the dough is added in small lumps while constantly stirring. Once the mixture reaches a porridge-like consistency, it is removed from the heat, topped with ghee, and served immediately.

As in the case of many people in our region, Kholood enjoys making and sharing Mabthooth – whether with family during breakfast or a light snack before Maghrib (evening) prayers. Because of its comforting taste and consistency, she often brings it to sick friends or new mothers.





## Alaseeda العَصِيدَة

A main staple found in nearly every Aseeri household, this dish is made from wheat, corn, or barley flour dissolved through constant stirring using a wooden spoon, into water over a heat source. Alaseeda is paired with maraqa مَرَقَة to enjoy as a savory dish or as a dessert when topped with honey and ghee. The richness is in its simplicity. It has played an important role because the components are easy to make and it is a great provider of energy, this dish has played an important role.



## Sawega السَوِيْقَة

Highly detailed and sensitive, Sawega's most complicated process is based on the condition of its star ingredient: unripe barley grains. For this dish, the barley must be harvested right before it begins the ripening stage for optimum taste and consistency. The barley is air dried for 90 minutes, ground and then kneaded into a dough and baked. The Sawega is served with honey and ghee or dates. It is a favorite companion to Arabic coffee in the afternoon while spending time with family.



## Mashghutha المَشْغُوثَة

Mashghutha is a thick milky porridge that is traditionally served in a vessel made from tree trunks painted on the outside with tar or bitumen to preserve the heat and flavor of the food. It is made by stirring with a sturdy Y-shaped wooden stick called a miswat المِضْوَات . It is also on the menu for special occasions such as weddings or when receiving guests. It is still a tradition to serve mashghutha either topped with honey-combs, honey, or spread with local ghee to guests after mid-afternoon prayer on a wedding day, as the lighter meal before the main evening one. It is a typical iftar (breaking of the fast during the holy month of Ramadan) meal in the Aseer region. In some homes, it is also served for the last meal before dawn prayer and fasting begins.

## Areeka العَرِيكَة

Often recognized as a signature dessert of Aseer, Areeka's main ingredient is greatly influenced by the region's staple grain: whole wheat. To make the dish, whole wheat baked bread is broken up and mixed by hand with ghee, honey, and dates until softened. The name Areeka comes from the verb ark meaning grind, which refers to the ground-up dates and bread mixture, that are strategically rubbed together to make this dish that is as easy to prepare as it is comforting. dish that is just as comforting. It is available throughout the day but is preferred as a breakfast dish served with honey on top.



## Plants and Herbs

In Aseer, wild herbs and plants are enjoyed for both therapeutic and culinary properties. The horticultural heritage is a sacred tradition passed down through generations. Because of their commitment to land and nature, the cultivation of medicinal plants and preservation of the craft is one of the greatest contributions to the sustainability of the region's ecosystem and serves as a key component in investment and economic opportunities available.

## Aromatic plants

Durm **ضُرْم** (lavender) and Alrayhaan **الرَّيْحَان** (basil) can be found in the great plains and on the mountains of Aseer. Their long rich history as a lead economic crop, have allowed tribes to maintain vivid trade and market success throughout history. These aromatic plants are used for healing, cleansing, and cooking. Wild lavender is largely popular as a main ingredient in perfume and beauty products. Oils extracted from regional aromatic plants are cultivated to produce natural pesticides, medicines, and homeopathically as a cooling agent for farmers and travelers in the deep Saudi sun.



## Medicinal plants

The vast knowledge of homeopathic remedies and practices of the Aseeri people is ancient and well preserved. Passed down through generations, each tribe holds sacred connections to the healing practices of their plants, for both human and animal care. Juniper trees, naturally found in the region, are abundant. Large Arar **عَرَعَر** (Juniper) forests can be found in the area. The leaves are used to make tea, which is a natural remedy used for relieving respiratory and asthmatic symptoms. The native plants are recognized traditionally for having both decorative and medicinal traits. The tribesmen of the Rijal Almaa **رِجَالُ الْمَع** adorn flower crowns, made of Alyasmeen **الْيَاسْمِين** (jasmine) and Alqateefa **القَطِيفَة** or more locally called Dardaboush **دَرْدَبُوش** (marigold), for aesthetic purposes during special occasions. They're also used to ward off headache or sinus problems. Moringa is native to Aseer and an important medicinal plant and food staple. Its leaves, green pods, flowers, and roasted seeds are used as vegetables and in cooking. Additionally, its roots are used as a spice, and its seeds are preserved to extract moisturizing cosmetic oils.





