

Golden age

A Dubai fam trip showcases the emirate for all age groups, with a wealth of attractions to suit every generation, finds **Jo Fernández**



While it's famed as the glitziest of destinations, with every landmark seeming to hold the title for the tallest, fastest or most expensive of its kind, Dubai combines elements that appeal to visitors of any age, from young children to millennials and more mature audiences.

We arrived as the *fajr* – dawn prayer – began, signalling the first of the five daily prayers. In keeping with the early start, day one was devoted to attractions for children and teens who, let's face it, need less sleep than the rest of us.

Our first stop was Polynesian-themed Lapita Hotel, a fun-filled, 504-room family-focused property adjoining Dubai Parks and Resorts. Larger-than-life movie characters posed for photos in the lobby alongside guests draped with pretty lei garlands, while tiki frames and palm-tree-lined paths led to a pair of lagoon-style pools and a lazy river. Family rooms and suites encourage sleep with woody accents and natural colours.

A 10-minute walk from Lapita, Dubai Parks and Resorts is an action-packed world of multi-age options, from The Dragon coaster at Legoland ➤

Dubai's Museum of the Future (foreground)

PICTURE: Rami Dibo

TRADE views



Elliot Goldwater,
reservations consultant,
JTA Travel

"Dubai is great for our customers, with plenty for families and adults, from theme parks to museums. It also has amazing hotels, fantastic beaches and an incredible skyline. It's a safe environment with wonderful weather."



Daniel Henry Adams,
personal travel concierge,
Travel Counsellors

"Whether my clients want city breaks, beach escapes, thrills, food or shopping trips, Dubai offers it all. Many people with an opinion on Dubai have never been, so it's important to see it for yourself."



Steven Bresh,
UK sales manager,
Royal Brunei Airlines

"It was a pleasure to welcome our trade partners on board and receive such lovely feedback. Dubai is a fantastic destination – for kids splashing about in the world's largest water park, teenagers enjoying an Instagram moment on a yacht or adults taking a stroll around the bustling souks."



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Arabian Tea House; Burj Khalifa; the fam trip group
FACING PAGE: Th8 Palm Dubai Beach Resort; Legoland Dubai
PICTURES: VisitDubai; Adrian Chambre; Shutterstock/BestPhotoPlus



to Shrek's Merry Fairy Tale Journey at Hollywood-themed Motiongate. A gentle trundle through the dark Shrek-centred space provided a little rest with enough action for younger kids. For teens, the Lionsgate zone features two *Hunger Games*-themed rides and Now You See Me: High Roller, the world's fastest-spinning rollercoaster.

We ended a fun-filled day at the breezy Byron Bathers bistro on Palm West Beach, an Australian-inspired beach club with crowd-pleasing menus featuring smashed 'avo' and plantain chips, wood-fired pizzas and burgers – the answer for parents seeking a stylish dinner on the coast with food that kids will actually eat.

INSTAGRAM AGE

A new day brought new experiences tailored to Gen Z and millennials, looking at how much the emirate has to offer young, work-hard, play-hard types. A glamorous start at the Marina, passing vessels of all shapes and sizes, saw us board a shiny yacht to skim across sun-warmed waters, jump into the Arabian Gulf and spot the sail-shaped Burj Al Arab. The agents agreed it was a highlight for clients who want to soak up some sun while documenting their adventures on social media.

You need a head for heights in Dubai, and not just for the famous sights. Back on dry land, we whizzed up the 75-storey SLS Dubai, a towering collection of 254 hotel rooms and 270 apartments overlooking the Design District. This couple-focused hotel blends playful touches with full-on opulence. 'Fortune favours the bold' is etched into the stained-glass atrium window, and it's home to the highest overflow pool in the world.

We were all wowed by Bâoli Dubai, a sexy and atmospheric restaurant – sister to the Cannes hotspot that's a frequent celebrity haunt – which opened late last year at J1 Beach. Its grown-up, sophisticated vibe blends southeast Asian and French Riviera design, from huge potted palms to emerald green seating, with menus following suit as staff with model-like good looks brought dishes of perfectly presented charred edamame with truffle butter and golden prawn tempura.

