

SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

top picks

- Camel racing (p146)
- Oriental Hammam (p141)
- Ski Dubai (p142)
- Horse racing (p145)
- Amara Spa (p140)
- Wild Wadi Waterpark (p143)
- Four Seasons Golf Club (p144)
- UAE football match (p145)
- Boating past the Burj Al Arab (p143)
- Tennis at the Aviation Club (p138)

Before the boom, Emiratis spent their free time watching camel races, riding horses and boating. Now that expats have shown up, sports in Dubai have broadened to reflect the new population. Europeans brought golf, tennis and rugby. Cricket is huge, owing to the enormous Subcontinental communities. Emiratis have a new-found fondness for the world-popular game of football (aka soccer). Visitors generally take it easier, sticking to the Gulf's placid, bathtub-warm waters. You could spend an afternoon skittering across the surf on a kiteboard or diving in the shallow gulf on a scuba expedition. If you can't stand the sweltering heat, there's always Ski Dubai, the ultimate expression of Dubai excess. Or you could stay indoors; as you might expect in such a money-rich land of tourism and luxury hotels, spas and fitness clubs are big business. Spectator sports provide an occasional glimpse into Emirati life or the lives of expat workers. From the lowly game of cricket played out on a sandy lot by Indian and Pakistani labourers to the grand display of sheikhs rooting for their prize thoroughbreds, sports in Dubai unite its various subcultures. If you want to get under the skin of one in particular, keep an eye out for the games its people play.

HEALTH & FITNESS

The health-and-fitness set is comprised primarily of Western expats. While Emiratis grow large beneath their robes, Westerners shed the hummus at health clubs, yoga studios and fitness centres. With so many people working so hard to continue wearing their skinny jeans, there are lots of sore muscles in Dubai. Consequently, massage and beauty-treatment schedules at day spas fill up fast: book ahead. If you prefer swimming in salt water instead of chlorine, check out the beach listings on p78.

GYMS

Nearly every hotel in Dubai has a gym, but the equipment is sometimes chosen by people who don't work out. The worst have only a few stationary bikes and a cumbersome all-in-one machine with too many cables and pulleys that constantly need adjusting. The best have a full complement of top-end circuit- and weight-training equipment, including Smith racks, cable-crossovers and the hottest new gadget, a Power Plate. If it really matters, call the hotel and ask to speak to the fitness-centre manager. Because labour is so cheap in Dubai, many hotels have onsite trainers to help you tighten up. Some hotels sell memberships to nonguests, effectively packing them in during after-work hours; if you don't like crowds when you work out, avoid hitting the gym in the early evening. Admission to gyms generally costs about Dh100 for a one-day pass, twice that at a top-end hotel, but you'll gain access to the resort's grounds, tennis courts and swimming

pool. If you're going to a hotel gym, get your money's worth by making a day of it.

AVIATION CLUB [Map pp64-5](#)

☎ 282 4141; [www.aviationclub.ae](#); Dubai Tennis Stadium, Al-Garhoud Rd, Deira; Sun-Thu Dh80, Fri & Sat Dh95; 🕒 6am-11pm

Packed after work and on weekends – and with good reason – the Aviation Club has killer body pump and spinning classes, and a big selection of weights and circuit training for a pre-cardio workout or before a lap-swim in the half-Olympic-size pool. This is where the Dubai Tennis Championships are held; the club's five tennis courts – four side courts and one centre – are available only by reservation.

FITNESS FIRST [Map pp62-3](#)

☎ 397 4117; [www.fitnessfirst.com](#); Al-Mussalla Tower; Dh100; 🕒 6am-11pm

All the fitness junkies in Dubai are signing up for the hot new gym. Multiple locations mean easy access. There's a great line-up of classes – as many as 80 per week – from belly dancing and salsa to yoga and kick-boxing, and a full complement of free weights, racks, barbells and dumbbells, and benches. Onsite trainers hone your skills. Check the web for the list of locations. Fitness First have another Bur Dubai [branch](#) ([Map pp62-3](#)); ☎ 351-0044; BurJuman Centre, New BurJuman Bldg S-3) around the corner from this one. Though inconveniently located, we especially like the mammoth 27,000-sq-ft [branch](#) ([Map p52](#)); ☎ 375-0177; Dubai Festival City) at Festival

top picks

HOTEL GYMS

- Grand Hyatt (p156)
- Shangri-La (p158)
- Radisson SAS (p152)
- Dubai Marine Beach Resort (p160)
- Ramada Hotel (p156)
- Le Royal Meridien (p162)

City. Also consider the Ibn Battuta mall [branch](#) ([Map pp82-3](#)); ☎ 366-9933; Ibn Battuta Mall).

