

Dubai Travel Guide: Expert Tips for First-Time Visitors [Episode 40]

Welcome to episode 40 of the Global Travel Planning Podcast

Tracy: Welcome to episode 40 of the Global Travel Planning Podcast. Today we're diving into the glitz, glamour and hidden gems of Dubai with Kerry from Dubai Travel Planner. Whether you're dreaming of soaring skyscrapers, pristine beaches or vibrant souks, this episode is packed with tips to help you plan your first visit to this unforgettable destination. Hi and welcome to the Global Travel Planning Podcast. I'm, your host, Tracey Collins, who with my expert guests will take you on a weekly journey to destinations around the globe, providing travel inspiration, itinerary ideas, practical tips and more to help you plan your next travel adventure. Hello and welcome to another episode of the podcast. Today we're heading to the dazzling city of Dubai with the help of Kerry from Dubai Travel Planner. Kerry is an expert on all things Dubai and, in this episode we'll be talking about what makes this city so special, the best times to visit, and tips for navigating its many incredible experiences. We'll explore everything from must visit neighborhoods and day trips to cultural insights and budget friendly tips. Plus, Kerry shares her advice on planning an unforgettable itinerary and how to make the most of your time in Dubai. So if you're planning your first trip to Dubai or just curious about this extraordinary city, this episode is packed with practical advice to help you make the most of your visit.

Timp asks Kerry to describe Dubai to first time visitors

So to kick things off, I started by asking Kerry to introduce herself.

Kerry: So I'm Australian by origination, my parents are British and I ended up moving back to London in my 20s, met my now husband and about 12, 13 years ago we moved out to Abu Dhabi in the Middle East.

Tracy: And what's your. Because we're going to talk about Dubai today. So what is your connection to Dubai and how did it become a special place for you? Is a Dubai kind of somewhere special that you, you enjoy visiting?

Kerry: I think in terms of tourism and interest, obviously with Emirates being the major airline of the country and such a huge burst in tourism. Dubai grew as a tourist city long before Abu Dhabi did. And when we first moved out here, obviously there just weren't that many things in Abu Dhabi still, it's still very much a growing city, whereas Dubai is a much more developed city. So we would find ourselves every couple of weeks down in Dubai, to the point we've got friends down there, we would say every two, three weeks we'd be up there for a weekend. So we got very familiar with the city of Dubai.

Tracy: yeah. And if you were to describe Dubai to someone who's never been how would you capture its essence in a few words?

Kerry: I think the best way to describe it, it's a cultural fusion. So there's no one way to describe Dubai. I think the initial impact that everyone gets is that it's a big luxurious city, it's full of skyscrapers and everybody is rich. But you know, that obviously only accounts for a very, very small amount of the city. It's actually got, I guess the city and country as a whole has a very young population because so much of the country is expats. As much as 90% of the residents of the UAE are actually expatriates. And I

guess that with that it brings so many different cultures into play. So, in terms of the food, the architecture, activities that are available for people, it really is a cultural mix.

Tracy: And I guess Dubai is often a place that people will stop off at on the weight of the places. I know that we've stopped off a few times on the way from flying from Australia to Europe and vice versa. Going back from Europe, if you're going out to Australia or the forest, is quite a good place to stop off. but it is a holiday destination in its own right.

Kerry: It really is, yeah. And certainly I was the same. So probably for about 10 years I would fly through the city. So I knew it. As you know, I was there before the Burj Khalifa existed and remember that going up thinking, oh, what's the point of building a big skyscraper here? There's not that many people live here, what do they need that for? And of course over the years it's gone from being just a stopover city with Emirates to actually being a destination in itself. So I think initially they very much tried to market to the people who were doing a one or two night stopover. But that has very much changed now to I guess the city marketing itself as an actual destination to take your holiday.

Tracy: And so what would be the key things that you would say that visitors, first time visitors get into Dubai, what are the key things you think that they should know about the city?

Kerry: So I think we need to cover off culture, the size of the city and the temperature. So we could, we can work in reverse. But I know we're going to come back a bit to what's the best time to visit. But there is no mistaking you are based in the desert. You know, this is a city that really has risen out of the sand and it is hot for a lot of the year. So that's something to be very conscious of as a first Time visitor is planning the time of

year you're visiting. You need to think about the size as well. It is a huge city. You know, it is. It is not just a small Timpok country in the middle of the Middle East. It is a massive city. So it has got different areas to it. And if you are trying

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Kerry: to cover the city, you cannot do it all in a stopover. So you've got to think realistically about how many days you're there. And I think the other thing to be aware of, as we mentioned, is the multicultural side of it. So you're not going to come across Emirati people in all of the transactions that you're doing when you're in the city. So the customs person you meet at the airport might be an Emirati, but your taxi driver probably isn't. The person serving you in a restaurant probably isn't. And a lot of the touch points you have as a tourist probably are not going to be actually with Emirati people.

