

# Welcome to Dubai & Abu Dhabi

*Passengers arriving by air are transfixed  
by the view: futuristic skyscrapers  
flanked by a glittering coastline and  
surrounded by endless desert.*

## Embracing the Extraordinary

It's little wonder so many entrepreneurial designers and architects love Dubai. Together with a tax-free escape from throttling budgets, stringent building regulations and cookie-cutter specs, this place likes to show off. Tallest building in the world? Tick. Artificial island shaped like a palm? Tick. So-called seven-star hotel? Tick. Largest global shopping mall? Tick... And indoor snow slopes to boot? Tick.

While it's true that recent economic woes have led to some major projects hitting the dust or being scaled down, such as Dubai-land, others are being gradually resumed. More superlative-worthy projects to come? Tick. Dubai, a shrinking violet? Never!

## Let's Shop!

Before the 1970s, the only time you could shift your credit card into overdrive in Dubai was at the Gold Souq. Serious fashion choice required jetting off to London or New York. Today the city vies with both metropolises as a shopping destination, as well as providing much more than a mere retail experience. While temperatures spiral outside, the malls morph into places to shop, play, eat, drink (coffee) and socialise. If you want a glimpse of a more traditional culture, there are still souqs, particularly in Deira and Bur Dubai.

## Feeding Body & Soul

Dubai has a glut of excellent restaurants. Be prepared to be spoiled rotten with cuisine that ranges from East to West, from celebrity-chef-driven to Asian street-style. This is a foodie's fantasy destination, where atmosphere, surroundings and service are an accepted part of the culinary combo. Continue the self-pampering at one of Dubai's spas, with treatments and massages designed to soothe away stress and revitalise the senses. Or flop on a white sandy beach, take a dhow dinner cruise or watch the sunset over rippling red-gold sand in the desert, sharing a vision that was once deeply rooted in Dubai's Bedouin society.

## Beyond the City

Travel beyond Dubai to experience another world altogether as a skyscraper skyline is replaced by a more traditional desertscape.

Abu Dhabi is a fascinating and easily accessible destination to the south. This is the emirate that continues to surprise, quietly vying with Dubai with its considerable investment in culture, innovation and architecture. It is also home to the Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan Mosque, a magnificent must-see sight.



## Why I Love Dubai

By Josephine Quintero, Author

I lived in Kuwait for seven years and thought I was pretty savvy about the Arab way of life. How wrong I was. Dubai is a real one-off and full of surprises. There is nothing mundane or matter-of-fact about this place; it is all about drama and extremes – from the architecture to the weather to the food... Ah, the food! I also love the fact that there is a burgeoning, innovative art scene here and in Abu Dhabi. Discovering some fabulous galleries in the dusty Al-Quoz district was a real high point for me – along with travelling to the top of the Burj Khalifa, that is!

**For more about our author, see p224.**