

SIGHTSEEING, TOURS *and* ATTRACTIONS

PLANNING *for* DUBAI TOURING

DUBAI HAS A PLETHORA OF ATTRACTIONS for every type and every age of sightseer. The challenge isn't trying to work out *what* you want to do, but *when* you're going to fit it all in. Inevitably, you'll want to relax for a day or three on the beach, sip a cocktail at sunset, indulge in a spot of shopping and decide where you're going to eat. But it's well worth taking some time to explore beyond these obvious pleasures, as Dubai is rich in history and heritage, has a prolific art scene, the most fantastic architecture, old traditional souks and streets in which to lose yourself, waterways to travel down and a beautiful desert in which you can experience a multitude of thrilling activities and adventures. Dubai is not synonymous with culture and heritage, and most people do not come on holiday to Dubai to explore its rich and fascinating historical past. However, scratch beneath its glossy surface, and you will be agreeably surprised to find pockets of Dubai that still retain its traditions and culture and areas that are rich in history. You might want to take in the futuristic skyline of skyscrapers by car or explore the backstreets on foot and see an older, hidden side to Dubai, or learn about its heritage at museums and mosques, or travel down Dubai Creek on an *abra* (water taxi). Or you might want to spend an afternoon and evening in the desert on safari or try out dune bashing. Whatever it is that appeals most to you, you can be sure that the diverse contrasts will cause the most surprise and give a gentle but comprehensive introduction to life in Dubai.

Perhaps the most important thing to take into consideration when planning your sightseeing in Dubai is the weather. It's either hot or very hot. Winter, from November to April, is cooler, with

temperatures ranging between the low 20s to mid 30s. From May to October, you can expect temperatures to reach mid to high 40s and humidity to be very high. Our advice is to make sure that everyone in your party always carries a bottle of water with them. This sounds obvious, but you dehydrate so rapidly here, and once a headache sets in, your day will be spoilt. Take your sunscreen with you. Everywhere. And reapply liberally. Even when it doesn't feel that hot, the sun is so much closer than in Europe, and even the most olive-skinned are at risk of burning in minutes. Wear comfortable shoes. Fashion sandals that work in European climates become hot and sweaty and will rub and cause blisters when you're walking around in 30° heat for any length of time. We find rubber flip-flops keep you coolest, and brands such as Fitflop and Birkenstock are fantastic for these climates. Or if you prefer trainers or pumps, remember, your feet will swell in the heat, so make sure they're up a size for comfort.

Dubai sells itself as a premium tourist destination. However, it is important to remember that it is in the Middle East. The United Arab Emirates is a Muslim country, and Dubai, however liberal it appears, follows strict Islamic laws that should be respected by all travellers. We don't want to labour the point, as we have talked about dress code in detail in Part Three; however, for your own peace of mind, it is worth remembering that if you are visiting a mosque – or some of the older areas such as Karama, Deira, and Bur Dubai, where the streets are full of men, especially on evenings and weekends – then women are advised to cover arms and legs. One other thing to remember: Public displays of affection of any sort are illegal. Unless one of you is the parent and the other is your child, just restrain yourselves!

Children are particularly welcomed everywhere in Dubai, and plenty of attractions will really appeal to them as well as to you. There is an amazing amount for children to do in Dubai: there are numerous indoor themed attractions, water parks and 'edu-tainment'-type museums, and if they want to toboggan on snow in the morning and sandboard in the desert in the afternoon, then that is totally possible too. After all, this is Dubai. Desert activities have their own section in this guide, but we think a lot of them will appeal to children of all ages. It did occur to us, when researching this section, that an inordinate number of indoor theme parks are in Dubai, all vying to be bigger and better than the next. But taking into account the climate, which in effect cancels out outdoor activities for five months of the year, we do see why there is a need for them. Sort of.

If you have young children in your party who get up early, it is worth considering that when planning your itinerary. If you're going to a museum in the morning, it's good to spend an afternoon by a pool or on the beach. Do the outdoor sightseeing in the coolest part of the day, and spend the rest of the day at one of the attractions

for children that are indoors and air-conditioned, ending up on the beach or at the pool for a refreshing swim as the sun goes down at 6 or 7 p.m. The wonderful thing about Dubai is that shopping malls, restaurants, and many of the attractions for children stay open until 10 p.m. and much later, so there is never a great rush to fit everything in between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Some sites and attractions close at lunchtime for a couple of hours; others stay open all day. We attempt where possible to advise you of this, but it is always worth ringing and checking before you get there to avoid finding you have to wait until opening time again. The souks and older shopping areas tend to close in the middle of the day but do stay open until late at night.

If you are visiting Dubai during the holy month of Ramadan, be aware that there may be restricted opening times of all tourist attractions; and whilst you are not permitted to eat, drink, smoke or chew gum in public during daylight hours, the rules are slightly more flexible, we discovered, if you are travelling on the **Big Bus Tour** – where we were allowed to eat and drink surreptitiously! It tends to be quieter during the daytime when visiting Dubai during Ramadan, when you also have the opportunity to experience the excitement of the Iftar banquets and buffets to break the fast at sunset.

Dubai is very easy to negotiate autonomously but is equally as pleasurable to discover with a guide or on a tour. There are tours of all sorts in the city – by foot, by boat, by car. If you don't wish to take a taxi everywhere, and you have no desire to drive yourself, consider hiring a driver or guide for the day to show you around. We list tour companies that we know are efficient and reputable.

The weekend in Dubai is Friday and Saturday. Consequently, from Thursday evening to Saturday evening, it gets very busy in malls, parks, water parks and restaurants, as well as on tours and desert activities. If you can do some of these activities during the week – Sunday through Thursday – then you will find them less crowded and much more pleasurable.

Before planning what you want to do and where you want to go, consider obtaining one of the following maps once you are in Dubai: The Big Bus Company's map is excellent and can often be found in the larger hotels. The bus tour itself is really worthwhile if you want to check out all the main tourist sites in a few hours and get a feel for the city, but even if you don't decide to take the tour, the map is really useful for highlighting the best things to see and do. Another map that is invaluable is called Dubai Mini Map, by Explorer Publishing, and can be found in most bookshops, larger supermarkets and large hotel shops. It is detailed, splits the city up into the main areas and highlights the best things to see and do, as well as being tiny enough to slip into your pocket. If you prefer a meaty, larger map with the whole of Dubai on page, again Explorer Publishing has come up

trumps with its north-orientated, water-resistant and tear-proof Dubai map. Larger in scale, it is excellent for detail and virtually indestructible. To purchase these maps, visit explorerpublishing.com or any supermarket or bookshop in Dubai.

EXPLORING:

Useful Tips Summarised

SIGHTSEEING IN DUBAI REQUIRES a little planning in order to ensure that you have the best possible time and the least possible hassle. Here are a few tips.

- 1. Water** Carry at least a small bottle each, and refill during the day if necessary. The sun, the heat, the air-conditioning, along with all the walking and touring you will do, will make you very thirsty. If you don't drink regularly, you will become dehydrated.
- 2. Small-denomination banknotes** Shops, cafes and taxis are notoriously bad about giving change or having change for large banknotes. If the ATM only gives you AED 500, change it into 100s, 50s and lots of 10s before you set out for the day.
- 3. Sunscreen** We have all made the mistake of thinking we have acclimatised and that the sun isn't so hot today. It is, and you will burn without protection. We all have. And we felt foolish. Don't make the same mistake.
- 4. Hats** It is a good idea, if you plan to be in the sun for any length of time, to cover up with a hat of some description. And if any children, especially young ones in buggies, are in the party, it's imperative that their heads are covered or that a sun parasol protects them.
- 5. Public displays of affection** We can't reiterate it enough. They are not tolerated. In the street, in the malls, on the beach, in restaurants, in hotels. Anywhere. Emiratis do get offended and have been known to call the police if they witness any untoward behaviour. Save it for the privacy of your room. It's not worth being arrested.
- 6. Visiting a mosque** You will need to cover your arms, legs and head. Normally women will be loaned an abaya (robe) and a hijab (headscarf) to wear in the mosque, but it is respectful, if you know you are going to be visiting the mosque, to wear modest clothes as well.
- 7. Ramadan** The holy month of Ramadan falls earlier each year than the year before. In 2011 it will start at 1 August; in 2012, 20 July, in 2013, 9 July; and so on. It depends on the moon, and it lasts for 30 days. Each day the fast is broken with a big *Iftar* feast. During Ramadan it is illegal to eat, drink, chew gum or smoke in public during daylight hours. At the least, if you are caught, police will caution you. At the worst, you can be arrested. Cafes and restaurants are closed – except in hotels, where spe-

cial screens are erected at the entrances so that non-Muslims can eat without offending fasting Muslims. Opening times of everything might be different from normal, so check first before setting out. Be aware that if you are planning to do a lot of physical activities, you are not allowed to drink water in public during daylight hours. Just plan your itinerary accordingly, and whilst it is permitted for young children under the ages of 11 or 12 to eat and drink in public, there won't be any eateries open to refuel them at lunchtime. Probably better either to take a picnic to eat discreetly out of public sight, or stay close to the larger hotels where food is still being served.

TOP ATTRACTIONS:

Visitors' Checklist

FOR ADDITIONAL MUST-VISIT ATTRACTIONS, look for the  .

ABRA RIDE

THE BEST WAY TO GET FROM THE SOUKS in Deira to Bastakiya and Dubai Museum is to take these water taxis across Dubai Creek – efficient, speedy and fun. Buy tickets either side of Dubai Creek at abra ticket stations or onboard. Bear in mind that if you're wearing a skirt, it will fly up as the boat takes off. Tuck it in around you, and beware of the splashes. Tickets cost AED 1, and the ride takes 10–15 minutes depending on where you want to stop.

ATLANTIS

WHETHER THEMED HOTELS AND WATER PARKS are your thing or not, Atlantis, the majestic focal point of Palm Jumeirah, is well worth a visit for its magnificent scale and ingenuity. The resort includes a landmark hotel, Dolphin Bay, Aquaventure Water Park, The Lost Chambers Aquarium and Atlantis Dive Centre. Add to that pristine white beaches, world-class cuisine, a luxurious spa and designer boutiques, and this is a day out (albeit very expensive) for all the family. (☎ 04-426-0000; atlantisthepalm.com)

BASTAKIYA

THE ANTITHESIS OF ATLANTIS, Bastakiya is one of Dubai's oldest residential areas, now beautifully restored, with historical, windy, shady streets; courtyard houses with traditional wind towers; museums; art galleries; boutique hotels; and delightful restaurants and cafes. Dubai Museum and the Textile Souk are within easy walking distance. For guided walks and information about the area, contact The Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding situated in Bastakiya. (☎ 04-353-6666; cultures.ae)

CREEK DINNER CRUISE

YOU CAN'T FAIL TO NOTICE the floating restaurants when you stroll along Dubai Creek, on the Bastakiya/Bur Dubai side, moored along the Creek's edge opposite the British Embassy. At night, these dhows, converted into restaurants, sail up and down the Creek whilst dinner is served. Quality definitely varies between the dhows, and certainly some look a bit basic. However, the following are elegant, the food is excellent, and the experience is delightful. Be sure to book in advance.

We think the best is Bateaux Dubai (see page xref). Best of the rest include Al Mansour Dhow (see page xref) and Creek Cruises (see page xref).

DESERT SAFARIS

NO TRIP TO DUBAI IS COMPLETE without a desert safari. Tour companies have been quick to jump on the bandwagon. A safari is usually half a day, a full day or an overnight stay. Most include dune bashing (tearing wildly up and down sand dunes in 4x4s), a buffet dinner and drinks at a desert camp; sandboarding; camel riding; music; belly dancing; and henna painting. If you get carsick, consider taking travel sickness tablets before you set off – it can be hair-raising. The camps are well equipped with toilets and washbasins. See page xref for the tour operators we recommend.

DHOW BUILDING YARD

LOCATED CLOSE TO THE AL-GARHOUD BRIDGE and along the Dubai Creek, this shipyard is a fascinating place to see how the traditional dhows are made. It's an incredible sight to see a full-size dhow being transported on the back of a trailer by road. Their size, beauty and wooden construction make them a work of craftsmanship, compared to their modern fibreglass counterparts, and they never cease to impress and please. See how they are made, then walk along Dubai Creek and see them in use. We love the contrast of age-old tradition juxtaposed with all that is new and shiny in Dubai.

DUBAI CREEK

MAKE TIME TO EXPLORE ON FOOT BOTH SIDES of Dubai Creek. Start on the Deira bank, and be transported back in time as sailors load and unload huge blue wooden dhows with cargo. The docks are piled high with boxed shipments for abroad. There is such a sense of romance and excitement about these dhows that it makes you wish that you could stow away and sail off for an adventure. Walk along to the souks and immerse yourself in traditional Arabic life. Be prepared to haggle; the shopkeepers expect it. Then hop onboard an abra and cross the water to the Bur Dubai side, where dhows converted into floating restaurants are moored. Here you will discover the delights of one of Dubai's oldest neighbourhoods – Bastakiya and the Textile Souk. This is an area steeped in tradition, as far removed from one's

preconceived idea of Dubai as is possible.

DUBAI FOUNTAIN

ONLY IN DUBAI WOULD YOU HAVE FOUNTAINS THAT DANCE. We admit that it's a little cheesy, but there's something strangely beautiful, almost moving, certainly hypnotic, watching jets of water perform with synchronised accuracy to rousing music and beams of light. Either stand and watch for free from the terraces of Dubai Mall and the bridge that crosses from Dubai Mall to Souk Al Bahar, as the fountains perform every 30 minutes each evening, or reserve a table on the balcony of any restaurant overlooking the water and be entertained as you dine. (thedubaimall.com; every half hour: Sunday–Wednesday 6–10 p.m., Thursday–Saturday 4–11 p.m.)

MADINAT JUMEIRAH

ESSENTIALLY, THIS IS AN ARCHITECT'S CONCEPT of an Arabian-style hotel resort for Western tourists, complete with artificial Venetian-style canals and cobblestones, a 'traditional' souk, abras, waterfront cafes and restaurants, a theatre and an open-air amphitheatre. The atmosphere's buzzing, and it's fun to take a boat down the little river and visit the turtle sanctuary at the Mina A'Salam. The open-fronted bazaar shops are charming to wander through, but for a bargain you're far better off visiting the real souks and Karama. The Madinat Theatre has very good shows, and the amphitheatre has occasional food festivals and concerts. This is worth a visit for the people-watching. (Jumeirah Beach Strip; ☎ 04-366-8888; jumeirah.com)

SOUKS

NOTHING BEATS WANDERING through the bustling souks in the traditional areas of Deira and Bur Dubai across Dubai Creek. Spices, textiles, gold, perfume, pots and pans, electrical goods and kitsch tourist souvenirs – this is a feast for all the senses. Revel in the aromas of the spices, the calls of the shop owners, the sights of the jewel-coloured textiles. Meander through the windy streets, be prepared to bargain, and experience a slice of traditional Dubai life. Visit the Fish Market – you'll smell it before you see it – and be amazed at the variety of species on sale. Take a water taxi to cross from one side of the Creek to the other. Women should dress conservatively. Take cash to pay, as cards are not accepted. In the summer go early or late, as it gets very hot wandering around. Hours vary, but the souks are generally open Saturday–Thursday, 7 a.m.–noon and 5–7 p.m., and on Friday, 5–7 p.m. See Part Nine, Shopping, for more information.

THE WONDER BUS

THE WONDER BUS (☎ 04-359-5656; wonderbustours.net) from America is another bus tour option – with a difference. Not only is it capable of doing 120 kilometres per hour on the road, but it's

Best Views

THE GULF and **BURJ AL ARAB** from **Madinat Jumeirah**

BIRDS and **BUILDINGS** from **Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary**

BURJ AL ARAB and **JUMEIRAH BEACH HOTEL** from public beach

CREEKSIDE PARK from the cable cars

The **DUBAI FOUNTAIN** from **the bridge between Souk al Bahar** and **Dubai Mall**

DUBAI from **Burj Khalifa**

The **DUNES** around **Big Red**

The **PALM JUMEIRAH** from the **Monorail**

SHEIKH ZAYED ROAD from the **Metro**

The **SKYLINE** along **Sheikh Zayed Road**

The **SKYLINE** from either side of **Dubai Creek**

also able to do 7 knots on water. The trips are 1½-hour mini-tours of Dubai, around the Creek area and down the Creek. The bus has onboard television and toilet, and refreshments are served. Watch the video on the Web site, and thoughts of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* will spring to mind.

ACTIVITIES *and* TOURS

TOP TOUR COMPANIES

DUBAI HAS NUMEROUS TOUR COMPANIES for every type of activity. We have selected the following because we feel that they are the best at what they do and cover the widest range of activities on offer in the Emirate.

ARABIAN ADVENTURES (☎ 04-303-4888; arabian-adventures.com)

THIS TOUR COMPANY WILL CREATE AN ITINERARY to suit you and ensure that you come away with a host of unique experiences – dining in the desert, sandboarding down the dunes, taking a moonlit cruise by dhow, and many more. It split its tours into different categories – sightseeing, special interest and safaris – and will also organise car rental for you.

You might want to try an orientation tour of Dubai City, take a Bateaux Dubai cruise, or ‘Experience the Future of Dubai’, go to Wild Wadi, or visit Ski Dubai when it’s 40° outside. Perhaps you’d like to try a mountain safari to Wadi Hatta, or a camel-riding and sandboarding safari. Whatever it is you’re interested in, Arabian Adventures can arrange it for you. Not only does it organise its own tours, but it will also organise trips to attractions in and around Dubai. We have found that this company, used by most of the hotels as their first choice of tour operator, excels in organising first-rate tours and experiences and has an in-depth knowledge of Dubai and its environs. Check out its Web site for all its reservation numbers and detailed information on the activities it offers.



THE BIG BUS COMPANY DUBAI

(☎ 04-340-7709; bigbustours.com)

WE LIKE THE BIG BUS COMPANY for several reasons: It makes us smile to see big red open-top London double-decker buses driving round Dubai; it is an excellent way to discover and see an enormous number of sites and areas in Dubai in a few hours; and it is delightful to be able to sit on the top of an open-top bus and not feel freezing cold. Informative, interesting and providing the opportunity to hop on and off all over Dubai, visit museums, malls and beaches, and take a dhow cruise down Dubai Creek. We think The Big Bus offers excellent value for money, with two routes for one ticket – City Tour and Beach Tour – which can be done one at a time, one after the other, or one merged into the other within 24 hours of purchasing your ticket. Options are endless.

The ticket also includes:

- opportunities to hop on and off at any of the Big Bus stops to sightsee at your leisure
- free entry to Dubai Museum
- free entry to Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum’s House
- free Arabian dhow cruise
- free walking tour daily from October to April
- free three-hour Beach Tour
- free Wafi Welcome Card, offering various discounts at more than 150 shops
- free Mercato Advantage Booklet, offering 10%–50% discount at various shops and restaurants.

Buses operate seven days a week, all the major sights are covered, and there is a recorded commentary in a choice of eight languages. You can purchase your tickets from any Big Bus stop, from your hotel, via the Internet or by telephone at the number listed above.

DAY TOUR: 24-HOUR TICKET

Adult	AED 220
Child (ages 5–15)	AED 100
Family (two adults and two children)	AED 540

DAY TOUR: 48-HOUR TICKET

Adult	AED 285
Child (ages 5–15)	AED 130
Family (two adults and two children)	AED 700

If you just can't bear the thought of wasting the beautiful weather on a bus, but you still want to take in all the sites, it's really worth taking the Night Tour of Dubai. This will give you a completely different perspective of the city as the sun sets and the entire city lights up and sparkles. This tour is two hours long and features a live commentary from a fully-trained guide. The tour departs from Deira City Centre at 7:30 p.m., returning at 9:30 p.m., or from Souk Madinat Jumeirah at 8:30 p.m., returning at 10:30 p.m.

NIGHT TOUR

Adult	AED 100
Child (ages 5–15)	AED 75
Family (two adults and two children)	AED 275

COMBO PACKAGE TOUR*

Adult	AED 75
Child	AED 50
Family	AED 200

*Purchase your Night Tour ticket at the same time as you buy your Big Bus Day Tour ticket to benefit from the combo package deal.

DESERT RANGERS (☎ 04-357-2233. ☎ 050-276-8111; desertrangers.com)

A TRAVEL, TOURS AND ADVENTURE SAFARI operator, this company offers an enormous selection and variety of tours, activities and desert adventures. Not only does it cater for individuals and families, but it will also tailor-make any adventure programme for you. This company is outstanding at providing activities – from deep-sea fishing to dune buggy safaris, camel trekking by night to a helicopter tour of Dubai – that are fantastic fun and exciting, that may take you out your comfort zone, and that all have excellent attention to detail and safety.

Apart from the activities mentioned above, the company also offers eight different types of safari, a desert driving course, dhow cruise with dinner, Dubai city tour, canoeing expedition, trekking, rock climbing

and a desert balloon safari. It also works closely with schools throughout Dubai and offers a range of overnight adventure programmes, so it is very comfortable with children of all ages and abilities, making it an ideal company to use if you are travelling with children. We love its Dune Buggy Safari with barbecue dinner. It involves spending time in the desert, driving through the sand dunes in dune buggies – which are better than any fairground ride – watching the sun set over the stunning orange desert, riding a camel, trying shisha pipes, enjoying a sumptuous barbecue dinner and watching a belly dancer. The atmosphere is convivial, the staff are fantastically professional, and the experience is magical. It's touristy but amazing fun.

Prices vary according to the activity, the time you choose to spend on the activity and whether children are in the party. On average, you're looking at spending around AED 450 per activity, but it can be as little as AED 150 per person for the city tour to more than AED 1,000 per person for the helicopter tour. All information can be found on the company's Web site. Or if you prefer to phone, staff are excellent at helping you work out which activities you want to do and which are suitable for your party.

[TICKET_DXB] (☎ 04-321-4977; ticket-dxb.com)

THIS IS A TOUR COMPANY WITH A DIFFERENCE. If architecture is your thing, then you will love the tours organised by this agency established by the German architects Dominic Wanders and Hannes Werner. Their mission is to present architecture and urban development in Dubai in an informative and highly entertaining manner. Programme lengths can be anything from one to five days, and whilst we're not suggesting that you would want to spend your entire holiday looking at the architectural delights Dubai has in abundance, we do think that an opportunity to see the Palm Jumeirah, Dubai Marina, Madinat Jumeirah and its souk, the half-finished Dubailand, Burj Khalifa (the world's tallest building), Souk al Bahar, Dubai Mall's Aquarium, the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), and Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club might be made all the more fascinating if experienced architects are your tour guides.

In addition to lending their expertise to these specialised tours, the team of [ticket_dXb] is also happy to help you choose your hotel and organise additional non-architectural trips and activities as well.

BOAT AND YACHT CHARTERS

FOR A DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE, consider chartering your own boat or yacht. We have selected charter companies to suit all pockets.

ARABIAN ADVENTURES (☎ 04-303-4888; arabian-adventures.com)

ARABIAN ADVENTURES WILL CHARTER YOU A LUXURY YACHT manned by a full crew for whatever you'd like to do: a private excursion

to sea, water sports, a fishing trip, a dinner cruise and so on. The crew will ensure that you make the most of your time onboard, and Arabian Adventures can also arrange for personalised catering and refreshments during your charter.

BRISTOL MIDDLE EAST (Marina Walk, Dubai Marina;
☎ 04-366-3538; ☎ 050-473-2988/98; bristol-middleeast.com)

BRISTOL MIDDLE EAST HAS A LARGE FLEET of different sea craft to charter, from luxury motor yachts to sail catamarans. Boats can be hired for any event, and the company will organise fishing trips and water sports as well.