Ramadan is the most important time of year to visit Dubai

Tracy: Okay. you just touched on the weather. And I'm going to mention this because the first time we actually stopped off in Dubai, it was on our way to move to Australia. And it was July. And I lived. And I grew up in Africa, I've lived in Botswana. We're on the edge of the desert. And I thought I knew hot, but my goodness, I did not know hot until I was in Dubai in July. And it was.

Kerry: We have a whole new. Like The Eskimos have 50 different words for rice or whatever it is. We have so many different, different words for hot out in the Middle east because it is just, you, know, it was the same growing up in Australia. I grew up in Perth.

I thought I knew what hot was. It's nothing compared to what you can experience in Dubai. I guess the big difference is the city has been built to cope with it. So in terms of, you could now very, very comfortably do a stopover in July and August and live pretty much in air conditioning. Just being clever about when you go outside and how you experience it. But it still takes a lot of people by surprise. You know, even by, I guess, the end of March and all the way through to early November, it's too hot to do most activities daytime outside. So it's really about planning your days properly.

Tracy: So if, if you were going to recommend kind of an ideal time of year to visit, if people have a choice and they have the whole 12 months to choose from, when would you recommend they. They do that?

Kerry: I think it depends if you are, A sun seeker or you're someone who enjoy, enjoys the culture and going out. So if you really want the coolest weather of the year, you're only December through February. If you love coming out for the sunshine, I would say the best sort, of beachy weather is going to be end of October and November and March into April. But the other thing to be aware of, too is when religious events occur. So particularly Ramadan is the one that I would put on everyone's radar. It's nothing like it used to be, and it's nothing like it is in, say, Saudi Arabia or countries which are much stricter in terms of the enforcement of Muslim rules. So you almost wouldn't notice the difference now as a tourist, to be honest. But it's important to note, at the moment, it falls over the month of March, so we're recording this in 2025. It will be approximately 1st to 30th of March will be the month of Ramadan. And what it means is that Muslims, abstain from a number of things, but primarily they don't eat and drink during the day. What does that mean for you as a tourist these days? Almost nothing, because restaurants, are allowed to remain open, certainly hotels will have almost all their restaurants open. You can still go out swimming during the day. there isn't nearly the

same strict enforcement in terms of clothing out in public and public affection. All the other things that were quite strict even a decade ago when I first moved out here, they're not really enforced anymore. And this is because of the reliance of the city on tourism.

Tracy: Okay, that's a good point, because I've just planned. In fact, I've just booked a trip to Morocco, and I did look to see when Ramadan was. So we're going before just because I think it'll be kind of easier.

Kerry: There's some wonderful things about coming in Ramadan. Well, you obviously get to enjoy the iftar. Night markets have become a really big thing now as well. So just the culture kind of changes a little bit. They, because of the daytime fasting, governments and schools and most workplaces reduce the number of working hours. So you find people only work for a short time during the middle of the day. Then they'll go home, have the equivalent of a siesta, and then life starts again after sunset, where they have a big feast at the end when the sun goes down. And then life really just revolves around the evening instead.

Tracy: Yeah, sounds like actually, a really good experience.

Kerry: Yeah, yeah. And the weather's beautiful. Now you know, my first Ramadan was in the middle of August when we moved out here and I had two tiny children at the time and that, that was tough. You know, you didn't, didn't know what the rules were and I felt the need that I had to be covered up all the time. And no, it is really relaxed over the last, last 10 years.

Tracy: Okay, that's good.

So now if I'm planning to come and stay in Dubai, are there specific areas or neighborhoods

So now if I'm planning to come and stay in Dubai, are there any specific areas or neighborhoods that you would recommend?

Kerry: again it really depends what you've come for. So if you've only come for a stopover, say you've got a long gap between your flights and you just want to do a 24 hour stopover. I would stay somewhere on the airport side of town. Where the airport is in Dubai is considered Old Dubai. So it's around the area of Deira and on the eastern side of Dubai Creek. Then the city I guess has merged and sprawled a long, long way along the coastline out to the west. So downtown is a, very convenient spot if you are only, coming for a short break. If you're there for a week long holiday, especially if you're coming with the kids, I would head

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Kerry: all the way down to Jumeirah beach, JBR, Dubai Marina, the Palm. These are the areas that are full of all the resorts, you know, hotel, apartment type buildings and a little bit of it plays down to budget as well. So if you're on a budget, obviously these big resort areas are going to be more expensive. If you want something cheaper, head to the older area of town or what we do actually when we come and visit now because we always need a larger, I've got three children so we always need a larger room. When we visit, we look for places anywhere that's along Shakeside Road and the Red Line Metro. By doing that, you can access almost anywhere in the city by catching the metro. So yeah, you don't have to be on the beachfront to have a good experience in Dubai.

