



U.A.E.– DESTINATION INSIGHTS

Dubai / Abu Dhabi / Ras Al K Khaimah ~ Welcome to the breathtaking UAE



Step into a sleek, air-conditioned lobby of a hotel where there are lavish chandeliers above you, a fleet of Ferraris and Lamborghinis parked outside, and the world's tallest building and the most expensive hotel just down the road. This is Dubai – the Arabian city of superlatives where extravagance is the norm.

Every inch of this ambitious city is engineered to be glamorous and newsworthy. There are few places where you could be drinking tea in a desert tent, eating in gold-filled Michelin-starred restaurants and picking up trendsetting pieces at a futuristic shopping centre all in the same day. Dubai is made for luxury holidays, where you can take your pick between palatial resorts on affluent manmade islands like Palm Jumeirah or city hotels with views of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest tower.

While it might seem like authenticity is harder to come by in a city that is always moving forward, there are experiences that instantly give you a taste of Arabia as it's always been. Brilliant mosques and spice-filled souks sit beside the glimmer of high rises so you can browse the regal-style jewellery casually on sale in the Gold Souk (where haggling is a normal part of the purchasing process), or stop by the desert just beyond the city to drink tea in a Bedouin tent and ride sunburnt dunes in a 4x4.

I cannot wait to share my experience of living and visiting the whole of the UAE, for the past 8 years – from glitz and glamour to shopping for the best bargains to take home (at the time I was living in the Maldives) so trust me I know where to shop within your luggage allowances.

U.A.E – DUBAI

Dubai's most lavish hotels are more than just the best in the country – they set the bar for hotels around the world to emulate with their over-the-top interiors and impressive inclusions. The crème de la crème come with sensational views, a collection of Michelin-starred restaurants and the VIP factor of being able to swing by sister hotels where there are even more facilities at your disposal.

The beaches in Dubai are made for pleasure seekers. You can join the colourful display of crescents in the sky at Kite Beach and learn how to windsurf in its warm waters, or get Instagrammable snaps of the lavish Burj Al Arab Jumeirah from Sunset Beach. Head to The Beach at JBR for a cool hangout space complete with a manicured beach, big-brand eateries and flashy cars brandished in names like McLaren and Maserati – it's also close to The Walk, where you can go shopping or cool off with a scoop of gelato. Jumeirah Beach focuses on simple sand-and-



sea fun better suited to travellers who prefer relaxation over lively activities, though it can get fairly busy in peak season. Many of Dubai's beach hotels can be found along Jumeirah Beach.

Where is Dubai?

The city and state of Dubai is on the north-east coast of the United Arab Emirates, south of the Arabian (Persian) Gulf. It's around an hour and a half's drive north-east of the capital, Abu Dhabi, and has excellent connections from its international airport which makes it an easy stopover choice en route to long-haul destinations from the around the world.

Shopping

If Dubai is famous for anything, it's shopping. There's currently no tax on purchases in Dubai so you can look for deals on designer goods, or just enjoy the impressive, air-conditioned interiors of the huge malls. Dubai Mall is the largest in the world and has over 1000 stores, a virtual reality theme park and an Olympic-sized ice rink. Items that are usually better value in Dubai are local fabrics and gold which you can find at dedicated gold souks – just be sure to buy from reputable stores to avoid being sold fake items. Part of the Madinat Jumeirah Resort, the Souk Madinat Jumeirah is a meticulous replica of an Arabic souk surrounded by waterways.

Food & drink

Food is of a high standard in Dubai, with plenty of international options across central shopping areas and in hotels and resorts. Eating out is generally more expensive than in the UK; a pint of beer costs around £6 and a dinner for two with a bottle of wine in a mid-range restaurant can cost between £25 and £60 depending on the restaurant. Fast-food outlets are common for a quick and reasonably priced bite and you'll be spoilt for choice if you like to try something different every day. There are classic Italian restaurants with wood-burning ovens, celebrity restaurants for acclaimed sushi and edgy European twists and spectacular chandelier-strewn venues for decadent seafood. Authentic Emirati cuisine can be hard to come by, but there are restaurants serving up Arabic dishes like mandi (spiced meat and rice) and dishes made with chickpea, tahini, flatbreads, salad and grilled meat and fish. Stop by a café for sweet dates and a cup of Arabic coffee – a classic set-up for locals meeting up with friends. To satisfy your sweet tooth, try the Egyptian bread pudding umm ali, a favourite in many Arabic countries.





Getting around

Taxis are one of the easiest and cheapest ways to get around Dubai. They are marked and metered, and easily hailed in public areas. The super modern Dubai Metro stops at Dubai Mall and the Burj Khalifa, Deira, Dubai Marina and Dubai airport. A note – all taxis are super safe and the safest taxis I have ever taken in the world. They are fast efficient and so cheap. A must to get through the day to day life even if for a short journey – saves the sweaty desert heat.

UAE – ABU DHABI

Discover ancient sculptures on display in lavish hotels, head to the newest art addition, the Louvre Abu Dhabi, for state-of-the-art permanent collections and masterpieces on loan from its Paris counterpart, and visit one of the United Arab Emirates' most outstanding monuments, the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, where glistening white marble domes meet chandeliers, gilded calligraphy and Mamluk, Ottoman and Faklid styles.

