

## Dub-ias Moments

Back to Dubai for the 2 nite express stopover to Europe and a chance to reacquaint ones soul with what the other side does to alleviate the ravages of the drought. Emirates Airways pound per square inch gives cattle class a lift into the climes of other Airlines business sector and calorie overload is the only legal complaint.

A veiled trolley dolly with the alluring name of Chardonnay, a fitting Islamic misnomer, advised that nearly every plane from NZ/Oz is full or should that be ....sorry Ocker the Fokker's Chokker. Smog covered the Airport & everywhere planes were like busy bees taxiing or landing with crowds inside the terminal resembling an apocryphal Asian Scout Jamboree.

Dubai Airport is full-on 24 hours and splashy drawcards flaunt the shopfronts with Porsches and exotic luxuries as lottery or shopping prizes. This is the eye opener to the Do Buy persona a never ending display of consumer largess in the world's greatest town of excess.

Baggage collection, passporting, exiting the place and cabbing to the Deira New town Hotel in the old town part of the city took 2 hours. Professing to be a "New " hotel in a fairly nondescript part of Deira is suspicious to Dubai regulars but at least there was no outward appearance of hourly room rentals.

The city is a wall to wall pastiche of Indian and Pakistani guest workers with a sprinkle of Filipinos thrown into the mix and the building sites resemble ant's nests as the phalanx of workers swarm in continuous shifts.

Balconies are Laundromats in waiting as the indentured labour lives 4 to a room and even in cases share a bed in shifts. Grilling Maneech our ever constant hotel driver revealed he came from Chennai in India and worked 7am to 7pm for 24 months before a paid holiday home.

A fee is negotiated by mutual consent for Maneech to drive 4 of us to Wild Wadi Water Park an hour's drive through heavy traffic for \$A14. Arrival at opening time on a Thursday revealed 5 admission queues snaking endlessly about the front leading to a quick scheduling reappraisal.

Enquiry reveals waiting on every ride and no waterfall is worth this wait for entry as temperatures were quelling the queue quotient very quickly. Dam it the Malls are going to cop a mauling just to escape the climaticus maximus that was now the pervading force.

The nearest centre was the Madinet but it was only a lesson in consumer overload representing a mock Souk with upmarket products and a paucity of cliental. The centre had great product presentation with large wooden doors, cabinets and Arabic themes creating ancient desert designer chic servicing the Burj clientele.

Here we have window shopping without heart and the most successful operation is the wallet-ectomy a fitting terminal result. Its crowning glory is the access as a viewing platform for the Burj El Arab towering across a moated fort with mock Dhows floating about the extremes.



Why waste precious time in the small malls when the godzillas are just around the dunes. The biggest wonder dome of any enticing Dubai promotion is sure to feature the Great Mall of The Emirates the Aspen of Arabia.

A giant cylinder monument to the creative excess of petro-dirhams basks in 35C as snowboarders hustle the slopes of the silver shute. Grab a seat at any sector of the "Chill", "Steam", "Bake" or "Flame" mega restaurant at the end of the slope in the food emporium. A creative idea in food presentation at an exposed series of cooking venues in pristine stainless cubes as serial auto Môn Benito bouncers charm the sashimi into shininess.

The food areas blend as a stylistic series of islands with preparation, blending, cooking and staff interacting into all parts of the operation. The diners munch and stare into the slopes as a chairlift disappears into the silver cocoon to disgorge the brightly clad snowboarders and skiers.



There is a limit to interactive shopping and even though there are 400 outlets the penultimate mall of monuments and largess looms as the expeditionary forces move on.

The new Palace of extreme is Il Battutta at the end of the Jumeriha construction Gulag a veritable oasis in the desert and a masterful supplicant to the deities of Dubai. The sheer audacity of this pre-emptive strike into the heart of all consumer corpulence unfolds as the taxi delivers to the drop zone at the ultimate Theme Park Centre.

It is paramount that the DZ be at the right entry so that the full impact of the continual meander through the 5 zones of retail zoology impacts. Entering the Andalusia hall with its Spanish overtones leads to a location guide useful for future reconnoitring through the halls.