## Tourism in Aseer

## Traditional Souqs سُوق Markets

In Aseer, markets are not merely a holding mart for goods; they are grand events, honored by long standing traditions of centuries of nomadic peoples who have crossed the dusty roads, the mountain peaks, and the moist valleys that make up the area. The popular markets in the Aseer region are the most important sites visited by visitors and vacationers in the region.

The dense population and the nature of the terrain in the region made it possible for tribes to establish their own markets, as every tribe wanted to open one of their own. Following the steps of the tribes and people of the Aseer, each market was dedicated to a different day of the week. As a result, some markets became so popular that they were named after the town as well, such as Khamees Masheet **دَمِيْسْ مَشِيْط**. Each market

holds a different sacred purpose – from medicinal plants to handicrafts and holds a dear connection for the community as centers of socialization. Although some of the markets today operate on multiple days, the original namesake tradition is maintained: Mahayel **مَحَايِلْ** Aseer souq, the Tuesday market, the Saturday Hubail **الْحَبِيْل** souq, the Rufaida **رُقَيْدَة** Sunday souq, the Monday market in Ibn Hamoud **بْن حَمُوْض**, the Saturday Alaya **الْعَلَايَا** souq, and one of the liveliest is the Khamees Masheet **دَمِيْسْ مَشِيْط** souq which occurs on Thursday (an important marker before the community traditions honored on Fridays).





## Diverse Climates and Vast Terrain

Proximity and diversity are key factors in preserving cultural heritage and tradition. Until the 1980s, Aseer maintained a pious and private harmony across its rich and vast terrain. A varied landscape is an organic prerequisite for the development of tourism. The picturesque landscapes, the wildlife in the region's highlands, and the urban nature of Abha all make Aseer one of the most important tourist destinations in the country. In addition, the winter temperatures in the coastal plain and on the shores of the Red Sea provide warmth to those escaping the cold of the desert. The various textiles, embroideries, handicrafts and clothing are demonstrative of all the treasures the region has to offer



## Tourism and Local Exploration

Tradition finds harmony alongside modernity in Aseer. Promoting recreational activities and domestic tourism in the area, the first national park in Saudi Arabia was established. With mountainous peaks that reach 2,000 to 3,000 meters above sea level, Aseer National Park provides camping facilities, hiking trails, and the ability to explore 1000 sqm of natural preserve. The weather and geography of Aseer offer ideal conditions for a wide range of athletic activities, including marine sports, mountain climbing, and desert exploration. Climbing races in the Tanumah تَنُومَة Mountains and paragliding in Al-Soudah السُّودَة are important and renewable options for adventurers and outdoor activities. Twelve trekking trails that have been proposed in Aseer. In addition, the region offers a number of sports activities, and will continue to explore this arena, especially in the realm of mountain biking and dune climbing. Sandboarding, canoe and rafting competitions, surfing and kayaking, camel safaris in the Bisha desert tract, and seashore football on the coast of Aseer are just a few of the activities available.

In addition, there are important archaeological and historical sites, as well as interesting traditional architecture styles found in several villages and urban areas. For example, the Shada Palace dating back to 1820s is a mud walled fortress that visitors can visit and get a glimpse of the area's history. There is also the Rijal Alma'a Museum and Village. In the past, this was the main trading capital in the Peninsula, receiving traders from India, Yemen, and others from Africa, via Qahma, Albark, and Aljizan. The village is located west of Abha, going down to Tihama Aseer.



