

Years of Culture to Debut New Children's Book at QIFF, Celebrating Qatar-USA Cultural Legacy and Qatar's Natural Heritage

"The Mysterious Desert Delicacy" developed in partnership with Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press

8 January 2026 - Doha, Qatar: The Years of Culture initiative will unveil a new children's book, *The Mysterious Desert Delicacy*, at the Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF), taking place from 14–24 January 2026. Developed in collaboration with Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press (HBKU Press), the book is a creative legacy project of the Qatar-USA 2021 Year of Culture, celebrating cultural storytelling, environmental heritage, and culinary discovery.

Written by American author Allison Taylor and illustrated by Damon Guthrie, the book introduces young readers to Qatar's rare and culturally treasured desert truffle (*fagga*) through a tale of adventure and friendship.

The English edition will be available for purchase in the QIFF Juniors storytelling area and via Snoonu. Live storytelling will also take place daily during the Festival, with the author leading the sessions on Saturday, 17 January; Friday, 23 January; and Saturday, 24 January at 5:00 pm.

Speaking ahead of the launch, Allison Taylor said: "It is a great honour and a privilege to share my book, as a legacy project of the Years in Culture partnership between Qatar and my home country, the USA. I hope this playful and beautifully illustrated tale of the desert truffle inspires those who read it to explore and appreciate the great abundance that Qatar's natural heritage has to offer, including tasting a desert truffle should you be fortunate enough to find one!"

The inspiration for the book came after the author's first encounter with the *fagga*. What began as a personal culinary discovery soon evolved into an imaginative, rhyming tale she created for her two young children, brought to life through Damon Guthrie's illustrations.

The book intentionally combines education and cultural knowledge-sharing, featuring wildlife insights by ecologist Sara Abdul Majid and a truffle-inspired recipe by Chef Damien Leroux, former head of Alain Ducasse restaurants in Doha.

Developed as a legacy of the Qatar-USA 2021 Year of Culture, the book is a meaningful addition to the growing literary legacy of the Years of Culture programme, which celebrates cultural exchange between Qatar and its international partners. Through exhibitions, performances, and educational programmes, the 2021 partnership highlighted shared values of creativity, innovation, and collaboration. Major highlights included *The New Black Vanguard: Photography between Art and Fashion* at M7, the *Jeff Koons: Lost in America* exhibition, and the *Made in Qatar* film showcase in Washington, D.C. Cultural exchange projects such as JEDARIART and music collaborations between the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra and the U.S. Air Forces Central Band further strengthened people-to-people connections.

Each Year of Culture partnership connects Qatar with another nation through collaborative projects in art, education, heritage, and community exchange.

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About Years of Culture

The Years of Culture initiative, chaired by Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, spearheads long-lasting cultural partnerships between Qatar and other nations. It exists to promote respect and understanding among diverse cultures and serves as a catalyst for bringing people together, nurturing connections, encouraging dialogue, and deepening understanding. At its heart, Years of Culture celebrates the power of cultural exchange, which enriches Qatar's ties with partner countries beyond the dedicated year.

Each year is organised with support from Qatar and partner countries' cultural institutions, ministries, foundations, and private and public sector partners, with assistance from Embassies in Qatar and abroad. Programmes are tailored to explore the unique nature of each partner country with a focus on cultural heritage, creative industries, social and economic development, and innovation.

Previous Years of Culture have included: Qatar-Japan 2012, Qatar-UK 2013, Qatar-Brazil 2014, Qatar-Türkiye 2015, Qatar-China 2016, Qatar-Germany 2017, Qatar-Russia 2018, Qatar-India 2019, Qatar-France 2020, Qatar-USA 2021, Qatar-MENASA 2022, Qatar-Indonesia 2023, and Qatar-Morocco 2024.

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