GRAND HYATT [Map pp64-5](#)

☎ 317 1234; [www.hyatt.com](#); Al-Qataiyat Rd; Sun-Thu Dh200, Fri & Sat Dh250; 🕒 6am-11pm

The top-notch equipment includes Smith racks, cable-crossover racks, and full circuit-training equipment. The gym also offers aerobics, yoga and onsite trainers to guide your workout. Justify the expense by spending the afternoon inside with a treatment at the glittering spa or outside by Dubai's biggest swimming pool. Also outdoors you'll find a meandering 450m running track beneath tall palms and four tennis courts. Kids have their own pool.

INTER-FITNESS [Map pp54-5](#)

☎ 222 7171; [www.interfitness.com](#); Radisson SAS Hotel; Dh77; 🕒 6am-11pm

For serious lifting, Inter-Fitness has two smallish rooms full of equipment. It feels

a bit grungy, like an old YMCA, but the equipment is in good shape and the location convenient to both sides of the Creek. No aerobics classes; this is a place to grunt with iron, then dive into the pool.

PHARAOHS CLUB [Map pp64-5](#)

☎ 324 0000; fax 324 4611; [www.wafi.com](#); Wafi City Mall, Al-Qataiyat Rd; weekly membership including pool use Dh 450, pool per day Dh100 Other than [Fitness First](#) (opposite), this is the closest you'll find to an LA-style club, with some serious weight-lifting equipment (including 100lb dumbbells) for juiced-up grunners, a climbing wall, squash courts and multiple fitness classes (some for women only) including body pump, yoga, aikido, mat Pilates and step. The best amenity is the enormous, free-form 'lazy-river' rooftop swimming pool; kids love it. One caveat: temporary memberships are a nuisance to acquire. You must set one up, via fax or in person, at least three days prior to your week's membership; passport required. Don't bother if you're not staying nearby. The [pool](#) (🕒 9am-10pm), by contrast, is open for one-day drop-ins.

YOGA & PILATES

CLUB STRETCH [Map pp62-3](#)

☎ 345 2131; [www.clubstretch.ae](#); next to Capitol Hotel, Al-Mina Rd; per class Dh70; 🕒 8.30am-8.30pm by reservation

An independent studio great for Pilates and Bikram (hot-room) yoga, Club Stretch's

DUBAI'S TOP SPA TREATMENTS

Oriental Hammam (p141) Impeccable re-creation of a Moroccan bathhouse. Not to be missed.

Couples' Massage (Amara, p140) Reignite your romance behind a walled garden.

Pure Awakening Package (Talise, p141) Get over your jetlag in 50 minutes – or at least feel somewhat refreshed.

Maya's Secret (Sensasia, p141) Indulge your olfactory senses with a sandalwood-and-myrrh body scrub – or opt for the dry-skin-reviving Sunrise Body Treatment, a moisturising olive-oil body scrub and massage.

Seaweed Wraps ([Map p158](#), Willow Stream Spa, Fairmont hotel) Great for marine-inspired treatments and exfoliating rubs. Two pools mean you can chase the sun from morning till evening.

Rasul Mud Treatment ([Map pp82-3](#)); ☎ 399 8888; [www.grosvenorhouse.lemeridien.com](#); Retreat, Grosvenor House) Soak in a hydrotherapy tub before getting slathered in detoxifying mud.

Food-based Body Scrubs ([Map pp82-3](#)); ☎ 318 6184; [www.ritzcarlton.com](#); The Spa, Ritz-Carlton, Al-Sufouh Rd) If you're into food-body treatments, the Ritz does them well – think wild-berry body bath and cinnamon body glow.

Hopi Ear Candles ([Map pp64-5](#)); ☎ 324 7700; [www.waficity.com](#); Cleopatra's Spa, Wafi Pyramids, Wafi City Mall, Bur Dubai) If your ears didn't unplug after your flight, ear candles may help by drawing out excess wax. Women only.

SAVING FACE IN DUBAI

Dubai does a roaring trade in plastic surgery, rivalling surface-deep Los Angeles for rhinoplasty, liposuction and breast augmentation. One local cosmetic-surgery clinic announces on its website, 'Stem cell technique could help women grow their own breast implants.' DIY breasts. Who'd have thought? Plastic surgery in Dubai makes sense because afterward you have to hide out, vanish from the social scene for a couple of weeks and heal. No self-respecting socialite would dare appear the next day at a cocktail party with two black eyes. Botox is one thing; broken bones are another. In Los Angeles, celebs get their faces smashed around, then disappear to Palm Springs to recover poolside, in total privacy, behind bougainvillea-covered walls. Palm Springs is to the States as Dubai is to the world: a hiding place for the nipped and tucked. Think about it. Geographically speaking, Dubai is in the middle of nowhere, halfway between London and Singapore, and most of the world's airlines fly here. London matrons and wives of Russian oligarchs can jet here in a few hours and remain totally anonymous while they get their faces done, a world away from their normal social circles. And all that high-end shopping means they can also build new wardrobes to match their new noses, with zero fear of running into their girlfriends in the boutiques. After all, the point of plastic surgery is not to let anyone know you've had it. Keying in to a need for good care in a region that once had none, the American Academy for Cosmetic Surgery has set up shop at the new Dubai Healthcare City, guaranteeing its international clientele the same high standard of medical care they'd find in the States, the birthplace of the craft. If you're staying at a five-star beach resort, one of the self-contained compounds that guests need never leave before they fly back home, keep an eye out for oversized black sunglasses worn by women too old to be so thin. Chances are there are a couple of big, fat shiners turning purple beneath those Gucci frames.