EL MUNDO (☎ 050-240-1465; elmundodubai.com)

ANDORRA IS EL MUNDO'S 15.24-METRE, 15-man luxury yacht, moored at Dubai International Marine Club at the Le Méridien Hotel and Beach Resort. It is available for all types of sailing charters. *Andorra's* captain has been sailing the Gulf and European waters for more than 35 years and is a qualified yacht master. Fully comprehensive insurance is included, and the yacht can be rented by the hour for private charters, or for morning and sunset cruises.

LUXURY YACHTING CATAMARAN (LYC) (Bur Dubai side of the Creek; ☎ 050-586-9746; lycatamaran.com)

ON VERRA CONCEPT BOATS have sailed around the Caribbean, the Côte d'Azur and the Seychelles and are now in Dubai. *On Verra VI* is located in the Creek on the Bur Dubai side, in front of Bastakiya. With the catamaran's 82-man capacity, this company caters for parties with DJs, cocktail food and drinks. All departures are from Bur Dubai Creek to the Burj Al Arab and the Palm Jumeirah. There is a choice of scheduled cruises lasting from three to six hours, or the catamaran can be rented privately by the hour. For details and prices call LYC or check their Web site. This is a perfect ship for a party.

ULTIMATE CHARTER (☎ 04-331-1483; ☎ 050-865-0765;
dubaiultimatecharter.com)

PRIVATE CHARTERS WITH ULTIMATE CHARTER'S yachts range from a seven-man fishing and cruising boat to a 30-man yacht with hot tub. An experienced and qualified crew mans the boats, and pickup and drop-off before and after the cruise can be arranged.

CAMPS AND CAMPING

Camping in the desert is a magical adventure, but unless you live in Dubai, we don't advise you to head out on your own. Many of the tour operators profiled in this section organise overnight desert safaris, which are well worth trying out, or for something a little

different we recommend Green Turtle Adventure (☎ 050-287-6293; greenturtleadventure.com), a British-managed adventure company committed to the highest standards in adventure activities and outdoor education. They operate two adventure centres in the U.A.E.: Dhaid Desert Adventure, a purpose-built camp which provides the setting for adventure courses for schools and corporate groups; and Kalba Adventure Centre, with the residential capacity to cater for 160 guests in an Omani fort-style setting. We recommend this camp particularly because many of our children have been on school camps at the Dhaid Desert Camp and have come back with rave reviews. And if it's good enough for the international schools to use, then we know that it will be well run, and a thoroughly exciting experience.

Kalba Adventure Centre is located on the edge of the Kalba mangroves on the east coast of the U.A.E. This is camping in the desert for those who don't want to rough it! They offer an overnight camping trip at the Kalba Adventure Centre, followed by a day of activity. The camp has bathrooms, and there is a choice between safari tents or *barasti* (palm leaf) cabins with en suites.

The centre operates a wide range of adventure activities, including sailing, high and low rope courses, horse riding, kayaking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and a series of other challenging pursuits. The Kalba mangroves, a protected nature reserve, provide an ideal location for all the adventure activities. You can choose from packages ranging from activity days where you learn a specific skill to multi-activity weekends.

Qualified instructors lead all activities. Land-based activities include abseiling, archery, camping, caving, high and low rope courses, hiking, horse experience, mountain biking, orienteering, rock climbing, sandboarding, team building and wilderness skills. Water-based activities include canoeing, kayaking and raft building. All the activities adhere to the highest levels of safety – the instructors are rigorously trained and extremely experienced, and all activity equipment is checked daily.

CRUISES

MANY COMPANIES OFFER CRUISES around Dubai's coastline and up and down the Creek. As with everything else, the quality and the prices vary enormously. Here we recommend five of the best. Prices are subject to change and vary according to season.

AL MANSOUR DHOW (moored in front of the Radisson Blu hotel on the Deira side of the Creek; ☎ 04-222-7171; radissonblu.com)

AL MANSOUR DHOW IS OWNED by the Radisson Blu Hotel and is a traditional wooden dhow. Not quite as elegant or sophisticated as its glass-panelled rival Bateaux Dubai, it offers tradition and charm instead. The dhow has two decks: the air-conditioned lower deck

seats 60 persons; the upper deck is open, with a majlis set-up, and seats 70. The best place to reserve your table is on the upper deck, where you have great views, even though you have to traipse downstairs for the food, which is a serve-yourself buffet. The Arabic and International food, whilst not haute cuisine, is good, and a bar serves alcoholic drinks. The cost, which includes a buffet and fruit punch, is AED 185 for adults, half price for children ages 4–11, and free for children age 3 and under.

ARABIAN ADVENTURES (☎ 04-303-4888; arabian-adventures.com)

IN ITS PORTFOLIO OF TOURS, Arabian Adventures includes a dhow cruise along Dubai Creek, with dinner. The company will collect you from your hotel and take you to the dhow, moored on the Creek. There is an International buffet with soft drinks and a cash bar serving alcoholic drinks. This cruise does not offer live entertainment. As the dhow sails up and down the Creek, you will see old wooden dhows and luxury yachts, spectacular modern architecture, such as the National Bank of Dubai and the Chamber of Commerce & Industry buildings, whilst Sheikh Saeed's House, the birthplace of Sheikh Rashid and the Heritage Village are reminiscent of days gone by. The price, which includes a buffet dinner, two soft drinks and Arabic coffee, is AED 285 for adults and half price for children ages 2–12.

BATEAUX DUBAI (moored on the Bur Dubai side of the Dubai Creek opposite the British Embassy; ☎ 04-399-4994; bateauxdubai.com)

BATEAUX DUBAI IS A LUXURY CRUISE SHIP, with a 360-degree glass-enclosed restaurant, owned by Jebel Ali International Hotels. It is made up of three sections – a two-tiered outdoor deck, an indoor lounge and the restaurant. The restaurant can host up to 200 guests for dining cruises, and the outdoor deck is perfect for a sundowner before the meal. Known for their sophistication and atmosphere, Bateaux Dubai's dinner cruises combine good food with the opportunity to sail down the Creek. You are served an excellent four-course meal from an à la carte menu offering a fusion of Eastern and Western cuisine. Alcohol is available and charged separately. Live music is played (a pianist accompanied our meal), and as the boat meanders down the Creek, you have fantastic views of old and new Dubai. The experience is more like going to an excellent restaurant that happens to be on a boat, as opposed to going on a cruise with food thrown in. The cost, including a four-course meal and soft drinks on arrival, is AED 295 for adults and AED 220 for children. The cruise is not suitable for children under age 5.

EL MUNDO (berthed at the Dubai International Marine Club at Le Méridien Mina Seyahi, Al Sufouh Road; ☎ 050-240-1465; elmundodubai.com)

FOR AN ALTOGETHER MORE CASUAL CRUISE EXPERIENCE, possibly appealing to a younger crowd, El Mundo offers a lively, fun-filled Friday in the Sun four-hour cruise. The boat has a large air-conditioned lounge with bar area, an open deck area, and seating on top of the main cabin roof and on the foredeck, so guests may kick back, relax and later watch the sun set across the Gulf. Amenities include ladies' and gents' bathroom facilities and deck shower. Guests board at Dubai International Marine Club (DIMC) and take a sightseeing cruise around The Palm. The ship then drops anchor in sight of the iconic Burj al Arab hotel. You can then swim, snorkel, enjoy banana boat rides, or sunbathe on deck. An informal lunch of gourmet burgers made at the live cooking station is served, and the ship has a licensed bar. Just before sunset, you return to DIMC, where guests are treated to a complimentary beverage at the Barasti Bar. For AED 240 for adults and AED 190 for children, the cruise includes water, soft drinks, gourmet burgers, four alcoholic drinks and all water sports.

Note: All passengers departing on a cruise with El Mundo are required to bring an original as well as a copy of a form of photographic identity (for example, a passport). Any persons not doing so will unfortunately not be allowed to sail.

YELLOW BOATS (☎ 800-4034; theyellowboats.com)

THIS IS ONE FOR ADRENALINE JUNKIES. Yellow Boats offers high-speed boat tours along the Dubai coast, so while not officially a cruise, it is a wildly exhilarating boat ride nonetheless. The Yellow Boats are top-of-the-line rigid inflatable crafts, manned by experienced and fully-qualified boat crews. Each boat is equipped with the latest GPS navigation and safety equipment. Four tours – ranging from an adrenaline-filled thrill ride to tours around the Palm Jumeirah, Burj Al Arab and Dubai Marina – are on offer and last 20–90 minutes. Prices range AED 90–200 for adults, AED 70–140 for children ages 5–12, AED 300–580 per family (two adults and two children), depending on the tour and its duration. Unfortunately, children under age 5 and/or less than 15 kilograms are not allowed to travel on the boats. The Yellow Boats are fantastic fun and very exciting. Teenagers will love them.

For full prices and schedules, contact The Yellow Boats, or visit the Web site.

DESERT ACTIVITIES

A LOT OF COMPANIES IN DUBAI ORGANISE a wide range of desert activities. How do you know which is better than another? Most desert activities include refreshments (normally a barbecue), music, shisha, sometimes henna painting and all drinks. All desert camps are fully equipped with toilets and wash facilities.

As with all desert activities, our main concern is that the tour

operator is licensed and insured, and that all vehicles are fitted with the regulation safety equipment – especially seat belts. When you make the booking, it's worth finding out what time you will be returning (particularly if you have young children in the party); how child-friendly it is – if that is relevant to you; whether the drivers have the necessary licence for safari; and what the facilities are like at the camp. Also find out what show or performance will be taking place at the camp – some have a belly dance; others have a full programme – what kind of food, buffet or barbecue will be served, and at what time; how many people will be in each car; how long the journey will take; if there will be stops en route; if you will be going dune bashing (if you get carsick, it's worth taking travel sickness pills, as it can be a little wild); and if you will have water supplied on the journey.

Most tour operators offer the standard desert safari, but prices do vary quite a lot, and the cheapest aren't necessarily the best – so shop around until you're happy.

The ubiquitous desert safaris are half days, full days, or overnight safaris. You will be picked up from your hotel and will travel to your desert camp in 4x4s. It will be a scenic drive, and once you reach the desert, your driver will normally take you across some fairly exciting dunes. The safari normally starts in the afternoon so that you arrive at the camp early evening. The camp is laid out like a Bedouin camp, with rugs and cushions. Usually a buffet or barbecue dinner and drinks are served, and you will have the chance to go sandboarding, camel riding and smoke shisha or have your hands painted with henna and watch some belly dancing. The bathrooms are perfectly civilized, with proper toilets, tiled floors and washbasins. If you're staying overnight, there should be showers as well, and you will have breakfast in the morning and the chance to do some more sandboarding and dune bashing before being driven back to your hotel. Confirm the prices when you book, as they change according to season.

ALPHA TOURS (☎ 04-294-9888; alphatoursdubai.com)

A VERY COMPREHENSIVE TOUR COMPANY that has extremely well-organised tours. Long-term knowledge of the region has given Alpha Tours a lot of experience in fine-tuning their activities. Desert Safaris are action packed – the Bedouin campsite is five-star, and you can do all the usual – ride camels, smoke shisha, sand-surf, have henna painting done and enjoy a three-course barbecue dinner buffet with a belly dancer to entertain you. The overnight safari extends this.

ARABIAN ADVENTURES (part of Emirates Airlines; ☎ 04-303-4888; arabian-adventures.com)

USED BY ALL THE MAJOR HOTELS as their tour operator of choice when it comes to organising desert tours, safaris, exploring wadis, desert driving, sandboarding, riding camels and anything else you

can do in the desert, this company has informative guides. They can arrange any itinerary you like, and a selection of their desert tours includes Sundowner – a dinner safari in the sand dunes; Riddle of the Sands – a full-day safari; Rise & Shine – a taste of desert tradition; An Off-Road Adventure – wadi and desert tour; Rides and Slides – camel riding and sandboarding; Up the Wadi – a mountain safari to Wadi Hatta; Desert Driving Course . . . and the list goes on. The Sundowner prices are AED 330 for adults, AED 295 for children and a discounted rate for children under age 12. We would recommend this tour company as your first choice; compare tours and prices of other companies with theirs.

ARABIAN DESERT TOURS (☎ 04-268 2880; ☎ 055-874-3891; ☎ 050-758-8911; adtuae.com)

THIS WELL-ESTABLISHED COMPANY offers a range of tours, such as Hummer safari, desert safari, quad biking or overnight desert safari, and some are slightly more unusual than the other tour operators. It has two desert camps, one located within the secure location of Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve (for exclusive usage) and the other located in the Margham area in the Big Red (VIP usage). Staff are experienced, knowledgeable and hospitable.

ARABIAN NIGHTS TOURS (☎ 04-321-6565/6500; arabiannightstours.com)

THE DESERT SAFARI: Footprints in the Sand takes you into the heart of the desert, where you will experience dune bashing. You then watch the sunset over the desert before moving on to the Bedouin-style campsite. You will relax in carpeted tents; smoke shisha; attempt riding a camel; try on some local costumes; consume tea, coffee, soft drinks and dates; and have henna painting if you wish. There will also be a photo opportunity with a falcon. A belly dancer will entertain you, and an Arabic-style barbecue with meats, salads, vegetarian dishes, rice, fruit and sweets will be served round the campfire under the stars. You will be driven back to Dubai later on. Ample soft drinks, mineral water, tea and coffee will be provided at the campsite, and a cash bar serves alcohol. The prices for this safari are AED 300 for adults and AED 200 for children age 11 and under.

DESERT ADVENTURES (☎ 04-224-2800; desertadventures.com)

THE 4X4S TAKE YOU ON A ROLLER COASTER RIDE on the sand dunes on the Desert Safari with Barbecue excursion. You stop on the highest sand dune to watch the sunset. You then continue your journey to the Bedouin campsite in the heart of the desert, where you can have henna designs painted, try on local costumes and enjoy soft drinks, water, tea or coffee. Then it is time to try camel rides

and shisha. A belly dancer will perform to Arabic music, and there is a delicious barbecue buffet. This company provides the following warning: The tour is not recommended for heart patients or people with neck or back problems. The half-day tour costs AED 290 for adults and AED 196 for children.

DESERT RANGERS (☎ 04-357-2233; ☎ 050-276-8111; desertrangers.com)

DESERT RANGERS MARKETS ITSELF as a Desert Adventure Tour operator, and its range of activities is extremely comprehensive. Not only does it provide itineraries for pleasure, but it also has a record of creating extremely successful corporate team-building activities. It has a fleet of its own 4x4 Land Cruisers, it pays huge attention to detail, and its staff are very well trained. Activities include a variety of different desert safaris with barbecues and entertainment – such as desert balloon safaris, dune buggy safaris, Hatta pool safaris, mountain safaris and sandboarding safaris – desert driving courses and camel trekking by night (this is just a selection). For the half-day Dune Dinner Safari, the trip stops at a camel-breeding farm, as well as stopping for photo opportunities and refreshments at the more spectacular dunes, in addition to the other typical safari activities. Prices are AED 295 for adults and AED 195 for children. This company is also highly recommended.

The Dune Buggy Safari lasts a half-day, and after basic instruction and a safety briefing, you will head off on a roller coaster drive through the sand dunes, where you will have the opportunity to lead the convoy if you feel the urge. For your comfort and safety, each dune buggy comes equipped with a full roll cage, bucket seats and full safety harnesses. The minimum age for driving is 15. Helmet and goggles are provided. You are required to sign a disclaimer form against damage and personal injury, and a certificate will be provided at the end of the safari. For a 60-minute ride, the cost is AED 425. For a 45-minute ride sharing with another person, the cost is AED 325. Spectators pay AED 150. This company is also highly recommended.

EXPLORER TOURS (☎ 04-286-1991; explorertours.ae)

THIS COMPANY PUTS TOGETHER outside activity tours for people with a sense of adventure. The sort of tours it offers include dune buggy safaris, desert safaris, desert driving courses, overnight safaris, sandboarding safaris, camel trekking by night and Liwa Desert safaris. For the very adventurous it offers Extreme Explorer tours, which might last several days. The staff are extremely experienced, and the tours are very well organised. The emphasis is on getting the best out of yourself, and having fun in the process. This company also does a lot of work with schools, including organising Duke of Edinburgh Award programmes and Desert Explorer programmes,

which give students an opportunity to have a unique day in the desert hunting fossils, sand dune boarding, camel trekking and playing desert cricket. Staff are extremely experienced at working with children between the ages of 8 and 18.

If you choose the Desert Safari, you will visit a camel-breeding farm and have the chance to ride a camel, unwind by smoking an aromatic shisha, or enjoy a chilled drink before eating a delicious barbecue dinner. A belly dancer will introduce you to the art of Arabian entertainment before you leave the desert and head back to Dubai. Prices are AED 270 for adults and AED 180 for children.

In comparison to quad bikes, dune buggies are more powerful and reliable on sand and at the same time are safer, as they are equipped with a full roll cage, bucket seats and safety harness. You need to be at least 16 years old and sign a disclaimer form against damage and personal injury. You will be provided with safety helmets and goggles. The Dune Buggy Safari costs AED 500 per person, or, if you are sharing a buggy, AED 375 per person.

HELICOPTER TOURS

IF YOU HAVE A HEAD FOR HEIGHTS and want to experience a truly unique way to tour Dubai, then consider taking a helicopter ride above the city.

ALPHA TOURS (☎ 04-294-9888; alphatoursdubai.com)

ALPHA TOURS OFFERS DAILY CITY TOURS of varying lengths, taking in different sights and flying over the main attractions of Dubai. The shortest tour is 20 minutes; the longest is one hour. You can either share a helicopter with five other people, or have it for your exclusive use. All passengers must carry an ID document with them – preferably a passport.

AEROGULF HELICOPTER SERVICES (☎ 04-220-0331; aerogulfservices.com)

AEROGULF HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED in Dubai for more than 30 years, providing helicopter support to Dubai's oil and gas industry and aerial work for a variety of other industries throughout the Middle East. In recent years, the company has diversified by offering its unique heli-touring experience, Fly Dubai.

Aerogulf services are based at Dubai International Airport, and pickup can be arranged from your hotel. You will arrive at a dedicated VIP check-in area, from which you will then board the helicopter. You can either organise a private charter or take one of the scheduled city tours, lasting either 30 or 45 minutes.

MEYDAN RACECOURSE (Nad al Sheba. ☎ 04-327-0077; meydan.ae)

THE NEW MEYDAN RACECOURSE opened in March 2010 with the pinnacle of Dubai's racing calendar, the Dubai World Cup. The venue, which is gigantic and resembles an airport, comprises a 1,750-metre all-weather surface and 2,400-metre turf course. The grandstand accommodates a capacity of 60,000 spectators and incorporates the world's first five-star trackside hotel, known as – wait for it – The Meydan. The racecourse will also be home to the Meydan Museum & Gallery, the Meydan Marina, Meydan Grandstand Suites and the Falcon Commercial Park free zone offices. In addition to this there will be an IMAX cinema, and the Dubai Racing Club and Emirates Racing Authority will have their offices located here. The idea is that Meydan will become a year-round entertainment venue.

Three main horse racing events will take place at Meydan annually: the Winter Racing Challenge, from early November to early January; the Dubai International Racing Carnival, from the middle of January to the beginning of March; and the Dubai World Cup meeting, which traditionally falls on the last Saturday in March.

General admission will be free; grandstand and package prices vary. Races commence at 7 p.m. If you are thinking of being in the grandstand you will need smart attire, and women are encouraged to wear hats and formal dress. Think Ladies' Day at Royal Ascot and you can't go wrong. If you've only brought holiday gear with you, stick to the free admission areas and you'll be fine in casual wear. For information about future racing events, check the Web site dubairacingclub.com or call ☎ 04-223-0000.

SEAWINGS (☎ 04-807-0708; seawings.ae)

IS IT A BOAT? IS IT A PLANE? IT'S BOTH. It's a plane that takes off from water. It operates up to 16 flights daily, offering guests the chance to travel 457 metres above Dubai for a fantastic aerial city tour. Seeing the sights from a bird's-eye view is a thrilling experience. Flights include Seawings Silver, a 40-minute 'dock to dock' excursion providing views of Dubai's most iconic landmarks; and The Burj Experience, also a 40-minute 'dock to dock' aerial experience focusing on the Burj Khalifa and the Burj Al Arab. You depart from Jebel Ali and land at Dubai Creek. Prices are AED 1,225 per adult, AED 1,040 per child age 2–11. Children under age 2 are free.

WALKING TOURS

Dubai is a fascinating city to explore on foot, and with a good map you will be able to discover areas with great ease. You will find people helpful and friendly, and it is safe to wander pretty much everywhere. The best times to go walking are anytime during the winter months, or if that's not possible, either very early morning between 7 and 9 a.m., or late afternoon and evening, from 5 p.m. onwards. Take plenty of water, apply your sunscreen, wear comfortable shoes, and you're

ready to go. On your own, you might like to explore Dubai Marina, Jumeirah Beach Walk, Satwa, Karama, Dubai Creek and any of the long stretches of beach parallel to Jumeirah Road in the Jumeirah–Umm Suqeim stretch.

Bastakiya

The Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding (SMCCU), based in Bastakiya, organises walks through Bastakiya, one of the oldest, most traditional districts in Dubai. The guides are knowledgeable, informal and very friendly. You will be led through the narrow winding streets and into old restored houses with traditional wind towers. You will have a chance to find out about the history of Dubai and this neighbourhood in particular. After the tour, you will be invited to the SMCCU, a traditional wind tower house with courtyard, for coffee and dates and the opportunity to have all your questions answered. For information and bookings, call ☎ 04-353-6666, or view the SMCCU's Web site at cultures.ae.

Arabian Treasures Walk

If you take The Big Bus Tour (see page xref), then this guided walk is included in the ticket. It starts at Dubai Museum and ends at Dubai Gold Souk. You will wander through some of the oldest trading districts of Deira and into the Textile Souk, and you'll then take a traditional abra ride across Dubai Creek into the bustling trade route of the city – to the Spice Souk, the Old Souk and the Gold Souk. You'll have the chance to try your haggling skills and maybe come away with a bargain or two. This is a lovely walk, full of hidden treasures and mysteries. It shows a very different side to Dubai. The walk takes place daily from mid-October to April at midday and 3 p.m. It lasts an hour. For information about the Big Bus Tour, call ☎ 04-340-7709, or view its Web site at bigbustours.com.

ORGANISED TOURS

DUBAI WATER BUS (☎ 800-9090; rta.ae) Dubai has recently seen the introduction of a new type of water transport – the Water Bus. It is spacious and comfortable with panoramic windows and wheelchair access. It services five routes along the Creek, enabling commuters, residents, and tourists faster and more efficient journeys by water. Each Dubai Water Bus has a sales kiosk selling snacks, magazines and newspapers, as well as prepaid cards for use on the Water Bus. While the Water Bus offers commuter service, the tourist service is a special sightseeing cruise and guided tour of Dubai Creek. Every hour, from 8 a.m. to midnight, the Water Bus takes tourists on a 45-minute ride from Al Shandagha Station to Al Seef Station and back. The cost is AED 25 per person.

DREAMDAYS (☎ 800-2080; dreamdays.ae) Just when we thought that we couldn't find anything bigger, better, or more fanciful than the

world's largest, tallest, first . . . we discovered Dreamdays, a company that makes all your dreams come true. And in Dubai, where excess and extravagance are lauded, and modesty is not a virtue, how apt to find a company that is considered 'the first and leading provider of gift experiences in the U.A.E.', whose aim it is 'to meet the wishes of customers looking to fulfil their lifetime's fantasies'. This is an Internet-based business; choose the experience you desire and book it through the dedicated call centre (☎ 800-2080).

