

SHALTA ECOLOGDE

AL GHAT NATIONAL PARK, SAUDI ARABIA

CLIENT Supreme Council of Tourism (SCT) SUSTAINABLE MASTER PLANNER EDSA and Planning Charette Participants (United States)
ARCHITECT Hitesh Mehta and Design Charette Participants (Kenya/United States) CULTURAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE EXPERT
Dr. Ali Al-Anbar (Saudi Arabia) TOURISM PRODUCT SPECIALIST Keith Sproule (United States)

EDSA, a landscape architecture and planning firm based in Florida was the facilitator and team leader for the preparation of conceptual plans for Shalta Ecolodge, Al Ghat National Park, located three hours north of the capital, Riyadh. Following a site visit, all the drawings that were produced were the result of a four-day participatory ecolodge workshop comprised of local community, professionals, and members of the Supreme Commission of Tourism. The program for the ecolodge, which is sited overlooking a seasonal waterfall and facing the rising sun, includes private accommodation areas, presidential suite, environmental utility learning area, nature center, and public spaces, such as reception, lounge, and dining areas.

The Shalta site has all the regional ingredients for a successful ecolodge: There are unique old Nejd villages (Al Ghat and Al Majma'ah) with rich architectural heritages, the national park is a protected area, and the opportunities for interpretations are numerous. The whole ecolodge will celebrate local Nejd vernacular architecture to reflect its context with the desert surroundings and only locally available materials will be used to build the ecolodge. The proposal is to establish a development "credo" for the ecolodge that will give it a distinct identity among ecolodges in Saudi Arabia. The utmost intention is to encourage respectful development that takes into consideration both environmental and social Islamic concerns such as defined areas for men, women, and children.

Shalta Ecolodge was a "model" ecolodge exercise and hopefully will advance to the next stage of development.

