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CULTURE SHOCK!

A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette

The *CultureShock!* series is a dynamic and indispensable range of guides for those travellers who are looking to truly understand the countries they are visiting. Each title explains the customs, traditions, social and business etiquette in a lively and informative style.

CultureShock! authors, all of whom have experienced the joys and pitfalls of cultural adaptation, are ideally placed to provide warm and informative advice to those who seek to integrate seamlessly into diverse cultures.

Each *CultureShock!* book contains:

- insights into local culture and traditions
- advice on adapting into the local environment
- linguistic help, and most importantly
- how to get the most out of your travel experience

CultureShock! Dubai is a survival guide for anyone wanting to discover life in the emirate known as the City of Gold. The major business hub with a lion's share of the global gold trade is poised to welcome the world at World Expo 2020. This guide draws on insider knowledge to take visitors through the process of settling in, whether for short or longer stays. From surviving the scorching desert climate, soaking in world-class mall experiences and exchanging Islamic greetings to sipping Arabic coffee and camel milk, shopping at spice *souqs* and visiting a ski resort in the middle of the desert, this is a must-read for complete information on what's unique about life in Dubai.

US \$15.95 / UK £12.99

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CULTURE SHOCK!
DUBAI



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A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette

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Leena Asher

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ABOUT THE SERIES

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Culture shock is a state of disorientation that can come over anyone who has been thrust into unknown surroundings, away from one's comfort zone. *CultureShock!* is a series of trusted and reputed guides which has, for decades, been helping expatriates and long-term visitors to cushion the impact of culture shock whenever they move to a new country.

Written by people who have lived in the country and experienced culture shock themselves, the authors share all the information necessary for anyone to cope with these feelings of disorientation more effectively. The guides are written in a style that is easy to read and covers a range of topics that will arm readers with enough advice, hints and tips to make their lives as normal as possible again.

Each book is structured in the same manner. It begins with the first impressions that visitors will have of that city or country. To understand a culture, one must first understand the people—where they came from, who they are, the values and traditions they live by, as well as their customs and etiquette. This is covered in the first half of the book.

Then on with the practical aspects—how to settle in with the greatest of ease. Authors walk readers through how to find accommodation, get the utilities and telecommunications up and running, enrol the children in school and keep in the pink of health. But that's not all. Once the essentials are out of the way, venture out and try the food, enjoy more of the culture and travel to other areas. Then be immersed in the language of the country before discovering more about the business side of things.

To round off, snippets of information are offered before readers are 'tested' on customs and etiquette. Useful words and phrases, a comprehensive resource guide and list of books for further research are also included for easy reference.

CONTENTS

For Review only

Preface	vi	Chapter 4		Chapter 7		Chapter 9	
Dedication	vii	The Melting Pot	37	Enjoying Dubai	118	Working in Dubai	186
Map of Dubai	ix	Islamic Greetings	38	A Top Tourist Destination	119	Work Culture	187
Chapter 1		The Society	38	The Party Never Stops	120	Landing that Dream Job	191
First Impressions	1	The Grassroots Expat	39	Shopping	121	Recruitment Agencies	193
At The Airport	2	The Changing Tides of Dubai	41	Experiencing Ramadan	129	Emiratisation	194
A Global City	3	The Road Ahead	45	Festivals	131	Economy	195
Safety in Dubai	4	Chapter 5		Local Folklore	131	Starting a Business	205
Language	5	Settling In	48	Exploring Dubai	132	Charity and Volunteer Work	206
Getting Around	5	Before Moving to Dubai	49	Activities Around Dubai	134	Chapter 10	
Weather	7	Visas and Permits	51	Dubai's Hidden Secrets	148	Fast Facts	208
The Emirati Culture	9	Accommodation	55	Tourist Must-Do's	154	Famous People	211
Wardrobes	9	Your Family	62	Enjoying Dubai with AED 10	157	Culture Quiz	215
The Coffee Culture	11	Pets	63	The Nuts and Bolts	158	Do's and Don'ts	219
Knowing Dubai	12	Banking and Money Matters	64	Living Like A Dubaian	161	Glossary	221
Chapter 2		Costs of Living	76	Sports in Dubai	168	Resource Guide	225
Land and History	19	Telecommunications	80	Cinema	175	Further Reading	232
The Beginning	20	Education	81	Eating Out	175	About the Author	233
Leadership	21	Moving Around	83	What's New	176	Index	234
The Government	23	Health Care	93	Chapter 8			
Geography	24	Registering Births	96	The Language	180		
Religion	26	Getting Married	97	History of Arabic	181		
Flora and Fauna	26	The Legal System	102	Arabic Language	184		
Chapter 3		Chapter 6		Entertainment	184		
Emiratis and Expatriates	29	The Food of the World	107	A Bilingual City	184		
Population	30	The Food of the World	107	Learning the Local Language	185		
The Arabic Community	32	Cuisines and Tastes	108				
Arabic Homes	34	The Local Cuisine	111				
The Expatriate Community	36	Being A Guest	114				
		Inviting Your Friends Home	116				

