DESIGN IN THE DESERT
The Architecture of Dubai and Abu Dhabi
What a few decades ago was mainly empty desert is now Dubai’s skyline — one of the world’s most distinctive and rapidly growing. With the help of massive cash investments from the government and foreign investors, hundreds of imaginative skyscrapers have sprung up. These include ambitious building projects such as the Burj Al Arab, designed to mimic the shape of a traditional sail; the Palm Jumeirah, a man-made archipelago on an unprecedented scale in the shape of a palm tree; and the Burj Khalifa, the tallest skyscraper in the world. The variety of designs is highly eclectic — the result of influence from both Arab and international architectural and design firms. After exploring the highlights of Dubai, travel to the neighboring emirate of Abu Dhabi — the capital of the UAE and home to extravagant architecture such as the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque. Learn about the complex relationship the two emirates share when it comes to designing buildings and the economics behind their growth. Delve also into the darker side of such rapid expansion — accusations of worker abuse and human rights violations. Come away with a balanced perspective and new insight into this fascinating and dynamic part of the world.
DAY 1  Welcome to Dubai

Arrive at Dubai International Airport and transfer to your hotel. Enjoy a welcome dinner tonight aboard the Bateaux Dubai. Enjoy dinner and drinks while gliding over the Dubai Creek channel in luxury as your expert introduces you to the city’s architectural history. (D)

DAY 2  Old Dubai

Explore the cultural side of Dubai today. Begin with a visit to the Dubai Museum inside the Al Fahidi Fort, built in 1787. Walk through the local textile market. Then board a water taxi to reach the spice and gold souks in Deira. Pause for lunch at Al Dawaar — Dubai’s only revolving restaurant — which provides changing views of the water and cityscape. The afternoon will be at leisure. Gather this evening for a presentation on the architecture of the UAE. Discuss the history of the Emirates, current building projects and the sites that the group will visit tomorrow. (B, L)

DAY 3  New Dubai

Take part in a packed, all-day architectural tour of Dubai. This full itinerary includes the most unusual and ambitious architecture in the region. Begin at the Nakheel Development Center, a government-owned organization responsible for many of the largest building projects in Dubai. Continue to one of Nakheel’s projects, the Palm Jumeirah. Ride the monorail for an up-close look at this man-made archipelago crafted in the shape of an enormous palm tree. Other visits today include Dubai Marina, home to hundreds of skyscrapers constructed within the last five years. Pause for lunch at the Souk Madinat Jumeirah. After lunch, explore Business Bay and downtown Dubai and catch your first glimpse of the Burj Khalifa, the world’s tallest skyscraper. Dine this evening at a restaurant overlooking the channel’s waterfront. (B, L, D)
DAY 4    Only in Dubai

After breakfast, depart for the Mall of the Emirates, the largest mall in the world. This massive complex is much more than a shopping center. It is also home to Ski Dubai, the first indoor ski resort in the Middle East as well as a remarkable architectural achievement. This unique structure includes five ski slopes and a 400-meter ski run. Learn from your expert just what kind of planning was required to create a snowy 85-meter-high mountain in the desert. Return to the Burj Khalifa for a special experience: Travel to an observation deck on the 124th floor for unparalleled views of the city. Dine this evening inside the opulent Burj al Arab, Dubai’s iconic hotel created in the shape of a ship’s sail. Gather for an elegant dinner at Al Mahara. Instead of walls, the restaurant is lined with a floor-to-ceiling aquarium. (B, D)

DAY 5    To Abu Dhabi

Check out of your Dubai hotel and depart for Abu Dhabi, a 1.5-hour drive. Along the way, your expert will discuss the complex and often competitive relationship between Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Each seeks to outdo the other, investing in ambitious and costly building projects — with mixed success. Check in to Le Méridien Abu Dhabi and enjoy the afternoon at leisure. Those who wish may explore the nearby YAS shopping mall. Dine as a group this evening at Rozanah restaurant, which specializes in Lebanese and Middle Eastern cuisine. (B, D)
DAY 6 Exploring Abu Dhabi

Depart for a full day exploring the architecture of Abu Dhabi. Visit the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, an elegant place of worship that took an international team nearly a decade to complete. The grounds are large enough to accommodate 40,000 worshipers, making it the largest mosque in the UAE. It was designed as an international project, utilizing materials and artisans from Morocco, Pakistan, India, Italy, Greece and many other countries. The ornate carpet in the main hall is considered the largest in the world. Reflecting pools that run alongside the arcade shine light onto the mosque's 96 columns, which are inlaid with mother-of-pearl. See the Sheikh Zayed Bridge, said to be among the most intricate ever created. Head to YAS Marina Circuit — the home of the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix — and pass by the nearby Ferrari World, an indoor theme park notable as the largest space frame structure ever made. Tour the under-construction MASDAR city, a planned city that seeks to run exclusively off renewable energy. Visit the newly constructed Louvre in Abu Dhabi. This evening, toast the end of your trip to the United Arab Emirates with dinner at Safina Restaurant. (B, D)

ACCOMMODATIONS

4 NIGHTS Novotel Dubai Al Barsha The Novotel Dubai features a beautiful hanging garden and views of the Persian Gulf. Guests can enjoy the on-site Balance Spa, pool and attentive service.

2 NIGHTS Le Méridien Abu Dhabi This four-star resort hotel features a beach, pool, lush gardens and more than a dozen dining options.

DAY 7 Departure

Travelers depart for Abu Dhabi International Airport for individual flights home. (B)

EXPEDITION EXPERTS

Christopher Hawthorne
November Departure

Christopher Hawthorne was the architecture critic for the Los Angeles Times from 2004 to 2018. Before coming to The Times, he was architecture critic for Slate and a frequent contributor to The New York Times. He is the author, with Alanna Stang, of “The Green House: New Directions in Sustainable Architecture.” Hawthorne grew up in Berkeley and has a bachelor’s degree from Yale, where he readied himself for a career in criticism by obsessing over the design flaws in his dormitory, designed by Eero Saarinen.

Phoebe Crisman
December Departure

Phoebe Crisman teaches architecture, urbanism and sustainability at the University of Virginia. She is a professor of architecture and directs the Global Environments + Sustainability program. Crisman has received more than 30 major awards for her work designing more resilient and just communities. She is passionate about design and has led many study trips to cities in Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America, including two Semester at Sea voyages.
DATES & PRICING

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All ground transportation within the itinerary unless otherwise indicated
All sightseeing as specified in the itinerary
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Gratuities to porters, drivers and guides for all included arrangements
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WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

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Travel and trip cancellation insurance
Passport, visa, airport departure and baggage fees
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Personal items such as telephone, fax and Internet charges, laundry, room service and alcoholic or other beverages not specified as included
Gratuities for non-group services
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Expenses incurred in making individual travel arrangements in conjunction with the trip, and sightseeing not included in the itinerary

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