Dh120 one-week introductory package is a bargain for hard-core yogis. Reservations essential. Also offers individual Pilates sessions on a reformer.

GEMS OF YOGA Map pp72-3

☎ 331 5161, 331 1328; www.gemsofyogadubai.com; 17th fl above KFC, near the Fairmont Hotel, Sheikh Zayed Rd; introductory class Dh50; ☎ 6.30am-10pm Sat-Thu, 10am-8pm Fri
These guys are serious about their yoga. The challenging hourly classes include Hatha, as well as power-yoga (a combination of aerobics and yoga) and occasional outdoor classes in local parks; call ahead for schedules. Dh50 buys you an introductory one-hour class.

DAY SPAS & MASSAGE

Though you can get a good rubdown at most sports clubs, for the proper treatment book a dedicated spa. Dubai's spas like to incorporate food into their treatments – berries, chocolate, even gingerbread at Christmas. You may disagree, but we remain unconvinced of their merit. If you're dubious, stick to the tried-and-true, not the out-of-the-blue. Make reservations as far in advance as possible; for top spas such as Amara and the Oriental Hammam, book weeks ahead. Ask if a spa treatment includes use of the pool and grounds; if it does, make a day of it – arrive early and lollygag poolside. If you're considering a facial and you like to sun, book an afternoon appointment

– say, 5pm – following your tanning session. If you receive the treatment in the morning, your skin will be too sensitive for sun exposure that afternoon. Note: facials look best the next day, so if you have a fancy dinner engagement and want to look great, get the treatment the day before. Spas are generally open from 10am to 10pm Saturday through Thursday; on Fridays, most open only in the afternoon. Most spas offer manicure-pedicures; if you want a dedicated nail salon, a first choice is **Nail Spa** Mercato Mall (Map pp76-7; ☎ 349 7766; Jumeirah); Aviation Club (Map pp56-7; ☎ 282 1617; Al-Garhoud); and Ibn Battuta Mall (Map pp82-3; ☎ 368 5070).

AMARA Map pp56-7

☎ 602 1234; www.dubai.park.hyatt.com; Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club
Dubai's top spa has eight treatment rooms, including three couples' rooms, all with their own totally private walled gardens complete with outdoor showers – the only ones to be found in Dubai. Instead of traipsing around in a robe from the locker room, you're escorted directly to your own beautifully lit private garden suite, where the entire treatment takes place. You even choose your own background music. First comes a luxurious foot bath, then your selected treatment. Best of all, afterward you're not shoved out the door, but instead are served tea and allowed time to relax and enjoy the tranquillity. Reserve well ahead.

1847 Map pp72-3

☎ 330 1847; Boulevard at Emirates Towers, Sheikh Zayed Rd

Men: if you're lucky enough to be able to grow a good-looking beard, we highly recommend you do so while in Dubai. The Arabs will approve and be ever-so-slightly more accepting of you. (It worked for us.) However, many expats prefer to keep a hairless visage; the dandies among them indulge in an old-fashioned straight-razor shave – complete with hot towels beforehand – at the clubby men-only 'grooming salon' 1847. Ask about packages, including mani-pedis and massages. Good haircuts, too. There's another branch at the Grosvenor House (pp162) in New Dubai.

GIVENCHY SPA Map pp82-3

☎ 315 2140; www.oneandonlyresorts.com; One&Only Royal Mirage

Clean, elegant and straightforward, Givenchy exclusively uses its eponymous products in its 12 treatment rooms. The lighting is a bit yellow, but it's the kind of place you can go with your conservative mother who prefers sensibility to excess. Hot-stone massage is the specialty.

JET SET Map pp82-3

☎ 399 8888; www.grosvenorhouse.lemeridien.com; Grosvenor House, Dubai Marina

The ladies-only salon at Grosvenor House is vaguely reminiscent of the beauty parlour in the 1939 film *The Women* – if only one could speak Arabic to keep up on the gossip. Great for a wash-and-set and mani-pedi before a big night out.

SENSASIA Map pp76-7

☎ 349 8850; www.sensasiaspas.com; The Village, Jumeirah Rd, Jumeirah

Detox treatments, facials and massage are the specialties at this independent Jumeirah spa done in a fancy Far East-meets-Middle East style. For a splurge, book the Queen for a Day treatment (Dh1350), a 4½-hour indulgence. There are no grounds to roam afterward; instead plan to lunch at **Lime Tree Café** (pp119), then hit the boutiques – just like the Jumeirah Janes do.

