

## ENTERTAINMENT

### top picks

- New Asia Bar & Club (p127)
- Troyka (p127)
- Bar 44 (p130)
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- QD's (p134)

A night on the town is a big deal in Dubai, and despite the municipality's efforts to curtail excessive noise, every night of the week you'll find a place to whoop it up. The big nights are Thursday and Friday – Dubai's weekend nights – when expats burn off steam from their 12-hour-a-day work weeks. And boy, do they like to drink. Plan to head to hotels which, along with major sporting venues, are the only places licensed to serve alcohol. This concentration of bars in hotels by definition makes them touristy. In Dubai there's no such thing as an independent, out-of-the-way neighbourhood pub that nobody knows about.

Finding the right bar can be tricky. Dubai is a city of new money and playground of the parvenu, as much as it's a city of expat workers trying to advance their careers and save some tax-free cash. You're in Dubai either to dump your wallet or fill it. Choosing an appropriate bar depends on the people with whom you want to rub shoulders. Wanna get a sense of the social lives of resident workers? Follow the expats. Wanna feature that new Marc Jacobs outfit you just bought? Follow the glam crowd. And then there are the niche bars, places frequented by, say, Russian oligarchs or British footballers. Wherever you wander, don't expect to strike up many conversations; most people in Dubai stick to their cliques. Occasionally you'll spot a random *dishdasha*-clad local breaking ranks with his countrymen (and the law) by drinking alongside Westerners, but this is an anomaly. We've endeavoured in our reviews to paint a picture of who frequents which bars and clubs to help you choose, but we highly recommend you stray from your comfort zone and visit a few of each to get a representative sampling of what Dubai's nightlife is all about.

DJs spin nearly every night of the week (except during Ramadan), with regular one-off dance events. The repertoire is global – funk, soul, house (lots of house), trip-hop, hip-hop, R&B, African, Arabic and Latino. Though most hotels engage full-time ensembles, they're basically cover bands: there's a lack of innovative local musical talent.

Nights can be long, but they never end at dawn. Clubs and bars officially close by 3am, smaller venues at 1am. Start early with sunset cocktails, head to dinner, then follow up with post-dinner drinks before hitting a dance club. Afterward soak up the booze with a late-night shawarma. The fancy-pants bars are concentrated around Jumeirah and New Dubai. The seedy places are at cheap hotels in Bur Dubai and Deira; working girls are common – too common – but there are also some gritty-fun ethnic bars here worth a visit.

Alcohol is expensive (see boxed text, p126) but that doesn't stop rowdy Westerners from downing pint after shot after pint. Nurse your drinks or you'll shell out a lot of dirhams. The irony is, it can be hard – really hard – to catch the eye of a bartender. Long waits at the rail are common at crowded venues. Conversely, waiters are trained to upsell guests (though not usually trained in the fine art of service). If you hear, 'Would you like another round?' make clear exactly who at the table wants one or you may wind up with a full table of glasses – and a hefty bill. Likewise if you order a bottle of wine; waiters often empty a bottle into one person's glass, rather than divvy the last of it up between everyone's, then look at those whose glasses are empty and ask, 'Another bottle?' Don't be duped. When there's not much left in the bottle, keep it out of the waiter's hand.

If you're not up for drinking, plan to hit the mellow *sheesha* cafés and play a game of backgammon. This is where you'll spot locals. Emiratis don't like to be around alcohol, but they sure love coffee. You could also take in a movie, but we've got our reservations about cinemas in Dubai. For more on the subject, see p135.

It's best not to criss-cross the city on a weekend; traffic is abominable on Thursday and Friday nights, and taxis can be hard to come by. Stick to a particular area or two, such as New Dubai and Jumeirah, or Deira and Bur Dubai. And under no circumstance should you ever get behind the wheel of a car if you've had even one drink. The authorities will lock you up and throw away the key. Seriously.

## BARS & CLUBS

Multicultural Dubai has a range of bars and pubs to match your mood, from gritty to

glam. Though they're touristy, plan to visit a beach bar in New Dubai to see the sun set over the gulf – a quintessential Dubai experience; a fancy spot, whether it be a dance club or a

## NIGHTS ON THE TOWN

It's wise – and cost-effective – to stick to one area of town for a night out. There's no better buzz-kill than Dubai's weekend traffic. Here are some favourite nights out, by neighbourhood.

### Bur Dubai

Wafi City and the Grand Hyatt hotel are solid options for a night out because they're within walking distance of each other and provide a varied selection of bars and restaurants. At Wafi, you could start with wine and cheese at **Vintage** (p127) or soak up the views over fancy cocktails atop Raffles hotel at **New Asia Bar** (p127). For dinner consider the Indian party scene at **Asha's** (p112) or the Asian cooking at **Thai Chi** (p112). For a serious splurge, book a table at **Fire & Ice** (p110). You could pep it up with post-dinner drinks at **Ginseng** (p126). Or head to the Grand Hyatt for something mellow. There's a good selection of wines at the Grand's mellow Vinoteca. For a sexy Indian tandoori dinner, head to **lp** (p110) or book a table (late) at Lebanese **Awtar** (p111), which can turn into its own big night out. To dance to Arab pop and live DJs, hit the dance floor at **MIX** (p132), but the hands-down best club is a short taxi ride from either Wafi or the Grand: **Chi@The Lodge** (p131).

### Deira

Begin with a quiet pre-dinner drink at **Issimo** (p126), before having the ultimate top-end dinner at Gordon Ramsay's **Verre** (p107). Alternatively book a window table for Persian at **Shabestan** (p107) and tap your toe to the fantastic all-Iranian band. If you're feeling mellow after dinner, stroll along the waterfront and watch dockworkers loading the *dhow*s. To coo with your date over a snifter of brandy, head to intimate, sometimes lively **Ku-Bu** (p126), or sink into a sofa and time-travel back to the 1970s at the often-empty **Velvet Lounge** (p126).

### Sheikh Zayed Road

Start the evening with a glass of wine at the Emirates Towers location of **Agency** (p127) – it's beside the escalators of the Boulevard shopping centre – or a fancy cocktail high in the sky at **Vu's** (p128). Have a casual supper at **Noodle House** (p117) or a Lebanese feast at stately **Al-Nafoorah** (p116). If it's a weekend and you're in the mood for live music, pop over to the Novotel for jazz and Belgian beer at **Blue Bar** (p133). If you're featuring a new ensemble and want to show it off, sip French champagne at glittering **Cin-Cin** (p128). For something in between, consider cocktails with the mixed crowd at thump-thump **Lotus One** (p128).

