

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION – DUBAI.

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Dubai is a city of many contradictions. Situated in a Muslim country, it welcomes non-Muslims from all around the world. Many people, who have not yet visited the city believe that Dubai's wealth comes from a source below the ground, but Dubai has no oil. Its wealth is generated from tourism and the services it offers. The popularity and contribution of Emirates Airlines should not be underestimated. Dubai is built on sand, but it stands proud as a mass of concrete buildings, stretching up towards the sky.

Dubai has a special place in my heart, having lived there for seven years. I now travel back on a regular basis to visit friends, involving myself in the world of the theatre and fulfilling my role as a member of two School Advisory Councils. I have been there three times since the beginning of December, the nature of each journey reflecting the world-wide situation *apropos* the pandemic.

If Britain is the mature older person and America the young adult, then Dubai is the teenager, still discovering its identity, but refusing to be stereotyped by those who have not understood its potential. In a world where those who preach hate seek to tell us about the importance of our differences in efforts to convince us that 'tribalism' is the way forward, Dubai seeks to recognise and respect 'difference', whilst reminding us that what is most precious for everyone is what we have in common, our humanity.

Respect for everyone, and, in particular, respect for the religion of Islam is central to the culture of Dubai. In this sense the tall buildings, including the tallest of them all, the Burj Khalifa, stand as symbols. They remind those who are religious of the heavens, shining above, as the Burj Khalifa points a sharp finger upwards. At the same time, such buildings reflect the achievements of human beings in designing and constructing such magnificent pieces of architecture. It is yet another example of how Dubai can bring together apparently contradictory concepts and cultures.

You cannot write about Dubai without recognising those shining heavens above. The sun, amongst other features of life, is what attracts many of us towards this most desirable of tourist destinations. Even in the winter, I never once wore a jumper or a coat. In the summer, paradoxically, I went outside to cool down as the fierce air-conditioning there froze my sandal-clad toes. This contrasts with the UK, in terms of the language used about temperature. In the UK, the phrase 'The weather's getting better' means that it is getting warmer. In Dubai it means that it is getting cooler.

Lockdown has had a profound effect on many people, increasing a sense of isolation in many and having a negative impact on their mental health. But there has been a positive side for many of us, as we have gone on country walks, which have reminded us of the greenery and beauty of the English countryside, which had been forgotten by some during the hurly-burly of our busy lives, prior to the pandemic.

In contrast, the greenery in Dubai has been artificially imported, as sand is the natural base for everything that exists there. Even where there is grass, any stroll in the heat along the

pavement in your sandals, will remind you that you are in the desert, as you have to stop from time-to-time to remove small stones from between your sandals and your feet.

Another striking feature of Dubai is the roads, the king of which is the Sheikh Zayed Road which is the main thoroughfare which marks its territory down the centre of the city. The road does not only assert its prowess, but it also serves as a reminder of the different driving cultures that are evident in such a multi-cultural city. I remember someone once telling me that you could identify the likely country-of-origin of someone by the way that they drove. I am sure that this was said with a degree of humour, but behind many such remarks, there is often a grain of truth or, in this case, a grain of sand.

My favourite time of the day in Dubai is the night. When describing the beauty of a location, we often focus on natural beauty, describing trees and lakes, rivers and fields. But we should not forget human-made beauty. The genius behind some of the architecture in Dubai is truly breath-taking.

If you have not yet visited, do consider Dubai as a possible destination.

750 words exactly.