

EXECUTIVE LIFE



Desert Luxury

A burgeoning oasis, Dubai is the new “in” place for the vacationing CEO. **BY REBECCA FANNIN**

New York City entrepreneur Grace Gallo is three years away from turning 50, but she’s already emailing friends and family to save the date for a big birthday bash abroad. The location? A place unthinkable just five years ago: Dubai.

She briefly considered Egypt but selected the bustling Middle Eastern outpost with its over-the-top hotels, restaurants and nightclubs for her early September celebration—even though she knows Dubai will be blaringly hot then. She’s planning to blow out her birthday candles at the \$666-

per-night Burj Al hotel, a sail-like shaped landmark on the Arabian coast. It gets seven stars for its all-duplex suites, 24-hour butler service, roof-top helicopter pad, underwater bar and Rolls Royce fleet.

“I managed to get 50 people to come to Vienna and stay at the Danieli (Hotel) for a Venetian ball on my 40th birthday, so I think I can do this,” says Gallo, an Italian-born, Australian native who runs export marketing consultancy Gallaco from an office in Rockefeller Center.

Dubai is inspiring more global-minded execs like Gallo,

who has worked in China and traveled worldwide, to sample Arabia in this safe cosmopolitan oasis of more than 1.2 million people.

Business-class passengers arriving in Dubai after an overnight flight on Emirates Airways feel fairly refreshed, thanks to such comforts as self-adjusting, vibrating seats that recline to become bed hideaways, wireless in-flight email, personalized video on demand and French champagne. Met by a representative of Emirates, they are whisked through immigration courtesy of a no-fee visa instantly granted at the airport and escorted to a curbside Mercedes for a 10-minute ride into the city. Along the wide Sheikh Zayed boulevard cutting north-south through the city, neon signs and gleaming skyscrapers set against a desert landscape remind one of Las Vegas.

Though Arabic is the official language here, English is widely spoken and one could almost forget that one is in the Middle East if not for the large number of mosques in the city, the occasional palace and the traditional Arab clothing of the locals. First-time visi-

tors quickly discover that Dubai's shops and museums are closed on Thursdays and Fridays but reopen on Saturday morning and that alcohol is not served in hotels during Islamic religious holidays and not in restaurants outside the hotels at any time.

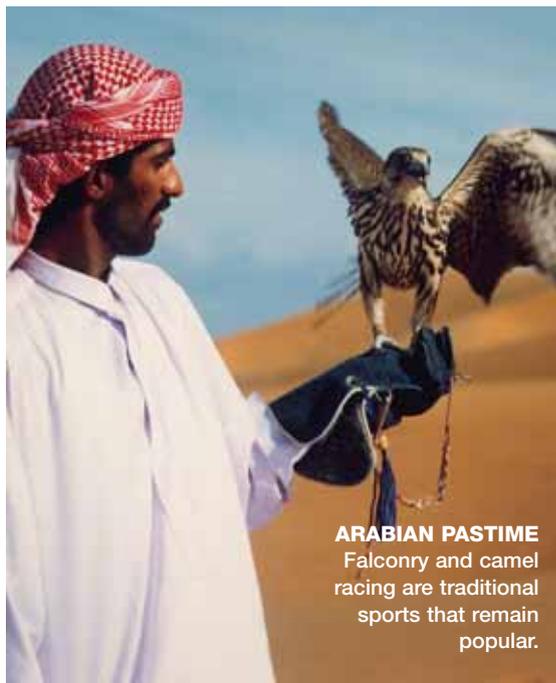
Although a recent terrorist attack in nearby Bahrain gave pause to some international business travelers, Dubai has so far avoided the political conflicts of the Middle East. A small coastal village in the 1830s, but today one of seven making up the United Arab Emirates, Dubai is emerging as an "in" destination.

Nearby Doha and Qatar may vie for the title, but Dubai is becoming the region's hub for business. Tourism is one of the growth engines and the number of hotel guests swelled in 2003 by 5 percent to 5 million, many of them are Brits and Germans who came to soak up the bright sunshine at the numerous luxury resorts lining the shores of the Arabian Gulf. Travel from the U.S. is picking up, too, after a dip following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks; the number of U.S. visitors increased to 126,000 in 2003 from 94,000 the year before. Helping boost the numbers is a new, 12-hour direct flight from New York's John F. Kennedy airport to Dubai by Emirates Airways with free stopovers and bargain hotel rates for passengers en route to Asia or Africa.

