

# Nizwa Fort

Beauty has an address

Visitor assist: 80077799  
[www.omantourism.gov.om](http://www.omantourism.gov.om)



SULTANATE OF  
oman

Ministry of Tourism

## A crowning citadel



It is fitting that the fortress of Nizwa, Oman's early capital, is a citadel of monumental proportions, crowned by an immense circular tower, the largest in the country, and once the most heavily fortified. This distinctive stronghold remains a prominent icon in the architectural lexicon of the land.

The story of the monument is intertwined with the distinguished history of the nation. From the mid 8th to the mid 12th Centuries, the town of Nizwa served intermittently as the capital for a succession of Imams. With the ebb and flow of political power over time, the Imamate moved to other places such as Bahla, Rustaq, Sohar and Muscat, but Nizwa maintained its role as the preeminent city of learning and enlightenment.

Known as the Pearl of Islam, Nizwa both produced and attracted the country's leading religious scholars, poets, and scientists. Two of Nizwa's historic mosques, the Shawadhna and the Sa'al, date from the very early days of Islam and are said to have been built in 623 and 629 AD respectively. It is possible that the original fortification is as old as, or even older than these mosques, but the first credible estimate for construction of the precursor to the present structure is said to be in the 9th Century when Al Salt bin Malik held the Imamate. Omani history, however, records that the building was renewed by Imam Nasir bin Murshid Al Ya'rubi early in the 17th Century.

## In flourishing times

The Ya'ruba ruled Oman for more than a century, from approximately 1624 to 1744. During that time Oman, always a seafaring nation, became a significant naval power. By 1650, the Ya'ruba had freed Oman from a century and a half of Portuguese occupation and began to build a powerful realm based on control of the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean trading routes. At the height of empire, the commercial and political dominion of the Ya'ruba dynasty stretched east to the Indian coast of Coromandel, west to the Red Sea and south to Pemba and Mombassa.

Sovereignty of the seas brought a revival of trade and immense wealth. Having united the interior and coastal tribes of Oman, the Ya'ruba ushered in an era of ambitious infrastructural development including expansion of the falaj irrigation system to ensure increased agricultural yields. It was also a period of cultural and spiritual efflorescence marked by a renewal of Islamic scholarship and learning.

In this flourishing environment the Ya'rubu created monumental buildings of unsurpassed strength and beauty. In 1670, almost fifty years after the reconstruction of Nizwa Fort, Jabreen Castle was built, followed by Al Hazm in 1708.

## A commanding site

Strategically situated along a vital trading artery, Nizwa Fort surveilled the flow of commerce to and from the Interior. From its commanding site on a rise in the centre of the town, the Fort overlooks a lush oasis of date palms, fed by Oman's most bountiful water channel, the Falaj Daris. Designed to guard the oasis as well as the water sources in the nearby mountains, it provided a safe haven in dangerous times and sheltered the craft industries for which Nizwa has long been famous.

The Friday Mosque stands at the side of the Fort, harmonising its solidity with the unseen domain of the spirit. Rising against the massive bulk of the fortification, a slender minaret asserts its authority, reminding us that Nizwa was for centuries the stronghold of the Imamate. The view of the mosque from the crenellated walls of the fort is a favourite of painters and photographers, especially in the late afternoon sun, when the gold and purple tiles of the dome seem to shine like jewels plucked from the sky.



## The character of the complex

In times past, the city was surrounded by a protective wall, which formed the first line of defense, although the massive fortress standing high above the town was the strongest deterrent. The structure consists of both a castle and a fort standing side by side; the former built for administration and residential life and the latter for defense. The towered citadel with its circular gunnery platform constitutes the 'Fort' (Q'ala) and the adjacent residence or 'Castle' (Hisn) is also fortified. The Fort and Castle complex is built around a large quadrangular enclosure according to the traditional Arabian design.

As has been noted, the residential and administrative component of the complex is understood to predate the tower by several centuries. The defensive tower, constructed from 1649 to 1661 by Imam Sultan Bin Saif Al Ya'rubu, was expanded beyond traditional military proportions to form the immense round citadel, 36 metres in diameter and 30 metres high. Its ancient stylistic antecedents can be found in the early 3rd Millennium beehive tombs, a UNESCO World Heritage site

located further south at Bat and Wadi Al Ayn.