Writing *CultureShock! Dubai* was both a fulfilling and educational journey. It was such a satisfying experience to write about Dubai, the city I was born and brought up in, the city where I feel the safest in the world, the city I call home, the city I hear about when I travel, the city where the world comes, the city that outshines the rest of the region by leaps and bounds. When I travel outside Dubai and make friends, people are excited to know more about Dubai. I have welcomed several of them when they come here as tourists and I take pride in seeing how much they enjoy spending time in this city.

I have witnessed the city rising from the sands of the desert to the world-class city it is today. We have grown up together, Dubai and me. I counted the floors as Emirates Towers was being constructed and thought, this is going to be the tallest building in Dubai. Very soon, I was counting the floors as the construction of Burj Khalifa began.

Throughout my journey of writing this book, I have come to have a lot of respect for the leadership, the culture, the perfect life that Dubai tirelessly tries to create for all the people who step into this city, whether they are visiting Dubai for a day, a week or have been working here for several years and generations.

Dubai is my home and this is where I will always want to live. Having travelled around the globe, I consider Dubai home because it provides safety and security to me and my family, and a quality of life that I see unmatched anywhere else.

Dubai has been shaped as a dream unfolding from the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum.

CultureShock! Dubai is my dedication to His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the one man whose single, focused dedication transformed the merchant transit city into a world-class city that rivals its counterparts like Paris, New York and London. His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's focused vision revolutionised Dubai; both locals and expatriates are equally grateful.

The magnificent Burj Khalifa.

For Review only

MAP OF DUBAI



For Review only

CHAPTER 1

FIRST IMPRESSIONS



“I want Dubai to be a place where everybody from all over the world meets each other, don't think of fighting or hate, just love it, enjoy their sport, and that's it.”

— His Highness Sheikh
Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

AT THE AIRPORT

Whether your aircraft touches down at Dubai in daylight or at night, you are surely in for a treat. The one word I hear even residents say as they arrive in Dubai is “Wow!” This is usually people's first impression of Dubai.

Unless you are from one of the 33 countries eligible for a visa on arrival, you will require a pre-arranged visa to enter Dubai. Any hotel, tour operator or employer can arrange the visa for you. Don't get intimidated by seeing an Arab at the immigration counter. Most of them speak English and are always ready to help visitors. The world-class airport and duty free shops will leave you reaching for your wallet immediately and mind you, this is just the beginning.

Owing to its strategic location, Dubai is less than a four-hour flight to and from almost half of the world's population. The Dubai airport holds the position of the world's number one airport in handling passenger traffic of 75 million in 2015. With 100 airlines connecting 240 destinations around the world to Dubai, this is the city most passengers want to transit at or visit.

Nationalities That Get Visa on Arrival

Nationals of the Arab Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) member states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Saudi

Arabia) do not need a visa to stay in Dubai. Expatriate residents (of specific professions) of GCC countries can obtain a non-renewable 30-day visit visa upon arrival at Dubai Airport.

British Citizens: Residents of the UK, with the right to abide in the United Kingdom, may obtain a free visa on arrival, which is valid for 60 days and can be renewed for an additional 30 days. Holders of the British Overseas Citizens Passport, who not have the right to abide in the UK, will also obtain the free visa.

Nationals of 33 countries getting a 30-day visa on arrival: France, Italy, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Portugal, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus, Finland, Malta, Spain, Monaco, Vatican City, Iceland, Andorra, San Marino, Liechtenstein, United States (US), Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong. (*Refer to the section on 'Visas and Permits' in Chapter 5: Settling In for the different types of visas.*)

There are ample taxis and buses available outside Dubai airports. If you prefer, there are also taxis with lady drivers that are available upon request.

