

Understand Dubai & Abu Dhabi

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Dubai & Abu Dhabi Today

Dubai and Abu Dhabi are at an exciting juncture: behind them lie the bad old days of regional unrest, global recession and economic vulnerability. Ahead lies the prospect of enhanced stability, stronger regional ties and closer integration with the international community. With prestigious cultural and infrastructure projects underway, this is an excellent time to visit two cities that are at the heart of Arabia while being a world away from neighbouring troubles.

Best on Film

Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol (2011) Tom Cruise scales the Burj Khalifa in this 'Mission' thriller.

Syriana (2005) This political thriller starring George Clooney and Matt Damon was partly shot in Dubai.

Duplicity (2009) Spy-themed comedy features exterior shots of Dubai.

Naqaab (2007) Bollywood suspense thriller largely shot in and around Jumeirah Beach.

Best in Print

Arabia through the Looking Glass (Jonathan Raban; 1979) One of the first Western travel accounts of modern Arabia.

Dubai: the Story of the World's Fastest City (Jim Krane; 2009) Balanced review of Dubai's rags-to-riches story.

Dubai: Gilded Cage (Syed Ali; 2010) Scholarly and critical examination of Dubai's rapid transformation.

From Rags to Riches: A Story of Abu Dhabi (Mohammed Al-Fahim; 2011) A memoir of the city written by an Emirati.

Regional Union

Arab Gulf states (except Iraq) already collaborate through a forum called the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), established in Abu Dhabi in 1981. There is now a growing appetite for closer union.

The practicalities of union, however, are problematic. When locating the central bank needed for currency union, Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) pulled out. No one can decide whether to admit new members... and so it goes on. Where the cooperation between Arab states has met with success is in the customs union, implemented in 2015, and a common market whereby GCC citizens can gain education and health care, work, own property and retire in all member states.

Global Integration

The GCC has also successfully cooperated on shared water and power projects and integration hopes are now pinned on a US\$15.5 billion railway. The project, linking six member states, will create a regional transport corridor from Iraq to Oman designed to boost trade, carry freight and tighten regional ties. The first leg of the 1940km track, between UAE and Oman, is due to be completed by 2018.

The railway is axiomatic of a desire for international integration. Dubai and Abu Dhabi have led the charge, bringing collaborations with foreign institutions, providing an exchange of peoples through the world's largest transport hubs, giving a platform for global sporting events and providing a forum for international arts.

Diversification

To be an international player, you have to have the funds, and to date oil and gas have ensured a healthy bank balance. This financial security is not guaranteed, however, as the recent 'sheikhs versus shale' battle has shown. The