

lonely planet Hotels & Hostels

Want more Sleeping recommendations than we could ever pack into this little ol' book? Craving more detail – including extended reviews and photographs? Want to read reviews by other travellers and be able to post your own? Just make your way over to lonelyplanet.com/hotels and check out our thorough list of independent reviews, then reserve your room simply and securely.

SLEEPING

top picks

- XVA Art Hotel (p157)
- Raffles Dubai (p156)
- Hilton Dubai Creek (p152)
- Emirates Towers (p158)
- One&Only Royal Mirage (p162)
- The Palace, Old Town (p157)
- Al-Qasr (p159)
- Shangri-La (p158)
- La Maison d'Hôtes (p160)
- Al-Hijaz Heritage Motel (p154)

SLEEPING

Make no mistake, Dubai is a luxury-travel destination. Your biggest expense will be your hotel. In order to accommodate the vast amounts of wealth pouring into the city, five-star hotels have been opening nearly every month – and there still aren't enough to satisfy demand. Likewise for midrange accommodation, where rates hover around Dh1000. New chains are arriving to meet tourist demand; brands like Four Points, Holiday Inn Express and Easy Hotel all plan to open in 2008, but these will cost around Dh700 a night at best. If you're on budget, the least you'll pay is Dh400 a night, making Dubai a bad choice for backpackers. Alternatively, if you can bear 50°C heat, come during the summer, when you can often score deep discounts.

Accommodation in this chapter is listed by neighbourhood, with listings sorted by the price, from highest to lowest, of a double room.

ACCOMMODATION STYLES

There are two types of hotel in Dubai: the city hotel and beach resort. City hotels range from one star to five, while the beach resorts are generally all five-stars. Though there are no official camping sites in Dubai, some residents spend weekends camping on beaches or in the desert, but given the temperatures and lack of facilities, camping is neither a reliable nor popular option for a Dubai holiday.

Before you choose a hotel, determine what you want from your holiday. If you like to drink, make sure your hotel isn't dry. City hotels are ideal for jaunts to shopping malls, souqs and historic areas. Beach resorts tend to be more lavish, with expansive grounds, swim-up bars and sandy shores, but they're 30 minutes from Dubai centre; when the traffic's good, a taxi costs Dh50. Most resort guests do the sights in a day and spend the rest of their time soaking up the sun.

Top-end hotels are cities unto themselves, with multiple restaurants, bars and night-clubs. Alcohol is generally only served in hotels, which means expats flock to them in droves. At a good hotel, the party comes to you. Conversely, if you're at a low-end hotel, you'll wind up travelling to the big hotels for fun.

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

PRICE GUIDE

\$\$\$	over Dh1200
\$\$	Dh700-1200
\$	under Dh700

CHECK-IN & CHECK-OUT TIMES

Because flights arrive in Dubai at all hours, it's crucial to confirm your check-in time with the hotel prior to arrival. Get a confirmation number when you book, and present it at check-in; it's shocking how many reservations get lost. Check-in is generally at 3pm. It's sometimes possible to arrive earlier, but this is never a given unless you pay for the previous night. Check-out is 11am or noon. Here's a little trick to score a late check-out: on the morning of departure, call the front desk and ask, 'How late can I check out?' Don't give them the option to say no by asking, 'Can I check out late?' If you don't get the answer you want, speak to the manager on duty, who will give you the final word. If you absolutely must keep the room until the evening, inquire about a day rate, which is usually half the overnight rate.

LONGER-TERM RENTALS

The Bur Dubai area is full of longer-term rentals; many hotels throughout the city also rent furnished apartments. The chief advantages are the kitchen and washing machine. Prices start around Dh700 for a studio in one of the midrange hotel apartments in Bur Dubai, and prices often drop for stays longer than a week. At top-end hotel apartments, rates skyrocket. [Dubai Tourism](http://www.dubaitourism.ae) (www.dubaitourism.ae) has a full listing.

STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT ROOM RATES

We visited every hotel listed in this chapter and inquired directly about rates. Some hoteliers were upfront and told us what the average guest pays; others were cagey and quoted numbers *higher* than rack rates. We were left scratching our heads, wondering what to quote to readers. Understand that the numbers listed in this chapter are to be used as a guide for comparison only. You can often score better, but you may pay more. Visiting Dubai was once dirt cheap. No more. It's now one of the world's most expensive cities.

Fear not: unless you're coming in November or December, when occupancy is highest, or for a major conference or event, you'll nearly always find rates that are lower than racks. Shop around – a little research goes a long way. Even if the words 'package tour' send a chill up your spine, keep in mind that airlines and tour companies often offer the best deals available – especially for resort hotels.

RESERVATIONS

Most major hotel chains have online booking engines, saving you expensive telephone calls. Smaller hotels sometimes offer online booking, but they don't always use a secured server; verify the site's security certificate (use an up-to-date browser; Firefox has good security) before sending your account number. When reserving a hotel that you can't book online, expect miscommunications via email. Pick up the phone and expect to stumble through conversations with people who don't fully understand English. Once reserved, the reservation must be guaranteed with a fax-copy of your credit card, along with a signed guarantee. Upon sending the fax, verify receipt of it by telephone. Keep your fax-confirmation page, and get a reservation number: bring them both with you. This detail is crucial. You may need proof of your reservation on a sold-out night. You will seriously bum out if you arrive at your hotel at 3am, following a too-long flight, only to learn you've nowhere to lay your head or have a shower. Don't let it happen to you. (We actually saw this transpire at our hotel in Dubai. The guy was a wreck.)

Hunt for specials on hotels' proprietary websites (if none is available, it typically means occupancy is high). [Expedia](http://www.expedia.com) (www.expedia.com) is pretty good, as is [Lastminute](http://www.lastminute.com) (www.lastminute.com); both often have good deals in Dubai. We really like [Let's Go](http://www.reservations.bookhostels.com/letsgo.com) (www.reservations.bookhostels.com/letsgo.com) for finding budget hotels.

NB: Dubai's occupancy rates are the highest in the world, with an annual average of 86% – and that factors in the miserable months of summer. For peak periods (read: winter), book well ahead. If you arrive and need accommodation, there's an office to your left after you pass through customs – but you may be SOL (out of luck).

ROOM RATES

Rates we've quoted are generally rack rates – standard, published, high-season rates. Expect to pay these at peak times and during major events; during city-wide sell-outs, prices spike higher, sometimes as much as 50%. Always ask for the 'best price' or whether there are any specials – generally the hotels won't say unless you ask. If you work for a big company, presenting a business card may qualify you as a corporate client and earn you a substantial discount.

Nearly all hotels in Dubai have private baths; all have air-conditioning. Budget rooms are tiny and have only the basics, with wafer-thin pillows and closet-size bathrooms. Midrange hotel rooms are big enough to unpack two suitcases, and usually have tea- and coffee-making facilities, minibars and extras like flat-panel TVs. Top-end hotels have enough space to throw a cocktail party and inevitably have huge marble bathrooms – some very sexy – with amenities like rainfall showerheads and freestanding oversize bathtubs. Ablutions are a cornerstone of Arab culture: Emiratis love their bathrooms. Even at a two-star, they're usually spotless.

