ithra by aramco

Ithra Annual Report 2024

Ithra.

Inspiring Hearts.
Enriching Minds.

Ithra is a destination that ignites cultural curiosity, stimulates knowledge exploration and inspires creativity through the power of ideas, imagination, innovation and knowledge-based experiences.

A destination like no other, Ithra is the beating heart of the Kingdom's cultural and creative ecosystem — it is where imagination is powered, ideas are born, knowledge is shared and culture is celebrated.

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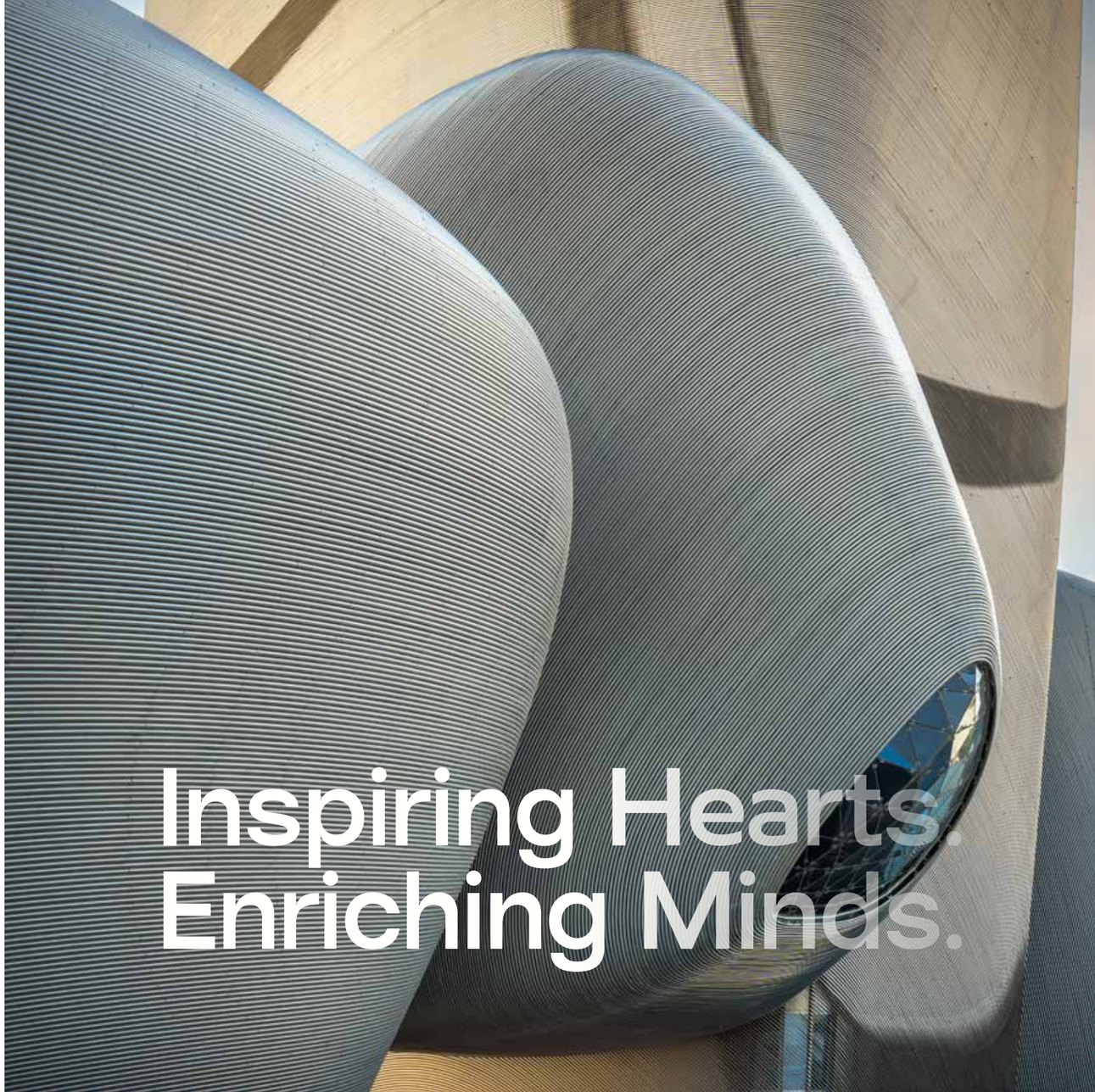
Welcome to Ithra

Located in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, an Aramco initiative popularly known as Ithra, is an institution dedicated to fostering the Kingdom's blooming creative and cultural industries and nurturing the cultural and human development of the Saudi people. It features a five-gallery museum, an exhibition hall, a performing arts theater, an innovation lab, a cinema, a state-of-the-art library, extensive education facilities and the first children's museum in the nation.

Ithra — from the Arabic word for "enrichment" — is a platform for art, creativity and culture. It is a cultural catalyst, a global gateway and an economic engine. It is Ithra's mission to foster the creative and cultural sector; and it does so by supporting the work of individuals in visual, cinematic and performing arts, as well as design and entrepreneurship. The Ithra building is an architectural masterpiece resulting from an international competition won by the Norwegian firm Snøhetta. It features a unique skin made of 360 km of individually bent steel pipes. With the steel-pipe exterior set alongside the rammed earth walls of Ithra's interior plaza, the building combines the world's newest and oldest architectural technologies to create a model of environmental sustainability that has twice been awarded Gold LEED status — Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, the world's leading green certification — both for its built environment and for its operations and maintenance. In 2018, Ithra was listed by TIME magazine as one of "the 100 greatest places in the world to visit."



Director Statement

A Year of Milestones and Cultural Enrichment at Ithra

2024 has been a landmark year for the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra)—a year of achievements, creativity and profound cultural impact. We proudly welcomed our five-millionth visitor, curated thousands of inspiring programs and expanded our reach, all while sharpening our focus on key areas of impact.

At Ithra, our mission is clear: to enrich people's lives through cultural and creative engagement. This year, we deepened our connection with diverse audiences, delivered rewarding visitor experiences that inspire and educate and worked to create a positive impact on society. Throughout all of this, sustainability—both environmental and economic—remains at the core of our values, as we work toward a future where culture is not just an expression but a driving force for progress. We see the cultural ecosystem as a powerful economic engine for Saudi Arabia. This belief is reflected in Ithra's diverse offerings, where financial sustainability plays an increasing role in our programming. From business models that support the creative sector to workshops that equip emerging talents with professional skills, our approach is built for long-term success.

Abdullah AlRashid

Director, King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra)

Inspiring the Next Generation

Investing in youth remains a priority. In 2024 our volunteer program engaged over 4,500 young people, offering valuable educational experiences and opportunities for cultural engagement. A personal highlight was "An Introduction to the Creative and Cultural Industries," which saw our summer camp introduce Saudi youth to career opportunities in the cultural sector. Ithra also continues to inspire through unforgettable performances. This year we were honored to see the iconic Egyptian composer Omar Khairat whilst the English Chamber Orchestra, in a defining moment, chose to perform a piece by a young Saudi composer they had met at an Ithra workshop. These moments are not just milestones, they represent the success of our ongoing mission to foster professionalism and creative excellence among emerging talents.

Preserving Heritage, Shaping the Future

One of our most ambitious initiatives in 2024 was the Islamic Art Conference, which featured a diverse range of programs and hosted more than 27 international speakers from over 13 countries. United under the theme 'In Praise of the Artisan', this initiative was a call to action reviving and celebrating traditional crafts as vital, sustainable professions. Among the many extraordinary artists featured, master carver Siddique Bhati created the largest and highest-quality jali wall since the 17th century. This monumental project engaged 400 artisans, passing down centuries-old craftsmanship and ensuring its legacy lives on. This effort aligns with our anticipation of Saudi Arabia's Year of Handicrafts, reinforcing Ithra's role in preserving and revitalizing cultural traditions.