### Jumeirah & New Dubai

Chill out with sunset drinks on the veranda at **Bahri Bar** (p128) or swill margaritas at **Maya** (p130). For maximum splash, book pre-sunset drinks at the **Skyview Bar** (p129) atop the Burj Al Arab (reservations essential). Sup at one of the Royal Mirage's stellar restaurants – **Tagine** (p121), **Eauzone** (p120) or **Nina** (p121) – then swill post-dinner drinks at the **Rooftop Bar** (p130) or recline on cushions at the atmospheric **Sheesha Courtyard** (p134). If you're up for a trip around the dance floor, head to the Moroccan club **Kasbar** (p132). If drinking and dancing are your top priorities, skip a sit-down meal and start at Madinat Jumeirah's **Agency** (p128) for vino and tapas, followed by drinks at the lounge-y **Left Bank** (p129), and live music and more snacks at the bar of **Jam Base** (p133). If you prefer to stay in Jumeirah, start out at **Sho Cho** (p129), then throw back tequila and salsa-dance at **Malecon** (p129). Once the clock strikes 1am, turn it out on the dance floor at swanky **Boudoir** (p131).

lounge, to giggle at arrivistes in impossibly high heels; and an expat bar to catch a buzz with overworked Westerners laughing too loudly. If you like to make your own discoveries, put down your guidebook and wander the ethnic backstreets of Deira, find a bar in a no-star hotel, maybe an Iranian or Filipino club, and soak up the colour (for a headstart, check the low-end listings in the Sleeping chapter, p151). Don't overlook your own hotel bar, even if – especially if – you're staying in a dive; you may be surprised by a goofy house band and wacky floorshow.

Bars are open until 1am or 3am; alcohol service is illegal between 4pm and 6pm

Fridays and Saturdays. Drink prices are ridiculous (see the boxed text, p126). You could pay anything from Dh20 to Dh40 for a pint of beer or Dh25 to Dh100+ for a glass of wine, depending on quality and vintage. Hotels usually add a 10% service charge. Tip a few dirhams per round. Take heart: nearly all bars in Dubai offer drink specials at nonpeak times, happy hours, and ladies' nights when women drink free. (Dubai's population is 75% male; bars are desperate to pad the room with gals.) For current specials, check **Mumtazz** (www.mumtazz.com). Some bars accept reservations for tables; call ahead.

## WHY ALCOHOL COSTS SO MUCH: THE TAX FORMULA

Alcohol costs a small fortune in Dubai because it's forbidden by Islam. Understanding the importance of booze to tourism, the municipality allows it, but slaps on a hefty *haram* tax – in short, a sin tax. Here's the formula.

A bottle of California plonk that costs US\$10 wholesale automatically incurs a 50% import tax, upping the importer's price to \$15. Add a 33% profit for the importer, and now it costs \$20. The Dubai-based purchaser (ie, the hotel that sells it to the consumer) pays a 30% tax. Now it costs US\$26 – at wholesale. The hotel then marks up the price 200% to make its profit and pay its employees. Now it costs about \$75. At the moment of sale, the public pays an additional 20%, jacking up the final retail price to a whopping \$90.

Prices aren't going to come down anytime soon: a duopoly controls all the alcohol sales in Dubai. If drinking is important to you, buy your alcohol at duty-free before leaving the airport. Otherwise, you may get the jitters when you see your bar bill.

## DEIRA

### ISSIMO Map pp54–5

☎ 227 1111; Hilton Dubai Creek, Baniyas Rd;  
🕒 7am–1am

Illuminated blue flooring, black-leather sofas and sleek chrome finishing lend a James Bond look to this sports-and-martini bar, popular with middle-aged men. If you're not into sports – or TV – you may find the giant-screen TVs distracting. Good for drinks before dining at [Verre by Gordon Ramsay](#) (p107).

### JULES BAR Map pp56–7

☎ 282 4040; Le Meridien Dubai, Al-Garhoud;  
weekend cover including two drinks Dh80;  
🕒 11am–3am

The six-piece Filipino house band kicks, twirls and belts out top-40 hits, while an odd mix of oil workers, southeast Asians and European flight crews (especially on Fridays) grind shoulder-to-shoulder on the floor. If you're over 40, you'll hate it – unless you're as hammered as everyone else – but you just have to dig those charcoal portraits of Whitney and Mariah. The outdoor terrace is way mellower and charges no cover.

### KU-BU Map pp54–5

☎ 222 7171; Radisson SAS Dubai, Baniyas Rd;  
🕒 6pm–3am

A DJ spins funky tunes at this small, dark, sultry bar that has African-inspired interiors and secluded nooks that are made even more private with plush draperies. If you're alone, you may get hit on. Still, it's a good choice for drinks before or after dinner at the Radisson SAS's terrific restaurants.

### TERRACE Map pp64–5

☎ 602 1234; Park Hyatt Dubai; 🕒 noon–1am  
Specialising in French oysters, caviar, champagne and vodka, the Terrace is one of Dubai's smartest waterside lounge bars. Resident British DJ Lady Red sets just the right mood with sensual chill-out beats. The dramatically lit interior is stylin', but it doesn't compare with sitting on the outdoor deck and watching the bobbing boats moored in the marina.

### VELVET LOUNGE Map pp54–5

☎ 227 8206; Al-Khaleej Palace Hotel; 🕒 7pm–1am  
Miles from the glam-slam New Dubai scene, in an unfashionable hotel, the accidentally fabulous Velvet Lounge is stuck in a baroque 1970s time warp with smoked-mirror ceilings, velour sofas and red-velvet draperies. And it's often empty, making it a top spot for a *tête-à-tête* with your paramour.

## BUR DUBAI

### GINSENG Map pp64–5

☎ 324 8200; Wafi City Mall, Al-Qataiyat Rd;  
🕒 7pm–2am Tue–Fri, 7pm–1am Sat–Mon

A good spot to start the evening, Ginseng makes brilliant cocktails with everything from champagne to espresso. The faux-Asian décor needs a fluff job and too many hard surfaces mean high decibel levels when it fills up. Come early – and bring a wrap to deal with the too-cold air-con.