Expect to present your passport at check-in. Hotels are legally required to scan them and file a copy with the CID, Dubai's secret police, so they can track your movements if they want to (welcome to Dubai). Hotels also require you to leave a credit-card authorisation of about Dh500 per night for incidentals. If you don't have a credit card, you must leave a cash deposit.

Hotels charge 20% tax: 10% municipal tax, plus 10% service charge.

DEIRA

Deira is the city's grittiest, most colourful area. Near the neon-lit chaos of the souqs, it's fun for getting lost in back alleys, but horrible for

top picks

VIEWS

- Burj Al Arab (p159)
- Hilton Dubai Creek (below)
- Shangri-La (p158)
- Park Hyatt Dubai (below)
- Jumeirah Beach Hotel (p160)
- Mina A' Salam, Madinat Jumeirah (p160)
- Al-Qasr, Madinat Jumeirah (p159)

taxis. The best hotels front the Creek. Budget hotels are tucked inland along narrow streets. Many hotels provide airport, mall and beach shuttles; inquire when you book. You'll find great deals in Deira, but if you have business elsewhere, you'll be slowed (way) down by traffic; choose Bur Dubai instead.

PARK HYATT DUBAI Map pp56-7 Hotel \$\$\$

602 1234; www.dubai.park.hyatt.com; Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club; s/d Dh2350/2550; Discretion is the watchword at this sprawling low-rise golf resort, where every huge room has a Creek-view balcony. Park is Hyatt's luxury brand, and it's evident in the details: rooms are austere and artfully styled in greige tones, sand-dune-inspired wave-patterned textiles and Moroccan-led archways. By night, the lobby glows by candlelight. The open-floor-plan bathroom has a giant two-person tub at its centre and a detached enormous shower stall with a waterfall showerhead – ideal for a romantic retreat, but lacking in privacy for shy couples. Downstairs is Dubai's top spa, [Amara](#) (p140), and the [Dubai Creek Golf Club](#) (p144) surrounds the hotel.

HILTON DUBAI CREEK Map pp54-5 Hotel \$\$\$

227 1111; www.hilton.com; Baniyas Rd, Rigga; r from Dh1440; These sexy city digs are the best of Deira's accommodation, with swooping wood-panelled walls, leather-padded headboards, grey-granite baths, and fabulous beds with feather-light duvets. The floor-to-ceiling windows provide amazing Creek views – request a no-additional-charge corner room. There's stellar in-room gadgetry (think iPod docking stations) and the ultra-modern design offers a smart alternative to the in-your-face white-marble opulence of

Dubai's other luxury hotels. Its restaurant, [Verre](#) by Gordon Ramsay (p107), is Dubai's top table. Fabulous rooftop pool.

HYATT REGENCY DUBAI

Map pp54-5 Hotel \$\$\$

209 1234; www.dubai.regency.hyatt.com; off Al-Khaleej Rd; r from Dh1200; The granddaddy of Dubai's five-stars opened in 1980. All 414 spiffy guestrooms have sumptuous beds with ultrasoft high-thread-count linens, and giant picture windows overlooking the Palm Deira. Primarily geared toward business travellers, the hotel also has family activities, including mini-golf, tennis, and indoor ice-skating. Traffic is the biggest drawback to staying here.

RADISSON SAS DUBAI Map pp54-5 Hotel \$\$\$

222 7171; www.dubai.radissonsas.com; Baniyas Rd; s/d from Dh1200;

This Creekside stalwart is the city's first five-star. It commands a great location, within walking distance of the souqs and dhow wharves. The Soviet-era-celldblock high-rise architecture is dated, but the rooms (however small) recently got a much-needed renovation and all the basic business-class amenities are in place. The biggest selling point is the restaurants – [Sumibiya](#) (p107) for Korean-Japanese, [China Club](#) (p109), [Shabestan](#) (p107) for Persian and [Yum!](#) (p110) for noodles. Great gym too. For these prices you can do better, but this is a solid backup.

AL-BUSTAN ROTANA Map pp56-7 Hotel \$\$\$

282 0000; www.rotana.com; Casablanca Rd, Al-Garhoud; s/d Dh1150/1200; The atrium lobby is vintage-1990s, but the spacious rooms are up to date and surprisingly decked-out at this airport hotel, catering primarily to business travellers. Wall-mounted LCD screens, big desks, spotless baths, good mattresses and an oversized pool justify the price, but the location is inconvenient unless you've got an early flight.

SHERATON DEIRA Map pp54-5 Hotel \$\$\$

268 8888; www.starwood.com; Al-Mateena St; s/d 950/1050;

Rates are reasonable for the better-than-average business-class amenities at this off-the-beaten-path five-star in Little Inq. It got a facelift in 2007, and the spiffy decor is fresh, if predictably pastel. Go for the junior

suites, if you can score a good rate; they're extra-spacious, with big marble bathrooms and giant tubs. Good service too.

SHERATON DUBAI CREEK

Map pp54-5 Hotel \$\$\$

228 1111; www.starwood.com; Baniyas Rd; s/d Dh950/1050; Floor-to-ceiling windows provide mesmerising Creek vistas at this traditional business-class chain property. There's nothing risky to the beige design scheme, but amenities like flat-panel TVs, DVD players, cushy bed linens and marble baths provide extra comfort. The best views are from tower floors; the food is good, too, especially at Indian [Ashiana](#) (p107) and Japanese [Creekside](#) (p108).

SUN AND SANDS HOTEL

Map pp56-7 Hotel \$\$\$

223 9000; <http://sunandsandsdubai.com>; 37 St; s/d Dh900/1000; Better than others in this three-star ghetto of anonymous concrete-block hotels, the Sun and Sands is nonetheless a three-star, which automatically implies quirkier furnishings and so-so service compared to the four- and five-stars listed above. Still, this is a good choice for its price range. Though heavy on chintz, rooms are fresh and well-kept – management takes great care of the place. Bathrooms are the weak point: tiles need re-grouting and fans hum too loudly. Still, it's worth spending the extra Dh200 for the vastly better service and facilities.

CARLTON TOWER HOTEL

Map pp54-5 Hotel \$\$\$

222 7111; www.carlontower.net; Baniyas Rd; s/d/ste Dh800/900/1300, Creek view extra Dh100; Fave of Russian tour groups, this stately hotel has a picturesque Creekside location – pony up Dh100 for a view. Rooms are decorated with blonde-wood and glass-topped furniture; bathrooms are spacious, but tiles need replacing. Still, rates are terrific, the souqs walkable, and the pool refreshing. The nightclubs are cheesy, but there's a great belly dancer in the restaurant.

MARCO POLO HOTEL Map pp54-5 Hotel \$\$\$

272 0000; www.marcopolohotel.net; Al-Mateena St; s/d 800/900; The off-the-beaten-path Marco Polo is good for exploring the backstreets of Little

Iraq. The tourist-class digs are well kept, if simple, and though pillows are lumpy, the white linens are spotless and fresh. Minibar prices are great – only Dh15 for a beer, half the Dubai average. Alas, the pool gets no direct sun in winter; if you're out for a tan, look elsewhere.

RIVIERA HOTEL Map pp54-5 Hotel \$\$\$

222 2131; www.rivierahotel-dubai.com; Baniyas Rd; s/d Dh700/775, Creek view 750/850; The Indian-fancy chintz decor may be dated and tired, but the Creekside location can't be beat. Bathrooms are immaculate, and beds even have down pillows. Aesthetes may bemoan the recessed fluorescent lighting, but splurge on a Creek view and you'll hardly notice. Note: no alcohol.