Tracy: Oh, that's good. And that kind of segues into.

The next question is about how's the best way to get around Dubai

The next question is about how's the best way to get around the city.

Kerry: Yeah. Yep. So again, if you're going to be there for a few days, it's worth it just to get a Metro card. it's your cheapest journey on the metro. I don't, I presume most of your listeners are either using Australian dollar or UK pound. So you drop Metro Us. Yeah, one to two Australian dollars is probably all it Costs to take a short journey on the train. So I would invest in getting a null card to use the Metro. Otherwise, taxis careem there, is Uber here as well. But Kareem is the more common one that we would use as a card rideshare service. You know that's easier just for point to point. The problem with the Metro in Dubai is it's pretty much the train line runs along the coast, so it runs from the airport, does a loop around downtown Dubai and all the way down to where the Palm and Djibai Marina are and now extends down to where the expo grounds are. But it doesn't, I guess, satellite into more of the suburbs. It doesn't go out into the desert. So anything beyond the city you'll need to find alternate transport.

Tracy: Okay, and then is that, is there an app for that? The there is an RTA app.

Kerry: I would say it's variably good. Not good doesn't always give me the exact answers that I want.

Tracy: Okay, and is there like the car, app like Uber that you mentioned?

Kerry: Yeah, the best app if you want to exactly where you want picking up. Yeah.

Tracy: Okay, that sounds good.

Plan your itinerary for Dubai ahead of time to avoid feeling overwhelmed

So if you're starting to plan an itinerary for Dubai, how can you make the best of your time without feeling overwhelmed? If you want to have a variety of kind of experiences in Dubai.

Kerry: Yeah, I think that's going to vary a lot by the time of year that you're looking at. So as we said, if you're coming in the summer, you're really going to be restricted to only doing things in the early morning and the evening. So there's no point planning a week long holiday if your intention is to walk everywhere, go out into the mountains, explore the country in general, you probably only need a much shorter time if you're coming in the summer because you won't be doing those things. I think you've got to not underestimate the effect of jet lag as well. So a lot of people, as you say, are coming as an international stopover. So you've got to consider that most flights into Dubai actually land in the middle of the night. So if you're arriving at 2m, don't try and be clever and last all the way through till your hotel check in at 3:00pm book yourself a hotel room from the night before, get a good night's sleep, then start your exploring the following day. And I think you just got to think about pre booking during busy times as well. So the busiest times to Visit are going to be around Christmas to New Year is definitely the busiest time. The spring break and Easter holiday, traditionally especially a lot of Europeans come to visit at that time of year and the year you're going to have

that coinciding with Eid, which is the celebration they have at the end of Ramadan. What it means when it's busy, it just means accommodations in short supply and everything skyrockets in price and there's crowds for everything. So you'd be lining up for everything. So if you have the luxury to travel outside of traditional school holiday times in the northern hemisphere, I'd strongly recommend you do that.

Tracy: Yeah, it sounds like a good idea. I recommend that for anybody visiting the.

Kerry: UK as well if they can exactly finish school. Trust me, that's how I will be traveling.

Tracy: It gets, it get, it's so nice when they finish school and you don't have to travel during school holidays.

Kerry: Yeah. So sometimes ours don't quite align with the UK or have you as well. So yeah, definitely try and take advantage of that.

Tracy: Oh, that's useful.

So what about must do experiences and things to see and do in Dubai

So what about must do experiences and things to see and do in Dubai?

Kerry: Right. Well I guess you could start with the, you know there's the glossy shiny things. You know we have got the world's tallest house but do expect even if you pre book your ticket to be lining up for it and stuck there with the crowd ain Dubai has just reopened. So that's the biggest observation wheel in the world. It opened its shut. It's

now finally reopened at the start of 2025. So again these are big glitzy, glamorous things. You get amazing views over the city. But are they the most important things to see? Maybe not. Maybe not. You want to get a bit of a mixture of everything I guess. So I would definitely recommend getting into the old town. So that is spread over two sides around Dubai Creek. So Dubai is a trading city, has actually existed for a couple of hundred years. It's actually been a trading port unlike I guess the rest of the country is very underdeveloped and it's really only developed over the last 60 or so years. But Dubai has actually been an active

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Kerry: trading city for a long time. So there is a lot to explore in terms of the old town taking an abroad across Dubai Creek and going to some, some more of the traditional markets. You know again it's touristy but it's, it's a has to be done kind of activ. And even in the peak of summer if you leave it to later in the day. You can still do this sort of exploration by foot.