### KEVA Map pp64–5

☎ 334 4159; Al-Nasr Leisureland, Oud Metha;  
🕒 noon–3am

Keva's Eurasia-meets-join-by-numbers décor goes a bit overboard with fake grass

## TOP YE OLDE PUBS

Dubai's old English-style pubs were the lifeblood of expats before the city boomed – informal social clubs where you could meet others with a love of bad food and warm beer. These days most foreign residents stick to their cliques. But not at the pubs. When you want to strike up a conversation and down a few ales with new friends, pop into a pub.

**Fibber Magee's** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 332 2400; Sheikh Zayed Rd, behind the Crowne Plaza Hotel; 🕒 noon–2am) Dubai's most authentic Irish pub is a scruffy boozier with great ales and stouts. Tuesday is quiz night (arrive by 8pm). Great fun on match nights.

**Carter's** (Map pp64–5; ☎ 324 0000; Wafi City Mall, Al-Qataiyat Rd; 🕒 noon–2am) For better or worse, Carter's is a Dubai institution. Love that kitsch Egyptian décor. Happy hour from 6pm to 8pm Saturday to Thursday.

**Dubliners** (Map pp56–7; ☎ 282 4040; behind Le Meridien Dubai, Airport Rd, Al-Garhoud; 🕒 noon–2am) A friendly, boozy Irish bar with reliable pub grub and Guinness. Packed on match nights; happy hour 5pm to 8pm. Try the pies.

**Irish Village** (Map pp56–7; ☎ 282 4750; Aviation Club, Dubai Tennis Stadium, Al-Garhoud Rd, Deira; 🕒 11am–1.30am) An Irish pub popular with expats for its pond-side 'beer garden'. No happy hour, but there's Guinness and Kilkenny draft.

**Long's Bar** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 312 2202; Tower Rotana Hotel, Sheikh Zayed Rd; 🕒 noon–3am) The longest bar in town, live bands, cheap drinks and a late closure keeps this American-style bar-and-grill hoppin'. Number-one bar choice during Ramadan. Happy hour, noon to 8pm, till midnight Friday.

walls in the ladies' toilets, but the low-slung seating, moody lighting, live DJ and big menu of surprisingly great bar nibbles make it ideal before twirling on the dance floor of the adjoining [Lodge](#) (p131).

### MAHARLIKA Map pp64–5

☎ 334 6565; President Hotel, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Rd, Karama; 🕒 6pm–3am

The black-box cabaret feels like a speakeasy at this all-Filipino club, revealing a glimpse of the culture of service-industry expats who cook your hotel breakfast. The vibrant floorshow is awesome – think nine-piece high-energy bands with wacky names like Elvis Presley Asia.

### NEW ASIA BAR & CLUB Map pp64–5

☎ 324 8888; Raffles Dubai, Wafi City Mall, Al-Qataiyat Rd; 🕒 7pm–3am

High atop the pyramid of the ultra-plush Raffles hotel, dynamic New Asia draws a slick crowd for its fancy Asian-inspired cocktails and drop-dead views. We like the outdoor terrace, but the black-marble-and-leather interiors make a better backdrop for that hot little Betsy Johnson dress you just bought. Stay late to shimmy to high-energy house.

### TROYKA Map pp62–3

☎ 359 5908; Ascot Hotel, Khalid bin al-Waleed Rd (Bank St); drink minimum Dh100; 🕒 7pm–3am, floor show 11.30pm–1.30am

If you're into Bob Fosse musical numbers (think *Chicago* and *Sweet Charity*), make a beeline to Troyka for an extraordinarily camp floor show by sequin-spangled Russian dancers who twirl, dip, and kick higher than a young Shirley Maclaine. In between, a three-piece house band plays mournful Russian ballads. Stunning. Scope the crowd for oligarchs ignoring the show. Come for dinner (p112) and make a night of it.

### VINTAGE Map pp64–5

☎ 324 0000; Wafi City Mall, Al-Qataiyat Rd;  
🕒 6pm–1.30am

A favourite of Dubai wine aficionados for its impressive wine list and wide range of varietals, Vintage also serves superb fondue, cheeses, charcuterie meats and fantastic cheesecake. The living-room-like interior is well lit – a boon if your eyesight is failing – but its small size means tables fill up fast. Arrive early.

## SHEIKH ZAYED ROAD

### AGENCY Map pp72–3

☎ 330 0000; Boulevard at Emirates Towers, Sheikh Zayed Rd; 🕒 noon–3am, Sun–Thu, 3pm–3am Fri & Sat

A cosmopolitan wine bar frequented by older businessmen, Agency is a civilized spot for a glass of French wine. (Skip the New World wines; they're strictly grocery-store labels.) Alas, it's in an office tower and

# top picks

## VIEW BARS

- Bar 44 (p130)
- Koubba (opposite)
- Skyview Bar (opposite)
- Vu's (right)
- New Asia Bar (p127)

feels like it. Focus your attention on the interesting varietals; go for a flight of four half pours (Dh110). Good cheese fondue and finger foods like fried calamari.

### CIN-CIN WINE BAR Map pp72-3

☎ 332 5555; Fairmont Hotel, Sheikh Zayed Rd; ☎ 6pm-2am

You'd be hard-pressed to find a more impressive wine-and-spirits list than the one at this sleek bar, styled out with blue light, deep leather club chairs, and illuminating changing-colour ice buckets. The list is dizzying, with over 400 wines – 48 by the glass – 50 vodkas and 26 Scotches. Prices skew high, but you'll find good French vintages in the Dh300 range. Shine your shoes.

### HARRY GHATTO'S Map pp72-3

☎ 319 8088; Boulevard at Emirates Towers; ☎ 8pm-3am

Grab a posse of friends and belt out your favourites at this shoebox-sized karaoke bar. Drinks are expensive and service gruff, but we love the odd mix of people drawn here, including the occasional *dishdasha*-clad local.

### IKANDY Map pp72-3

☎ 343 8888; Shangri-La hotel, Sheikh Zayed Rd; ☎ 6pm-2am

Wear white to Ikandy and your clothes will glow in the diffuse hot-pink light reflecting off the diaphanous fabric hanging from the palm trees. Think Ibiza pool party, only it's set on the 4th-floor pool deck of the Shangri-La hotel instead of the Balearics. Stellar views of the Burj Dubai. Note: open October to March only.