MOSCOW HOTEL Map pp56-7 Hotel \$\$\$

228 8222; www.moscowhoteldubai.com; Al-Maktoum Rd; s/d 700/800; An eye-poppingly kitsch slice of Moscow, the lobby sports an over-the-top Bolshoi Theatre-styled dome, a nod to the upwardly mobile Russian tourists it caters to. Rooms are big and colourful, but furnishings border on tacky (think French provincial chairs with vinyl seats). The Russian-by-the-Creek theme continues throughout, with the crowning touch the Red Square nightclub and its mullet-headed Russian rock band.

LANDMARK HOTEL Map pp54-5 Hotel \$\$\$

228 6666; www.landmarkhotel-dubai.com; just off Baniyas Sq; s/d Dh600/800; Along with its sister, the Landmark Plaza, this is the best of the hotels around Baniyas (or Al-Nasser) Sq, an Indian business district. Rooms are furnished in mass-market blonde wood, but they're clean and have satellite TV and enough room to unpack. The tiny rooftop pool has no loungers, but reveals a delicious panorama of Deira, especially during the call to prayer, when mosques' loud-speakers compete in a blaring cacophony.

ORCHID HOTEL Map pp56-7 Hotel \$\$\$

295 6999; www.orchidhoteldubai.com; off 37 St; s/d Dh500/600; The Orchid is popular with Russian and Arab travellers. Rooms are unexceptionally decorated with plain-Jane wood-laminate furniture, and are smaller than at other neighbouring hotels, but service is better

here. Rooms are clean, if not immaculate; bar fridges and satellite TV sweeten the deal. Alas, the rooftop pool is t-i-n-y and closes at 6pm but you'll dig the hotel's international club scene – African, Arabic and Indian – all with live bands nightly.

LORDS HOTEL Map pp54–5 Hotel \$

☎ 228 9977; lords@emirates.net.ae; Al-Jazeera St; s/d Dh500/600; 📍 🚗

The pool gets all-day sun at this lacklustre Deira hotel, which is otherwise only notable for its clean rooms, good-size bathrooms and convenient location for souq shopping raids. Rooms are furnished with mass-produced wood-laminate furniture and mismatched fabrics. Keep it on your backup list when other hotels are full, but it's not worth seeking out first. Note: no alcohol.

AL-HIJAZ HERITAGE MOTEL Map pp54–5 Hotel \$

☎ 225 0085; www.alhijazmotel.com; next to Al-Ahmadiya School; s/d/q Dh350/420/650; 📍

Our favourite budget Deira hotel is run by warm and welcoming innkeepers. Next to Al-Ahmadiya School (p58) and Heritage House (p58), Al-Hijaz occupies a historic building with rooms on two floors surrounding a central courtyard. Rooms are spotless, with tiled floors, satellite TV and some charming details like carved wooden armoires and embroidery-edged pillowcases. Suites are huge. The call to prayer from the adjacent mosque is atmospheric, but really loud; bring earplugs. Note: no alcohol.

RAMEE INTERNATIONAL HOTEL Map pp54–5 Hotel \$

☎ 224 0222; rameedxb@emirates.net.ae; 9C St; s/d Dh350/450

This busy hotel off bustling Baniyas Sq attracts tour groups doing Dubai on a budget. It's the usual bland three-star, with dreary hallways and bad lighting, but the rooms are basically clean (though on our last visit, pillows were lumpy and the tub grout black with mildew). Extras include satellite TV, bar fridges and 24-hour room service. Pop in to see the fun Indian bars downstairs.

FLORIDA HOTEL Map pp54–5 Hotel \$

☎ 226 8888; www.floridahotels.co.ae; Al-Sabkha Rd; s/d 300/400

The front door opens onto the chaos of Deira's souqs, but inside all is calm and

quiet. Rooms are surprisingly clean (evidence, the plastic-wrapped lampshades) and have a few spiffy amenities like stitched-leather side chairs. The carpet needs replacing and bathrooms have dim fluorescent lighting and the occasional mildew spot, but face it, the Florida offers overall good value. Budgeteers: put this one high on your list.

PACIFIC HOTEL Map pp54–5 Hotel \$

☎ 227 6700; www.pacifichotel-dubai.com; 115 Al-Sabkha Rd, opposite Sabakha bus station; s/d/tr Dh360/440/520; 📍

The best things about the Pacific Hotel are firstly, its location near the Creek and secondly, its balconies overlooking the neon-lit hordes roaming the souqs below you. Alas, the lobby is dumpily – expect to see an Indian man napping on the sofa – and rooms are clean but run-down. The paper-thin sheets are scratchy; you'll be happier if you bring your own pillow case. However, friendly management makes up for the shortcomings, as does the wall-mounted satellite TV.

DEIRA PALACE HOTEL Map pp54–5 Hotel \$

☎ 229 0120; alkhadari_2010@yahoo.com; 67 St; s/d Dh250/380

Don't be fooled: there's nothing palatial about this bare-bones hotel, though the recently remodelled bathrooms are surprisingly clean. Now it's time to redo the bedrooms and replace the ratty low-pile carpeting and beat-up furniture. But you can't argue about the rock-bottom prices. Bring earplugs: people shout in the echoey marble hallways. Most guests are Africans doing business in the souqs, or backpackers looking for Dubai's gritty underbelly. No visitors after 9pm.

TAXI SIR?

Many four- and five-star hotels in Dubai offer guests dedicated taxi service in chauffeur-driven sedans under contract with the hotel. These 'taxis' have no signage, though they do have meters (if not, don't get in) and generally cost about Dh5 more than a regular taxi, provided there's no slowdown. But when you're stuck in heavy traffic, the meter ticks fast: expect to pay nearly double the fee of a regular cab. If you object to paying more, tell the bell captain you want a regular taxi (you might have to insist). But if you are pressed for time and there are no other cabs available, you'll be grateful for the wheels.

THE CALL TO PRAYER

If you're staying in the older areas of Deira or Bur Dubai, you may be awoken around 4.30am by the inimitable wailing of the *azan*, the Muslim call to prayer, through speakers positioned on the minaret of nearby mosques. It's jarring, to be sure, but there's a haunting beauty to the sound, one that you'll only hear in the Middle East.

Muslims pray five times a day: at dawn; when the sun is directly overhead; when the sun is in the position that creates shadows the same length as the object shadowed; at the beginning of sunset; and at twilight, when the last light of the day disappears over the horizon. The exact times are printed in the daily newspapers and on websites. Once the call has been made, Muslims have half an hour to pray. An exception is made at dawn: after the call they have about 80 minutes in which to wake up, wash and pray, before the sun has risen.

Muslims needn't be near a mosque to pray; they need only face Mecca. If devotees cannot get to a mosque, they'll stop wherever they are and drop to their knees. If you see someone praying, be as unobtrusive as possible, and avoid walking in front of the person. All public buildings, including government departments, libraries, shopping centres and airports, have designated prayer rooms. You'll find a *qibla* (a niche indicating the direction of Mecca) in every hotel room in Dubai, either on the ceiling, desk or bedside table. Better hotels provide prayer rugs with a built-in compass.

