

ENTERTAINMENT

top picks

- 360° (p130)
- Bar 44 (p131)
- Barasti Bar (p132)
- Buddha Bar (p131)
- Chi@The Lodge (p133)
- Irish Village (p127)
- Neos (p129)
- New Asia Bar & Club (p128)
- QD's (p135)
- Rooftop Bar (p132)

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A night on the town is a big deal in Dubai, and despite the municipality's ban on outdoor music and dancing in late 2007, every night of the week you'll find a place to whoop it up. The big nights are Thursday and Friday – Dubai's weekend nights – when expats burn off steam from their 12-hour-a-day working week. And boy, do they like to drink! Plan to head to hotels, which along with major sporting venues are the only places licensed to serve alcohol. In Dubai, there's no such thing as an independent, out-of-the-way neighbourhood pub that nobody knows about.

Finding the right bar can be tricky. Dubai is the playground of the parvenu as much as it's a city of expat workers trying to advance their careers and save some tax-free cash. You're in Dubai either to dump your wallet or fill it. Choosing an appropriate bar depends on the people with whom you want to rub shoulders. Wanna get a sense of the social lives of resident workers? Follow the expats. Wanna show off that new Marc Jacobs outfit you just bought? Follow the glam crowd. And then there are the niche bars, places frequented by, say, Russian oligarchs or British footballers. Wherever you wander, don't expect to strike up many conversations; most people in Dubai stick to their cliques. Occasionally, you'll spot a random *dishdasha*-clad local breaking ranks with his countrymen (and the law) by drinking alcohol alongside Westerners, but this is an anomaly.

DJs spin nearly every night of the week (except during Ramadan), with regular one-off dance events. The repertoire is global – funk, soul, house (lots of house), trip-hop, hip hop, R&B, African, Arabic and Latino. Some hotels engage full-time live bands but they're almost all cover bands: there's a lack of innovative local musical talent.

Clubs and bars close by 3am, smaller venues at 1am. Start early with sunset cocktails, head to dinner, then follow up with post-dinner drinks before hitting a dance club. Afterwards soak up the booze with a late-night *shwarma*. The fancy-pants bars are concentrated around Downtown Dubai and Dubai Marina. The seedy places are at cheap hotels in Bur Dubai and Deira; working girls are common – too common – but there are also some gritty-fun ethnic bars here worth a visit.

Alcohol is expensive (see p128), but that doesn't stop rowdy Westerners from downing pint after shot after pint. Nurse your drinks or you'll shell out a lot of dirhams. The irony is, it can be hard – really hard – to catch the eye of a bartender. Long waits at the bar are common at crowded venues. Conversely, waiters are trained to upsell guests (though not usually trained in the fine art of service). If you hear 'Would you like another round?', make clear exactly who at the table wants one or you may wind up with a full table of glasses – and a hefty bill. Likewise if you order a bottle of wine; waiters often empty a bottle into one person's glass rather than divvy the last of it up between everyone's, then look at those whose glasses are empty and ask, 'Another bottle?' Don't be duped. When there's not much left in the bottle, keep it out of the waiter's hand.

If you're not up for drinking, plan to hit the mellow *sheesha* cafes and play a game of backgammon. This is where you'll spot locals. Emiratis don't like to be around alcohol, but they sure love coffee.

There's not yet much going on in terms of high-brow entertainment since the first financial crisis of late 2008 put an end to ambitious plans for an opera house. Live performances tend to be light fare – musicals, cabaret or touring shows – that appeal to Western sensibilities. The Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre (DUCTAC, p137) is one of the few spaces that also trains the spotlight on local talent. If you want to catch a movie, you've got plenty of hi-tech multiplexes to take in the blockbusters; almost all are in shopping centres. Alternative and art house cinemas are practically nonexistent (there's one screen now at Reel Cinemas in Dubai Mall that screens nonmainstream fare), although galleries and alternative venues, such as the JamJar (p73) and XVA Café (p113), occasionally run one-off series.

It's best not to criss-cross the city on a weekend; traffic is abominable on Thursday and Friday nights and taxis can be hard to come by. Stick to a particular area or two, such as Dubai Marina, Jumeirah, Downtown Dubai, Deira or Bur Dubai. And under no circumstances should you ever get behind the wheel of a car if you've had even one sip of alcohol (see boxed text, p182).