### LOTUS ONE Map pp72-3

☎ 329 3200; World Trade Convention Centre, off Sheik Zayed Rd; ☎ noon-2am

Sitting on Lucite stools over glass flooring or in the '60s-throwback swinging chairs may throw off your equilibrium by your third round, but fret not. You wouldn't be the first to stumble out of this Asian-inspired scenester bar with a cosmo spilled down your pant leg. Wear black, not white.

### NEZESAUSSI Map pp72-3

☎ 428 5888; Al-Manzil Hotel, Burj Dubai Blvd; ☎ Sun-Thu 6pm-2am, Fri & Sat noon-2am

Throw back pints with your mates at this high-end sports bar, just a stone's throw from the world's tallest tower. Great food (see p116). The huge round bar lets you watch both the match and the mainly Aussie, Kiwi and South African crowd.

### VU'S BAR Map pp72-3

☎ 330 0000; Emirates Towers Hotel, Sheikh Zayed Rd; ☎ 6pm-2am

The tower-top views over Sheikh Zayed Rd are as breathtaking as the prices at this sophisticated restaurant-bar, 51 storeys in the sky. If conversation lags, bury your nose in the encyclopaedic cocktail list. Look sharp: no jeans or sneakers allowed.

## JUMEIRAH

### AGENCY Map pp76-7

☎ 366 6320; Souq Madinat Jumeirah, Al-Sufouh Rd; ☎ noon-1am

The Agency wine bar at Souq Madinat Jumeirah gets packed with khaki-clad tourists and expats. As at its sister branch at Emirates Towers (p127), the wine list includes unusual varietals (skip the New World wines in favour of better French labels), but here there's a terrace overlooking the canals of the Madinat where you can glimpse the Burj Al Arab. Good luck snagging a table at peak times.

### BAHRI BAR Map pp76-7

☎ 366 8888; Mina A' Salam, Madinat Jumeirah, Jumeirah; ☎ noon-2am

One of our first-choice spots in winter, Bahri has a fabulous 2nd-floor veranda laid with Persian carpets and big cane sofas where you can drink in gorgeous views of the Burj Al Arab. It's the kind of place you take your visiting parents for after-dinner drinks. Inside is less impressive and way too crowded on weekends, but the cocktails are strong – if overpriced. For a touristy treat, order the camel-milk mocktail.

## DUBAI'S NEW SMOKING LAWS

In November 2007, a smoking ban was issued by the Dubai municipality. But because of vague language, it's not clear the extent to which it will be enforced. Hotel managers are scratching their heads, trying to figure out how to implement the loophole-riddled legislation. Can you imagine smokers' corners outside 'lifestyle hotels'? How untidy. Here's what we've been able to figure out for sure. Smoking is no longer allowed in hotel public areas, but it is permitted indoors at hotel bars and nightclubs provided the establishment builds a depressurised room to keep smoke from wafting into the nonsmoking areas. Lighting up on outdoor terraces remains legal. When in doubt, look for ashtrays or ask the bartender if there's a designated smoking area.

### BARZAR Map pp76-7

☎ 366 6348; Souq Madinat Jumeirah, Al-Sufouh Rd; ☎ noon-1am

Barzar is a bit of a pickup joint, but it's good for pre-club cocktails. Sit outside (never inside: the cheesy cover band plays too loudly) in the relative comfort of beanbag chairs and sip killer cosmos while overlooking the water.

### KOUBBA Map pp76-7

☎ 366 8888; Al-Qasr, Souq Madinat Jumeirah, Al-Sufouh Rd; ☎ noon-2am

Score a candlelit table on the outdoor terrace overlooking the Madinat and Burj, and you'll instantly know you've found one of the most tranquil and romantic spots in all Dubai. The interior is nearly as compelling, with plush red velvet and Oriental cushions for you to lie against as you chill out to live Arabian-lounge music. Too bad it's illegal to lock lips in public.

### LEFT BANK Map pp76-7

☎ 368 6171; Souq Madinat Jumeirah, Al-Sufouh Rd; ☎ noon-2am

We love the waterside tables, with *abras* floating past, but the real party is inside the dark bar, where moody lighting, giant mirrors, leather club chairs and chill beats create a dynamic lounge scene. Put your name on the list for a table; expect to wait. Good food, too, especially steaks.

### MAI TAI LOUNGE Map pp76-7

☎ 366 5646; Souq Madinat Jumeirah, Al-Sufouh Rd; ☎ 6pm-1.30am

The tiki bar at Trader Vic's mixes lethal cocktails served in pineapples with paper umbrellas – the ultimate in kitsch. It's great fun once you've downed your second round and the salsa band gets going, usually at 9.30pm. Unlike its sister branch at the Crowne Plaza on Sheikh Zayed Rd, here there's room to dance.

### MALECON Map pp76-7

☎ 304 8281; Dubai Marine Beach Resort & Spa, Jumeirah Rd; ☎ 6.30pm-3am

Tequila is the essential drink at Malecon, an important stopover for the party crowd. Tipping its hat to Havana's graffiti-walled Bodeguita del Medio, this Latino-inspired bar is the place to hit late – do shots and twirl with a Cuban heel. Look sharp; though unpretentious, the crowd appreciates nice gear. Inquire about the ever-fun salsa classes.

### SHO CHO Map pp76-7

☎ 346 1111; Dubai Marine Beach Resort & Spa, Jumeirah Rd; ☎ 7pm-3am

The cool minimalist interior, with its blue lights and wall-mounted fish tanks, may draw you in, but the beachside deck is where it's at. Join the white-pants-wearing Lebanese party people for sunset martinis. The sushi is merely average, but the cocktails are awesome. Great on Mondays and Wednesday, when you can reserve an outdoor table. Sundays and Tuesdays it's packed.

### SKYVIEW BAR Map pp76-7

☎ 301 7438; Burj Al Arab, Jumeirah Rd, Umm Suqeim; ☎ 11am-2am

Cocktails or afternoon tea on the 27th floor of the Burj Al Arab tops most tourists' must-do lists, and with good reason: the views are breathtaking, plus you gain access to the world's most garish hotel lobby (for more, see p159). Arrive before sunset or don't bother. But *you must* book ahead. The per-person minimum is Dh250. As for the Liberace-meets-*Star Trek* interiors, all we can say is, welcome to the Burj.