When you hear the call to prayer, listen for the phrasing. First comes *Allah-u-akbar*, which means 'God is Great'. This is repeated four times. Next comes *Ashhadu an la illallah ha-illaah* (I testify there is no god but God). This is repeated twice, as is the next line, *Ashhadu anna muhammadan rasulu-ilaah* (I testify that Mohammed is His messenger). Then come two shorter lines, also sung twice: *Hayya ala as-salaah* (Come to prayer) and *Hayya ala al-falaah* (Come to salvation). *Allah-u-akbar* is repeated twice more, before the closing line *Laa ilaah illa allah* (There is no god but God).

The only variation on this standard format is at the dawn call. In this *azan*, after the exhortation to come to salvation, comes the gently nudging, repeated line *As-salaatu khayrun min al nawn*, which translates to 'It is better to pray than to sleep'.

If you're not in a hotel where you can hear the call to prayer, stop by the souqs in Deira and pick up a mosque alarm clock – it's the perfect tchotchke to take home to friends.

HOTEL DELHI DARBAR Map pp54–5 Hotel \$

☎ 273 3555; Naif Rd; s/d Dh220/325

There always seems to be luggage piled in the lobby of this Indian-run, budget-basic hotel, but accommodations are better than most you'll find in Deira's neon-lit commercial centre. Though rooms feel a tad run-down, they're spacious and clean, have fridge and TV, and overlook the vibrant street scene. Bathrooms smell vaguely of mildew, with asylum-yellow fluorescent lighting, but they're clean – even if the tubs need reglazing. There's a popular Indian restaurant on the ground floor, and the souqs are a stone's throw away.

DUBAI YOUTH HOSTEL Map p52 Hostel \$

☎ 298 8151/61; uaeyha@emirates.net.ae; 39 Al-Nahda Rd; YHA members/nonmembers dm Dh80/90, s Dh170/190, d Dh200/230; 📍

The only hostel in town has far better facilities than you'd expect. The new wing, with spotless single and double rooms, beats the Deira and Bur Dubai zero-star hotels hands down for comfort. The dorm rooms are more like pre-teen bedrooms, the New House rooms are excellent value – provided you're a YHA member (Dh200 per annum). If you're not a member, it may be more economical to stay in a better-positioned chea-

pie in Deira (particularly considering taxi fares, though you can take the bus too). Still, you won't match the facilities: a pool and a gym, sauna, spa, Jacuzzi, tennis court and billiards room. Catch buses 3, 13, 17 or 31.

BUR DUBAI

Bur Dubai's heritage sights – Bastakia and Bur Dubai Souq – should be on every traveller's list, and the closer you stay to them, the richer your experience of Dubai will be. Alas, with the exception of the dynamic Indian quarter between Khalid bin Al-Waleed Rd and Al-Fahidi St, the rest of Bur Dubai feels soulless, full of low-rise concrete-block apartments. There are lots of apartment-hotels here, but few you'd get excited about recommending; Golden Sands (opposite) dominates the market.

top picks

ON A BUDGET

- Al-Hijaz Heritage Motel (opposite)
- Fusion Hotel (p161)
- XVA Art Hotel (p157)

top picks

SWIMMING POOLS

- One&Only Royal Mirage (p162)
- The Palace, Old Town (opposite)
- Shangri-La (p158)
- Fairmont (p158)
- Grand Hyatt (right)
- Hilton Dubai Creek (p152)

RAFFLES DUBAI Map pp64-5 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 324 8888; www.dubai.affles.com; Wafi City Mall, Al-Qataiyat Rd; r from Dh3500; 📍 🚗

Finally a luxury hotel that lives up to the moniker, with service and amenities on a par with the world's top hotels. Built in the shape of a giant pyramid, Raffles is a new Dubai icon. Its magnificent rooms are done in the colours of a Moroccan kilim – deep-blue, burgundy-red and sandy-taupe. Bathrooms are of limestone and sandstone imported from Egypt, with giant sunken tubs and Dubai's biggest rainfall showerheads. Luxury is in the details: complimentary coffee presented with your wake-up call, lighting controlled from a bedside console, Spiegelau-crystal glassware and Bose CD-stereos – the pool deck is even refrigerated. The palatial limestone lobby is ground-zero for spotting Sheikhs feasting at tables spilling over with chocolates and dates. Don't miss the Michelin-star-worthy [Fire & Ice](#) (p110) or [New Asia Bar](#) (p127), the view lounge at the top of the pyramid.

MÖVENPICK HOTEL BUR DUBAI

Map pp64-5 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 336 6000; www.movenpick-hotels.com; 19 St; s/d Dh1140/1380; 📍 🚗

The garish lobby looks like it was decorated by a court jester, with red-leather walls, faux gold-leaf ceilings and a sweeping staircase. Rooms however are midrange business generic, but crisp white duvets and feather pillows compensate for the blandness; spacious bathrooms provide plenty of room. The rooftop pool is good for laps, with grand views from its spacious deck, and the gym has extensive equipment. Note: choose a city-view room or overlook the sunless atrium.

GRAND HYATT DUBAI Map p52 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 317 1234; www.dubai.grand.hyatt.com; Al-Qataiyat Rd; s/d from Dh1200/1350; 📍 🚗

The vast white-marble lobby at this behemoth destination resort recreates a tropical rainforest, with dhow hulls hanging from the ceiling. Rooms are more staid, with dark-wood furniture and tasselled draperies, but have all top-end business-class amenities, from robes and slippers to ultrasoft pillow cases of filigreed cotton. Facilities are impressive and include Dubai's biggest swimming pool, extensive palm-tree-studded gardens, a kids' club, tennis courts, a fantastic gym, and several excellent restaurants. Skip the bland suites.

RAMADA HOTEL Map pp62-3 Hotel \$\$

☎ 351 9999; www.ramadadubai.com; Al-Mankhool Rd; s/d Dh960/1080; 📍 🚗

The most notable feature of this mid-budget hotel is its striking late-1970s stained-glass feature stretching 10 storeys up the atrium. The 172 split-level rooms are spacious and good for business travellers, but there's nothing compelling about the generic furnishings. Still, visitors like the Ramada for its oversized rooms, central location and excellent in-house gym.

ORIENT GUEST HOUSE

Map pp62-3 Boutique Hotel \$\$

☎ 351 9111; www.orientguesthouse.com; Al-Fahidi St; r from Dh1000

Tucked down a hidden pedestrian alley in the historic Bastakia Quarter, the Orient captures the feeling of old Dubai. Rooms in the former home surround a central courtyard; each is styled with carved wooden headboards, delicate chandeliers and velvety-soft jewel-tone fabrics. Alas, the bathrooms are tiny and the pillows thin,

top picks

HOTELS FOR SHOPPING

- Kempinski (p163)
- Raffles Dubai (left)
- The Palace, Old Town (opposite)
- InterContinental (☎ 701 1111; www.intercontinental.com; Festival City; r from Dh1800; 📍 🚗)

but the charming service and romantic vibe more than compensate.

CAPITOL HOTEL Map pp62-3 Hotel \$\$

☎ 346 0111; www.capitol-hotel.com; Al-Mina Rd, Satwa; s/d Dh800/900; 📍 🚗

The Capitol stands out for its anonymity: you've seen these rooms a hundred times at airport business-class hotels – comfortable, clean and entirely forgettable. Still, it's a solid back-up choice and well-located near Al-Dhiyafah St, Dubai's best walking street. Request an outside room, or face the sunless atrium. The gym is good, but the rooftop pool gets no afternoon winter sun: tan in the morning.