SOFTTOUCH SPA Map pp82-3

☎ 341 0000; www.kempinski-dubai.com; Kempinski Hotel, Mall of the Emirates
Conveniently located for a post-Ski Dubai rubdown, Softtouch specialises in Ayurvedic oil-drip treatments as well as massages. While you'll love the Asian-minimalist look – slate floors, Thai-silk walls, orange hanging lamps – the changing rooms are upstairs, meaning you have to walk through the hotel's public areas in a robe. There's no sense of exclusivity, but after shooshing down the slopes, it's a great choice.

TALISE SPA Map pp76-7

☎ 366 6818; www.madinatjumeirah.com/spa; Madinat Jumeirah

Arrive by *abra* at the Madinat Jumeirah's Arabian-themed spa, which has 28 gorgeous free-standing temple-like treatment rooms complete with altars laden with quartz crystal – they're like the inside of a genie's bottle. The only problem is, once your treatment is over, you can't enjoy the sumptuous surroundings because you're hustled out the door to make room for the next appointment. Still, the treatments are top-notch – a blend of Eastern and Western, from Ayurvedic cupping to Swedish massage – and convenient if you're staying at the Madinat. Otherwise, think about trying **Amara** (opposite).

THE ROYAL TREATMENT

In a city built on ersatz facsimiles and Disney-esque gimmicks, the not-to-be-missed **Oriental Hammam** (Map pp82-3; ☎ 315 2140; www.oneandonlyresorts.com; One&Only Royal Mirage) stands out as the hands-down best re-creation of another country's cultural institution: a Moroccan bathhouse. Moroccan-born attendants walk you into a giant, echoey, steamy marble room lit by stained-glass lanterns, where they wrap you in muslin, bathe you on a marble bench from a running hot-water fountain, then lay you down on an enormous, heated marble cube – head-to-toe with three other women (or men, depending on the day) – and scrub your entire body with exfoliating coarse gloves. Next they bathe you again then lead you to a steam room where you relax before receiving a sensuous mud body mask and honey facial, a brief massage and your final rinse. Afterward, you're wrapped in dry muslin and escorted to a meditative relaxation room, where you drift to sleep beneath a blanket and awaken to hot mint tea and dates – just like in Morocco. If you visit only one spa in Dubai, make it the Oriental Hammam.

HENNA

Henna body tattooing is a long-standing tradition dating back 6000 years, when central-Turkish women began painting their hands in homage to the Mother Goddess. The practice spread throughout the regions around the eastern Mediterranean, where the henna shrub grows wild. Today, Emirati women continue the tradition by decorating their hands, nails and feet for special events, particularly weddings. A few nights before the nuptials, brides-to-be are honoured with *lawayt al-henna* or henna night. This is a women-only affair, part of a week of festivities leading up to the big day. The bride is depilated, anointed head-to-toe with perfumes and oils, and shampooed with henna, jasmine or perfume. Her hands, wrists, ankles and feet are then tattooed with intricate floral designs, which typically last around six weeks. Lore has it, the duration of the tattoos is an indication to the mother-in-law of what kind of wife the bride will become. If she's a hard worker – and thus a more desirable daughter-in-law – the henna will penetrate deeper and remain longer.

Want to give it a try? Henna tents are all over the city. Look for signs depicting henna-painted hands in **Deira City Centre** (p92), **Burjuman Centre** (p96), **Souq Madinat Jumeirah** (p101), **Emirates Towers** (p99) and hotel lobbies. Just don't show your mother-in-law; she may disapprove.

RUNNING

The winter months are cool enough for running nearly anytime during the day; in summer you've got to get up with the sun to jog with no fear of heatstroke. The following groups meet regularly. If you're into the more social aspects of running (read: drinking afterward), look into Dubai's 'hashing' clubs at www.creekhsh.net. There's also a marathon in January (see p15).

DUBAI CREEK STRIDERS Map pp72–3

☎ 321 1999; www.dubaicreekstriders.com; meet at Trade Centre car park opposite Exhibition Hall 4, Sheikh Zayed Rd

The Striders meet for weekly training runs on Friday mornings at 7am opposite the Novotel (check the web for an aerial image). The run's length varies depending on the season, but it's generally 10km. Contact the club to register before turning up. Free.

DUBAI ROAD RUNNERS Map pp76–7

☎ 050-624 3213; www.dubai-road-runners.com; north entrance to Safa Park, Al-Wasl Rd; per adult Dh5; ☎ 6.30pm Sat

The club welcomes runners of all ages and abilities to run one or two laps of the park (3.4km per lap). Runners predict how long it will take them to run the course; the one closest wins a prize. Fun and communal.

'WINTER' SPORTS

Ice Skating

AL-NASR LEISURELAND Map pp64–5

☎ 337 1234; www.alsnrll.com; off Oud Metha Rd, Oud Metha; incl boot hire Dh10; ☎ 2hr sessions at 10am, 1pm, 4pm & 7.30pm

Though Leisureland sporting facility is dated, it's got a bit of character, and the rink here is bigger than the sad-looking one at the **Hyatt Regency** (p152). If the kids tire of the ice, there's a bowling alley next door. Look for the Indian restaurant Khazana; it's the best of the onsite food options.