Finally, if all the tours in this guide have failed to inspire you – if open-top buses, guided walks, dhow cruises, water taxis, helicopters and seaplanes have left you underwhelmed – we have one last suggestion: an exclusive luxury limousine city tour. Dreamdays will arrange for your own professional chauffeur to collect you from your hotel in one of a choice of limos – a Hummer H2 or H1 limo, Cadillac Escalade limo, or Ford Excursion SUV limo, all with an entertainment system – and for the next three hours Dubai will be your oyster. You will be treated like royalty, and service will be lavish – all you have to do is sit back and relax. The limousine will hold a maximum of 18 people, and the price is AED 1,349. If you wish to have an extra hour after your three hours are up, add AED 650 per hour.

ART GALLERIES AND EVENTS

DUBAI HAS A PROLIFIC ART SCENE. For a comprehensive overview of all that's happening in the art world in Dubai, check **artinthecity.com** (☎ 04-341-7303), and pick up a copy of *ArtMap*. Both are excellent sources of information. Additionally we recommend

Brownbook (**brownbookmag.com**), an urban lifestyle guide published six times a year focusing on art, design and travel across the Middle East and North Africa. Also useful is *Canvas* (**canvasonline.com**), a bimonthly magazine offering the latest news on art and culture from the Middle East and the Arab world. The government of Dubai has created its own Web site, **dubaiculture.ae**, which has two useful sections: Live Our Heritage and Calendar and Events. <UT>

Al Quoz Industrial Route

The industrial area of Al Quoz is not immediately a place that would seem to attract a buzzing developing art scene, but it is fast

becoming home to some of Dubai's most exciting contemporary art galleries, alternative venues and unique cultural institutions, offering an insight into the active development of Dubai's art scene. The great thing about this area is that the galleries are centred around a few streets and are close to quirky, inexpensive restaurants such as

More Cafe (☎ 04-323-4350; **morecafe.biz**) in the Gold & Diamond Park – which not only serves delicious light meals but also showcases artwork from artists based in the Middle East – and **The Courtyard Gallery & Café** (☎ 04-347-9090; **courtyardgallerydubai.com**) in Al Quoz 3. The cafe features a spacious courtyard, richly Oriental in design, with traditional buildings housing modern galleries surrounding it. Frequently-changing exhibitions showcasing a range of international and local artists, evening concerts and a delightful cafe make this a lively and interesting venue worth visiting on your tour of Al Quoz.

Of the Al Quoz galleries, **thejamjar** is the creative hub for both **artinthecity.com**, whose aim is to promote art and culture across Dubai through an informative, up-to-date, easy-to-use Web site, and ArtBus, an excellent bus tour with a difference.

DIFC Arts Area

Dubai's newest art spot, the DIFC, is the city's centre of high-end fashion brands, interior design and fine art. Compared to the grittiness of Al Quoz, this is an area that oozes sophistication and polish. It juxtaposes the modern financial world with cutting-edge contemporary international and regional art in a dynamic architectural setting. For a lively, interesting evening out, don't miss **Art Nights @ Gate Village** (☎ 04-362-2395; **registerwithdifc.com/artnights**). Every month, Art Nights @ Gate Village brings together the galleries and retailers of the Gate Village to combine elements of art, film, fashion, design and cuisine through a variety of indoor and outdoor activities. The event is free and open to the public from 7 p.m.–late.

Bastakiya Galleries

Al Bastakiya is a beautifully-restored heritage site and is Dubai's original artistic and cultural hub. Not only is it home to several of Dubai's long-established art galleries, but the historical houses, which are open to the public, also provide a platform for emerging artistic talent as part of Dubai's independent fringe-art fair – Bastakiya Art Fair. The boutique hotels in this district also showcase upcoming talent in their integrated galleries. Bastakiya has the informality of Al Quoz and the glorious natural sophistication of an area steeped in history, heritage and culture. Small collections of art are in most houses into which you poke your head – and all have their doors open for viewers to enter as they please.

TOURING NEIGHBOURHOODS

DUBAI IS SPLIT UP INTO DIFFERENT AREAS, each with its own particular set of characteristics. The contrast between the old and the new is striking, and whilst the skyline is no longer dominated by cranes, you can't fail to notice pockets where development and construction are still ongoing, and other places where it has all ground to

unofficial TIP

If you're interested in all things art-related and love an auction, then twice a year – in April and October – the Christie's Dubai auctions continue to act as a major catalyst in the development of the contemporary art market in the Middle East. Call ☎ 04-425-5647 or visit **christies.com**.

a halt. The recession has struck a mighty blow to certain ambitious projects, and many construction sites are eerily quiet, certainly for the foreseeable future.

Originally Dubai centred on the Creek, to the north of the city, a 15-kilometre inlet that runs through the centre of the older areas – Deira and Bur Dubai. This is the traditional part of the city, where you will experience the true hustle and bustle of Arabic life and which is as thrilling to visit as any of the new developments. Jumeirah Road, 16 kilometres long, runs parallel to the coast, starting at Al Mina and Dubai Dry Docks in the north, taking you sedately from old Dubai, through the attractive residential areas of Jumeirah and Umm Suqeim, to Al Sufouh and into new Dubai, comprising the luxury beach hotel resorts, the Palm Jumeirah, Dubai Marina and the buzz of Media and Internet cities. Parallel to Jumeirah Road, and one block inland, the more frenetic Al Wasl Road takes you through the urban and industrial areas via Satwa and Safa Park to Mall of the Emirates. And parallel to this, one block inland again, is Sheikh Zayed Road, commencing near Karama and Bur Dubai in the north. Lined with iconic skyscrapers, this multilane highway takes you from Za'abeel Park, past Downtown Dubai and the financial district, through the industrial area of Al Quoz – which is fast becoming an artistic hub – and into the sprawling green new residential developments of Emirates Hills, the Lakes, the Greens and down to Jebel Ali.

This section is intentionally not in alphabetical order; rather, it works its way, where possible, through the districts from north to south.

Garhoud

Previously not known for much more than being the site of Dubai International Airport, Garhoud was zapped to life by the construction of Dubai Festival City, opened in 2007. A true juxtaposition of old and new, Garhoud is an established residential area, popular with airport staff and airline crews for its proximity to the airport. You do need a car to visit this area, or grab a taxi from one of the Metro stops. There are several well-known hotels here, useful for the airport, and whilst there aren't any particularly interesting tourist sites of note, Dubai Festival City (☎ 04-213-6213; festivalcity.com) is a beautifully-landscaped waterfront residential community incorporating the massive shopping mall Dubai Festival Centre (☎ 04-232-5444; festivalcentre.com) with its huge choice of international retailers, restaurants and entertainment venues. Eat alfresco at Canal Walk, or enjoy a ride on an abra. Walk along Festival Marina, where luxury yachts are moored, or catch live concerts in the Centre. Irish Village (☎ 04-282-4750/2; theirishvillage.ae) is a great bar if you're after a dose of normality, inexpensive drinks and live music, whilst next door in Century Village (☎ 04-282-4122; centuryvillage.ae), you can choose from a range of restaurants with cuisines from around the

world. The new state-of-the-art Dubai Tennis Stadium (☎ 04-282-4122; aviationclub.ae), home to the star-studded annual Dubai Tennis Championships, is also located here. This is a great area if you need to be close to the airport or work in the area; apart from that, it can feel a little remote.

Dubai Creek (Deira side)

The Creek is a natural seawater inlet that separates Deira on the east side of the Creek from Bur Dubai on the west. Life along the Creek retains a sense of Dubai's historical past and its traditions. This area has played a central role in Dubai's development and is an important starting point if you wish to discover what life was like before modernisation took precedence. Trade stemmed from the Creek and is still part of the vibrant way of life here. There are five crossing points across the Creek: Business Bay Crossing, nearest Dubai Festival City; Al Garhoud Bridge, next to Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club; Floating Bridge; Maktoum Bridge; and Shindagha Tunnel, which is closest to the sea.

Starting at the inland end of the Creek is **Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary**, the city's only nature reserve, which attracts an impressive range of bird species, including flamingos, as well as being a site for many native plant species. Call ☎ 04-606-6822/6 or visit wildlife.ae to obtain a permit to enter the sanctuary.

Continuing past Dubai Festival City and up the Creek, you reach Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club (☎ 04-295-6000; dubairgolf.com), voted one of the world's top 100 must-play golf courses. The marina here is home to some truly luxurious yachts, but it is the Boardwalk Restaurant, built out over the Creek, that we like to head to when we fancy some really decent fish-and-chips. The views are lovely, but we advise you to watch out for bombing seagulls.

It is worth exploring as much of the Creek as you can on foot if possible, especially when you reach the dhow wharf, where stunning blue dhows are moored and sailors load and unload their cargo. The dockside is piled high with crates, the Creek banks are chaotic, and there is an air of excitement and adventure that makes you wish you could hop on board and sail away.

The abra ticket office and station is located here. Abras are the water taxis and are the most popular form of transport up and down the Creek and over to Bur Dubai, Bastakiya and the souks on the other side. To cross to the other side it will only cost you AED 1. Many people use the abras to go to work, and they are considerably cheaper and faster than buses or taxis. Don't make the mistake of taking a private boat – they will charge you AED 20 or more. The abras fill up quickly – they seat up to 30 people – and be careful as you hop on board; you don't want to fall into the Creek. Men should try and avoid sitting too close to women on the abra unless you are travelling together in the first place. The abra ride is breezy and you may get

splashed, so sit back and hold onto loose clothing. The crossing from one side to the other takes between five and ten minutes.

You may be offered a private tour up and down the Creek, which is a wonderful way to view the spectacular modern skyline on the Deira side, in contrast to the traditional, historical buildings on the Bur Dubai side. You will be asked for AED 50 one way, AED 100 for both. But you should try and bargain it down to AED 40 and AED 80 at most.

Past the abra station you will reach the souk area in Deira. This is a wonderful place to wander around and experience the hustle and bustle of daily Arabic life. It feels a little like you're entering a time warp, especially if you've come from the newer parts of Dubai. Men in dhotis and dishdashas throng the streets; women in abayas come here to buy their spices and, farther along, their fresh fish.

Meander through the **Spice, Gold and Old souks** towards the **Fish Market**, which you will probably smell before you see it. Be prepared to barter, and watch out for men on bikes weaving their way through the narrow streets. The shopkeepers will try and draw you into their shops and will love to chat to you if you let them.

Deira

Once you are in the souks and you wander back a street or two, you are in Deira proper. With its narrow, crowded streets – a little slice of India rather than Arabia – this area oozes personality. This district is full of budget hotels and fantastic, inexpensive places to eat, with every type of Eastern cuisine imaginable – Arabic, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Iraqi, Iranian and Thai – the choice is endless. On weekends, locals and expats of all nationalities spill out onto the pavements of these small cafes and restaurants. If you're looking for a bargain, this is the area to visit. Apart from the souks, which sell everything from the aforementioned spices, gold and electrical goods, you will also discover clothes, perfumes and quirky tourist souvenirs. For a vast selection of rugs, visit Deira Tower on Al Nasr Square, where about 40 shops sell carpets from Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Afghanistan. For a more modern shopping experience, Deira City Centre Mall (☎ 04-295-4486; deiracitycentre.com), which opened in 1995, changed the concept of shopping in Dubai, with the now familiar mix of high-end shops, restaurants and entertainment facilities. The streets in Deira come alive in the evenings when it cools down. Well worth a visit is the Fish Market near Shindagha Tunnel, though best to go early morning, when the fish has just been caught and the heat of the day has not had a chance to ripen the pungent odours. Next door is the Fruit and Vegetable Market, piled high with stunning displays of the freshest produce. Once again, it is expected that you will barter when you buy.

As you make your way towards the sea, you'll discover **Al Ahmadiya School** – now a museum of education (☎ 04-226-0286; dubaitourism.com).

ae). It was the first school to be built in Dubai, in 1912, and is now an important heritage site. Adjacent is Heritage House, another historical landmark, built in 1890. This is a beautiful house and an excellent example of a traditional Emirati home, constructed from coral and gypsum, with simple architecture and intricate carvings within the arches of the courtyard inside.

Al Hamriya Port sits on the seafront overlooking the unfinished Palm Deira, and a little farther north is Al Mamzar Beach Park (☎ 04-296-6201), covering an area of 106 hectares with barbecue sites, private chalets for hire, swimming pool, food kiosks, sheltered beach and safe lagoon, a scenic train and many children's play areas.

Bur Dubai

Bur Dubai, on the western side of the Creek, is an area steeped in history. Explore souks and old neighbourhoods, and if you are interested in finding out what life in Dubai was like long before it was transformed into the Dubai of today, you will discover an altogether more traditional pace of life here, seemingly unaffected by the rapid transformations that have taken place elsewhere.

Although not strictly in Bur Dubai, **Creek Park** (☎ 04-336-7633) is adjacent to it, facing Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club on the other side of the water. It is a magnificent expanse of green space overlooking the Creek and is the second-largest park in Dubai after **Mushrif Park** (☎ 04-288-3624). Creek Park offers a multitude of interesting activities, including a **Dolphinarium** (☎ 04-336-9773; dubaidolphinarium.ae) with live shows; **Children's City** (☎ 04-334-0808; childrencity.ae), an interactive science museum; a cable car with fantastic views out across the Creek; a miniature train; mini-golf course; bike hire; fishing pier; and food outlets. If you visit on a Friday, the delicious aromas of barbecued food will tantalise you as the park fills with locals and expats picnicking at the water's edge. Next to the park you will find **Wonderland Theme & Water Park** (☎ 04-324-1222; wonderlanduae.com). With a mix of fairground rides and a water park, this is one of Dubai's older parks of this type. It now has to compete with the likes of Aquaventure and Wild Wadi, but it is a cheaper alternative.

As you wander up the Creek, views across to Deira are spectacular, with modern skyscrapers dominating the skyline. Pass the British Embassy (☎ 04-309-4444; ukinae.fco.gov.uk) on your left and you will see cruisers, yachts and dhows moored on your right. Many of the dhows have now been converted into floating restaurants. Sailors will badger you to take a private dhow up the Creek for AED 100. If you're interested, then barter to reduce the price to no more than AED 80. At the mouth of the Creek, you will see the splendid entrance to the Ruler's Court. If you continue up the Creek a little farther, you will reach the Textile Souk, with its glorious array of fabrics of every variety, in every colour. This really is a very pretty area,

which has been recently restored, along with the adjacent **Bastakiya**. The stunning textiles will dazzle you, and it's fascinating to watch the tailors working on their old-fashioned sewing machines. Remember to barter for anything you wish to buy, though if you're after a really good bargain, we would also recommend going to **Satwa** for your textiles. Here, however, you can find stunning jewel-coloured pashminas and saris, as well as unusual jewellery and gifts. Once you have found the fabric, if you need an excellent tailor, we would recommend **Lobo Tailor** (☎ 04-352-3760/3345) in Souk Al Kabeer. If you're feeling thirsty, there's a great little place with a wheelbarrow outside that sells the best fresh fruit juices. It's located between the Textile Souk and the abra station.

A street away from the Textile Souk is **Souk Al Kabeer**, or Meena Bazaar, as it is known to its predominantly Indian population, which started settling here in the early 1900s. This is one of the oldest residential districts in the city, and you can be sure to find fantastic bargains here. Don't miss a wander down Al Fahidi Street, bordering the Textile Souk. This is the location of Dubai's electronics souk and really comes to life at night. You can't miss it; just look out for the neon lights. This is a fantastic area for delicious, inexpensive Indian food, and you'll find a good selection of restaurants near Dubai Museum and in the nearby Astoria and Ambassador hotels.

A short walk inland and you arrive at **Dubai Museum** (☎ 04-353-1862; dubaitourism.ae), a fascinating museum within the beautifully restored Al Fahidi Fort, erected in 1787 to defend the city against invasion. The museum tells the story of the development of Dubai, its history and its traditions. This area is rich in heritage, and as you reach the mouth of the Creek to the area called Shindagha, you can visit **Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum's House** (☎ 04-393-7139), the official residence of Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum, ruler of Dubai (1912–1958) and grandfather of the present ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. The building, which dates from 1896, today houses a rare collection of historical photographs, coins, stamps and documents that record Dubai's history. We would recommend a visit to the **Heritage and Diving Villages** (☎ 04-393-7151), a two-minute walk away. This is a 'living' village, and more than 30 traditional handicrafts are demonstrated here.

As you walk back down towards the Textile Souk and the Creek, you come into Bastakiya, one of the loveliest, most atmospheric areas in Dubai. Bastakiya was Dubai's first commercial district, dating back to the early 1900s, and in recent years many of the buildings have been restored and converted into art galleries, shops, small museums, cafes and boutique hotels. All are free of charge to enter, and you can quite easily spend a day meandering through the winding narrow streets and alleyways, where you may explore old houses with their distinctive wind towers, traditional Arabic architecture and cool, shady courtyards.

The area is close to the docks, with old souks, beautiful architecture and traditional houses with wind towers and shady courtyards. Particularly worth a visit – and not just for their architecture – are a couple of lovely boutique hotels: XVA (☎ 04-353-5383; xvahotel.com), an art hotel with an award-winning vegetarian restaurant, and Orient Guest House (☎ 04-351-9111; orientguesthouse.com). Basta Art Cafe (☎ 04-353-5071) is a welcome oasis after walking around in the heat. It has a delightful leafy courtyard, and the food is delicious – enormous salads and light snacks, a children's menu and refreshing fresh juices. You could sit here all afternoon. It also sells art and jewellery. Make a point of visiting Local House Restaurant (☎ 04-354-0705), where traditional Arabic food is served and the speciality is camel! Dip in and out of a choice of galleries to suit every taste and pocket; whether you want art, jewellery, spices, antiques or gifts, you will find them here. Other converted houses of note are Calligraphy House, Philately House, the Coins Museum, the Architectural Heritage Department, Innovation Gallery, the Majlis Gallery and Siwar Arts & Handicraft. Between mid-January and the end of February, don't miss the winter market (Saturdays in winter, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; ☎ 04-321-7114) set up in the streets of Bastakiya, with live music and about 50 stalls displaying arts and crafts, antiques, refreshments and a kids' corner.

If you prefer, you can take a delightfully informal guided walk of Bastakiya organised by the **Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding** (☎ 04-353-6666; cultures.ae).

Karama

Once you have tested your bargaining skills in the souks, you will be more than ready to visit Karama. This is mainly a residential area, but it is renowned for its shopping complex, consisting of two central streets lined with small shops selling extremely good quality but less-than-authentic 'designer' bags, shoes, sunglasses, watches and clothes. If you have teenagers with you, they will love the bargains they can find here. Be prepared to be pestered by the salesmen, and drive a hard bargain. And if you don't think the price is fair, be strong-minded and walk away; you will inevitably get a further reduction. Take plenty of cash with you; credit cards are not always accepted, and cash sometimes means better discounts. Particularly good shops to visit are Green Eye (☎ 04-337-7721) and Valencia (☎ 050-958-0779). They really are Aladdin's caves, especially if you are invited to enter the ominous-sounding back room to see yet more stock. Go for it! You may discover exactly what you didn't realise you were looking for. If all that shopping makes you hungry, food is cheap and tasty at any of the roadside restaurants. Try Pakistani food at Karachi Darbar, Sri Lankan food at Chef Lanka or Filipino food at Tagpuan. You may prefer a set-price thali at any of the Indian restaurants, or shawarma, falafel and fresh fruit juices in the small Arabic restaurants.

South of Karama is the beautiful **Za'abeel Park** (☎ 04-398-6888). As always, it is so lovely to find such a fantastic green oasis in this busy city, and the park is never manically busy. We think it has the best children's playground in Dubai.

Oud Metha and Um Hurair

This is the area located in the centre of Dubai, adjacent to Karama. It has good shopping and entertainment facilities but is not necessarily the most interesting of tourist areas if you're short of time. Just south of Dubai Healthcare City, a state-of-the-art medical facility developed in conjunction with top international medical organisations, is **Wafi City** (☎ 04-324-4555; wafi.com), an Egyptian-themed mall that looks like a pyramid. It has its own souk with a magnificent stained-glass window that dominates the ceiling, bathing the alleyways below in a kaleidoscope of coloured light. It is one of the largest windows of its kind in the world and really is worth seeing. The **Encounter Zone** (☎ 04-324-7747) – which has a huge soft play area and a skate park, three-dimensional cinema and Crystal Maze – is a great venue for families. Nearby is **Lamcy Plaza** (☎ 04-335-9999; lamcyplaza.com), another mall with a wide selection of shopping outlets and restaurants and the excellent children's play area Lou Lou Al Dugongs (☎ 04-295-4333). If you're keen to take in a local football match, Al Nasr Football Club (alnasrclub.com), a great venue to catch a game, has a real family atmosphere. Al Nasr Leisureland (☎ 04-337-1234; alnasrll.com) includes an ice rink, bowling alley, swimming pool and the Fruit Garden Luna Park, with little fairground attractions. Again, you won't go hungry there, as there's a wide selection of restaurants from which to choose.

The **Al Boom Tourist Village** (☎ 04-324-3000/1444; alboom.ae), sandwiched between Garhoud Bridge and Creek Park, is a popular wedding venue for couples. You can sample local cuisine in Al Dahleez Restaurant or take a dinner cruise on one of its dhows. Just across the road you can see traditional wooden dhows being built.

Sheikh Zayed Road

This six-lane highway commences at Za'abeel Park, and as you travel south towards Jebel Ali, you can't help but be awed and inspired by the stunning architecture that creates new Dubai. On both sides of the highway you will be captivated by the mass of iconic skyscrapers, including the Burj Khalifa, which dwarfs every other tower; Emirates Office Towers; Shangri-La Hotel; the Dusit; the Rose Tower; and the Fairmont. It's well worth taking a drive along Sheikh Zayed Road just to see the futuristic skyline, or travel above it by Metro for a thrilling tour of this exciting city. It really is a stunning skyline and a fascinating example of what happens when the world's architects are let loose in one area.

World Trade Centre to Downtown Dubai

When the Dubai World Trade Centre (☎ 04-332-1000; dwtc.com) was built in 1978, it was Dubai's tallest building at 149 metres and the first high-rise along Sheikh Zayed Road. This area marks the first stretch of the Sheikh Zayed Road, and the World Trade Centre is the landmark of Dubai's business district, with its hotels, exhibition halls, convention centre and serviced apartment blocks. Although there are now higher, more modern buildings to scale, a trip to the Trade Centre's Observation Deck is worth a visit for its panoramic view of the city.

Two of the most iconic towers in Dubai, which stand opposite each other and change in dynamic depending on where you look at them from, are The Emirates Towers (☎ 04-330-0000; jumeirah.com). Containing the Emirates Office Tower and Jumeirah Emirates Hotel, they are adjoined by a two-storey complex – The Boulevard at Emirates Towers – which is *the* shopping destination of choice for Dubai's well-to-do. Views are stunning from Vu's Bar on the 51st floor, a venue worth visiting for some serious people-watching.

Behind the towers is **Dubai International Finance Centre** (☎ 800-3432; difc.ae), home to Dubai's own financial exchange. We think that the Gate Village – the lifestyle heart of DIFC – is well worth a visit in its own right. This ultra-contemporary area contains innumerable business offices, but it is also a buzzing enclave of art, culture and fashion. The art quarter is fast becoming the hub of Dubai's art world, whilst a number of international fashion boutiques, including the inimitable Vivienne Westwood, make this shopping area a little more interesting than many. Worth knowing is that during Ramadan, a lot of the restaurants here, which offer a wide and interesting choice to suit all pockets, still serve food during the day. There is very much a feel about this area of any one of Europe's capital cities.