FOUR POINTS SHERATON DOWNTOWN Map pp62-3 Hotel \$\$

☎ 354 3333; www.starwood.com; 4C St, off Mankhool Rd; s/d 800/850; 📍 🚗

The hyper-masculine, stark-white chrome-and-marble lobby can't quite decide what it's trying to be – contemporary Italian, 1950s modern, or 1970s disco – but rooms at this new mid-budget hotel are spacious enough for a small family. The look is sterile, but extras such as comfy mattresses, big flat-screen TVs, and rooftop gym and pool make up for it. Good value.

GOLDEN SANDS HOTEL APARTMENTS Map pp62-3 Apartment Hotel \$\$

☎ 355 5553; www.goldensandsdubai.com; multiple locations off Mankhool Rd; studio apt from Dh700; 📍 🚗

Golden Sands has possibly the biggest inventory of hotel-apartments in Dubai. The 12 stand-alone buildings, all boxy concrete structures, see a lot of wear and tear from business travellers. The efficiency-style kitchens are tiny, but include a washer. Alas, not all buildings are wired for high-speed internet, and those that are share a central modem, meaning slow connections; likewise in the business centre. Furnishings are utilitarian and bland. Still, this is a satisfactory landing pad for expats.

FOUR POINTS SHERATON BUR DUBAI Map pp62-3 Hotel \$\$

☎ 397 7444; www.starwood.com; Khalid bin al-Waleed Rd; s/d from Dh700; 📍 🚗

Despite the gritty sidewalk scene out front, this Four Points (one of three in Dubai) is a reliable business address.

top picks

FOR ROMANCE

- One&Only Royal Mirage (p162)
- XVA Art Hotel (below)
- Raffles Dubai (opposite)
- Park Hyatt Dubai (p152)
- Al-Qasr, Madinat Jumeirah (p159)

Slated for renovation in 2008, rooms at the time of writing were respectably decorated, if small, but furnishings were old. The bed linens were exceptionally good – crisp white cotton duvet covers with plump feather pillows – a rarity in this price range. You'll find an adequate gym, a small pool, a hot tub and a British pub downstairs. The location is convenient for sightseeing, but taxis are hard to hail. Don't miss the excellent on-site [Antique Bazaar](#) (p112) Indian restaurant.

XVA ART HOTEL Map pp62-3 Boutique Hotel \$\$

☎ 353 5383; www.xvagallery.com; behind Basta Art Café, Al-Musallah Roundabout; s/d/st Dh650/700/800

Dubai's first guest house occupies a 100-year-old villa, complete with original wind-towers, in the heart of the historic Bastakia Quarter. Rooms open onto a courtyard doubling as a gallery and café. Each one is different, but all are decked out with local artwork, arabesque flourishes and rich colours. Best of all, you get the feeling of staying in a real Arabian guest house. Put XVA at the top of your list. No TVs. No alcohol.

SHEIKH ZAYED ROAD

Lined with giant towers, Sheikh Zayed Rd's biggest selling point is location: it's at the city's geographic centrepoint, making it great for exploring. Rates skew high, but fluctuate wildly with demand. Alas, rush-hour traffic is terrible.

THE PALACE, OLD TOWN

Map pp72-3 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 428 7888; www.sofitel.com; Old Town, Downtown Burj Dubai; r from Dh2200; 📍 🚗

In the shadow of the Burj Dubai, the Palace is among the city's top new luxury hotels.

JUMEIRAH

The primary advantage of staying in Jumeirah is its oh-so-civilized and calm beachside location. This is where Emiratis live in big villas. Note: heritage sights lie a good 20 minutes away.

BURJ AL ARAB Map pp76–7 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 301 7111; www.burj-al-arab.com; Jumeirah Rd, Umm Suqeim; r from Dh8500; 📍 🚗

We adore the exterior of Dubai's iconic sail-shaped hotel, but when we first saw the interior, we laughed and nicknamed it the Bourgeois à l'Arabe. Decorated in the Sheik's favourite colours – gold (of course), royal blue and blood red – it's the first-choice hotel of billionaire Russians of dubious background (one such guest was murdered in his suite here; Google 'murder at the Burj'). Rooms are l-u-s-h, with moiré silk walls, mirrored ceilings over the beds, curlicue high-backed velvet chairs, and inlaid bathroom tiles displaying scenes of Venice. But as for this seven-star-hotel business, we disagree: despite a six-to-one employee-guest ratio, the doormen didn't even hold the door on our last visit. Okay, okay – there are advantages to staying here, like being whisked through customs at the airport and the Rolls Royce limousine-transfer service, but if you can afford to stay here, you probably already have a Bentley. We suggest you stay at [Raffles \(p156\)](#) and come for drinks in the *Star Trek*-meets-Liberace Skyview Bar (reservations required but good luck getting an operator to pick up) and drop a hundred dollars on drinks instead of two thousand on a room.

AL-QASR, MADINAT JUMEIRAH

Map pp76–7 Resort \$\$\$

☎ 366 8888; www.madinatjumeirah.com; Al-Sufouh Rd, Umm Suqeim; d from Dh3400; 📍 🚗

Sister to [Mina A' Salam \(p160\)](#) Al-Qasr was styled after an Arabian summer palace. Details are extraordinary, like the lobby's Austrian-crystal chandeliers reflecting rainbows onto mirror-polished inlaid-marble floors. Rooms are styled with heavy arabesque architectural flourishes, rich colours, and cushy furnishings, including sumptuous beds and his-and-her bathroom amenities. The side-by-side balconies lack privacy, but overlook the grand display of the [Madinat \(p75\)](#). Excellent service, great beach.

Celebrities favour the Shangri-La. The understatedly sexy rooms in the 43-storey tower are like a Ferrari: everything is perfectly placed. The bedside console lets you adjust the lighting, set the a/c and do everything but close the curtains. Art is the focal point opposite the bed, not a giant flat-screen TV, and marble is conspicuously absent in the bath, replaced by smart grey-granite tiles. The rooftop pool is a happening gathering place for rich locals, and the stellar French-Vietnamese [Hoi An \(p115\)](#) merits a special trip. Great gym.

NOVOTEL WORLD TRADE CENTRE

Map pp72–3 Hotel \$\$

☎ 332 0000; www.novotel.com; behind World Trade Centre, Sheikh Zayed Rd; d from Dh860; 📍 🚗

The no-nonsense Novotel, behind the Sheikh Zayed strip, adjoins the convention centre. Rooms are smallish, but there's lots of desk space and a sofa. Furnishings are dated and amenities limited (no washcloths in the bath, wafer-thin soap, lumpy pillows), but the location is central and service friendly. The rectangular swimming pool is sufficient for laps, and there's a pretty good gym with circuit-training equipment.

