



OASIS IN THE DESERT: Bab Al Shams' luxurious amenities stand out in the arid landscape and promise a unique desert experience.

DREAMING OF DUBAI

CHRISTINA FERNANDES gives us a peek into the fun-filled attractions of the Las Vegas of the Middle East.

The Dubai of today is known for its mega malls, towering behemoths, and glitzy hotels. But those who dig deeper can also discover ancient Arabia alongside modern mammon. The United Arab Emirates' most famous emirate is a more versatile destination than its reputation leads on.

TRADITIONAL DUBAI

Bur Dubai and **Deira** along Dubai Creek, which splits the city, are home to much of what's left of the olden days here. Many traditional residential neighborhoods were demolished to give way for modern ones. But in recent years, the Dubai government has made efforts to preserve relics of its past. History buffs may enjoy a stroll through the **Bastakiya**, also referred to as the Al Fahidi Historical District, whose

original residents made their living from pearl diving. Its labyrinth of narrow cobblestone alleys is flanked by traditional mud-houses and wind towers.

The **Dubai Museum**, which houses artifacts representing the emirate's pre-history up to modernity, can be found in this area. A good shopping experience is never far away in Dubai. However, and historic or not, the Bastakiya is no exception. The textile souq's luxurious cloths, shoes, clothes, and souvenirs attract many bargain hunters. **Bayt Al Wakheel**, a traditional restaurant on the waterfront, is reminiscent of Dubai's pre-oil boom charm.

Just across the creek are the spice and gold souq, which every tourist should visit at least once. The heaps of jewels and precious metals at the gold souq seem almost obscene, but walking through

PHOTO COURTESY MEYDAN HOTELS



FEAST FOR THE EYES: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) Neos at The Address Downtown; the rooftop at the One&Only Royal Mirage Hotel; Dubai Fountain; Dubai Mall

its glimmering, shimmering alleys is great fun nevertheless. Crossing the water to get to the souq is itself an authentic and scenic experience: small boats called *abras* ferry people to and fro every few minutes throughout the day.

Aside from the *abras*, there are also water-taxis that provide transport between certain destinations along the creek, and the **Al Shindagha Historical Area** can be reached easily from Bur Dubai this way. It is home to the **Heritage Village**, where Emirati women bake local breads, cook traditional foods, and make local handicrafts. The **house of Sheikh Saeed al Maktoum**, the current ruler's grandfather, has been preserved as a museum and is also located here.

MODERN DUBAI

Adventure-seekers and children will find delight in the city's water parks. Although **Aquaventure** at the Atlantis Hotel (www.atlantisthepalm.com) on the **Palm Jumeirah** is now the country's most visited water park, **Wild Wadi** (www.jumeirah.com), with its 1,001 Nights theme and location next to the iconic Burj Al Arab, is still popular.

Dubai's shopping malls, each very unique, are among the top reasons many tourists visit and the emirate's city planners have embraced this trend with fervor. The **Mall of the Emirates** (www.malloftheemirates.com/en) is home to **Ski Dubai** (www.skidxb.com), the Middle East's only indoor ski slope. Watching penguins waddle around the snow park as the temperatures outside soar past 40 degrees is a slightly surreal experience. The recently opened **IHOP** (www.ihop.com) and **Cheesecake Factory** (www.thecheesecakefactory.com) here also attract throngs of visitors.

STAY



Novotel World Trade Centre:

Simple but stylish hotel located on Sheikh Zayed Road in the heart of the city. www.novotel.com

XVA Art Hotel:

Atmospheric boutique hotel in a restored villa located in the Al Fahidi Historical District. www.xvahotel.com

Bavaria Executive Suites Dubai:

Excellent views of the Palm Jumeirah and beachfront in the heart of Media City. www.bhihotels-dubai.com





HERITAGE HOTSPOT: Dubai exemplifies well how local culture can be enriched side by side with modern developments as seen in Bab Al Shams Desert Resort (ABOVE) and among locals (RIGHT) who embrace their culture.