A GLOBAL CITY

Dubai is home to over 2.4 million people from over 200 countries who reside in absolute harmony and understanding. A truly global city, Dubai strikes the perfect balance between its own conservative culture and the liberal lifestyles of the expatriates. Rather than being in competition, residents and locals complement each other in their ways of life. Many corporate organisations promote diversity and inclusiveness in their cultures for their staff to understand the societies and

lives of their colleagues. It won't be a myth to call Dubai the world's most culturally diverse city.

Dubai is the second biggest emirate in the country of United Arab Emirates. The locals are called Emiratis. With the local Emiratis making up just below 15 per cent of the total population of the city, it is not hard to feel that the local-Islamic identity can be easily diluted under the sheer size of the expatriates almost feeling at home at Dubai. But ironically, this is not the case in Dubai. The next generation is evolving as they grow up in an international community at schools, malls, libraries, sports and parties. In keeping with the cultural values, traditions, language, cuisine and their family oriented personalities, locals balance their lifestyles between their parents and grand-parents, simultaneously raising their next generation with similar roots so they can identify their roots and know where they come from and belong.

In the words of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the late President of the United Arab Emirates, "He who does not know his past will certainly not understand the present. If a man knows the past, he will understand the present also and on that basis find out what lies in the future."

As the local Emiratis and the expatriates work on showcasing their best talents, cultures and products, pick up the Dubai Calendar and you can spot a variety of events from around the world all happening in Dubai.

SAFETY IN DUBAI

Dubai is often hailed for its impeccable safety record and the lifestyle it offers to expatriates and their families who can enjoy living here without fear of eve-teasing, robbery or crime. In contrast to other highly populated cities, Dubai has a high standard of safety, and violent crime is extremely

rare, but petty crimes do occur and normal precautions should be taken. It is not uncommon to see women walking, driving and taking taxis and travelling around the city after dark. Women on their own are not considered to be targets or at risk. However, it is advised to use common sense in dressing with respect to the local culture. When expatriates leave their homes vacant during the summer holidays for their vacations, burglaries can occur. It is good practice to advise the local security when you expect to be away. The key to surviving Dubai is staying safe. Stay safe when you are out on a girls' night out, stay safe when you have had a few drinks, stay safe not to mess with others, stay safe in public places. This will convert you from a newbie to a real Dubaiian. Before you know it, you will be advising your family on what to expect in Dubai.

LANGUAGE

Although Arabic is the national language, English is more widely spoken in the city. Spot the written Arabic on the sign boards on the roads. Apart from Arabic, other languages spoken around by the expatriates are Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, Tagalog, Persian, Chinese and Malayalam.

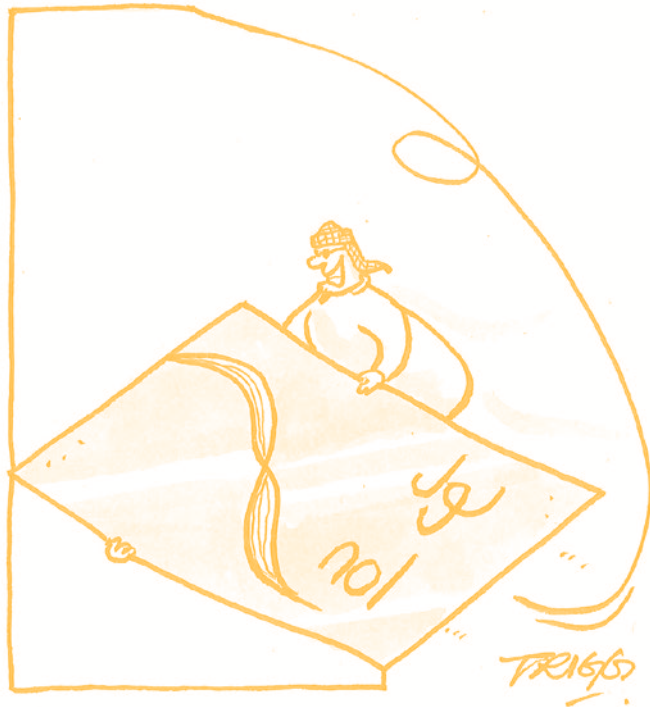


Bilingual signs at a waterbus station.