IBIS WORLD TRADE CENTRE

Map pp72–3 Hotel \$

☎ 332 4444; www.ibishotel.com; behind World Trade Centre, Sheikh Zayed Rd; d from Dh450; 📍 🚗 Surprisingly stylish, this hotel's lobby makes promises the small rooms can't keep. But at this price and location, it's the best-value digs in Dubai. Sure, it'll probably be filled with convention-goers here for a plastics conference, and there are no views or a pool, but if our next cancelled flight sees us shuttled to an Ibis as good as this, we'll sleep happy.

top picks

HOTEL DINING

- [Shangri-La \(opposite\)](#)
- [One&Only Royal Mirage \(p162\)](#)
- [Radisson SAS Dubai \(p152\)](#)
- [Grosvenor House \(p162\)](#)
- [Hilton Dubai Creek \(p152\)](#)

lobby and big rooms. The look borders on chain-store modern, but it's fresh, with ultra-suede upholstery, bright-white linens and zero clutter. The palm-lined, blue-tiled pool is fab. Like its sister – both of them four-stars – it's not worth Dh2000, but you can often score way better rates.

AL-MANZIL Map pp72–3 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 428 5888; www.southernsun.com; Old Town, Downtown Burj Dubai; s/d Dh1950/2000; 📍 🚗

Arabesque meets mid-century modern at Al-Manzil. The open-floor-plan rooms (read: no wall between the bed and bath) are sexy, but not for shy couples. Baths sport giant rainfall showerheads and big soaking tubs surrounded by glass walls; beds have soft down duvets and crisp white-cotton sheets. The colour scheme is pure Dubai: ten shades of off-white. You'll love the 24-hour pool, but the deck needs more loungers.

AL-MUROOJ ROTANA HOTEL & SUITES Map pp72–3 Hotel/Apartment-Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 321 1111; www.rotana.com; Al-Saffa St; s/d 1300/1500; hotel apt from Dh2000; 📍 🚗

The overdone lobby clashes with itself and rooms can't decide whether they're formal-fancy or trendy, but overlook these sins in favour of location and in-room comforts like oversized tubs and big desks, a boon for business travellers. Note: book a 'complex view' overlooking the swimming pool, or deal with construction noise. The next-door hotel-apartments are sterile in design, but functional.

DUSIT DUBAI Map pp72–3 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 343 3333; www.dusit.com; Sheikh Zayed Rd, next to Interchange No 1; s/d Dh1500/1600; 📍 🚗

Shaped like an upside-down tuning fork, this is one of Dubai's most architecturally dramatic towers. The target market is the business traveller; rooms have big desks and oversized leather chairs, and the usual high-end amenities, like feather-light down pillows. Upper-floor views are stellar. The rooftop pool is good for laps (though overhead trusses partially block the sun). Onsite [Benjarong \(p115\)](#) is one of the city's top Thai tables.

SHANGRI-LA Map pp72–3 Hotel \$\$

☎ 343 8888; www.shangri-la.com; Sheikh Zayed Rd; s/d from Dh1100/1200; 📍 🚗

Silk-clad hostesses greet you with cool towels and fresh juice; a white-gloved butler escorts you to your room. Styled in soothing earth tones, the look is chic and understated – a refreshing change from Dubai's usual hit-you-over-the-head aesthetic. Bathrooms have inlaid marble floors, mother-of-pearl soap dishes, and Frisbee-sized rainfall showerheads. Plan to linger long by the vast palm-lined swimming pool while gazing up at the world's tallest tower.

FAIRMONT Map pp72–3 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 332 5555; www.fairmont.com; Sheikh Zayed Rd; s/d Dh2000/2200; 📍 🚗

The Fairmont is a distinctive sight at night when its four-poster towers are illuminated by changing coloured lights. There's nothing understated about this place, from the chrome-and-marble lobby to the white-leather desk chairs that recall Joan Collins' office in *Dynasty* (a renovation is slated for 2008). Still, it's a landmark hotel, with amenities to match, including float-away beds, Bose wave radios and deep bathtubs. The outlets are exceptional, especially the [Exchange Grill \(p115\)](#).

EMIRATES TOWERS Map pp72–3 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 330 0000; www.emiratestowershotel.com; Sheikh Zayed Rd; d from Dh2160; 📍 🚗

Arguably the top business hotel in the Middle East, Emirates Towers is one of Dubai's iconic hotels. The black-and-grey aesthetic is ultra-masculine and heavy on angular lines, and like the [Shangri-La \(right\)](#), the room layout is sleek and functional with fabulous in-room gadgets, chief among them a Bang & Olufsen TV. Club-executive rooms even have a radio-frequency USB plug to broadcast tunes from your computer to the TV. Alas, lower-floor bathrooms are disappointingly small. Solo women travellers should book the Chopard ladies' floor, where pink replaces grey and in-bath fridges let you chill your thousand-dollar face creams. Service is among Dubai's best.

QAMARDEEN Map pp72–3 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 428 6888; www.southernsun.com; Burj Dubai Blvd, Downtown Burj Dubai; s/d Dh1950/2000; 📍 🚗

Sister to the Al-Manzil, the Qamardeen manages to be hip but not overbearing, with bold splashes of colour in its soaring

DESERT DREAMS

Just an hour from the traffic jams, construction sites and megamalls are two stellar desert resorts. If you're craving a little peace and quiet, and are prepared to spend some serious money, these hotels will show you a calmer, less-hurried side of Dubai.

Bab al-Shams Desert Resort & Spa (Map p167; ☎ 832 6699; near Endurance Village; r from 2400) Bab al-Shams resort is the tonic for tourists seeking to indulge their *Arabian Nights* fantasies. While the Al-Hadheerah restaurant whirls dervishes, flies falcons, paints henna and rides camels in a production of Disneyesque proportions, the hotel is more restrained; it's a labyrinthine layout displaying both Gulf and Moorish influences. Rooms are gorgeous, spacious and evocatively earthy, with pillars, lanterns, paintings of desert landscapes and prettily patterned Bedouin-style cushions. Beyond desert tours, there's not a lot to do but cosy up with a book in hidden coves and alluring courtyards. There's a wonderful infinity pool where the water appears to merge with the desert landscape; the luscious, if expensive, Satori Spa; an archery range; and Sinbad's Club, which entertains kids from 9am to 6pm. We've heard murmurs that service is occasionally less than attentive, but if you get a good rate, a short stay will add dimension to your Dubai break.

Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa (Map p167; ☎ 303 4222; on Dubai–Al-Ain Rd; ste from Dh6170) When you really want to escape, book the most exclusive hotel in the emirate. Al-Maha is in the **Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve** (p166), where there's nothing for miles but rolling dunes. Privacy is the watchword: children under 12 and visitors aren't allowed; every suite comes with its own pool; and a three-to-one staff-to-guest ratio ensures proper pampering. Several outdoor activities are included in the room rate, including desert tours and camel rides; a conservation expert is on-hand to answer questions about the reserve. The 40 suites are like small houses, with elegant furnishings and intricate design flourishes, and the spa is tailor-made for sustained luxuriating. Dine on private verandas while looking at peach-coloured dunes, punctuated by mountains and grazing white oryx and gazelles. Paint, paper and easels are in your suite should you be inspired to sit on your balcony and capture the scene. Expect to shell out big money for the privilege of staying here.

MINA A' SALAM, MADINAT JUMEIRAH

Map pp76–7 Resort \$\$\$

☎ 366 8888; www.madinatjumeirah.com; Al-Sufouh Rd; r from Dh3000; 🚗 🚶

The entry-level hotel at the behemoth Madinat Jumeirah resort (which also includes Al-Qasr and Dar al-Masyaf) feels less palatial than its sisters (eg gold paint instead of gold leaf) but every spacious room has a private sea-facing balcony and the same luxe bed linens as the other properties. The best thing about staying at the **Madinat** (p75) is the sense of place. Yes, it's Disneyesque, but it's the only megaproject in Dubai that's actually finished.

