



DESERT GEM: As the UAE's capital, Abu Dhabi has ambitious plans that can be clearly seen with its world-class architecture.

ABU DHABI'S ALLURE

CHRISTINA FERNANDES marvels at the glitz and grandeur of one of the world's richest cities.

Abu Dhabi often seems like a collection of opposites. It's ancient Arabia meets modern metropolis; contemplative Bedouin tradition blended with an unquenchable ambition for the future; high rises and land reclamation projects pushing their way across vast deserts and natural islands. As a result, a visit to the UAE's capital can be a surprisingly versatile, if slightly schizophrenic experience.

The city is home to the UAE's government offices, and its ruler is also the country's president. Owning almost 10 percent of the world's oil and gas reserves, it has been named one of the world's richest cities. Thus, its urban planners have poured their resources into constructing ambitious architectural ventures, as well as building a world-class center for sports, culture, and arts.

Tourism experiences are no less paradoxical than anything else about Abu Dhabi and visitors have a choice of hitting high-end boutiques versus kayaking through mangroves, racing around the Formula One track at breakneck speed, or wandering across sand dunes on camel back, visiting historical forts or relaxing on one of the numerous beaches.

Shopping is one of the emirate's favorite pastimes and Abu Dhabi's collection of malls does not disappoint. **Marina Mall** is the city's biggest and glitziest and home to an ice rink, a bowling alley, and musical fountains.

The **Souk At Quaryat Al Beri** is a callback to the ancient Arabian markets reflected in its architecture. It is home to a varied selection of restaurants, including **Abdel Wahab**, **Burger Fuel**, and **Entrecôte**

PHOTO Jay Alonzo



Good to Know!

Dress modestly. Wear clothes that cover the knees and elbows.

Watch what you drink. Alcohol consumption in nonlicensed establishments is illegal. Drinking and driving is strictly prohibited.

Carry proof of identity at all times. Tourists are required to identify themselves to security officers upon request.

Think before you snap. Do not enter or photograph restricted areas, such as government buildings and embassies.



PHOTOS TOP - Jay Alonzo; BOTTOM - Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority

GOLDMINE OF ADVENTURE: Speed on a jetski to see the city's megastructures (top) or traverse the sand dunes on camelback—one of the world's richest cities is never out of options.



EYE FOR DETAIL: Abu Dhabi's textile industry, with its intricate details and quality materials, will seduce any buyer.

Café de Paris.

Make some great bargains at the **Madinat Zayed Gold Centre**, where craftsmen also create one-of-a-kind designs on demand. Historical sights are thinly spread in Abu Dhabi, but the **Qasr Al Hosn Fort** is an illustration of the capital's development over the years. Views of the sprouting skyline are visible from within the ancient walls of the city's oldest building, also known as the **White Fort**, which is located smack in the middle of downtown.

Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, the world's largest after Makkah and Madinah, dazzles visitors with Italian marble, an Iranian carpet (the world's largest), and German chandeliers. Its courtyard's 17,000-square-meter marble mosaic is considered the largest in the world.

Contrary to first impressions, Abu Dhabi is not only about mortar and concrete. The city has 10 public beaches popular for walks, swims, and relaxing with the locals and tourists alike. But one

of the most surprising activities on offer though is the kayaking tours through the city's protected mangroves, which are particularly scenic at sunrise or sunset. Dune bashing and desert safari tours are an easy way to explore the sandy expanses outside of the capital.

Thrill-seekers might enjoy speeding around the Formula One circuit on **Yas Island**, also home to **Ferrari World**, the world's largest indoor theme park at 200,000 square meters, and **Yas Waterworld**, one of the emirate's newest water parks.

Off-the-beaten track attractions also abound. A visit to the **Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital** with its free-flying falcon display and high-tech wards is an excellent way to learn about falconry, a tradition that Emiratis are very proud of. The institution treats more than 6,000 sick birds a year and also houses a museum.

Ambition is in abundant supply in the UAE's capital, and Abu Dhabi has been striving to

Must-read

Grab a copy of the 14-point behavior guide for tourists published by the Abu Dhabi police. Printed in 12 languages, it is available in hotels, tourism operators, entry points to the emirate, tourism police centers, and other public places.

PHOTO
Jay Alonzo



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SUPERSIZED: Abu Dhabi is known for its superstructures such as the Hodariyat Bridge (top), but Abu Dhabi is also home to the largest species of Flamingo (left).

Stay



THE ROYAL HOTEL
ABU DHABI

The Royal Hotel (www.theroyalhotelabudhabi.com) Retro interiors a short walk from the Corniche.

One to One - The Village (www.onetoonehotels.com/index/the-village/) Boutique hotel with a popular Lebanese restaurant.

Al Maha Arjaan By Rotana (www.rotana.com/arjaanhotelpartments/unitedarabemirates/abudhabi/almahaarjaanbyrotana) Spacious studios with kitchenettes in the heart of the city.

PHOTOS Jay Alonzo (THIS PAGE)

become an international hub particularly for arts, culture, and sports. **The Louvre**, the **Guggenheim Museum**, and the **National Museum**, all to be located on **Sadiyat Island** and with planned openings over the next few years, are the most prominent examples of such initiatives.

Sports events include the **Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix**, the **Volvo Ocean Race**, and the **HSBC Golf Championship**. **Gourmet Abu Dhabi** and the **Abu Dhabi Festival** are among the most popular cultural celebrations.

Restaurant options are as eclectic as anything else in Abu Dhabi. There are many different ways of tickling one's taste buds, from **Fishmarket**, a 30-year-old institution serving fresh Omani lobster and Gulf sole right on the beach, to **Rhodes 44** by Michelin-star chef Gary Rhodes located at the swanky **St. Regis Abu Dhabi**. The **18°** at the **Hyatt Capital Gate** is among the quirkier options, with its place in the *Guinness Book of Records* for leaning at an angle four times more acute than the Tower of Pisa. The **BBQ Al Qasr** at the beach of the über-glamorous **Emirates Palace Hotel** is one

of the most romantic dining spots in the city. **Lebanese Flower** is an Abu Dhabi takeaway institution but its shawarmas and mixed grills are also popular for dining at the restaurant.

Understatement doesn't exist in Abu Dhabi and its popular nightspots are no exception to the rule. The rich and famous mingle at **Allure by Cipriani at the Yacht Club on Yas Island**, the place to see and be seen. **Jazz Bar at the Hilton Abu Dhabi** with its resident six-piece South African band is a favorite with live music aficionados. Fantastic views of the skyline abound at **Club SO-HI by Relax@12**, a favorite among party lovers.

Abu Dhabi is an illustration that opposites attract and feed off each other. Locals in *kanduras* walk alongside expats in *saris* and suits. Foreigners have made their home here and left their mark. This unique development has made the city a blend of East and West, its leaders trying to protect and promote their traditions at the same time as pushing forward at dizzying speeds. Built on an Arab foundation and shaped by influences from around the globe, the UAE's capital is among the top destinations in the region. It may be the more sensible counterpart to Dubai, its glitzy neighbor to the north, but Abu Dhabi certainly does not need to hide in its sister's glittering shadow. ■



GILDED SKYLINE: Abu Dhabi's many glittering towers transform during the sunset like at The 18° at the Hyatt Capital Gate.

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