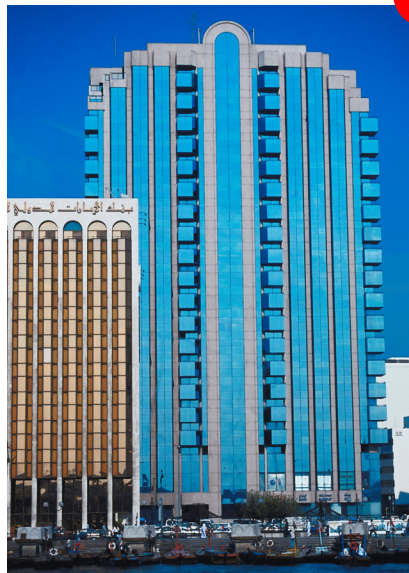


Dubai *or* Singapore?



Singapore and Dubai - two of the world's great cities. Dubai is my home away from home, brash, new, exciting and just a little less sanitised than its Asian counterpart!

Three things I would miss if I left Dubai – well, it has to be my grocer, my nail salon and guilt-free dining, indulged at least three times a week if I am honest.

In the Arabian Gulf city, my neighbourhood grocer will send a messenger around within 10 to 15 minutes of calling, burdened with nothing more than a dozen eggs or a can of air freshener – a sweet contrast with Singapore where that trip will cost me \$5 at the very least.

Nail salons ... well, you know there are plenty to go around in Singapore, but in Dubai ... they must be just 100 metres apart, sited conveniently to avert a broken nail crisis, cater to a polish necessity or a mandatory weekly manicure and pedicure.

There is an air of indulgence about the city, but while you might assume Dubai has spoilt me rotten, there are a few facts worth looking at.

I have never worked harder in improving my Emotional Intelligence (EQ); I am living and working in a city that is serviced by more than 160

nationalities from that irreplaceable neighbourhood grocer, to workplace colleagues, to taxi drivers, to staff in restaurants and bars...

First tip, I tell everyone, is to forget your super-efficient Singapore systems when you are in the Middle East. It's just not like that here. Different, yes, better, sometimes, but efficient ... not typically!

The bonus is the experience of the new. Love those cross-cultural moments when you can see the world through new eyes.

Relish that experience when a bevy of waiters from Kerala, the Philippines and Egypt mull the best way to remove a car from the perils of a sandpit ... yes, here we drive our cars over the sand to watch beautiful but ephemeral sunsets on the ... err ... beach.

The point is – with such a medley of nationalities – you have to be patient and accommodating to understand how others view and feel about things to eventually get the simplest things done sometimes. (Simple by Singapore standards that is.)

It's no wonder that Dubai is a mystery to the visitor and expat resident alike.

Here the mosque and the mall live side by side. Pre crisis, the term 'Las

Vegas of the Middle East' was an apt description of an emirate where the race to the future encompassed the biggest, tallest and often tackiest, from architecture to celebrity bling.

Post crisis, it should be quieter and more mature ... but the fact is, the monster mall culture lives on from designer bikinis on the beach to the *uber* cool clubbing.

Some 45 minutes away, in the neighbouring emirate of Abu Dhabi, it is a different story. The UAE capital remains a conservative older brother to its wayward sibling, and the living is considerably more sedate as a result.

But, if a life in the fast lane is an option, and you're considering living and working in Dubai, take note of a few hints from one who has been there and done that:

- 1) The law may not necessarily be on your side even if you are right. Local Emirati Arabs tend to be favoured more in this city in any legal situation, perhaps because they form less than 10% of the total population;
- 2) Appearances count ... or at least you can make them do so. More than 5,000 salons vie for business serving a population of just one million. Great grooming is the only option!
- 3) Singaporeans are favoured. Arabs love us, although you have to get used to their pronunciation of '*Sing-four-eans*'. They (rightly) think we are smart, super organised and very green



... so make the most of that warm regard. It even extends to professional and social circles – altogether a positive brand experience;

4) Understand the deep fundamental difference between Dubai and anywhere in the Middle East (ME) – Dubai is a unique ‘social oasis of fun’ and that type of environment does not exist anywhere else in the region.

Although ...take note, you cannot kiss in public, cannot wear very short shorts or minis in a mall and you may get arrested coming out of a bar on rare and unlucky occasions because you ‘have been drinking’;

5) If sociable, you will have friends who span continents, cook up dishes ranging from chicken shawerma to oriental Chinese to Russian and Polish fare, and who party, party, party;

6) Normal rules do not apply – expats who have lived here for more than 30 years without any sort of permanent residency still reckon they have a great deal – sunshine, cheap petrol, villa living, generally low crime rate and no taxes works for a lot of people.

7) If you are looking for a job, use the top three recruiters in your sector



at most, and rely on word of mouth and personal networking at relevant quality events. No one returns your calls anyway. More so than in any city I have seen, if you can win the trust of the decision maker fast, your name is referred faster than an Australia bushfire spreads;

8) Good news on the driving front – the authorities recognise Singapore licences. This would save you about \$2000 and 20 hours of anguish on the roads (bring your Xena the Warrior Princess outfit when here – serves as better protection than the car air bag safety system). The UAE is notorious for car accidents (record to date is the 200 car pile-up in Abu Dhabi last year).

And oh, bring your favourite classical music to ease nerves on the roads – road rage is as common as the road diversions;

9) Whatever your personal experiences are, take time out to enjoy the beauty of the desert, the architectural marvels of the mega buildings, to save money and to remember that you are citizen of the world; and lastly

10) Appreciate that you are in a city strongly prided by the locals to be representative of the vision held by their founding father the late Sheikh Zayed Bin Al Nahyan. So do what would be considered respectful by them and if you do not feel comfortable at any point of time, make the conscious effort to leave and find another interesting destination to call your expat home.

Dubai can be addictive... I should know, I've been trying to leave the city for five years.

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