Unique in scale in Omani architecture, the citadel is filled with earth and stones to a level of 15 metres and capped by a platform with ports from which 23 cannon can be fired in a 360-degree radius. The walls of the tower continue above the platform to curtain an internal rim holding a sentry walk where defenders could fire safely in the shadows of the tower's crenellations.

State-of-the-art for its time, Nizwa Fort was laced with ingenious traps. To catch invaders off guard, stairs were interrupted by deep, gaping pits over which planks were laid - to be quickly removed when the intruder alarm was raised. Such pitfalls lay behind each of the seven sturdy doors in the dark and narrow zigzagging passageway that led to the citadel. If the enemy survived assault from the murder hole that preceded each door, he would surely then fall victim to the lethal pit on the other side.



## The Exhibits Hall

The former prison area of the Castle, with its maze of cells and rooms, has been transformed into an Exhibits Hall with a collection of more than twenty galleries, each interpreting a specific theme related to Nizwa's history and heritage. But one room is reserved to illustrate the old prison; and here, artifacts such as leg irons conjure the atmosphere in which prisoners served out their sentences. The date stores, wells and baths have also been kept in their original condition.

The Exhibits Hall is an illustrated treasure house of information and artifacts. World class audio-visual presentation technologies ensure that the displays are exciting, varied and accessible. One series, comprised of displays in six interconnected galleries, contains rich information on Oman's system of forts and castles along with fascinating material on the history, architecture and restoration of the Nizwa Fort complex and Souq. In an adjacent gallery, a wall frieze features historic maps and memorable quotations about Nizwa from early travelers and geographers.

Special attention is paid to Islam and scholarship. On a plasma screen, inset within a pictorial collage, the architectural beauty and historical referents of Nizwa's mosques are featured.

Characters in the history of the Fort and Castle come alive in a 'look and see' display where a peephole reveals images in 3D. One of the more popular stories is about a shawi (shepherd) who lived in the Castle and used to take the Imam's goats and sheep out to graze. The shawi also collected stray animals and put them 'in jail' in the Castle's stables until their owners came to claim them. Owners were sometimes fined for not controlling their livestock. Unclaimed animals were

sold at auction in the Souq with the proceeds going to needy people in the area.

A long passageway leading to the Castle's history wing has been transformed into a 'time corridor'. This seemingly unbounded space follows Oman in the development of the world from the formation of the Arabian Peninsula in geological time through ancient archaeological periods to recent historical times. It is interesting to note, for instance, that Oman's 3rd Millennium World Heritage necropolis at Bat roughly coincides with the building of the Great Pyramid at Giza

