



Clockwise from top: Al Bastakiya; XVA Art Hotel; Jumeirah Mosque; Aladdin slippers for sale in Deira

JENNY SOUTHAN/ROBERT HARDING/ISTOCKPHOTO

From gold souks to ski slopes, **Jenny Southan** discovers Dubai has plenty to keep you entertained

The ambitious emirate has plans to double the number of tourists it attracts annually to 20 million, by 2020. Whether or not it achieves this, if you are one of the growing number of business travellers who are combining work with pleasure, here are some suggestions of places to visit and things to do in both old and new Dubai in your free time. Just don't forget your sunscreen.

OLD DUBAI

Al Bastakiya On the banks of Dubai Creek, the sleepy, sand-coloured streets of this historic part of the city – complete with wind towers and a cushion-strewn open-air *majlis* – hark back to life in the emirate at the turn of the last century. Once a buzzing residential district, it fell into disrepair after oil was discovered in the 1960s. Facing demolition in the 1980s, along came British architect Rayner Otter, who, together with the backing of Prince Charles, pushed for it to be restored. Thankfully, it was, and visitors can now seek solace from the heat in the cool of its numerous charming establishments.

The **Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding** (cultures.ae) in al Bastakiya is well worth visiting if you have time. The non-profit organisation was set up in the mid-nineties to introduce foreigners to local Emiratis, help them learn Arabic, give them the opportunity to visit the Jumeirah Mosque, and even partake in traditional meals such as *iftar* (a nightly breaking of the fast during Ramadan). Cultural breakfasts (Dhs 60/£11) are hosted 10am Monday and Wednesday, lunches (Dhs 70/£12) 1pm Sunday and Tuesday, brunch 10.30am on Saturday (Dhs 80/£14) and dinner 7pm on Tuesday (Dhs 95/£17). Turn to page 40 to learn more about this experience.

Just down the road is **XVA Art Hotel** (xvahotel.com), a nine-room boutique property with an award-winning vegetarian café, a modern art gallery, an in-house tailor, a fairtrade gift shop and two central courtyards where you can sit with an ice-cold lemon mint beneath the shade of a tree. It's all very boho-chic – rough-hewn pots stand against whitewashed walls, and old vines twist down to meet hand-woven rugs. It's the perfect antidote to the artificiality of new Dubai.

A few minutes away from the hotel is the **Dubai Museum**, which is housed on Al Fahidi Street in the old coral-rock Al Fahidi Fort, and opened in 1971 with the intention of preserving the emirate's past. Beyond its high walls you'll find traditional *dhow* boats that were once used by pearl divers and fishermen, and recreations of simple Bedouin homes in the open air. Inside are displays of antique *khanjar* daggers and guns, heavy silver jewellery, and mock-ups of souks and desert camps. (Entry is Dhs 3/53p, open 8.30am–8.30pm, Sat–Thurs.)

To get to Deira on the other side of the creek, take one of the awaiting *abra* boats. Tickets only cost Dhs 1 (17p) and, typically, the wooden vessels remain moored until the captain decides there are enough passengers, but if you can't be bothered to wait, you can also charter one for about Dhs 20 (£3.50). Sitting on the deck of one of these water taxis as it speeds along, not only will you experience the local architecture from a different vantage point but also get a view of the salt-encrusted trading boats that chug back and forth from Port Saeed to South Africa, Iran, Turkey and India, transporting spices, dried fruit, textiles and ceramics.

Once back on dry land, make your way into Deira, where you'll immediately come across a small souk selling everything from open sacks of dried rose buds, saffron and chilli, to neatly arranged pairs of Aladdin slippers, golden *shisha* pipes and boxes of tea. From here, you can then stroll up to the famous gold market on and around Sikkat Al-Khail Road. You might not be looking to buy, but the gaudy window displays of yellow metal bracelets and necklaces are quite dazzling – keep an eye out too for the world's biggest gold ring at Kanz Jewels. Weighing 64kg, you wouldn't even be able to get your arms around it.

The sand-coloured streets hark back to life in the emirate at the turn of the last century

NEW DUBAI

Located on the ground floor of the Mall of the Emirates, **Ski Dubai** (skidxb.com) might not be the most environmentally ethical place to visit – with its minus 2-degree temperatures, 6,000 tonnes of real snow and, yes, live penguins running around – but it certainly is an experience. You don't need to bring any special clothing as you will be kitted out with a suit, gloves, boots and skis on arrival, and you can leave your belongings in a locker.

Once inside, shoppers watch from the windows as you take a chairlift up to the world's first indoor "black run" (it's not really that challenging), stretching 400 metres from top to bottom, with a drop of 60 metres. There's also a couple of gentler slopes, as well as the Snow Park at the bottom where you can go zorbing, tobogganing and bobsledding. Make sure you buy the right ticket though – the "Slope Session" option costs Dhs 200 (£36) and allows you two hours of skiing. If you want to hug a penguin, you need to pay an extra Dhs 145 (£26) for a 40-minute "encounter".

Drive down the long trunk of the Palm Jumeirah and you'll come to the **Atlantis hotel** (atlantisthepalm.com) – shaped like an Arabic gateway, it stands like a giant paper cutout against the sky.