

Cocoon amid an opulent resort development, or get out and explore. Either way, the coexistence of the larger-than-life glamour that has come to define the world's leading boomtown as well as the narrow alleys, souks and other intriguing remnants of Dubai's historic past make this city a destination not to be missed.

DUBAI



Pictured from left to right, Dubai attractions such as the historic Dubai Madinat Souk are in close proximity to dramatic pillars of modern architecture such as the Burj Al Arab hotel (left centre). The views from Jumeriah beach include Dubai's dramatic skyline. Developments on the man-made Jumeriah Islands (right) offer a glimpse into the lavish lifestyles enjoyed by the city's ultra-wealthy residents, and hint at Dubai's reputation for making even the impossible possible. PHOTOS: DUBAI TOURISM AND COMMERCE MARKETING NORTH AMERICA

Dubai is the sort of place that can't resist trying to trump the competition.

Tropical resorts the world over have long billed themselves as destinations for sun, surf and sand. Dubai, a city and emirate on the southeast tip of the Arabian Peninsula, touts itself as the home of "sunshine, shopping, seaside, sports and safety." These days, it could easily add "skyscrapers" to that list.

Take the Burj Dubai, for example. Not to be confused with the Burj Al Arab, the sail-shaped hotel that is probably the city's most famous current landmark, the Burj Dubai will be the tallest building ever constructed when it opens – an event expected to happen later this year. Its final height is a closely guarded secret, but at its current height of over 800 metres, it has already left the CN Tower in the dust; its spire can be seen 95 kilometres away.

The building's developer,

Emaar Properties, has revealed that the world's tallest observation deck will be located on the 124th floor, 442 metres above the ground, and that the grounds will feature performing fountains that will shoot water as high as a 50-storey building. Take that, Las Vegas.

The complex will include residences, retail and several hotels, including Giorgio Armani's much-anticipated foray into the world of hospitality, the Armani Hotel Dubai. The 160-room property will include the first Armani/Spa located in a hotel, as well as the first Armani/Privé nightclub in the Middle East.

Another first for the Dubai is Al Ruwaya, the first golf course designed by Tiger Woods. The 7,800-yard, par 72, 18-hole championship course will be shaded by 11,000 trees, some imported from as far away as Thailand and South Africa. The 55-million-square-foot Tiger Woods Dubai property will also

include a 90-room boutique hotel designed by Elie Saab, a Lebanese designer probably best known to Canadians as the designer of the dress Halle Berry wore when she won her Oscar.

Tiger Woods Dubai will also include 197 private residences. If you're among the elite set that remains flush with cash these days, you might consider buying one of the 100,000-square-foot "palace" lots, the perfect place to build a holiday home to fulfill your every whim.

It would be easy to cocoon in these opulent developments, but savvy travellers will want to get out and see more of this 21st century boomtown, where Texas oilmen rub shoulders with British real estate developers, Canadian consultants, Swiss bankers and countless others. Everyone is here to make their name or fortune amid a boggling thicket of construction cranes, five-star hotels, fantastical office build-

ings and opulent shopping malls.

Ah, yes, malls. Dubai is home to some of the world's largest shopping centres; air-

conditioned enclaves where international retailers cater to well-heeled Emiratis, homesick expats and the growing number of tourists. But if shopping

isn't your thing, there are lots of other places to escape the heat, including the Wild Wadi water park and the indoor ski hill at Ski Dubai.

It may be hard to glimpse the tiny fishing village that Dubai once was before oil was discovered here in 1966, but it's not impossible. Curious visitors head to the historic district of Bastakiya, where narrow alleys and souks (marketplaces) perfumed with the scents of cinnamon and frankincense seem worlds away from the Disney-like glamour of modern Dubai. Adventurous types can also go windsurfing, water skiing or scuba diving. And it's easy to arrange a ride on a camel – an iconic Arabian experience that Dubai's competitors in the international tourism sweepstakes find hard to match.

From frankincense and camels to Tiger Woods and the world's tallest building, it's clear Dubai is in a travel class of its own.

GETTING THERE

FLIGHTS: Emirates Airlines offers direct flights from Toronto to Dubai on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The trip takes 13 hours. (www.emirates.com/ca)

WHAT TO PACK: Casual resort wear is fine for the beach – Dubai is one of the Middle East's more liberal destinations – but bring more modest clothes if you're planning to tour souks or mosques. And don't forget the silks and spangles if you're heading to a fancy restaurant or nightclub – this town dresses up to play.

VISAS: Canadian passport holders don't need to buy a visa in advance, but other travellers should check requirements with the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing website (www.dubaitourism.ae).

CLIMATE: The best time to see Dubai is between late fall and early spring, when temperatures vary from the low 20s to the low 30s. Summer temperatures often soar into the 40s.

ELECTRONICS: Bring dual-voltage appliances, as Dubai uses 220V current.

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