

# The greatest show

Expo 2020 has finally arrived in Dubai and it's just one of the new attractions that has the emirate abuzz. **Yolanda Zappaterra** reports

It's fitting that poetry created by both humans and artificial intelligence lies at the heart of the United Kingdom Pavilion at Expo 2020 in Dubai. This memorable concept, created by artist and designer Es Devlin is, in its multitextured depth, an elegant metaphor for the location of this latest World Expo.

Fifty years since the United Arab Emirates came together as one country, Dubai continues to confound, intrigue, confuse and bemuse. While some travellers are appalled by the ostentation of a destination they perceive to be a cultural desert, many others love it for its literal desert, endless sunshine, glorious beaches and over-the-top chutzpah.

## ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

There is culture in Dubai: the wonderful photography collection at the Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum House; the Majlis gallery, located in one of the wind tower houses in Bastakiya; the Jameel Arts Centre, where the focus is firmly on modern and contemporary Arabic artists; the vibrant art and design scene in areas such as Alserkal Avenue and the d3 design district; and the recently opened community art space Foundry are just some great examples.

But culture isn't the main reason most people come to Dubai, and its newest attractions are all focused on it being the ultimate Middle Eastern playground, the go-to destination for lovers of conspicuous wealth. ➤



### WHERE TO Stay

#### Jumeirah Beach Hotel

The wave-shaped JBH is a slam dunk for a great family holiday. All its 599 sea-facing rooms and suites offer amazing Arabian Gulf views, and all are breezily and beautifully designed, but it's the location, right on the beach next to Wild Wadi Waterpark, that will sell it to every child in the world (and their grateful parents).

**Book it:** From £207 per room per night.

#### Burj Al Arab

The 200 suites at the famous sail-shaped all-suite hotel are as jaw-dropping as you'd expect, with breathtaking views, opulent chandeliers, gold leaf, Hermes toiletries, airport transfer via Rolls-Royce and, perhaps best of all, access to the stunning 100m-long infinity pool and Terrace, one of the most coolly exclusive seafront spots in the emirate.

**Book it:** From £1,345 per suite per night.

#### Jumeirah Emirates Towers

Perfectly located for the Museum of the Future, this top-notch business hotel features classic design pieces such as Eames armchairs and an elegant, masculine mien across its 400 rooms and suites. Ten rooms on a women-only floor offer yoga mats and a cosmetics fridge, and if you've children in tow, it's the only city hotel in Dubai offering unlimited complimentary access to Wild Wadi Waterpark.

**Book it:** From £118 per room per night.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Jumeirah Beach Hotel; Royal Suite, Burj Al Arab; Expo 2020; the Ain Dubai wheel

PICTURE: Dany Eid



The most recognisable of these, the 'seven-star' Burj Al Arab, has recently turned its two royal suites into the centrepiece of the Inside Burj Al Arab tour, which lets visitors unable to afford the £1,345 per night price tag pretend they're staying in the sail-shaped hotel by snapping pics of its eye-poppingly lavish royal suite.

Next door, the Experience Suite offers an engaging series of digital interactives and augmented reality displays that document the genesis and journey of Dubai and its most famous hotel. It comes complete with a virtual feast and a range of green-screen Burj backdrops visitors can pose against for commemorative photos. Oh, and the decks that David Guetta used on his United at Home lockdown gig, live-streamed from the hotel's helipad during 2021's lockdown.

#### FROM SEA TO SAND

The carefully considered content and attention to detail that have gone into creating Inside Burj Al Arab (tickets from £80), which has its own shop, reception area and cafe bar, are exactly what you'd expect from the always luscious Jumeirah group. But the hotel's spearheading of the Dubai Turtle Rehabilitation Project is more unexpected.

Since the programme's inception in 2004, some 2,000 injured sea turtles have been rescued and restored to health in the Rehabilitation Lagoon at Jumeirah Al Naseem, which is open daily to visitors. The free weekly feeding session (at 11 am on Wednesdays) gives priority to children and is utterly charming.

And turtles aren't the only wildlife being given a helping hand in Dubai. At the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, you can see how the Arabian oryx – once classified as extinct in the wild – is faring under a successful breeding programme, and even if you don't actually see one of these elegant one-horned white antelopes, the startlingly beautiful landscape is always worth the visit. It's long been popular with visitors keen to dine in the desert under the stars, act out *Lawrence of Arabia* fantasies on a camel ride or tear up and down sand dunes on quad bikes.

But many Dubai residents discovered a gentler way of exploring this landscape for themselves during lockdown, when cycling the more than 50 miles of desert tracks became so popular that bike sales soared. Visitors can join in the fun through the mushrooming bike hire companies and tour companies offering day trips. ➔



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## THINGS TO DO AT EXPO 2020

- ✿ Travel 300 years into the future for the Future of Food: Epochal Banquet, featuring glow-in-the-dark dishes and flavour-changing desserts.
- ✿ Enter a rotating cabin to access the Garden in the Sky, a 55m-high observation tower and 'flying park'.
- ✿ Take shade under one of the metallic solar 'trees' that make the Grimshaw-designed Sustainability Pavilion Terra so striking.
- ✿ Escape the giant claw that is the 'gnasher' in the Sustainability Pavilion, themed around nature and humanity's recent destruction of it.
- ✿ Experience traditional New Zealand *manaakitanga* (warm, generous hospitality) and haute cuisine in the airy, elegant Tiaki restaurant.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Jameel Arts Centre; Dubai Turtle Rehabilitation Project; Jumeirah's T3 Lounge at Dubai airport



## FUTURE GAZING

Back in town, the 48 flight cabins of the new big wheel Ain Dubai (and we mean big – at 250m, the largest in the world) is already proving a hit for its unforgettable views of both desert and city. And the gleaming, gorgeous calligraphy-covered torus-shaped Museum of the Future has already earned the affectionate nickname of 'doughnut', due to open early next year.

For now, and until April 2022, the real future is explored in engaging detail at the aforementioned Expo 2020. This 1,000-acre site – twice the size of Monaco – is accessed via three soaring entry portals designed by London-based designer Asif Khan.

Pavilions from 191 countries unite under the theme 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future'. From the falcon-wing-inspired structure of Santiago Calatrava's graceful UAE Pavilion to the 80,000 plants that make up the hanging gardens of the Singapore Pavilion, via the



## JUMEIRAH AIRPORT LOUNGE, Dubai

Jumeirah's recently opened meet-and-greet T3 Lounge is a delight. After being met at arrivals, guests are escorted to a tranquil space where refreshing towels and a perfect flat white, iced tea or cold soft drink await, along with trays of dainty nibbles. From here, they're escorted to a waiting chauffeur-driven car and their hotel. From £30. [jumeirah.com](http://jumeirah.com)

world's largest passenger lift to the top of the Foster + Partners-designed Mobility Pavilion, where visitors can learn the history of human mobility through exhibitions featuring 9m-tall figures and ancient-looking reliefs, the Expo has already been hailed by *The New York Times* as "world class".

Even detractors would have to admit this brashest of cities has always been original and inventive, but in bringing together striking structures by some of the world's best architects, artists and designers, and filling them with conceptually strong and emotionally engaging content, Dubai has really pulled out all the stops and given us a glimpse of what the future might look like. **TW**