Another interesting venue is **Ibn Battuta Mall** (www.ibnbattutamall.com), which is themed along the travels of the legendary Arab explorer. Shoppers can wander underneath the great dome at the Persia court, admire a Chinese sailing junk at the China court, and marvel at the life-size elephant in the India court. The relaxed atmosphere and healthy food at the **Lime Tree Café** here is worth a visit.

Souk Madinat (www.jumeirah.com), a recreation of a traditional market at the Madinat Jumeirah located next to the Burj Al Arab, is also a great spot for good food. Dozens of gourmet outlets here offer everything from Belgian beer to Moroccan meat.

Finally, there is the king of malls, **Dubai Mall** (www.thedubaimall.com), with its 1,200 stores, an ice skating rink, and a cascading waterfall. This is a place where world records are broken. The largest aquarium in the world along with its

underwater zoo attracts thousands of visitors a month. Every day after 6 p.m. the world's largest fountain, **Dubai Fountain**, comes to life and dances to music against the backdrop of the 829-meter **Burj Khalifa's** (www.burjkhalifa.ae), the world's tallest skyscraper. Those not afraid of height can take a lift up to the tower's observation deck on the 124th floor. Lunch, high tea, and dinner are served at its restaurant, **At.Mosphere** (www.atmosphereburjkhalifa.com), on the 122nd floor, which promises no less than the city's best views.

Souk Al Bahar (www.soukalbahar.ae), another retail center on the opposite side of Dubai Fountain, is home to many popular restaurants, such as **Abdel Wahab** for Lebanese food, **Mango Tree** for Thai, and **Baker and Spice** for breakfast.

Dubai is a city with no shortage of watering holes, but some places offer a little something extra. **Bahri Bar** at the Mina'a Salaam Hotel (www.jumeirah.com).



PHOTOS Courtesy Meydan Hotels (above); Christina Fernandes (inset)



AQUATIC ADVENTURES: *Abras* and *dhow*s (ABOVE) are the traditional mode of transportation along the Dubai Creek. Have fun at Aquaventure (LEFT), one of Dubai's favorite water parks.

Turbulent desert safaris complete with dune bashing and dinner at a desert camp are one option. Quiet drinks and snacks on the **Bab Al Shams Desert Resort's** (www.meydanhotels.com/babalshams/) roof terrace with stunning views of the surrounding sand dunes are another. Either way, getting out of the city has its charms.

Dubai is a destination of superlatives and contradictions. It is simultaneously garish, glamorous, and glittering, but it also has its unexpectedly traditional, quiet, and reflective sides. One thing is for sure: you won't get bored here. ■

surrounded by the winding canals of the Madinat Jumeirah and affords excellent views of the **Burj Al Arab**. There is also **Buddha Bar** at the Grosvenor House (www.buddhabar.com) where swanky style meets Asian charm.

At **Neos**, on the 63rd floor of the Address Downtown Hotel (www.theaddress.com), you can look out of the window and catch a great

view of the Dubai Fountain from above. And the **Rooftop at the One&Only Royal Mirage Hotel** (royalmirage.oneandonlyresorts.com) features candlelit lanterns, cozy beanbags chairs, and tin drum tables on its terrace.

If you have a little time on your hands, venturing away from the hustle and bustle out into the desert can be a worthwhile experience.

LOCAL INSIGHT

Refrain from kissing or hugging in public. Public displays of affection are frowned upon and can actually lead to arrest, depending on their severity.

Dress modestly. Tourists and residents are asked cover up their knees and shoulders when in malls and other public places.

Public consumption of alcohol, except in designated establishments, is strictly prohibited. There is also zero tolerance of alcohol when driving.

Think before you take photographs. Do not take photographs of locals without permission. It is also illegal to photograph official government buildings, including embassies.

PHOTOS Courtesy Christina Fernandes (above); Jumeirah (below);



PAL Express will fly between Manila and Dubai starting on November 6, 2013. For more information, call PAL Express reservations at (+632) 855 9000 or visit www.philippineairlines.com or www.flypalexpress.com.