

# Khalifa Fund Projects

## Maestro Commercial Enterprises

· Ali Al Saloom, of course everyone knows and recognizes that name, as you are the Emirati icon and self-appointed ambassador of the Middle East, however, people would love to know more about your childhood and background.

I grew up in Baniyas, in a rural area, almost out in the desert. There I went to school and we lived a really very traditional life. My Emirati brothers and sisters, usually get surprised, to know that I come from this region and capable of speaking English. But from an early age, my passion for travel and my interest in cultural studies was ignited by the opportunity to travel with my beloved father, an academic and avid traveler. In the years to follow, I embraced new cultures and languages such as English, South Korean and German.

My dream was to be an Air Force Pilot, but my dad guided me in a different direction, towards hospitality. He inspired me by suggesting that I could be the first Emirati, to get such a degree and that the late Sheikh Zayed our beloved father of the Nation, would be proud of me. What more of a motivation would be needed? Of course I could not resist the fact of being the first Emirati in this field. I got a scholarship from Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and graduated 2003 in Hospitality Management from University of Central Florida, USA.

· From where was the start of your working experience?

Highly motivated and with a bachelor degree in my hand, I moved back to my country, and my father, who was of course very proud of me, had already thought of few options for me to hook up in my first job. When we drove towards the Beach Rotana Hotel, I was really ambitious thinking of a nice office and such things, that come along with a Senior Management position. Well, things turned out to be a bit different: my first job was "Door-Man"; yes, a bit surmising but it was because my father believed that the best way to learn about this industry, is by working in almost every position, starting from the guy who welcomes people to the hotel as simple as that. I started my career as an Emirati with a University Degree from the very first step on the ladder. I moved on to become a concierge officer then worked as a Receptionist and eventually became Assistant Front Office Manager. And guess what?! I am so proud of this priceless experience, alhamdulillah.

· What were the following steps that ended with having your famous brand "ask-ali"?

During my years abroad, I was often the only Arab amongst my peers in the hospitality college and whenever during classes or discussion any subject related to our Arab and Gulf region or Islam came up, the common advice of my classmates was to you guessed it "Ask Ali". So that's how I got my nickname and it sticks with me. After my return to my country from Canada, I joined a government job and the more I interact with people from around the world as our capital grows and welcomes more international visitors, I started to realize that our country lacks Emirati men in the tourist guiding field, also we lack Emirati cultural consultants or experts, or even people who speak in English and master the art of conveying the inter-cultural messages between us as Emirati's and the expatriates community. I believe this is why one day I woke up and felt that my destiny and my purpose in life was to be that person who bridge these gaps between the East and West, hence, the idea of ask-ali.com came as a first step toward inking my promise of making a difference and taking an action.

I simply wake up everyday, Thanking Allah that I come from Zayed land, the UAE, and I'm proud of it, and therefore it's my duty to tell the world about it. I wanted to tell the real authentic stories about my country and I wanted to break down this cultural barriers and help people from all parts of the world to a better understanding and a more respectful and peaceful life. ask-ali.com was the gateway to a bigger picture.

With big plans, great enthusiasm, the readiness to work hard and completely empty pockets, I knocked the doors of Khalifa Fund. I don't know, if I convinced them or confused them – they supported me and so Maestro Commercial Enterprises, the holding of the Ask Ali Brand, the Cultural Consultancy Embrace Arabia and my online TV platform One TVO was born.

Via the Ask-Ali portal I have received and answered meanwhile more than 5000 questions. I love the challenging questions. And don't even think, I knew it all. But I had made a committed and so I did my research to find the answers and broaden my own knowledge about my own country and culture. Like this, I went deeper into our culture and tradition, capturing more and more reasons and explanations behind our traditions cultural codes. And this knowledge should not be hidden, I feel committed to share it with our own people and with everybody, who would like to know a bit more about us as Muslims, Arabs and Emiratis.

· Can you please elaborate on the role Khalifa fund had played in starting and growing your business?

Last June I had one of the greatest moments in my life, when His Highness General Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces and Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council shook my hand and presented me with the Khalifa Fund Business Award 2010 for the successful start up of Maestro Commercial Enterprises. Khalifa Fund believed in me and my idea and supported me in my journey to become an entrepreneur from the first moment. I'm proud to take this step and I have learned a lot from this partnership with them, I'm grateful for their kind advice and guidance and as you read above its because of Khalifa Fund Award I was blessed with shaking hands with one of my heroes in life, His Highness General Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and until today I cherish every single second of seeing and meeting him.

· What are your future plans?

My ultimate goal is to create a better understanding and make this world a place of peaceful and respectful coexistence of people from various cultural backgrounds. This journey takes me along all communication highways that are reachable.

I hope to continue being an inspirational inter-cultural awareness guide, trainer, and a professional speaker. I hope to get the chance to facilitate many more infotainment sessions, creating a greater level of cultural Awareness about the UAE and the region. And I will do my best to be a role-model as an entrepreneur, helping the young generation of Emirati brothers and sister on their way to enter the business world with confidence and a great vision to support our country's economy by introducing their own business ideas to the market one day soon inshallah.

And yes, more Media-production are in the pipeline and last not least my series of Ask Ali: Miniguide publications such as the Ask Ali: A guide to Abu Dhabi, will be continued with updated books and new editions of the "Ask Ali" guide-books. Updated Abu Dhabi editions and a new Dubai edition are out in the market by now.

· What are your ambitions?

I no longer work, I create. I have lots of ideas in my mind and hope to achieve as many as I can.

I can feel every day, that what I am doing is touching hearts and souls of people and that I really have a gift – I can connect people of different cultures. I can help them to understand and appreciate each other better. And as long as people understand and appreciate each other, they can live peacefully together.

Well, respect and peace is the mission. Inshallah I can contribute my humble share to make this world a better place.

And this is what keeps me going...Trust me, not the wealth, a self-starter will gain. Just kidding; I am still an Emirati without a Maserati. But guess what - I have at my little family farm an Arabian horse, a Saluki dog, an Arabian Mau cat, rabbits, chicken and goats. I love the simple nature, and as long as I'm attached to my environment and my heritage then I'll definitely reach my objectives and aim in life.

I am a happy person because I found my purpose of being here: You Ask – and I answer.