Meanwhile, 2024 was also the Year of the Camel, a tribute to an enduring symbol of Saudi heritage. In partnership with Layan Culture, we mounted the exhibition The Camel Through the Ages, and during National Day celebrations, we welcomed a stunning camel caravan in collaboration with the Riyadh-based Camel Club—a spectacle that captivated audiences and honored the Kingdom's rich traditions.

Enrichment for All

True to its name, Ithra (Arabic for enrichment) is a place where culture comes alive. Whether through concerts, films, interactive library activities, exhibitions or hands-on learning experiences, we strive to offer something for everyone—families, lifelong learners, children and creative professionals alike.

As we step into an even brighter future, Ithra stands as a beacon in the Kingdom's cultural landscape. We are proud of our achievements in 2024, but our journey doesn't stop here. With renewed energy and ambition, we invite you to experience all that Ithra has to offer—because 2025 promises to be even more extraordinary.

Ithra: Transforming a Cultural Ecosystem

Entering its sixth year of being open to the public, Ithra pivoted with even more focus on the future. As a pioneering Saudi cultural institution, Ithra is charged with several tasks: nurturing the creative and cultural sector, building audiences, establishing a national baseline of cultural excellence and paving the way to the future with global cultural experiences.

Unlike most cultural centers around the world where there are established audiences and consumption models for theatrical, performance, cinematic and visual arts, Ithra's great challenges have included building audiences from scratch and working to establish content production in multiple cultural categories. To do this, the Saudi Aramco leaders who founded Ithra chose to initiate an even broader range of offerings, including a world-class library, the Kingdom's first children's museum and a component dedicated to creativity and innovation — the Idea Lab. The building would be of a huge scale with an even vaster slate of facilities and programs. Community. Culture. Creativity. Education. Intellectual development. To optimize the project, Aramco held its first architectural competition, which was won by the Norway-based firm Snøhetta. When Ithra opened to the public in 2018, it was immediately upheld as an architectural masterpiece: the building achieved Gold LEED certification - a prestigious green/sustainable credential - and it was named by TIME magazine as "one of the world's top 100 places to visit."

From the perspective of six years of operation, this report seeks to answer the questions: Has Ithra lived up to the original hopes and expectations for the Kingdom's largest CSR? Is it delivering for the people of Saudi Arabia? Is it — so far — a success?

In his opening remarks at the 2024 TecShift summit held at Ithra, Ahmad Al-Khowaiter, Aramco Executive Vice President for Technology & Innovation, commended Ithra as his lead example of turning a bold idea into a pioneering institution in the creative and cultural sector — one that "has not only led the transformation of the Kingdom's cultural landscape, it is also helping to advance human knowledge on a global scale." He continued: "Ithra illustrates a fundamental truth: game-changing ideas do not emerge fully formed in one day. It may begin with a spark, but the journey from idea to execution relies on contributions from many along the way.

Ithra embodies what this summit (TecShift) hopes to achieve. It began as a bold and ambitious idea, one that perhaps some people thought had no chance of success. But others bought in, they accepted, and eventually a whole range of stakeholders were behind Ithra — from artists to architects to cultural experts and more. They all came together, each contributing their own unique capabilities. Working together, they brought the project to success."

This is Ithra — a spark that has grown into a successful game-changing idea.While a pioneering cultural institution cannot come about without the leadership of seasoned professionals, it can have little impact if it doesn't connect with its intended audiences. In 2024, Ithra welcomed its five-millionth visitor, surpassing both its goals and the expectations of many. Because the local public was not in the habit of experiencing the offerings of a multifaceted cultural center, outreach has been critical to this success. One such offering is the Alsharqiya Gets Creative initiative which, in 2024, grew to offering over 1,600 events throughout the Eastern Province, working with more than 400 creative partners. Tens of thousands attended. It is the largest community-oriented creativity program in Saudi Arabia.

The Center is currently focusing on knowledge transfer in the cultural industries — from commissioning traditional artisans so they can share their generational knowledge in a vocational setting to offering workshops for filmmaking, performance and cinematic professionals — with the understanding that changing the landscape of the creative sector is a long-term process. A fundamental component for successful change is taking a strategic approach to sustainability. It is not enough for an artist to learn a skill or make a product. There needs to be a market and support, which can only happen on a broad scale by growing audiences and expanding the desire of the public to understand and value cultural productions. If there is no one to purchase or commission the work, the profession withers. By informing the public and offering them experiences that reinforce the value of cultural productions, Ithra is nurturing the entire sector as well as the role of Saudi culture in society. This is a process that takes time and ceaseless work; with our ongoing efforts and the ethic of excellence, as we saw in 2024, Ithra is having an impact and finding success. One 2024 effort that has further opened the public's doorways to cultural knowledge was the Ithra Library's consolidation and simplification of membership and access to its electronic assets. Now, Ithra Members can read over 60,000 e-books and audiobooks in Arabic and English in the Ithra E-Library and more than 7,000 magazines and international newspapers via the PressReader mobile app.

Other 2024 public intellectual enrichment programming included the education-oriented Ithra Academy, a talent development platform that seeks to help Saudis compete in the global market by offering hands-on and cutting-edge content designed and delivered by national and international experts. The Academy offers courses and masterclasses in six domains: creative leadership, art and design, film and performing art, literary studies, music, and science and technology.

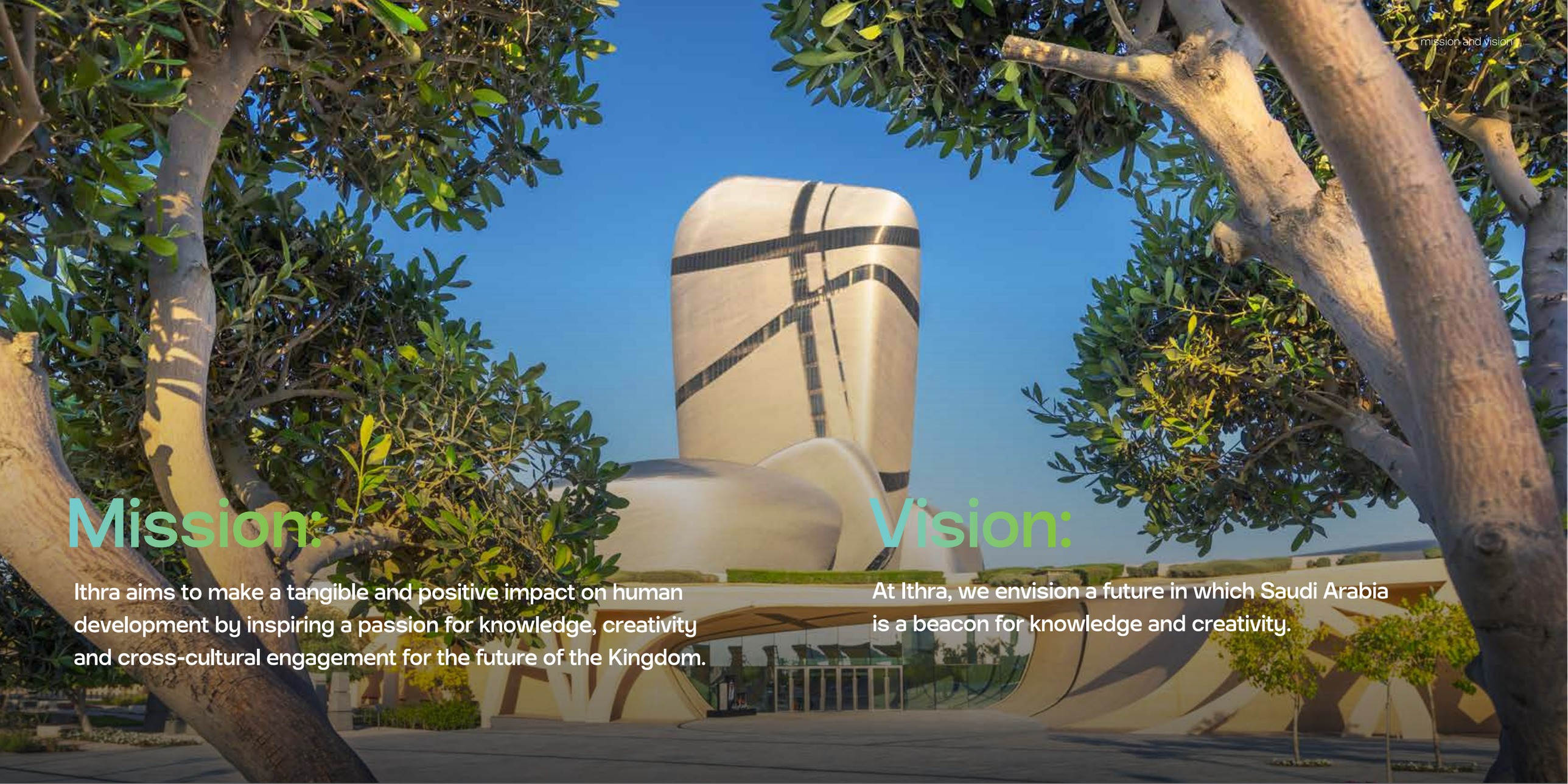
It takes creativity, inspiration and experience, but the implementation of game-changing ideas that can fundamentally transform an entire cultural ecosystem may indeed start with the smallest of sparks. Certainly, it requires contributions of many and the full participation of leadership, professionals, staff, audiences, communities and, quite often, the entire society. This is our mission. At Ithra, we are working to light the beacons of the future.