Skiing & Snowboarding

SKI DUBAI Map pp82–3

☎ 409 4000; www.skidxb.com; Mall of the Emirates; Snow Park admission adult/child Dh85/70; Ski Slope per 2hr Dh180/150; ☎ 10am–11pm Sat–Tue, 10am–midnight Wed–Fri

Dubai's most famous attraction, Ski Dubai draws gawkers to the plate-glass windows of the Mall of the Emirates, where they peek inside a faux winter wonderland, complete with ice sculptures, a tiny sledding hill and a 400m ski run. Gulf Arabs are fascinated by this display of a winter they've never seen before, but they typically restrict themselves to the walk-through Snow Park, passing through a colour-lit igloo filled with carved-ice penguins and dragons, then sledding down a little hill in plastic toboggans. Here is one of the rare opportunities to spot Emiratis openly guffawing. Skiers and boarders are kept separate from the Snow Park and instead whiz down a forking slope – one side for beginners, one for intermediates. The 58m (190ft) vertical drop is an ant hill when compared with a real ski mountain, and the chairlift is s-l-o-w, but if you've never skied or boarded before, it's a good place to learn basics. Advanced skiers quickly weary of the too-short runs (think 30 seconds at a good clip) but generally everybody is pleasantly surprised by the velvety snow. Conditions are ideal: at night,

the interior is chilled to -10°C, and snow guns blow feather-light powder; during operation, it warms to a perfect -1°C. The operators spent a lot on this place, and managed to get the snow right, but we're disappointed with the upper hill's appearance – a giant Fly Emirates advertisement dominates the ugly baby-blue gymnasium-like walls. A *trompe l'oeil* sky-and-mountain scene would go a long way toward creating a compelling illusion. (After all, isn't illusion the point?) Though weekends are more crowded, Ski Dubai operates a faster-moving secondary lift, a rope tow, that significantly shortens the ride uphill, giving you more runs per hour than you can get riding the chair. Everything you need is provided, from socks to skis. (Note: you *must* wear the ski clothes they provide; if you wear your own gear you'll be barred admission until you've changed clothing.) Bring gloves and a hat, or buy them cheap in the adjoining ski shop; gloves start around Dh10, hats Dh30.

DIVING

The waters around Dubai are home to small coral reefs, tropical marine life and a few shipwrecks, but visibility is lousy, due in large part to underwater construction of the Palms and the World Islands, which are being built with little regard to the environmental impact they're having on marine environments. If you want to dive, get far away. Dive companies will zip you up to the East Coast to dive between Khor Fakkan and Dibba, or off the east coast of the Musandam Peninsula, in Oman. For more information on diving on the East Coast, see p173. Not including equipment hire, a day's diving includes two dives and costs between Dh200 and Dh500. No experience is required, but if you are uncertified, here's your chance to take a course; ask the concessionaires for details.

The Emirates Diving Association is the UAE's official diving body. It takes a strong interest in environmental matters – whether anyone in Dubai is listening is another matter. The association runs a good website: www.emiratesdiving.com. Also look for the 180-page *UAE Underwater Explorer*, which provides details on 30 dive sites.

AL BOOM DIVING Map pp76–7

☎ 342 2993; www.alboomdiving.com; Al-Wasl Rd, Jumeirah, just south of the Iranian Mosque

Al Boom's staff is experienced and PADI certified; they teach courses and guide dives in Dubai, off the East Coast in Fujairah, and at Musandam. They also provide air-tank fill-ups and equipment maintenance.

SCUBATEC DIVING CENTRE Map pp64–5

☎ 334 8988; Sana Bldg, cnr Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed & Al-Adhbi Rds, Karama

Scubatec runs classes for PADI certification, rents equipment to experienced divers, and leads two-dive trips off Khor Fakkan. With a few days' notice staff can also arrange dives to the Gulf's pearl beds.

OTHER WATERSPORTS

The hot sun, warm sea and high volume of tourists make water sports big business in Dubai. Most facilities are at major beach hotels and private clubs, meaning prices skew high for the following activities. Calm waters mean lousy surfing – indeed there are no major surfing concessionaires because of it – but the placid conditions are ideal for beginners in the sports of kite boarding and water skiing.

Kite-surfers congregate at Wollongong Beach, aka Kite Beach (Map pp76–7), where there's a designated launch and recovery area. You must have a licence to kite-surf on Dubai's beaches; the **Dubai Kite Club** (www.dubaikiteclub.com) regulates the sport. Visit its website for details on temporary licences. Note: use only the instructors it recommends – there's been reports of phoney (and unlicensed) teachers. Rent kites and seek advice at **Fatima Sports** (Map pp76–7; ☎ 050-618 0612; www.fatimasport.com; Kite Beach).

