

Two tribes

Glam grown-up getaway or fun family break? Arabia does both brilliantly — thanks to hip hotels, bling bars, water parks and desert larks. Here's how to nail your first trip



Dubai: for families

Seaside hit: From the airport, bundle the family into a taxi. It's good value (£10-£20) and is a great way to see Dubai's architectural stardust (there are skyscrapers and fountains aplenty) on the way to your hotel. Whether it's an early start or an evening stroll — UK flights land all hours here — the new shop-beach-eats hub La Mer is a must. This alfresco seaside complex houses hip Turkish tea houses, artisanal Indian sweet shops and beach-club sunloungers (£13 a day; lamerdubai.ae). Run kids ragged at La Mer's Laguna Waterpark (day-pass £27), riding Lazy River for tots, or Manta for fearless families. Or ease jet-lagged muscles with a swim in the sea at the adjoining Jumeirah Open Beach.

Mall pals: Next day, kids' body clocks should be four hours ahead of London. That being the case, destroy an only-in-Dubai hotel brekkie buffet, then escape

the relentless heat in the Downtown Mall. Descriptions such as 'futuristic' and 'OTT' do limited justice to its three-storey aquariums, dinosaur skeletons and fountains that dance 140 metres in the air — all for free. Better still, little ones can be safely left at Dubai Mall's KidZania (dubai.kidzania.com; £38), where they can role-play as surgeons, firefighters or cookie chefs. Older siblings can control the cockpit at the Emirates A380 Experience (the dubaimall.com; £34). Top tip: avoid At The Top, up the 160-storey Burj Khalifa. Cheaper for panoramic views is a £9 Caipiroska (or £6 Pepsi) at At.Mosphere on Level 122 of the same tower.

Back to the future: The sun sets between 6pm and 7pm over Jumeirah Beach Walk, a 2km stretch of free beach, outdoor gyms and Pimm's bars. Fenced-in splash-zones keep toddlers cool (£17 for two hours), while skydivers

Through the looking glass: above and right, a glimpse of lionfish from inside a tank and a touching moment with penguins — both at the Aquarium & Underwater Zoo in the Dubai Mall. Far right, the pool at the Rove Downtown hotel; spices at the souk; bathing on Jumeirah Beach

descend to the sand, carried in tandem parachutes. The big attraction for 2019 is the Ain Dubai ferris wheel on Bluewaters Island (aindubai.eu), which takes 45 minutes to turn 360 degrees. Try to spot the Creek, Dubai's old quarter, through the night sky.

Souks city: Kids will love a morning ride back in time aboard Dubai's advanced driverless metro (£1.30). Alight at Al Fahidi for the textile souk and be aware that silver-tongued vendors will dress little ones in Arabian garb while backs are turned. But it's harmless fun and merits giving a tip. Keep it old school with a 20p abra boat ride across the Creek to Deira's spice market. What beats priceless piles of saffron and dates? An Instagram of the world's largest gold ring (64kg) in Deira's bling gold souk. Feeling adventurous? Take the ferry (£10) from Al Ghubaiba terminal back to the Dubai Canal or Marina.

Desert or the Palm? You've two options depending on how whacked the kids

are. Select a sunset dune safari for sandy memories of belly-dancing, 4WD-driving, camel-riding, sand-skiing and, phew, a three-course barbecue (arabian-adventures.com; from £63). Or head home by way of the Palm. Here Atlantis offers the chance to snorkel in an aquarium lagoon or slide down an Aztec ziggurat through a shark-tank no less (atlantisthepalm.com; £74 for combined aquarium and water-park ticket). Feeding a family in Atlantis itself costs a bomb, so head instead to Club Vista Mare, midway up the Palm's trunk. It's a cracking cluster of affordable alfresco restaurants with 1,000 outdoor seats.

Park life: How to prepare kids for a seven-hour flight home? Try the 45 football fields' worth of green space in Zabeel Park, complete with tech zone, BMX track, Farmers' Market and 3D cinema. Since 2018, it's also been home to the Dubai Frame. This 150-metre-high gate literally frames the old and new city (and pairs vintage photos with Dubai-in-50-years images to prove it).

Take the lift (dubaiframe.ae; £10.70) to its highest platform for a final cityscape. From Zabeel Park it's a 10-minute taxi to the airport terminal.

Where to sleep

● In late 2018 Versailles was reincarnated on the Palm as the Emerald Palace Kempinski Dubai (kempinski.com; doubles from £640, room-only). Lashings of gold and marble suffuse a fabulous, fun mega-hotel where offspring are spoiled with a 'Little Kingdom' kids' club (ages 3-12), a playpark, a children's pool and a lifeguard-patrolled beach containing imported Maldivian sand. There's a teens' club, too.