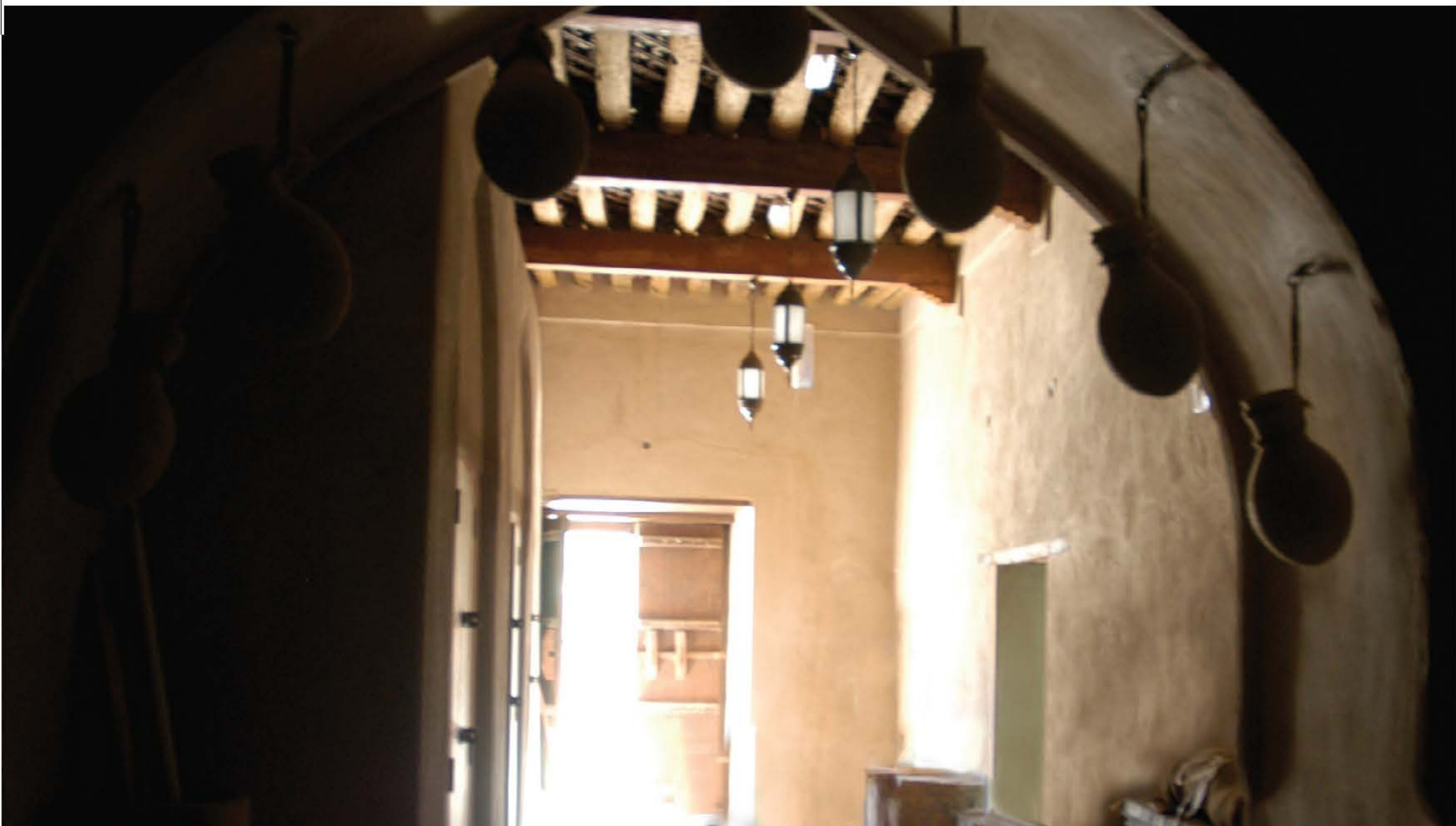


## The courtyards



A visit to any of Oman's forts and castles is an exciting journey into history, not to be forgotten. Nizwa Fort brings that history alive in an innovative panorama of sounds, images, objects and words, enabling the long-silent walls to speak through four centuries of thoughts and deeds.

As they walk out through the ancient doors of the Fort into the bright sunshine of the open street, visitors of all ages from any part of the world will carry with them a satchel full of images, ideas and memories – from the town fabled as a centre of enlightenment.



## Experience history

A visit to any of Oman's forts and castles is an exciting journey into history, not to be forgotten. Nizwa Fort brings that history alive in an innovative panorama of sounds, images, objects and words, enabling the long-silent walls to speak through four centuries of thoughts and deeds.

As they walk out through the ancient doors of the Fort into the bright sunshine of the open street, visitors of all ages from any part of the world will carry with them a satchel full of images, ideas and memories – from the town fabled as a centre of enlightenment.