ARABIAN NIGHTS

Turning our attention to the over-40s, we head to Madinat Jumeirah Resort, where the brand has recreated a traditional Arab village complete with a marketplace, restaurants and sand-coloured hotels flanked by cool, palm-lined waterways. After a browse and short boat ride, we lunched at Pad Thai in Jumeirah Al Qasr's peaceful gardens, where aromatic green curries and steamed sea bass pay homage to Thai flavours.

Dinner was something – and somewhere – entirely different. A retro Jeep safari with Platinum Heritage bounced us through desert landscapes where we spotted Arabian oryx, before arriving at a Bedouin camp to be welcomed with *gahwa*, slightly bitter yet cardamom-rich Arabic coffee. It lent a dreamy element to the stargazing experience as some puffed on shisha pipes and others relaxed on rugs and cushions among the desert dunes. A searchlight picked out star constellations in the inky sky, another unforgettable highlight.

A wander through the souks of old Dubai provided more memorable moments – the charismatic owner of



WHERE TO STAY



Th8 Palm Dubai Beach Resort, Vignette Collection

Th8 Palm Dubai Beach Resort sits on the Palm Jumeirah, with fashion-forward five-star nods to Miami and the art deco era, including shiny chevron monochrome floors, clean lines, curves and soft pastel shades. My suite had an open-plan, kitchen-dining-living space and balcony facing the Persian Gulf. The sophisticated look belies the hotel's family-friendly elements – although the pizza oven shaped like a disco ball combines both – with a basketball court, kids' play area, two infinity pools, sandy beach and cabana-clad beach club.



Grand Hyatt Dubai

Overlooking Dubai Creek, the Grand Hyatt is notable for its 37-acre, grassy landscaped grounds. Later this year the space will transform into the Grand Hyatt Dubai Resort Waterpark, where 20,000sq m of fun-filled waterslides and the city's largest urban beach will mean guests can enjoy the on-site attractions within 15 minutes of Dubai International airport. I loved the lower-ground-floor shopping and restaurant area, where giant palms and bridges over rivers create a nature-themed respite from the intense heat.

the spice shop will stay in my mind, proffering samples of saffron and cherry juice – but we escaped the heat by way of an *abra* (wooden water taxi) across the creek. We took refuge in the atmospheric Arabian Tea House, set in the Al Fahidi district. It's a cool, stone-walled space that feels almost Mediterranean, with crisp blue-and-white furniture and a *palapa* (thatched) roof, where shafts of light streamed through as staff brought plates of samosas and saffron-infused rice.

FUTURE FOCUS

After that, it was time to head beyond the present. The Museum of the Future is a refreshing architectural landmark among a city of skyscrapers, its distinctive silver oval structure adorned with Arabic calligraphy. As impressive inside as out, sensory exhibits

transport visitors to the year 2071, including a digitally recreated Amazon rainforest.

For impressive architecture, the jaw-dropping Burj Khalifa can't fail to wow even the most blasé of visitors. Thousands of workers built this engineering marvel, currently the world's tallest building at 828 metres. We sped our way up to the observation decks on the 124th and 148th floors at a heady 22mph.

Our last stop led us to Gerbou, a beautiful restaurant with an LED-lit entrance located in the sleepy Nad Al Sheba suburb. Inside, wood and weavings keep things authentic, but the creations by Michelin-starred chef Ionel Catau are pushing the boundaries for modern Emirati cuisine. His finale was a dessert shaped like the restaurant, which provided a fitting end to our time in such an architecturally striking destination – and something for any age to enjoy. **TW**

BOOK IT

Mercury Holidays offers a six-night stay at Th8 Palm Dubai Beach Resort in a Standard Deluxe Room, with breakfast, from £1,013 per person, based on two sharing, including flights from Heathrow departing December 5.

mercuryholidays.co.uk

Kuoni offers a five-night stay at the Grand Hyatt Dubai, with breakfast, from £1,379 per person based on two sharing, with flights from Gatwick departing November 3.

kuoni.co.uk