Tracy: Yeah. Not, not at, not at midday like Doug and I did it when it was. We managed about, I think about two minutes outside before we had to go back into Acorn. It was literally, it was m. Ridiculous.

Kerry: And honestly, you know, if you, if you have, you know, if you lived in Australia for a long time, I think, well, I can handle the heat, I can go out for a bit. But it's a different sort of heat. It really is. It is true that there are a lot of air conditioned bus stops and everyone just revolves their life around air conditioning and keeping it in the malls.

Tracy: Are pretty amazing, I have to say. We were.

Kerry: They are, yeah. And you'll be amazed what's inside them. You know, there's more than just shops inside malls. You know, lots and lots of fancy restaurants are inside malls. Play centers, you know, entertainment centers really all revolve around indoor facilities here.

Tracy: Fish. I remember an aquarium.

Kerry: Yes. You can see a lot of the Djebel Aquarium from inside Dubai Mall. And likewise if you go out to Atlantis, you can see a fair bit from the public viewing area. Yeah.

Tracy: So what other experiences would you kind of highly recommend? I know that skiing is something I've heard about. Indoor skiing.

Kerry: Yeah. I guess when it first opened in Dubai it was very much a novelty to go skiing in the desert and you can see penguins in the desert and other such things if that floats your boat. I think you have to mix the old and the new is what I always recommend to people. So one of the places I actually recommend, again, touristy gimmick, but there's a place called the Djebel Frame. It's nowhere near as tall as Burj Khalifa, but it gives you a pretty good aerial view over the city. From one side you can look out over the old city, towards Deira and Sharjah and see, you know, how the sort of low lying areas of the city look. And then out the other side you see the very modern Dubai downtown. Then head down from there. Underneath there you've got Seville park. And then you can take, you know, do your boat nab or what have you. And then I would definitely, if you've got the time available, spend an evening around downtown Dubai. See the spectacle off the fountain shows on, the lake there. See the Burj Khalifa lit up at night and just the multicultural mix that hangs around in downtown Dubai. Your

pocket probably can't last more than a night or two there because it is, you know, Everything around there. You are paying top dollar for, Dubai desert safaris that, you know, they have. I remember taking my first one 20 plus years ago and they are still going strong to this day. they're very much changed from the days of bumping over, sand dunes in a four wheel drive and taking a camel ride. They still exist. You can very much do those things. But Dubai has very much moved into the glamping market now. So you can actually have very upscale dining and overnight camping if you wish in the desert to experience the other side. And it doesn't, you know, you don't have to travel too far out of the city to hit the dunes and have a starlight sky. And it's very, very different side to Dubai.

Most obvious day trip from Dubai is to make sure you head down to Abu Dhabi

Tracy: and are there other day trips that you recommend that?

Kerry: Yeah. So obviously a lot of what you can do in Dubai is very easy to do from within the city. If you do do one of these, desert safaris, almost all the companies will come and pick you up from your hotel or wherever you're staying in Dubai. So it's very easy to do all of that without transport. the most obvious day trip from Dubai is to make sure you head down to Abu Dhabi as well. Again, it depends how much time you've got in your timetable. It is a city that has hugely grown over the last decade or so. You know, we moved here just after the Sheikh Zayed mosque had just opened. Since then, you've had Yas Marina circuit open. So that's where they hold the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix in sort of November, December time every year. there are now four theme parks on Yas Island. So it's a huge entertainment center. If you've got kids, that's the number one

spot they're probably going to want to head to. and in addition to the mosque, you've got the Presidential Palace, Qasr Al Watan, that only opened a couple of years ago. Again, in terms of size and scale, it rivals the Grand Mosque. Now in terms of the grandest building in the city, you've got. The Louvre has been open for a couple of years now. And in the next couple of months, with any luck, the rest of the Saadiyat Cultural district will be opening in May this year. So that's going to include a Guggenheim museum, the, Zayed Museum, just a huge cultural zone in addition to what's already here. So you could easily do two, three days of an itinerary down the road in Abu Dhabi.

Tracy: And how long does it take to get from Dubai to Abu Dhabi, amazingly quick.

