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ARABIAN GEMS

Karen Worrall offers ideas for Middle Eastern cities to visit, with a fascinating combination of ancient tradition and state-of-the-art modernity

If you like Doha... visit

DUBAI



Dubai might seem like a super-modern city but there's plenty of history here. Settlement around Dubai's heart — Dubai Creek — began four millennia ago, the modern city established when the Bani Yas tribe settled here in the 1830s. Deira, on the north side, contains the world's largest gold souk, and the fragrant spice souk. Cross Dubai Creek on an atmospheric *abra* (wooden ferry), or cruise along it on a century-old dhow. Bur Dubai on the south side is home to Al Fahidi, the heritage district. Learn about the original Emirati industries of pearling and fishing at the Dubai Museum in Al-Fahidi Fort and the 18th century Sheikh Saeed Al-Maktoum House. The alleyways of the atmospheric Bastakia Quarter are packed with minaret-laden Arabian architecture. The Heritage and Diving Village recreates Bedouin and coastal life with Persian homes, coffee houses and belly dance shows. Just a 20 minute drive out of town it's possible to dune bash in a 4x4, ride a camel, or sleep under the Lahbab desert stars.

Dubai cityscape
at sunrise

IMAGE: GETTY



If you like Singapore... try
ABU DHABI

The spectacular skyline of the Middle East's first global city is best viewed from its highest point on the 74th floor at Jumeirah at Etihad Towers Hotel. The decade-old Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque is a must-see, with its Taj Mahal-esque white domes, opulent Persian carpets and mosaics combining Islamic, Mughal and Moorish architecture. Yas Island attracts families and adrenaline junkies – Ferrari World has the world's fastest rollercoaster and Yas Waterworld the world's largest surf-able artificial wave. Saadiyat Island's Cultural Quarter contains the Louvre Abu Dhabi, Manarat al Saadiyat visitor center and UAE Pavilion (with the Zayed National Museum and Abu Dhabi Guggenheim in the works). Visit the Hawksbill sea turtles nesting there, or connect with the symbol of the United Arab Emirates at the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital.

IMAGE: GETTY

Sea and skyscrapers in Abu Dhabi