### 360° Map pp76-7

☎ 352 3500; Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Jumeirah Rd, Umm Suqeim; ☎ 5pm-2am

Wander out the long pier to this rooftop with a circular outdoor bar offering sublime views of the Burj Al Arab. A shiny-shiny

crowd of scenesters packs the place on Fridays; expect to deal with bouncers at the rope. Alas, the outdoor music ban imposed in 2007 means no more live DJs or dancing. But ask around. We've a feeling they'll come up with a solution, possibly by hosting DJs inside the downstairs restaurant. Expect s-l-o-w bar service – don't come thirsty. But oh, what a view.

## NEW DUBAI

### APRÈS Map pp82–3

☎ 341 2575; Mall of the Emirates, Sheikh Zayed Rd; ☎ noon-2am

After four hours shopping at the Mall of the Emirates, a triple-berry cocktail becomes a very novel idea. The crowd at Après feels very expat – loud and raucous – the polar opposite of what you see out the windows: Emiratis stumbling in the snow at Ski Dubai. Great chocolate-Cointreau fondue.

### BAR 44 Map pp82–3

☎ 399 8888; Grosvenor West Marina Beach by Le Meridien, Jumeirah; ☎ 6pm-2am

The champagne lounge on the 44th floor of the Grosvenor House has extraordinary views of New Dubai's skyscrapers and the burgeoning marina. Done in a retro-1970s chic, with high-backed tufted-velvet banquettes and buttery-soft leather tub chairs, this is the spot to kick up your (high) heels with local swankers and raise a glass to excess. Good backup if Buddha Bar is full.

### BARASTI BAR Map pp82–3

☎ 399 3333; Le Meridien Mina Seyahi Beach Resort & Marina, Al-Sufouh Rd; ☎ 6pm-2am

Seaside Barasti is the locals' top spot for laid-back sundowners on a hot afternoon. No need to dress up – you can head straight here after a day at the beach, provided you look sexy in a sarong: the crowd is very body-conscious. DJs play indoors, but it's generally better to sit outside within ear shot of the sea.

### BUDDHA BAR Map pp82–3

☎ 399 8888; Grosvenor West Marina Beach by Le Meridien, Jumeirah; ☎ 7pm-3am

If there are celebs in town, they'll show up at Buddha Bar, where the dramatic Asian-inspired interiors are decked out with gorgeous chandeliers, a wall of reflective sheer glass, and an enormous Buddha lording

over the heathens. The bartenders put on quite a show with their impressive shakes (think Tom Cruise in *Cocktail*). Because the deep-red lighting is so central to the atmosphere, the bar opens only after dark. Arrive early or wait in line; otherwise book dinner for guaranteed admission. For more, see p120.

### LIBRARY BAR Map pp82–3

☎ 399 4000; Ritz-Carlton Hotel lobby; ☎ 3pm-1am

When you're craving a Glenfiddich and a Cuban cigar, steer your luxury sedan to the Ritz-Carlton. A pianist and singer play easy-on-the-ear jazz standards to set the mood. If you're under 50 and still have your vision, you'll be in the minority.

### MAYA Map pp82–3

☎ 316 5550; Le Royal Meridien, Al-Sufouh Rd; ☎ 6pm-2am Mon-Sat

Arrive an hour before sunset to snag one of the Gulf-view tables on the rooftop bar of this upmarket Mexican at the Royal Meridien, and swirl top-shelf margaritas as the sun slips into the sea. Order a plate of the succulent duck enchiladas to soak up the booze.

### ROOFTOP BAR Map pp82–3

☎ 399 9999; Arabian Court, One&Only Royal Mirage, Al-Sufouh Rd; ☎ 5.30pm-1am

The fabric-draped nooks, cushioned banquettes, Moroccan lanterns and Oriental carpets make this candle-lit outdoor rooftop bar one of Dubai's most sublime spots. Come at sunset to watch the sky change colours – but not earlier; the bar doesn't pick up till evening. The new Palm Jumeirah diminishes the views, but the moody lighting and romantic vibe make it easy to overlook any unsightliness. An ideal spot to present a gift-wrapped jewellery box.

## DANCE CLUBS

Clubbers come out in force when big-name DJs like Pierre Ravan, Roger Sanchez and Joey Negro jet in for the weekend, but even on a regular old Tuesday, you can find ardent club kids twirling beneath disco balls to house music, the preferred sound in Dubai. Wednesday through Friday are the big nights out, when marauding expats join gyrating tourists on the dance floor. The scene remains segregated. Not only are Dubai's clubs rife with

## OUTDOOR DANCING? FORGET IT

In late 2007, the Dubai municipality banned outdoor dancing and amplified music, effectively curbing the fun at some of the city's major DJ-dance venues. The leading bars once beloved for their outdoor scenes – Barasti Bar, 360° – could no longer blare music outside or allow patrons to dance beneath the stars. Hotel owners were left scrambling to reconfigure their spaces; some simply ripped out their dance floors. It's hard to know for sure how this is going to play out over time, but one thing's certain: if you dance outdoors at a bar, even for your own inner beat, you'll be thrown out. Ask locals for an update or Google 'Dubai outdoor music ban'.

racism (p31), but cliques of club-goers keep to themselves. Don't go out expecting to meet new friends at a Dubai dance club.

The scene starts late – around 1am – just two hours before clubs are required to close, and queues are sometimes preposterous. It's best to arrive early to snag seats and load up on drinks before the line forms, then hit the dance floor when others arrive.

Dubai's dance floors reveal engrossing sociological studies and vignettes. The city's population is made up of well over 100 different nationalities, and everyone grooves differently. The Lebanese are the reigning kings of the club world. Western expatriates look down on them, tackily whispering things like, 'That guy is such a Lebanese poser.' But damn, do they dress sharp and dance hard. Others don't move at all, endlessly looking for something to look for, frozen at the edge of the parquet floor, cell phones in hand, desperately texting potential partners. Most people meander on and off the floor, some featuring their outfits, others their moves.

