

# DESERT DREAM

## DESTINATION DUBAI

With its lucrative sporting events and state-of-the-art training complexes, the city of Dubai is destined to become the sporting destination of the future

 You don't have to lollop around the Arabian desert on a camel to understand what is going on in Dubai – just pick up a newspaper: "Dubai's \$10m prize richest in golf"; "Dubai group to take over Liverpool?"; "Dubai hosts world's richest horse race"; "International Cricket Council moves to Dubai". The former pearl-diving settlement may only have the pungent joys of camel racing to offer us from its own sporting past, but the steel and glass megalopolis mushrooming out of the sands is set to enjoy a rich sporting future.

The city of Dubai, capital of the emirate of the same name that forms part of the United Arab Emirates, began as a blank canvas of white sand dunes on which the visionary

Al Maktoum ruling dynasty, currently headed by Sheikh Mohammed, set out to create a modern city that would still glitter in the sunshine when the oil loot runs out. Yes, Dubai made some moolah from the discovery of oil in 1966; today, though, 95 per cent of its GDP comes from other sources – such as business, real estate and tourism.

Of course, to prosper in all of these areas, the new kid on the block needed to scream and shout to get noticed. And so, like a real-life game of *Sim City* with the ruling Sheikh furiously clicking the mouse, the building began. There's the gargantuan **Burj Dubai** (the tallest man-made structure on earth), the iconic **Burj Al Arab** (that big, sail-shaped hotel) and the famous trio of man-made **Palm Islands** – and two audacious new island projects, shaped like the world and the universe, are also under way.

These daring creations have helped this adult Disney World catch the eye of investors, traders, manufacturers and tourists. But Dubai has another secret weapon, one of the most potent in modern society: sport.

Nothing grabs global attention quite like sport, and Dubai now boasts a range of sparkling events to entice the world's sporting elite and their hordes of fans to the desert. In January, footballing giants Inter Milan and Ajax competed in the **Dubai Cup**; in February, golf star Tiger Woods won the lucrative **Dubai Desert Classic** while Rafa Nadal and Ana Ivanovic turned up for the **Dubai Tennis Championships**; March saw the **Dubai World Cup**, the richest horse race in the world; and rumours persist that **Dubai International Capital**, an investment fund of the Dubai government, are still keen on buying Liverpool Football Club.

This has all helped put Dubai firmly on the sporting map, but the emirate is determined to build a solid sporting infrastructure, too. **Dubai Sports City**, which will cover more than 50 million square feet, is set to become the

world's first purpose-built sports city. The project will include a 60,000-seater stadium, a 25,000-capacity cricket bowl, a golf course designed by Ernie Els (opened this year), a Manchester United Soccer School, a Butch Harmon School of Golf and the ICC Global Cricket Academy. This £2bn project, parts of which are already up and running, is scheduled to be completed by 2010.

Today, visitors to Dubai can watch top athletes in action, use world-class facilities to hone their golf or tennis skills, make the most of the white sand beaches and year-round sunshine, enjoy tax-free shopping at the palatial shopping malls and scoff fine cuisine – **Gordon Ramsay's Verre** opened there in 2001. It's easy to see why the number of tourists has doubled since 2000.

Flashy and, in truth, quite strange, Dubai is an improbable desert metropolis worthy of a science-fiction comic. But the pace and scale of its growth is mind-boggling. Will Dubai ever be finished? No. But that is what makes it such an exciting place to visit.

MARK BAILEY

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For more info on Dubai and a full archive of Sporting Cities, see [www.myfreesport.co.uk](http://www.myfreesport.co.uk)



**GOLF**  
Watch the Dubai World Championship

The new Dubai World Championship, which takes place at Jumeirah Golf Estates in November 2009, will be the richest game of golf on the planet, with a prize fund of \$10m. This event will be the climax of the European Tour Order of Merit, which is next year being renamed as 'The Race to Dubai'. With \$1,666,660 on offer for the winner of the tournament itself, alongside \$2m for topping the Race to Dubai rankings, one player could find himself standing over a final-hole putt worth almost \$4m. Nervous? [www.europeantour.com](http://www.europeantour.com)

**OUTDOOR ADVENTURE**  
Sand blast

Dubai is a giant sandpit: outside of the skyscraper-filled city lies mile upon mile of golden sand dunes for you to play in. You can slide down dunes on a sandboard, whizz around in a dune buggy or bump over dry river valleys in a 4x4 for a spot of 'wadi-bashing'. Most desert safari trips include a barbecue dinner and give you the chance to go quad-biking at night, so you can go tearing over the sand dunes with only your headlamp to guide you. Great fun - just watch out for camels and nomads. [www.deserttrangers.com](http://www.deserttrangers.com)

**DIRECTORY** What to do and how

**CAMEL POLO**  
Just don't hit the camels with your mallet. They run away. Fast. [www.dubaipoloacademy.com](http://www.dubaipoloacademy.com)

**DIVING**  
Explore coral reefs and surreal, deliberately sunken wrecks. [www.aboomdiving.com](http://www.aboomdiving.com)

**GOLF**  
Courses like the Emirates Golf Club and The Els Club make this a world-class venue. For booking, visit [www.dubaigolf.com](http://www.dubaigolf.com)

**HORSE RACING**  
The glitzy Dubai International

Racing Carnival runs from January to March each year. [www.dubairacingclub.com](http://www.dubairacingclub.com)

**SKI DUBAI**  
An indoor ski dome located in the Mall of the Emirates, complete with 400m run, quarter-pipe and a toboggan. Oh, and penguins too. Plastic ones, of course. [www.skidxb.com](http://www.skidxb.com)

**WATERSPORTS**  
The warm waters and gentle breeze of the Gulf make Dubai good for watersports from kite-surfing to donut-ring riding. [www.dwsa.net](http://www.dwsa.net)

**FLIGHTS**  
Four nights at the 5\* Le Royal Meridien, and return flights from Heathrow, from £829. [www.virginholidays.com](http://www.virginholidays.com)

**Dubai**  
Sports events

**November 27-29**  
**DUBAI RUGBY SEVENS**  
Top nations including New Zealand, South Africa, England and Australia slug it out in the first round of the International Rugby Sevens series at a brand new, purpose-built venue. [www.dubairugby7s.com](http://www.dubairugby7s.com)

**January 16**  
**DUBAI MARATHON**  
The \$1m prize fund makes this the richest marathon in the world, and there's another \$1m on offer for anyone who breaks a world record. Good luck. [www.dubaimarathon.org](http://www.dubaimarathon.org)

**January 29-February 1**  
**DUBAI DESERT CLASSIC**  
Part of the PGA 'European' Tour, this contest sees the world's best golfers fight for a share of the \$2.5m prize fund. Any winner will have to beat 2008 champ Tiger Woods, though. [www.dubaidesertclassic.com](http://www.dubaidesertclassic.com)

**February-March**  
**DUBAI TENNIS CHAMPS**  
A hardcourt showdown featuring all the big-name stars like Roger Federer and Jelena Jankovic. [www.dubaitennischampionships.com](http://www.dubaitennischampionships.com)

**March 24-30**  
**DUBAI WORLD CUP**  
The richest horse meeting in the world takes place at the Nad Al Sheba Racecourse, with \$21.28m in prize money up for grabs. In 2010, the race will move to its new home in Meydan, with a fancy new 60,000-seater grandstand. [www.dubaiworldcup.com](http://www.dubaiworldcup.com)



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