

Y E M E N : Journey to the Gates of Arabia

Casa Árabe Madrid

May 18 - May 23, 2026



Presented by:
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Centro de Estudios Árabes Contemporáneos
مركز الدراسات العربية المعاصرة



With its great diversity of landscapes, its millennia-old history, its rich traditions, and its unique architecture, Yemen represents a fundamental part of Arab and Islamic natural and cultural heritage, which is often little known or misunderstood in Spain and across Europe.

Yemen: Journey to the Gates of Arabia seeks to offer an opportunity to give visibility to a country as fascinating as it is complex. Its aim is to promote a deeper understanding of contemporary Yemen, beyond stereotypes or media coverage, which often focuses solely on the ongoing conflict or the humanitarian crisis.

At the same time, the event aims to serve as a space for cultural exchange where the Yemeni diaspora, country experts, and the public can come together to share, learn, and connect through history, art, architecture, photography, music, and culinary specialties.

In an increasingly interconnected global context, this initiative also aims to foster intercultural dialogue, strengthen the bonds of friendship between Yemen and Spain, and explore potential future avenues of cooperation between both countries.

Masarat Foundation is a non-profit organization founded in 2025 and based in New York, which works to support women and girls in Yemen through education and access to dignified work opportunities. Guided by the belief that when women thrive, entire communities are strengthened, the foundation promotes safe and inclusive learning environments, cultural preservation, and basic assistance in health and food through various programs in internally displaced persons' camps in southern Yemen, as well as in Egypt, where it supports the Yemeni diaspora.

Through this approach, Masarat seeks to help the Yemeni people cope with the consequences of war and contribute to building a more just and resilient post-conflict society.

PROGRAM

Monday, May 18, 2026

19.00 - 19.30

WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE EVENT

(In Spanish and Arabic with simultaneous interpretation)

Led by **Muti'a Dammaj**, Minister of Culture and Tourism of Yemen; **Mustapha Noman**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; **Aws Alawd**, Ambassador of Yemen to Spain; **Miguel Moro Aguilar**, Director General of Casa Árabe; and **Vanessa Lago**, Director of Masarat Foundation.

19.45 - 21.00

OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION “Hadramaut, persistence and memory”

Until June 5

Photography: **Vanessa Lago**

This exhibition offers a rare and intimate glimpse into the daily life of the inhabitants of Hadramaut, a region with a millennia-old history located in southeastern Yemen. The show captures the resilience and austere beauty that define this often-overlooked corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Portraits of sun-drenched plateaus, ancient mud cities such as the famed Shibam, and fertile wadis celebrate the deep connection between the Hadrami people and their land.

The exhibition also explores the tension between preservation and change, as Hadramaut's rich cultural heritage faces the pressures of modern life and ongoing conflict. Yet, amid uncertainty, the dignity and hospitality of its people stand out.

Following the exhibition's opening ceremony, there will be a tasting of traditional sweets, Hadramaut honey, and Yemeni coffee and tea.

Tuesday, May 19, 2026

17.00 - 18.30

ROUND TABLE: “Yemen in Context: Local, Regional, and Humanitarian Dynamics of a Complex Conflict”

(In Spanish and English with simultaneous interpretation)

Speakers: **Ignacio Gutiérrez de Terán**, professor in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM); **Maysaa Shuja Al-Deen**, researcher at the Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies; and **Yousef Al Dubai**, Yemeni writer and poet, author of the book *From Yemen to Spain*

Moderator: **Leyla Hamad Zahonero**, associate researcher at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CEARC)

This panel offers a broad and contextualized approach to Yemen from different perspectives, with the aim of offering a deeper understanding of the country’s reality.

A brief overview of its recent history will be provided in order to highlight some of the social and cultural characteristics that define Yemeni distinctiveness and that have had a decisive influence on its political evolution. This introductory framework will help situate the discussion and facilitate further analysis, as well as a better understanding of the various elements that shape the current situation.

It will also address the ongoing conflict, focusing on its contemporary dynamics and possible future scenarios. The panel will examine the main key aspects of the war: the local actors involved, the role of regional and international powers, and its impact on the daily life of the Yemeni population.

Three perspectives—political, international, and humanitarian—will be offered to approach a complex and, often, overlooked reality, within the framework of a critical dialogue that invites reflection on Yemen.

19.00 - 20.30

BOOK PRESENTATION: *Arabia Feliz*

(In Spanish with simultaneous interpretation)

With the participation of **Javier Puga Llopis**, author of *Arabia Feliz*, diplomat at the Embassy of Spain in Sana'a from 2008 to 2012, and currently Chargé d'Affaires ad interim at the Embassy of Spain in Damascus.

Arabia Feliz (Arabia Felix) is the name the Romans gave to the territory that is now modern-day Yemen. In his book, Puga Llopis recounts his personal experience as a career diplomat during the four years he spent in the country, a pivotal period just before the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Through his largely autobiographical account, enriched with anecdotes and personal experiences, the author invites us to discover the landscapes, customs, and daily life of a country as little-known as it is fascinating. His testimony also offers key insights into the historical and political complexity of Yemen at a crucial moment in its recent history.

The session will conclude with a Q&A with the author, offering the audience the opportunity to explore the themes addressed in the book in greater depth.