JUMEIRAH BEACH HOTEL

Map pp76–7 Resort \$\$\$

☎ 348 0000; www.jumeirahbeachhotel.com; Jumeirah Rd, Umm Suqeim; s/d Dh2900/3000; 🚗 🚶

The most family-friendly of the Jumeirah Properties is shaped like a giant wave. The beach is huge (nearly 1km long), but the rooms need help: their bland pastel colour scheme is tired, as are their furnishings. Stellar Gulf views make up for some of the designer's missteps, as does the better-than-average service. Kids go nuts for the adjoining **Wild Wadi Waterpark** (p143).

DUBAI MARINE BEACH RESORT & SPA

Map pp76–7 Resort \$\$\$

☎ 346 1111; www.dxbmarine.com; Jumeirah Rd, Jumeirah; r from Dh2000; 🚗 🚶

You'll forgive the vintage-1980s condo box architecture when you consider the convenience of staying halfway between Deira and New Dubai at this compact beachside resort with meandering gardens, terrific restaurants and nightclubs, three pools, a well-equipped gym and a small sandy beach. Rooms are comfy, but display bland business-class design – it's the facilities that are great.

LA MAISON D'HÔTES

Map pp76–7 Boutique Hotel \$\$

☎ 344 1838; www.lamaisondhotesdubai.com; 83B St, off Al-Urouba; s/d Dh850/950, family ste Dh950/1050; 🚗 🚶

At last Dubai has a real boutique hotel, where you can live like a rich local at budget prices. In a residential neighbourhood near Jumeirah's shops, La Maison's quietly sophisticated, Arabian-style villas sit behind bougainvillea-covered walls, offering a great alternative to Dubai's behemoth hotels. Rooms are individually styled with oriental rugs, canopy beds and rich fabrics; mani-

cured gardens surround both swimming pools. Marvellous privacy and sense of place. Good onsite country-French restaurant.

RYDGES PLAZA

 Map pp62–3 Hotel \$\$

☎ 398 2222; www.rydges.com; Satwa Roundabout; s/d Dh650/750; 🚗 🚶

Along Al-Dhiyafah Rd, Dubai's most dynamic walking street, Rydges Plaza stands out for its respectable English-style dark-wood decor, an aesthetic soothing to

squeamish travellers. The sheets are thin, but bathrooms have big showerheads and oversized shower stalls. The location is central – a quick hop to the beach or Deira – and taxis are plentiful in the off hours. The health club has great circuit-training machines; the pool is good for laps.

FUSION HOTEL

 Map pp76–7 Boutique Hotel \$

☎ 478 7539; www.fusionhotels.com; off Al-Wasl Rd; s/d Dh450/550; 🚗

DEBUNKING THE FIVE-STAR MYTH: WHEN BUSINESS CLASS MASQUERADES AS FIRST

 John A Vlahides

From the iconic sail-shaped Burj Al Arab to the pyramid-shaped Raffles, Dubai is home to some of the world's most instantly recognisable hotels. But does the service measure up to the facilities? Some come close, but no Dubai hotel I found merits the rarefied ranking of a real five-star.

What constitutes true five-star service? In short, the primary difference between four- and five-star service lies in the anticipation of a guest's needs: a good hotel provides you with what you want before you know you want it. Here's an example. You're staying at a city hotel, say, in London and you step outside just as it starts to rain. Before you even ask, the doorman offers you an umbrella. Sure, any good four-star hotel stocks umbrellas, but only the five-star will thrust one into your hand at the exact moment that you need it, without you having to ask.

Dubai's hotels are staffed by inexperienced youths from developing countries, many of whom had never set foot inside a luxury hotel before working in one. Few employees speak the same language and are forced to communicate in English, their second or even third language. They can't rely on shared cultural gestures and nonverbal cues: misunderstandings constantly occur. Employees don't know basic hotel lingo, such as 'feather pillow' or 'alarm clock', let alone 'iPod docking station' or 'ethernet cable'.

Dubai Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) determines the star level of the city's hotels, but the system is based entirely on facilities. Thus, many hotels in Dubai are classed as five-stars. However, classification systems used elsewhere in the world, by organisations such as Michelin (in Europe, the UK and elsewhere) and Mobil Travel Guides (in North America), are based on anonymous visits by inspectors, as well as facilities. This makes the third Michelin star, or the fifth Mobil star, hard to get.

When I visited the hotels reviewed in this guidebook, I worked like a Michelin or Mobil inspector, considering service as well as facilities. I gave each hotel the benefit of the doubt by assuming it a five-star until it proved itself otherwise. Then I deducted points. I deducted a lot of points in Dubai.

Let's take the Burj Al Arab, the hotel most famous for hyping itself as the world's only 'seven-star' hotel. Psha, say I. To my eye, it's a four-star. Why? The doorman was missing in action, and nobody held the door for me when I arrived, even though a battalion of valets stood by as I approached, one within arm's distance of the front door. He smiled at me, then stood with his arms at his sides and watched as I opened the door myself. A small detail, yes, but the fifth star is entirely about small details. And at US\$2500 a night, there's no room for a mistake such as this, one which a demanding guest would consider a discourtesy.

The reason the valet didn't hold the door is at the heart of why Dubai's five-star-hotel service is weak: hotel employees live in fear of losing their employer-sponsored work visas, so they dare not go off script. The valet is hired to park cars, not open doors. But at a proper five-star, employees must be nimble, take initiative: honour first the guest, then the employee handbook.

The true measure of a hotel's service lies in how it handles problems. Anyone can steer a ship in calm seas, but only a master can navigate a gale. Thus, I present complex service requests when I visit a hotel. I won't reveal tactics, but I will say which hotels responded best. The number-one property I found in Dubai is **Raffles Dubai** (p156). Others that placed include **Emirates Towers** (p158); **One&Only Royal Mirage** (p162); **The Palace, Old Town** (p157); **Burj Al Arab** (p159); **Al-Qasr** (p159); and **Shangri-La** (p158). Fear not. You probably won't have any problems with the service at your hotel, unless you're particularly demanding, in which case, please take notes and send them my way.

Before becoming a guidebook writer, John A Vlahides was a senior concierge at a luxury hotel, and a member of Les Clefs d'Or, the international union of the world's elite concierges.

DUBAI'S DRAWING BOARD...

Five-star hotel openings in Dubai are as common as fashion shows in Paris – and they're greeted with nearly as much fanfare: Sheikh Mohammed himself personally inspects every one. Here's a short list of the big-name projects that are under way.

Armani Hotel (www.armanihotels.com) Another feather in Dubai's cap, Giorgio Armani will open his first hotel in the world's tallest tower, the Burj Dubai. The colour scheme in the mock-ups looks bland (how many shades of brown are there, anyway?) but with views like these, you'll hardly notice the furniture. Due 2008.

Hydropolis (www.hydropolis.com) If rumour is any indicator, the world's first underwater hotel seems a little too...er, fishy for us to believe. The date keeps getting pushed further back, and we'll be surprised if the hotel ever actually materialises. Opening TBA.

