

'It's rooted in heritage and history'

**FARIDA AHMED - GENERAL MANAGER OF
FRYING PAN ADVENTURES**

The food tour guide and lifelong Dubai resident shares her top tips for uncovering hidden gems in the desert city



Dubai Creek, Al Fahidi historical neighbourhood

The best thing about it is

Dubai is a very friendly, very safe place to travel. There's something for everyone, whether you're a solo traveller or visiting with friends, a partner or even family. We have everything from skydiving to ziplining to hot air balloon rides and family entertainment is found in the many theme parks here, from Legoland to IMG World of Adventure and Global Village, which I personally love. We have great public transport, which makes getting around the city easier. Language is not a barrier, if you are comfortable speaking English, it's spoken all around the city.

If you go, make sure you

visit the older side of the city. Of course you've heard of the Burj Khalifa and the Dubai Mall, but the government has done an excellent job of restoring and rehabilitating some older areas, like the Al Shindhaga Historical District. A visit to the Creek House is an absolute must if you want to understand the transformative journey this city has taken. Dubai went from the Flintstones to the Jetsons in less than 50 years. The same site also houses a perfume museum, which is one of my favourite places to visit to understand how perfumes play such an important part in the indigenous population.

The best local food is

an indigenous Emirati meal in the Al Fahidi district. I love Al Khayma Heritage restaurant, their laham machboos, vegetable salona and luqaimat (sweets) are amazing. The ambience is homely and they have majlis rooms where you can sit down and eat in the traditional Emirati style. The decor is peppered with photos of the past and present. After, take a walk down along Dubai Creek and ride a dhow across to the other side. It's a beautiful experience.

The best place to eat

currently, and I stress this, one of my favourites is Asian Street by Thai located in JLT. They serve authentic, super spicy Isaan-style Thai food. The Thai owner employs a 60-year-old woman from her village back home to come in during the

day and make the food and share tips with the other cooks who are also mostly from Thailand. They don't really even have service staff.

If you like adventure

book a falconry safari with Royal Shaheen. These are unique experiences where a professional falconer will help you understand more about the birds of prey and their role in the indigenous Bedouin lifestyle. It all happens in a part of the desert called the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve and is an experience that cannot be missed.

The best time of year to

go is during the cooler months from November to early March.

A tour you should do is

one of our food tours. We have three signature food tours; the Middle Eastern Food Pilgrimage, Dubai Souks and Creekside Food Walk, and Little India Food Tour. Each of those tours takes anywhere from three to four hours long and we do a deep dive into the cuisines that are featured but, along with that, we also share personal anecdotes from our childhood growing up in the city, historical context and discuss dining etiquette.

The most unique thing is

the UAE (United Arab Emirates) is home to at least 200 nationalities and it's rooted in heritage and history. Dubai is an extremely welcoming city and you can feel that all around. The Emirati culture is very hospitable and generous.

Don't forget to pack

sunscreen. Even during the cooler months, people tend to forget that at the end of the day we are a desert city and sometimes even the winter afternoons can be warm.

Do not leave the city without

trying the local Arabic coffee, which is called qahwa. Also do not leave without trying and picking up camel milk chocolates from Al Nassma.

WORDS: JENNY HEWITT

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