

FOOD and TRAVEL

CATALAN CUISINE

Costa Rica
Gourmet Traveller

René Redzepi
On the future of food

Winter Activities

FEB/MAR 2019 £4.80



Best pubs with rooms

FREE 20-PAGE GUIDE TO **FINLAND'S ARCHIPELAGO**

Reviews Drinks Chefs Food News In Season Hotels Restaurants

Ghee whizz
INDIAN MADE EASY

Temple-style lentil and vegetable stew

CITY BREAKS

ABU DHABI

Unofficial cultural capital of the UAE, this is a place where spectacular landscape and wildlife exist side by side with sleek malls and culinary fireworks, says Imogen Lepere

Why go? Little more than 60 years ago, Abu Dhabi was a humble town surviving on the remains of the pearl-diving industry. Thanks to the discovery of oil in the Fifties, today it is a brunch-loving, champagne-fuelled glitter ball suspended between the rippling dunes of the Empty Quarter and the Persian Gulf. As if year-round sunshine, glamorous nightlife and acid-bright beaches weren't draw enough, it is also emerging as the cultural capital of the UAE with a host of world-class galleries including The Louvre. It isn't all about seeing and being seen, however. On the outskirts of town silent herons wade the swamps, while falcon trainers and their faithful dogs pad out to the desert at sunrise. Occasionally, between a designer mall and sushi restaurant, you'll glimpse the hem of a *mukhawara* (traditional dress) swishing down a side street and the ancient pearl village doesn't feel so far away.

What to do Sunning yourself on the Corniche's famous beachfront and shopping in Yas Island's vast mall yasmall.ae are rites of passage for first timers, but there's plenty more to discover. Look out for hawksbill turtles on a guided kayaking trip through the mangroves naukhada.ae or join local wildlife enthusiast Sultan Karrani 00 971 506 543 309 for a walk through Yas Island's Al Wathba Wetland Resort, famed for its flamingos. The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque szgmc.gov.ae/en is located between the three main bridges connecting Abu Dhabi City to the mainland and is the top sight in the city. This glistening haven is big enough to hold 40,000 people as well as the world's biggest chandelier and carpet, both meticulously handmade. Since opening in 2017, Louvre Abu Dhabi loureaabudhabi.ae has been at the forefront of the UAE's cultural scene and the architecture (by Jean Nouvel) is captivating. With their haggling opportunities and chances to sip sweet tea with traders, souks are a great way to experience Emirati culture. *Al Ain* (the Old Souk) is crammed with everything from clothes to spices, while the Fish Souk and Fruit and Vegetable Souk are near the main port and can easily be combined into a single trip.

Travel information

Currency is the UAE dirham (AED). Time is 4 hours ahead of GMT. Flight time from London is around 7 hours. The taxi journey from the airport to the city centre takes around 30 minutes.

Getting there

Ethad Airways has direct flights from London Heathrow to Abu Dhabi International. ethad.com

Turkish Airlines also flies from Heathrow to Abu Dhabi with one stop in Istanbul. turkishairlines.com

Where to stay 'Big', 'bold' and 'beautiful' all spring to mind when describing Abu Dhabi's hotels. Expect hundreds of rooms, service as polished as the marble domes of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque and pristine pools with swim-up bars. With its amethyst-encrusted lifts, Jumeirah at Etihad Towers Hotel 00 97 123 115 555, jumeirah.com is case in point. In contrast is Zaya Nurai Island 00 971 250 662 22, zayanuraisland.com – a ten-minute hop by speedboat from Saadiyat Island, with its teepee-style beach tents, 34 pool villas and book cellar. Count the super-yachts in the marina from the spanking-new Abu Dhabi Edition 00 971 2 208 0000, editionhotels.com while the Park Rotana 00 971 2 657 3333, rotana.com makes a great, well-located budget option.

Where to eat and drink Abu Dhabi is a mecca for expats without forgetting its Emirati roots. Enjoy cocktails and red snapper at Asia de Cuba 00 971 269 933 33, asiadecuba.com on the Corniche, then pick up baklava and thick Arabic coffee from a local café on the way home. Mezlai 00 971 2 690 7999, emiratespalace.com at the Emirates Palace was the first fine-dining Emirati restaurant in the city. It conjures local ingredients such as camel milk, za'atar and rosewater into beautiful modern plates. Yadoo's (Grandma's) House 00 971 2 441 1311, yadooshouse.com focuses on traditional favourites such as *al harees* (meat and wheat slow-cooked and served with ghee). Brunching is a religion here. Every Friday (the first day of the weekend), the city's beautiful people hit Zuma 00 971 2 401 5900, zumarestaurant.com and Aqua 00 971 281 355 50, rosewoodhotels.com and The Terrace 00 971 2 694 4553, theterraceonthecorniche.com to sip mimosas.

Time running out? Book a half-day desert safari to ride camels over the dunes as the sun sets before dining on bedouin dishes like *salona* (vegetable stew) around a campfire. arabianightsvillage.com
Trip tip While it is famed for its hospitality, Abu Dhabi is governed by strict etiquette. Remember to dress appropriately and avoid overt displays of affection or tipsiness in public.

Resources

Visit Abu Dhabi is the official tourist board and its website provides a wealth of essential travel tips. visitabudhabi.ae

Further Reading

Temporary People (Restless Books, £12.99) by Deepak Unnikrishnan is a collection of short stories told from the point of view of the many Indians who work in Abu Dhabi's hotels, providing a fascinating insight into life in the city.

AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Min C	13	14	17	20	23	26	28	29	26	22	18	15
Max C	22	24	27	32	37	38	41	40	39	35	30	25
mm	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Clockwise from top left: the vast Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, a sunset camel ride; beautiful Yas Island; a view of the Corniche; a morning meeting; bright whites abound; lunch is served; typical sweet tea; traditional Emirati dress; crimping pastry