The 2 Idiots Travel Blog

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**Ultimate Kid-friendly Itinerary for Spending 1, 2, 3 or 4 days in Dubai, United Arab Emirates**

Why do The 2 Idiots recommend Dubai?

Dubai is AJ’s hometown; he grew up here! He’s watched the city grow from a sleepy town where there were only a few skyscrapers, and today, it’s astounding how big Dubai is. The mixture of old and new is astounding. You can still see parts of what Dubai had been, combined with this amazing city coming out of nowhere with humongous skyscrapers and the best international cuisine all in one place. (This is one of our top places to eat in the world.) Dubai just wows you! While other cities such as [Florence](https://www.2idiotstravel.com/ultimate-kid-friendly-itinerary-to-spend-1-2-3-or-4-days-in-florence-italy/) have a history you can see, Dubai is creating history, and you can be a part of this new city as it thrives and grows.

CREATING AN IDEAL ITINERARY

AJ’s parents still live in Dubai, so we stay with them when we visit. But we have a lot of experience with Dubai – Natasha has been to the city seven or eight times – and we have many friends who visit the city and to whom we provide itinerary advice. (It’s also a good pitstop for travelers from America heading to southeast Asia or India.)

There is so much to see in Dubai and the city prides itself on building the biggest of everything that you truly need five days to see everything and to pace yourself. We provide a jam-packed itinerary to squeeze in the most for you if you only have a day or two, but if you can spread your trip out to five days, this itinerary will be much easier on your family.

Logistics

Dubai is divided between Old Dubai and New Dubai. We suggest you stay in New Dubai, as close to Burj Khalifa as possible, because the sites we recommend are in New Dubai and in that area. A slightly less expensive area that is still very convenient is Karama, just a few minutes from Burj Khalifa. (And where AJ’s parents still live!)

We also suggest renting a car. The city is large and filled with highways (and very fast drivers in luxury sports cars!) and it is difficult to get around without a car. While taxis and Ubers are everywhere, you will need a car seat here; renting a car makes your tour of the city and outskirts much easier.

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| **Vacation days** | **Itinerary** |
| Day 1 | Visit Burj Khalifa   * Top of the world (Prices start at 141 AED) * The Dubai Fountain * Dubai Mall * Dubai Aquarium (Prices vary by expeirence)   Burj Al Arab and Jumeirah Beach  The Palm Islands and Atlantis  Spend evening at Madinat Al Jumeirah |
| Day 2 | Visit Dubai Frame (50 AED adults; 30 AED kids)  Experience Old Dubai   * Dubai Museum (3 AED adults; 1 AED kids) * Meena Bazaar and Old Textile Market * Optional: Walk alongside Dubai Creek * Take the Abra across Dubai Creek to Deira * Spice market * Gold Souk   Take a Desert Safari (Prices vary by tour) |
| Day 3 | Take a day trip outside of Dubai, choose one:   * Abu Dhabi - Visit the Grand Mosque * Hatta - Visit Jabal Hafeet * Beach in Ajman * Beach in Khorfakkan |
| Day 4 | Visit Global Village (15 AED)  Mall of the Emirates and Ski Dubai (Prices vary by experience)  Visit Dubai Miracle Garden (50 AED for 12 and up; 40 AED for kids)  Enjoy the evening in La Mer |

***Day 1: Discover the New City in the Desert***

On your first day in Dubai, you should head directly to Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world. It truly is an incredible site to behold. [Buy tickets in advance](https://tickets.atthetop.ae/atthetop/en-us), and select a time that works for you. This 163-story building built in 2009 is the No. 1 attraction in the city and tickets go very quickly. Prices are higher during peak visit times, and sunset is expensive and crowded. While it would be pretty to catch the sunset from Burj Khalifa, visit in the morning for less crowds and cheaper tickets; it will be easier with children. (They offer sunrise tickets, should you feel like waking before the sun.) You can visit from the windowed lounge, or go straight to the top, where it is open-air.

When you reach the observatory at Burj Khalifa, you will be rewarded with 360-degree views of Dubai. It’s great for getting acclimated to Dubai and seeing where everything is, as you are literally on top of the world here. It’s also perfect for learning about the history of Dubai, from its humble beginnings to discovering oil and becoming one of the wealthiest nations in the world. Hand-held monitors allow you to turn and adjust to see what Dubai looked like just 30 years ago – nothing but desert. (This is the Dubai AJ grew up in!) The Burj Khalifa is an amazing experience, and even Natasha, with her fear of heights, made it to the top to take it all in.