Wednesday, May 20, 2026

19.00 - 20.30

CONFERENCE: “From Yemen to Silves: Rethinking the Presence of Southern Arabia in Iberia”

(In English with simultaneous interpretation)

Speakers: **Sama’a Al-Hamdani** is a political analyst and cultural professional specializing in the Arabian Peninsula, and in particular Yemen. She is the founder and director of Dar Samaa, a cultural association based in Portugal dedicated to fostering artistic exchange and intellectual dialogue between the Arab world and the Lusophone world; **Raul Ramires** is a researcher and cultural promoter who works on issues of politics, international relations, and historical identity, focusing on the connections between the Arab world and the Iberian Peninsula. He is the director of Casa do Alentejo, a historic cultural institution in Lisbon that represents the Alentejo region.

This presentation explores the presence of certain tribes from southern Arabia—particularly from Yemen—in the Iberian Peninsula through the case of Silves (Shilb) and the Algarve. It examines the place of Gharb al-Andalus within early Islamic Iberia, the role of Arab elites linked to Yemen and tribal formations in the western Iberian Peninsula, as well as the rise of Silves as one of the main urban centers of Islamic Portugal and al-Andalus. In this way, the session offers a historical bridge between Yemen and Iberia through the history of one of the most significant Andalusí cities in the peninsula.

Thursday, May 21, 2026

19.00 - 20.30

CONFERENCE: “Freya Stark: In Search of the Incense Route”

(In English and Spanish with simultaneous interpretation)

Speaker: Dr. Cristina Mondin, archaeologist and researcher at the University of Padua.

With the participation of **Freya Lo Giudice**, entrepreneur and goddaughter of Freya Stark.

Freya Stark (1893–1993) was one of the great explorers and writers of the 20th century, known for her courage, curiosity, and sensitivity in venturing into regions that were largely inaccessible to Westerners—and even more so to women—of her time. Among her most iconic journeys is her 1930s expedition to a mysterious and scarcely mapped region in southern Arabia, Hadramaut, part of present-day Yemen.

Driven by the desire to follow the legendary Incense Route, which for centuries connected Arabia with the Mediterranean, Stark undertook a journey through deserts, canyons, and fortified cities, challenging not only geographical boundaries but also the social norms imposed on women travelers. This conference will explore Freya Stark’s role as a writer, explorer, and witness to a Yemen on the brink of transformation.

The lecture will also analyze Stark’s role in the history of exploration, her prolific literary work, and her contribution to the understanding of southern Arabia, and the Middle East in general.

In addition, Freya Stark’s goddaughter, Freya Lo Giudice, will join us and, through anecdotes and personal experiences, will reveal the more private side of what is considered one of the last great romantic travellers.

Friday, May 22, 2026

17.00 - 18.30

CONFERENCE: “Seeking Human Impact Through Heritage Preservation: UNESCO’s Cultural Strategy in Yemen”

(In English with simultaneous interpretation)

Speaker: Nuno Oliveira, Director of Programs at UNESCO in Yemen.

This conference will address the role of culture as a fundamental tool for resilience and recovery in conflict settings, focusing on the case of Yemen. Drawing on the experience and initiatives promoted by UNESCO, it will analyze how the preservation of cultural heritage—both tangible and intangible—can generate human impact, strengthening the social fabric, collective identity, and local capacities.

The lecture will examine the main challenges facing Yemeni heritage in the context of war, as well as the emergency, restoration, and training projects implemented to protect historical sites, revitalize traditional crafts, and promote economic opportunities linked to culture.

Beyond monumental conservation, the conference will highlight the human dimension of these interventions, emphasizing how culture can become a driver of hope, cohesion, and sustainable development in times of crisis.

Friday, May 22, 2026

19.00 - 20.30

SCREENING OF THE DOCUMENTARY: *Socotra, the Island of the Djinns*

(The documentary is in the Socotri language and subtitled in Spanish)

With the participation of **Jordi Esteva**, director of the documentary. In addition to being a filmmaker, Esteva is a photographer and writer. Among his works, which lie between travel literature and anthropology, are *The Arabs of the Sea*, *Journey to a Forgotten World*, and *The Nomadic Impulse*.

This documentary, based on a book of the same name, explores the mysterious island of Socotra, located in the Indian Ocean. Considered one of the most remote and unique islands in the world, Socotra preserves a unique biodiversity and almost intact ancestral traditions.

Esteva delves into the heart of the island to collect the oral accounts of its inhabitants, who pass down legends, myths, and beliefs about genies, spirits, and supernatural forces that inhabit its landscape.

Through poetic imagery and a slow-paced narrative, the documentary, entirely filmed in the Socotri language, reveals the deep bond between the Socotri people, their natural environment, and their spiritual worldview. *Socotra, the Island of the Djinns* is not only a remarkable ethnographic portrait, but also a reflection on memory, identity, and the fragility of traditional cultures in the face of modernity and oblivion.

Saturday, May 23, 2026

10.00 - 11.00

CHILDREN'S WORKSHOP: "Discover Yemen Through Play"

(The workshop will be in Spanish and Arabic)

This activity will be led by **Dima Raghis**, a teacher at Casa Árabe Language Center and head of the Arabic for Children program.

This workshop is specially designed for children to discover the rich culture of Yemen in a fun and creative way, while learning some basic words and expressions in Arabic. Through games, stories, songs, and other activities, children will explore key aspects of Yemeni life, such as its landscapes, traditional foods, colorful clothing, and, of course, its famous *jambiya*!

During this session, the children will listen to a traditional Yemeni story and learn to identify distinctive elements of Yemeni architecture, such as the mud-brick houses of Hadramaut and the tower houses of Sana'a with their colorful qamariyas. In addition, they will visit the photographic exhibition "*Hadramaut, Persistence and Memory*," located in the Column Hall of Casa Árabe.

The workshop is aimed at children aged 6 to 10. At the end, each participant will take home a self-made craft inspired by Yemen.

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