## Our Festivals

### Aseer Summer Festival - Khayrat Aseer خَيْرَات عَسِير

Paying homage to our region's seasonal delicacies, Khayrat Aseer خَيْرَات عَسِير is a special highlight of the Aseer Summer Festival. Local agricultural products indigenous to Aseer take center stage alongside Aseer's livestock, and vivid art of beekeeping. Tourists visit to explore the more than 100 diverse offerings including grapes, pomegranates, figs, mangoes, bananas, strawberries, vegetables, dates, honey, ghee, coffee, roses, aromatic plants, and hundreds of varieties of grain. The focus of the festival is to provide economic growth for the community of farmers and cultivators, as well as offer a vast array of investment opportunities looking to expand their portfolios with rich heritage centers in the Kingdom.



### Abha Honey Festival

The South of Saudi Arabia is home to the Abha Honey Festival, nestled in the small but vibrant city of Abha in the Aseer region. As if carrying the stories on their tiny wings, the bee farms are center stage promoting the delicate community of bees that have been previously raised by generations of bee farmers that make Abha their home. The fertile land and optimal weather conditions are the perfect backdrop for the gathering of regional beekeepers who sell their wares and display their family legacies. Fans and experts alike delight in being at the source for Majarra, Acacia, and Sidr honey, native to the region.

## Festivals بَلْحَمْرُ Ballahmar

### Wheat Festival بَلْحَمْرُ Ballahmar

Aseer's Sarawat سَرَوَات mountains welcomes visitors annually for the Wheat Festival in Ballahmar بَلْحَمْرُ. Although wheat is one of the most significant agricultural products that brings visitors to the area, the Mountains span hundreds of thousands of hectares that showcase diverse fields of coffee, fruits, vegetables, wild ghee, and rare aromatic trees. During the off-season the area welcomes visitors to plant orchards and museums that display historic cultivation and agricultural equipment. As the Kingdom expands its tourist opportunities, local Ballahmar بَلْحَمْرُ wheat will soon become a delicacy enjoyed by international guests from near and far.



### Ballahmar بَلْحَمْرُ Ghee Festival

Another featured festival in Ballahmar بَلْحَمْرُ is the celebration and showcasing of over 200 cattle breeders and ghee producers in the region at the Ballahmar بَلْحَمْرُ Ghee Festival. Heralding a commitment to growing economic, social, and environmental sustainability through innovation, creativity, and job creation, the Ghee Festival has set a tone for new marketing practices for traditional livelihoods in Aseer.

The festival pays homage to the Kingdom's equestrian traditions with an equestrian race, thoroughbred horse shows, and expansive livestock camel and sheep pavilions showcasing the latest trends, techniques, and technologies. With niche interests at its core, the Festival also provides educational programs for cattle breeders, as well as ghee manufacturers and producers.



## Ballahmar بَلْحَمْرُ Fruit and Grape Festival

One of the most beloved festivals in Ballahmar بَلْحَمْرُ each year pays tribute to fruits and grapes. With nearly 100 sections, the annual event provides economic opportunities for the youth of Aseer as it showcases over 560 varieties of grapes, peaches, pomegranates, figs, pears and apples. With a special commendation by the Director General the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture over 100 farmers participating in the festival were honored at the last event.



## Ruman رُمانْ Pomegranate Festival in Sarat Abidah سَرَاة عَيْدَة

With its contemporary focus of promoting health and wellness through traditional means, the annual Pomegranate Festival in Sarat Abidah سَرَاة عَيْدَة has quickly become a highlight of the region's festival season.

In addition to showcasing the beloved fruit, the festival is committed to encouraging the economic stability and innovation of local farmers and fruit producers throughout the Kingdom. Because of the pomegranate's rich and passionate history as being a creative muse, the festival is also home to showcasing the cultural arts of the region with a series of events dedicated to poetry, theater, and folklore. Presented at various notable pavilions and historical landmarks, the Festival also holds workshops on agricultural practices and the integration investment opportunities in line with the National Vision 2030, in partnership with the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture.