Kerry: So the two cities at the moment are connected by freeway and you can drive 140km an hour down the freeway. So from where we live to get to the outskirts of you know, where our friends live in Dubai, about one hour by car. Obviously you need to allow a little bit longer if you go to further points in the city, an hour and a half you can catch a bus in under two hours. there is a bus that goes directly to the Zayed International Airport which is the brand new airport that's open in Abu Dhabi. Or you can get the, the regular

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Kerry: intercity bus into town. And again that's very cheap. It's Dh25 per person on the intercity bus which you know, I'm going to have a guess here, it's about five quid. So you know it's, it's very affordable way to get between the two cities. But obviously once you get to the other end there are ah, buses but you know you're probably better off getting a taxi to get to your final destination. So as I said Abu Dhabi will be the number

one spot if you've got the time. You definitely want to see both. It's just a slightly different vibe between the two cities. Abu Dhabi is actually the capital. and I guess the, the rate of progress of building in Abu Dhabi feels like they've just gone that little bit slower, little more meticulous. It's grown over time whereas Dubai kind of pops up overnight and every time we drive up there there's a new skyscraper that's appeared since we were last there.

Tracy: So I feel like every time I fly into Dubai it seems just getting.

Kerry: Bigger and bigger and it will continue to expand. You know there are plans, I think it's by 2030 they want to open the new airport in Dubai South. So Emirates will move all of its operations further out of the city because they simply, they're out of capacity at their current location.

Tracy: I can imagine. Well it's a major hub airport as well for. It is, it is indeed.

Kerry: And you know, and not just for, yeah, not just for people coming to the Middle east obviously. Anyone travel, traveling around the world, I'll get the statistic totally wrong but it's something like 80 of the world is within a 12 hour flight from Dubai so it's no wonder it's a hub. But in addition a few others I definitely should mention. So within Dubai, Emirates are not, I'm not, I probably should go back and explain slightly so Dubai almost sits in the middle of United Arab Emirates, but there's actually seven emirates in the uae. Abu Dhabi is by far the largest, the richest and takes up the most of the the land if you like. But Dubai was, as I said because it was originally a trading port, is just a city that has grown up. Rather than surviving on oil, it survives on other industries through trade, real estate, tourism, etc, Then beyond Dubai you have the Northern Emirates. So you have Sharjah, Ajman, Omal, Queen, Ras Al Khaimah and

Fajera all sit to sort of the, the northeast of Dubai.

Mazendam peninsula is probably one of Oman's most beautiful places

What might surprise a lot of people is that there's mountains in the uae. So actually running along the end of the Arabian Peninsula all the way from the very top, the very top point of the Arabian Peninsula, where you're almost hitting Iran, is actually a little part of Oman called Mazendam. And the Mazendam peninsula is probably one of the most beautiful places. So every time everyone asks me what's the best day trip in the uae, I say actually it's to escape the UAE and go up to this very northern part. They call it the Norway of Arabia because it's just very tranquil and beautiful. You can catch a boat, go dolphin spotting, swimming and just relax out in the water, sleep overnight out in the water. It's wonderful. As you make your way down most of the Haj Mountains go through Ras Al Khaimah, so the tallest peak in the uae. You'll find Jebel Jace in Raz Al Khaimah. a lot of adventure activities out there. So if you've got your adrenaline junkies who like to go mountain biking, hiking, hiking, ziplining, that's probably the number one spot I'd recommend you head is up into the mountains there. Over the other side of the mountains is Fujairah and Fujairah faces, this wrong name is a golf of Oman. It faces on the eastern coast. Always tends to be a couple of degrees cooler over there. So if you are visiting in some of the hotter months, it can be a good idea to look at some of the resorts that are on the Fajera coast instead. Again, a lot more tranquil out there. There's a bit of history out there and there's lots of development going along that coast as well. So you've got a couple of other enclaves of Sharjah there where they're putting a lot of money and development time into making that coast of the country a lot more interesting. And it's all getting Connected by high speed rail at the moment as well. So yeah, the whole country is getting there in terms of connectivity.

Tracy: So lots of exciting developments going on then.

Kerry: Awful lot, awful lot. And then in terms of historical towns as well, if you had. so Dubai obviously sits on the, on the Gulf coast. As you head inland down towards the Oman border, you've got towns like Hatta which is still part of the Dubai Emirate. A lot of adventure activities out there. So that again, if you love you doing your hiking, climbing, axe throwing, anything, any of those bizarre sports, you can get all of that down in Hatta Wadi Hub. And the other town is a big regional town is Al Ain, which sits on the border and this is known as the home of the founding father, Sheikh Zayed. He was brought up in Al Ain. again a really great place to come if you want to learn more about the history of the country. They do have a big water park down there, big zoos. It's being renovated at the moment but big zoo and safari park down there, massive learning education centre and Jebel Hafeet as well which is quite popular with, you can climb up the top of the mountain, see over into a man, it's popular with cycling and there's also a natural spring at the bottom. So yeah, very busy place on weekends is El Ain. And it sits about equidistance between Dubai and Abu Dhabi. So people who do

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Kerry: have the time, I suggest they go from Dubai, do a trip down to El Ain on the border and then triangle it back up to Abu Dhabi.

