

Welcome to Dubai

Where is Dubai?

Dubai is a modern, coastal city, located by the Persian Gulf in the heart of the Middle East. It is beautiful and sophisticated, with a charm that is unique to the region.

Dubai is located at sea level (approximately 16m/52 ft above at its highest) within the Arabian Desert, and the Emirate, covering a little over 4000 square km (1600 square miles approximately), sees Dubai to the North and shares its border with Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia and Oman. It is 4 hours ahead of GMT, and average flying time from the UK is 7 hours, served by many major airlines flying either directly or using Dubai as a convenient stop-over. There are also many cheap flights to Dubai, making travel to Dubai all the bit easier.

This diverse and multi-cultural city hosts over 1.5 million people from some 170 different nationalities, all contributing to its growing economy - an economy that majors on trade, manufacturing, finance and tourism, with only 6% of its income generated from petroleum and gas.

However, what makes Dubai stand out for the visitor is the most exceptional modern architecture seen anywhere in the world – the now legendary Burj Al Arab, the only 7-star Hotel in the world, fast becoming the symbol of modern Dubai; the Burj Dubai is currently the tallest skyscraper in the world, due for completion in 2009; the Palm Islands, being referred to as the 8th Wonder of the World; the Mall of the Emirates (or Dubai Mall), the largest shopping mall in the world (containing Dubai Ski, the largest, man-made, indoor ski resort in the world!). In fact, it is being referred to by many as "Dubai architecture".

And there's more to come – the Hydropolis Hotel is planned as the first underwater hotel anywhere in the World. It seems that everyone is talking about hotels in Dubai!

But with all this record-breaking modernity and trend-setting, architectural achievement, we mustn't forget the cultural and leisure aspects of Dubai.

For those wanting to experience the culture of the region, there's Old Dubai, the Souk Madinet market bazaar, and the National Day Festival, held annually on the 2nd of December. A visit to the Dubai Museum will give a fascinating introduction to the cultural heritage of the immediate Dubai area. For the more modern 'culture seeker', Dubai has a very well-established network of television, radio, electronic (internet) and print which service the city.

Leisure activities include the best shopping facilities in the regions, helicopter tours, annual festivals and events, desert safaris, indoor skiing, beach and maritime activities, varied nightlife and cuisine that crosses all five continents. While traditional Arab food is of course popular in the city, there is a rich variance of fast, Asian and Chinese food. Dubai has become known for its varied nightlife, with clubs and bars found mostly in hotels. The sale of alcohol, although strictly licensed, is freely available in four and five star hotels.

Dubai is considered an important tourist destination – its port, Jebel Ali, has the largest man-made harbour in the world. Dubai International Airport, ranked in the top twenty in the world, is the home of Emirates Airlines, and the new Dubai World Central International Airport in Jebel Ali is now almost complete.

Dubai is also well served by modern and efficient transport infrastructure. The large bus system services approximately 70 routes, with almost 100 million people-journeys annually. The Dubai Metro project is well under way, with 43 stations and over 70 kilometres of track planned for. And

for those in less of a hurry, there's still the "abras" – the small boats which ferry passengers across the Dubai Creek.

The city's development as a regional hub for service industries such as finance and IT is reflected by the recent establishment of the Dubai International Financial Centre and the set-up of industry-specific free zones throughout the city.

Dubai has a hot and occasionally humid (mean in the region of 60%) climate, where temperatures can reach 40°. Rainfall tends to be quite light, occurring mostly from January to March (an average of 15cm or 6 in per year). However, although the rain can be heavy during the winter months, the temperature still averages 25°.

The sandy desert surrounding the city is host to wild grasses, desert hyacinths and acacia trees, while some 320 species of migratory birds pass through during spring and autumn. There are over 300 species of fish inhabiting the waters off Dubai.