## Enduring symbols of power

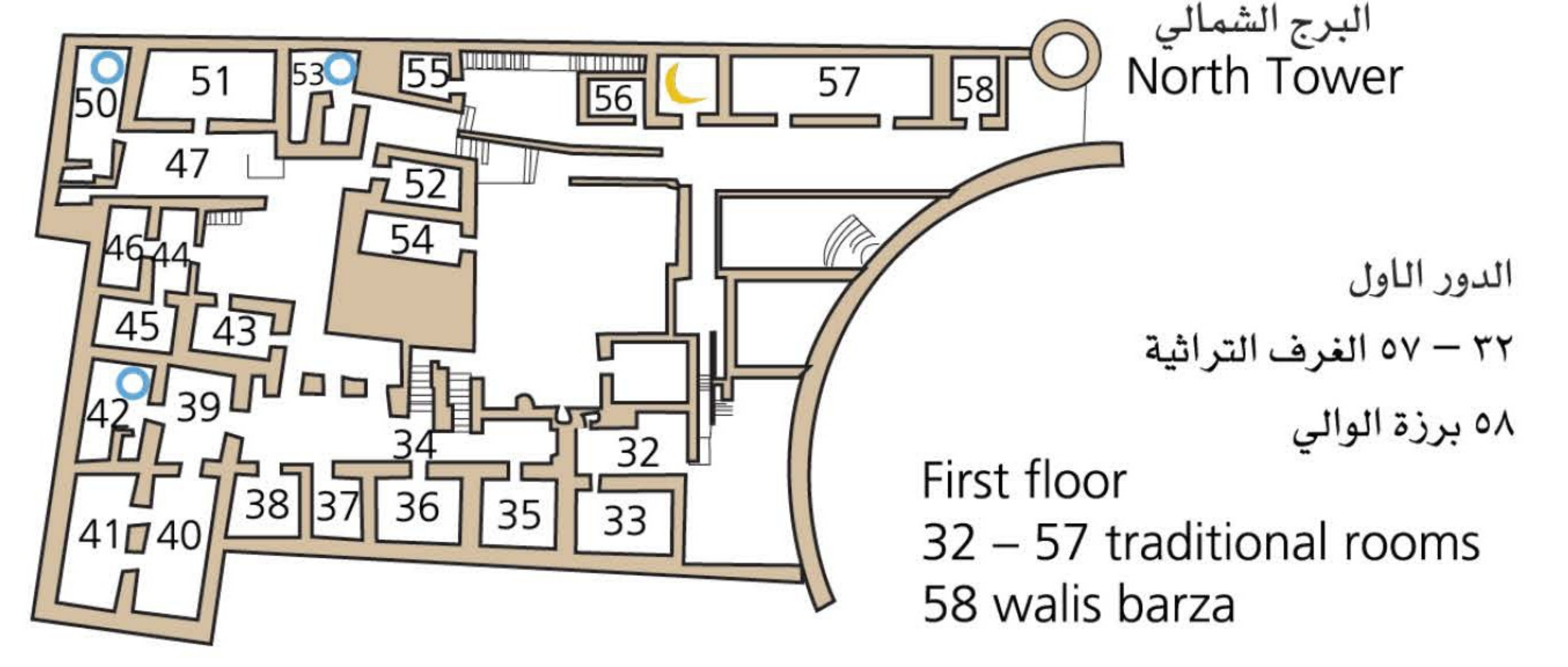
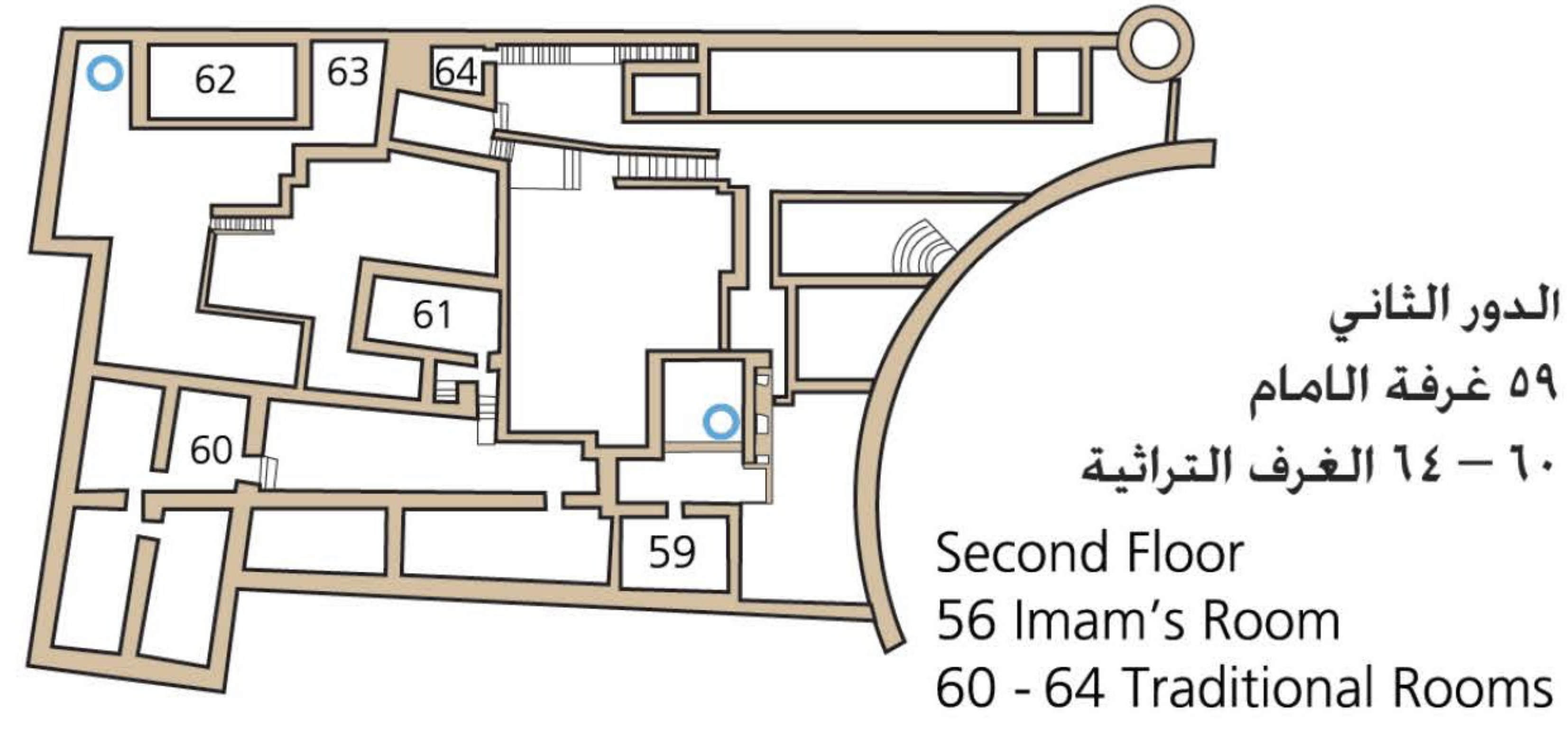
The cannon of Nizwa Fort stand as potent symbols of its original military purpose. The outer portal of the Fort is flanked by two historic cannon. One is a cast iron Swedish Finbanker, dating from the 18th Century, mounted on a bracket carriage. The other is a very fine example of a mid 16th Century bronze Portuguese cannon on a bed carriage. The inner portal is defended by an exquisitely decorated bronze cannon which is almost certainly of Omani manufacture. This gun is particularly interesting for its Arabic inscription and stylised calligraphic cartouches. Displayed nearby is a British 9-pounder cast iron cannon, about two hundred years old, mounted on a garrison bracket carriage. All cannon carriages are exact replicas, constructed from the original drawings of their respective historic periods.