GETTING AROUND

To get around Dubai, most visitors get a Nol card – the prepaid travel card of the city. The word "nol" is an Arabic word for "fare" or "transport cost". Dubai is well-connected

by its rapid transport system called the Metro, the driverless and fully-automated rail network. You can pick up your Nol card at any Metro station or online.



The Metro is the fastest way to get from point A to B. Like many other cities, Dubai roads get busy during office hours and trying to use a Metro or bus may not necessarily be a good idea. Unless you know how to squeeze your insides, it's not recommended to use public transport from 8:00 to 10:00 am and 5:00 to 7:00 pm. Airport terminals 1 and 3 have Metro stations connected to them. Make sure your hotel is close to a Metro station. You don't want to walk around a lot with your luggage. Taxis in Dubai are generally clean and drivers are well-trained to handle visitors. Your conversation

with your taxi driver may be a better one than what you would have with a tourist guide. (Refer to the section on 'Moving Around' in Chapter 5: Settling In.)



The Dubai Metro chugging across Sheikh Zayed Road.

WEATHER

The climate of Dubai is generally hot and humid, more so in summer. The city is warm most of the year. Winters in Dubai are considered the most pleasant time of the year in this city. By contrast, humidity levels rise to uncomfortable levels in summer. It's a tropical desert and that's a fact. A local joke that goes around is there is no other weather in Dubai; it's just hot, hotter or hottest. A long summer stretching from April to October keeps most people indoors. Once inside, it's hard for many to believe the outside temperature which tends to hit 50°C (122°F) in summer. Keep yourself well hydrated with a lot of cold water. It's thus natural, with a lot of time spent indoors, that Dubai has developed some of the world's best activities for indoor recreation. There are no summer rain showers or thunderstorms or hail storms in Dubai. Over 85 per cent of the local residents do not even own an umbrella!

During change of weather from spring to summer, low pressure areas develop, forcing strong winds from the north to Dubai. These winds are called Shamaal winds, "Shamaal" meaning "north" in Arabic. Shamaal winds that blow at a speed of 20 to 40 knots bring strong sand and dust storms along with them. Residents and visitors with dust allergies are advised to be cautious when they are outdoors during

this time of the year.

From mid-March to mid-September is when the heat sets in, making the city hot and humid. The silver lining is that most of the city is air-conditioned and functions effectively and efficiently. All retail outlets, malls, clinics, hospitals, private and government offices, schools, trains, buses, bus stop shelters and all public places are air-conditioned to keep indoors comfortable for all in the city. Daytime temperatures can reach 50°C. There isn't much relief even after dark. Temperatures stay high throughout the days in summer. Dubai enjoys ample sunshine throughout the year from five in the morning until seven in the evening. There is no rainfall during these months. All schools in Dubai close for their annual vacation in July and August, which has a direct impact on the traffic situation in the city. With most families gone for holidays during this time of the year, the city is less crowded and relaxed during summer.

From October onwards the temperature begins to drop and gets only better from there till March. Temperatures move to mid-thirties during daytime and 25°C to 28°C in the evenings.

From the end of November until end of February is the best time of the year to visit Dubai. Daytime temperatures average around 25°C and evening temperatures can dip to as low as 10°C. January also brings some rainfall which makes most Dubaiians very happy and cheerful. Parks and resorts get packed with families who plan all day long barbecues and picnics to make the most of the weather.

Although many may not find any need to open their winter wardrobes in Dubai, you may still notice women in boots, scarves and stylish winter wear. Dressing up in winter is a style statement that local Dubai residents never give a miss.

THE EMIRATI CULTURE

Dubai is an Islamic state and the social fabric of the city follows the Islamic way of living. Social mannerisms are held in high regard in the local culture. Meeting and greeting each other with respect and in the right way is considered important. Locals tend to exchange general pleasantries for a few minutes after meeting. An Arab name includes his own name, his father's name and his family name. E.g. The Crown Prince of Dubai is called His Highness Sheik Hamdan bin Mohammed Al Maktoum: Hamdan (being his first name), bin (meaning son of) Mohammed (his father's name) Al Maktoum (being the family name). Locals like to be addressed with their family name formally, e.g. Mr. Al Maktoum or Sayyed Al Maktoum (Sayyed meaning Sir). Local women can be address as Madame.