One of the most exciting developments to be found a little farther south is **Downtown Dubai**, where the skyline of already impressive skyscrapers is dwarfed by **Burj Khalifa** (☎ 04-888-8124; burjkhalifa.ae), the world's tallest building, and shoppers can shop to their hearts' content in the world's largest shopping mall – **Dubai Mall** (☎ 800-DUBAI-MALL or 800-382-246-255; thedubaimall.com)

But more than that, Downtown Dubai is an inspirational urban concept. Architecturally designed to complement the traditional buildings found in Bastakiya and Bur Dubai, **Old Town** is its residential area, where many of Dubai's bright young expats live, work and play. Make time to go and see the **Dubai Fountain** (☎ 04-366-1688). Spectacular fountains that spray to heights more than 150 metres and perform to music and light every evening, they are strangely moving. Enjoy a stroll or a picnic at Burj Park Island, a beautifully landscaped waterside park, or take the state-of-the-art lift up Burj Khalifa, ascending at 10 metres per second, to obtain the best panoramic

views of Dubai. Whether you like shopping malls or not, Dubai Mall is still worth a visit. Not only will you get a lot of exercise – the place is huge, with 1,200 shops, two department stores, Fashion Avenue (dedicated to haute couture), a Gold Souk, and more than 150 cafes and restaurants to tempt you – but there are some excellent leisure attractions for families for when you've had enough of the beach for a day or so: the world's largest aquarium, **The Dubai Aquarium and Underwater Zoo** (☎ 04-448-5200; thedubaiaquarium.com) – well worth a visit and beautifully designed; **Kidzania** (☎ 04-448-5222; kidzania.com) – you will lose your children for three or four hours, at the very least, to the best-designed children's 'edu-tainment' city concept we've come across; **SEGA Republic** (☎ 04-448-8484; segarepublic.com) – an indoor theme park, an Olympic size ice rink and the ubiquitous multi-screen cinema complex.

To offset the commercialism of the mall, we suggest that you wander over to the elegant **Souk Al Bahar** (theoldtownisland.com) overlooking the fountains. Linked to the mall by a bridge, and to the stunning **Palace Hotel** (☎ 04-428-7888; theaddress.com), it is a delightful mix of eclectic shops and excellent restaurants and cafes. We recommend eating dinner on one of the many restaurant terraces and enjoying the Dubai Fountain whilst you eat. This area comes alive and is buzzing at night.

Satwa

The other side of Sheikh Zayed Road, east towards the sea and on level with The Trade Centre, is a district of Dubai that couldn't be more different from Downtown Dubai. It is an area of contrasts. At one end of Al Satwa Road, it is a wide, green and leafy residential avenue with smart villas. As you travel north it becomes a busy, bustling souk, with small open shops crammed side by side. Carpenters' workshops sit next to car mechanics, shops selling every type of electrical goods next to beauty salons and florist shops, car accessories sold next to a butcher's shop with a carcass hanging in the window – there are shops here overflowing with things you never knew you needed. The streets are crowded with Indians, Filipinos, Pakistanis, well-heeled Western women getting a dress made, and the occasional tourist looking for a good deal. This area brims with atmosphere and bargains and is the place to go if you wish to have clothing made. The textiles shops are fantastic, and tailors will copy your favourite dress or suit for a fraction of the price you bought the original for, in any fabric of your choice. For cheap Indian or Arabic food, you won't be disappointed.

Off Al Satwa Road is Hudaiba Street, commonly known as Plant Street. It is famous for its pots and plants and is where expats desperate for a real tree as opposed to a fake one go at Christmas time! Be sure to walk down to **Book World** (☎ 04-349-1914), back down on Plant Street. It stocks more than 45,000 mainly second-hand books, from Booker Prize quality to chick lit and beyond.

By now you are sure to be feeling hungry. **Al Mallah** (☎ 04-398-4723), on Al Diyafah Street, serves up some of the best Lebanese food in Dubai. Its falafel and shawarma are delicious and generous in portion, and its fresh juices are excellent. **Ravi's** (☎ 04-331-5353), a Pakistani restaurant on the east side of the Satwa Roundabout, is legendary for being incredibly cheap and very tasty. Many restaurants along Satwa Road are worth trying, and if you have the time, we recommend eating a traditional Indian thali at **Vandana Vegetarian Restaurant** (☎ 04-331-5346).

Two other things to look out for when you're in Satwa: If you're on Plant Street, walk along to Al Wasl Road and see the intricate and colourful mosaic architecture of the Iranian Hospital and Iranian Mosque. If you wander down to the far end of Al Diyafah Street, towards the sea where it meets Jumeirah Road, you will have an excellent view of the gigantic flag – the biggest U.A.E. flag in the world – flying above Union House, which is where the treaty uniting all seven emirates into the U.A.E. was signed in 1971.

Jumeirah

Jumeirah begins by the giant flagpole at the end of Al Diyafah Street and is the area sandwiched between Jumeirah Road, or Beach Road as it is informally known, and Al Wasl Road. It stretches about 9 kilometres down to Umm al Sheif Road. Jumeirah Road runs parallel to the coast for about 16 kilometres in total, as far as Al Sufouh Road, near **Madinat Jumeirah**. Areas in this strip, after Jumeirah, are Umm Suqeim 1, 2 and 3 and Al Sufouh 1 and 2.

Jumeirah comprises three areas, originally named Jumeirah 1, 2 and 3. It is home to several public beaches, a couple of historical sites and hundreds of luxury villas. Jumeirah is the oldest expat residential area in Dubai and therefore the most established. It is leafy and has pavements, and you will more than likely see maids and gatemen cleaning cars and hosing front pavements as you explore. Jumeirah Road feels like a seaside resort; you can easily access several long golden beaches, and there are lots of cafes, restaurants, boutiques and smaller shopping malls. This road also seems to have more than its fair share of medical clinics of every kind, from dental to plastic surgery, physiotherapy to laser treatment.

The beautiful **Jumeirah Mosque** (☎ 04-353-6666) is well worth a visit, as is **Majlis Ghorfat Um al Sheif** (☎ 04-394-6343), an excellent example of a traditional house, constructed in 1955 from coral stone and gypsum and used by the late Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum as a summer residence. Dating back to the sixth century AD is the **Archaeological Site** at Jumeirah 2 on Street 16, between Jumeirah Road and Al Wasl Road. This was the site of a caravan station along an ancient trade route that linked Iraq to Oman. It's one of the most significant archaeological sites in the United Arab Emirates, with sections of walling, a souk and houses – one of which is thought

to have been the governor's palace. The site is surrounded by modern villas, and whilst it's not officially open to the public, you are able to look round if you first obtain a permit.

The beaches are fantastic down Jumeirah Road. Jumeirah Open Beach is free – next to Dubai Marine Beach Resort & Spa – or spend a day at **Jumeirah Beach Park**, with all the facilities of a beach club – restaurants, showers, landscaped gardens, children's play areas, barbecue areas, sunloungers and umbrellas for hire for no more than AED 5 per person, or AED 20 per car. Just remember that Monday is ladies' day only.

For delicious fresh food and juices we wholeheartedly recommend Lime Tree Café (☎ 04-349-8498) next to Jumeirah Mosque. We love the summer holiday feeling that Jumeirah Road induces.

Umm Suqeim

This is the area adjacent to Jumeirah, between Jumeirah Road and Al Wasl Road as they continue south. Like Jumeirah it is an established, leafy family neighbourhood where many of Dubai's Western expats live. It has long stretches of beach, parks in abundance, and an easy, laid-back feel to it. Some of the expat international schools are situated in this area, and you will find Western-style supermarkets with goods from the U.K., the U.S. and the rest of Europe. You will see a predominance of well-heeled yummy mummies (or Jumeirah Janes, as they are familiarly known) driving around in their 4x4s here. Do not be surprised to see mothers trailing round the supermarkets followed by their maids looking after their young children. How quickly expats adapt!

The iconic landmark **Burj Al Arab** (☎ 04-301-7777), Dubai's most luxurious hotel, dominates the coastal skyline here in the shape of a billowing sail. Originally the tallest hotel in Dubai, it has now been pipped by the Rose Tower on Sheikh Zayed Road. At night it is beautifully illuminated, and from the sea, if you look back to shore, the Burj Al Arab is the sail in front of the wave that is **Jumeirah Beach Hotel**. The stretch of beach from Jumeirah Beach Hotel is home to several beach resort hotels and **Wild Wadi** (☎ 04-348-4444; jumeirah.com), a water park with 30 rides and attractions, themed around the tale of Juha, a well-known character from Arabian folklore.

All the hotels along this stretch are beautiful, but particularly worth a visit, even if you're not staying there, is **Souk Madinat Jumeirah**. It resembles a traditional Arabian souk, and within the resort is a maze of alleyways with open-fronted shops and boutiques. Lively restaurants and cafes line the Venetian-like waterway, where abras chug up and down, taking guests for rides. It does have an element of the theme park about it, but with masses of atmosphere it's a great place to spend an evening. The Madinat Theatre, also within the resort, has a regularly-changing, interesting programme of shows and concerts.

Al Safa and Al Quoz

Sheikh Zayed Road cuts through two distinct areas after it passes Downtown Dubai and Business Bay, going south towards Sharjah. To the right – west – in Al Safa, is an unexpected 64 acres of open park. **Safa Park** (☎ 04-349-2111) is an oasis of serenity in the middle of a built-up urban district. It is one of Dubai's oldest and largest parks and has something for everyone.

Across the other side of Sheikh Zayed Road, to the east, is **Al Quoz** industrial area. This is not an immediate contender for best tourist destination in Dubai; however, strangely, it is becoming one of the most interesting areas of Dubai to visit if you love art and the arts. Hidden away in massive warehouses that are often a little difficult to find is a collection of galleries and interior design shops, small cafes, the Gold and Diamond Park and Times Square Centre.

The Al Quoz art scene attracts up-and-coming artists and photographers. Galleries here work to promote Arab art on the international scene, and when you find the galleries nestled amongst the industrial warehouses, you feel a real sense of excitement and discovery. Some galleries showcase artists' works; others offer workshops and studio sessions. For comprehensive information about Al Quoz, and all the other art areas in Dubai, we'd recommend visiting the excellent site artinthecity.com and getting hold of its *ArtMap*.

For fantastic bargains, and every type of souvenir imaginable, the **Antiques Museum** (☎ 04-347-9935; fakihcollections.com) neither sells antiques, nor is it a museum, but it resembles a rather more ramshackle, chaotic version of Mr Magorium's Wonder Emporium for grown-ups. The most eccentric place to visit, it is piled high and crammed full to bursting point with everything you would ever find in any tourist shop or souk, and at even better prices. Worth a visit if only to see how fire, health, and safety regulations have been bypassed in the most spectacular of ways.

Al Barsha/Mall of the Emirates

Al Quoz leads into Al Barsha, which is an area of Dubai that seems to have little to recommend it as far as sightseeing is concerned, except that it's where **Mall of the Emirates** (☎ 04-409-9000; malloftheemirates.com) is situated. It has an inordinate number of new, cheaper-priced hotels springing up. Part of Al Barsha is an established residential area, with large villas at a fraction of the price of their counterparts in Jumeirah across the Sheikh Zayed Road. Mall of the Emirates is home to **Ski Dubai** – that's what the ski-slope-shape protrusion emerging out the top is – the **Kempinski Hotel**, and as many shops, cafes and restaurants as you could hope to find in one mall, as well as a multi-screen cinema and other entertainment facilities. The mall was recently enlarged by half its size again. Recession? What recession?

New Dubai

This area encompasses everything between Mall of the Emirates and Jebel Ali, including **Palm Jumeirah** and **Dubai Marina, Media City, Internet City, Knowledge Village** and the **Emirates Living Community**. With the exception of a few hotels, everything in this area has been built in the last five years, and most future developments are happening on this side of town.

From the sky, Palm Jumeirah looks like a palm-tree-shaped piece of land sticking out into the sea. Luxury apartments and stunning villas sit on the trunk and the fronds of the Palm. At the end of the Palm rises the majestically-themed **Atlantis Hotel** (☎ 04 426 0000; atlantisthepalm.com). You have to drive under the sea to reach it. If we are very honest – whilst the Palm is a sensational example of land reclamation, and residents enjoy their own private beaches, happy in the knowledge that they are part of a unique and exclusive community – there is a whiff of the glorified housing estate about it, albeit an exceedingly luxurious one. Atlantis Hotel is enormous and marginally gaudy. The lobby reminds us a little of a gigantic bus or train terminal, with hordes of people constantly milling around. This is not a hotel for the faint-hearted. Everything is done on a gargantuan scale. It is situated on a 46-hectare site, with a 17-hectare water park – **Aquaventure**, a sensational aquarium – **The Lost Chambers**, and **Dolphin Bay**, where you can swim with the dolphins. It also has **Ambassador Lagoon**, home to the largest open-air marine habitat in the Middle East, with 65,000 marine animals. The hotel has 17 restaurants, of which 4 are celebrity chef restaurants; two kilometres of private beach, and two pools the size of lakes. It would be quite easy to enjoy a holiday here and find enough to keep you entertained for a week without having to go anywhere else in Dubai.

Back on the mainland, the area in front of the Palm is Al Sufouh, home to Media City, Internet City and Knowledge Village. Both tax-free business zones, Media City and Internet City are home to global giants such as CNN, the BBC, Reuters, Bloomberg, *The Times*, Sony, Microsoft, Dell, HP and IBM to name just a few, whilst Dubai Knowledge Village, with more than 450 business partners, enjoys the distinction of being the world's only free zone cluster totally dedicated to human resources management. For a very funky vibe, the new **Media One Hotel** (☎ 04-427-1000; mediaonehotel.com) is a stylish venue for a night out if you want to mix with Dubai's hip young media scene. For jazz lovers, Dubai Media City's Open Air Amphitheatre hosts the extremely successful annual **Dubai International Jazz Festival** (☎ 04-391-1196; dubaijazzfest.com). It usually takes place around February each year.

Continuing along the coast, past the Palm, you will reach Dubai Marina, the Venice of the Middle East. This area has seen the most enormous amount of development in the last few years.

Extremely sought-after high-rise apartment buildings line the man-made Marina, whilst **Jumeirah Beach Residence (JBR)** has 36 towers along the last stretch of beachfront. JBR Walk is full of trendy boutiques and seafront cafes and restaurants. Between October and April, Dubai's very own Covent Garden Market (coventgarden.ae) takes place every Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday just at the end of the Walk near the beach. Elegant beach resort hotels fill the coastline here, and Dubai International Marine Club (dimc.ae) is the prime location for sailing and boating in Dubai and hosts legs of the Off-Shore Powerboat Racing Series. Dubai Marina, the largest man-made marina in the world, has a varied selection of restaurants and cafes and is a fun place to visit with children, as the fountains set in the pavement outside Starbucks are great for them to run around and cool off in. You can rent go-karts and take a tour of the walkway from Johnny Rocket's to Marina Mall, or we can recommend a short sea trip by dhow from Dubai Marina, courtesy of Captain Jack's Cruises (☎ 04-366-3538; bristol-middleeast.com).

As you continue along Sheikh Zayed Road, away from Al Barsha, with Media City on your right, you reach a new residential community, called Emirates Living. This is a series of gated districts that particularly appeals to the expat community. Reminiscent of Stepford Wives, the communities are immaculate. The Lakes, Emirates Hills, The Meadows, The Springs – all have manicured lawns, landscaped parks, tree-lined streets, flowers in the gardens and perfectly-designed villas. Whilst these developments are extraordinarily well planned, there is something a little eerie about them. They lack soul. Perhaps that will come in time, but drive through them, and you expect at any moment for every front door to open simultaneously and perfectly-pressed families to exit mechanically at the same time – and maybe one child will let its ball drop out of sync and spoil the perfection of the street. Each zone has its own security-gated entrance to prevent non-residents from entering uninvited. In the middle of Emirates Hills there are two golf courses and the **Address Montgomerie Hotel** (☎ 04-390-5600; montgomerie@theaddress.com). Why, you might almost forget you were in the Middle East.

Hatta

We decided to include Hatta in this guidebook about Dubai because it is in Dubai – just. To get to it, you have to leave Dubai, enter Oman, leave Oman, and re-enter Dubai. And you'll need your passport. But it still is in Dubai. You'll also need a four-wheel-drive, or a driver, or a guide, or all three. If you rent a car in Dubai, make sure that you are insured to drive it off-road and in Oman. An easier alternative is to take a tour with a reputable company. We would strongly recommend, if you're planning to drive yourself, that you get hold of an excellent guide by Explorer called *U.A.E. Off-Road: 26 Adventurous Routes*. It takes about an hour to get to Hatta from Dubai and is well

worth a visit if you have the time.

Ignore the Hatta Fort Hotel, which is a bit ‘pack ’em in and rip ’em off’ (☎ 04-809-9333; hatta-fort-hotel.com) and isn’t nearly as nice as the photos make it seem. When we visited it on a weekend, it was heaving with day-trippers and frenetic tourists, they charged us to use a nearby piece of sand as their overflow car park, and the buffet had seen better days. Instead, either take a picnic with you, or go to the supermarket complex nearby and buy a selection of freshly-made food on which to picnic, and make straight for the Hatta Pools. You will have wonderful views of the Hajjar Mountains en route, and swimming in these natural clear rock pools known as wadis is unbelievably refreshing, especially in the summer months. Do be careful in and near wadis, though, as flash floods occur, and the speed with which the water rises has to be believed.

We would also recommend visiting the **Hatta Heritage Village** (☎ 04-852-1374), which is nestled in the Hajjar Mountains. It dates back 400 years to the 16th century and provides a fine example of traditional-style village architecture. You can wander everywhere in the village, but we’d recommend visiting it in the cooler winter months, as it is outside. It consists of two watchtowers, a mosque and houses constructed of stone, mud, reeds and palm tree trunks, built around the imposing Hatta Fort dominating the village. When you arrive, men in dishdashas sitting in the shade will offer you traditional Arabic coffee and dates. If you want to really go off-road and drive into the desert, we suggest you go to Big Red – a big red sand dune, which has become a challenge for most off-roaders to reach the top. Go on a Friday afternoon, especially in winter, when this area becomes one big dune-bashing motor show. Fossil Rock is where many people go camping during the winter months and is a great desert drive for beginners. This large outcrop is known as Fossil Rock after the marine fossils that can be found on its slopes. And whilst you are en route to Hatta, you will pass small shops lining the main road, offering an interesting selection of clay pots and carpets from Iran and Afghanistan. Ladies, watch out – here was the only time in Dubai that we came across some really lecherous salesmen.

If you’re feeling peckish on your way back from Hatta and can’t wait until you get back into Dubai proper, it’s worth making a detour at International City – and we’ll explain why. International City lies along the Dubai–Hatta road and between Interchange 5 and 6 of Emirates Road, opposite to the Dubai Central Fruit and Vegetable Market. It is a purpose-built city providing low-cost accommodation built in clusters featuring the architectural design properties of countries from around the world. It’s unexciting except for two places of note: **Dragonmart** (☎ 04-428-5665/4; dragonmart.ae), a shopping mall with 3,950 shops all selling products from China (the bargains are amazing), and **BritBalti** (☎ 04-432-7528; britbalti.com), a very

small Indian restaurant serving British-style curries for those Brits who are feeling homesick and are missing their chicken tikka masala on a Saturday night. It’s not snazzy, and there’s not a lot of atmosphere, but the owners – the Ahmed family, who ran a curry house in Twickenham, near London – are delightful, warm and welcoming. The food is tasty and familiar to British curry aficionados, and you will definitely not be breaking the bank.

DUBAILAND

WE WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE to have included information about the celebrated Dubailand, which should have opened in 2009, will cover an area of about 279 million square metres, and will house the biggest theme-amusement park in the world. This complex will be divided into seven themed zones called worlds: Attractions & Experience World, Retail & Entertainment World, Themed Leisure & Vacation World, Eco-Tourism World, Sports & Outdoor World, Downtown and Science & Planetariums. Apart from the countless entertainment zones, the complex will also include tourism, real estate, luxury hospitality and retail areas. Conceived as the largest destination for family-orientated tourism and entertainment in the Middle East, Dubailand will have a number of theme parks, including one of the largest water parks in the world. It will also feature several attractions catering to the entire family. These include The Restless Planet, a dinosaur theme park being developed in cooperation with the Natural History Museum in the U.K.; a Sports City, featuring large state-of-the-art stadiums; the Great Dubai Wheel; the Islamic Culture and Science World; the Mall of Arabia, set to become one of the largest shopping centres in the world; and Tiger Woods Dubai. Universal Studios was also going to open there. Indeed, there are some sensational gates at its entrance, but that’s all there is of it so far, as was the case at Legoland.

Exciting and amazing as all this sounds, the aim is that it will become the world’s biggest theme park, twice the size of Walt Disney World in America, and will contain a minimum of 55 hotels within its geographical location. The only thing that currently exists is Global Village, which closes for the summer. The rest is mainly sand. Construction has ground to a halt, and it is now anticipated that this ambitious project may not be completed until 2020.

Dubai Attractions by Type

TYPE AND NAME	AUTHOR'S RATING	NEIGHBOURHOOD	TYPE AND NAME	AUTHOR'S RATING	NEIGHBOURHOOD
ART EVENTS			CHILDREN'S ATTRACTIONS		
Bastakiya Arts Fair	★★★★★	Bastakiya, Bur Dubai	Aquaplay	★★★★★	Mirdif
ArtBus	★★★★	Madinat Jumeirah, Al Sufouh	Cité des Enfants	★★★★★	Mirdif
Art Dubai	★★★★	Madinat Jumeirah, Al Sufouh	Dubai Aquarium and Underwater Zoo	★★★★★	Downtown Dubai
ART GALLERIES			Jumeirah Beach Park	★★★★★	Jumeirah
Ayyam Gallery	★★★★	Al Quoz	Kidzania	★★★★★	Downtown Dubai
Carbon 12	★★★★	Al Quoz	Aquaventure	★★★★	Palm Jumeirah
Cuadro Fine Art Gallery	★★★★	DIFC Gate Village	Children's City	★★★★	Bur Dubai
The Empty Quarter	★★★★	DIFC Gate Village	Safa Park	★★★★	Al Safa
The Farjam Collection	★★★★	DIFC Gate Village	Ski Dubai	★★★★	Al Barsha
Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde	★★★★	Al Quoz	Wild Wadi	★★★★	Umm Seqeim
Majlis Gallery	★★★★	Bastakiya, Bur Dubai	Cable Car Ride	★★★	Bur Dubai
The Third Line	★★★★	Al Quoz	Café Céramique	★★★	Al Barsha, Jumeirah, Garhoud
XVA Gallery	★★★★	Bastakiya, Bur Dubai	Dolphin Bay	★★★	Palm Jumeirah
Art Sawa	★★★	Al Quoz	Dubai Dolphinarium	★★★	Bur Dubai
Mojo Gallery	★★★	Al Quoz	Dubai Drums	★★★	Desert
Portfolio Gallery	★★★	Al Quoz	Dubai Kartdrome and Laserdrome	★★★	Motorcity (Al Barsha South)
thejamjar	★★★	Al Quoz	Encounter Zone	★★★	Oud Metha
1x1 Art Gallery	★★	Al Quoz			

Dubai Attractions by Type (continued)

TYPE AND NAME	AUTHOR'S RATING	NEIGHBOURHOOD	TYPE AND NAME	AUTHOR'S RATING	NEIGHBOURHOOD
CHILDREN'S ATTRACTIONS (CONTINUED)			CULTURAL AND HERITAGE SITES (CONTINUED)		
Al Saheel: A Thousand and One Horse Tales	★★★	Arabian Ranches	Heritage and Diving Villages	★★★★	Bur Dubai
thejamjar	★★★	Al Quoz	Al Ahmadiya School and Heritage House	★★★	Deira
iFly Dubai	★★	Mirdif	Bait Al Wakeel	★★★	Bur Dubai
The Lost Chambers	★★	Palm Jumeirah	Majlis Ghorfat Um Al Sheif	★★★	Jumeirah
Luna Park, The Fruit Garden	★★	Oud Metha	Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum's House	★★★	Bur Dubai
Magic Planet	★★	Al Barsha, Deira, Mirdif	Jumeirah Archaeological Site	★★½	Jumeirah
Soccer Circus Dubai and Team Zone	★★	Mirdif	MOSQUES		
Yalla! Bowling Lanes	★★	Mirdif	Jumeirah Mosque	★★★★★	Jumeirah
SEGA Republic	★	Downtown Dubai	Grand Mosque Dubai	★★★	Bur Dubai
Stargate	★	Za'abeel	PARKS AND GARDENS		
Wonderland Theme Park and Splashland Theme Park	★	Oud Metha	Mushrif Park	★★★★★	Mirdif
CULTURAL AND HERITAGE SITES			Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary	★★★★	Bur Dubai
Burj Khalifa	★★★★★	Downtown Dubai	Safa Park	★★★★	Al Safa
Dubai Museum	★★★★★	Bur Dubai	Za'abeel Park	★★★★	Za'abeel
Hatta Heritage Village	★★★★★	Hatta	Dubai Creek Park	★★★	Bur Dubai
The Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding	★★★★★	Bastakiya			

ATTRACTION PROFILES

HAVING LOOKED AT AREAS OF DUBAI and pointed out, in brief, places or attractions that we think may interest you, we now describe in more detail some of the major attractions. Under each profile we inform you of where they are in Dubai, to whom we think they will appeal and into which category they fall. Author's ratings suggest how good the attraction is in its category and whether we think it's really worth seeing in the short space of a holiday.