## Our Theme

Saudi Vision 2030 is an ongoing developmental strategy in Saudi Arabia, thanks to His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Kingdom's Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, breaking new ground and expressing long-term goals built upon the country's aspirations, strengths, and capabilities. The new framework highlights the importance of culture by reinvigorating social development and encouraging a vibrant society. The vision of the gastronomy industry in the region of Aseer is in line with the Kingdom's Vision 2030 in that it provides all its people the equal opportunity to enjoy culture and gastronomy, both as producers and consumers. The core of this concept of the year of award sparks the recognition, innovation, and implementation of new ideas that will lead to a more effective process, service, and systems. The program organized for the World Region of Gastronomy year aims to provide the tools for inspiration and action in the gastronomic industry. It will facilitate the making of great strides towards satisfying the drive, success, and sustainability of the practices of its population.

Part of bringing 2030's vision to life involves working on the grassroots level. This means that even on the community level, we have to all get involved with initiatives that promote our objectives to achieve our collective goals. Keeping that in mind, the Culinary Arts Commission a sector body under the Ministry of Culture, helping drive culinary excellence forward, has developed plans to carry out the objective of fulfilling Vision 2030's goals.

Since 2020, the Culinary Arts Commission (CAC) has undertaken a strategic program for the country's culinary industries. CAC seeks to establish a vibrant and sustainable food industry through tourism and hospitality, professional training, and a resilient culinary ecosystem. They are creating economic opportunities by extracting value from the local culinary assets and professionals and pushing innovation and leadership across the value chain. In addition, CAC's strategy is to foster a joint food mission and highlight opportunities for action.

On amore regional level, there's also been a tremendous amount of discussion and planning. Aseer's Development Authority recently launched the strategy for the Aseeri region, built upon the strength of the creative sector, to enhance the region's distinguished position as a tourist destination while achieving a balance between development and the protection of the natural environment. The strategy of Aseer was developed with several goals in mind: to contribute to the attainment of the goals of Vision 2030, of which includes nurturing a vital community by working to improve health services, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and improving the quality of life, as well as ensuring environmental sustainability and creating an environment conducive to the empowerment of the local communities. The strategy will also contribute to the booming economy by developing partnerships with the private sector, thereby maximizing the value generated from the creative industry,

and extending the role of the Public Investment Fund as an engine of growth to provide opportunities for all through the growth of small and medium enterprises and micro-enterprises. Such a unique cultural heritage paired with the added richness of Aseer's gastronomy, the programs and initiatives set forth are an acknowledgment of the talent and effort of the local community. They will create a platform for producers to engage with, as well as create new opportunities in all food processes, while encouraging the maintenance of traditions. Furthermore, these initiatives will promote the blossoming of the local food scene, which will grow the gastro-tourism in the region. Aseer's cultural center's ingenuity will inspire an ever-increasing tourism industry, which, in turn, will contribute to the region's economic growth.

Cooperation and collaboration are at the center of this vision. The city, along with local businesses, has started to recognize that tourism's potential stems from the region's people, their rich gastronomic heritage and the current local producers. By implementing the set forth aims and objectives, Aseer hopes to make gastronomy an accelerator for the sustainable development and continued prosperity of the region's rich culture.



## Our Objectives

- Bring to light the unique gastronomy of Aseer at a local, national, and international level.
- Create strong engagement, connection, and collaboration between professionals, businesses, and partners in the gastronomy industry.
- Drive Aseer's economic growth by supporting local producers and accounting for agriculture, which plays a vital role in the region's gastronomy industry.
- Create an atmosphere for innovation and creativity by empowering professionals through training activities and knowledge exchange support.
- Push Aseer towards being an international gastronomic tourist destination.
- Drive forward environmental sustainability and implement best practices to become an eco-friendly region.



