



Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world, towers above the fountains at The Dubai Mall



Burj Al Arab: Voted the world's most luxurious hotel



Standing above the clouds in downtown Dubai



The massive open archway through the middle of Atlantis opens to the Arabian Sea

GOOD TASTE

BEST CITY TRAVELS

# MID-EASTERN WONDERLAND

BY KERI HARVEY

The world's tallest building, the inspiring Burj Khalifa, is a microcosm of Dubai. Replete with residential apartments and business space, restaurants and shopping, Burj Khalifa is a city within a city—all 828 metres of it. Yet just 40 years ago not a

single building existed in Dubai city. Dubai was a small Bedouin settlement on the banks of a creek, nothing more. It was the fearless vision of then ruler Sheikh Rashid al Maktoum—carried forward by his son and the current ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid al Maktoum—that has enabled Dubai to flourish into a city with no

parallel. Highly coveted as a luxury holiday and world-shopping destination, also for its real estate and can-do attitude. In Dubai they say, if you can dream it, you can do it.

Rumour has it Sheikh Mohammed put the word out to architects who wanted to create unusual structures to bring them to Dubai. Now there are buildings like

*Dubai has changed, perhaps like no other city in the world. It now even boasts the world's tallest building*

NOVEMBER TWO THOUSAND AND TWELVE

ocean waves, pyramids, massive arches, dhow sailing ships, one that twists like a corkscrew, and of course Burj Khalifa—shaped like a conical spire, but with the footprint of a rare flower.

At over 200 floors high, **BURJ KHALIFA** sways by design, and the observation deck on the 124th floor is the highest in the world—looking down onto the roofs of surrounding skyscrapers. From Atmosphere on the 123rd floor—the highest restaurant in the world—you can see The World, the islands created from reclaimed land that depict all the countries on earth. When Sheikh Mohammed told the Emirate people he would “write on water”, they had no idea this is what he meant.

**PALM JUMEIRAH** is another example. A massive palm tree from reclaimed land lying in the Arabia Sea, its fronds encrusted with villas and apartments, with **ATLANTIS** at the far end of it. This pink mega hotel resembles a wall with a massive open archway through the middle of it opening onto the Arabian Sea. At Atlantis, you can even sleep in a room under the ocean, if you choose.

**S**till, the first on any Dubai itinerary should really be the **SHEIKH MOHAMMED CENTRE FOR CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING**, in the old district of Bastakiya, with its iconic wind towers that provide natural air-conditioning. A visit here will dispel all myths and gives insight into the Emirate culture, customs and dress. You can visit a mosque—**JUMEIRAH MOSQUE** in the city is also open to westerners—chat with real Emirate people, and then share a meal together. The Emirate people are often

*‘Dubai is known by many names: City of Gold for its jewellery, Hong Kong of the Middle East for its business environment, Venice of the Middle East because it lies on a wide creek, and Shopping Capital of the Middle East for its mega malls’*



You can get anything from gold to spices at Dubai's traditional souks



perceived as aloof, so this is a savoured interaction with them.

Shoppers won't know where to touch first. The **DUBAI MALL** with 1 200 shops—most of them designer labels—also has a walk-through aquarium and Olympic ice rink. At night, there are 150m high musical dancing fountains outside, and Dubai Mall is also the public entrance to Burj Khalifa. The **MALL OF EMIRATES** is almost as big and has Ski Dubai, where you can ski in snow all year round. **IBN BATTUTA MALL** is completely clad in mosaic art, **THE MERCATO MALL** is Italian inspired, while **WAFI MALL** boasts a pyramid and Egyptian replica statues. Then

every year from November to the end of February, the **GLOBAL VILLAGE** comes to Dubai. It's where the world comes together and sets up shop. Over 40 countries showcase their food, entertainment and merchandise here, so you can feast on cultures from Iran to Thailand without leaving the city.