The building is part of a gigantic campus that also consists of the Dubai Fountain and the Dubai Mall – both the biggest in the world. After your top-floor glimpse of Dubai, make your way back to ground level and visit the fountain.

The Dubai Fountain is similar to the Bellagio Fountain in Las Vegas, only bigger. As the largest choreographed fountain in the world, it provides a colorful dancing water show set to music in the 30-acre man-made lake in downtown Dubai. The fountain shoots every 30 minutes in the evening, which can be pretty crowded. We recommend catching the daytime shows (which vary depending on day but is typically at 1 p.m. and 1:30 p.m.). If you can catch a nighttime show, it is breathtaking -- just be ready for crowds.

Next, walk over to the Dubai Mall. Americans invented the wall, but Dubai perfected it. It literally has every shop you could think of, and it’s exhausting! You couldn’t see the entire mall in one day if you wanted to. There is an app for the mall that helps you map out a route between stores and sites and we recommend you [download this app](https://thedubaimall.com/en/map) and figure out a plan before you visit – you can definitely get lost in the mall!

But we aren’t sending you to the mall for shopping; there is so much to see and do inside. They have an ice skating rink and an aquarium where you can actually scuba dive with the sharks and fish, which AJ did on our visit. The aquarium is great for kids.

After the mall, grab your rental car and head to Burj Al Arab, the world’s only seven-star hotel. This is the iconic hotel that is shaped like the sail of a boat. You cannot enter the hotel without a reservation, be it for a stay or dining, but it’s expensive and you can catch views of the hotel (and take pictures) from Jumeirah Beach.

The beach is a public beach, and if you bring your suits, go for a dip while there. Remember: this is a Muslim country; please dress on the conservative side when visiting a public beach.

You can continue down the road to its end, where you’ll find the Palm Islands. This is a collection of islands built artificially in the shape of a palm tree – it’s so crazy to think about it, but you’ll see it from Burj Al Arab. Here, the Atlantis Resort is the main feature of the islands. While you will not be able to find alcohol in Dubai restaurants at the mall or downtown (again, this is a Muslim country) but you can find bars at the resorts. We grabbed a drink at the Waldorf Astoria, which was expensive, but everything in New Dubai is expensive.

As your day comes to an end in Jumeirah, there is a lovely outdoor mall modeled like Venice with canals and amazing restaurants on the water called Souk Madinat Jumeirah. There is an incredible view of the Burj Al Arab from this mall, as well. Enjoy dinner here, choosing from one of the plethora of international cuisine available to you, including the best southeast Asian foods that are as if you are eating in those countries.

*This day is a really long day, so if you squeezed all of these things in, kudos to you. But if you have five days in Dubai, you can divide the above into two days.*

***Day 2: Step Back into Old Dubai***

After your first exhausting day in the heart of Dubai, take a step back by visiting Old Dubai. This is Natasha’s favorite part of Dubai because everything in Dubai is new, new, new and it’s become a tourist town, but Old Dubai is peaceful, charming and has an old school way.

When you visit Old Dubai, head straight to the Dubai Frame first. Literally a picture frame in the desert, when you stand before it you can see New Dubai’s skyline within the frame. Of course, this is an Instagram-worthy moment. It’s a very popular site, so again, [purchase tickets in advance](https://www.thedubaiframe.com/tickets.html) so you can select the time that works for your schedule.

After your photos at the Frame, head to the Dubai Museum to see what the country was like before it became what it is today. It’s a small and quick museum for a start in Old Dubai, but the building itself is the oldest building in the city: Al Fahidi Fort, which was built in 1787.

From here, walk down to the Indian Meena Bazaar. There are more Indians living in Dubai than Arabs. The Indian community has had a huge influence on Dubai helping to build the city; many of the construction workers come from India and many business owners are Indian, including AJ’s father, who has his own business in Dubai. (There are so many expats in Dubai, the city is highly diverse and only 20 percent of the population is from the Emirates, and there are more than 200 nationalities in the whole of the U.A.E.) The Bazaar is all about Indian clothing, fashion and electronics. Feel free to haggle here! Start with a third or a half of the price they give you; never accept the first price!