Attracted by strong economic growth, entrepreneurs have poured in from nearby countries. Some 80 percent of Dubai's citizens hail from other regions of the world, many of them from India. Local Indian entrepreneur Kulwant Singh runs Lama Desert Tours & Cruises, the city's first privately owned tour operator. Lama offers spine-

tingling, jeep caravan rides into the desert, roller coaster riding over the dunes. His company's all-teak traditional dhow or cabin cruiser takes visitors on dinner cruises along Dubai Creek for a quick overview of the city.

Grandiose, Dubai is. Ads proclaim nearly every hotel, restaurant, nightclub, shows, shopping mall or real estate developments as the largest, priciest or most luxurious of them all. One of the most popular resorts is referred to even by locals only by its full name, The One and Only Royal Mirage. Just north of the Mirage, on landfill in the shape of a palm tree,



ARABIAN PASTIME
Falconry and camel racing are traditional sports that remain popular.

IF YOU GO Dubai



Top Hotels and Resorts

Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa

P.O. Box 7631
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
971-4-832-9900
www.al-maha.com

Burj Al Arab

(pictured above)
P.O. Box 74147
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
971-4-301-7777
www.burj-al-arab.com

Madinat Jumeirah

P.O. Box 75157
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
971-4-330-0111
www.madinatjumeirah.com

One & Only Royal Mirage

Jumeirah Beach
P.O. Box 37252
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
971-4-399-9900
www.oneandonlyroyalmirage.com

Emirates Towers Hotel

P.O. Box 72127
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
971-4-330-0000
www.emiratestowershotel.com

EXECUTIVE LIFE

some 2,000 villas, hotels, shopping centers and cinemas are rising.

The project is already sold out and the developer, Nakheel, is planning two, larger island developments—one with 300 raw islands in the shape of a globe. Investors can buy part or all of a “country,” and one investor wound up buying all the islands that make up the shape of Australia, according to Jacqui Josephson, a nonstop marketing exec (what’s a “nonstop marketing exec?”) for The Palm project. She says it’s up to investors to decide how to use the property—private island, golf resort, executive retreat or whatever.

There’s no shortage of things to do in Dubai. For sports fans, the calendar of

events is packed in all but the hottest summer months with the Dubai Marathon, the Tennis Open, the Desert Classic, the World Cup, the Duty Free Grand Prix and so on. For golfers, the city has six championship courses.

Plenty to buy in Dubai

Tired of sports? Try shopping. How about the month-long Dubai Shopping Festival starting in mid-January? It attracts more than 5 million visitors who come for the retail pavilions and carnivals and also the chance to win daily raffle prizes, ranging from 1 kilo of gold to Lexus cars to villas. And don’t forget the well-stocked and crowded gold and

spice souks or the high-fashion boutiques and electronic shops in any one of Dubai’s 30 and growing shopping malls. The airport itself is a gigantic duty-free shopping zone. Raffles are held regularly and winners drive away in a brand-new Porsche or Jaguar. One lucky London advertising executive brags that he won two of the cars; he sold one and had the other shipped home.

For the adventuresome, the desert beckons. Try an overnight safari in the desert to see isolated villages, camel farms and the Hajar mountains in the distance [Bok?]. Experience sand skiing down the dunes; imaginably a lot like surfing. After the sun goes down, try a traditional Arabian barbe-



UNDER THE LIGHTS
Night golf at the Nad Al Sheba Club, the only fully lit golf course in the Middle East.

