



The high life: skydiver Jeff Provenzano above Dubai's Palm Jumeirah artificial archipelago

The all-action emirate

DUBAI Even in a place known for the last word in luxury, the great outdoors beckons

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Once a modest fishing village, now a land of luxury and excess. Dubai's massive transformation has earned it a global reputation for commercial attractions and malls so large you need an indoor taxi to get around them. While the shopping is a big part of the culture here – the sales tax stands at a consumer-friendly zero per cent – there is more to it.

Dubai is a place of futuristic architecture – look up and you'll see the world's tallest building, the 160-storey Burj Khalifa – and old world traditions. But take a short ride in a water taxi, known as an abra to locals, up the Dubai Creek and you'll find a traditional region where locals make their living

raising camels, where falcons, desert foxes and the Arabian oryx roam free. After stepping off the boat and into the Deira area of the city, it's clear you've left the modern cityscape behind. Here, you'll wander through cobblestone street souks, haggling for spices, gold and Persian rugs, while chewing on pistachio-stuffed dates.

Back in the shopping areas, the streets of Dubai are brimming with trendsetters. Even women wearing uniform black abayas stroll proudly clutching the latest designer handbags, sporting fuchsia lipstick to complement their immaculately made-up faces. Locals greet you with a smile, excited to tell you about their favourite falafel house and rave about the latest building development, such as a moving skyscraper slated to continuously change shape with individual rotating floors.

The lure of tax-free shopping brings people from as far as the USA, the UK and Australia, but there are still things to do in the emirate that don't involve shopping bags.

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Sun, snow and a lot of sand: away from the cityscape in Dubai

1 Skiing and snowboarding

With temperatures reaching 40°C, sweating is quite likely in Dubai. If you must dodge humidity with artificial air conditioning, why not hit the slopes? Dubai has its own indoor ski resort: five runs as well as a freestyle zone of rails and jumps. After throwing on your gear in a changing area that resembles a Colorado ski lodge, a quick chairlift ride takes you to 3,000m² of snowy terrain. There's even a lodge at the top where you can grab a hot chocolate. While it doesn't compare to outdoor resorts, Ski Dubai does come without wind, ice and rocks. www.skidxb.com



Sandboarding, the grittiest of the new board sports



When heading out into the desert, please remember that some 4x4s are furrer than others

2 Sandboarding

The sand dunes in Dubai are perfect for plunging down. Rent a sandboard, essentially a wax-free snowboard, from a local tour operator and find a steep-sided dune. Upon reaching the top, strap in, place your weight on your back foot and sail down. The thrill is well worth the hike back up at the end of the ride. While sand is slower than snow, the rush of sandboarding comes from bombing straight down a dune; there is no turning or jumping involved, and speed is of the essence. www.arabian-adventures.com

3 Skydiving

If you're going to jump out of a plane, then you might as well have unique landscape to look at on the way down. The primary dropzone in Dubai is located high above Palm Jumeirah, a huge artificial archipelago that extends into

the sea. Jumpers free fall over the man-made islands that have become an iconic Dubai landmark. Pro skydiver Jeff Provenzano likens the experience to "skydiving over Tatooine, that alien planet in *Star Wars*, mixed with Bahamas-like blue water". In addition to the view, daredevils often leap from the plane next to royalty, as Dubai's Crown Prince, Sheikh Hamdan, skydives here regularly. www.skydivedubai.ae

4 Wadi bashing

In Dubai, dried-up riverbeds (which are called *wadis* in Arabic) make for exciting off-road terrain. The sport known as wadi bashing involves snaking through twisty riverbeds in specially crafted 4x4 vehicles. Wadi bashing is an adrenalin-filled activity similar to dune driving, except that you bounce over rocks and boulders instead of sand, making for a bone-shaking experience. The best time to wadi bash is during Dubai's dry season, October to April. www.dayoutdubai.com

5 Desert camping

The hotels of Dubai are undeniably glamorous, but there's nothing better than sleeping under a sky painted with stars. Pitch your tent in a valley of dunes and watch a fireball sunset over pristine sand. You can bed down with nothing more than the desert sky for company, or sign up to a curated overnight adventure, in which your camping experience comes with a barbecue, belly dancers and a hookah pipe. There can be something magical about 'roughing it'. www.desertrangers.com

