

Dubai

Arabia's field of dreams

Dubai is located in the middle of the Arabian Desert and is one of the fastest growing tourist resorts in the world. It's growing so fast that when the coastline ran out, restricting the building of more hotels, the famous and spectacular three Palm Islands were created on enormous artificial islands.

Intensely hot and humid in summer, with temperatures averaging 44° C, even the azure sea feels hot, and hotel swimming pools are actually cooled to provide some relief from the searing heat. Our winter months are the best time to go. The weather during December to February is considered perfect, with cooler temperatures.

With miles of soft, pure white, clean sand, beach trips are a real pleasure. Most beaches are owned by hotels, but there are public beaches such as Jumeria Beach which is the most popular with shaded areas under the trees and cafés.

Alcohol is legal only if drunk in private or in one of the many licensed restaurants. A wonderful way to spend an evening is at one of the outdoor restaurants along the edge of Dubai Creek, the river that runs through the middle of the city. Here you can try smoking a shee-sha, a tall bottle-like contraption common in the area. It is packed with flavoured tobacco such as apple, cherry or liquorice.

Dubai has many elegant shopping malls containing some rather surprising shops like British Home Stores and the Early Learning Centre and, as it is a very child-friendly country, there are plenty of soft play areas for small children. If you like shopping, visit the city during the magnificent experience that is the Dubai Shopping Festival. In 2008, this will be held between 24th January and 24th February. At this festival, sellers do everything in their power to get your business, and with each purchase you receive raffle tickets for prizes such as cars, money and shopping vouchers.

For a more traditional shopping experience, visit the souqs. See the spice souq, displaying bags of colourful spices from frankincense to chilli and take in the pungent fragrances in the perfume souq. The dazzling gold souq is a wooden arcade full of gold jewellery shops. Here, you pay for the gold itself rather than the outstanding workmanship, so your purchase is weighed and you pay the set price for that weight of gold.



Dubai also has a host of water sports to try as well as more original excursions. Take a dhow cruise up Dubai Creek where the view of the architecture from these traditional boats is simply stunning. And you must take a trip into the desert!

Between the red sand dunes there are dried-up river beds called Wadis, surrounded by rugged rocks and many free-roaming camels. Dune-bashing is the name for the exhilarating experience of driving a 4 wheel drive vehicle up and down steep dunes. Do not go unaccompanied as it is very easy to get stuck and even overturn in the shifting sands.

Dubai is a paradise with top hotels, shopping, restaurants and leisure all unequalled in their scale and extravagance. Just 6 hours flying time away from the UK, no need for a visa and you are almost guaranteed non-stop sunshine as it only rains for about 5 days a year. What are you waiting for?

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