Tracy: Wow. Okay. Well it sounds like there's a lot of variety of things that you can.

Kerry: Do and it just involves looking beyond what's in there. You know, the tourist brochures will obviously direct you to the most expensive activities to do in Dubai itself, but there's so much to see beyond the city. So if you are willing to hire a car, and I do

say this hand on, same as the heat, people don't believe me when I say it, you've got to be able to handle the traffic like the, the traffic move. It's, it's better than some countries I can think of. Plenty worse. Looking at you Egypt, but it's still hair raising driving down six lane freeways with trucks and taxis, everyone hurtling past you at 140km an hour. So you really need to have your wits about you to hire a car in Dubai. But if you want to get to these outlying places, it's far the easiest way to do it.

Tracy: Okay. And other Tour companies that you'd recommend or any.

Kerry: There's a growing number of tour companies who are doing it. Not as many as you would think. When I've tried to search for friends coming to visit and trying to find them tours to do, they're few and far between. So I end up doing a fair bit of tourism in my own car when friends come out to visit. But yeah, you can, you can definitely, you know, if you. Certainly, if you're booking for any of the major airlines, they will try and sell you their holiday packages with tours added on and what have you. So you just need to weigh them up. But there's a lot of competition out there for anything that's in the immediate vicinity of Dubai, like the Dubai Safaris, you'll find a lot of operators.

Tracy: Yeah, I have seen a lot of those. And, we're, we're planning to fly from, Istanbul, hopefully Sri Lanka. And I am considering having a, a bit more than just a few hours in Dubai Airport, which is what I've had the last few times.

Kerry: So it'll be good to, for people to know doing stopovers as well. If you have. I'm going to get the timing wrong for this, but if you have a stopover, I believe it's more than eight hours, that is unavoidable. As in Dubai, Emirates cannot provide you the connection. You're entitled to get a free hotel room. You can't choose which one it is. They will choose the hotel for you based on your ticket class. It's either eight or 10

hours at the moment. They keep changing the rule on it. But do allow yourself enough time to, you know, if you're going to have a stopover, I would say you need minimum six to seven hours even to get out of, you know, to make it worth passing customs and getting out. but also consider Etihad as well. I find Etihad, the more expensive airline, as someone who lives here, who needs to fly out, but for people flying through, they have exceptionally good deals. And the other thing to look at, they also do free overnight stays as well. So that, that includes, I think up to two days you can get free and if you do longer, three or four days, you can get up to 30% off your hotel if you go through their selected list. So there's definitely some huge incentives to do these sort of, these sort of stopovers. They'll have some stopover dates over things like Christmas, New Year, over Grand Prix, but for much of the year you can grab these sort of deals To. To encourage you to come and stay just a little bit longer during the stopover.

Tracy: Oh, that's great. I'm gonna definitely check those out now.

There's a huge amount of regional influence on Dubai's culture

I'm gonna. I'm gonna pivot to food. Being a foodie. What food and drinks should. Should I. Or would you recommend that somebody tries? And I know you can say multicultural, I guess there's got to be in scampi.

Kerry: And over the years, I find it hard to narrow, you know, foods that I thought, oh, this was local cuisine. Someone's. No, that's actually Lebanese food or that's Turkish food. So it's fair to say there's been a huge amount of sort of regional cultural influence. And the fact that so much of the population is Indian and Pakistani, that's a massive influence on the culture out here. Certainly trying some Arabic coffee or some carrot tea

while you're here, that would be a good way to experience some of their local culture. they'll try and claim that shawarma is local cuisine, but everyone's got to have a shawarma at some point while they're in Dubai. anything with camel in it, too, whether that's camel meat or camel milk. That's probably a unique experience for most people coming through the Middle East. I was surprised. I thought you might ask me about the, viral Dubai Chocolate, but, I still don't know. Maybe it's just the younger crowd. Yeah. Someone asked me the other day, is this genuine Dubai Chocolate? And I said, I'm going to have to confess I've never had any. So I know what it is. Like, it's a, it's pistachio and something inside a chocolate. And I think they're going through a few, international copyright claims at the moment over, you know, trademarked. Can you actually call it Dubai Chocolate if it's not made in Dubai?

Tracy: Oh, okay. I didn't like that. Maybe I can't remember.

Kerry: It's quite expensive to buy, but that might be on some people's bucket list to give that a go while they're in Dubai.