One leaves this hall and ventures into the Tunisian zone for a lesson in history of the theme behind the man Il Battutta the greatest explorer the ancient world has seen.

In the 14thC the sheer diversity of lands he wandered for 25 years, plus culture he assimilated, defies comprehension. This scion of Islamic adventuring left his environment to spend a life rewriting the unknown world and interactively entered the religious inequities along the way.

This devout Muslim went to Europe, Africa, India, China and tales abound of procreative overtones only compromising ancient morals by cohabitating with whatever "tribal" group the mores would accept.

This museum and carnival of themes has Persian warriors, Chinese Junks and Indian elephants all in their relevant halls under a surreal representation of a starlight desert solar system as the roof.



History lessons abound in static displays with original equipment and drawings showing 15th C medical and cardiovascular systems which make mockery of our modern awareness of the evolution of the ancients.

A free ticket to wander into interactive internal malls as the biggest consumer theme park provides a cheap day out in Dubai.

Sensory overload and a long day at the desert hustings beckon retirement to the 1 star enclave and a trip along the Al Muteena road to sample the sidewalk café critter enclaves. The street is a clangorous, bustling, interaction of the Indo/Pak workforce getting the victuals and social networking done at a fast pace.

Sitting curb side at a Lebanese Shawara Café provides a viewing platform for a surreptitious industry of "girls" needing rides from strangers. The cafes are cheap and good quality Indian food abounds as long as one is prepared to sit in the evening still.

Tiredness and heat drive us back to compound Deira and the thought of air-conditioning is the lure to get a campsite into action. However there is only one problem with staying on a discount rate of \$US105 is that the quality of the clientele is relative. The hotel boasts Indian, Iranian & Pakistani nightclubs and this is a warning of impending nite moves.

The ubiquitous beats of Punjabi lounge music interspersed with indestructible Asia beats blasted a tattoo of sound into the 1st floor bedrooms. The combined 16 hour flight, full day's program and the obligatory Bombay and Tonics did little to assuage the syncopations.

A glitch in prebooking as the pecking order for room placement when on the budget express is an early reservation to ensure good rooms on the right floor.

A new day dawns and the traffic is ceaseless but the encroachment is minor in comparison to the strangled manifestations of the Imams compelling call to prayer at 4.30am. Yes life starts early in the desert and the psychology of interpretations intrudes no matter your religious predilections.

Onward to search for the Hotels complimentary breakfast zone slightly suspect in quality due to the prior excesses of the seedy nightclub aura. Quaint and hidden behind the clubs it is staffed exclusively by Filipinos with plenty on hand to individually make ones toast and clear every plate poste haste.

The choice is varied and plentiful ; salads,cheeses,baked beans, grilled eggplant, herb potato ,sausage,eggs,French toast, fruit ,coffee and teas. The guests are a mixture of the world's races all chattering, pushing and demanding as one does when it's free. The Arab contingent has seated the veiled hadjibbed women separately looking like starlings on a wire whereupon the ultimate heist took place.

Without fear, favour or a front end loader a veiled Queen of the desert took seven visits to refuel. All forms of food were backpacked out of the room without interference from the comatose staff whilst the remainder went into calorie uplift. Perhaps you can do an impression of Fat Albert without a worry of visible weight problem as the flowing robes and scarfs hide the product of gargantuan binge eating.

Friday is the Islamic rest day and any trip to Dubai prepares one for the limitations of openings and certain closures. A shopping visit to the Lamcey Plaza is organised as it opens at 10am and is the "working Mans Mall" with prices suitable to local participation.

The entry boasts a tired waterfall of stoneage manufacture but with prices barely above Karama markets shopping is achieved without serial harassment. Clothing, footwear, optical goods and such are again sold by a majority of Filipino staff in comparison to other nationalities. Engaging these girls in small talk reveals some interesting revelations in what is almost a modern commercial slave trade.

The major areas of engagement were from the Cebu/Zamboanga areas and they were all tired from the lengthy hours of the retail merry go round and were happy to lean on a friendly shoulder. Problems were manifold with complaint of no work at home, long hours with little social contact, Catholics inside a Muslim society, Money diluted in purchasing power therefore smaller remittances ,treatment by Arabs and the rabid desire to get married.