## Our Focus Areas and Initiatives

### Education

With so many talented producers and professionals in the region, commercial and professional support is the foundational objective of the program the year of award . Firstly, the education sector has a lot of potential to contribute to regional development with an opportunity to strengthen skills and career pathways through educational mechanisms that not only support individuals, but also raise awareness of the gastronomy industry as a whole. To address this strategic orientation, a regional food experience center will be established to combine food-related activities, under one physical location, that provides cooking classes, creates food boutiques, and partners with universities to develop food conferences.

Additionally, to create an innovation-driven economy and hone the talents and creativity of Aseeri professionals, an initiative entitled Professional Education will focus on the educational development of professionals who work in all aspects of the industry. The program will fill the gaps in the markets by developing initial and ongoing training, courses, and scholarships. The program will also highlight regional dishes that best represent the local community, and create relevant activities that will be subsequently nationally and globally publicized.

Furthermore, the recognition of healthy and local foods will be developed through a program that introduces the profession across multiple age groups, from elementary-aged students to those in universities in the region. Highlighting the importance of agriculture and gastronomy, and presenting it to youth in schools, will help develop the appreciation of agriculture, along with its roots in the region, and relevant knowledge paired with creative skills.

Aseer is known for its landscape and climate diversity, which, as mentioned, enriches the variety of local produce and products. Aseer's local influences have additional contributors as well. People, throughout time, have brought their food-relevant practices with them as they rode in caravans traveling along the main trade routes through the region. This has left an impact as far as their contributions to the rich cuisine. The wonderful result of all these influences has added to the significant role food plays in both the history and the cultural core of the local identity.



An integral part of the programs under this focus area is the discussion and demonstration of how food shapes and manages heritage. Documentation of this element is another initiative. This includes the codification of intangible cultural heritage, including ingredients, techniques, know-how, recipes, folklore, and traditional cookware (stone and ceramic pots). By promoting the Aseeri traditions through the preservation and continued showcasing of the traditional work of its people, we can continue to promote the numerous local culinary practices.

On top of all of this, emphasizing cultural food heritage in local cultural and food festivals ignites and sustains traditional knowledge which reinforces the region's authenticity. By codifying and preserving intangible cultural heritage related to gastronomy, networks will be encouraged to share knowledge and mobilize fundamental resources for sustainable tourism. This initiative will become a valuable source of information on rural culture, and additionally promote a sense of community and communal pride. The Beekeepers Association, in partnership with Aramco, will continue their training program in the practice of beekeeping and preservation, as well as support farmers on organic farming standards, and honey and coffee product processing, thus adding even more value to their products.

In conclusion, the projects and initiatives under focus will nurture skills, promote sustainability of practices, contribute to meaningful work across the industry, expand professionals for the regional and worldwide market, and meet tomorrow's economic needs by expanding strategic assets which will continue to lead innovation.



## Innovation, Creativity and Job Opportunities

The core of the World Region of Gastronomy is positioning gastronomy as a major contributor to inspiring relevant work in the field of gastronomy, as well as innovation and continued sustainability. This will be done through the creation of the optimal environment to foster growth related entrepreneurial projects in the region's culinary practices, develop skills, and increase region-wide opportunities to secure Aseer as a gastronomic tourist destination.

The majority of the initiatives are the results of collaboration between a variety of culinary-affiliated entities. One of the initiatives proposed is the establishment of the Association of Culinary Professionals which is a platform to bring in culinary arts professionals to share knowledge, resources, and skills from traditional knowhow to skills pertaining to packaging and manufacturing food products. There will also be the creation of test kitchens, ghost kitchens, and food halls which will be physical setups that support entrepreneurs, small businesses, and startups in testing their creations in a low-risk environment. Furthermore, this will include an initiative that aims to conduct research related to innovation in Aseer culinary concepts such as new experiences, future trends, and projects.

On top of those previously mentioned, an initiative to be undertaken is the establishment of a Saudi culinary boutique, which entails the development of online retail channels that promote locally sourced products. Another action proposed is the Moving Culinary Exhibit which is a cross-regional exhibit that provides chefs and educators the space to promote Saudi cuisine and food producers and utilize local locations including schools and universities.