Dining in Dubai can be pretty expensive but there's a huge variety

Tracy: What, about any particular, Do you have any favorite restaurants or places to eat that you'd recommend?

Kerry: Oh, the problem is I'm always traveling with kids, so, you know, always ending up at the traditional family restaurants. I think if you want to go and have a proper foodie experience, go and have a proper food tour in old Dubai. So there's a company called Frying Pan Adventures, gets a huge amount of acclaim. they do the proper walking

tours where you can walk through the markets and that will take you to more of the hole in the wall type experiences. Otherwise, dining in Dubai can be pretty expensive.

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Kerry: Like if you are just sticking to the hotels and sticking to the tourist areas, it has gone up a lot. You can get food court food relatively cheap and you get good variety too. You know, it's far more than just your McDonald's because of that cultural mix. You know, you can get any type of cuisine you can imagine in Dubai, that cater well to vegetarians as well. There's a huge variety there. And at the other end of the scale they have a huge, huge range of five star restaurants as well for the foodies.

Tracy: Yeah, well, I've heard about the brunches.

Kerry: Oh and that's what I mean. And without joking, brunches are probably one of the best value things in Dubai. They've become a lot more expensive. But a brunch is not the meal between breakfast and lunch in, in the uae it's basically it's a buffet. So it's traditionally used to be a Friday. Now the week in Dubai has moved. So we used to follow, like many of the Middle, East countries used to do a Sunday to Thursday working week where Friday and Saturday is the weekend. All of the UAE now does a Monday to half day. Friday is the official government working hours of the week. So Saturdays are now the big brunching day. But you can get brunch in an evening, you can get brunch on a Sunday afternoon. Some would just call it Sunday roast, but it's always called a brunch here. But basically it's an all inclusive food and drink package and it's just exceptionally good value. You know, no matter what end of the scale. If you're going for, you know, a pub style meal or one of these five star hotels, it's, it's amazing value.

Tracy: All right, I'll definitely have to try one of those. Now.

Have you got any budget friendly tips for anybody visiting Dubai

What about other. Now I'm conscious of my budget because we're, we're traveling for quite a long time at the minute. So have you got any budget friendly tips for anybody visiting Dubai?

Kerry: As I said, Dubai is, I used to go, yeah, of course you can do things cheap and it really is getting expensive and that's, that's something I've noticed since co. Obviously during the COVID years when we could only travel, you know, domestic travel was the only type we got so many amazingly good deals on hotels and dining out two for one vouchers, they're getting more difficult to get hold of now. So I'm not going to lie that it's a cheap city. transportation is the one thing that stayed relatively cheap, whether that's metro or catching taxis. Relatively cheap. But as I mentioned earlier, if you want to stay somewhere that's a long the metro line, that's one way to save a little bit. So you don't need to get those taxis in between catch your trains everywhere. The entertainer used to be an absolute must that I would recommend to tourists. That's where you can get a, two for one voucher. So if you're buying meals out, make sure you get your buy one, get one free. They still exist, but they probably again, just don't have the variety and special offers that they used to. But you know, you look up your coupon sites as well to see if there's, there's any special offers you can get on anything. But, but I would avoid, if you are staying in a hotel, avoid probably eating in the hotel restaurant because you'll pay extra tourism taxes on top if you're eating in a hotel. There is a 5% VAT on all goods and services now. you pay extra in hotels. And the other thing, always the way when you travel is alcohol is one way to keep your expenses down as well. If you're dining in

a hotel, you end up paying more if you're adding alcohol and then that's got additional taxes on it.

Tracy: Okay, that's good to know. Luckily Doug doesn't drink, so I'll just have to go teetotal while I'm there as well.

Kerry: No, again, just shopping around for happy hour deals when you can as well. There's a lot of particularly like your rooftop bars and that sort of thing. If you're prepared to go early evening, you can get sunset deals where you can get your two for one drinks and get your deals on it. But don't be hanging out late at night paying for your drinks. You'll pay top dollar.

Tracy: A lot of money.

So what about cultural norms and etiquette when visiting Muslim countries

So what about cultural norms and etiquette? Because I know this is, this will be a question that people will usually ask like, how do I dress?