A Destinstion for Inspiration

Ithra is a world-class destination and the beating heart of Saudi Arabia's culture and creative industries, contributing to its prosperity by enabling talent, supporting content production and encouraging cross-cultural exchange that promotes social harmony and human development.

Priorities

We at Ithra aim to make a lasting impact on our audiences and ensure that we are inclusive. Our programs range from the best of international culture to projects revitalizing areas that need to be reimagined and reinvented for the future. We equip our volunteers with the skills they need in the modern international workplace. It is our goal to professionalize the Kingdom's creative and cultural ecosystem at all levels — from supporting emerging and established professionals to introducing youth to the possibilities of creative vocations.



Mission:

Ithra aims to make a tangible and positive impact on human development by inspiring a passion for knowledge, creativity and cross-cultural engagement for the future of the Kingdom.

Vision:

At Ithra, we envision a future in which Saudi Arabia is a beacon for knowledge and creativity.

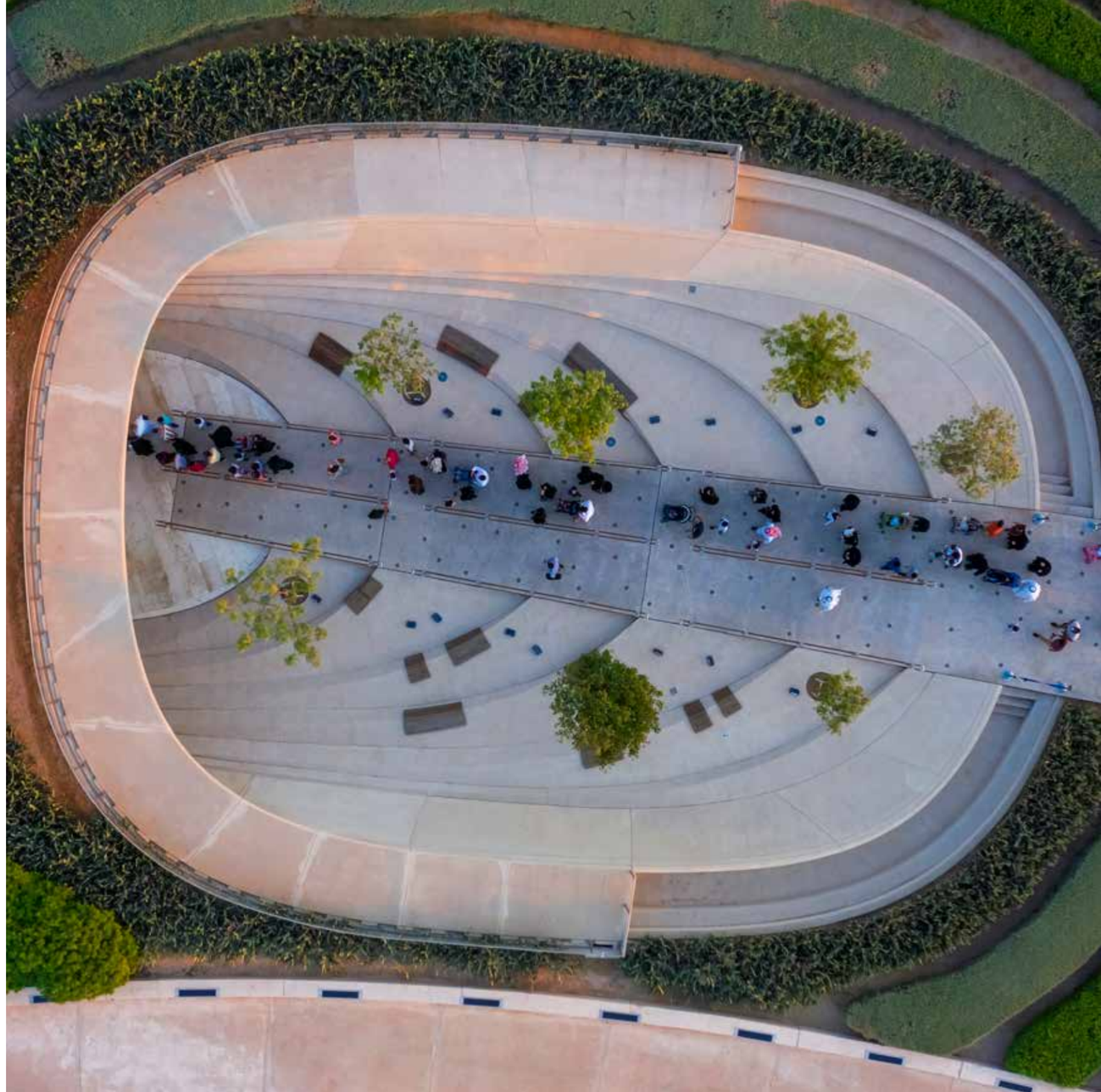
Building for the Future

The award-winning building was conceptualized as a collection of five stones symbolizing unity and mutual support. The ground level stands for the present, below is the past, and the upper elements represent the future.

Ithra's message of sustainability includes yet goes far past environmental impact, which is a genuinely impactful reality and a model for the ethic that cultural efforts can lead to growth in terms of economic as well as environmental impact. The mashrabiya—the centuries-old Middle Eastern cooling system easily recognizable as the cantilevered wooden screen windows that jut out from traditional buildings—is evident throughout the facility's architectural functions and aesthetic — a metaphorical reminder of long-established successful innovation of the Arab world regarding both energy and improving quality-of-life for people, as well as a literal concept used to turn away the actual effects of solar heat on the building's exterior.

Even before construction began, Ithra had been designed to be a beacon of environmental sustainability, specifically targeting Gold LEED certification. Ithra's architecturally unique steel pipe skin differentiates it from any other building in the world. It combines this newest building technology with one of the oldest – rammed earth, a combination of uncemented dirt, gravel and clay that is watered and then compressed into a structural form. Rammed earth has excellent insulation, humidity-control and acoustic qualities. Ithra's rammed earth elements proudly feature earth from around the Kingdom, and this use of local materials is a critical sustainability element for LEED certification. Ithra achieved certification for operations both through LEED (Gold) and became the first facility in the world to be named with the highest possible certification, the Diamond Level Certification for "Operations + Existing Buildings" in the Saudi Mostadam Program, the Ministry of Municipal, Rural Affairs and Housing's sustainability rating and certification system.

