

BCD Travel Recommends: Abu Dhabi

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Abu Dhabi is the capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the largest of the seven emirates. As the most important cultural city in the UAE, Abu Dhabi attracts many visitors to its established Cultural Foundation center, which is responsible for hosting various art exhibitions and musical performances from all over the globe.

Abu Dhabi was a major hub for the pearl industry before it discovered its rich reserves of oil. Today, the city is one of the most rapidly developing cities in the world, with a population of 1.45 million (2008). In just over half a century it has transformed from a small Bedouin village a major center for investment and tourism. The city now features international luxurious hotels, never-ending shopping malls, vast entertainment and leisure facilities along its beautiful green streets and parks.

Getting to and from the airport:

Abu Dhabi airport is situated on the mainland, 35 km east of the city; reaching the city center should take about 45 minutes, depending on the traffic. Limousine taxis are

Story highlights:

- A visit to the extravagant seven-star Emirates Palace
- Stroll along the Corniche and take in the picturesque sights
- Take a dhow cruise on the clear Gulf waters
- Sample local Arabic cuisine, which won't break the bank
- Soak up the rich sounds, sights and aromas of the Souks

available outside arrival halls 1 and 2 and will cost approximately AED 85 (US\$23) to the town center. Some old white airport taxis charge approximately AED 25-40 (US\$7-10) to the city center. The cheapest option is to take bus 901 which operates between the airport and the city at one-hour intervals and costs AED3 (US\$0.80) per trip.

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Getting around Abu Dhabi:

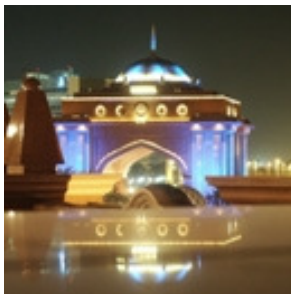
Abu Dhabi is easy to navigate with a modern and well-indicated network of roads. A taxi or car is the most popular and practical method of getting around Abu Dhabi. Taxis can either be flagged down at the roadside or booked by phone through companies such as Al Ghazal and NTC (National Transport Company).

Most drivers speak good English, but are more familiar with landmarks rather than street names. Trips around the city shouldn't cost more than AED10 (US\$2.70), although night-time fares will be slightly more.

The Abu Dhabi Municipality operates bus routes all over the Emirates, as well as in the city. The service runs more or less around the clock and fares are inexpensive – as little as AED1 (US\$0.30) for travel within the capital. One day passes are AED 3 (US\$0.80) and can be purchased from bus stations or grocery stores.

Walking and cycling are generally limited due to the searing summer heat, and there are no trains or trams.

What to see:



BCD Travel UAE recommends a visit to the following sights in Abu Dhabi:

Emirates Palace is a seven-star breathtakingly huge hotel. But it's much more than just a hotel. Complete with great marble halls, high painted ceilings and golden grandeur, the hotel displays stunning historical artifacts and has its own **Cultural Museum**. The museum details new developments taking place in the city, as well as an exhibition on how oil was discovered in 1958 and exported four years later.

Located at the Breakwater in the middle of Abu Dhabi, **Heritage Village** is a living museum offering a glimpse into the country's past. A visit offers a first-hand glimpse into how the Bedouin lived during the old times, before the modern irrigation and agricultural system came to existence.

Al Maqtaa Fort is a 200-year-old fort which was used as a watch house against invading bandits at the time of its construction.

Walk along the **Corniche**, well known for its fountains, park-lined coastal boulevard that skirts the city and architecturally modern buildings that face the sea.

Visit the **Dhow Harbor** where you will find the traditional wooden sailing boats used by merchants many centuries ago. Take a dhow cruise lunch or dinner as an enchanting way of sightseeing the Gulf waters and numerous islands scattered around the city. If you are interested in watching craftsmen build dhow vessels using traditional techniques then head to **Bateen Shipyard**.

Where to eat:

The best quality restaurants are within five-star hotels and are the most expensive. Indian restaurants in Abu Dhabi are famous for excellent quality food and at reasonable rates. Lebanese and Arabic food is inexpensive and widely available. Go to the Hamdan area to find some of the best small and family owned restaurants that are very affordable. Note that local restaurants are not allowed to serve alcohol; only hotel restaurants have a licensed bar.

Abu Shakra

Istiqlal Street

+971 (0) 2 6337849

Abu Shakra is a rustic Middle Eastern eatery renowned for its fine selection of Egyptian dishes, from grilled skewered meats and meze to rich vegetable stews. Cups of thick, black coffee are served sugary sweet.

Art Cauldron

Al Falah Street

+971 (0) 2 644 4309

Art Cauldron is one of the very few independently-run restaurants in Abu Dhabi, providing a relief to budget travelers and locals. This Bohemian themed restaurant is tucked away in a basement with a cozy atmosphere and a pleasant interior. The restaurant serves various international dishes with generous portions and an average meal for two would cost approximately AED 100 (US\$27). This restaurant does not serve alcohol.

Al Fanar

Le Royal Meridien, Khalifa Bin Zayed Street

+971 (0) 2 6742020

Al Fanar is the one and only revolving restaurant of Abu Dhabi, situated in the Le Royal Meridien hotel. With a nautical feel, the restaurant is famed as a gastronomic institution with fantastic views. The menu offers excellent seafood, grills and salads. Friday lunch time is usually the busiest as the restaurant offers an international buffet, which includes unlimited Champagne.

Where to Shop:



The Madinat Zayed Shopping & Gold Center is located in the heart of the city and is famous for some of the largest jewelry shops in the UAE. The mall also houses a big entertainment complex with a babysitting section and an arcades area.

The beautifully designed **Marina Mall** houses around 300 stores, including international and designer brands, hypermarkets, food courts, cinema complex and an indoor ski slope. Additionally, it is the home of the only IKEA store in Abu Dhabi.

Al Wahda Mall is located in the center of downtown. This modern, 1.5 million square feet shopping mall has high-end stores, an extensive food court and a large grocery store in the basement called LuLu Hypermart.

Souks are traditional Arabic markets housed in narrow alleys of Abu Dhabi, with a colorful and vibrant “local bazaar” ambiance. Pick up authentic Middle Eastern goods and spices at the **Iranian Souk**, including coffee pots (symbol of hospitality) from the region, shisha pipes and antique silver jewelry. Grab some backstreet bargains at the **Old Souk** where you can find handicrafts, fabric, carpets, textiles and silver carvings.