Men freely shake hands when they meet. However, local men and women do not shake hands. Foreign men should be mindful of shaking hands with local women. Many local women do not like to shake hands with men and this can include even educated and well-travelled women. A better alternative is to place your hand on your ear respectfully. Locals greet each other several times before settling down into a conversation. Customary pleasantries include enquiring about health, parents, family and children (pets are enquired). Be mindful not to ask questions about any females of the family. Greetings go on for a while. Hence, if you are going for a business meeting, expect greetings to go on for a few minutes before the actual conversation begins.

WARDROBES

Locals dress up according to Islamic values. Local women cover themselves from their hair to their feet. The hair is

covered with a scarf called a *sheila*. The regular dress is covered with a black robe called an *abaya* that is worn over the normal clothes and is of full length, with full sleeves. Some local women also prefer to cover their faces. Ladies wear the *abaya* either for cultural or for religious reasons. The women who wear it for cultural reasons tend to experiment with a variety of fabrics, designs and cuts. Designer-labelled *abayas* and *sheilas* can cost from fifty to five thousand US dollars. Dubai has produced some of the finest *abaya* designers in the region. The designers develop their exclusive line of modern style *abayas*, prêt-à-porter and haute couture *abayas* with some of them extending their labels to customised *sheilas*, perfumes, and jewellery. Whether locals or expatriates, women in Dubai are expected to dress up modestly, wearing clothes that cover the shoulders, arms and legs. Ironically, in all-female company or inside female-only areas of the home, local women dress up quite provocatively, experimenting with a large range of Western wear that includes almost every Western designer label. Local females do not use swimsuits or bikinis. This is largely frowned upon. In the corporate world, local women are expected to wear *abayas* and *sheilas* over simple office wear.

Local Emirati men wear a loose long white robe called the *kandoora* made of fine white cotton or woolen fabric for winter wear. The head is covered with a white fabric called the *ghutra*. Every Arab country has its own distinctive style of *kandoora*. The differences are in the cuts of the *kandoora*, the collar shapes, to the colors of the headgear, the *ghutra*. In summer, a full white *ghutra* is worn and in winter colored checkered and printed woolen *ghutra* is popular. The *ghutra* is held in place by using an *agal*, a black rope that was originally made of camel tether. *Agal* styles also differ among the Gulf

countries. For example, Qataris wear a more African-style *agal*, with two long “tails” reaching down the back. Among the Arab nations, the Omani style of wearing the *ghutra* is different than the rest. The *kandoora* is acceptable both for formal and informal settings. An outer cloak is called the *bisht*. In the earlier times, the *bisht* was worn by Arabs in winter. However, it is now worn mainly by the royals in formal settings like weddings or royal meetings. The *bisht* has real gold thread embroidery with expensive base fabric. The art of tailoring a *bisht* is a skill passed down from generation to generation. Traditionally, the *bisht* has two sleeves but it can be worn with only one arm through the sleeve and the other wrapped around loosely and tucked into the side.

THE COFFEE CULTURE

The coffee culture is both ancient and modern in the city of Dubai. Arguably, coffee originated in this part of the world and there is a new wave of artisan and boutique interest among both Emiratis and expatriates alike. With Dubai home to some of the best mall experiences in the world, you may find yourself skiing or sipping a hot mocha while the temperature outside hits 50°C. Bringing the world to Dubai, the coffee culture in Dubai is a live reminder of its cultural diversity.

An interesting twist is the addition of camel milk to the menu. Apart from being a local product, camel milk provides many health benefits, as it's higher in protein and lower in fat than cow's milk. The camel milk is further flavoured with cinnamon, honey or caramel to enhance its taste. This is available at the several outlets serving coffee from around the world, and is accompanied by many other activities. From coffee shops to *shisha* lounges, cake and confectionary boutiques, karaoke clubs, simulator games, pool and billiards

tables, watching the latest cricket or football match together with family and friends or just lazing to have a cup of coffee as you watch the city pass by, this one activity will certainly please you.