Architecturally unique throughout the world, Ithra is wrapped in 93,403 stainless steel tubes totaling more than 360 km in combined length. This steel pipe skin creates a natural air flow that removes solar heat gain from the exterior of the building, much like a mashrabiya. The mashrabiya is celebrated in Ithra's design through the steel pipe skin, the covered walkway around the building and the perforated steel gates in the Plaza.



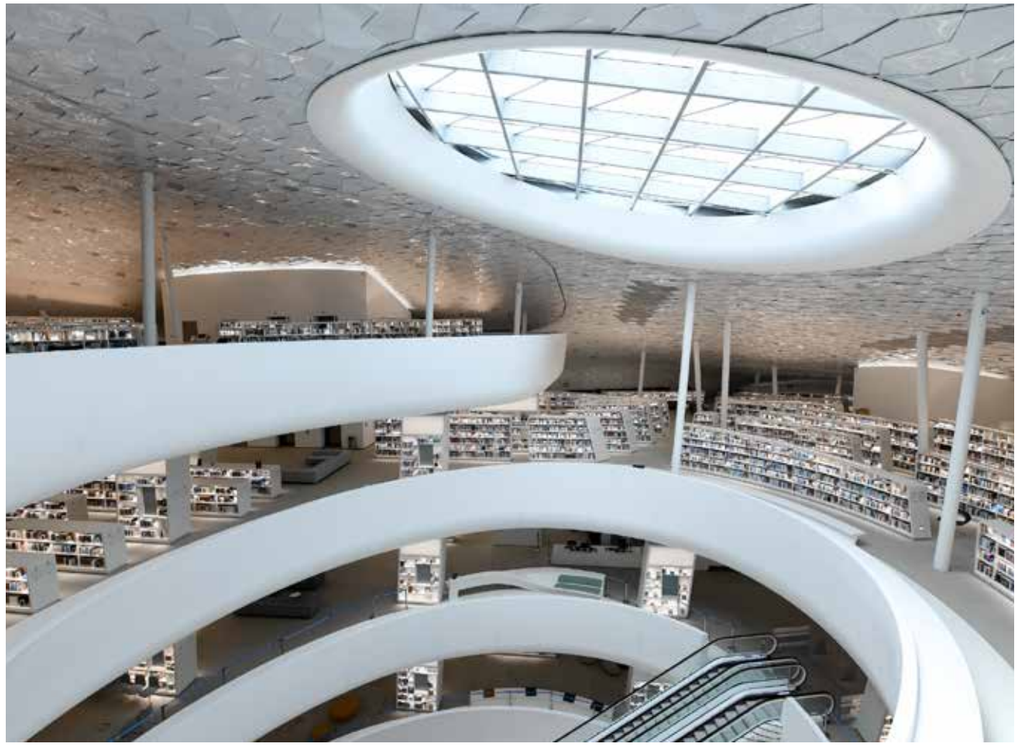
Ithra
Components

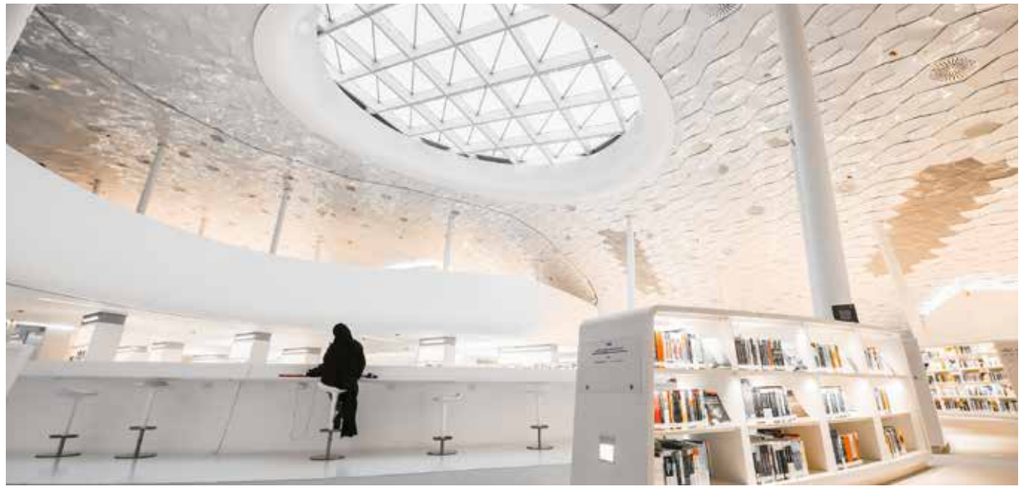
At the heart of Ithra are the people who make up our teams in programs, communications, administration, advisory, technical services and operations.

We work together in the spirit of uncompromising professionalism to ensure the public experience of Ithra is defined by our ethic of excellence that drives our nine components.

Ithra
Library

The Ithra Library is Saudi Arabia's first digitally integrated library. It is one of the largest public libraries in the region, with a collection of over 400,000 paper volumes in Arabic and English arranged across four floors. The Library offerings include audio and e-books, book fairs, signings, talks by prominent literary figures, children's programs, literary competitions such as iRead, oral history sessions and much more. In 2024, the Library consolidated and simplified access to its electronic assets: Now, with just their Ithra membership, readers can acces over 55,000 e-books and audiobooks in the Ithra E-Library and more than 7,000 magazines and international newspapers via the PressReader mobile app.





Ithra
Museum

The Ithra Museum houses five captivating galleries and organizes dynamic programs both within the Center and beyond. Gallery One (Funoon) celebrates international and Saudi contemporary art. Gallery Two (Ajyaal), hosts diverse exhibitions with a focus on art and Saudi heritage. Gallery Three (Kunooz) showcases curated displays that highlight the depth, elegance and reach of Islamic art, design, and history. Gallery Four (Rehlaat) invites visitors to explore the natural history of the Arabian Peninsula. The Archive Gallery brings Aramco's history to life through significant objects and archival treasures. Additionally, the Museum presents major exhibitions in the iconic Great Hall.