Lamcey Plaza down and the next theme palace is the Wafi Mall an exaggerated Egyptian themed sarcophagi in homage to some sort of Ptolemaic dynasty. A glass multi coloured pyramid hovers over the top but the jewel in this retail Theban theatre is the Lebanese Wafi gourmet food centre on the 2nd floor. This is an emporium style modern souk, magnificent presentation of all products, sensory flavours and used by Emiratees.



Sweets and marzipan goodies wrapped to kill alongside a World Series Arabic coffee stand pumping out flavours and aroma. The hustle is everywhere with big fiery ovens pushing out warm smells ,flat breads,shawaras ,kebabs and a salad selection as varied as any great vegetarian kitchen. Barrels of Olives, pyramids of aubergine, waterfalls of pomegranate and exotic fruits under superb lighting makes presentation of all goods like designer victuals Versace style.

A veritable feast of Arnabit salad (crumbed cauliflower, lemon juice and garlic paste), a Halabi kebab (pastachio, garlic lamb), chicken shawara and green almonds still in pods spread amongst four grazers came to \$A20.

Wandering further through the emporium even on a holiday day was like a Sunday stroll in Brisbane and elicited half tossed remarks of "Do you want to buy" by vendors senile in their boredom. The entreaties are not the catalyst as such luminescent brands as Sixty are touted at 75% discount and are hard to resist.

The impression lingers that the designer and courtier labels are subject to whatever shopping venue is in vogue so bargains emerge to compensate.

The real bargaining values exist in the old hub of Deira as the glitterati of Africa and Europe go to the entrepot riverside tourist trap of the Gold Souk. The urge to watch the human exotica is richer in stature than the yellow fever of the 24 carat trinkets bursting out of every enclave.



The striking features of the blue/black Cameroon women exuding indigo hues against the colourful streams of traditional material contrast the groups of sheeplike Westerners marching under flag bearing guides. All windows are brightly lit and gold encrusted offerings draw the purchaser slowly into the web and everyone becomes a supplicant to the magical golden gods.



Roads and alleys all lead toward the Creek and into the spice souk and the search for Iranian Sargot Saffron the second best in the culinary world to the rich red high growth Hindu Kush variety.

The smells and action takes place as the spice vendor attempts to flog the saffron of his choice but the order demands the best and the battle to agree is tense.

Varied alternate products on offer such as big boy soap, natural Viagra and virgin tightening cream are thrown into the mix as the bait to get the sale finalised.



Final offer is a compromise of 7 dirham's per gram and a vacuum sealed spice is securely packed to satisfy Australian customs. The resulting smell of saffron permeates all clothing in the travel bags amid suggestions to perhaps slow boil the undies and risotto the remains.

The short stagger from here to the Dubai Creek as dusk settles gets a first hand look at the abra dodgem handicap. The 30 odd seater boats touch, jostle and bump as each jockey for position & as fast as one fills the next nudges in to take its place.

It is 1 dirham to take the ride across to the Bastakiya or an alternative is to private hire for a cruise down the Creek to go past the elite buildings along the waterfront.



The final shopping excess at Do Buy is to lurk about the Karama markets the Emirates el cheapo alternative for factory outlets or sample knock-off heaven.

The level of harassment has lifted in 2 years and the industry in fake bags and watches increased immeasurably but police do not charge the vendor if caught only the economic realities of confiscation drive the subterfuge. Bargaining for product is driven by the first price then rapidly discounted to a usual compromise around 30% of initial asking.

Good cheap eats abound this perimeter and settling into any hummus laden dip fest can be accompanied by the forbidden pleasure of gin and juice. An operation of great care and subtlety is required to take a labelled water bottle backfilled with gin and splash it into a fresh glass of guava or mango.

Feels like the days of taking illegal liquor to a dance or footy match and slurping in the car park. It is not the sense of danger that exists only an awareness that you need to be careful not to cop the wrath of an over zealous polizia perhaps suffering an Allah overload that may be inclined to entrap an unwary westerner.