

TRAVEL

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DUBAT DETOUR

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29 | 2012 | EDITOR CARALYN CAMPBELL 604.605.2784 | CACAMPBELL@SUNPRO

A 36-hour stopover in the Manhattan of the Middle East reveals a city of superlatives Pages I2-3



The 200-storey Burj Khalifa stands in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Dubai's Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum opened the world's tallest tower in 2010.

ONLINE Grounding

The crew of the doomed Italian

cruise ship Costa Concordia has been awarded the 'Seafarer

of the Year' award.

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Ports and Bows

The 'godfather' of cruise writing has plenty of money-saving tips for readers, and a list of the world's best vessels



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Travel deals for you

The Sun welcomes our latest blogger — Chris Myden. He's a self-confessed addict for travel bargains, and made his mark with a \$100 outing to Spain.



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New city soars over old Dubai

MARK SISSONS

From my lofty vantage point on level 124 of the world's tallest building, the panoramic view of the city, surrounding desert and Persian Gulf is breathtaking

surrounding desert and Persian Gulf is breathtaking.
Far below, the slyscrapers that dominate the glitzest and most Westernized of the seven United Arab Emirates shimmer in the scorching midday heat like Lego pieces arranged in a giant sandbox.
I'm not the only one enjoying a bird serge view of Dubai's architectural audacity. Across town, the gland Mohammed, smiles down upon his realm from a billboard atop one of those skyscrapers like a benevolent those skyscrapers like a benevolent

those skyscrapers like a benevolent Big Brother.
Since oil was discovered here in 1966, launching their emirate's astounding transformation from Bedouin backwater to ultra-modern metropolis, Sheik Mohammed's family — despite ongoing accusations of gross migrant labour exploitation, suppres-sion of human rights and even ecocide — has religiously stuck to the plan: If you build it bigger, taller, grander and richer, they will come.

I come to Dubai aboard Emirates

I come to Dubai aboard Emirates Airlines recently launched, non-stop flight from Seattle on a 36-hour stop-over to sample what an unending pipeline of petro dollars and a deter-mination to be the biggest and brash-est has created in an otherwise austere part of the planet. The skyline's the limit

In the global race for vertical brag-ging rights that can seem like perpet-ual civic penis envy, the 828-metre-high Burj Khalifa (nearly 300 meters taller than the CN Tower) is currently top banana. My destination is the sec-

top banana. My destination is the sec-ond highest outdoor observation deck in the world at level 124, which I reach via an ear-popping 10 metres per sec-ond elevator rocket ride. Unlike Tom Cruise, whose charac-ter Ethan Hunt scaled the Burj Khali-fa's exterior in the recent blockbuster, Mission: Impossible – Ghost Proto-ol, I'm content to simply take in the grandiose lestament to this emir-ace's determination to diversify from grandiose testament to this emir-ate's determination to diversify from an oil-based to a service- and tour-ism-based economy. My next stop is Dubai's other most famous high-flying architectural marvel, the Burj Al Arab, often voted the world's most luxurious hotel. Shaikh Mohammed reputedly hotel. Shaikh Mohammed reputedly wanted its billowing traditional Arab dhow sail structure rising 321 metres above the sea to be the symbol of the city, like Sydney's Opera House and the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Frequently described as the world's only seven-Star hotel (although officially rated five star deluxe), Burj al Arab occupies its own artificial island. Only hotel guests are allowed inside the Burj Al Arab's opulent interior, encased in a giant translucent fibre-glass wall designed to protect the largest atrium in the world against scorching desert heat by day and

scorching desert heat by day and serve as a spectacular light show pro-jection screen by night. So I stand











1. Traditional wooden water taxis called an Abras still regularly cross Dubai Creek. 2. The Iconic Bay IAI Arab is bother world the world's most luxurious hotel. 3. The ancient Bedouin sport of Ialonovi is still very much allve. 4. At the Dubai Autodrome, one of the most challenging tracks in the world. 5. Camels wait to transport guests during a "sundowner."

gawking from the entrance gate as a hotel Rolls-Royce enters, one of a fleet at the disposal of jet-setters staying

at the disposal of jet-setters staying in lavish two storys suites that reach 8,400-8,4-ft and can cost a shek?s ransom of up to \$9,0,000 per night. Fantasy island Luckily, I am allowed to enter another of Dubai's engineering marties afficial island, jutting out the stay of the sta

Dubai authorities call Palm Juramiah in wix of gargantuan them resorts (including Atlantis, a duplicate of its namesake in Nassau, Bahamas), luxury villas, apartment buildings, manicured beaches, marinas and restaurants "the eighth wonder of the world." Its a wonder, then, how the entire island could be sinking at arafe ing to recent geological studies. That would make Palm Juramiah one of the world's most audacious examples of world's most audacious examples of diminishing real estate returns.

Street scents

Street scents
Dubai isn't all mega projects and
monster towers, as 1 discover the
next morning while strolling the back
streets of the city's old quarters alongside the Creek, the commercial lifeblood of what was once an important
regional trading hub long before oil
wealth arrived

regional trading hub long before oil wealth arrived.