Palazzo Versace (www.palazzoversace.ae) Versace made its first foray into hotels on the glitzy Gold Coast, so it's fitting that the brand's second property should be located in Dubai, on the oil coast. The pedicured toes of guests will be spared the city's notoriously hot sands: plans are afoot for temperature-controlled sand. Due 2008.

Palm Trump International Hotel Publicity-magnet and developer Donald Trump is a natural for Dubai. So is his gold tulip-shaped hotel on the Palm Jumeirah, which actually looks more like several upended cockroaches covered in gold leaf. Opening TBA.

Atlantis The Palm (www.atlantisthepalm.com) This is one project we can't get behind. Also on the Palm Jumeirah, the Atlantis hauled 28 live dolphins 30 hours by air from the Solomon Islands to entertain guests in its new water park, despite protestations from environmental groups. Think twice before spending your money here. Opening 2008.

Live like a local at this remarkably well-priced B&B villa in a residential area. Though some of the austere decorated rooms could use some upgrades, like armoires instead of clothes racks, rates are terrific for what you get – privacy, space, breakfast and, best of all, the sense that you're a guest in someone's home.

NEW DUBAI

The furthest reaches of the city, New Dubai is where the beach hotels are concentrated. Inland lie several enormous malls and hotels good for shopping holidays.

ONE&ONLY ROYAL MIRAGE

Map pp82–3 Resort \$\$\$

☎ 399 9999; www.oneandonlyresorts.com; Al-Sufouh Rd; Palace/Arabian Court r from Dh2670/2930, Residence & Spa r from Dh4260; 📞 📺
Our favourite beach resort, the Royal Mirage consists of three parts: the Palace, done in Moorish style; the Arabian Court, which is more pan-Arabian; and the Residence & Spa, with its majestic spa and *hammam*. All the rooms face the sea, and though cushy, they lack the wow-factor of some of Dubai's flashier hotels, which is just why we like them: they're tasteful. Spend your days meandering through the lush palm-lined gardens, lollygagging in a cabana beside the giant pool, or strolling the 1km private

beach. You may never leave the grounds. The bars and restaurants are among Dubai's best. Note: score the best rates through tour operators and consolidators.

GROSVENOR HOUSE

Map pp82–3 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 399 8888; www.grosvenorhouse.leremidien.com; Dubai Marina; r from Dh2500; 📞 📺
Grosvenor House was the first hotel to open among the jumble of the Marina's sky-punching towers. Though there is a disconcerting amount of building still going on around the hotel, all rooms have drop-dead views over The Palm development, a fascinating sight. The look is sleek and angular, with black-wood and chrome furniture, giant flat-panel TVs and lots of high-tech gadgetry. Beds have zillion-thread-count linens and even come with a pillow menu. Downstairs is the famous **Buddha Bar** (p130). One drawback: the beach is across the road and shared with Le Royal Meridien – if screaming kids don't factor into your holiday vision, choose the Royal Mirage or Westin.

LE ROYAL MERIDIEN

Map pp82–3 Resort \$\$\$

☎ 399 5555; www.leroyalmeridien-dubai.com; Al-Sufouh Rd; r from Dh2350; 📞 📺
A giant stretch of beach and extensive gardens are the standout features of this tower-hotel resort with three swimming pools, spa, top-notch health-club facilities,

numerous restaurants and a bar every 50m. Though kids have their own dedicated pool, they're everywhere: this is not a place for honeymooning couples, but families are very happy.

RITZ-CARLTON DUBAI

Map pp82–3 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 399 4000; www.ritzcarlton.com; Al-Sufouh Rd; r from Dh2300; 📞 📺
The first Ritz-Carlton in the Middle East opened in 1998, when New Dubai was still the middle of nowhere. Now high-rises loom above, but the mature gardens and tall palms create a visual berm. The Mediterranean villa-style resort is typical of the chain's restrained and elegant European style – conservative, but cushy – with plush fabrics, marble foyers and Colonial-style hardwood furniture. All 138 rooms face the gardens and sea beyond. Spend the day by one of three pools or the expansive beach.

WESTIN MINA SEYAH

Map pp82–3 Resort \$\$\$

☎ 399 4141; www.starwood.com; Al-Sufouh Rd; r from Dh2000; 📞 📺
The top choice for water-sports enthusiasts, this spiffy beach resort sits smack next to the yacht harbour and aesthetically appears like a cross between a Sheikh's summer palace and an Italian palazzo – big and angular, topped with Arabian-style wind-towers, and surrounded by expansive beachfront grounds. The oversized, hyper-masculine rooms look sharp – clean lines, chunky furniture, and chocolate-brown and charcoal-grey accents. Oversized desks reveal that this is also a business hotel. As at all Westins, the biggest selling point is the ultracush Heavenly Bed. Baths have enough marble to sink the QE2, which will moor permanently in view of the ocean-view rooms. The hotel shares facilities with the neighbouring **Le Meridien Mina Seyahi** (right).

top picks

BOUTIQUE HOTELS

- XVA Art Hotel (p157)
- La Maison d'Hôtes (p160)
- Orient Guest House (p156)
- Fusion Hotel (p161)

LE MERIDIEN MINA SEYAH RESORT

Map pp82–3 Resort \$\$\$

☎ 399 3333, watersports centre 318 1372; www.leremidien-minaseyahi.com; Al-Sufouh Rd; r from Dh1800, with sea view Dh2000; 📞 📺
Families love this beachfront hotel for its extensive activities, from diving to tennis. It has a giant freeform pool, meandering palm-tree-lined gardens and a big beach. All 210 rooms are in an ugly, dated tower; they're comfortable enough, but frankly need renovating. Better to choose the neighbouring Westin, which shares facilities.

KEMPINSKI

Map pp82–3 Hotel \$\$\$

☎ 341 0000; www.kempinski-dubai.com; Al-Barsha; r from Dh1600; 📞 📺
Adjoining the Mall of the Emirates, the Kempinski is tops for a shopping holiday. The cavernous white-marble lobby is predictable. What stands out are the rooms' bathrooms: tubs are enormous, as are the travertine, sit-down shower stalls and their rainfall showerheads. Pretend you're in Aspen in the premium 'Ski Chalet' rooms overlooking Ski Dubai; alas, they get no sun. Good gym. Great beds.

HILTON DUBAI JUMEIRAH

Map pp82–3 Resort \$\$\$

☎ 399 1111; www.hilton.com; Al-Sufouh Rd; r from Dh1500; 📞 📺
Though overshadowed by the massive Jumeirah Beach Residence on its inland side, the Hilton remains a good choice for a family vacation. Rooms are nothing special – think pastel boxes – but most face the sea, and it has a generous stretch of beach, a playground, baby-sitting, casual eateries and kids' activities. The hotel's top restaurant, **BiCE** (p120), serves the most authentic Italian in Dubai.

CORP EXECUTIVE HOTEL

Map pp82–3 Apartment Hotel \$

☎ 341 7474; www.boutiquehotelsandresorts.com; Al-Barsha; r from Dh600; 📞 📺
Despite the lobby's annoying stadium lighting, the Corp is a solid, if sterile, place to stay when you need an apartment hotel in the middle of Dubai's ever-extending city limits. Appliances are new, beds comfy and the washing machine a godsend. And it's right next to the Mall of the Emirates. Tip: hail taxis at the nearby Kempinski Hotel.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'