Next walk to the Old Textile Market, which is all about, well, what else? Textiles (especially Indian clothing). After shopping the textile markets, enjoy lunch in Old Dubai. As Old Dubai is situated on the Dubai Creek, feel free to take a walk along the creek or take the Abra ferry to Deira. It costs less than a dollar to cross the creek and it’s an awesome experience.

After you cross the creek, visit the spice market of Dubai: Persian spices, Indian spices… everything can be found here. We regularly buy saffron (one of the world’s costliest spices) from this spice market. There is also a Gold Souk (souk means market in Arabic) within walking distance of the spice market. This is the best place to get gold and jewelry in Dubai – don’t spend the extra money in New Dubai, where everything is marked up significantly. Here, they will offer you market price for what they call the “gold charge,” and then you can haggle on the “making charge.”

A word of caution: Be careful of people selling fake merchandise like fake Rolexes and Prada purses. They will try to take you to random stores or apartments in the middle of Dubai. Just say “no.”

Leave the area around 4 p.m. and spend your evening going on a desert safari. You’ll take a 4WD vehicles across the dunes for a fun ride until you reach a camp, where you can dress in Arab clothes, enjoy hookah, ride a camel, watch a belly dancing show and enjoy authentic Arabic food. It’s a really neat experience and there are tons of tour operators available to do these tours. We suggest you go to [TripAdvisor](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Products-g295424-zfd60,240-Dubai_Emirate_of_Dubai.html) to find the best tour operators.

Note: If you’re cautious about taking little kids on the 4WD rides, you can ask for a driver to go calmly across the desert or have one parent take the children straight to camp while the other joins the dune tour portion. The operators are happy to make you comfortable.

***Day 3: Day Trip in the Desert***

If you have three days in Dubai, we highly suggest exploring the United Arab Emirates and leave the city behind for a full-day excursion. The following are each a couple of hours away, so you’ll want to pick one. The No. 1 spot we recommend is visiting Abu Dhabi.

Abu Dhabi is the capital if the U.A.E. and the second largest city after Dubai. Here, you’ll find the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, which is a beautiful mosque comparable to Istanbul’s Hagia Sophia. It features 82 white domes and is one of the largest mosques in the world – it can hold 41,000 people! (Do not visit during Ramadan!)

Abu Dhabi also offers Emirates Palace, which is a gorgeous beachfront estate with a marina and lots of restaurants to choose from (and bars!). And, because the U.A.E. wants to be the best at everything, you will find the world’s second Louvre here in Abu Dhabi. Actually created in partnership with the Parisian museum, this location is filled with many of the treasures that were tucked away in storage due to size. By having a second location, now you can see even more art and antiquities owned by the Louvre Museum.

Another day trip option is to visit Hatta, which is in the mountains of the U.A.E. This area is often filled with outdoor adventurers who want to hike and mountain bike in the hills, but it provides a completely different experience than Dubai. Drive up Jabal Hafeet, the largest mountain in the area; it borders U.A.E. and Oman and gives you a great view of the countryside. The road itself can be tricky; if anyone is prone to car sicknesses, you may want to skip this drive, which has 60 switchbacks/corners.

Another option is Ajman, which rests on the Persian Gulf. The U.A.E. is so named for its different Emirates (similar to a state with a different ruler, or emir, leading it) and this is the capital of the smallest emirate. Here, explore the 18th century fort, now the Ajman Museum.

Ajman has become a newer tourist destination, but is much less expensive than Dubai. Here, the beaches are some of the most beautiful we have ever seen around the world. As are the beaches in nearby Khorfakkan, which is a perfect place to spend a night. We stayed at the Ajman Saray Resort, and just enjoyed the beach and the views.

***Day 4: Ski in the Desert***

There is just so much to see and do in Dubai that it truly is difficult to narrow down the sites you can see. We are barely giving you a glimpse! If you have a fourth or fifth day to enjoy Dubai, head to the Global Village. Originally created during the Dubai Shopping Festival, countries from around the world brought their products and food. It was such a success, they extended it so that it is practically a permanent exhibit. You can find tons of deals here, on designer goods. You’ll need [tickets](https://tickets.globalvillage.ae/gv/b2c/index.cfm/ticketselection) to get in, as it is still an exhibition. Shop away!