When the kids start whining about the heat and grow weary of your hotel pool, give them a big treat: a visit to **Wild Wadi Waterpark** (Map pp76–7; ☎ 348 4444; www.wildwadi.com; Jumeirah Rd, near the Jumeirah Beach Hotel; adult/child Dh180/150; ☎ 11am–6pm Nov–Feb, 11am–7pm Mar–May & Sep–Oct, 11am–9pm Jun–Aug) Wild Wadi is an American-style waterpark with 14 interconnected rides, including a big-wave pool, a white-water rapids 'river' and a 33m-high slide that drops you at a speed of 80km/h, resulting in a serious wedgie. Little kids have their own dedicated play areas. Rides follow a vague theme about an Arabian adventurer named Juha, and his friend Sinbad the sailor who get shipwrecked together, but it lacks the seamless perfection of Disneyland's attractions. But really, who cares when there's so much fun to be had splashing around? Come on weekdays to avoid long queues.

DID YOU KNOW?

The white metal crosspieces at the top of the Burj Al Arab form what is said to be largest cross in the Middle East – but it's only visible from the sea. Some say the Western designer did it on purpose. Regardless, by the time it was discovered, it was too late to redesign the tower even if the owner, the venerable Sheikh Mohammed, had wanted to – the hotel already had put Dubai on the map and become *the* icon for the city. Jumeirah Properties' PR people downplay it saying that it's not a cross, but an architectural detail. What do you think? Go see it on a boat charter and decide for yourself. You won't believe the scale of it.

Water-skiing in the polluted Dubai Creek is not recommended. Instead head to New Dubai or Abu Dhabi. Water-skiing at a Gulf-front five-star hotel with its own beach club costs around Dh140 for 20 minutes – which, if you've never water-skied, is a long time. Nonguests must also pay a daily admission fee for access to the hotel grounds and beach club (usually about Dh75 to Dh250). Try **Le Meridien Mina Seyahi** (p163), where beach access costs Dh150 and water-skiing Dh140.

Dubai's waterfront is growing like mad. To get perspective on just how far the city now stretches, see it from the water. While there's a location for the following charter service at Dubai Marina, we recommend starting from the Creek and yachting past Deira and Bur Dubai – the original city – then into the Gulf and up the coast to New Dubai. Along the way, you'll pass the Palm Jumeirah and get to see the Burj Al Arab – and its accidental Christian symbolism (above) – from the sea.

For boat charters starting at Dh700 per hour, with a one-hour minimum, visit **Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club** (Map pp56–7; ☎ 205 4646; www.dubaigolf.com; near Deira side of Al-Garhoud Bridge) The skippered vessels range from a 30ft fishing boat with room for six to an 88ft yacht with room for 28 people. Plan three to four hours to make it to the Palm and Burj, then back again. Ask about food-and-drink packages.

GOLF

Dubai has become a big golfing destination over the past few years and will continue to grow, especially with Tiger Woods lending his cachet to a new planned golf community scheduled for completion in late 2009. Dubai has several challenging courses designed by other big names. Fear not: Dubai's clubs don't

require memberships; however, greens fees at top clubs soar to nearly Dh800 for 18 holes. Proper attire is essential. If you're serious about golf, reserve your tee times as soon as you book your hotel and flight.

ARABIAN RANCHES off Map p52

☎ 884 6777; www.thedesertcoursedubai.com; Arabian Ranches, cnr Umm Suqeim St & Emirates Ring Rds; per 18 holes Thu-Sat Dh600, Sun-Wed Dh510 (cart Dh55)

If you've golfed in the American southwest (ie Palm Springs or Scottsdale) you'll feel right at home on this 18-hole desert-style course designed by former golf champion Ian Baker-Finch. Nine-hole play also available.

DUBAI CREEK GOLF & YACHT CLUB

Map pp56–7

☎ 295 6000; www.dubaigolf.com; near Deira side of Al-Garhoud Bridge; per 18 holes Thu-Sat Dh760, Sun-Wed Dh715

The former host course of the Dubai Desert Classic has been redesigned by a former winner of the tournament, Thomas Björn. The Creekside location is gorgeous. Serious golfers should stay at the neighbouring **Park Hyatt** (p152), within walking distance of the greens. There's also a par-three floodlit course for evening play, but the driving range is pricey – Dh30 for a bucket of 50 balls.

EMIRATES GOLF CLUB Map pp82–3

☎ 347 3222; www.dubaigolf.com; Interchange No 5, Sheikh Zayed Rd; 18-hole Majlis course Dh825

The first grass course in the Middle East is home to the **Dubai Desert Classic** (www.dubai-desertclassic.com), a major tourney on the PGA circuit; compare your tee-offs to Tiger Woods'. The way-cool Bedouin-style tents set a striking backdrop for the 19th hole.