Kerry: Absolutely. And it's probably front of mind for a lot of people. Especially if you haven't been to a Muslim country before. You'll have that immediate concern of anything you're doing. Is this going to be culturally offensive, what I'm doing? I can tell you that there's not much you could do that they haven't seen before here. But as a good tourist there are plenty of things you can do just to show a little bit of extra respect. I have this argument, I've given up arguing on travel forums about this. When it comes to clothing

that you should wear in the Middle east, it, ah, always pays to wear something that covers your shoulders and your knees as just a bare minimum. It does. You know, someone might ask, you know, today I'm wearing a shirt that just barely covers my shoulders. That's fine. Absolutely. In the majority of circumstances. If you plan to go to a mosque, if you're going to one of these, old apartments, parts of towns, of the markets, you might just want your skin a little bit more covered. I wouldn't go overly cleavage hanging out, but no one's standing there with a ruler to check that you're past your knees or what have you. If you are more comfortable wearing shorts and T shirts, go for it. I wouldn't be wearing super thin, strappy singlet, tops unless you're at a beach or in a beach club setting. Perfectly acceptable within those settings. But when you're walking back through the hotel foyer, when you're leaving there, going on the metro, going up out to the malls, just show a little bit extra respect. It's not hard to do, unfortunately. Too many people seem to be doing it now in Dubai and as soon as a few people do it, other people think, oh, well, they're getting away with it, but they're perfectly within their rights. Any security guards

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Kerry: or police to come tap you on the shoulder and tell you that's not good enough, you need to leave. So yeah, for most people it won't be an issue whatsoever to show respect with your clothing. there's still, there's huge breakthroughs I guess in terms of the way females are viewed in the country. So again, talking about the expat population, we said close to 90% of the population's expats and a huge number of those expats are, male. So actually the male to female ratio in the country is significantly swayed because there are so many labourers and workers, predominantly from Asia. So these people do tend to have a tendency to, again, different cultural norms. They stare, they look, but relative, you know, in my experience and certainly anyone I know, harmless.

It's just that might make people feel uncomfortable. So again, another reason to make sure you're wearing respectful clothing. But I've never heard of people having actual safety issues. The only safety issues I've ever heard from women who are out late at night in clubbing type environments or in the type of environment where other, cultural norms from a Muslim country might not be being followed. But for the average tourist, no, you should have no issues whatsoever. I probably wouldn't, for example, reach out to shake the hand of a male as a female unless the hand was offered to me first. But again, if you're going to start getting to that sort of, you know, the business etiquette, there's a whole other book of things and it would very much depend on the circumstance.

Tracy: Yeah, I can imagine. I was kind of thinking for that first time visitor tourist who, you know, there's those questions that you ask about, you know, to show that respect. What do I need to do? it's the same as, you know, you know, you go to Italy, you go into a church, you know you're gonna cover your shoulders. Exactly.

Kerry: So if you are going into a mosque here, you will need to be completely covered. So that is clothing all the way down to your wrists, none of your chest showing, clothing all the way down to your ankles. the main one that people will visit in Dubai is probably Jumeirah Mosque, or if you're coming down to the Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, they used to lend abayas for ladies to wear and a shayla to cover your head. They do not do that anymore. So that's something to be conscious of if you're going there. If you turn up without the appropriate covering, there's now a small, like little souk attached to the mosque that you'll need to go and buy a cheaper buyer to go for your visit. But again, it's considered a souvenir from you from your stay here. And if you go to any other Muslim country in the future, you've got yourself something appropriate to wear.

Tracy: Absolutely. No, that's good, that's good advice.

Global Travel Planning Podcast welcomes Kerry to discuss Dubai with us

So it's going to wrap up, but I always ask the one question at the end of my podcast, which is what would be the 12 tip that you would share for anybody visiting Dubai for the first time?

Kerry: I think what I would tell them is you've got to be open minded and don't let your very first impressions of the city be your only impression. So it really is the type, you know, I tell a lot of people. It's like it's a city that's like Marmite. You either love it or you hate it. And too many people make a decision when they're there on a 24 hour stopover, without touring, you know, if they've just gone straight from the airport to a hotel and seen the big buildings and think it's all glitz and glamour. You know, maybe they've seen Dubai bling on Netflix or something. I think that's what the whole place is like. Like anywhere. You cannot judge, especially big cities, because all big cities have similar traits, don't they, in terms of traffic and concrete? You know, these things are very common. So you really need to give. It's a city. I think you need to give a chance to. So if you've only done a stopover before, come back, do a longer stopover, Go, and see more of it, get beyond the city, see some of the things we talked about on these day trips, and I think you'll come away with a very different impression.

Tracy: Oh, brilliant. Thank you so much, Kerry, for coming onto the podcast this week. It's been great to chat with you all about Dubai.

Kerry: Thank you.

Tracy: Thank you for joining us on this episode of the Global Travel Planning Podcast. For more details and links to everything we discussed today, check out the show notes@globaltravelplanning.com Remember, if you enjoyed the show, please consider leaving us a review on your favorite podcast app, because your free feedback helps us reach more travel enthusiasts just like you. Anyway, that leaves me to say, as always, happy global Travel Planning.

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