● The bargain-luxe Rove Downtown (rovehotels.com; doubles from £79, room-only) has PlayStation corners, late check-out lockers and a swimming pool with views to the Burj Khalifa, which is just a 10-minute stroll away. It also throws in complimentary shuttle buses to La Mer, Bur Dubai and other must-sees. One-third of rooms are interconnecting, perfect for families.

Dubai: for grown-ups

Buzz straight to the beach: For a taste of the future, step aboard the fully automated metro at Airport Terminal 3 (£1.50). Forty minutes later, alight at Dubai Marina Mall for swims, shishas, yachts and high-end hotspots. Not checking in until later? Doze on a lounge at Azure Beach (azure-beach.com; day-pass from £21, £42 at the weekend with a £21 food and drink voucher) for pool tunes, sushi and pizzas (mains about £17). Or try the Pier 7 restaurant tower (pier7.ae; mains about £25), where you can dine Oz-Asian, Beirut or modern Emirati — all with Gulf views.

Dubai on a plate: Fifty years ago, when the nation's population was 70,000, Bur

Dubai was the city. Unparalleled migrations (the UAE now hosts 9m people) have turned Dubai's oldest quarter into a global mish-mash of Sri Lankan pancakes ('hoppers'), Pakistani parathas and Afghan cookies. Eat through the sub-continent at age-old restaurants such as Karachi Darbar (10 Al Nahdha St; mains about £4). Better still, Frying Pan Adventures runs Little India, souk food or other tours (fryingpanadventures.com; £84 for four-hour tour with 10 tastings).

Art seen: In 2007, a Syrian modern artist hired an industrial unit in which to work. Since then, organic growth at the Alserkal Avenue factory complex has

brought artists from Egypt, Germany, Pakistan and the UK, alongside concepts such as a bean-to-bar chocolate factory (try the Vietnamese and Tanzanian). Nowadays, highlights include more than 20 galleries, plus an arthouse cinema furnished with abandoned armchairs. Try Parisian vegan outpost Wild & the Moon (wildandthemoon.ae; mains about £10).

Food container: Still peckish? Copy Alserkal's roaming shoppers by taking a 10-minute Uber to Boxpark (boxpark.ae). Opened in 2015, it consists of about 100 shipping containers housing inventive diners, such as the light-bite Emirati Logma (mains about £8) and the Egyptian Love Mhshy (mains about £7). Plan an early night. Tomorrow you're doing 'the full Lawrence'.

Arabian dawn: It's a 90-minute desert drive to the inland retreat of Hatta. Tours depart at daybreak for good reason. At sunrise, both the Arabian sands and Hajar mountains glow ochre, while cool breezes allow for cycling on the four Hatta Mountain Bike Trails. Crisp air also suits oasis photography, canyon-hiking and kayaking across a vast man-made lake. It's as telegenic as a David Lean movie, with gourmet lunches available at Jeema (jaresortshotels.com; mains about £25) at the old Hatta Fort Hotel.

Burj splurge: You've earned a cocktail at the Burj Al Arab. In the '90s this all-suite hotel crowned Dubai as the king of bling at the cost of £0.8bn. From 4pm-6pm, Scape offers drinks with tapas on the Gulf terrace for £18 — a Burj bargain. Even scrummier is Nathan Outlaw's seafood delight (full tasting

menu £203). It's served, with no hint of irony, beside a colossal aquarium. And there's more. The Burj is part of the Madinat Jumeirah complex, a mini-Monaco where a score of restaurants are strung around a palm-lined lagoon dotted with abra boats (tours from £18). Hours of 'only in Dubai' fun.

Rock the kasbah: Beside the Creek is the alluringly authentic Al Fahidi district, built two centuries ago, using a mix of coral and limestone. Boutiques and bougainvillea have now overrun the porticoes, as well as avant-garde Emirati offerings such as a coffee museum serving Ethiopian and Yemeni brews. Converse with Emirati hosts over breakfast or lunch, for a nominal fee, at the area's Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding.

Or go private with a goodbye baklava 'n' falafel at the endearing Arabian Tea House. The airport is 10 minutes away.

Where to sleep

- The ultimate smarty-pants address opened a year ago on a mini-island off Jumeirah Bay. Dubai Bulgari's stylish rooms (bulgarihotels.com; doubles from £355, B&B) are best reached by the resort's Riva speedboat, which alights at La Spiaggia beach club. Its restaurant and cafe are both sun-soaked pieces of Milanese chic.
- In January 2019 the funhouse W The Palm (marriott.com; doubles from £354, B&B) shook the fronds of Dubai's ritziest enclave. All the snazzy rooms boast at least a partial sea view. They also persuaded triple-Michelin maestro Massimo Bottura to prepare dinner. *Tristan Rutherford*

All bright at night: Dubai's glitzy Marina