Al Ahmadiya School and Heritage House ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★ TEENS ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★ OVER 30 ★★ SENIORS ★★★

near Gold House Building, Al Khor Street, Al Ras, Deira;

☎ 04-226-0286; dubaitourism.ae

Type of attraction Two important heritage sites – the first school in Dubai (now a museum of education) and the house belonging to the pearl merchant who established the school **Admission** Free **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 8 a.m.–7:30 p.m.; Friday, 2:30–7:30 p.m. **How much time to allow** 1 hour **Special comments** Gives an excellent insight into the architecture and history of Dubai. **Author's rating** ★★★. Well worth a visit to appreciate the history of education in Dubai and the beautiful detail in the construction and architecture of the buildings. Make this visit a part of your tour of the souks in this area to get a real feel for how Dubai used to be.

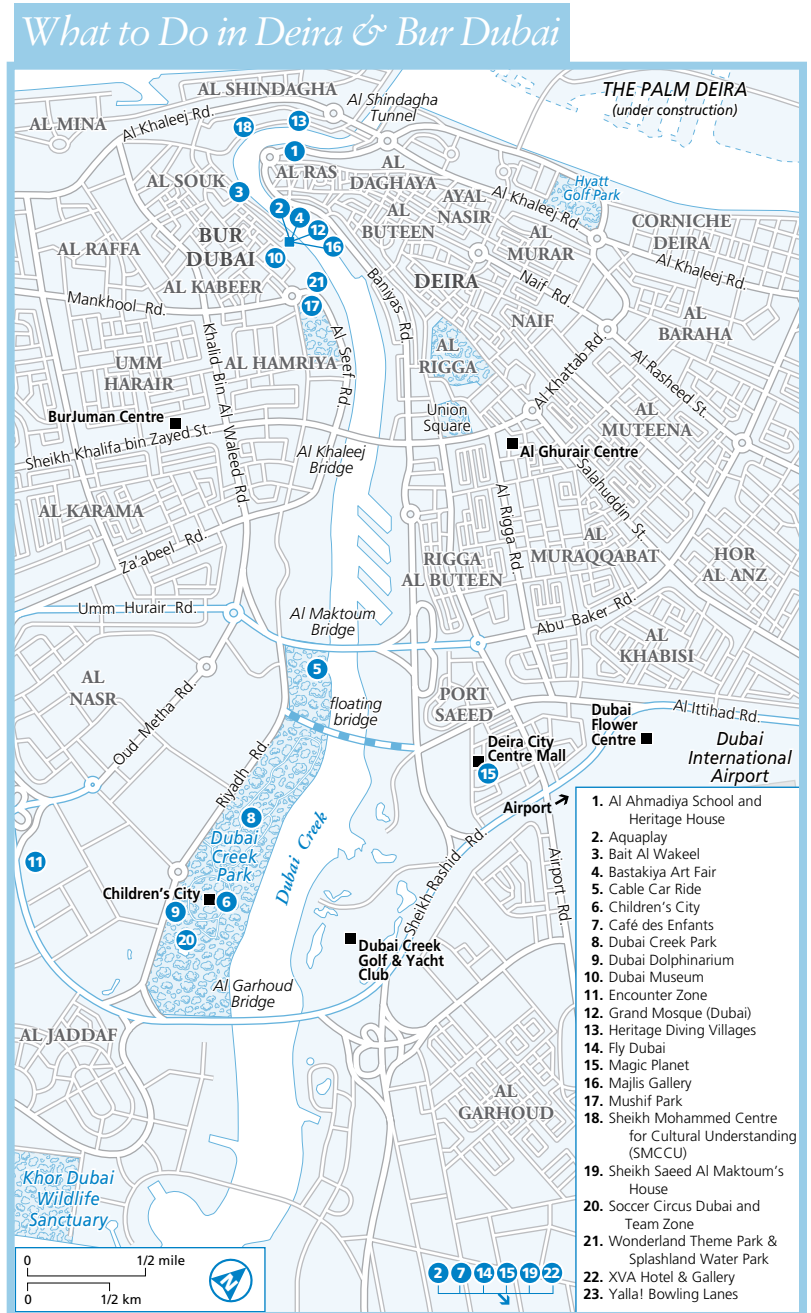
DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Constructed in 1912, Al Ahmadiya School was established by Ahmed Bin Dalmouk, a wealthy pearl merchant who believed in the benefits of education. About 200 boys were taught at the school, learning basic arithmetic, the Quran and Islamic studies, the Arabic language and grammar. Pupils still coming to the school up until 1962, when it moved to larger premises. The school provides information about education at the turn of the century, and the classrooms look as they did when the school was in use. The school is located in what is becoming an established heritage district and is just behind Heritage House, which was Sheikh Ahmed bin Dalmouk's former home. It dates back to 1890 and is an excellent example of a traditional family house. Both buildings have been converted into museums and have been restored using original construction materials – gypsum, coral, shell, stone and sandalwood.

kids Aquaplay ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS –
YOUNG ADULTS – OVER 30 ★ SENIORS ★

Mirdif City Centre Mall, Mirdif; ☎ 800-534-7873; aquaplayme.com

Type of attraction Indoor water-based entertainment area **Admission** Rides



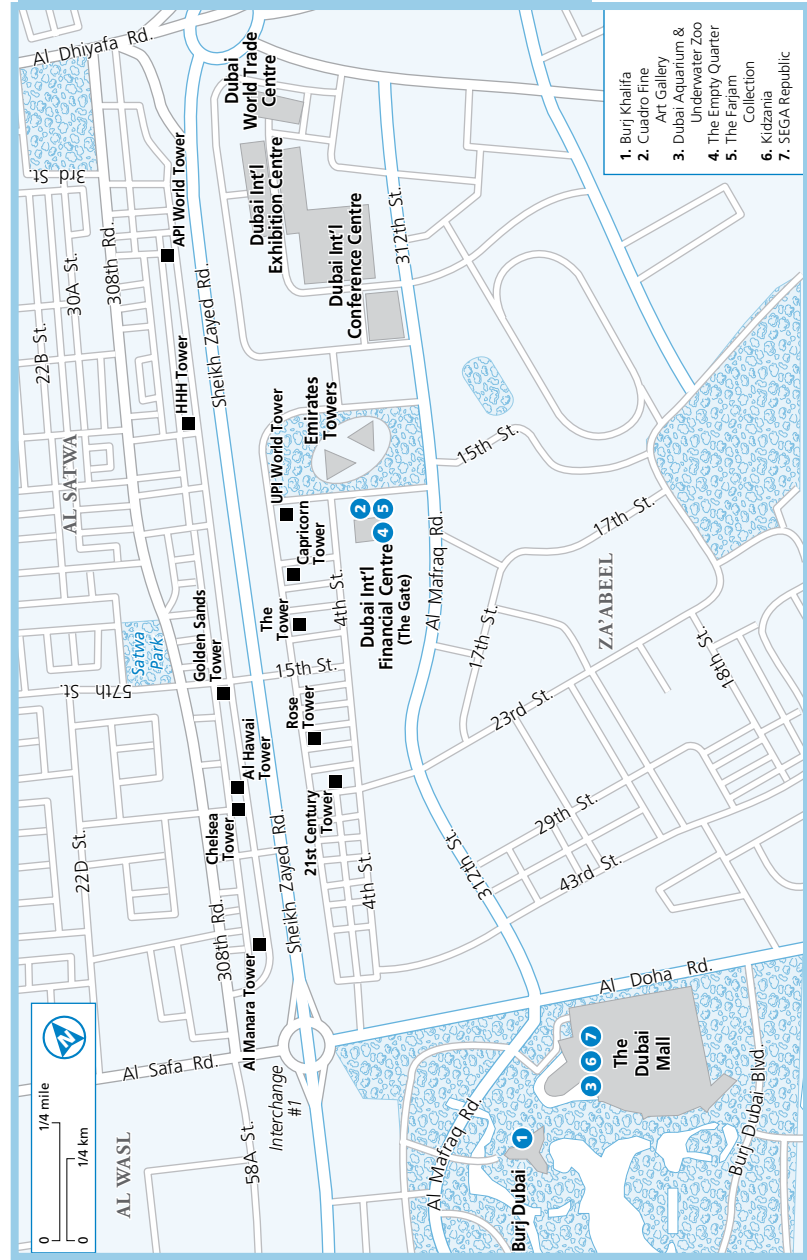
What to Do in Jumeirah

- 1. Aquaventure
- 2. ArtBus
- 3. Art Dubai
- 4. Art Sawa Site
- 5. Ayvam Gallery
- 6. Cafe Ceramique
- 7. Carbon 12
- 8. Dolphin Bay
- 9. Dubai Kartdrome and Laserdrome
- 10. Encounter Zone
- 11. Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde
- 12. Jumeirah Archaeological Site
- 13. Jumeirah Beach Park
- 14. Jumeirah Mosque
- 15. Lost Chambers
- 16. Luna Park, the Fruit Garden
- 17. Magic Planet
- 18. Majlis Ghorfat Um Al Sheif
- 19. Mojo Gallery
- 20. 1X1 Art Gallery
- 21. Portfolio Gallery
- 22. Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary
- 23. Safa Park
- 24. Al Saneel
- 25. Ski Dubai
- 26. Stargate
- 27. theamjar
- 28. The Third Line
- 29. Wild Wadi
- 30. Za'abeel Park



What to Do on Sheikh Zayed Road

- 1. Burj Khalifa
- 2. Cuadro Fine Art Gallery
- 3. Dubai Aquarium & Underwater Zoo
- 4. The Empty Quarter
- 5. The Faram Collection
- 6. Kidzania
- 7. SEGA Republic



vary in price between AED 5–30 per ride. **Hours** Daily, 10 a.m.–10 p.m. **How much time to allow** 2 hours **Special comments** You won't need a swimming costume. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. A bit like Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory with water instead of chocolate. Fun and educational, and you don't have to get wet.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Water, young children, splashing, no mess for you to clear up – what could be more perfect? This is an indoor entertainment centre at Playnation with a difference – all the interactive games involve water. Children wear plastic overalls and, under the diligent eye of the staff, can splash to their heart's content at Muriel's Aquatraptions – a stand-and-play activity area with mini water tubes, slides, interactive fountains, squirters and boats that children can mess around with while learning about water movement, pressure, currents and hydropower. Oscar's Wave Rider is a kayak-style log-flume ride, and Pelican Bay is a fishing port-themed climbing and soft play area. There's also a bumper-boat ride – Ravi's Slamming Shells (!), a seahorse carousel, water-themed arcade games, gemstone digging and a tugboat swing ship. If you have older children, send them off to another Playnation attraction and let the little ones have a great time at this excellently designed one.

kids Aquaventure ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★ SENIORS ★

Atlantis The Palm, Jumeirah; ☎ 04-426-0000

Type of attraction Outdoor water park **Admission** AED 200 for adults, AED 150 for children. **Admission** after 3 p.m. Sunday–Thursday, AED 150 for adults and AED 120 for children. **Hours** Daily, 10 a.m.–sunset **How much time to allow** Half a day **Special comments** If you are going to visit during the summer months, Thursday evenings, when it opens until midnight, is the best time to go. **Author's rating** ★★★★★.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Only the very hard of heart could fail to love this completely over-the-top water park. It's actually smaller than you might imagine, with fewer rides than competitor Wild Wadi, but the ones it does have are very impressive. The vertical Leap of Faith slide shoots you through a shark tunnel at Formula 1 speeds, but there are more sedate rides too. Bobbing about on the lazy river in a giant tyre is a very pleasant way to spend an afternoon. There is also a beach with sunloungers for when you get bored – beware, though, towel rental for a family can rack up, so think about bringing your own. Food and drink is also expensive, so load up on the bottles of water before you get in. The ground can get very hot during summer, so do wear flip-flops into the park, and if you are prone to sunburn, wear a T-shirt over your swimsuit, as the rides don't afford much shade.

ArtBus ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL – TEENS ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

To coincide with Art Dubai and Bastakiya Art Fair;

☎ 04-341-7303; artinthecity.com

Type of attraction Bus tour with an art theme **Admission** AED 50 **Hours** Only runs during Art Dubai and Bastakiya Art Fair, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. **How much time to allow** 1–2 days **Special comments** ArtBus follows two full-day routes. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. By the end of a day you will not only have seen some of Dubai's most interesting art galleries, but you will have made new friends as well.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS ArtBus is a fantastic bus tour dedicated to getting enthusiasts to where the art is! The only downside is that it runs for merely three days each year, during Art Dubai, Dubai's annual art fair, which is held in March at the Madinat Jumeirah. ArtBus shuttles passengers on a tour of Dubai's art pockets to and from the fair via the Al Quoz galleries, the Al Bastakiya arts quarter and Dubai International Financial Centre's (DIFC's) Gate Village. The bus provides guided tours of the city's prominent galleries, studios, art centres, alternative art spaces and art fairs. It's a hassle-free journey of Dubai's changing landscape and developing arts scene. There are two tours, and each tour takes a full day, with pickup and drop-off at the Madinat Jumeirah, where Art Dubai is held. Both tours take place each day of the Art Dubai period. Two knowledgeable guides accompany each bus, and the tour is conducted in English. The guides stay with the passengers for the entire tour, and there is a lunch stop at a lovely restaurant. The atmosphere on the bus is very friendly, and passengers get to know each other over the course of the tour, so that by the end of the day there's a really convivial feeling amongst the group. Seats fill up very fast, so it is important to make a reservation.

Art Dubai ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL – TEENS ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Madinat Jumeirah, Jumeirah; ☎ 04-323-3434; artdubai.ae

Type of attraction Art fair held annually **Admission** AED 50 **Hours** Usually held for three or four days in March. **Hours** vary. **How much time to allow** 2 hours to 2 days **Special comments** One of the biggest contemporary art events in the Middle East **Author's rating** ★★★★★. A fantastic opportunity to see art from more than 70 galleries and 30 countries in one place.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Whilst this is not a gallery, it is important to include Art Dubai, the extremely prestigious international art fair that punctuates Dubai's prolific art scene annually. It is now considered the essential gathering place for collectors, artists and art professionals

from across the Middle East, South Asia and beyond, and has been instrumental in reviving the city's art culture. Dubai has many small galleries, but Art Dubai provides a focal point for the year for Dubai's art scene and showcases many of the local galleries' works.

Art Sawa ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Al Rasaas Road, Street 14B, Al Quoz 1; ☎ 04-340-8660; artsawa.com

Type of attraction Art gallery **Admission** Depends on the event; gallery viewing free of charge. **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 10 a.m.–7 p.m. **How much time to allow** Depends on the event. **Special comments** Particularly focused on exhibiting artists from the North African continent. **Author's rating** ★★★. A spectacular gallery, the largest in Dubai, promoting work from a wide range of artists, in a variety of different media.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Enormous (1,115 square metres) art space that devotes itself to showcasing artists from the Middle East, North Africa and neighbouring countries. It hosts innovative exhibitions and educational programmes, as well as offering a range of publications reflecting current issues and practices.

Ayyam Gallery ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Al Serkal Avenue, Street 8, Al Quoz 1; ☎ 04-323-6242; ayyamgallery.com

Type of attraction Contemporary art gallery **Admission** Free **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 10 a.m.–8 p.m. **How much time to allow** 30 minutes + **Special comments** A 929-square-metre space dedicated to promoting contemporary art from Syria and the Levant. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. A beautiful space, well curated, providing an excellent introduction to Middle Eastern art.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS This gallery, which also has locations in Damascus and Beirut, concentrates on showcasing works of young, emerging Middle Eastern artists. Several times a year the gallery organises in-house the Young Collectors Auction, which offers an opportunity to a new generation of collectors and patrons in the Middle East to buy sought-after artworks at highly competitive prices. The gallery represents more than 30 artists exclusively around the world.

Bait Al Wakeel ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★ SENIORS ★★

edge of Creek, between Bur Dubai Abra Station and Old Souk Abra Station, Bur Dubai; ☎ 04-353-0530

Type of attraction Maritime museum and restaurant **Admission** Free **Hours** Daily, 11:30 a.m.–midnight **How much time to allow** 1 hour including time for lunch **Special comments** It was the first office building in Dubai. **Author's rating** ★★★. For atmosphere, the restaurant is hard to beat, as you sit literally over the Creek, in one of Dubai's oldest buildings, watching life on the river. Decent traditional food, and the museum explains Dubai's maritime history.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Built in 1935 by the late Sheikh Rashid, Bait Al Wakeel was a shipping office for Gray Mackenzie & Company, who were agents for many of the shipping lines that sailed into Dubai. The lower floor was used as offices, whilst the manager and his family used the upper floor as accommodation. To board the ships, staff only had to walk through the back door and they were on the quayside. The building is a fine example of early 20th-century Arabic architecture and was made from local mud and coral. Mangrove poles to support the roof were imported from East Africa. After Bait Al Wakeel was restored and refurbished, the landing stage, from which the agents' boats used to sail out to visit the cargo ships anchored offshore, was turned into a deck for dining as part of a restaurant within Bait Al Wakeel. Today it also houses a fishing museum depicting Dubai's once-traditional fishing and maritime history and culture. The restaurant serves very decent seafood.

Bastakiya Art Fair ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Bastakiya, Bur Dubai; ☎ 04-353-5383; bastakiyaartfair.com

Type of attraction Annual art fair held for four days only **Admission** Free **Hours** Usually held in March to coincide with Art Dubai. **Hours** vary. **How much time to allow** 2 hours to half a day **Special comments** Located in the galleries and streets of Bastakiya. Take plenty of water; it can get hot. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. Bastakiya is a fascinating area in its own right, so be prepared to get sidetracked. This is a laid-back fringe art fair, in a beautifully-restored heritage area.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Bastakiya Arts Fair runs parallel to Art Dubai annually, and it's altogether a more relaxed and bohemian affair. It provides a wider celebration of the arts in one of Dubai's loveliest heritage areas. Traditional houses within Bastakiya are opened to the public, and participants exhibiting their works are local, regional and international. Exhibitions are by individual participants, galleries and internationally-acclaimed curators. The programme of events includes daily exhibitions, movie screenings, book readings, performance art and a series of brunch talks. Intersperse this with some relaxation in any of Bastakiya's delightful restaurants or cafes, and the chance to wander through some of Dubai's most beautiful restored streets, and you have the recipe for a fun-filled, fascinating day out.


Burj Khalifa ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★ TEENS★★★★
 YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

1 Emaar Boulevard, Downtown Dubai; ☎ 04-888-8124; burjkhalifa.ae

Type of attraction Tallest building in the world with a spectacular observation deck **Admission** Reserved – dated and timed: AED 100 for adults, AED 75 for children ages 4–12, and free for children age 3 and under. Immediate entry: AED 400. **Hours** Sunday–Wednesday, 10 a.m.–10 p.m.; Thursday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–midnight **How much time to allow** 2 hours **Special comments** Book in advance and save AED 300 per person **Author's rating** ★★★★★. Not strictly a cultural attraction, but may become part of Dubai's heritage.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS The tallest building in the world towers over every other building in Dubai and can be seen for miles around; it majestically dominates Dubai's skyline and is home to residential apartments, offices and shops. It's very difficult to get a sense of just how tall it is, but bear in mind that at 800 metres tall, it is almost half a kilometre taller than the next tallest building in Dubai, the Emirates Office Tower at 355 metres. Its opening in January 2010 was televised around the world. It holds several other records apart from those already mentioned – it has the highest number of storeys in the world, the highest occupied floor in the world, the highest outdoor observation deck in the world and the lift with the longest travel distance in the world. Up close you can't fail to be overwhelmed by its sheer immensity.

The Burj houses the Armani Hotel Dubai and Armani Residences (see page xref) as well as private ultra-luxurious residences and corporate suites. On level 122 is a restaurant, and the tower's public observatory is on level 124. Burj Khalifa's At The Top experience is literally out of this world. Best to book in advance to avoid queuing and to cut your costs considerably. Pitch black, high-speed lifts travelling at 10 metres per second whisk you 124 floors above the ground for an awe-inspiring view from the observation deck. A typical visit will last about an hour, although you are welcome to stand gawping for as long as you like, and the views are some of the most stunning you will find of Dubai. On a very clear day, you can see the coastline of Iran; but even if it's hazy, you'll get a wonderful bird's-eye view of Sheikh Mohammed's palaces and the desert beyond.

The journey begins in the lower ground level. You'll leave the reception area aboard the 65-metre-long 'travelator' on a trip that portrays, through multi-media presentations, a history of Dubai up to the present day. A viewing point at this stage allows you to look at the tower close up through a skylight. You'll then enter the lift, which fits about 20 people. It travels incredibly fast – at 10 metres per second – but you are not aware of the speed at which you're travelling, and during your journey, a light show and music plays in the lift. The observation deck is very large and is split into two parts – one roofed, one open-air. Floor-

to-ceiling glass walls provide a breathtaking unobstructed 360-degree view of the city, desert and ocean, but if you suffer from vertigo, don't worry: The sheer size of the observation deck seems to minimise how scarily high you actually are.

