

## SHOPPING

# top picks

- Amzaan (p94)
- Azza Fahmy Jewellery (p98)
- Candylicious (p98)
- Dubai Mall (p99)
- Magrudy's (p93)
- Pride of Kashmir (p93)
- Five Green (p94)
- S\*uce (p100) & S\*uce Light (p100)
- Souq Madinat Jumeirah (p101)

# SHOPPING

Dubai loves to shop. The city has just about perfected the art of the mall, which is the de facto air-conditioned 'town commons', the place to go with the family, hang out with friends and take in some entertainment. Dubai malls have ski slopes, ice rinks and aquariums. They look like ancient Persia or futuristic movie sets. The range of stores – high-street to designer, electronics to carpets – is amazing, but true bargains are as rare as tulips in Tonga, except possibly during the Dubai Shopping Festival (p95).

The explosion in themed mall architecture took off in 2002 with the opening of Mercato Mall and its Tuscany-meets-Venice architecture. Souq Madinat Jumeirah reinterprets the classic covered Arabian bazaars of old, with gracefully arching wooden ceilings above a maze of corridors designed to get you lost. Anchoring the complex at either end are two palatial, seaside hotels connected by a series of canals, with the iconic Burj al-Arab hotel looming in the background: think Disney does Arabia. Nearly 1.5km long, Ibn Battuta Mall is comprised of six interconnected shopping centres, each one styled after a country visited by the eponymous explorer, who travelled from Andalusia to China in the 14th century. Amble beneath faux starry skies, past towering live palms, and into a giant tiled Persian dome. The China section is the stunner: a life-size junk lies on its side – someone is always posing for pictures in front of it.

Mall of the Emirates is best known for its indoor ski slope, Ski Dubai, where fresh snow is generated overnight. The massive Dubai Festival City opened in 2007, with a red-carpet-lined VIP entrance (essentially valet parking). The back of the mall is most impressive: a three-storey-high, origami-inspired marble sculpture, with water running down its faces, doubles as a staircase for shoppers. *Abras* (water taxis) float past on outdoor canals, setting a picturesque if ersatz backdrop for alfresco performances.

Open since November 2008, Dubai Mall is the world's largest retail mall; it packs an Olympic-size ice rink, a huge aquarium and underwater zoo, several indoor amusement parks and 1200 stores into its massive frame. It's smack-dab in Downtown Dubai, at the foot of Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest tower. Opposite, reached via a bridge spanning Downtown Dubai Lake, is Souk al-Bahar, a diminutive version of Souq Madinat Jumeirah.

Looked down upon in other parts of the world, air-conditioned malls make sense in Dubai, their trickling fountains and cool marble floors a welcome respite from the oppressive heat. The problem is that every new mall offers more of the same corporate chain stores, repackaged in glitzier format. We've included some of these major style franchises, such as Zara and Topshop, but have endeavoured to suss out the independent shops: stores like the exotic Samsaara in Souk al-Bahar, whimsical Ginger & Lace in Ibn Battuta Mall, and the funky Lebanese fashion shop Aizone in Mall of the Emirates.

The Dubai shopping scene lacks the dynamism and breadth of major Western cities, such as London and New York, primarily because the city has no significant underground art scene to fuel new ideas. Everything in Dubai is imported, including creativity. That's why you'll be especially happy about two independent boutiques, S\*uce and Five Green. While they won't bowl you over if you shop the world, you'll find brands and designs you otherwise wouldn't.

Scouring the souqs (covered outdoor markets) remains the city's quintessential shopping experience and the fastest way to get to the heart of the culture. Nothing compares with the atmosphere and chaos of the souqs – the colours and textures, the cacophony of sounds, the street hawkers barking for customers, and the call to prayer booming down narrow lanes. There's a souq for everything: fish, fruit and vegetables, Bedouin jewellery, Palestinian embroidery, curly-toed Aladdin slippers, Oriental perfumes, frankincense and myrrh, cheap headphones, and mosque-shaped clock radios to take home to friends.

Souqs are on either side of Dubai Creek and in the backstreets of Karama; malls are scattered about town. Hailing a taxi can take a long time (see p102). Malls have dedicated taxi lines (though they may be over an hour's wait in length). At the souqs you'll simply have to stand in the street; alternatively, head to the nearest main drag, or take a bus or *abra*. All malls have food courts, some remarkably good, especially Mall of the Emirates and Dubai Mall; they also boast full-service restaurants, some licensed, and ATMs and foreign-exchange offices. Whether they