All of the initiatives described under this focus area provide a unique platform for the artists, creatives, and specialists in the region and across a variety of industries.





## Balanced and Sustainable Tourism

The unique features and flavors of the Kingdom's gastronomic assets would be ideally showcased in festivals that are open to people from around the globe. Aseer's gastronomic excellence, a great part of the Kingdom's culinary art, should be celebrated and shared with all. The programs and initiatives proposed under this focus area will contribute to the region's tourism, employment, and economic growth, as well as enhance the wellbeing of the regional population, and showcase this specific region's unique culture to those both inside and outside Saudi Arabia. Festivals are a way to draw in cultural tourism to the region and deliver public benefits in which a sense of community and pride is evoked.

Aseer will have a distinguished role in a festival that celebrates all the food of the Kingdom. The Aseer Development Authority is a key entity in developing Aseer's tourism industry. They have a keen focus on building up agricultural tourism in rural areas. The authority is planning on creating activities that encourage visitors to visit farms and learn more about the region's culture and heritage from the local population. As a way to celebrate the local restaurants and chefs, local associations will collaborate, along with relevant supporting entities, to bring in regional culinary tours. The culinary tours will stop off at various establishments and farms to taste local delicacies and discover hidden treasures.

One of the supporting organizations is the Saudi Tourism Society. Established at King Saud University, this group acts as an agency for communication and cooperation between academics, researchers, and scholars in tourism and hospitality across Saudi universities. Its vision is focused on the development and the deepening of knowledge in tourism and hospitality among specialists and members of the community. In working with the local community, this scientific society aims to conduct training courses on Agri-Tourism Development, Food and Beverage Tourism, Experience Management in Tourism, Destination Management, Event Management, Destination Marketing, and other related courses that will build sustainable tourism and create agritourism experiences in the region. We will work together to develop a community of practice in the region that is both informational and inspirational.

# Feeding the Planet

In addition to the work done through King Saud University, and the Saudi Tourism Society, work that recognizes both the cultural and environmental impact of our work is being done through the National Center for Palms and Dates, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture.

This collaboration highlights our collective mission: our culture and environment deserve protection at the local level, as we must recognize that traditional farming practices continue to play an important role in preserving this heritage. The environmental impact of these practices needs to be continually examined and discussed so that we can continue to work on best practices throughout the industry.

To this end, steps are being taken. For example, the National Center for Palms and Dates developed a policy called Saudi Dates Mark, aimed to certify dates in order to improve the standard requirements for food safety as well as to comply with international requirements of global markets. Because this requires professionals to obtain a certificate enabling them to export their products, it facilitates access to electronic platforms designed to promote their products. These steps help to regulate the safety element of this creative field.

The Ministry of Agriculture contributes to this realm as well. They have placed a focus on long-term agricultural production, and are working to expand the organic farming industry, particularly in Aseer. They have established the Organic Farming Project, through which 21 pilot farms will receive extensive training in order to serve as regional promoters and multipliers for organic agriculture in the region. This project is self-promoting in the sense that word spreads quickly, in the most positive way. Al Mahdi farm, which is intimately linked with local life, will be a part of the project in the Aseer region. Because they are an influential farming entity, they will pique the interest of conventional farmers, who will be assisted in making the transition to organic farming by the Ministry, and thereby encourage the actions of others.

Promotion is further supported by the Ministry of Agriculture. Because the Saudi National Organic Label is not generally recognized, as part of the pilot project, the Ministry of Agriculture conducts public relations operations concentrating on the health benefits of organic farming. The Organic Farming Project is also addressing the challenge of on-farm research to assess and monitor regional needs in order to be able to propose corresponding actions.



## Supporting SMEs

For Aseer's gastronomy industry to achieve significant growth, development between SMEs and public sector needs to be fostered. In addition, this year's program includes initiatives that provide and improve business support to strengthen the capacities of SMEs. This includes the Saudi Culinary Incubator program, which aims to provide support to entrepreneurs and small businesses in business development and training, as well as services for packaging and distribution.

