

Dubai debut

With a line-up of dazzling new resorts, Dubai is pulling out all the stops to keep visitors coming back for more this winter, writes **Lina Molloholli**

It's my first time in Dubai, and as we cruise through the city our guide, Ayaz Nasir, offers up one superlative after another: the world's tallest building, the biggest mall, the largest fountain. It's clear Dubai builds to impress, and there are no signs of slowing down.

I'm here on a fam trip to see the latest additions to its futuristic skyline. With visitor numbers on the up – 9.31 million travellers arrived in the first half of the year, 9% more than in 2023, according to Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism – and more agent fams planned for 2025, the Gulf Tiger is set for a strong winter season.

It's also easier to get to: Emirates will reintroduce a daily Edinburgh-Dubai route from November 4, while Virgin Atlantic has increased capacity on its daily service from Heathrow, which operates from October 26-March 30.

Works are also underway for Al Maktoum international airport, five times the size of the current DXB site and set to be the world's largest airport when it opens by 2030. From new attractions to much-anticipated hotel openings, here are the Dubai developments that will appeal to first-timers and repeat visitors alike.

BEST FOR LEISURE

Banyan Tree Dubai opened last December on Bluewaters Island – an artificial isle running along one side of Dubai Marina – with 178 rooms and suites. Its star attraction is the sprawling infinity pool framed by retro-style cabanas, plus a spa, activity-focused kids' club, fitness centre, wellness facilities and watersports. Culinary highlights include TakaHisa, a Japanese omakase (chef's choice) restaurant; and Demon Duck, where we sample scrumptious slow-roasted duck and wagyu tenderloin.

Adding to the area's buzz is 382-room resort **Five Luxe**, which opened in April in the heart of Jumeirah Beach Residence. The property's private beach club Playa Pacha promises Ibiza vibes and a regular line-up of international DJs, with a new offshore dome-shaped cabaret, Lío Ibiza, opening in 2025. It is known as the 'Pearl of Dubai', designed to look like a floating shell emerging from the sea.

Back in downtown Dubai, **The Lana**, part of the Dorchester Collection, offers a central location near Marasi Bay Marina, overlooking the Burj Khalifa. Cheery doormen in burgundy top hats and tails greet us on ➤

Skyline with Burj Khalifa and Dubai Fountain

PICTURE: Visit Dubai

DESTINATIONS

WINTER SUN | DUBAI



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Rooftop pool, The Lana; Banyan Tree Dubai; Siro One Za'abeel; One&Only One Za'abeel PICTURES: Natelee Cocks, Rupert Peace



arrival, as we're whisked into a lobby decked out with marble floors and grand arched windows. The room scent leaves a lasting impression – a divine blend of eucalyptus, lily and rose crafted especially for the hotel. There are 225 rooms and suites, eight dining and drinking venues, a rooftop pool and a Dior Spa offering exclusively curated treatments.

First impressions matter at **The Palace Dubai Creek Harbour** too; as we step into the lobby, we are greeted by an Arabian-inspired water feature underneath a delicate glass chandelier. The 122-room hotel has its own marina and yacht club, plus an infinity pool, three restaurants and a wellness centre.

Just a few minutes away, we also get a sneak peek of the refurbishments to come in 2025 at the **Grand Hyatt Dubai**. In addition to its 710 guestrooms and 12 bars and restaurants, the resort will add more guest accommodation and a water park featuring 15 rides, a wave pool,

lazy river and toddler area, which will also be open to visitors who aren't staying at the hotel.

BEST FOR WELLNESS

"This isn't a hotel, it's the world's first vertical resort," says sales manager Rita Neves as she shows us around the new **One&Only One Za'abeel**, set in an affluent area of Bur Dubai, the city's historic district. This impressive property sits in one of two imposing towers connected by a boulevard-style bridge called The Link, which floats 100 metres above the city. The three-storey-high Link houses the UAE's longest infinity pool (at 120m), plus six restaurants by a roster of top chefs. The property has 229 rooms and suites, plus a second pool and three-level Clinique La Prairie spa – the Swiss clinic that was a pioneer in medical spas.

One Za'abeel tower is also the address for **Siro** – a new hotel brand from the company behind Atlantis and One&Only – which centres on the five 'biohacking'

pillars of fitness, nutrition, recovery, sleep and mindfulness.

Here, everything has been designed to elite athlete standards: a Siro app controls blackout blinds to wake guests up in sync with their circadian rhythm, mattresses are thermoregulated to maintain constant temperature and there are 11 options on the pillow menu. There's even a zero-gravity chair said to help with spinal decompression and an in-house nutritionist who can put together a meal plan tailored to specific needs, from muscle gain to fertility.

On the 31st floor, we find the Recovery Lab, home to 12 recovery rooms alongside a sauna, steam room and cold plunge pools. I opt for an assisted stretching session as when it comes to flexibility, my joints fall somewhere between a steel crossbeam and a marble column. I didn't manage to master touching my toes, but I did come out feeling like jelly and for once nothing in my body hurts – a sure sign of renewal amid an ever-changing city. **TW**

WHAT'S NEW

There are even more hotels and attractions to look forward to – here are our top picks.

HOTELS

Ciel Dubai Marina: The world's highest hotel-only building is set to open next year, standing 365 metres tall. It will have more than a thousand rooms, a rooftop infinity pool and bar.

Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab: Set beside the Burj Al Arab, the latest Jumeirah resort was inspired by superyacht design and will have its own stretch of private beach.

Six Senses Residences The Palm: The first Six Senses property in the UAE will have 61 rooms and 162 branded residences when it opens later this year, featuring a kids' club, games room, library and more.

ATTRACTIONS

Football-themed area **Real Madrid World** opened at Dubai Parks and Resorts in April, with more than 25 rides and attractions, immersive exhibits and VR games.

The Dubai Balloon at Atlantis launched in March, offering flights over the city's iconic landmarks.

Arte Museum Dubai, a cutting-edge digital art experience, opened in February. Expect larger-than-life projections, interactive installations and immersive experiences.

BOOK IT

Elegant Resorts offers five nights at One&Only Za'abeel from £3,865, based on two sharing a Sanctuary Suite on a B&B basis, including flights from Heathrow and private transfers on April 24, 2025. elegantresorts.co.uk

Tui offers a seven-night stay at Banyan Tree Dubai from £2,502, based on two sharing a Bliss Double Room with Balcony on a B&B basis, including flights from Heathrow and coach transfers, departing November 13. tui.co.uk