Aimed predominantly at families and kids, Ferrari World Abu Dhabi is worthy an afternoon stop for roller coasters and simulators, and Yas Island's WaterWorld offers a similar experience, albeit with surf waves and super slides instead. If you're looking for sand there's plenty of it – the renowned Corniche Beach has three long stretches with the majority of beach being Blue Flag certified. No Abu Dhabi holiday is complete without a journey into the desert – take a morning or evening safari and experience everything from sand boarding to dune bashing and a traditional Bedouin evening feast.

Abu Dhabi is one of the most popular departure points for Arabia and Indian Ocean cruises. Cruise lines such as [Celebrity Cruises](#) and Royal Caribbean made Abu Dhabi their home port for at least one of their ships, allowing you to travel in style around the Arabian Sea and beyond.

Where is Abu Dhabi?

In the Arabian peninsula on the north-eastern side of the Persian Gulf, Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates, is an island city just 250 metres from the mainland, connected by four bridges: Maqta bridge, Mussafah bridge, Sheikh Zayed bridge and Sheikh Khalifa bridge.

Getting around

Bus services have thorough networks throughout the emirate while silver taxis and metered limousines are also popular methods of transport. Hiring a car is easy and convenient and roads are good – although often gridlocked during rush hour.

Shopping

Abu Dhabi's shopping malls are almost out of this world, packed not only with designer stores and high-end brands but also cinemas, entertainment and dining. You'll find the very best of Arabic sweets and pastries, cult perfumeries selling hand-made scents and even ice rinks, bowling alleys and musical fountains. Shopping highlights include Yas Marina Mall, Al Wahda Mall, Avenue at Etihad and The Galleria.



Food and drink

Red snapper and ceviche, Persian cuisine, omakase Japanese tables, restaurants with floor-to-ceiling windows looking out onto wild beaches and rooftop bars where cocktails come with a serving of smoke: nightlife in Abu Dhabi is exciting, innovative and lavish. Mostly found in hotels and resorts, you'll find candlelit dining with Arabian Gulf views, stylish cafes with vegan menus and sky-high delights overlooking Yas Marina and afternoon tea 300 metres up at Etihad Tower's Observation Deck 300.



U.A.E – RAS AL KHAIMAH

A rare glimpse of the elusive Arabian oryx, Champagne dinners on white sands and trekking by Arabian horse through valleys and pools; Ras Al Khaimah holidays are for those inclined to discover lesser-known places. Imagine Middle Eastern style picnics on oriental rugs as you sink into oversized pillows on the beach, dune bashing out into the desert and kayaking through mangroves. This quieter emirate in the UAE has so far managed to keep its secrets away from the crowds but those in the know come here to go off-the-grid in blue skies luxury against a backdrop of dramatic Hajar Mountains.

You can tick off the crazy on holidays to Ras Al Khaimah – zip line on the Via Ferrata's one kilometre sky high route, quad bike over rolling dunes and climb the highest mountain in the UAE, but equally you can star gaze through telescopes, discover how Arabian explorers navigated the terrain and fall asleep under the stars to the night sounds of the desert. We love this part of the world for its mystique, romance and solitude – scorching days, cooler nights and unabashed indulgence.

The beaches are a dream – miles of white sand sloping into brilliant blue seas, nomadic life of years gone by can be found in abandoned ghost towns home to perfectly preserved 14th-Century buildings, and frenetic souks, early morning fish markets and unique mosques ascertain where you are in the world. Just an hour's drive from Dubai this under-the-radar emirate is making shapes to become a rather a special place.

Hike Jebel Jais, the highest mountain in the United Arab Emirates, follow the trails to peace and tranquillity in the Hajar Mountains and chase the sun on a dune bashing tour through the

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terracotta desert. The newest addition to sky-high thrills is the longest zip line in the world where you can fly through mountains at peaks of 300 metres or you can keep your feet firmly on the ground and explore the dust covered pearl fishing village of Jazirah Al Hamra just south of the city where you'll find 14th-Century houses abandoned long ago in a ghost town that's supposedly haunted. There are plenty of scuba diving opportunities among over 700 species of fish – sometimes you'll be lucky enough to spot a whale or rare green turtle – sunset cruises by catamaran or yacht and candlelit restaurants overlooking the beach.

Where is Ras Al Khaimah?

Bordering the Kingdom of Oman, Ras Al Khaimah is the northern most emirate in the UAE and the fourth largest, about an hour's drive from Dubai.

Getting around Ras Al Khaimah

The coastline stretches some 35 miles and as hotels, restaurants and attractions are quite spread out car hire is the most convenient way to get around. Parking is also free. Taxis are readily available and inexpensive.

Food and drink

Arabic cafes, shisha, lavish hotel restaurants on the beach and local dining on the Corniche, there's plenty to indulge in. Expect Indian, Lebanese and Turkish influences, fresh seafood platters and a very intriguing camel's milk ice cream. You'll find authentic Moroccan restaurants, glamorous New York-style steakhouses and world-class sushi

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