There is also an increase of tourism initiatives that work and feature local small businesses. Notably, as previously mentioned, there is the development of regional culinary tours, which allow tourists to explore the food of the region by having stops at local farms, shops, and restaurants.

By working closely with SMEs, Aseer is promoting a more sustainable model of tourism. A part of Aseer Development Authority's efforts to build a sustainable tourism model directly supports local small businesses and food and craft producers. By means of the World Region of Gastronomy projects, SMEs will be engaged to help promote their businesses and be provided with more significant opportunities.

## Collaboration with the Platform

Aseer Candidate 2024 strives to build strong and sustainable collaborations and partnerships with the platform and its members by actively participating in platform projects such as the Food Film Menu, Young Chef Award, Top Visitor Portals, and Local Food Gifts.

Collaboration and partnership activities on knowledge sharing and transfer will also be planned and implemented through online and face-to-face activities (for example, specialized focus group discussions across the IGCAT six focus areas, workshops, training and awareness events). This work will promote not only best practices, but also inspire interest in the field.





## Governance Structure

The commitments outlined will be coordinated by the founding stakeholders: Aseer Development Authority (ASDA), Bunyan, Culinary Arts Commission (CAC), Ministry of Culture, Faseel, Qoot – Restaurants & Cafes Association, Saudi Heritage Preservation Society, Saudi Tourism Authority, Saudi Tourism Society, and Soudah Development.

One of the primary aims of the governance model is to establish and grow an inclusive and participatory rich database where members of the value chain community can participate and contribute to the development and roll-out of projects across the IGCAT six focus areas. The program will aim at including local storytellers and legacy holders (this includes tribal leaders, the elderly, poets, and historians, etc.), farmers, chefs, restaurateurs, artists, musicians, small business owners, academicians, film-makers, and photographers. Engagement will be via one-on-one sessions, the Majlis (town hall meetings), activities and events (including focus groups and workshops).

## Communication and Marketing

Marketing and communication activities are central to promoting the principle of the platform, the initiatives and projects. Communication tools are fundamental in developing the projects, all of which promote a regional food system and integrate gastronomic offerings into tourism planning. Marketing involves the use of social media including Twitter and Instagram, as well as a dedicated website for the spread of relevant information. There will be a focus on the creation of multimedia content, including photos, audio, and videos published on social media and on the official Aseer bid award website.

As part of building our marketing initiatives, and reaching a wide audience, local celebrities and influencers will be featured on social media with the goal of their facilitating and infusing interest and inspiring curiosity regarding the uniqueness of the Aseeri gastronomy industry. Additionally, narrative-based content and storytelling will further assist to increase awareness with a more general audience.

Stakeholders, including Saudi Tourism Society, aim to create digital flyers and infographics that highlight the principles of IGCAT. In addition, there will be periodical seminars on Food Tourism offered at both the regional and international level. The exchange of knowledge and experiences, especially the mutual cooperation of local government, businesses, and academic institutions, has been one of the valued aspects being both considered and implemented. As part of the designation communication plan, a conference led by Saudi Tourism Society, will be established on the theme of Gastronomic Tourism that will focus on contemporary topics and industry practices in gastronomy, hospitality, tourism, and related fields of study.

## Sustainability and Legacy

A set of actions and strategies are in place to help Aseer achieve the goal of becoming a World Region of Gastronomy. Increased mindfulness of the region's gastronomy on both a national and international level will result in the acknowledgment and esteemed recognition of nearby traditional products, which can build self-pride and naturally develop into more ambitious undertakings.

Additionally, we intend to make environmental, economic, and social sustainability issues more visible in the training programs, as well as infuse them more directly throughout the program. Taking into account the communication plan, as well as the development of an integrated communication model capable of attracting tourists and residents to the region, we anticipate that the region will gain a positive well-deserved and national and international culinary reputation.