Ithra
Idea Lab

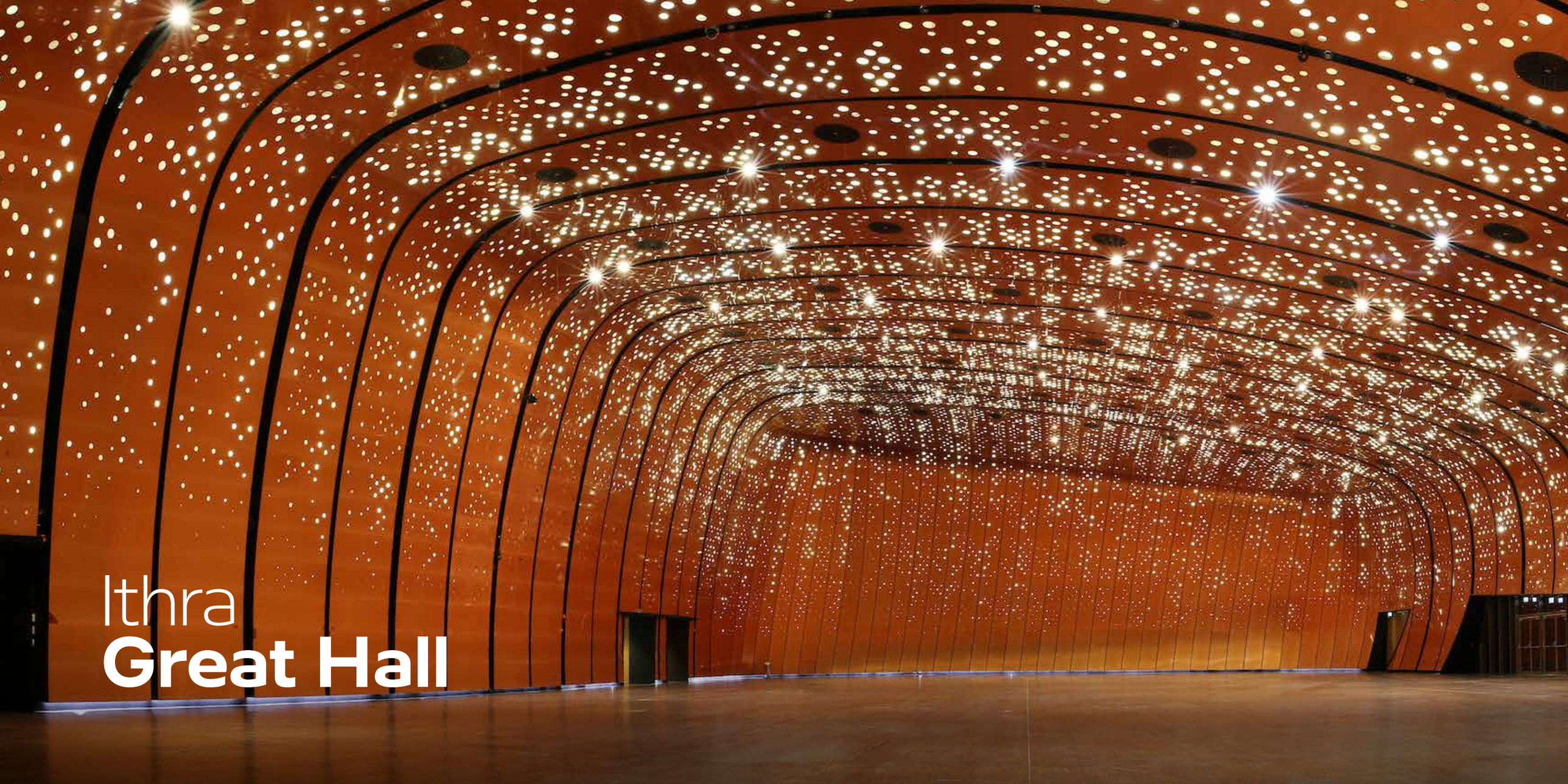
Ithra's Idea Lab is an innovation facility where aspiring creators, inventors and entrepreneurs can develop their ideas and transform them into prototypes and marketable products. It features a materials library, a state-of-the-art immersive lab, design exhibitions, 3D printers, meeting spaces and an amphitheater for presenting projects. The Idea Lab produces several of Ithra's major programs, such as the Tanween creativity conference and Creative Solutions.

Ithra **Theater**

The 900-seat Ithra Theater is a world-class opera-style stage venue that hosts a diverse program of Saudi and international productions, performances, ceremonies, conferences and talks. Since opening the doors to the public in 2018, the Ithra Theater has presented 74 productions from around the world, accounting for the sale of over 252,000 tickets for 310 performances over six years.

Ithra
Cinema

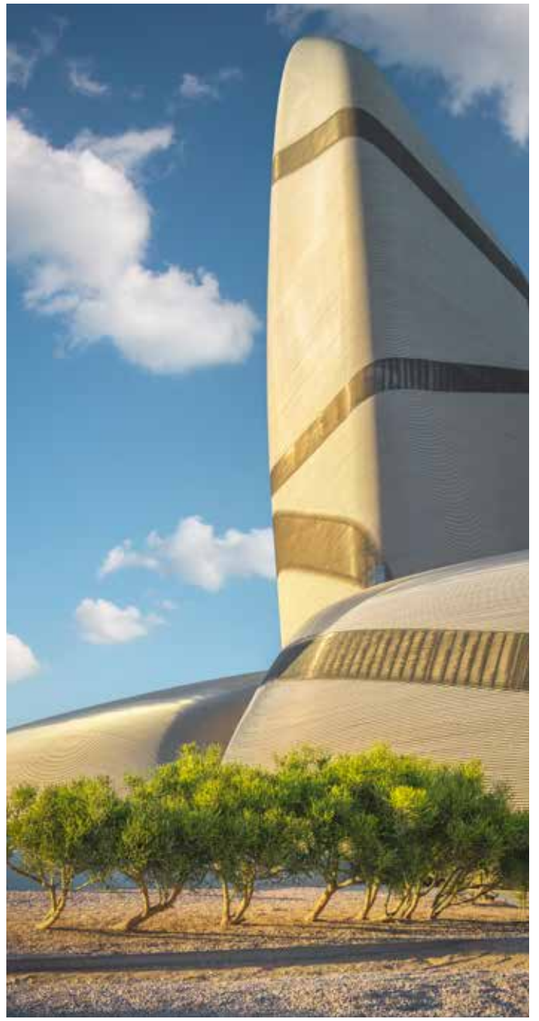
The design of the 310-seat Ithra Cinema was inspired by the transformative beauty of the aurora borealis. Ithra Cinema's mission is to provide a platform for diverse voices and global perspectives, engaging audiences of all demographics while celebrating artistic integrity and cultural diversity. The Cinema offers a screening venue catering to the interests of Ithra's diverse audiences with events to engage and inspire while functioning as a production platform, supporting the Kingdom's burgeoning film industry talent. Ithra Film Production is now one of the Kingdom's leading independent film production houses. Movies supported by Ithra have been shown commercially, in cinemas, at film festivals such as Cannes, the Red Sea International Film Festival, and the Toronto International Film Festival, and on streaming services. The Ithra Cinema is a founding partner and perennial host of the Saudi Film Festival which completed its tenth edition in 2024. And this year, the Ithra Cinema brought a special selection from the Annecy International Animation Film Festival, the highlights of which included La Frontera – The Frontier, Entre deux sœurs – In Between Sisters, and The Spirit of the Forest, among others

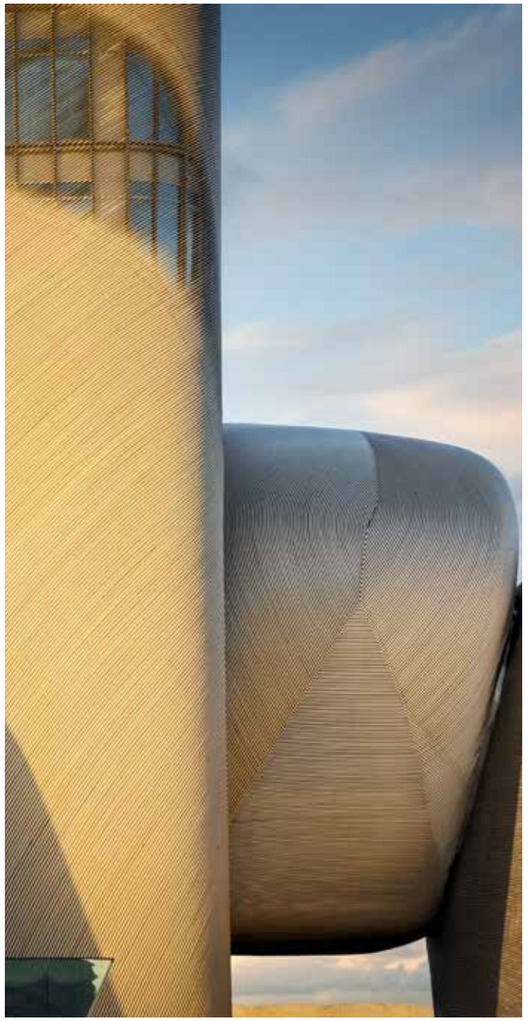

Ithra
Great Hall

Ithra's 1,600 square meter Great Hall offers visitors a window to the world as it hosts traveling exhibitions, major events, conferences and installations designed to expand the visitor's worldview with cross-cultural displays covering the arts, sciences, history and more in an expansive and unique copper-lined space.

Ithra
Tower

Soaring 18 stories into the sky, the Ithra Tower houses a wide range of educational facilities ranging from senate-style boardrooms and laboratories to multimedia and art studios and even a state-of-the-art immersive lab. The Ithra Tower hosts workshops in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math), literature, media and creativity, offering skills-based programs for people across all age groups and interests.