By the village is another outstanding mall. No! It’s not all about shopping here! The Mall of the Emirates has its own ski slope! You can actually ski and play in snow at [Ski Dubai](https://www.skidxb.com/) – skiing in the desert? Only Dubai would think of such a thing! Of course it is the first and largest ski park in the Middle East. Ski Dubai has slopes for different skillsets, as well as the all the equipment you need to rent to enjoy your time on the slopes. With a ski lift, you can head up the slope to the “mountaintop” café. You can also purchase two-hour slope passes for just a bit of skiing or boarding. Don’t ski? The Ski Park gives you a chance to play in the snow with rides and ice caves. For a quick visit, check out the Ski Dubai colony of snow penguins – the kids will love seeing them!

After your fun in the snow, visit [Dubai Miracle Garden](https://www.dubaimiraclegarden.com/), which has to be the most beautiful garden in the world! One of the top attractions in Dubai, it’s amazing see so much growth and color in the middle of the desert. Buildings, animal creations and even a full-size airplane are covered in flowers. The kids are free to run around while here, as well; a beautiful stop.

In the evening, head to La Mer, which is another shopping-centric, waterfront spot. This area is filled with restaurants along Jumeira’s public beach. This is one of the newer shopping promenades in the city and you’ll be visiting as its continuing to grow.

One thing you’ll discover throughout your time in Dubai is how kid-friendly it is. This culture is similar to Spain in that they welcome kids everywhere and include them in activities. It really is a wonderful environment for families and we hope you’ll visit soon!

**KID-FRIENDLY TIPS**

* Take your [good stroller](https://www.2idiotstravel.com/travel-stroller-recommendation-gb-pockit-stroller/), although you’ll need your rental car, some of the places, especially in downtown, are so large you’ll need your stroller to help your child visit all of the spots on the itinerary.
* Dubai has a culture similar to Spain where there is a break in the afternoon (shops close) and people eat dinner later at night. Be prepared for the break and the later evenings.
* While there are parks abound, you will most likely have to drive to find them rather than walking to one. And remember, it’s quite hot in Dubai: Don’t spend too much time at the park and bring lots of water!
* In fact, Dubai can get so hot (no matter what time of the year) that you should have plenty of sunscreen and apply whenever you are outside.
* Take your swim suits with you in the car wherever you go. Dubai and the neighboring Emirates have a ton of beaches and you may want to enjoy them.

**OTHER TIPS**

* Be cognizant of timing when you visit Dubai. Friday are public holidays in Dubai and many of the shops in the markets are closed during afternoons or open later, like in Spain.
* The local currency is Dirhams. Dollars are accepted everywhere, but you may not get the best rate and should use the local currency. Almost every place in Dubai accepts credit cards, except perhaps the small stalls on the streets selling food.
* Buy tickets in advance for Burj Khalifa and the Dubai Frame to make sure you get the time you want.
* Rent a car. Public transportation isn’t the best and it’s pretty easy to drive in Dubai. Make sure you get your [car seat](https://www.2idiotstravel.com/toddler-car-seat-recommendation-immi-go-car-seat/), as well, as it is required.
* In Old Dubai, be ready to haggle and bargain. Start at least a third lower than the original price offered.
* Dubai can be super expensive especially in New Dubai. Old Dubai is much more reasonable, from a price perspective.
* The best time to visit Dubai is during its shopping festival (from late December through late January) and during the winter months, when the hot temperatures are less extreme.
* It’s important to understand Dubai is a Muslim country with a sheikhdom – dress modestly, and remember that alcohol is only available in hotels and higher end restaurants/bars. Public indecency and drunkenness are not tolerable.
* We would recommend not visiting Dubai during Ramadan; it’s harder to find food during the day and attractions have restrictions and different schedules.
* Be careful of people soliciting for knockoffs. Just say no and keep on walking.
* Dubai has a ton of rooftop bars/restaurants that give you a great view of the city. One of our favorites is Kris with a view at the Park Regis Hotel in Dubai. This is in Karama and literally walking distance to AJ’s childhood home!
* Food tips:
  + The southeast Asian food is the best we have had outside of the home countries. Our favorite restaurants are Indego by Vineet in Grosvenor's house and Ushna at Souk Madinat Jumeirah.
  + Be sure to enjoy tea at the small shops on the streets – the best is called “disco chai.”
  + Definitely try the shawarma in one of the small shops on the streets, it is available throughout Dubai, especially in Old Dubai. AJ loves this so much he’ll eat it three to five times per trip!