Opening Hours:

Saturday - Thursday (9 Am-4 PM), Friday (8 Am- 11 AM, 2 PM- 4 PM)



# Nizwa Fort Plans



## Ground Floor Exhibits

5. Gift Shop
6. Inner Courtyard
7. Date Store
8. Ablution Room
9. Date Store
10. Date Palm
11. Stairs
12. Copper
13. Silver
14. Ablution Room
15. Locks & Keys
16. Indigo
17. Water Use
18. Nizwa Souq
19. Ablution Room
20. Nizwa Town
21. Time Corridor
22. Origins of Fortifications
23. Fort & Castle Architecture
24. Restoration of Fort & Castle
25. Life in the Fort & Castle
26. Islam & Scholarship
27. Fort & Castle History
28. Prison
29. Stairs to Exhibits
30. Armoury

## الدور الارضي المعرض

٥. محل الهدايا
٦. الفناء الداخلي
٧. مخزن التمور
٨. غرفة الغسل
٩. مخزن التمور
١٠. شجرة النخيل
١١. الدرج
١٢. النحاس
١٣. الفضة
١٤. غرفة الغسل
١٥. الاقفال و المفاتيح
١٦. صناعة النيلة
١٧. استخدامات المياه
١٨. سوق نزوى
١٩. غرفة الغسل
٢٠. مدينة نزوى
٢١. رواق التاريخ
٢٢. اصول التحصينات الدفاعية
٢٣. عمارة القلعة والحصن
٢٤. ترميم القلعة والحصن
٢٥. الحياة في القلعة والحصن
٢٦. الاسلام والعلماء
٢٧. تاريخ القلعة والحصن
٢٨. السجن
٢٩. الدرج
٣٠. مخزن الاسلحة