FOUR SEASONS GOLF CLUB off Map p52

☎ 601 0101; www.fourseasons.com/dubaigolf; Al-Rebat St, Al-Badia, at Festival City; Sun-Thu Dh685, Fri & Sat Dh725, includes cart & driving range

The hot new course in Dubai is a pleasure to play – impeccably manicured and well laid out with challenging land features and hazards. Reserve well ahead. The changing rooms are like a mini-spa, complete with sauna and Jacuzzi. The driving range is pricey – Dh100 – but includes unlimited balls. There's a good spikes bar for after-play drinks. As of this writing, the hotel

hadn't yet opened; check the website. It promises to become the new premier golf-hotel in Dubai.

SPECTATOR SPORT

Rumour has it, Dubai is gearing up to make a bid for the Olympics, probably in 2020, and they're building like mad at Dubai Sports City in Dubailand. While it may not offer much in the way of individual activities until it's completed, it will bring enormous stadiums and race tracks expressly built to host world-famous sporting events.

The single-biggest sporting event among elite Emiratis is horse-racing. The Nad Al-Sheba racetrack had temporarily closed for renovations as of this writing so that the track and clubhouse could be rebuilt to put the Dubai World Cup on par with the Royal Ascot and Kentucky Derby. By the time you read this, there should be a glittering, brand-spanking-new facility. If you score tickets to the Dubai World Cup, you may even glimpse Sheikh Mohammed himself, with a rare big grin on his face.

Expats turn out in force for the Dubai Rugby 7s, when you may spot more drunken Brits in one place than at any other time during the year.

And then there's cricket, the biggest single sport among Indians and Pakistanis. Emirates airlines teamed up with the International Cricket Council, and after nearly a century at Lord's in London, the council is now based in the UAE, much to the delight of the city's cricket fans. During any of these events, there's palpable excitement in the air; when a favourite team wins, people drive around blowing their car horns and waving flags.

This isn't the case when Tiger Woods wins the Desert Classic golf tournament or Roger Federer the Dubai Tennis Championships,

but spectators still show up from around the world to cheer them on while they play.

You could plan an entire trip around any of these events. Keep an eye out for more big-name international competitions over the coming years. This is Dubai, after all. You never know what's coming down the pike.

HORSE-RACING

NAD AL-SHEBA CLUB Map pp72–3

☎ 336 3666; www.dubairacingclub.com; Nad al-Sheba District, 5km southeast of Dubai centre; general admission free

A passionate love of Arabian thoroughbreds courses through the blood of Emiratis, and the Dubai-based **Godolphin** (www.godolphin.com) stables are well known to horse-racing enthusiasts worldwide. Though racing season officially starts in November, the Dubai International Racing Carnival (late January through March) is when things really heat up. But it's not the white-linen set that packs these weekly races. It's the not-so-civilised drunk expats in shorts and T-shirts – at least in the public areas. For access to the stands, you must wear a 'lounging suit', basically a jacket and trousers. The season culminates in the **Dubai World Cup** (www.dubaiworldcup.com), the world's richest horse race, with prize money of a dizzying US\$6 million and a total purse for the event of over US\$20 million. If you attend, dress to the nines.

Nad al-Sheba's races are held at night from about 7pm. Don a hat and make an evening of it. The stands are licensed, and there are various food and beverage packages available from Dh275 (for details, see www.dubairacingclub.com; click on 'hospitality'). Check the website of the **Emirates Racing Association** (www.emiratesracing.com) for the exact dates of race meetings throughout

UAE FOOTBALL

On winter weeknights, neighbourhood stadiums in Dubai are packed out with up to 10,000 spectators – mostly young Emirati men – passionately barracking for their favourite football teams. Surprisingly most foreigners, be they expats or visitors, hardly attend the matches. And they're rarely covered by the local English-language press. If you're a football fan, attend a match once and you may be hooked; the carnival atmosphere is electric. Fans dress up in colour-coordinated outfits, and a singer and band of drummers lead song-and-dance routines to inspire their teams. If you're curious, catch a match between the old rivals, Al-Ahli, Sheikh Mohammed's red-and-white jersey team, and the purple-clad Al-Ain. Watch out: tempers may flare post-match; it's not uncommon for police on horseback to charge the stadium and set off smoke bombs to restore order. Keep your distance. (Remember, Emiratis' legal rights *always* trump yours.) For the latest, check *Emirates Today* or the official **UAE Football Association** (☎ 316-0101; www.uaefootball.org).

the year. Even if you don't like horse-racing, attending a race presents great people-watching opportunities.

CAMEL RACING

DUBAI CAMEL RACECOURSE

☎ 338 8170; Lisaili, Al-Ain Rd exit 37, approx 40km from Dubai

The traditional sport of the UAE, camel-racing was originally practised only at weddings and special events. These days it's big business, with races held every Thursday, Friday, Sunday and sometimes Monday mornings, October to April. Races usually start around 7am and continue until about 9am. But in classic Emirati style, no schedule is set in stone. Other races are held exclusively for Emiratis. Call ahead before you drive an hour out of town.

The use of child jockeys at races has been a contentious issue in the past. International human-rights groups decried the practice, and the Emiratis acquiesced in July 2005; public races no longer exploit children.

