

ONE WEEKEND IN: Dubai, Land Of Creative Skylines, World-Class Shopping And The World's Most Expensive Cocktail

BY SHIRA LEVINE, THURSDAY JUN. 04, 2009

TRAVEL, DUBAI, LUXURY HOTELS, INSANITY

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Sometimes you only have a weekend between business meetings to explore wherever the hell you are. HalogenLife cuts to the chase with your precious time. The following on-site article was contributed by guest travel author [Shira Levine](#), who writes and broadcasts frequently on destinations and culture trends around the world.

THIRTY-SIX HOURS and a knack for sleeping on flights ([Emirates First Class](#), of course) is all that's required to experience the United Arab Emirate of Dubai. Well, that and your American Express Black. Like its mischievous sister, Las Vegas, one can hop in and out for a glossed-over flash of extremes—only Dubai is decidedly kosher, or more accurately, halal. In Dubai money trumps culture. Here you'll find a juxtaposing, post-modern Middle East, where cash-driven

superlatives get you, ironically, closer to Uncle Sam's dream.

Take as Exhibit A: The world's most expensive cocktail. Although the charismatic and business-savvy Dubai PM and UAE VP, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (insiders call him Sheikh Mo) maintains alcohol is taboo in his Emirate, what goes on inside his hotels is another person's business. The [Skyview Bar](#) in the sailboat-shaped [Burj Al Arab](#) claims the Most Expensive Drink title for its "27.321" cocktail named for its price in Dubai currency and the bar's location on the 27th floor. In dollars? \$7,450. (It employs a Macallan 55-year-old single malt scotch, but seriously that doesn't begin to explain the price.) Inside any of Dubai's architecturally curious, mod hotels—The [Emirates Towers](#), The [Grosvenor House](#), the ocean-wave-shaped [Jumeirah Beach Hotel](#), or the [Park Hyatt](#) chic bars and restaurants where slinky model types clad in haute couture giggle over drinks with Saudi business leaders sporting traditional dishdashas, ghutras, egals and thobes.

Take as Exhibit B: Shop in the world's largest retail center, perusing 1,200 stores in the [Dubai Mall](#), and find yourself competing for the same to-die-for Longchamp totebag or Hermes scarf as abaya-silhouetted women decked out in Chanel, Cartier and Mikimoto. Not surprisingly, Starbucks still hopes to be dispensing venti soy lattes soon from a proposed "World's Largest Starbucks" (a "normal-sized" outlet has long had a presence here). To hit the slopes (indoors) at [Ski Dubai](#), head to the also impressive [Mall of the Emirates](#).

Believe it or not, stay too long and things begin to feel stale. This isn't Macau—Sheik Mo has a "no gambling" policy for now. The tiny sliver of a country is merely a 4X4 road trip from Saudi Arabia or Oman, and just an abra jaunt from Iran and Iraq. Indeed that's part of the thrill of this Middle East gem—the War on Terror is nearby, but (despite this spring's controversy over the Dubai Tennis Championships) not inside Dubai.

"Hotel Hopping" is a professional sport here. Dinner at the subterranean [Al Mahara](#) aquarium restaurant in the [Burj al Arab](#) is an experience, to be sure. But the view from an upper-floor terrace in the Burj—billed as the world's tallest hotel—offers a fantastic view of... [Burj Dubai](#), the world's tallest skyscraper (at 2,684 feet, designers included a telescopic spire that can extend in the event a taller building is constructed elsewhere). Lunch at the [Madinat Jumeirah](#) is reminiscent of Vegas' Venetian Hotel, with canals and gondolas successfully offering up the sort of faux authenticity you accept, simply because they did such a good job of replication. Dare to try the camel's milk for

breakfast at most hotels, and take the time to sample Lebanese Bekaa Valley wines.

The key to doing Dubai right is to never break a sweat. That might seem impossible considering temperatures reach 122 degrees, but thanks to immaculate customer service, hotels are dedicated to keeping visitors dry and refreshed. Dubai may be ignoring "green" initiatives, but they are sensitive to ensuring a patron's comfort: Doormen greet guests with a cool wet towels and bottled water. Expect the same service in the BMW and Mercedes hotel/airport car service (the country's laundry bill must be extreme!). Even outside most hotels, one can savor the air-conditioned air emanating from the buildings. The country's latest endeavor is a refrigerated beach so hotel guests don't burn their pedicured tootsies on the scorching sand. [Palazzo Versace](#) is also artificially cooling its sand, and rumor has it they're installing giant blowers for a gentle breeze over the beach.

Devour Dubai's luxe atmosphere while it's still shiny and new—there is [plenty of speculation](#) on how long this financial and social experiment will last. The more conventions and festivals the country can attract, the less unusual the words "Next year in Dubai" will become. But if they keep building and the people stop coming, well, then we may be witness to a fascinating museum-piece featuring man-made islands shaped like palm trees, and a planned archipelago of [universe-themed islands](#), along with the continually developing architecture that enjoys pushing the envelope a la' the Tower of Babel (we reported last week about the new mile-long bridge — [The World's Longest Arch Bridge](#) — going up).

For now Dubai is the land of superlatives and flowery exclamations, where the extreme is the norm—the glittering sandcastle and sparkling urban glass skyline isn't a mirage, and luxurious amenities and stellar customer service most certainly beckon.

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