Cover charges range from Dh50 to Dh300, depending on whether there's a big-name DJ spinning; call ahead. Groups of men aren't always allowed admission on busy nights; bring a girl. Some club nights, like the roving Peppermint Club, remain perennially popular, others disappear after only a month. As of this writing, the ever-fun iBo had closed, but promised to reopen. Check out [www.mumtazz.com](http://www.mumtazz.com), [www.timeoutdubai.com](http://www.timeoutdubai.com) and promoters' sites such as [www.9714.com](http://www.9714.com) and [www.fluidproduction.com](http://www.fluidproduction.com), for up-to-date details on what's happening in the club world. And not to be alarmist, but many clubs have terrible emergency-exit signage. Spot the ways out on your way in.

## APARTMENT Map pp76–7

☎ 406 8000; Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Jumeirah Rd, Umm Suqeim; ☎ 7pm-1.30am

You're going to hear about this place anyway, so here's the lowdown. The tight windowless space feels like an underground bunker, but that doesn't stop throngs of self-conscious twenty-somethings from flocking here, hormones raging, every weekend. Come with people you like or risk isolation. The saving grace is the better-than-average DJs, but the tiled dance floor is too small (and sometimes slick) to cut loose, and the so-called VIP area blocks movement around the club, resulting in a lot of drinking, instead of dancing, to the music. Free before midnight.

## BOUDOIR Map pp76–7

☎ 345 5995; Dubai Marine Beach Resort & Spa, Jumeirah Rd; ☎ 7.30pm-4am

Though snooty expats distance themselves from the tight-pants-and-straightened-hair Lebanese crowd at Boudoir, we love the look of the place. Tufted red-velvet booths, beaded curtains and tasselled draperies lend a super-model vibe – indeed, you may spot one among the wannabes – and the circular layout is perfect for twirling away from the occasional unwanted advance by a Lothario. High on the chic-o-meter. Look sharp or be ostracised.

## CHI@THE LODGE Map pp64–5

☎ 337 9470; Al-Nasr Leisureland, Oud Metha; cover charge varies; ☎ 8pm-3am

The shiny-shiny fave of young expats, Chi sometimes hosts live music, but the big draws are its kick-ass DJs playing funk, house and hip-hop; ever-popular theme nights (think retro-80s, skool disco, Hal-loween); velvet-plush surroundings; and big semi-outdoor dance floor and garden. Two sound systems and four big rooms mean that once you've worn out your legs, you can chill in a cushioned lounge or VIP cabana (provided you've made reservations and purchased a Dh500-or-so bottle of booze). Two white-suit-clad Indian little people greet your arrival; they're sometimes placed on the DJ booth and made to dance – offensive, yes, but you can't help but stare. The big fun makes up for the organisers' little transgressions. Arrive early to beat the queue.

## GETTING OUT WITH THE IN CROWD

For entertainment listings, buy the weekly *Time Out* and glance through *7 Days*. Look for free guides and leaflets promoting clubs, dance parties and gigs; find them at bars, cafés, Virgin Megastore and Ohm Records.

There's okay stuff on the web, but Dubai sites aren't the fastest to load – or the most complete. The best (by far) is [www.timeoutdubai.com](http://www.timeoutdubai.com). Also check [www.7days.ae](http://www.7days.ae), and try the club guides on [www.mumtazz.com](http://www.mumtazz.com) (click on the UAE flag for Dubai) and [www.fluidproduction.com](http://www.fluidproduction.com), which is the main site for the roving **Peppermint Club** (below). For tickets to concerts and major events at Dubai Media City, the Tennis Stadium and Madinat Jumeirah, phone the Time Out ticketline on ☎ 800-4669 (☎ +971-4-210-8567 from overseas). Or buy online at either [www.timeouttickets.com](http://www.timeouttickets.com) or [www.boxofficecm.com](http://www.boxofficecm.com).

### KASBAR Map pp82–3

☎ 399 9999; **One&Only Royal Mirage, Al-Sufouh Rd; cover charge Dh50; 🕒 9.30pm–3am Mon–Sat** Kasbar can be inconsistent – one night it's packed, the next it's dead – but we highly recommend you check out this sexy three-storey Moroccan-themed club, with glittering crystal chandeliers, a coffered ceiling, and big black-and-white-tiled dance floor. Call ahead to reserve a table on the mezzanine and take in the scene from above. Or forego the thump-thump scene in favour of a game of billiards on the quiet lower floor – a godsend for nondancing men whose dates want to twirl. When there's Arabian-fusion playing on the decks, don't miss it. Cover includes one drink.

### MIX Map pp82–3

☎ 317 2570; **Grand Hyatt; 🕒 9pm–3am, closed Sat** Big with the Middle Eastern crowd, Mix was Dubai's first super-club and it's still going strong. Every night is different, but you can generally expect hip-hop, R&B, house and Arabic pop, made better when a top international DJ spins. Things to like are the raised bar, huge dance floor, podium dancers, bongo players and stellar people-watching. Cover charge for DJ events. Ask about all-you-can-drink nights.

### PEPPERMINT CLUB Map pp82–3

☎ 332 0037, 050-343 3909; **Habtoor Grand Hotel; cover charge Dh120; 🕒 10pm–3am Fri** If you're a serious dancer, seek out the location of Dubai's ultimate Friday-night party. Promoter Fluid Production imports some of the biggest international DJs (Paul Van Dyk, Steve Lawler, James Lavelle etc) to wear out the insatiable, sweaty throngs. A mixed crowd of over 2000 clubbers packs the democratised dance floor. If you don't dance, don't come. Inquire about occasional weekend-long events that begin on

Thursday. Admission charge for men, but women often get in free. Look hot, but dress light: the floor gets overheated. The above location was accurate as of this writing, but is likely to change.

### ZINC Map pp72–3

☎ 331 1111; **Crowne Plaza Hotel, Sheikh Zayed Rd; 🕒 7pm–3am** Once you've got past the metal detector, old reliable Zinc plays crowd-pleasing popular tunes everyone knows. Though some uppity expats call it trashy, Zinc is good because people don't seem to care who you are; they're here to dance and drink, not show off. Wednesday's Kinky Malinki night draws house-spinning London DJs. Saturday before midnight is salsa night; lessons start at 8pm. The concrete floors are hard to dance on with rubber soles; wear leather (but no open-toes are allowed). Bar service is quick – well, for Dubai. Men pay cover, women don't. Flight crews get discounted drinks and flock here Thursday and Friday.