Ithra
Energy Exhibit

Ithra's ever-popular Energy Exhibit explores a world of discoveries in energy science through interactive displays, advanced technologies and multimedia. Established by Aramco in its original form as a traveling exhibit during the 1950s, the Energy Exhibit found a permanent home in its current location in the late 1980s, when it was the only major museum in the Eastern Province. It has since evolved into a state-of-the-art facility that offers exciting and engaging educational journeys that explore how natural resources and alternative forms of energy are harnessed safely and efficiently.

Ithra
Children's
Museum

The Ithra Children's Museum is the first museum in the Kingdom for children up to the age of 12 and their caregivers. Our youngest visitors are offered an array of exciting opportunities to enrich their lives through interactive play-based experiences, including exhibitions, classes and workshops. The Museum includes the Cave of Creative Stories, a section dedicated to Islamic arts and a hands-on environmental laboratory, in addition to the mezzanine floor, where young visitors up to the age of five years can play, learn and explore. The museum also hosts a range of educational programs for children, from workshops to seasonal camps and annual events.

Ithra
Volunteer Community

Ithra's Volunteer Services aims to help develop youth and individuals' commitment to society and future generations as well as creating a new generation experienced in service and the creative and cultural sector. In 2024, more than 4,500 volunteers generated over 172,000 volunteer hours. Ithra is officially accredited and certified by the Ministry of Labor and Social Development; it is the first entity to develop and manage professional volunteering programs and services in Saudi Arabia, surpassing all of the Ministry's Edama's standards to achieve the highest level attainable.

Our Team

Ithra's team comprises people from all over the world. We currently have 19 nationalities represented among our team, which numbers over 1,200 persons, including contractors and Aramco employees.
Ithra's team contains a variety of professionals whose skills are especially relevant to Ithra, including artists, educators, writers, technicians, conservation experts, theater managers, film producers, XR experts, sound and vision professionals, museum curators, architects and librarians among many others.

2024
A Pivotal Year

Ithra witnessed unprecedented growth in the number of participants and visitors in 2024 — including the five-millionth visitor since opening to the public. With more programs, exhibitions and theatrical programs than ever, turnout surpassed expectation, with more than 1.2 million visitors. Following is a series of short descriptions of Ithra's major events along with a sample of new programs and initiatives of 2024.

timeline

Ithra
Major Events

Islamic Art Confrence:
In Praise of the Artisan

In partnership with the Alfozan Award for Mosque Architecture, Ithra's 2024 Islamic Art Conference demonstrated the living nature of Islamic artistic traditions through the work of contemporary artisans, to recognize the value of craft and traditional arts professions. The conference explored the current state of craft in the Islamic world. The November event featured lectures, panel discussions, workshops, exhibitions, film screenings and demonstrations by skilled craftsmen. The conference was complemented by 11 exhibitions showcasing the rich history and influence of traditional arts and crafts in the Islamic world. The exhibitions were led by In Praise of the Artisan which examines the lives and works of master craftsmen from around the world with a special focus on major centers of Islamic craftsmanship such as Makkah, Istanbul, Damascus, Cairo, Delhi, Samarkand, Fez, Granada and Terengganu. Comprising more than 150 works, including pieces never before displayed, the exhibition showcases highlights from three major collections, including Al-Sabah and Tareq Rajab in Kuwait, as well as Ithra. The exhibition features an extraordinary range of historical and contemporary works including some of the most significant commissions of Islamic art in recent years.

Tanween

The seventh edition of Tanween — Ithra's annual creativity conference – invites audiences and creatives for six days of workshops, talks, masterclasses, exhibitions, panel discussions, design challenges and a variety of creative activations under the theme of Fail Forward. The conference was a platform for over 160 designers and creatives from 22 countries. Visitors saw the outcomes of projects from the previous Tanween Challenges, saw the stunning display of exhibited works of 50 design and architecture graduates from nine different countries and enjoyed the Day with an Expert program of design masterclasses. The second edition of the Tanween Mega Challenge gathered creatives from all around the world to develop design solutions to enrich the pilgrim's Hajj experience.

Motivated by humanitarian efforts to improve pilgrims' accessibility and comfort, Tanween challenged 70 innovators from across the globe to design sustainable and empowering solutions that improve services during the Hajj season.

The Mega Challenge targets three tracks in need of innovative solutions: health and wellbeing, waste management and communication. Winning ideas were submitted by Ithra to a list of qualified sponsors for evaluation and, pending approval, implementation.

Tanween in Numbers 2024

1 Mega Challenge

100 Opportunities Created

26 Speakers

62 Activities

5 Exhibitions

9 Workshops

Alsharqiya Gets Creative

Alsharqiya Gets Creative is a creativity initiative with events held throughout the Eastern Province. The fifth edition featured more than 1,600 activities in 10 cities, and included more than 70 workshops and 30 exhibitions as well as designathons, hackathons, marathons and competitions. For the 2024 edition, Ithra worked with four main partners, 19 strategic partners, 400+ creative partners and five media partners. The programs included a creativity market, mural painting, beautification projects, live performances, career discovery workshops, musical training, paddle competitions, football training, theater programs, art exhibitions and much more.

The fifth edition of the initiative was commemorated with Abwab Alsharqyia, a stunning hand-crafted installation located on the Dammam Waterfront. Featuring five traditional doors from the region, alongside the Alsharqiya Gets Creative Door that symbolizes Alsharqiya's creative diversity and has a creative twist on traditional ornamentation, this commissioned collection was handed as a gift to the people of the Eastern Province in celebration of the region's creative roots and as symbolic gateways to a bright future. Ithraeyat Magazine had also contributed with its 23rd issue that featured the overarching theme of Doors.

2034 World Cup
Announcement

There was a historic announcement at Ithra on December 11. The announcement was to share that Saudi Arabia will host the 2034 World Cup. With the announcement, there was four days of music, games, live performances and football-themed festivities to mark the event. Attracting over 73,000 visitors, the celebration included a meet-and-greet with players from Al-Qadsiah football club, a drone show, a trivia competition and a Football Freestyler Show – all in support of the announcement. Ithra was featured in the Kingdom's official World Cup 2034 announcement song and by the Saudi Tourism Authority as one of the leading national landmarks.

SYNC
Digital Wellbeing Initiative

The Sync Digital Wellbeing Summit 2024 was held on May 23 – 22, during which time Ithra had over 10,000 visitors. A call-to-action on the theme Confronting the Digital Paradox, the summit considered how to ensure that the future of technology is serving us, rather than vice versa. It featured over 70 speakers — industry professionals, academics, scientists, healthcare providers, government officials and innovation experts – from around the world, ranging from Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak and Wired magazine co-founder Kevin Kelly to the renowned Portuguese football manager José Mourinho and AI data scientist Rumman Chowdhury.

One of Sync's major 2024 achievements was the publication of the Global Digital Wellbeing Survey that was completed by over 35,000 adults from 35 countries around the world. This study, the largest of its kind, provides data and insights about we how to reap the benefits of the information age while simultaneously promoting health, safety and social cohesion.