Watching these mighty animals race at speeds of up to 60km/h is quite a sight. So is the erratic driving of their owners, who race around the inside track cheering on their camels. If you miss out on a race meeting, you can usually catch training sessions on each of the above-mentioned mornings at roughly the same time, and again around 5.30pm. The sheer number of camels is shocking. Bring your camera.

MOTOR RACING

Desert Rallying

Motor sports are exceedingly popular with Emiratis. The Emirates Motor Sports Federation holds events throughout the

year, with the important ones scheduled during the cooler months. A round of the FIA Cross-Country Rally World Cup, the **UAE Desert Challenge** (www.uaedesertchallenge.com), attracts top rally drivers from around the world. Held in November, it starts in Abu Dhabi and ends in Dubai. There are a number of smaller rallies during February and March, including the 1000 Dunes Rally and the Spring Desert Rally, which are both 4WD events. Visit the website of the **Emirates Motor Sports Federation** (www.emsfuae.com) for more details.

DUBAI AUTODROME off Map p52

☎ 367 8700; www.dubaiautodrome.com; off Emirates Rd (take Interchange No 4 on Sheikh Zayed Rd), south of Dubai centre

The best place to catch live motor sport is at the Dubai Autodrome. This 5.39km circuit and complex is host to a round of the burgeoning **A1 Grand Prix circuit** (www.a1gp.com), where drivers compete as representatives of their country. Oddly, despite it being a Dubai initiative, there's no UAE team on the circuit – the nearest local team is Team Lebanon, which only occasionally scores well. Things may soon change: a new Formula One track is under construction in Abu Dhabi, due for completion at the end of 2009. The Dubai Autodrome has an adequate track, but the facilities aren't up to snuff for the calibre of events the UAE wants to attract. Keep an eye out.

GOLF

EMIRATES GOLF CLUB Map pp82–3

☎ 347 3222; www.dubaigolf.com; Interchange No 5, Sheikh Zayed Rd

The **Dubai Desert Classic** (www.dubaidesertclassic.com) attracts some of the world's best golfers.

So popular is the event that some expat aficionados take the entire week off work to view international players tackling the local course. The event, which is held in late February or early March at Emirates Golf Club, has seen some thrilling finishes over the past couple of years – the 18th hole has become legendary on the PGA circuit. Tickets run at Dh175 per day for adults; you can purchase them online until the event draws near, but then you can only buy them at outlets in Dubai.

CRICKET

SHARJAH CRICKET STADIUM

off Map p52

☎ 06-542 2991, 06-543 0067; 2nd Industrial Rd, Industrial Area 5, Sharjah

Cricket lovers surely know about the surprising move of the International Cricket Council to Dubai after 96 years at Lord's, the home of cricket. However, at present, international cricket in the UAE is held in nearby Sharjah (and also in Abu Dhabi), where matches are hosted over the winter months. At present the sport hasn't entirely taken off. This will change once Dubai Sports City is complete and a new stadium constructed. Keep your ear to the ground.

RUGBY

DUBAI EXILES RUGBY CLUB

☎ 333 1198; www.dubaixiles.com

The club hosts one of Dubai's biggest annual events, the **Dubai Rugby Sevens** (www.dubairugby7s.com). Held in early December, the final of this three-day Bacchanalian jamboree of sport and booze hosts over 30,000 spectators, all crammed into a temporary stadium built expressly for the 7s. If you're a rugby fan, don't miss it. Book well ahead. Tickets are scarce in the final days leading up to the event.

TENNIS

DUBAI TENNIS STADIUM Map pp56–7

☎ 216 6444; www.dubaitennischampionships.com; Al-Garhoud

Big-name players like Roger Federer and Justine Henin compete at the Dubai Tennis Championships. Held over two weeks from late February to early March, the tournament consists of a Women's Tennis Association (WTA) event followed by an Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) event. The intimate stadium provides up-close views of the world's best hitters in action, a breathtaking sight.

CRICKET CRAZY

The enormous Indian and Pakistani communities l-o-v-e cricket. You'll see them playing on sandy lots between buildings during their lunch breaks, in parks on their days off, and late at night in empty car parks. By contrast, you won't see Emiratis playing: cricket in Dubai belongs to the Subcontinental nationalities. If you want to get under the skin of the game, talk to taxi drivers – you can be sure most of them have posters of their favourite players Scotch-taped to their bedroom walls. But first ask where your driver is from – there's disdain between Pakistanis and Indians. Each will tell you that his country's team is the best, then explain at length why. (Some drivers need a bit of cajoling; show enthusiasm and you'll get the whole story.) When Pakistan plays India, the city lights up. Remember, these two nationalities account for about 45% of Dubai's population, far outnumbering Emiratis. Because most of them can't afford the price of satellite TV, they meet up outside their local eateries in Deira or Bur Dubai to watch the match. Throngs of riveted fans swarm the sidewalks beneath the crackling neon – it's a sight to behold.

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