## LIVE MUSIC

Though on the upswing, Dubai's live-music scene is still in its nascent years. Only a handful of indie bands are doing anything innovative; generally you'll hear cover bands. Don't get us wrong, there's some cool music to be heard and some pretty good musicians, but Dubai is a boom town, not a cultural capital. Still, you'll occasionally find great music in unexpected places, particularly hotel restaurants which nearly all employ full-time house bands that play six nights a week. Arena concerts are a different story, when international acts like Moby or Black Eyed Peas swing through town on their world tours, but they're one-off performances not specific to Dubai. Instead keep an eye out for major-name Middle Eastern and

Subcontinental stars. When you see big posters and hear multiple radio ads for acts you're unfamiliar with, do a quick Google search to find out where they're from. There's a reason they're so popular. You'd be amazed by some of the acts that draw big crowds of expat locals – Lebanese, Indian, Pakistani, Persian. This is the stuff you can't hear at home. Check *Time Out* and *7 Days* magazines, as well as the ticket hotlines (opposite). If you're adventurous, ditch your guidebook, comb the streets of Deira, and pop into no-name hotels to check out the ethnic acts in the house bars. (Tip: for a head start, poke around the budget and midrange listings in the Deira section of the *Sleeping Chapter*, p151.) From mullet-headed Russian boy bands to jangly Persian belly dancers, you never know what you might turn up.

### BLUE BAR Map pp72–3

☎ 310 8124; **Novotel World Trade Centre; 🕒 noon–1am**

The best thing about Blue Bar is its stand-out selection of beers on tap. It hosts live jazz and blues 10pm to 1am Wednesday through Friday, and though the bands are hit or miss, the scene is mellow. It's a minimalist bar and lounge with floor-to-ceiling wood-panelled walls and scattered cocktail tables – a good place for the 40+ crowd. When there's no band, 'smooth jazz' (read: fake jazz) blares on the sound system.

### JAM BASE Map pp76–7

☎ 366 6730; **Souq Madinat Jumeirah, Al-Sufouh Rd; 🕒 7pm–2am Mon–Sat, to 3am Thu & Fri** Early in the evening, Jam Base is a moody supper club, with low lighting, hearty Creole-inspired cooking and jazzy music beginning at 7.30pm. At 10pm it becomes a dance club. Tables are cleared away and the over-30 crowd shimmies to live soul, R&B and Motown hits. This is when it's most fun, though you may have to endure getting your foot stepped on by a drunk or her beefy banker boyfriend. Biggish-name bands sometimes play here, too.

### MARRAKECH Map pp72–3

☎ 343 8888; **Shangri-La hotel, Sheikh Zayed Rd; 🕒 1–3pm & 7.30pm–1am** When you want to go out, but prefer hushed tones to amplified music, this is just the spot. Though it's first a restaurant (p115) and second a bar, Marrakech is rarely crowded, meaning you can snag one of

the low-slung tables draped in lace and take in the haunting sounds of a two-piece Moroccan oud and hand-drum player while luxuriating in upholstered armchairs with mint tea and pastries or a fine cognac. *Très civilisé*.

### PEANUT BUTTER JAM Map pp64–5

☎ 324 4100; **Wafi City Mall, Al-Qataiyat Rd; 🕒 8pm–midnight Fri, except summer**

You never know what you're going to hear at PBJ. Sink into a beanbag in the rooftop gardens of Wafi City Mall and munch on barbecued goodies while you take in that night's acts. The thing is, anyone can walk up to the mic and perform. Much of it is amateurish, a couple of steps up from karaoke, but you may be surprised. Go ahead and sing – we dare you.

### ROCK BOTTOM CAFÉ Map pp64–5

☎ 396 3888; **Regent Palace Hotel, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Rd; 🕒 10am–3am**

It's with reservation that we mention this Dubai institution, but since you may wind up in the back of a taxi with your new best friends insisting you simply must end the night here, it figured that you should be filled in. US GIs on leave from Iraq – and the women who hope to love them – pack the ersatz-American roadhouse, while a cheesy cover band blares top-40 hits and scantily clad women dance. No self-respecting woman would come here alone, but with a mob of friends and a bottle of tequila gone, it's the quintessential ending to a messy night on the town in Dubai.

## SHEESHA CAFÉS

Dubai's *sheesha* cafés give great insight into local culture. Even if you don't smoke, it's worth sampling a puff to better understand this traditional Middle Eastern pastime; for more details, see p134. The future of *sheesha* cafés is uncertain (see the boxed text, p129) but because they're so ingrained in the culture, doubtless they're not going away. *Sheesha* cafés are open till after midnight, later during winter months when the city's population spends their evenings outdoors. The going rate is Dh15 to Dh30 for all you can inhale.

### COSMO CAFÉ Map pp72–3

☎ 332 6569; **The Tower, Sheikh Zayed Rd; 🕒 8.30am–1am**

## SHEESHA: A PRIMER

*Sheesha* pipes are packed with flavoured tobacco, such as apple, anise, strawberry, vanilla and coffee – the range of flavours is endless. Good *sheesha* cafés, like good wine bars, pride themselves on the variety they offer.

The *sheesha* pipes used in Dubai are similar to those found in Lebanon and Egypt, and are available in the souqs, specialty shops and even some supermarkets. If, like many visitors to Dubai, you decide to take one home as a souvenir and forget the instructions the shopkeeper gave you, here's a primer on how to use one:

- First fill the glass bowl with water and fix the metal turret into it, ensuring that the tube is underwater with the rubber stopper holding it in position.
- Next, return the metal plate to the top of the turret and put your small ceramic or clay bowl on top of it.
- Fill the bowl with some loose *sheesha* tobacco and cover it tightly with a small piece of foil, before poking about five holes into it with a skewer or fork.
- Using tongs, heat up some Magic Coal on a stove or a hot plate or over a gas burner, then pop it on top of the foil. (Magic Coal is the preferred brand of charcoal because it burns the longest. It's from Japan and comes in a black box. Check the souqs.)
- Lastly, place the pipe into the hole on the side of the *sheesha* pipe, pop a disposable plastic mouthpiece on the end if you're planning to share, and take a long hard puff on the pipe. Recline on the Oriental cushions you bought at the souqs and remember your time in Dubai.

