

ALI ALSALOOM, FOUNDER OF EMBRACE ARABIA (EMIRATI)

I was born in Abu Dhabi in 1979 in the Bani Yas area of the city, in the Mafraq region. Bani Yas was the first community to be built off the main Abu Dhabi Island. Back then it was considered a 'journey' to go and visit the main city on the island. Maqtaa Bridge was only two lanes, one in each direction.

My parents, my sisters and I lived in a traditional house comprising just four or five rooms. There were only a few streets around and no street lighting – when I was little it used to be quite dark and scary outside after the sun went down! Today, our old house is still standing but there are intersections, highways, roundabouts and bridges all around it, not to mention street lights everywhere.

When I was growing up, I remember seeing very few Westerners in Abu Dhabi; the 'expats' back then mainly came from countries such as Egypt, Iran, Jordan and Somalia. The only Western expats I remember from when I was very little are my table tennis coaches.



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In 2000 I noticed a lot of changes taking place in Abu Dhabi. I was studying abroad at that time and when I came home, I realised many things were different, such as the huge influx of Western expats, the ways in which we did business, the introduction of international standards such as ISO, and changes in education and healthcare etc. We were not only becoming more

Westernised, but more globalised.

Apart from the obvious changes such as the height of buildings and the growing number of people, there are still many intangible changes going on here, for example people are more educated, they travel more around the world and more local women are now employed. We've experienced a complete style change in our lives, and we have to adapt. ■