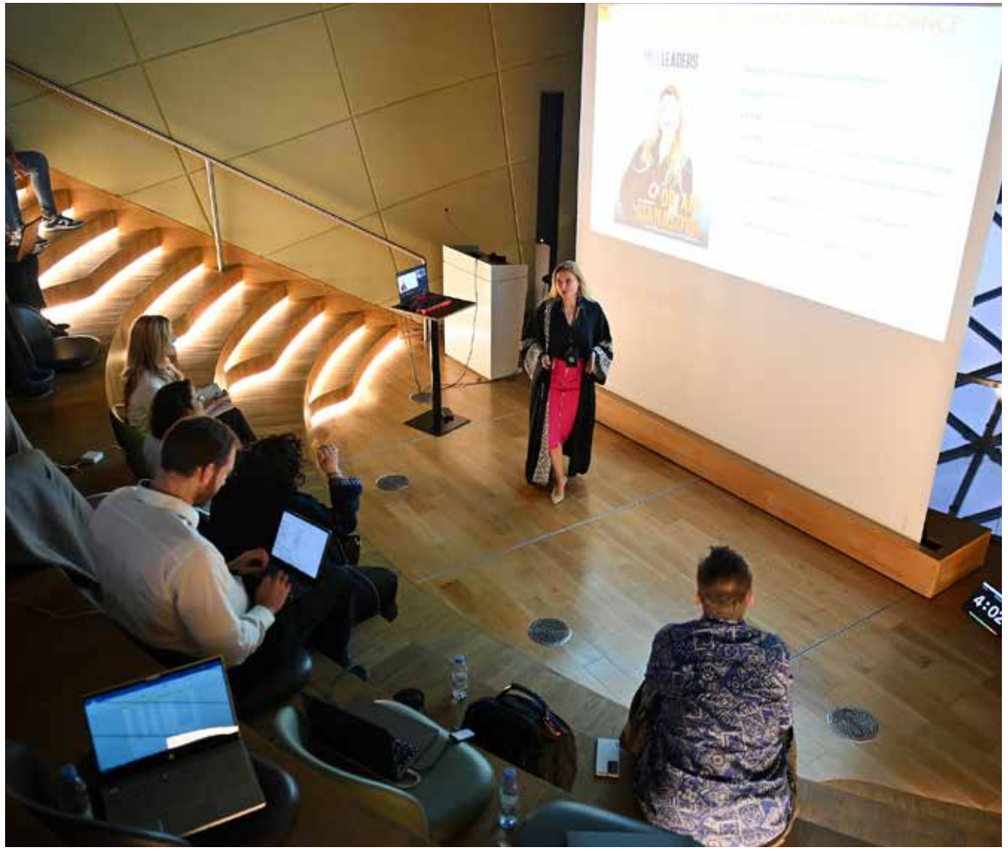
F1® in Schools

Ithra's Great Hall was transformed into an immersive hub for the 2024 F1® in Schools national finals, a program Ithra supports nationally. The event showcased the productions of the 120 national final students from Dhahran, al-Hasa, Riyadh, Jiddah, Madinah and, for the first time, Abha. They were divided into 20 teams who worked to develop prototypes under the supervision of 38 professionals over six months. The event also featured a VR experience to offer visitors an authentic taste of high-speed action and eight simulators so they could test drive an F1® vehicle in real time. This year's theme for the STEAM-based (science, technology, engineering, art and math) learning program was Overtake the Impossible. This was the first year Saudi Arabia hosted the F1® in Schools World Finals.

iRead
The Ithra Reading Program

iRead is a reading competition that has had 200,000 participants since its inception in 2012. For its ninth edition, iRead expanded to all Arab countries, leading to a massive increase in applications that reached more than 106,000, wherefrom 50 qualified contestants reached the final stages of the iRead camp.The competition grants the Reader of the Year Award to the student who writes the best description and critical reception of books read during the academic year.

Creative Solutions



The Creative Solutions Residency Program is a four-month digital storytelling residency with a focus on utilizing immersive technologies. Residents are guided by global experts in immersive tech, culminating in the production of working prototypes. This edition featured 28 participants and six immersive technology experiences designed by emerging Saudi-based creatives and storytellers.

Saudi
Film Festival

The 2024 Saudi Film Festival, the 10th edition hosted by Ithra and organized by the Saudi Cinema Association and supported by the Film Commission of the Ministry of Culture, showcased Saudi contributions to the film industry and offers professional development opportunities for the cinema sector. The 10th edition included film and screenplay

competitions as well as screenings, red carpet events, panel discussions, script development labs, a production market, VR experiences, book signings, masterclasses, seminars and workshops. This edition explored the sci-fi genre and put a spotlight on Indian films outside the commercial lens of Bollywood. The Golden Palm for best actor and actress were awarded to Hajjan›s lead actors Omar Alatwi and Tulin Essam, a film funded and produced by Ithra.

Ithra

Programs and Initiatives

Exhibitions

During 2024, the Ithra Museum curated and mounted a series of major exhibitions highlighted by the suite of shows created with an eye to the 2024 Islamic Art Conference which followed the theme of the lead exhibit, In Praise of the Artisan. Comprising more than 150 works, including newly commissioned works, Gallery Three exhibition examines work and processes of master craftsmen from major centers of Islamic traditional arts around the world. Complementary exhibitions include The Continuation of a Craft: Saudi Traditional Costumes (G2) and Crafts in Conversation: A Convergence Between Traditional and Contemporary Art (G3). The Camel Through the Ages (G2) featured a collection of visual art celebrating that 2024 was the official Year of the Camel in Saudi Arabia. Other major exhibitions included a retrospective of the leading Muslim world photographer Peter Sanders and a groundbreaking retrospective of the paintings of the late Etel Adnan, Between East and West. Of note, the Ithra-curated Net Zero was awarded the prestigious iF Design Award in the Interior Architecture and Cultural Exhibition category.

Theater
Events

In 2024, Ithra Theater continued to build upon the successes of previous years, offering a diverse range of national, regional and international artists of the highest calibre. At the heart of the programming are Ithra Theater's ongoing goals: building an audience base by engaging the local community; establishing Ithra Theater as a premier international venue; building and promoting local capabilities and talent; ensuring operational and financial sustainability. This year's international showcases included the international hit, Metaverse of Magic, the mesmerizing talent of Le Trio Joubran, classical concerts by the world-renowned English Chamber Orchestra and also the high-flying artistry, acrobatics and puppetry of Circus 1903. Ithra has established itself as a leading venue for stars of the Arabic stage and 2024 was no exception, with the dazzling and acclaimed performances of Faia Younan, Walaa al Jundi, Humood Al Khudher and Omar Khairat.

Ithra Academy

Ithra Academy is a talent development house that offers learning programs designed to empower and enable artists, professionals and ambitious individuals to play an active role nationally and internationally in the creative and cultural sector. The Academy aims to support skill and talent development in the creative and cultural sector through focused, hands-on and cutting-edge content designed and delivered by experts in six domains: creative leadership, art and design, film and performing arts, literature, music, and science and technology.

Content Initiative

As part of Ithra's efforts in supporting and developing Arabic content, in 2024 Ithra released the third edition of the Ithra Content Initiative in collaboration with the Cultural Development Fund. In 2024, 52 winning projects were selected. They received over 30 MM in funding as well as more than 1,500 advisory service hours that resulted in 270 novel Arabic language projects that included documentary films, literature, translation, online platforms, XR content, music, podcasts and video games.

Cultural Events

Searching for Light:
Peter Sanders

Searching for Light was a major retrospective featuring 84 iconic works by renowned British photographer Peter Sanders. The exhibition followed Sanders' career from his famous photos of 1960s music icons through the five decades he has spent as the preeminent photographer of the Muslim world. Searching for Light featured images from his 1971 pilgrimage along with photographs from his journeys to remote lands around the globe and encounters with remarkable people.

Ithra Art Prize

The Ithra Art Prize award is one of the most valuable art prizes in the world, and in February, Saudi artist Obaid Alsafi unveiled his Ithra Art Prize-winning artwork Palms in Eternal Embrace at the AlUla Arts Festival. The sixth edition of the prize was the first in collaboration with Arts AlUla.

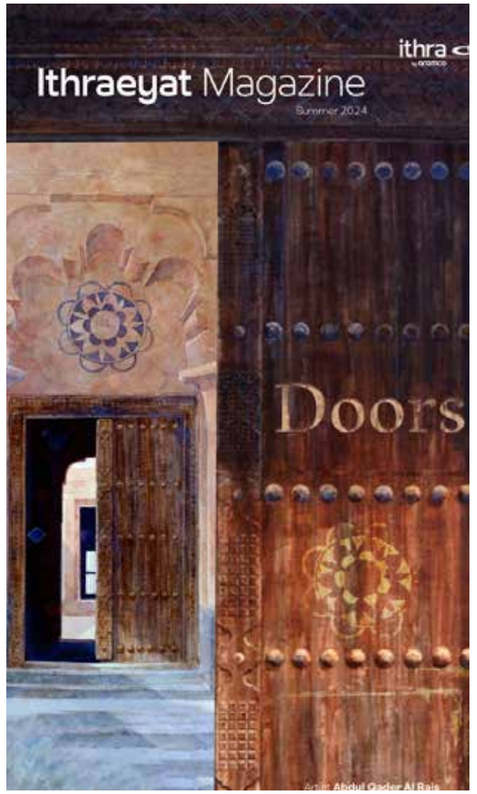
National Day

Ithra's festivities for the Kingdom's 94th National Day welcomed 108,000 visitors of all ages and the events included the third edition of Sing-Along for Saudi, theatrical and musical performances, traditional Saudi dances, workshops and interactive activities. The theme for this year's celebration focused on harmony, highlighting the beauty of the Kingdom's diversity and the spirit of community between its peoples.