The sleek metal-and-glass façade looks more Manhattan than Middle East, but if you're looking for a toehold on Arab expat life, you can glimpse beautiful, mainly Lebanese people sucking on *sheesha* at this stylish spot. Pretty good food, too.

### QD'S Map pp56–7

☎ 295 6000; Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club, Deira; ☎ 6pm–2am

Smoke beneath the stars at this always-fun outdoor Creekside bar, and watch the ballet of lighted *dhows* floating by. Shaped in a giant circle, the main action is on the (very public) raised centre ring, where Oriental carpets and cushions set an inviting mood. For privacy, score a table on the vast wooden deck jutting over the water, or book a cabana. Avoid tables by the bar; ugly fluorescent light bleeds from the kitchen, ruining the aesthetic. Highly recommended for *sheesha*, but skip the food.

### SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY Map pp72–3

☎ 331 1757; opposite KFC, just behind Sheikh Zayed Rd in Al-Attar Tower; ☎ 7am–1am

Linger long and puff *sheesha* under a big outdoor tent at this woman- and child-friendly hangout with mismatched velvet sofas, wicker chairs and big wooden tables. Perfect for a game of backgammon. The Lebanese-French menu is good for a nosh between smokes – think *croque monsieur*, crêpes and pizzas, all around Dh30. Good breakfasts, too.

### SHEESHA COURTYARD Map pp82–3

☎ 399 9999; One&Only Royal Mirage, Jumeirah; ☎ 7pm–1am

The Royal Mirage does it right. Reclining on beaded cushions and Oriental carpets in an Arabian palm courtyard is the ultimate way to enjoy a *sheesha*. Though it would take a connoisseur to appreciate the 20 different flavours on offer, you can't go wrong with the sweet aroma of apple. Highly recommended.

### SOUQ MADINAT JUMEIRAH Map pp76–7

☎ 366 8888; Central Plaza, Souq Madinat Jumeirah, Al-Sufouh Rd; ☎ 10am–11pm

The Madinat's *sheesha* courtyard is good for a smoke if you're staying nearby. The views are lovely – manmade canals dotted with floating *abras*, stately (if ersatz) wind-towers and views of the Burj – but because *sheesha* is a traditional Middle Eastern pastime, it's always better to get under the skin of Dubai and puff with the locals at one of the other spots, unless you're already staying at one of the Madinat's hotels.

### TCHÉ TCHÉ Map pp62–3

☎ 355 7575; Khalid bin al-Waleed Rd (Bank St), near BurJuman Centre; ☎ 10am–2am Sat–Thu, 3pm–2am Fri

If you're over the *Arabian Nights* tourist trip, hit this plain-Jane neighbourhood *sheesha* café with Arabian pop and a blaring TV reverberating off too many hard surfaces. It's interesting because it's frequented mostly by Emiratis and other Arabs, along with the

occasional expat. Good place to bone up on your Arabic.

### ZYARA Map pp72–3

☎ 343 5454; behind National Bank of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed Rd; ☎ 8am–1am

Puff in the shadow of giant skyscrapers at this convivial bo-ho-cool Lebanese café. The colourful dollhouse-like interior is great for booze-free socializing over a game of cards or backgammon. The *sheesha* is presented outdoors where you sit at living-room-like clusters of bright-orange sofas on a palm-lined patio while you gaze up at the impossibly tall towers.

## CINEMAS

The first thing you need to know if you're considering catching the latest Hollywood blockbuster at a mall in Dubai is that Emiratis don't view the cinema as a cultural institution, but as a social scene. At mainstream cinemas, kids run up and down the aisles while adults talk on their cell phones. It's excruciating. There's one exception: Gold Class (read on).

The *Dubai International Film Festival* ([www.dubaifilmfest.com](http://www.dubaifilmfest.com)), usually held in December, is arguably the cultural highlight of the year. The other 51 weeks of the calendar can be disheartening. The only independent cinemas are dedicated to Tamil, Hindi and Malayalam films, so English-language films are restricted to the unadventurous multiplexes. Occasionally a good film manages to sneak its way onto the schedules alongside the endless action movies, horror flicks and romantic comedies, but most of the time it's all too predictable. The festival's success suggests there's a market for independent and world film, and for years we've been hearing murmurs that an art-house cinema will open its doors to deprived cinemagoers. In the absence of quality programming at the multiplexes, art galleries such as the Third Line and XVA occasionally hold film screenings. These are free and pro-

moted in listings magazines such as *Time Out Dubai*. Also check out the *Alliance Française* (Map pp64–5; ☎ 335 8712), which shows weekly films in French and occasionally hosts festivals.

For pure-fluff value and a glimpse of local culture, consider taking in a Bollywood film instead – really, how often do you get the chance? They're pure spectacle, packed with melodrama, romance and action, and punctuated by song and dance numbers. Plots are hardly complicated, so you'll be able to get the gist if the films haven't subtitled. If you're not up for Hindi, look for free outdoor movie nights – a big draw for European expats.

### GOLD CLASS Map pp82–3

☎ 341 4999; Cinestar, Mall of the Emirates, Sheikh Zayed Rd; tickets Dh100

The ultimate way to see a movie, Gold Class is more of a small screening room than a cinema, but you'll hardly care. The seats are enormous recliners and waiters bring you blankets, popcorn in silver bowls and drinks in glass goblets. Best of all, everyone pays attention to the film. Reservations essential.

### LAMCY Map pp64–5

☎ 336 8808; Lamcy Plaza, Al-Qataiyat Rd; tickets Dh25

The two-screen complex is one of the few remaining theatres showing Hindi, Malayalam and Tamil films. If you've never seen a Bollywood movie on the big screen, do it in Dubai on a Friday, the only day off for most Asian expatriates. You're in for a memorable experience.

### MOVIES UNDER THE STARS Map pp64–5

☎ 324 0000; Wafi City Rooftop Gardens, Al-Qataiyat Rd; ☎ 8pm–midnight Sun

Settle into a beanbag on a balmy winter's night with a bucket of beers and watch a themed double-feature of vintage-modern films. Even if you don't appreciate, say, Tom Cruise night, it's hard to argue when admission is free.

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