

Welcome to Dubai & Abu Dhabi

*Dubai and Abu Dhabi are a
stirring alchemy of profound
traditions and ambitious
futuristic vision.*

Innovation

It's hard not to admire Dubai and Abu Dhabi for their indefatigable verve, gutsy ambition and ability to dream up and realise projects that elsewhere would never get off the drawing board. This is a superlative-craving society that has birthed the world's tallest building, an island shaped like a palm tree, a huge indoor ski paradise, the world's fastest roller coaster and – soon to come – starchitect-designed art museums of international stature. With many more grand projects in the pipeline for World Expo 2020, visiting here often feels like a trip to the future – to two cities firmly in charge of writing their own narrative.

Shopping Haven

Bargain hunter or power shopper, you'll have a fine time spending your dirhams in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Dubai especially is a top retail haunt that hosts not one but two huge annual shopping festivals. Shopping is a leisure activity here, malls much more than mere collections of stores. Some look like an Italian palazzo or a Persian palace and lure visitors with surreal attractions like an indoor ski slope or a giant aquarium. Traditional souqs, too, are beehives of activity humming with timeless bargaining banter.

Nocturnal Action

After dark, Dubai sometimes seems like a city filled with lotus eaters, forever on the lookout for a good time. Its shape-shifting party spectrum caters for just about every taste, budget and age group. From flashy dance temples, sleek rooftop terraces and sizzling beach clubs to fancy cocktail caverns and concerts under the stars, Dubai delivers hot-stepping odysseys. Much nightlife centres around the fancy hotels, but there's no shortage of more wholesome diversions either, including *sheesha* lounges, community theatre and live-music venues. Although sedate by comparison, Abu Dhabi is no stranger to cutting loose when the moon's high in the sky.

Cultural Dynamism

With Emiratis making up only a fraction of the population, Dubai and Abu Dhabi are bustling microcosms peacefully shared by cultures from all corners of the world. This diversity expresses itself in the culinary landscape, fashion, music and performance. Although rooted in Islamic tradition, this is an open society where it's easy for newcomers and visitors to connect with myriad experiences, be it eating like a Bedouin, dancing on the beach, shopping for local art or riding a camel in the desert.



Why I Love Dubai

By Andrea Schulte-Peevers, Author

Ever since I first set foot in this tiny powerhouse emirate back in 2007, Dubai has fascinated me with its energy, optimism and openness towards people from all over the world. I'm a die-hard foodie, so the staggering variety of authentic global fare is exhilarating, and even the shopping here – which I normally consider a chore – is actually a joy. Dubai is a place that's constantly in flux and it's been exciting to see it grow and mature as a city and as a society. I can't wait to see what the future holds.

For more about our authors, see p264.