On a bigger scale, Dubai has been holding the International Coffee and Tea festival for the last six years which incorporates several activities and events like Introduction to Coffee Roasting Techniques, Coffee Tasters Club networking, UAE Barista Championship and UAE Latte Art Championship in addition to the exhibition of coffee beans from around the world. The Dubai Tea and Coffee Festival is the only internationally-recognised trade event focused exclusively on coffee and tea in the Middle East. Last year, 6,500 visitors from 20 countries attended the event.

KNOWING DUBAI

Dubai like a grown up man, now in his 40s, with memories divided into old and new Dubai. Although there's nothing

official about it, it's the old Dubai that treasures its stories, the forts, the experiences of the city as it grew from a pearl trading centre to the new Dubai, an extraordinary vision of a world-class city in the desert.

The old Dubai has been in existence since the start of Dubai itself and therefore displays the character, architecture, history and realities of times gone by. This is where the first traders arrived, import-export activities thrived, and pearl traders exchanged their deep ocean treasures for money.



A traditional house in the old part of Dubai. Traditional architecture often features wind towers, a structure built to provide ventilation and direct airflow to cool buildings.

The old parts of Dubai include Bur Dubai, Karama, Satwa and Jumeirah in the South and Deira, Hor Al Anz, Al Ghusias in the North.

With the massive influx of expatriates into the city in the early 1980s, the old parts of Dubai have become crowded. However, if you had to ask someone living in the old parts of Dubai, they would always prefer to continue living there. This is real, organic and nothing feels fake in this part of Dubai. Take a drive from Sheikh Zayed Road and within 30 minutes you will find yourself in New Dubai.



Abras, traditional small boats used to ferry people across the Dubai Creek. The fare is AED 1 (US\$ 0.27).

Things To Do in Old Dubai

- Visit the Bastikiya Area and enjoy the local charm. The Majlis Gallery is Dubai's oldest art gallery founded in 1989 sits in the heart of Dubai's heritage circle.
- Take a ride in the local boat to get across the creek. Traditionally, the *abra* ride is how locals and residents crossed the creek. Today, the *abra* ride is a fun ride. *Abra* rides run from 10:00 am till 10:00 pm from the Bur Dubai Old Souq to Deira Old Souq.
- Eat at one of the local shacks that offer local, Persian, Indian and Pakistani meals and desserts. Recommended spots: Purnamal, Rangoli (Indian Food), Ravis's (Pakistani), Ostadi Kebabs (Iranian), Persian Cafeteria, Tasty bite (local takeaways).
- Buy a basil plant for as low as US\$ 1.
- Walk around to pick up local souvenirs at the best rates.
- Explore the Dubai museum.
- Visit the local textile wholesalers and get dazzled by their endless collections.
- Buy local spices and herbs. Recommended visit: Madhoo stores at Cosmos Lane.

New Dubai

The new part of Dubai is where most newly arrived expatriates tend to spend more time. The DIFC, Dubai Marina, Jumeirah



The Walk at Jumeirah Beach Residences, a popular outdoor shopping, dining and entertainment promenade.

Lakes Towers, Greens, Meadows, Springs, Jumeirah Beach Residence, Dubai Silicon Oasis, Motor City, Arabian Ranches are some of the neighbourhoods where most expatriates live today.

Jumeirah Beach Residences, or JBR as it is called fondly, is a massive 2-km (6,562 ft) long waterfront residential and commercial development comprising 40 high-rise residential towers and hotels overlooking the Arabian Gulf. The Walk at JBR is lined with restaurants and retail outlets.



Night view of the twinkling, glamorous Dubai Marina, where yachts are moored.

Dubai Marina is one of the most sought after locations by new expatriates arriving to Dubai. Dubai Marina offers Riviera-style living in a modern setting, spanning an area of 4.6 sq m (50 million sq ft) with a large, 3.5-km (11,483 ft) long canal. The Dubai Marina high-rise apartments offer most residents the view of the Marina where yachts are moored. The Dubai Marina Walk is a popular dining location on weekends, offering restaurants serving world-class cuisine, shopping and entertainment. The Marina Mall is the local mall which

is frequented by local residents. Dubai Marina Yacht Club is the authority for all operations and berthing in the Dubai Marina canal. Dubai Marina is inspired by the Concord Pacific Place development along False Creek in Canada. There are several cases of marine wildlife (especially whales and sharks) entering the Marina due to its connectivity to the ocean.