Dubai looks particularly lovely at night, with sparkling lights and stars vying for attention. Special telescopes provide virtual time-travel visions of the scenes beyond and below. You'll see close-up, real-time views as well as the past and the future, by day and by night. You can also walk the entire perimeter for the most comprehensive views. Windows are louvred so that you can take photos without getting a reflection from the glass. We were surprised to find that we stayed up there an hour; it was so intriguing.


kids Cable Car Ride ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★ TEENS ★★
 YOUNG ADULTS ★ OVER 30 ★ SENIORS ★

Creek Park – located between Al Maktoum and Al Garhoud bridges in the heart of Bur Dubai; ☎ 04-336-7633 (park) and ☎ 050-624-9642 (cable car)

Type of attraction Outdoor cable car ride **Admission** AED 5 per person for park entry. For the cable car ride, an additional AED 25 for adults and AED 15 for children. **Hours** Sunday–Wednesday, 8 a.m.–11 p.m.; Thursday–Saturday, 8 a.m.–11:30 p.m. **How much time to allow** 1 hour **Special comments** It does get hot, and during the summer the cable car runs at variable times because of the heat. During the winter it runs all day. **Author's rating** ★★★. This is definitely an attraction to do with younger children. The trouble is that there are so many sensational things to do in Dubai that this seems a little mundane in comparison because it is older. Nevertheless it is fun and, if you're in Creek Park, worth doing.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Another way to see how Dubai is developing is to take the 2.5-kilometre cable car ride, 30 metres above the shore of the Creek. The Dubai cable car ride system connects the park's amphitheatre and the Al Maktoum Bridge. There are three stations en route, and passengers can embark or disembark from any of them.

The Creek is fascinating from any viewpoint, and being up high only enhances it. Watching the busy road network from above is strangely mesmerising as well. We probably wouldn't recommend this ride if you are afraid of heights.


kids Café Céramique ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
 YOUNG ADULTS ★ OVER 30 ★ SENIORS ★

Town Centre Mall, Jumeirah Road, Jumeirah; ☎ 04-344-7331; Festival Centre, Festival City; ☎ 04-232-8616; cafe-ceramique.com

Type of attraction Concept cafe – paint your own ceramics **Admission** AED 50–

200, depending on how many pieces of pottery you choose to paint and what you have to eat. **Hours** Daily, 9 a.m.–midnight **How much time to allow** 1–1½ hours **Special comments** Bear in mind that you'll need to leave your ceramics to be fired, and then pick them up a few days later, so don't visit this cafe at the end of your holiday. **Author's rating** ★★★. A franchise, similar to many that are now seen on the high streets in the U.K. Go for the ceramic painting rather than the food.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Part cafe, part studio, the cafe walls are lined with bisque ceramics of all description, from crockery to sculpture. Paints, brushes and ideas are provided; all you need to do is select which piece of pottery you like and sit and paint it. You don't need to be artistic or a whizz with a paintbrush. This will keep the children occupied whilst you have a bite to eat. The food sounds better than it tastes but is perfectly pleasant, and this is a good place to while away an hour or so in the cool.

Carbon 12 ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Warehouse D37, Al Serkal Avenue, Street 8, Al Quoz 1;
☎ 050-464-4392 or 050-873-9623; carbon12dubai.com

Type of attraction Eclectic art gallery **Admission** Free **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 11:30 a.m.–7 p.m. **How much time to allow** Half an hour + **Special comments** Contemporary, simple white cube space enhances the art on display to great effect. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. A gallery with a mix of international artists, including some from the Middle East, showcasing works in all media.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Carbon 12 represents both newly-discovered artists and internationally-recognised names whose works already hang in museums. The gallery exhibits paintings, sculptures, photography and media art. The artists represented are often being seen for the first time in the region.

kids Children's City ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★ SENIORS ★★

Gate 1, Creek Park, Bur Dubai; ☎ 04-334-0808; childrencity.ae

Type of attraction Interactive science-centred children's museum **Admission** AED 15 for adults, AED 10 for children, and free for children under age 2. **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 9 a.m.–7:30 p.m.; Friday 3–7:30 p.m. **How much time to allow** 2 hours **Special comments** A great museum that will keep children occupied for a few hours during the heat of the day. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. We think that this is a gem of a museum; loads of interesting hands-on displays will interest a wide spectrum of ages – and unlike London's Science Museum, practically empty, so children have lots of time to try everything.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS If you've visited Launch Pad gallery at the Sci-

ence Museum in London, then you will have a fair idea of what Children's City is like. It is the first educational city in the U.A.E. devoted to children between 2 and 15 years old, where they can investigate, explore, play, discover and learn about the world in which they live. It takes the children on a journey through the human body, science and space with the help of different zones. More than 50 exhibits, many of which are interactive, appeal to all ages of children. Our favourites are trying the simulator, where you can try flying on a magic carpet or riding on a camel; dressing up in clothes from around the world; and using the giant computer to send messages. Other facilities include a special play area for those under the age of 5, a theatre, a planetarium, a souvenir shop and a cafe.

kids Cité des Enfants ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS –
YOUNG ADULTS – OVER 30 – SENIORS –

Mirdif City Centre Mall, Mirdif; ☎ 800-534-7873; citedesenfantsme.com

Type of attraction Children's educational play centre **Admission** AED 130 for one adult and one child, AED 190 for one adult and two children, and AED 245 for one adult and three children. Each additional guest over a group of four will be charged AED 50. **Hours** Saturday–Wednesday, 10 a.m.–11 p.m.; Thursday–Friday, 10 a.m.–midnight. **How much time to allow** 1 hour + **Special comments** New from France, this is a delightful educational play zone, beautifully designed. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. A mix between a science-type museum and a really good play centre, with very beautifully designed exhibits. A real treat for little ones.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Cité des Enfants is an 'edu-tainment' play area at Playnation with 97 different exhibits across five zones, designed around the principle of learning through play. Once you have paid, you can stay as long as you like. The five zones are called I Discover Myself; I Can Do; I Locate Myself; All Together; and I Experiment. We liked the light-and-colour exhibit in I Experiment, the hut of anger in I Discover Myself and the speaking letters in I Can Do. You'll find some really unusual exhibits here, which are both stimulating and great fun. Also worth looking out for are the monthly workshops, which cover a wide range of subjects such as Science Discoveries, Animal Mania and Our Mother Earth, to name a few. Workshop sessions are AED 75, and you drop your child off for 90 minutes – 45 minutes for the workshop followed by 45 minutes in the exhibition area, supervised by a Cité des Enfants animator.

Cuadro Fine Art Gallery ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Gate Village, DIFC; ☎ 04-425-0400; cuadroart.com

Type of attraction A gallery for the serious art lover **Admission** Free **Hours**

Sunday–Thursday, 10 a.m.–8 p.m.; Saturday, midday–6 p.m. **How much time to allow** 1 hour **Special comments** A serious player in the Dubai art world **Author's rating** ★★★★★. Cuadro is an impressive gallery with a beautiful space, and it takes itself very seriously, showcasing a range of really top-notch artists.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS This sophisticated gallery represents sought-after artists who boast work represented in permanent collections of museums such as MoMa, the Tate Britain and the Guggenheim. The gallery is equally committed to discovering, exhibiting and promoting artists from the Gulf and the Middle East, and working closely with international partners to exhibit the works of Middle Eastern artists in international venues.

kids Dolphin Bay ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★ SENIORS ★★

Atlantis The Palm; ☎ 04-426-1030

Type of attraction In-water interactive dolphin experience **Admission** Dolphin Encounter: AED 595; Dolphin Adventure: AED 890; Royal Swim: AED 975; observer pass: AED 300 **Hours** Daily, 9 a.m.–3.10 p.m. **How much time to allow** 90 minutes **Special comments** **Admission** price also includes access to the Aquaventure theme park and beach **Author's rating** ★★★. There's no getting around the fact that taking your family to get up-close and personal with these beautiful mammals is expensive, but it is a unique experience.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS There are a number of packages available here, all of them very expensive and, unfortunately, quite short. These are booked in time slots, so do allow yourself enough time to get there, as Dolphin Bay itself is quite some distance from the car park and you will hold up a whole group if you're late. On arrival, you are given lockers and towels and are issued wetsuits – don't wear jewellery, as you will be sternly told to take everything off, even small stud earrings. The trainers will then show a short video and walk you through what is about to happen. Then you'll be led into the water. If you are paying for the Dolphin Encounter, you'll wade to waist height in the water, where you can touch, play with and 'kiss' the dolphin – the whole experience lasts 30 minutes. Adults might find this a bit embarrassing, as you will be made to sing, clap and dance for the dolphin. Yes, really. The next tier, the Dolphin Adventurer, will lead guests out to water up to three metres in depth and will be allowed to hold onto the dolphin's fin while it gives you a ride back into shore. The newest experience to be added to the list is the Royal Swim, where two dolphins lead you around the pool and also jump over your head. Children under 12 are not allowed out into the water on their own, but there is no lower age limit for the Dolphin Encounter if a guardian is in the water too. For the other experiences, children must be aged over 12 and competent swimmers.

kids Dubai Aquarium and Underwater Zoo ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Dubai Mall, Downtown Dubai; ☎ 04-448-5200; dubaiaquarium.com

Type of attraction Aquarium **Admission** Aquarium Tunnel: AED 25 for adults and AED 20 for children ages 3–16. Tunnel and Underwater Zoo: AED 50. **Hours** Sunday–Wednesday, 10 a.m.–10 p.m.; Thursday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–midnight **How much time to allow** 2 hours **Special comments** An aquarium marketed as an underwater zoo with a rain forest theme; beautiful in every way. **Author's rating** . This is an excellent aquarium – very well laid out and themed, with informative panels, very friendly knowledgeable staff, and out-of-the-ordinary attractions to make it just that little bit different. ★★★★★

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS It has the largest viewing panel on the planet, a fascinating cage-snorkelling experience, more than 150 aquatic species and 33,000 aquatic animals, shark dives, glass-bottom boat rides and the world's largest suspended tank containing 10 million litres of water. And it is in a shopping mall. This is the most interesting aquarium we've visited. The facts alone are quite jaw-dropping, but the design is pretty spectacular as well. You have the choice of either just taking a walk under the water through the 48-metre-long Aquarium Tunnel – with sharks and rays swimming just above your head – or visiting the Underwater Zoo, part rain forest, part aquarium, with 36 aquatic displays, as well. At the Underwater Zoo you will see otters, penguins, water rats and piranha amongst other things; you can reach out and touch the Rock Pool creatures; and you can enjoy the slightly scary sensation of standing on top of the Aquarium Viewing Panel. It is fascinating to learn about what goes on behind the scenes at the aquarium – the logistics are mind-blowing. If that's not enough, you can dive and swim with the fish – if the thought of being in a giant fishbowl with the entire mall watching you doesn't put you off. A glass-bottom boat ride, which lasts about 15 minutes, will set you back an extra AED 25, the cage-snorkelling experience costs AED 225, and the shark dive, depending on whether you are already a licensed diver or need training, costs between AED 625 to AED 1,025. To find out more about these activities, call # 04 342 2993. We think this is one of Dubai's best-value themed attractions.

Dubai Creek Park ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

located between Al Maktoum and Al Garhoud bridges in the heart of Bur Dubai; ☎ 04-336-7633

Type of attraction A park with a myriad of activities for all ages **Admission** AED

5 per person **Hours** Sunday–Wednesday, 8 a.m.–11 p.m.; Thursday–Saturday, 8 a.m.–11:30 p.m. **How much time to allow** 2–4 hours **Special comments** Masses to do here. **Author's rating** ★★★. An excellent park in which to while away the time; probably too much to do in one day. Decide whether to do the outside activities or inside ones, not both, unless you plan to spend a day there.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS A beautiful park set in 96 hectares of lawns features 280 types of plants, a desert garden with a traditional irrigation system and lots of beautiful flower gardens. Set on the Creek, it's the second-largest park in Dubai after Mirdif Park and has wonderful views. With designated barbecue areas, shady picnic spots and a variety of restaurants and cafes, this park is an excellent place in which to spend a few hours. There are playgrounds, a miniature train and a cable car (see page xref), if you fancy having an aerial view of the Creek. The park has an amphitheatre, and you can fish from a designated pier. You can take abra rides and dhow cruises from the park, creekside, and there is a small 18-hole mini-golf course. There is also a jogging track. If it all gets too hot to be outside, the park has an excellent Dolphinarium (see page xref) with live shows daily, and a terrific children's science (sort of) museum – Children's City (see page xref).

If you're hankering after some green space, Creek Park is well worth a visit. Situated in the heart of the city but blessed with acres of gardens, this is the ultimate in park life. From Gate 2, four-wheel cycles can be hired (you can't use your own bike in the park). Rollerblading is allowed, if you by any chance thought to pack yours.

kids Dubai Dolphinarium ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★ OVER 30 ★★ SENIORS ★★

Creek Park, Entrance 1, Bur Dubai;
☎ 04-336-9773; dubaidolphinarium.ae

Type of attraction Dolphin and seal show **Admission** VIP seating: AED 120 for adults and AED 80 for children; circus: AED 140 for adults and AED 100 for children. Standard seating: AED 100 for adults and AED 50 for children; circus: AED 120 for adults and AED 70 for children. **Hours** Showtimes: Monday–Thursday, 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Friday–Saturday, 11 a.m., 3 p.m., and 6 p.m. Swimming with dolphins: Monday–Thursday, 1 p.m., 2 p.m., 3 p.m., and 4 p.m. **How much time to allow** 2 hours **Special comments** For limited periods throughout the year other shows – such as the Dolphin Spectacular Chinese Circus – take place at the Dolphinarium. Ring to find out. **Author's rating** ★★★. An easy, entertaining way to spend a couple of hours if you like performing dolphins and seals.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Three Black Sea bottlenose dolphins perform displays and sequences and impress with their skill and obedience, whilst four fur seals perform on land. This is a sizeable dolphinarium, and the shows are great fun. After the show you can have your photo

taken with the dolphins, with prices ranging from AED 80–120 depending on how you pose with the dolphins. There is also an opportunity to swim for 20 minutes with the dolphins, which is a wonderful experience. Prices range from AED 400 for up to six people to AED 1,600 for up to three people.

kids Dubai Drums ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★ SENIORS ★★

Gulf Ventures Desert Camp – see Web site for map and details;
☎ 050-659-2874; dubaidrums.com

Type of attraction Full-moon desert drumming **Admission** AED 190 (alcohol extra) for adults, AED 85 for children ages 5–14, and free for children under age 5. **Hours** Dependent on the weather, so September/October and then each full moon. 6:30 p.m.–midnight **How much time to allow** 5–6 hours **Special comments** This takes place at full moon, outside in the desert, when the weather's not too hot. Check the Web site for details. You can leave after dinner if you can't manage the whole six hours. **Author's rating** ★★★. A very unusual but cool way to spend an evening in the desert. Very magical to play the drums under the stars.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Full-moon desert drumming is an activity organised by Dubai Drums. You head out into the desert to the desert camp and will find African drumming experts, lots and lots of drums, a barbecue, dancing music and plenty of good company. It's an event that is surreal but lovely and suits all ages. You will be taught how to drum and will have lots of opportunity to do so, and when you're not drumming, you'll be having a barbecue and a few drinks, making new friends, relaxing, or dancing as you desire. Remember to take some warm clothes, as it gets chilly in the desert at night in the winter.

kids Dubai Kartdrome and Laserdrome ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★

Dubai Autodrome, Motorcity, south of Al Barsha;
☎ 04-367-8744; motorcity.ae

Kartdrome

Type of attraction Karting **Admission** AED 100 per 15-minute session **Hours** Vary seasonally; call telephone number listed above for daily availability of Arrive & Drive sessions; usually opens between 2–4 p.m. and closes 8:30–midnight. **How much time to allow** 1 hour + **Special comments** Ages 7–12 use the indoor track; age 13 and above use the outdoor track. Always phone first to find out timings and availability. **Author's rating** ★★★. Great fun if there are a few of you to race against. In summer check if you can use the indoor track, as it will be

unbearable outdoors once you are bundled up in your balaclavas and overalls!

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Dubai Kartdrome is based at Motorcity and has both an indoor and outdoor karting track for anyone over the age of 7 who wishes to come and race karts. There are special Arrive and Drive karts and karting sessions for children ages 7–12 every day in the Indoor Kartdrome. Check timings by phone for the daily schedule, as corporate parties sometimes take over the facility. You need to wear closed sports shoes or trainers but will be loaned helmets, balaclavas, gloves and kart suits, all of which are included in the price. You will be given a briefing when you arrive so that you know how to drive the karts safely and will then have a 15-minute session on the track. You can book as many sessions as you like, as long as there is space. Fully-trained staff monitor the children's safety and offer advice as necessary. The karts are very easy to get to grips with; the problem will be stopping the dads trying to take over.

Laserdrome

Type of attraction Laser tag (like paintball without the paint) **Admission** AED 90 per 15-minute game **Hours** 1 hour + **Special comments** For a good adrenaline-fuelled day out, try the Kart and Shoot combo. Phone first to check availability. **Author's rating** ★★★. Seems a bit daft to go to Dubai and do laser tag, but if you must, you must. And if you've got to wait your turn for the track, then you might as well add a laser battle into the mix.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS A unique feature of the Indoor Kartdrome Complex is the Laserdrome game area. Players are sorted into two teams (maximum ten players), and they battle against each other with laser guns. The battles are set in a mediaeval castle-type environment, featuring a huge Day-Glo dungeon-style decoration with lighting and artificial fog aimed at disorientating you and obscuring your vision, making it harder to tag your opponents. Add a pumping soundtrack, and it's like a life-size scene from the latest Xbox or Playstation game. Might be just the antidote to beautiful golden beaches and tranquil turquoise seas.



Dubai Museum ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE	PRESCHOOL –	PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★	TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★	OVER 30 ★★★★★	SENIORS ★★★★★	

near Bastakiya and Dubai Creek, Bur Dubai;

☎ 04-353-1862; dubaitourism.ae

Type of attraction Museum focusing on the history of Dubai **Admission** AED 3 for adults and AED 1 for children **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 8:30 a.m.–8:30 p.m.; Friday, 2:30–8:30 p.m. Check the timings at Ramadan. **How much time to allow** 1–2 hours **Special comments** It can get crowded if busloads of tourists are dropped off. Not wheelchair-friendly. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. This is a really interesting museum – be aware that the main part of it is underground. We've seen people leave after the first section, not realising that it continues!

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Located in the beautifully-restored Al Fahidi Fort, this museum gives a fascinating insight into Dubai's history, its development and traditional Emirati life. It is always surprising and lovely to find old parts of Dubai and to realise that it does indeed have a rich history. Al Fahidi Fort was built in 1787 and once guarded the landward approaches to the town. Outside the fort you can see the traditional city walls and an enormous wooden dhow. You enter an open courtyard, which has a display of miniature dhows. Rooms off the courtyard display weapons and musical instruments, and a film shows traditional dancing. Enter the turret in the corner and go downstairs – underground – to enter the main museum. In the first hall watch the fascinating film with three-dimensional displays showing the history of Dubai, its development and growth so far and future projects. It helps you understand why the Emiratis are justifiably proud of what they've achieved when you realise that until relatively recently, Dubai was a fishing village surrounded by desert. Hands-on exhibits and life-size dioramas lead you gently through the lives and times of the city and its people from the third millennium BC to the present day. There are recreations of a souk and typical homes, as well as tableaux that bring to life the occupations, costumes and social customs of the day. Background soundtracks provide atmosphere, and children as well as adults will enjoy walking around and through the exhibits.

The Empty Quarter ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE	PRESCHOOL –	PRIMARY SCHOOL ★	TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★	OVER 30 ★★★★★	SENIORS ★★★★★	

Building 2, Gate Village, DIFC; ☎ 04-323-1210; theemptyquarter.com

Type of attraction Photography gallery **Admission** Free **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 9 a.m.–10 p.m.; Friday, 3–10 p.m. **How much time to allow** 1 hour **Special comments** An excellent gallery for photographers and photography enthusiasts alike. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. Interesting exhibitions that focus on transcending cultures and political issues. The quality of the photography on show is consistently excellent.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS The Empty Quarter is the only gallery in Dubai devoted exclusively to fine art photography, and it serves a rapidly-growing membership of artists and photography enthusiasts. The gallery aims to expand the understanding and appreciation of photography as an artistic medium and showcases the works of young emerging and established photographers. Photography exhibited is from all continents and various points of views: documentary, fine art, photojournalism, poetic, personal, abstract, human and street photography. An excellent range of rare and special-edition books is available to buy.

kids Encounter Zone ★★★★★

YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★ SENIORS ★

Wafi City Mall; ☎ 04-324-7747

Type of attraction Indoor amusement park **Admission** Choose a zone, then pay AED 35 for two hours and AED 25 for every two hours after; some attractions are an additional AED 2. **Hours** Saturday–Tuesday, 10 a.m.–11 p.m.; Wednesday–Thursday, 10 a.m.–midnight; closed Fridays. **Special comments** A state-of-the-art entertainment centre **Author's rating** ★★★. If you're at Wafi and have a spare hour to kill with bored children, you could do worse than visit the Encounter Zone.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS A family entertainment zone, the Encounter Zone is divided into two separate areas – Galactica and Lunarland. In Galactica teenagers amuse themselves with the famous Crystal Maze, the three-dimensional cinema, an indoor rollerblading area and a 'live' horror show. In Lunarland, younger children will enjoy a soft play area, flying spaceships, an arts and crafts corner and a children's toyshop called Imaginarium with a collection of traditional toys. There is also a roller coaster simulator, which feels remarkably like the real thing, and numerous arcade games.

The Farjam Collection ★★★★★APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★**DIFC Gate Village, Building 4; ☎ 04-323-0303; farjamcollection.com**

Type of attraction A privately-owned art collection spanning vast historical and geographical spectra **Admission** Free **Hours** Sunday–Thursday, 10 a.m.–8 p.m.; Saturday, midday–8 p.m. **How much time to allow** 30 minutes + **Special comments** An impressive collection that includes treasures from ancient Islamic art as well as works by modern Western masters and contemporary Iranian and Arab artists. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. Differentiates itself from other galleries as its foremost ambition is art education.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS The Farjam Collection is an extremely prestigious privately-owned art collection and includes art works by masters such as Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Henri Matisse and Alberto Giacometti, as well as a selection of works by Farhad Moshiri, Mohammad Ehsai, Mostafa El-Razzaz and Ali Omar Ermes, and treasures from ancient Islamic art. Selected works from this distinguished collection are on view to the public through a series of curated exhibitions. A programme of educational events is offered free of charge to the public and includes First Wednesdays – guided lunchtime visits by exhibiting artists – and the monthly Art Nights, in conjunction with the DIFC, when the gallery stays open later than usual and visitors can enjoy the exhibition in a relaxed evening session. Art camps for children are run in the summer holidays.

Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde**(previously B21 Gallery) ★★★★★**APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★**Al Serkal Avenue, Street 8, Al Quoz 1 (opposite Ayyam Gallery);****☎ 04-323-5052; ivde.net**

Type of attraction Middle Eastern art gallery **Admission** Free **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 10 a.m.–7 p.m. **How much time to allow** Half an hour + **Special comments** An interesting, elegant space, dedicated to representing a group of artists emerging from the contemporary Arab and Iranian art scenes. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. Gallery IVDE showcases artists who practise in all media and who push the boundaries in terms of the conventional understanding of art currently coming out of the Middle East. Some interesting conceptual art exhibited here.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Gallery IVDE has discovered and nurtured the talent of some of the most promising figures in the Middle East's contemporary art scene. A generation of artists has emerged from the gallery's focused tutelage, attracting the attention of adventurous collectors and curators, as well as prestigious institutions from the region and beyond. These selected rising talents are leading the way in an exciting young art movement and manifest their ideas powerfully in their works.