Youth Camp

About 1,000 children attended the perennially sold-out Ithra Summer Camp and Winter Camp in 2024. In the summer program, the campers learned about the importance of sustainability with interactive hands-on/-minds-on programs on the theme of Eco-Crafts. The Ithra Youth Summer Program, in its third year, introduced dozens of participants between the ages of 13 and 18 from hundreds of applicants to the Creative and Cultural Industries, including a behind-the-scenes view of Ithra.

Ithraeyat Magazine



Available in English and Arabic, Ithraeyat is Ithra's award-winning art and culture magazine. Ithraeyat —Arabic for "enriching stories" — is a Saudi-inspired platform with an expansive international outlook that delivers a mosaic of creative and original stories collected from across the Kingdom, the region and beyond. Ithraeyat's 2024 activations included Tanween and Youth Camp workshops focused on storytelling and cultural journalism. The magazine also won Best Content and Visual Creator at the 2024 Netty Awards and Transform Awards MEA 2024 for typography, visual Identity and creative strategy.

New Acquisitions

The Ithra Museum actively collects unique objects of historic cultural value and works of art, contemporary and traditional. The 2024 acquisitions are highlighted by acquisitions commissioned for In Praise of the Artisan. Following are a few examples of recent acquisitions:

Jali walls

Master carver/supervisor: Ustad Siddique Bhati, Master fitter/carver: Ustad Heder Ali, and Master polisher/carver: Ustad Shahrukh Khan, and Saray Design . These two monumental Jali lattice screen walls were carved by hand from pure white marble by master stone carvers in Makrana, Rajasthan (India). The design was inspired by the religious complex of Khwaja Salim Chishti at Fatehpur Sikri (81-1580 CE/ 988 AH) commissioned by the Mughal emperor, Akbar. According to Abdul Karim Crites, a scholar of Mughal art, “Nothing of this scale or quality has been created since the seventeenth century.”

Makrana Rajasthan, India. 2024 CE/ 1445 AH.
Carved white marble.
Height: 3 meters, length: 16 meters.
Ithra Museum 2024.0028

Zillij and plasterwork Dado

By Master craftsmen Zine Abderrahim (Zillij tiles) and Abdel Latif Riffi Mtaoui (plaster carving)
Inspired by designs in the Alhambra palace in Granada, craftsmen from the medieval city of Fez worked together to create this zillij tile and plaster dado. This piece pays homage to the enduring legacy of those craftsmen who migrated from Spain to Fez during the 15th century CE/ 11th century AH.

Fez, Morocco. 2024 CE/ 1445 AH
Glazed tiles and carved plaster
Height: 3 meters, length: 10 meters
Ithra Museum 2024.0031

Success and **Partnerships**

To address the obstacles and challenges facing the world today, Ithra believes in the need for cooperation, knowledge sharing, and exchanging ideas in order to promote cultural and civilizational communication with the rest of the world, exploring new sources of energy and human potential, inspiring people, sparking curiosity and supporting innovation. As a result of these efforts, Ithra has won awards and accolades that have documented its successes and how the Center's leadership is driving change in the Kingdom and enhancing its global presence.

1,200,000+
Visitors

2,100,000+
Followers

170,000+
Volunteer Hours

4,500+
Volunteers

8,200,000
Website Visitors

6,022
Media Mentions

36,000
School Visitors

5,900,000+
Visitors since Opening

Ithra
in Numbers

Awards and Certificates

As the result of hard work, creativity and its ethic of excellence, Ithra won many awards, certifications and recognitions during 2024, including:

Mentl Awards

- Best Mental Health Initiative in Saudi Arabia Sync

Sync has been honored with the Mentl Awards 2024 in Dubai for Best Mental Health Initiative in Saudi Arabia, showcasing its exceptional impact in the field. The awards celebrated groundbreaking contributions to mental health from both public and private sectors across the region.

MarCom Awards

- Saudi National Day video (Platinum)

Ithra was awarded platinum for the 2024 Saudi National Day video. The MarCom Awards, administered by the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals (AMCP), honor excellence in marketing and communication, recognizing the creativity, dedication, and generosity of industry professionals.

NYX Awards

- Music Video Award category (winner)Watani Ana

Ithra has been awarded the 2024 NYX Award for the music video Watani Ana, which celebrates Saudi Arabia›s cultural richness, highlighting unique regional elements and honoring the nation’s heritage through art. The NYX Award is an internationally recognized prize for excellence across a wide range of industries, including advertising, marketing, communications, design, and video production.

King Salman Charter for Architecture and Urbanism Award

- Built Projects category

Ithra was awarded the inaugural King Salman Charter for Architecture and Urbanism Award on August 11 in Riyadh, prestigious initiative designed to recognize and celebrate architectural excellence aligned with the values of the King Salman Charter in Saudi Arabia. Ithra was one of the five winners in the highly competitive field.

SMARTIES Awards

- «Inspire your World» campaign
- Social Media Marketing category (Silver)
- «Inspire your World» campaign
- Brand Experience category (Bronze)
- «Inspire your World» campaign
- Cross Digital Media Marketing category (Bronze)

Honoring the most effective, innovative and impactful modern marketing, the SMARTIES Awards are part of the WARC Rankings, which is the global authority on advertising and media effectiveness.

Transform Awards MEA

- Gold for “Best Use of Typography” Ithraeyat Magazine
- Silver for “Best Visual Identity” from the Lifestyle and Wellbeing Sector
- Ithraeyat Magazine Highly Commended for Best Creative Strategy (Consumer) Ithraeyat Magazine

Ithraeyat magazine received awards and recognition across three categories at the 2024 Transform Awards MEA. The Transform Awards are an extremely prominent accolade in the field of branding and creativity.

Critics Awards for Arab Films

- Best Music – Hajjan

The Critics Awards for Arab Films is an initiative created by the Arab Cinema Center (ACC). The ceremony takes place annually at the Cannes Film Festival. Produced by Ithra Film Production, Hajjan received the award at the eighth edition of the Critics Awards for Arab Films at Cannes.

Hollywood Arab Film Festival

- Jury Award Special Mention for Directing – Hajjan
- Jury Award Special Mention for Acting – Hajjan

The third edition of the Hollywood Arab Film Festival was part of the annual celebration of Arab Heritage Month. One award was presented to Abu Bakr Shawky for his outstanding direction of the film. Another was presented to Saudi actor Omar Alatawi for his performance.

Gulf Cinema Festival

- Best Feature – Hajjan
- Best Actor – Hajjan (Omar Alatwi)
- Best Cinematography – Hajjan

The Gulf Cinema Festival showcases the best films in the GCC. Ithra received the awards — top festival accolades — at the Gulf Cinema Festival held April in Riyadh.

iF Design Award in Interior Architecture and Cultural Exhibitions

- Net Zero Exhibition

The Net Zero exhibition at Ithra was awarded the iF Design Award — one of the most important and prestigious design awards in the world — in the Interior Architecture and Cultural Exhibition category.

Volunteer Award

- National Award for Voluntary Work, in the private sector category

Ithra received the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development’s National Award for Voluntary Work, in the private sector category, for the third time.

Partnerships and **Collaborations**