Packed with narrow winding alleys, traditional buildings, boutique hotels, art galleries, and wind towers used before air conditioning to create natural ventilation in buildings, the historic districts of Bastakiya, Bur Dubai and Doira form the last, temming. and Deira form the last remaining pockets of Old Dubai. Negotiating their labyrinthine alleys

Bantering with Indian, Syrian and Lebanese merchants in the glittering Gold and aromatic Spice Sougs. Hop-ping an Abra (a traditional wooden ping an Abra (a traditional wooden water tax)) across Dubai Creek. Exploring the multimedia reconstruc-tions of the Emirate's story at the Dubai Museum, situated underneath the restored Al Fahidi Fort. All com-bine to give me a sense of a very dif-ferent life in this once-modest pearl-ing the state of the control of the control of the ping the control of the c ing village

ing village.

Into the fast lane
Steeped in Dubai's history, I shift into high gear that afternoon at the Dubai Autodrome. A combination of high-speed straights and technical corners makes this F.I.A.-sanctioned materials tioned motorsports circuit one of the most challenging in the world — ideal for channelling my inner Jacques

After a briefing by race school instructor Allen Nimmo, I'm strapped into a 180 h.p. Formula One style race into a 180 h.p. Formula One style race car and am soon screaming around the track with three other rookie drivers behind the pace car. Attempting to handle a vehicle that can go from 0-100 km/h in four seconds and reach speeds of 290 kmh is equal parts exhill-aration and terror. But, according to Nimmo, absolutely safe: These cars are very robust and the track run-off areas are large. You need to be doing something incredibly stupid to actually crash out here, "he explains after my race is over and I'm back in the pits, soaked in perspiration.

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Dunes day afternoon

On my final morning in Dubai I ewan enoud for caronity and haad for the vast, timeless Arabian Desert from which this city of superlatives sprang My destination is Al Maha Resort and Spa a luvurious and romantic hideaway neetled within the ans-squarekilometre Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve. Dubai's first national park.

Named after the Arabic word for the endangered Arabian Oryx that has been successfully bred within the Reserve. Al Maha is the antithesis of its neighbouring city. There are 42 secluded tented suites built in the style of an ancient Redouin settlement each one furnished with original and rare collections of regional artwork and antiques

"Every day is like brand new scenery for us here," says Al Maha's senior field guide, Riann Tolmay,

"You can go out now, drive in the dunes then come back in an hour and the landscape will have changed, especially in the area we call the shifting

dunes' I see what Tolmay means on a "dune bashing" 4x4 excursion around Al Maha in search of desert wildlife. Although he tells me that the reserve is home to 17 different species of mammals, including the Arabian Oryx, three types of gazelle, the Ethiopian hedgehog and the desert hare, it's still hard to believe that anything could survive in this parched patch of earth that occasionally feeds giant sandstorms called Shamals - northwesterly gales that blow over Iraq and the Persian Gulf states.

Then we reach the top of a massive dune, where a herd of Orvx stand like statues, their pure white coats and majestic horns dramatically set against the burning azure Arabian sky.

Late that afternoon I'll bash more dunes on a sunset desert safari that also includes a fascinating demonstration of the ancient Bedouin sport of falconry, a traditional barbecue dinner and shisha (the famous Arabic water pipe) at a traditional campsite, and a belly dancer performing around its campfire.

More Dubai Diversions:

Go downhill

Escape from the oppressive heat at Ski Dubai, an indoor ski resort enclosed within the massive Mall of the Emirates that features an 60-metre high artificial mountain



PHOTOS: MARK SISSONS/SPECIAL TO THE SUN

'You can go out now, drive in the dunes, then come back in an hour and the landscape will have changed,' says field guide Riann Tolmay.

and difficulty, (skidubai.com) Shop till you drop

Splurge on luxury goods in colossal cathedrals of consumerism like Dubai Mall, which boasts nearly 1,200 retail outlets, a 50-metre long aquarium that is home to over 33,000 marine creatures, and an Olympic sized ice rink,

Theme it up

Kickstart your inner child with a visit to one of Dubai's myriad theme parks with adult Disneyland names like Aquaventure, Dolphinarium, Magic Planet and Wild Wadi, the most popular water park in the Middle East.

Hit the track

Head to the Dubai Camel Racecourse for a thrilling evening of dromedary drag racing as the ships of the desert compete in the traditional sport of the United Arab Emirates,

With the use of underage camel jockeys now banned, watch for their robotic replacements to steer their grumpy steeds to victory under the remote radio control of the camels' owners speeding frantically alongside in their 4x4s.

Cruise the Creek:

Combine sightseeing with fine dining aboard on a romantic dinner cruise along Dubai's historic artery aboard an all-glass floating gourmet with five slopes of varying steepness restaurant. (bateauxdubai.com)



If it get too hot for you outside, cool down at Ski Dubai.

If you go

Getting there: Emirates Airlines (emirates com) flies three times a week nonstop from Toronto and now daily nonstop from Seattle to its Dubai hub for connecting flights to Asia. Africa and other destinations.

Getting around: Emirates offers a 36-hour Dubai stopover package that includes a meet-and-greet service upon arrival welcome package airport transfers, 24-hour check-in at over 60 hotels, city and desert tours, and more, Emirates-owned Arabian Adventures (arabian-adventures.com) one of Dubai's largest tour companies, offers a huge variety of activities, including sightseeing and historical city tours. desert safaris, dinner cruises, sailing and diving excursions, and more.

Where to stay: Dubai's accommodation choices veer firmly toward five star. This writer staved at the new Ritz-Carlton, Dubai International Financial Center and at the ultramodern Jumeirah Emirates Towers, one of the world's tallest hotels, set alongside swank Sheik Zayed Road.