

NEW DESTINATION

ABU DHABI ROLLING

No longer second fiddle to little brother Dubai, Abu Dhabi is fast becoming the Gulf's most exciting destination. **CHRISTINA FERNANDES** writes.

BUILT FOR SPEED: The Yas Marina Circuit is the venue of the Formula 1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on November 1-3. The F1 track is 5.55-kilometer-long and has 21 challenging turns. Now, imagine the incredible speed of the cars trying to beat the lap time of 1 minute and 40 seconds.

PHOTO COURTESY OF Abu Dhabi Motorsports Management



IN THE SCENE:

This season, Abu Dhabi is where all the action is (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): the Abu Dhabi Film Festival; Abu Dhabi Art; and F1 Grand Prix



In the race to make a name for itself as an international tourist destination, Abu Dhabi has not only begun building world-class waterparks, museums, and other venues; it has also been playing host to an increasing array of high-profile events.

Most likely to come to many people's minds, even non-motor-sports enthusiasts, is the **Formula 1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix**, being held this year from November 1 to 3 at its usual venue, the Yas Marina Circuit on Yas Island.

As part of the races, there are a whole array of planned fringe events, including concerts by Jay Z, Muse, Depeche Mode, and Amr Diab, as well as U.S. singer Ciara and Arab Idol winner Mohammed Assaf.

The **Yasalam Festival**, which also accompanies the F1 Grand Prix, is held each year at the Abu Dhabi Corniche and this

time around features concerts including a free Pinoy Party with Gary Valenciano and Vina Morales on October 31, as well as other beachfront gigs by Beat Antenna, Bull Funk Zoo, and Chronicles of Khan.

"Get Driver Fit," a free fitness program running from September 15 until November 3 as part of the F1 festivities at both the Abu Dhabi Corniche and the Yas Marina Circuit, offers free workouts including yoga, pilates, zumba, cycling, and running.

Although by far the biggest, the F1 is certainly not the only sports event to hit Abu Dhabi in the coming months. There is also the **Wake Park World Championship** on October 10–12, the **FIFA U-17 World Cup** from October 17 to November 8, the **Shotgun World Cup Final** on October 21–30, and the **Mubaldala World Tennis Championship** on December 26–28.

SHOP



The souks and malls of Abu Dhabi offer plenty of souvenirs for visitors to take home, especially during events held for National Day in December.

Arabian coffee pots and cups, a symbol of local hospitality, are a favorite, as are prayer beads in different colors, pashmina shawls in many variations, and wood carvings in the form of *dhow*s, falconry equipment, and canes (which are used by men in traditional Emirati dances).

Gourmet souvenirs such as camel milk chocolate, endless varieties of dates, and well-priced spices are also a popular choice.

The **Sougha** initiative, aimed at reviving ancient Emirati weaving traditions and empowering women across the country to create woven handicrafts to earn money for themselves, is a great place for souvenirs. There is an outlet located at the Abu Dhabi Central Market, which offers colorful, hand-woven items such as iPad, laptop, and mobile phone covers, pillows, handbags, purses, table runners, and embroidered bracelets.





Dine



Stills Bar and Brasserie
(Crown Plaza Abu Dhabi Yas Island; +971 2 656-3053) offers contemporary European cuisine, garden seating, and a 26-meter long bar.

Golden Sheraa Restaurant (Khalifa Street, Al Markaziya; +971 2 627-7204) is an affordable and family-friendly Lebanese seafood restaurant.

Pars Palace (Al Khalidiya, just behind Corniche Towers; +971 2 681-8600), is a hidden gem tucked away in a backstreet that offers excellent Persian fare.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE: No matter what your interests are, you'll have a grand time in Abu Dhabi's exciting line-up of events (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): Creamfields 2013 to be held at the du Arena; Zayed Heritage Carnival festivities; Al Dhafra Camel Festival.

Stars and glitz will dazzle the UAE's capital during the seventh **Abu Dhabi Film Festival** from October 24 to November 2. The 10-day program of Arab and international cinema is complemented by red carpet premieres and other events. Moviegoers are given the chance to speak to filmmakers during question-and-answer sessions following many of the screenings.

Slightly more highbrow but no less glamorous, the fifth edition of **Abu Dhabi Art** sees the world's top galleries, artists, collectors, and visitors come together for three days of art, talks, and performances at the Saadiyat Cultural District on Saadiyat Island on November 20–23. Nevertheless, you can always see one of UAE's greatest architectural masterpieces regardless of the season: The **Sheikh Zayed Mosque**.

The UAE National Day on December 2 is celebrated annually at locations around the city. The

Zayed Heritage Carnival at Al Wathba is especially exciting, featuring not only the fairly standard camel race, heritage village, handicrafts, and folkloric performances, but even a camel milking contest.

For those willing to travel about an hour south of Abu Dhabi to Madinat Zayed in the Western Region, the **Al Dhafra Camel Festival** held in December is a spectacular display of almost 30,000 camels, including a camel beauty pageant and auctions amidst the picturesque desert landscape.

Firmly back in the now, **Creamfields Abu Dhabi 2013**, one of the world's leading dance festivals, will draw the crowds to the du Arena on Yas Island on December 13.

Sometimes quirky, sometimes over the top, but never boring, Abu Dhabi's social calendar should have something on offer for most tastes. ■



PAL flies between Manila and Abu Dhabi daily starting October 1. For more information, call PAL reservations office at (+632) 855 8888 or visit www.philippineairlines.com.

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