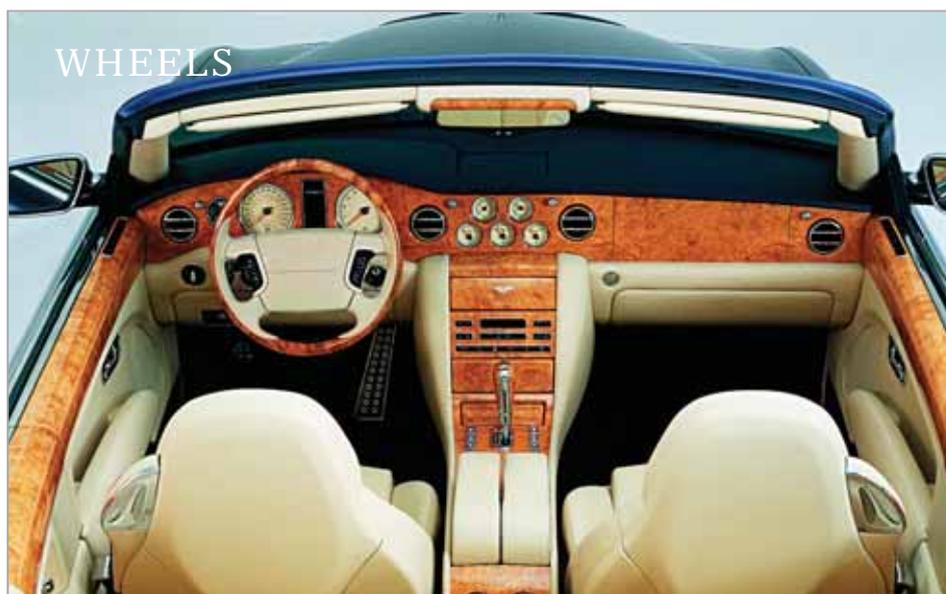
cue of spiced lamb while sitting under the stars and afterwards, take in a belly dance performance.

A highly romantic experience can be had at the Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa, with 41 Bedouin-style suites outfitted with private plunge pools overlooking a vast desert conservation reserve. Camel rides, horse back riding, falconry displays and archery are but a few of the amusements here.

Back in the city, the choice of hotels comes down to city or beachfront properties. In the city, the Emirates Towers looks eerily like the Twin Towers but has been named one of the best business hotels in the world for its many must-haves: fitness facilities, executive lounge, rooftop restaurants and bars, conference facilities and quick access to corporate offices.

At the beach, there's the usual assortment of Ritz-Carlton hotels, and the like, plus a newly opened high-end Arabian resort called Madinat Jumeirah, owned by the same group that operates the close-by Burj Al Arab. A re-recreation of an ancient Arabian village, the extra-large property, features two hotels (one like a palace; the other like a citadel) and 29 traditional courtyard summer houses with private pools. The resort also has a full-scale souk, tennis courts, a spa and its best feature: a wraparound lagoon with numerous canals and waterways for travel by water taxi anywhere in the resort. Seemingly, no expense has been spared, including a conference area large enough to host a World's Fair.

While some say Dubai verges on being ridiculous, Jonathan Howell-Jones, a marketing official with Dubai Internet City who relocated from rainy Britain, takes umbrage. "We're here, right? And we're not going. The taxes are low, the healthcare system is good and the weather is just about like this for eight months of the year," he says, pointing to a clear-blue sky on a 99-degree day, the wind blowing lazily through the palm trees. ▲



Cars for Connoisseurs

Pricey wheels combine top style, with performance to match

BY HERB SHULDINER

It won't do to have the chief executive of a major public company to drive around in a Rolls-Royce these days, given the tough regulatory and governance environment. But a guy who owns his own company can drive whatever he wants. "Most of my customers are just 'regular guys,'" says Brian Miller, proprietor of Manhattan Motorcars in New York, one of the nation's top retailers of super-luxury cars.

Only a small fraction of his customers are famous entertainers, athletes or heads of big public companies. But 44 regular non-celebrity guys and gals plunked down at least \$350,000 for a

Rolls-Royce Phantom at his dealership last year. Additional customers bought a Bentley Arnage or other super luxury cars from him. He's one of only about three dozen dealers in the country who sell ultra-posh cars that comprise a tiny fraction of the overall market.

"Many people can afford the super luxury auto, but few buy them," says Milton Silverstein, a senior partner of the Boston Consulting Group. "The \$150,000-plus car buyer is a rare species in today's world of a million millionaires." There are more \$10 million homes in Naples, Fla., than Rolls-Royces, he notes. Despite the small