The aim of the projects and initiatives will be supported by the Aseer Region Development Strategy, launched in 2021, by the Aseer Development Authority. In addition the joining of Soudah Development Company with the United Nation's Mountain Partnership alliance will aim to promote sustainable mountain development, combat climate change, and encourage low-impact tourism in line with Vision 2030's Green Saudi Initiative. Part of the goals is to plant 100 thousand trees annually until 2030 to reclaim the forests in Soudah and parts of Rijal Alma'a by developing vegetation cover, and to reduce carbon emissions and restore environmental balance. Part of the revitalization of vegetation cover includes the replanting of the indigenous plants of Aseer including lavender. The projects and initiatives outlined are also aided by the naming of Rijal Alma'a Village as one of the the best tourist villages by the World Tourism Organization, a UN agency and leading global organization that promotes tourism and sustainable development. Through collaborations and networking, solid relationships will be formed between the various players in the process, which will contribute even more value to the program.





## Economic Provision

The executive board of the Aseer Region 2024 candidacy will lead regionally and ensure effective development and delivery of business models, setting out a framework in which public and private sector partnerships can build their own strategies. The commitment of relevant stakeholders at local, regional, and national levels is a key factor in the success and implementation of the strategy.

#	Program	Budget
1	Culinary arts registry development, maintenance, and recognition program	153,000 SAR
2	Culinary arts heritage preservation program	415,000 SAR
3	Culinary arts media library and narratives development program	4,500,00 SAR
4	Local sector promotion and menus integration program	500,000 SAR
5	International promotion and gastro-diplomacy and exchange program	615,000 SAR
6	Saudi regional gastro-tourism program	3,500,000 SAR
7	Saudi flagship culinary arts events program	850,000 SAR
8	Community engagement and regional culinary festivals program	1,400,000 SAR
9	Culinary arts professional development and promotion program	5,500,000 SAR
10	"Saudi-food" concepts and "Saudi-concepts" in food enhancement and development program	4,000,000 SAR
11	Culinary products processing quality elevation and distribution program	3,000,000 SAR
12	Saudi culinary products and services research, innovation, and development program	100,000 SAR
<b>Total Estimated Budget</b>		<b>25,000,000 SAR</b>

## Partners and Stakeholders

- Aseer Development Authority (ASDA)
- Bunyan
- Culinary Arts Commission (CAC), Ministry of Culture
- Faseel
- Qoot – Restaurants & Cafes Association
- Saudi Heritage Preservation Society
- Saudi Tourism Authority
- Saudi Tourism Society
- Soudah Development





## Photography Credits

We thank our stakeholders and individual photographers who have kindly permitted use of their photography for this publication.

### Photo Credits:

Mohammad Alyousi, Soudah Development  
Culinary Arts Commission  
Saudi Heritage Preservation Society  
Sian Tichar



## Imprint & Acknowledgements

**Editor in Chief and Text:** Mada Alhamdan

**Content Development:** Majed Almuhanha, Heidi Alaskary, Hashim Mohiuddin, Rehaf Gassas, Sultan Alsaleh, Abdulelah AL-Tokhais, Ibtesam Aldera

**Design and Illustrations:** Mohammed Alharbi

**Proofreader and Editor:** Arlen Jane Gargagliano, Abeer Abdalla

## Acknowledgement

This bid for the World Region of Gastronomy details actions and recommendations taken by organizations and individuals locally, regionally, and globally.

Thank you to all stakeholders who have contributed to this endeavor and the entire process of developing this bid.

### With special gratitude to:

Salman Alotaibi  
Ali Hayani  
Dr. Ali Aldosari  
Rahma Al Asmari  
Ruba Ali Hamrah  
Wa'ad Al Tumaihi  
Noura Alqahtani  
Abdulmajeed Mahboob  
Ali Ramzy  
Om Sara  
Kholod Al Mshafi

### In addition to the following entities:

Ministry of Culture  
Culinary Arts Commission (CAC)  
Soudah Development  
Saudi Geographical Society  
Beekeepers Cooperative Association  
Aseer Development Authority (ASDA)  
Bunyan  
Faseel  
Qoot – Restaurants & Cafes Association  
Saudi Tourism Authority  
Saudi Tourism Society