Grand Mosque Dubai ★★★★★APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★**near the Ruler's Court, Bur Dubai**

Type of attraction Mosque **Admission** Non-Muslims are not permitted to enter the Grand Mosque, but they can visit the minaret and take photos of the mosque from there. **Hours** Any day except Friday or at prayer time. **How much time to allow** As long as it takes you to appreciate it. **Special comments** **Dress** conservatively; you are in an older neighbourhood visiting a religious site. **Author's rating** ★★★. Whilst you cannot enter the mosque, it is worth seeing, particularly at sunset, as it is so beautiful. Additionally, you are in a particularly interesting neighbourhood, and the Heritage and Diving Villages are adjacent – well worth a visit, especially in the evening.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS The Grand Mosque is counted as one of the largest mosques in the U.A.E., with the capacity to accommodate up to 1,200 worshippers. It was constructed in the traditional Islamic architectural style and opened in 1900 as a *kuttab* (Quranic school), where children learnt to recite the Quran from memory. The Grand Mosque was rebuilt in 1998, maintaining its original style, and now boasts a 70-metre-high minaret – the tallest in Dubai. It has 45 small domes in addition to 9 large ones, with handmade stained-glass panels. Its sand-coloured walls and wooden shutters blend perfectly with the surrounding older neighbourhood of Bur Dubai. It is Dubai's main centre

for worship.

Hatta Heritage Village ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

in the Hajar mountains, Hatta; ☎ 04-852-1374; dubaitourism.ae

Type of attraction Old restored village **Admission** Free **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 8 a.m.–8 p.m.; Friday, 2 p.m.–8 p.m. Ramadan: Saturday–Thursday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Friday, 2 p.m.–5 p.m. **How much time to allow** 1 hour + **Special comments** Go in winter – it is outside and will be very hot in summer. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. Fascinating to be able to wander around an old restored village and imagine life as it was 400 years ago. A perfect example of villages of the past, with stunning architecture in a beautiful setting. Make a day of visiting Hatta, and coincide this visit with a trip to the Hatta Pools.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Hatta Heritage Village dates back to the 16th century and provides a perfect example of traditional-style village architecture. Dating back 400 years, it is constructed of stone, mud, reeds and *barasti* (palm leaves and tree trunks). Two watchtowers, a mosque and houses comprising 30 buildings in total surround the impressive Hatta Fort, which dominates the village. As you wander around the site, through the open buildings and in and out of the narrow alleyways, it is easy to see how the village was able to protect itself from hostile invaders from the vantage point of the two towers overlooking the village. Hatta's history goes back more than 3,000 years, and the area includes a 200-year-old mosque and the fortress built by Sheikh Maktoum bin Hasher Al Maktoum in 1896, now used as a weaponry museum.



Heritage and Diving Villages ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Al Shindagha Area, next to Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum's House, Dubai Creek; ☎ 04-393-7139; dubaitourism.ae

Type of attraction A really interesting working village/museum with demonstrations, food tasting, camel rides, restaurants and so on. **Admission** Free **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 8:30 a.m.–10 p.m.; Friday, 3:30–10 p.m. Ramadan: Saturday–Thursday, 9 a.m.–2 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.–midnight; Friday, 8:30 p.m.–midnight **How much time to allow** 2 hours + **Special comments** Particularly fun to visit in the evening, and best to visit in the cooler winter months. Check out the Web site for special events and performances. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. Children will enjoy this as much as adults.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS The Heritage and Diving Villages give excellent insight into Dubai's Bedouin traditions and maritime past. A world away from the glitzy face of new Dubai, this is a chance to discover Dubai's

history – the importance of pearl diving, its architecture, its crafts, its food – in an interesting and informal way. This 'living' museum is staffed by real tradespeople who display their crafts and skills as they have been practised for hundreds of years. You can ride on camels, watch falcon displays and horse shows, and enjoy occasional performances by local musicians and dancers. The village is particularly lively during the Dubai Shopping Festival and national holidays such as Eid. You will see more than 30 traditional handicrafts, such as pottery, weaving and baking. Next door in the Diving Village you can find out about Dubai's maritime history and learn about its pearl-diving culture. There are models of dhows and pearling boats, demonstrations of boat-building and a small aquarium. Buy souvenirs in the small shops in the village and contribute to the livelihood of the villagers here. Local Arabic women serve up traditionally-cooked bread and Arabic coffee.

This area is actually a very accurate portrayal of what life was like when pearl trading and smuggling were the tiny emirate's main revenues. The best time to go is at night, when it comes alive, especially during the winter months and the Dubai Shopping Festival. This is an ideal way to experience Arabian hospitality and customs.

kids iFly Dubai ★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★ SENIORS ★

Mirdif City Centre Mall, Mirdif; ☎ 800-534-7873; iflyme.com

Type of attraction Indoor skydiving **Admission** Peak: AED 195 for adults and AED 145 for children. Off peak: AED 165 for adults and AED 125 for children. **Hours** Saturday–Wednesday, 10 a.m.–11 p.m.; Thursday–Friday, 10 a.m.–midnight. **How much time to allow** 1 hour **Special comments** Not for people with back or shoulder problems, and we didn't much like the damage waiver. **Author's rating** ★★. A skydiving experience in a wind tunnel. Unusual and exciting. Very brief.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS First the facts – iFly Dubai at Playnation is not a ride or a simulator. It is a vertical wind tunnel that moves air up in a vertical column, offering the best possible flight experience for indoor skydiving. It is safe for children, exciting for teens and challenging for adults. Skydivers train here as well. The airflow is controlled according to the ability of the people who are skydiving.

Flyers are taken into a training room where a skydiving instructor shows you a safety video and explains the positions you need to adopt when skydiving. Chris, the instructor we had the day we were there, had the look of a man who'd been quite an adrenaline junkie in a former life, and was now wondering what he was doing training indulged expat children the safety drill for skydiving in a wind tunnel. The training took 15 minutes. The group were then provided with padded jumpsuits, helmets, shoes, socks and goggles. The children all waited in the outer chamber of the tube, whilst Chris battled his way against the wind into it and then took

each child in separately for a couple of minutes, so that they could practise being horizontal on a pillow of air. They then went back in a second time and, like Lois Lane with Superman, were taken up the wind tunnel by Chris, who flew with them. They absolutely loved it. We thought that for the time they were in there, it was just a little bit of a swizz.

Jumeirah Archaeological Site ★★½

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL – TEENS★
YOUNG ADULTS ★ OVER 30 ★★ SENIORS ★★

Street 16, first left after Al Atthar Street from Safa Park, Jumeirah;
☎ 04-349-6874; dubaitourism.ae

Type of attraction Archaeological site **Admission** Free, but you need a permit
Hours Sunrise–sunset **How much time to allow** 30 minutes **Special comments** The archaeological site is not officially open, but you can enter and have a look. Obtain a free permit from the Dubai Museum. **Author's rating** ★★½. Unless you are a die-hard fan of archaeological ruins, you probably won't feel the urge to make a special journey to visit this site. However, if you are interested in the history of Dubai, coincide your archaeological trip with a visit to Majlis Ghorfat Umm al Sheif in the same area, then visit Dubai Museum and the Heritage and Diving Villages in Shindagha, where tools, pottery and coins excavated from the site are on display.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Archaeological digs during the past 40 years have uncovered pre-Islamic foundations dating back to the sixth century AD. This was the site of a caravan station along an ancient trade route that linked Iraq to Oman. It is considered one of the most significant archaeological sites in the U.A.E., with sections of walling, a souk and houses, one of which is believed to have been the palace of an earlier ruler. In the heart of Jumeirah, surrounded by villas and streets, this site is enclosed by a metal-link chain fence. Don't let that put you off; simply obtain a permit from the Dubai Museum, and you can look around.

kids Jumeirah Beach Park ★★★★★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Jumeirah Road; ☎ 04-349-2555 or 050-858-9887

Type of attraction Beach park **Admission** AED 5 per person, AED 20 per car
Hours Daily, 7 a.m.–10:30 p.m.; Ladies' Day on Mondays. **How much time to allow** 1 hour to a full day **Special comments** Beautiful beach park with the facilities of a hotel beach resort. Absolutely packed on Fridays **Author's rating** ★★★★★. This is a stunning beach park – with excellent facilities that will definitely appeal to all ages.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Apart from the beautiful beach, pleasant

shady gardens, barbecue area, showers, sunloungers for hire, changing rooms and cafes selling the normal junk food, there is also an excellent playground for younger children, which will keep them entertained for at least an hour. Despite the fact that on the weekend – Fridays in particular – it is really crowded, there is very little we don't like about this lovely park.

Jumeirah Mosque ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Jumeirah Road, Jumeirah; ☎ 04-353-6666; cultures.ae

Type of attraction Mosque **Admission** AED 10 per person; not suitable for children under the age of 5. **Hours** Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, 10 a.m. During Ramadan, an evening tour is scheduled. **How much time to allow** 2 hours **Special comments** Please make sure that you are suitably dressed to enter the mosque – women will be given an abaya and shawl to cover head, arms and legs, but should dress conservatively – trousers or a skirt to the knees. Men should wear trousers. The tour takes 1¼ hours. Arrive five minutes early; you do not need to pre-book. You can take photos. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. A fascinating introduction to Islam and Arabic traditions and a great opportunity to learn about the Emirati culture and religion.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Jumeirah Mosque dominates the square at the top of Jumeirah Road. It is a beautiful piece of architecture and is the only mosque in Dubai that non-Muslims are permitted to enter. The Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding (SMCCU; see page xref) organises visits to the mosque four mornings a week, and you may only enter the mosque with a guide. You don't need to book, just turn up Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday, or Thursday at 10 a.m. outside the mosque by The One furniture shop, where the guides will meet you. You will be taken inside, and women will be loaned a traditional abaya for the duration of their visit. The guides will help you cover your hair. Once inside, you will be asked to remove your shoes.

The SMCCU's motto is 'Open Doors, Open Minds', and the aim of the 1¼-hour tour is to enable non-Muslims to find out as much as they can about Islam, Emirati culture and religious practices. No question is taboo, and their aim is for you to have fun. Their style is informative and informal, and they are extremely friendly and welcoming. You will have the opportunity to learn about the architecture of the mosque and the religious significance of key design features. Male and female guides explain the origins of the religion and its central tenets – the five pillars of Islam. You will learn that the Arabic word for mosque is *masjid*, or 'place for prostration', and the holy day of the Islamic week is Friday. The call to prayer was traditionally made five times a day by the muezzin from the top of the minaret, but it is now heard with the help of high-powered speakers.

The Jumeirah Mosque is considered to be the most beautiful mosque in Dubai and was built in the medieval Fatimid tradition, using modern building materials. Completed in 1983, the white stone structure has towering twin minarets that frame a large central dome. Its seashell-like finish and colouring fit perfectly with the mosque's position opposite the white sands of Jumeirah Beach. It is particularly worth seeing at night when illuminated and each intricate detail of its artistry is enhanced.

Remember to dress conservatively. After your tour, we recommend eating at the Lime Tree Café, a couple of minutes' walk away. You won't be disappointed.

kids Kidzania ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★
YOUNG ADULTS – OVER 30 – SENIORS –

Level 2, Dubai Mall, Downtown Dubai; ☎ 04-448-5222; kidzania.ae

Type of attraction Interactive 'edu-tainment' centre, scaled-down city/world for children **Admission** AED 125 for children ages 4–15, AED 95 for children ages 2–3, free for children under age 2, and AED 90 for accompanying adults. **Hours** Sunday–Wednesday, 9 a.m.–10 p.m.; Thursday, 9 a.m.–midnight; Friday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–midnight **How much time to allow** At least 3 hours **Special comments** Best for ages 3–13; adults can only enter accompanied by a child. If the child is less than 120 centimetres, then he/she must be accompanied by an adult. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. Outstanding concept – a city scaled down to children's size. Here, children can remain entertained for four hours without a peep.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Think of the film *The Truman Show*, where Jim Carrey's world was, unknown to him, inside a massive studio, and that is a little bit what Kidzania is like. It is a nation for children – a fully-constructed city where a child can become a surgeon, a police officer, a firefighter, a racing car driver, a fashion model, a chef, a journalist, a pilot and a whole lot more. All in the course of a day. There is a choice of 70 professions. The official currency of Kidzania is kidZos. On arrival at the entrance to Kidzania, you'll find the staff dressed as aircrew, and the ticket you buy is an air ticket. The children are given a wallet with a cheque in it, and after 'landing' in Kidzania, they go immediately to the bank to cash their cheque. They are then free to spend their money at whichever outlets they like – outlets such as Waitrose, McDonald's, Emirates Airport, as well as more generic ones. At each outlet they are given the relevant job training, and as they are paid for their services, they then have more money to spend. Security is outstanding here. All children have an electronic bracelet, and if you accompany your child, you also have one. When you leave, it is recorded on your bracelet which children accompanied you, so you can't leave with anyone else's children. If you choose to leave your children inside unaccompanied,

you are allocated a number, which is recorded on the children's bracelets. Again when you pick them up, only the children with your number on their bracelet can go with you. All activities are coordinated by Zoopervisors, who are specially trained and extremely patient. And if you find that four hours in a children's world might conceivably be a little trying, there is an excellent Parent's Lounge, with cafe, computers, Internet connection, television room and comfy sofas on which to relax. Whilst Kidzania will predominantly appeal to 6-year-olds and up, there is also an excellent supervised five-room play area for little ones. This theme park really captures the imagination.

kids The Lost Chambers ★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★ SENIORS ★★

Atlantis The Palm, Palm Jumeirah; ☎ 04-426-0000

Type of attraction Themed aquarium **Admission** AED 100 for adults and AED 70 for children **Hours** Daily, 10 a.m.–11 p.m. **How much time to allow** 1 hour **Special comments** Only the very young or very credulous will get a lot out of this 21-exhibit aquarium. **Author's rating** ★★.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Guests at Atlantis get free entry to this mini 'underwater' theme park, and in all honesty we wouldn't recommend paying to get in otherwise. It is actually pretty well done – the Atlantian-themed underwater city is cavelike and has fountains that spew steam, Atlantian warriors guarding the tanks and fake lichen-covered walls – but it barely takes 30 minutes to trot around. Having said that, there is a great view into the Ambassador Lagoon, and it is interesting at feeding times (10 a.m., 2 p.m. and 4 p.m.). Some very cute touches include a small sea horse tank, a lobster 'tunnel' where you can watch them crawling above your head and also a touch pool where kids can get their hands on very ugly horseshoe crabs.

kids Luna Park, the Fruit Garden ★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS –
YOUNG ADULTS – OVER 30 – SENIORS –

Al Nasr Leisureland, Oud Metha; ☎ 04-337-1234; alnasrleisureland.ae

Type of attraction Funfair/theme park **Admission** AED 10 for adults and children age 5 and up; AED 5 for children under the age of 5 **Hours** Daily, 9 a.m.–midnight **How much time to allow** 45 minutes **Special comments** Best for ages 3–10; Another themed park, with a fruity theme. **Author's rating** ★★. Perfectly pleasant if you have the time.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS A sweet little park with fairground-type rides that will appeal to younger children. However, there are so many other places to visit that are more interesting and more fun that it would really only be worth visiting this park if you were in the area with an

hour to spare.

kids Magic Planet ★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★ TEENS ★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★ OVER 30 – SENIORS –

Mall of the Emirates, Al Barsha; ☎ 04-341-4000. **Deira City Centre Mall, Deira;** ☎ 04-295-4333. **Mirdif City Centre Mall, Mirdif;** ☎ 04-231-6311; magicplanet.ae

Type of attraction Indoor theme park **Admission** AED 1 for four tickets, redeemable for rides **Hours** Daily, 10 a.m.–midnight **How much time to allow** 1–2 hours **Special comments** Best for ages 3–5 and 10–13 **Author's rating** ★★. If your children like very noisy arcade-style theme parks, then this will appeal to them no end and will keep them amused for an hour or so.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Magic Planet can be found in Mall of the Emirates and Deira City Centre Mall, and now in a very zingy modern format in Mirdif City Centre Mall. If we were to choose just one to visit, it would be Mirdif's, hands down. The other two seem to follow the format of the frenetic amusement arcades you might find in any suburban town, whilst the very new one at Mirdif is calmer, with much better attractions. Traditionally in the other two you will find ten-pin bowling, bumper cars, billiards tables, many amusement arcades, carousels and fairground-type rides. The Mirdif branch has a climbing wall and a sky ride – where you are strapped into a harness and make your way around a circuit at roof level. Scary, but exhilarating. There's also Kids Planet (where you pay an hourly rate), which is a soft play centre for younger children; a bowling alley; dance mats; computer games; and a pool table. Mirdif's Magic Planet seemed lighter, more spacious and cleaner than the other two, and is part of Playnation, an outstanding new theme park at Mirdif City Centre Mall.

Majlis Gallery ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Al Musalla Roundabout, Bastakiya, Bur Dubai;
☎ 04-353-6233; themajlisgallery.com

Type of attraction A gallery of traveller-artists **Admission** Free **Hours** Saturday–Thursday 9:30 a.m.–8 p.m. **How much time to allow** 30 minutes + **Special comments** A fine restored majlis and courtyard, showcasing more-traditional, less-conceptual work, normally by traveller-artists who either live here or are staying here temporarily. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. An extremely relaxed gallery with very appealing, very affordable work on show and for sale. Artists use the gallery as a base for their travels, and their work is inspired by the Middle East.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS The Majlis Gallery, a haven for artists and art

lovers, was established over time by Alison Collins, who came to Dubai in 1976 to work as an interior designer, found the house that is now the Majlis Gallery, and moved her family into it for ten years, whilst also hosting many informal soirées there, introducing artists both professional and amateur to a somewhat culturally bereft community. In 1989, after moving out, she turned the Majlis into a full-time gallery space. The traveller-painters remain a defining part of what the Majlis represents, but it also exhibits and sells sculptures, artefacts, trinkets and shabby-chic wooden furniture, made in India out of limed mango wood. Not to be missed – ARTSHACK, a separate space within walking distance of the gallery, where they have a huge selection of art, furniture and artefacts at unbelievably low prices. Be sure to ask about it when you visit.

Majlis Ghorfat Um Al Sheif ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★ OVER 30 ★★★ SENIORS ★★★

17 Street, off Jumeirah Beach Road, Jumeirah 3;
☎ 04-394-6343; dubaitourism.ae

Type of attraction A former sheikh's summer residence and gardens **Admission** AED 1 for adults and free for children **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 8:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m. and 3:30–8:30 p.m.; Friday, 3:30–8:30 p.m. **How much time to allow** 30 minutes + **Special comments** A fine example of how the moneyed classes in Dubai used to live. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. It's surprising to find this fine old house amongst the modern villas now surrounding it. The gardens are particularly interesting, with a reproduction of a traditional Arabic irrigation system.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Constructed in 1955, Majlis Ghorfat, a two-storey house, was the summer residence of Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum. It is well restored and shows how effective the wind tower was in keeping a house cool in summer, without modern air-conditioning. Local people who came to air their grievances and discuss their ideas with the sheikh would attend the majlis in the evenings. Traditional building materials were used in the construction of the majlis: gypsum and coral rock, with palm fronds on the roof. The ground floor is an open veranda, whilst upstairs, the majlis is decorated with rugs, low seating, cushions, lanterns, rifles and a traditional coffee set laid out on a low table, as it may have been in Sheikh Rashid's day. The roof terrace was used for drying dates and for sleeping on. The wind tower, a traditional feature of most older houses, was designed to channel even the slightest breeze down the tower into the house to keep it cool during the hottest months. Before the construction of the modern villas, Sheikh Rashid had a beautiful view of the sea from the upper floors. It is interesting to wander around the gardens and see how they would have been irrigated.

Mojo Gallery ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Unit 33, Al Serkal Avenue, Street 8, Al Quoz 1;
☎ 04-347-7388; themojogallery.com

Type of attraction A dynamic art gallery **Admission** Free **Hours** Sunday–Thursday, 10 a.m.–7 p.m. **How much time to allow** 30 minutes + **Special comments** Focuses on design-based work and conceptual art. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. It not only showcases the work of established artists but also works closely with local universities, exhibits advanced design students' works, and promotes emerging artistic talent from the U.A.E.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Mojo Gallery is a multifunctional art space that brings together art, design and new media. Exhibitions explore contemporary themes and concepts in fine art and design expressed through different media and formats. The gallery exhibits original paintings, conceptual photography, digital media, works on paper, mixed-media prints, sculpture, illustrations and video art and installations. It also holds workshops designed and led by exhibiting artists and artists associated with the gallery.

Mushrif Park ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Airport Road, just behind Mirdif; ☎ 04-288-3624

Type of attraction Park **Admission** AED 2 per person, AED 10 per car. Swimming: AED 10 for adults and AED 5 for children. **Hours** Daily, 8 a.m.–11 p.m. **How much time to allow** 2–4 hours **Special comments** A bit off the beaten track, but well worth a visit. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. This is a lovely park, especially as it doesn't feel too landscaped and has lots of unmanicured areas.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Beyond Mirdif, set in a natural *ghaf* forest, is Dubai's largest and oldest park. It is 500 hectares and is made up of long, sandy plains tufted with grass. It has a substantially long cycle track on which you can ride your bikes, a small aviary, a wooden jungle gym, a fairground with merry-go-rounds, a swinging pirate ship, a miniature train, playgrounds, camel and pony rides and sports courts. The big draw for children, however, is World Village, which is made up of scaled-down houses reflecting architecture from around the world, including a Dutch windmill, a Tudor house, an Arabic house with a wind tower, a tepee and so on. There is plenty of space for children to have a good run around, and lots of natural shaded picnic areas with barbecue facilities where you can picnic. If you're feeling the heat, take a dip in one of the old-fashioned swimming pools.

1x1 Art Gallery ★★

YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★ SENIORS ★★★

next to Art Sawa, Al Rasaas Road, Al Quoz 1;
☎ 04-348-3873; 1x1artgallery.com

Type of attraction Indian art gallery **Admission** Free **Hours** Sunday–Thursday, 10 a.m.–6 p.m. **How much time to allow** 30 minutes + **Special comments** Specialises in promoting contemporary Indian art. **Author's rating** ★★. Interesting because it promotes Indian art in Dubai, but doesn't change its exhibition as frequently as other galleries in the area.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS 1x1 Art Gallery, established in 2006, has always been at the forefront of the Indian art scene, exhibiting modern and contemporary Indian art. It has a steady calendar of cutting-edge exhibitions and has set new benchmarks for works in installation and new media. Malini Gulrajani, director of the gallery, has won plaudits both in India and internationally, and her extensive knowledge of the Indian art scene has led her to become a consultant for serious collectors.

Portfolio Gallery ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★

Al Serkal Avenue, Street 8, Al Quoz 1;
☎ 04-323-2395; portfolio-uae.com

Type of attraction Dubai's first photography-only gallery **Admission** Free **Hours** Sunday–Thursday, 10 a.m.–6 p.m. **How much time to allow** 30 minutes + **Special comments** The gallery space includes a printing station for the city's photographers, a selection of photography books and a pool table! **Author's rating** ★★★★★. A fun, informal space, which prides itself on not being elitist. Interesting photography as well.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Portfolio Gallery is the initiative of French photographer Emmanuel Catteau, who has lived in the Middle East for nine years. His works capture the most unexpected images of cultural diversity, timeless sceneries, urban lifestyle and up-to-date photo reports. The gallery showcases his works, which are exceptionally interesting, and provides a space for other photographers whom he feels can bring a different and original view to photography.

Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

at the inland end of Dubai Creek on the Bur Dubai side; ☎ 04-338-2324

Type of attraction Outdoor habitat and wetland reserve **Admission** Free **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. (November–April is the best time for bird-watching) **How much time to allow** 2 hours + **Special comments** To visit the sanctuary you must apply to the Marine Environment and Sanctuaries

Unit, Environment Department, for a visitors' entry permit (# 04 206 4240/4244/4260). The application form can also be downloaded from wildlife.ae. Processing of the permit will take at least two working days. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. To see the pink flamingos is spectacular. And it feels as if you've discovered another world in the middle of the urban jungle.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Ras Al Khor, on Dubai Creek, is a wetland reserve featuring mangroves, lagoons, mudflats, sabkhas (coastal salt flats), reed beds and shrub lands. Spread across 6.2 square kilometres, it is one of the few urban protected areas in the region and is unusual because it is surrounded by frenetic urban sprawl. Thousands of different birds migrate here in winter, and the site is home to a multitude of native plant species, as well as crustaceans, small mammals and various species of fish. The sanctuary is most renowned for its pink flamingos: up to 3,000 flock here during the winter, and to see them feels like a real privilege. You can spot the birds here from three hides, which have been designed as traditional wind towers and offer a panoramic view of the sanctuary. The hides are equipped with telescopes, binoculars and other gadgets to facilitate bird-viewing. Visitors can enter the hides with the required permits.

kids Safa Park ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ **OVER 30** ★★★★★ **SENIORS** ★★★★★

Al Wasi Road, Al Safa; ☎ 04-349-2111

Type of attraction Park and playground **Admission** AED 3; free for children under age 3 **Hours** Saturday–Wednesday, 8 a.m.–11 p.m.; Thursday–Friday, 8 a.m.–11:30 p.m.; Tuesday: ladies and children only. **How much time to allow** 1–3 hours **Special comments** Lovely park with plenty to keep the offspring occupied for an hour or two. Gets very crowded on Fridays. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. Strange as it may seem, Ladies' and Children's day is actually very pleasant; much less crowded, and with an easy, laid-back atmosphere, but little boys can only enter with their mums on those days. Best for ages 4–7 with energy to burn, and teenagers who want an excuse to wander off.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS It comes as a surprise to find an enormous green and leafy park like this in the middle of one of Dubai's most built-up residential areas, with Sheikh Zayed Road bordering it on one side. Not only is it beautifully landscaped, but it also has something for all age groups. There are electronic games for teenagers in the Pavilion; a little fairground section with bumper cars, a merry-go-round and a Ferris wheel; a miniature train that takes you round the park; boats to hire on the lake; a trampoline; and an old-fashioned maze that is surprisingly difficult to find your way out of. There are acres of grassy lawn, picnic and barbecue areas, children's playgrounds, ducks to be fed – so take some old bread – and large four-wheel bikes to hire. This is a really lovely park for a family afternoon out.

This is one of Dubai's largest and most popular parks and is an unexpected 64 acres of green oasis. It can take about two hours to walk around on foot and has a good three-kilometre spongy running track. On weekends, particularly Fridays, this park is incredibly crowded, full of people with picnics, barbecues and guitars. On the first Saturday of every month it hosts a flea market with great bargains and lots of tat as well. There is a canal and waterfall, a hill with shady trees – great for picnicking – sports courts and football pitches and barbecue areas. When you're feeling peckish, there are snack booths and a restaurant with decent snack food. If you need to escape the male population, there is an enclosed, separate ladies-only park within the park. If it's nature you're after, there are wooded wildlife habitats where you can find more than 200 species of birds.

kids Al Saheel: A Thousand and One Horse Tales ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ **OVER 30** ★★★★★ **SENIORS** ★★

HoofbeatZ Pavilion at the Dubai Polo Equestrian Club, Arabian Ranches; ☎ 04-330-6266; alsaaheel.com

Type of attraction Theatre/horse show **Admission** AED 225 for adults and AED 100 for children ages 2–12; free for children under age 2. Hospitality (priority seats and a behind-the-scenes preshow): AED 325. **Hours** Open seasonally; check Web site for details. Thursday–Friday, 7:30–9:30 p.m. **How much time to allow** 2 hours **Special comments** 44 horses, 30 riders, music, lights, theatre and stunt riding. Arabian horsemanship at its best. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. If you have children who are mad about horses, this is an excellent show, combining the excitement of the circus with the drama of the theatre. An unusual and entertaining evening out.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS A horse show with drama, music, lights and excitement, this spectacle has 25 acts that include light shows, songs, fabulous costumes and traditional dances. Al Saheel is the ancient Arab tradition of storytelling. You will see Spanish dressage, stunt riding and horse whispering, as well as the horses performing various tricks. The HoofbeatZ stables house the widest variety of horse breeds in the country, including Spanish Andalusian dressage horses, black Friesians from Europe, American Morgans and quarter horses, pintos, miniature horses and a whole herd of beautiful Arabians, some of which were rescue horses that have been completely re-trained and rehabilitated by the HoofbeatZ training team. A variety of live cooking stations and drinks are available on a cash basis. The show takes place in the air-conditioned big-top-tented HoofbeatZ Pavilion.

kids SEGA Republic ★

YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 – SENIORS –

Level 2, Dubai Mall, Downtown Dubai; ☎ 04-448-8484; segarepublic.com

Type of attraction Indoor theme park **Admission** Power Pass (a day pass for all attractions): AED 140; Platinum Power Pass (day pass for all attractions plus AED 200 credit for games): AED 220; Pay & Play Pass: buy a minimum charge of AED 10 and top it up as you go. Attractions have individual prices, ranging between AED 15 and AED 30. **Hours** Sunday–Wednesday, 10 a.m.–11 p.m.; Thursday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–1 a.m. **How much time to allow** 1–2 hours **Special comments** A state-of-the-art amusement arcade with fairground rides best for ages 9–13 **Author's rating** ★. Useful for leaving bored teenagers for an hour or two whilst you indulge in a spot of retail therapy, or take younger children to Kidzania.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Five zones of entertainment for all ages include Speed Zone – with motion simulator games; Adventure Zone – with a roller coaster and other adrenaline-pumping rides; Sports Zone – sports simulation games such as snowboarding and goal shooting; Cyberpop Zone – interactive gaming equipment, with battle zombies, combat jet flying and karaoke singing; and Redemption Zone – games with winnable merchandise. It's loud, it's frenetic, and it's a bombardment of the senses. If you're young, what's not to love?

The Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding (SMCCU) ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Bastakiya; ☎ 04-353-6666; cultures.ae

Type of attraction Organisation that hosts events and tours **Admission** Depends on the event/tour; see below, visit the Web site, or call for details **Hours** Depends on the event/tour; see below, visit the Web site, or call for details **How much time to allow** Depends on tour you are attending **Special comments** An excellent centre that organises a number of activities designed to increase understanding about life, religion, culture and traditions in Dubai. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. The staff here are incredibly knowledgeable about what to visit, see and do in Dubai – a sort of alternative tourist office. Local volunteers run a series of fascinating and entertaining programmes – walks, meals, tours and so on – and go out of their way to make you feel welcome, to want to ask questions about anything and everything, and to dispel the mystery that surrounds Islam and the Arab way of life.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Based in a traditional restored house in old Bastakiya, SMCCU aims to break down barriers between people of different nationalities and to raise awareness of the local culture, its traditions and customs and the official religion – Islam – among foreign residents and visitors to the U.A.E. The building is well worth visiting for the majlis-style rooms around a large enclosed courtyard. SMCCU

organises an excellent guided tour of Jumeirah Mosque (Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday at 10 a.m.; see page xref); cultural breakfasts (Monday 10 a.m., AED 50 per person, book in advance); cultural lunches (Sunday 1 p.m., AED 60 per person, book in advance); guided walking tours of Bastakiya (phone to reserve a place); language classes; and cultural programmes. U.A.E. nationals act as volunteers for these activities and are enthusiastic to explain all aspects of Emirati life. During Ramadan, special Iftar dinners are organised. For information about all the events, call the centre or drop in. We can't overemphasise how charming staff are here. We particularly like the fact that they want you to ask questions and want to introduce you to the Arabic way of life.

Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum's House ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Al Shindagha Area, next to Heritage and Diving Villages, Dubai Creek, Bur Dubai; ☎ 04-393-7139; dubaitourism.ae

Type of attraction A former sheikh's palace rebuilt and turned into a museum **Admission** AED 2 for adults and AED 1 for children; children under age 6 free **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 8 a.m.–8 p.m.; Friday, 3–9:30 p.m. **How much time to allow** 30 minutes **Special comments** A beautiful example of what is considered a modest palace. **Author's rating** ★★★. Visit in the evening, when the house is illuminated and looks particularly beautiful.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum, the architect of modern Dubai and ruler of Dubai 1912–1958, was the grandfather of the present ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. The original house was built on the Creek in 1896 by Sheikh Saeed's father with magnificent views of the Gulf so he could observe shipping activity from the balconies. However, the significant development along the shoreline in recent years has diminished these views.

It became the seat of the Al Maktoum family and local government, as well as Sheikh Saeed's official residence until his death in 1958. After his death, the house was abandoned and was finally demolished. The current palace was rebuilt adjacent to the original site.

This 30-room house consists of wind towers and rooms built around a central courtyard. There are two entrances into the building – along the Creek side and at the rear of the building, the latter more than likely reserved for family members. Traditional construction techniques were used – coral from the Gulf was treated with lime and plaster to form the walls, and the house was kept cool by four elegant wind towers. Sheikh Saeed's residence is a typical example of late 19th-century Arabian architecture: vaulted high-beamed ceilings, arched doorways, sculpted windows, carved teak doors and windows, wooden lattice screens and gypsum ventilating screens with floral and geometric designs set into the thick walls. On the ground floor you will find a large majlis, living rooms, storerooms and kitchen, which open onto a central courtyard,

protected from the hot desert winds by high boundary walls. The upper floor, with its numerous bedrooms and balconies, enjoyed spectacular views over the Creek.

Today the house is open to the public as a museum, and the rooms display rare and beautiful photographs, coins, stamps, paintings, lithographs and documents that vividly portray the early development of Dubai.

kids Ski Dubai ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★

Mall of the Emirates, Al Barsha; ☎ 04-123-4567 or 800-534-7873; skidxb.com

Type of attraction Indoor snow park/ski slopes **Admission** Snow Park: AED 100 for adults and AED 90 for children; Ski Slope (two hours): AED 180 for adults and AED 150 for children. **Hours** Sunday–Wednesday, 10 a.m.–11 p.m.; Thursday, 10 a.m.–midnight; Friday, 9 a.m.–midnight; Saturday, 9 a.m.–11 p.m. **How much time to allow** 2 hours **Special comments** Wear warm clothes if you have them, because even though all ski clothing is given to you, it's still very cold in there, and gloves and hats aren't included with the kit. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. Surreal as a ski resort in a shopping mall with real snow is, even by Dubai's standards, it is worth going to for the 'I've been there' kudos.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS When it's 40° outside, there is nothing more surreal than donning a snowsuit and playing in the snow in a shopping mall. And as for conserving energy, consider that as air-conditioning cools the mall down, inside Ski Dubai, 22,500 square metres (equivalent to three football pitches) are covered with real snow all year round, and the temperature is maintained at -1° to -2°. It is 85 metres high (approximately 25 storeys) and 80 metres wide. And halfway up, Avalanche Cafe has overhead heaters on its terrace to keep you warm. This is a fantastic place to go for any snow enthusiast who has had enough of the heat.

This indoor ski resort with real snow offers something for all age groups. Included in your Slope Pass are jackets and trousers for adults, all-in-one ski suits with hoods for children, disposable socks, skis, ski boots and ski poles or snowboard and snowboard boots, and helmets for children. Younger children will love the Snow Park, where they can play on toboggans and race down snowy hills, go on a bobsled ride, explore a snow cavern, make a snowman, or play with snowballs. When they're feeling cold, you can sit in the little cafe, still in the snow, and enjoy a creamy hot chocolate. It really does feel as if you are in a ski resort. Older children will enjoy skiing or snowboarding; there are five different runs for varying abilities with ski lifts and an alpine cafe halfway up. This is a really entertaining way to spend a couple of hours when you need a fix of alpine conditions.

kids Soccer Circus Dubai and Team Zone ★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★ OVER 30 – SENIORS –

Mirdif City Centre Mall, Mirdif; ☎ 800-534-7873; soccercircus.com

Type of attraction Indoor interactive football game **Admission** Soccer Circus: AED 80 for adults and AED 55 for children under 1.2 metres. Team Zone, peak times: AED 520 per hour; off-peak times: AED 400 per hour. **Hours** Saturday–Wednesday, 10 a.m.–11 p.m.; Thursday–Friday, 10 a.m.–midnight **How much time to allow** 1 hour + **Special comments** Indoor football pitch with a difference. **Author's rating** ★★. A clever football-themed attraction – full pitches to play a game and a full-size innovative interactive soccer game to train against. Ideal for the Dubai climate; possibly a bit mundane for children from Europe, who can play football outside whenever they wish.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Soccer Circus at Playnation has two parts to it. The first is Training Academy, made up of four different skill games played by each person in a football-themed arena. The second is Powerplay, where you play a game against an automated team in a stadium-like atmosphere. Team Zone, meanwhile, comprises three five-a-side pitches that can also be used for badminton, volleyball, hockey, cricket and other sports. Turn up, and you will be formed into a team with other people wanting to play. Coaches will referee your game and will help your performance where necessary.

kids Stargate ★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★ SENIORS ★★

Area A, Gate 4, Za'abeel Park, south of Karama, off World Trade Centre roundabout; ☎ 04-398-6888; stargatedubai.com

Type of attraction Space theme park best for ages 5–15 **Admission** Entry to Za'abeel Park – AED5 per person. Entry to Stargate is free, and you buy a swipe card, which you load with as much credit as you want, depending on which attractions you visit. Special promotions include: pay AED100 and receive AED30 extra; pay AED200 and receive AED100 extra, with no expiry date. Attractions vary in price from AED15 upwards. **Hours** Saturday–Wednesday, 10 a.m.–10 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m.–11 p.m. **How much time to allow** 3 hours + **Special comments** Another family 'edu-tainment' centre **Author's rating** ★. The space theme is a bit misleading, as the only reference to space is the names of the different domes. The activities themselves are pretty run-of-the-mill theme-park type attractions.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Stargate comprises five space domes linked to a central pyramid, each with a range of attractions for the entire family. It looks impressive from outside. The domes are UFO Dome, with a go-kart track; Lunar Dome, which houses an ice rink; Saturn Dome, with

a three-dimensional cinema; Mars Dome, with a state-of-the-art play and activities area for children; and Earth Dome, containing a 'Spinning Earth' family roller coaster. The central pyramid is the food court, with a range of cafes and restaurants to suit all tastes. It's a perfectly nice theme park, but it's just one of many, and we're a tiny bit dubious about where the 'edu' bit of 'edu-tainment' fits in. Za'abeel Park is, however, lovely and worth a wander round, and Zen Restaurant (# 04 358 0099; zendubai.com) at Gate 6 is delightful.

kids thejamjar ★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

White Warehouse No. 45, Al Quoz; ☎ 04-341-7303; thejamjardubai.com

Type of attraction A gallery, a creative art space, a studio and a venue for special event evenings **Admission** Depends on the event **Hours** Saturday and Monday–Thursday, 10 a.m.–8 p.m.; Friday, 2–8 p.m.; closed Sunday. **How much time to allow** Depends on the event **Special comments** Slightly off the usual tourist track, and in an interesting area for an arty day out **Author's rating** ★★★. An exciting venue with activities, exhibitions and events that will appeal to all age groups

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS A lively, informal gallery, thejamjar exhibits contemporary art from emerging local and international artists. Through its curatorial collaborations and cultural exchange programme, it brings to the forefront cutting-edge art practises with a year-round exhibition and arts calendar. Its creative team – responsible for creating the ArtBus, ArtintheCity.com, and publisher of *ArtMap* – is dynamic, innovative and forward thinking. Not only does the gallery showcase the works of professional artists, but it is also a creative art space that can be used by both professional and amateur artists. The gallery has studio space for people who wish to come and paint for fun and runs workshops for children and adults. It provides everything you need in terms of canvas, paint and professional advice, so you can be as creative as you like. The painting workshops are best for ages 5–15. (Dare we say that girls might prefer this to boys?)

Open every day but Sunday, this is a fantastic place to take children to when they are bored in the holidays. It organises corporate team-building days and events and works closely with local charities. This venue also hosts film, music and drama nights and is a popular centre for artists of all genres. Ring the gallery or look at their Web site to see what events are taking place.

The Third Line ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

Al Quoz 3 (next to the Courtyard Gallery & Cafe);

☎ 04-341-1367; thethirdline.com

Type of attraction A serious gallery that only represents Middle Eastern artists **Admission** Free **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 10 a.m.–7 p.m. **How much time to allow** 30 minutes + **Special comments** Dubai gallery well known on the international art scene. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. This is a sophisticated art space showcasing interesting, contemporary regional art. Just worth noting: the gallery has a fantastic polished concrete floor!

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS This art gallery focuses on promoting contemporary Middle Eastern art and artists locally, regionally and internationally on a long-term basis. In addition to monthly exhibitions, the gallery hosts and organises non-profit alternative programs.

kids Wild Wadi ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★ SENIORS ★★

Jumeirah Beach Road in front of Burj Al Arab, PO Box 26416;

☎ 04-348-4444; wildwadi.com

Type of attraction Outdoor water park **Admission** AED 200 for adults and AED 165 for children; Sundowner entry (two hours before park closes): AED 165 for adults and AED 135 for children. **Hours** November–February: Daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; March–May: Daily, 10 a.m.–7 p.m.; June–August: Daily, 10 a.m.–8 p.m.; September–October: Daily, 10 a.m.–7 p.m. **How much time to allow** At least half a day **Special comments** A wonderful day out in the sun – and do take a look at the photos they snap of you going down the slides; they are often unintentionally hilarious **Author's rating** ★★★★★. Best for ages 5–15

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS The original and, many would argue, still the best, Wild Wadi may not boast a shark-infested tank, but it is a great day out for the whole family. Teens will love the simulated surfing ride; babies will be thrilled with a bob in the wave pool; toddlers can enjoy a themed water play park; and adults can dare each other to brave the genuinely frightening Jumeirah Sceirah drop, at 80 kilometres per hour. There is also a lazy river (which actually becomes wild-water rapids at points, so hold onto those string bikinis), a large beach and a couple of shaded terraces where you can have some downtime. If you load up your wristband with cash on entry, you won't have to return to your locker all day, as you can pay for food, drink and even souvenirs with these.

kids Wonderland Theme Park and Splashland Water Park ★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★ OVER 30 ★★ SENIORS ★★

near Garhoud Bridge, alongside Creek Park, Oud Metha; ☎ 04-324-1222;

wonderlanduae.com

Type of attraction Theme and water park **Admission** Theme Park: AED 90 for adults and AED 85 for children ages 5–12; Water Park: AED 85 for adults and AED 80 for children ages 5–12; Combined ticket: AED 100 for adults and AED 90 for children ages 5–12; free for children under age 5. **Hours** Theme Park: Daily, 10 a.m.–10 p.m. Water Park: Daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m. **How much time to allow** 3 hours + **Special comments** One of Dubai's older family amusement parks. Not nearly as popular with tourists and expats as Wild Wadi or Aquaventure. **Author's rating** ★. Best for ages 5–15. If we were choosing a water park to visit for the day, we'd probably not go to this one, as the other two are far more modern and exciting. However, they are also more expensive, so that might be a deciding factor in this park's favour.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Wonderland, with connotations of Michael Jackson (but not deliberately so), is a theme park with a Caribbean slant, separated into three main areas – Main Street, which offers a water mist show and videos played on a thin film of water, as well as slot machines and arcade games; Theme Park; and Splashland. A selection of restaurants offer fast food, and the theme park is like a fairground with roller coaster rides, slides, bumper cars, go-karts, a pirate ship, a horror house – you get the picture. Splashland is the watery bit, with a lazy river, speed slides, rapids, surf hill and a dragon pool. Whilst it is fine, and the facilities are good, it does feel dated and lacks the pizzazz of Wild Wadi and Aquaventure.

XVA Gallery ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★ TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

next to Creek in Bastakiya, Bur Dubai; ☎ 04-353-5383; xvagallery.com

Type of attraction Art gallery, art hotel, cafe and shops **Admission** Free **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 9:30 a.m.–8 p.m. **How much time to allow** 45 minutes–1 hour +, if you decide to stop for a drink and some food. **Special comments** Part of a really lovely un–Dubai-like boutique hotel in a restored house with courtyards. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. We love the fact that this hotel and gallery are as far removed from one's preconceived concept of Dubai as is possible. Even if the art weren't interesting, we'd recommend this gallery for the beauty of its architecture and its chic and understated luxurious atmosphere. However, the works exhibited are always exciting and inspiring and are exhibited throughout the gallery and the hotel, making this a most appealing and relaxing place to visit and stay.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS XVA occupies a renovated traditional majlis-style building, boasting original architectural motifs, wind towers and three open courtyards, in which one can relax and soak up the exceptional atmosphere of this heritage space. Besides being an internationally-acclaimed art gallery, XVA boasts a unique art hotel, an

award-winning vegetarian cafe, several shops, an in-house tailor and a traditional dhow. Since 2003, XVA has pioneered contemporary Middle Eastern and international art in Dubai. It is now one of the foremost contemporary art galleries in the Middle East. It participates regularly at international art fairs and is responsible for creating the Bastakiya Art Fair, which runs every March.

kids Yalla! Bowling Lanes ★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL – PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★

Mirdif City Centre Mall, Mirdif; ☎ 800-534-7873; yallabowlingme.com or playnationme.com

Type of attraction Bowling **Admission** AED 17–AED 25 per person for one game; AED 30–AED 45 per person for two games; AED 40–AED 65 per person for three games. Prices go up depending on what time of what day you are playing. Best to look at price list or call to find out. **Hours** Daily, 10 a.m.–midnight **How much time to allow** 1 hour + **Special comments** State-of-the-art bowling alley **Author's rating** ★★. Very nicely laid out, even if a bowling alley is pretty similar the world over. To be fair, it is spanking new and has very nice decor.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS This bowling alley features 12 lanes of cosmic ten-pin bowling with advanced video simulation. This Playnation attraction also consists of a pool and billiards area and the latest video games. It has a bit of an urban graffiti look going on. Bowling is always fun for the whole family, and this bowling alley is a little more state-of-the-art than most. This area is also home to Johnny Rocket's diner, which makes it very popular with Dubai's teenagers.

Za'abeel Park ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★★★ PRIMARY SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

south of Karama off World Trade Centre roundabout; ☎ 04-398-6888

Type of attraction Park and playground with a multitude of activities **Admission** AED 5 per person **Hours** Saturday–Thursday, 9 a.m.–11 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m.–11:30 p.m. **How much time to allow** 1–3 hours **Special comments** If you get a chance to try the restaurant at Gate 6 after your day in the park, it's well worth the effort. **Author's rating** ★★★★★. A fantastic playground that will appeal to big children as well as little ones.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS More like two parks connected by footbridges, this delightful 51-hectare park sports a large lake where you can hire boats, an amphitheatre, a 4.3-kilometre jogging track, manicured cricket pitch, and an adventure playground that is enormous and suits children from tiny toddler age to young teenagers. There are even little bikes for hire. There are large expanses of landscaped gardens, covered picnic areas

and barbecue facilities. Kiosks sell drinks and ice creams, and we heartily recommend an excellent restaurant just inside Gate 6 called Zen Restaurant, which has stunning views over the water and delicious Thai, Chinese and Indian food on the menu. An entire area is dedicated to inflatables, trampolines, a miniature train and horse rides, which is fun in the cooler months. And at Stargate (see page xref), the space-age theme park (called an 'edu-tainment' centre), you will find five space zones in which you can participate in activities including go-karts, bumper cars, an ice rink, three-dimensional cinema, roller coaster, fun track and the world's biggest soft play area, as well as a large food court.