Jumeirah Lake Towers or JLT which is administered by DMCC (Dubai Multi Commodities Center) is a collection of 26 clusters, each hosting three towers, with each tower having its own name. JLT has been built around artificial lakes and landscaped parks. Walking to work and back home is a concept that works well in this neighbourhood as it has designated towers for commercial and residential use. Many professionals working in JLT prefer living in the same neighborhood for this convenience: to avoid traffic and the city rush.

The Greens is a neighbourhood of low-rise residential apartment buildings focused on creating a community and courtyard environment. With convenient amenities like swimming pools, gyms, restaurants and schools all within walking distance, The Greens is a popular neighbourhood for families with schoolgoing children.

Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) is a federal financial free zone established in 2004 to provide a platform for financial institutions and related businesses with infrastructure

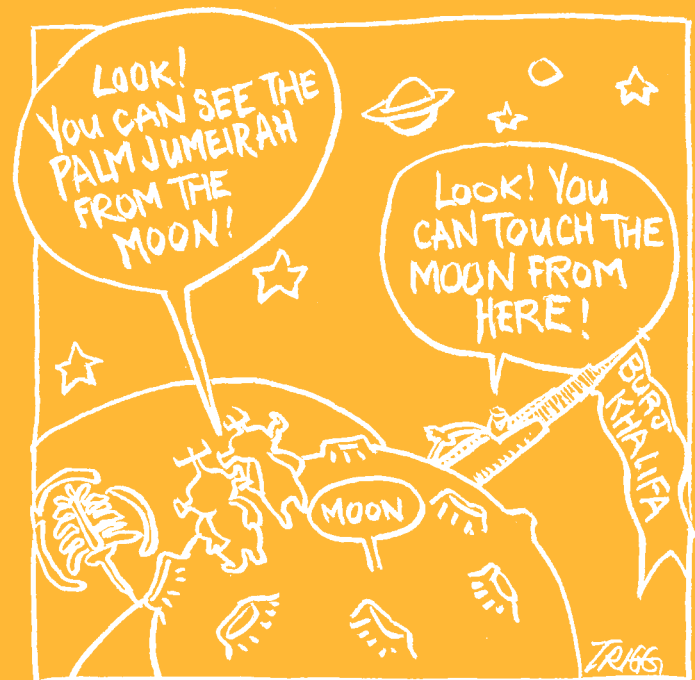


The Dubai International Financial Centre, home to the Ritz-Carlton, art galleries, restaurants and service outlets.

benchmarked against international standards. The DIFC has its own legal system and courts distinct from those of the wider UAE, with jurisdiction over corporate, commercial, civil, employment, trusts and securities law matters.

CHAPTER 2

LAND AND HISTORY



FURTHER READING

For Review only

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Dubai that you see is a vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. Read his book called *Flashes of Thought* to get an insight into his dreams, aspirations and vision of Dubai. *Flashes of Thought* is a compilation of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's ideas about leadership and governance and covers several topics about leadership, creative thinking, positivity, his personal life, success and the drivers.

40 Poems From the Desert is another great collection of his old and new poems which His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum signed at the opening ceremony of Burj Khalifa.

Camels Love Dubai, by Stephen Wilkins is a good read. It is the story of Mohan Adikaram from Sri Lanka who loses his family in the 2004 tsunami. He moves to Dubai and attends university after being fostered or sponsored by a rich Dubai resident.



Leena Asher

Leena Asher is from the third generation of an Indian family in Dubai. Her grandfather arrived at the shores of Dubai from Karachi (which was then a part of India) in a ship called "Launch", covering a distance of 1,158 km (720 miles) in a week. Her father, Naraindas Asher, has since set up his home and business in Dubai. His business thrives in Deira's bustling Baniyas market even today.

Having completed all her education up to a post-graduate level in Dubai, she has complete faith in the quality of education that Dubai has to offer.

Dubai is her home and this is where she will always want to live. She has travelled the globe with her husband, Sanaullah Khan, a renowned Dubai-based businessman and the backbone of her achievements and considers Dubai as home because it provides safety and security to her family and a quality of life that she sees unmatched. Her children Vikrant and Viraj were both born and raised in Dubai. The fourth generation of her family now lives in Dubai, because they believe in the leadership of Dubai and the quality of life people enjoy in Dubai.

She works as a senior analyst in a company in the energy sector and is involved in various voluntary causes around the city. She loves art and music.