Dubai's **TRADITIONAL SOUKS** are a particularly fantastical shopping experience, all along the banks of the creek in Deira. From gold to spices, perfumes to pashminas and water-pipes, it's all here. To hop from one side to the other, catch the local *abras* or water taxis that crisscross the creek. Stop for lunch at a waterside restaurant

and then continue *souk* shopping and *abra* hopping as you watch wooden merchant boats from India idle up the creek to unload their wares. At night the creek is quieter, and a dinner cruise on a dhow is a relaxing way to see the city sparkle at night, at the same time enjoying traditional cuisine.

Yet just 40 minutes from downtown Dubai is Arabian desert par excellence.



The Grand Mosque has more than 50 small and large domes



The Arabian desert and all its activities are only 40 minutes from the city

As far as the eye can see, sand in honey hues, and a sanctuary in the middle of it: **AL MAHA**. In the Dubai Desert Conservation Area, Al Maha means ‘The Oryx’ in Arabic, and protects the endangered, snow-white antelope that was until recently on the brink of extinction. You can stay over at Al Maha, in accommodation designed to reflect the colours and creativity of traditional Bedouin culture. And while there, see falconry in action, savour the desert expanses, and, of course, view the rare Arabian Oryx.

Alternatively, play golf on world-class courses back in the city, watch camel racing, jet ski, dive, sail, catch some sun, ride a rollercoaster, see belly dancing, marvel at buildings and the towers of Dubai Marina and Sheikh Zayed Road, ride Wild Wadi water park, go scuba diving, windsurfing, hang gliding and hot air

ballooning, visit the Dubai aquarium and underwater zoo, go dune bashing in the desert, book a desert dinner or a meal at seven-star Burj al Arab—or kick back and go bird watching at Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary, right in the city.

**W**ith all Dubai has to offer, it’s not surprising it’s a city known by many names: the City of Gold for its jewellery, the Hong Kong of the Middle East for its business environment, the Venice of the Middle East because it lies on a wide creek, and, of course, The Shopping Capital of the Middle East for its mega malls, designer boutiques and old world *souks*. Just know that whatever you expect to find in Dubai, there will definitely be much more. Here, like nowhere else on earth, more is *more*. And the whole world comes to enjoy this bounty. **GT**

## ALL ABOUT THE CITY OF GOLD

### IN THE CITY:

- ◆ Dubai has a population of 2,2 million and 90 per cent are foreigners. People from over 200 nations and speaking 100 languages live in Dubai.
- ◆ The city has not one drop of surface water. All Dubai’s water is desalinated. A litre of water (R4) costs more than a litre of petrol (R3).
- ◆ Dubai is scrupulously clean, with smoking only in designated areas. There is no pollution.
- ◆ No beggars, old cars or dirty cars can be seen. Essentially there is no crime because of strict policing.

### TRAVEL ADVICE:

- ◆ The best time to travel is in the UAE winter—from November to February—when weather is warm and comfortable (approx. 25-28°C). The Dubai Shopping Festival takes place from 3 January-3 February 2013, with great shopping deals.
- ◆ Be respectful to Muslim culture and refrain from wearing revealing or see-through clothing that doesn’t cover the knees or shoulders.
- ◆ Visas are required by South African passport holders.
- ◆ Emirates Airlines flies directly to Dubai

3 times a day from Joburg, twice a day from Cape Town and once a day from Durban. Luggage allowance is 30kg.

### CONTACTS:

- ◆ Big Bus Tours – [www.bigbustours.com](http://www.bigbustours.com)
- ◆ Burj Khalifa – [www.atthetop.ae](http://www.atthetop.ae)
- ◆ SMCCU – [www.cultures.ae](http://www.cultures.ae)
- ◆ Global Village – [www.globalvillage.ae](http://www.globalvillage.ae)
- ◆ Al Maha – [www.luxurycollection.com/almaha](http://www.luxurycollection.com/almaha)
- ◆ Dubai Tourism – [www.dubaitourism.ae](http://www.dubaitourism.ae) or [www.definitelydubai.com](http://www.definitelydubai.com)
- ◆ Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing – 011-702-9600 or email [info@dubaitourism.co.za](mailto:info@dubaitourism.co.za).