

Enjoy Dubai on a budget without missing the magic

After a long hiatus, it seems that some lucky ones are managing to make their way into UAE for tourism purposes, even on Bangladeshi passports. While we remain hopeful for more of such heartening news, here is how you can make the most of one of UAE's most alluring cities — Dubai — on a slim budget.

When one thinks of Dubai, words such as luxury and opulence come to mind first. Think of the mighty Burj Khalifa lighting up the skies, or the golden Dubai Frame glinting through New and Old Dubai. Yes, the city is all that and then some, but its real beauty lies in its nooks and crannies, most of which are almost as affordable as good ol' Bangkok — almost.

Street Smarts

When you land in Dubai, you may be tempted to buy a sim right off the bat. Brush that thought away, as sims at the airport are easily triple the price of those you can get outside of it. Once out, look for the nearest MRT (metro station) if travelling light, as this can save you quite a bit of money.

Metros are great for fast and cheap commutes inside the city. Moreover, stations are peppered quite close to each other, so you are almost always around one. Children ride free and NOL cards are a great investment as they come at a nominal fee and some initial credit, and allow you to commute through trains, buses, water buses, and even some taxis. If metros are not your thing, opt for a taxi, instead of ridesharing vehicles, which are more likely to overcharge you.

What to Do

There are a number of things you can do in Dubai that are cheap, or even free. And for the Instagram enthusiast, the good news is that mostly all the spots are Insta-worthy.

For instance, one of the most beautiful buildings in the world, the Museum of the Future in Dubai, has an entire floor that is free for tourists. Take

pictures by the coveted "V" sculpture outside the museum and then head indoors to pet a robotic dog, or marvel at a flying dolphin. Upper floors are great for exploration too, but come at a slightly steeper cost.

If you want to soak in the views of the city without breaking the bank, skip the Burj and head to the Dubai Frame. For a mere 40 AED, you can enjoy breathtaking views of the city and walk the glass floor.

Go to Dubai Mall for window shopping, and then head out its doors for the best view of the Burj Khalifa. Time this activity for the evening as the lights on the Burj and its surrounding buildings make for an astounding skyline you wouldn't want to miss.

For a relaxing beach outing, head to Kite Beach, which welcomes visitors until 2 AM at night. Clean, colourful and exciting, Kite Beach is one of the few free beaches that also have child-friendly activities along its shores.

If you enjoy relaxing walks, there's nothing better than the Marina Walk near Jumeirah Beach to unwind. With views of the cruise boats on the Persian Gulf coastline, the promenade boasts a clean, pedestrian friendly walkway, lined with food shops. It is a touristy area, so be sure to check for the more economical food options.

Missing the Dubai Fountains? A close second to the OG is the Skyblaze Fountain Show at Atlantis The Royal, Jumeirah. While the hotel itself is super lavish and equally pricey, the fountain show is free for all viewers, regardless of whether they are staying at The Atlantis.

If you enjoy history, a walk along the Al Fahidi neighbourhood might appeal to you. An older section of Dubai, located in Bur Dubai, Al Fahidi is famous for its simple, and heat resistant



architecture. Step into the neighbourhoods' souvenir shops or simply stroll along the lanes for a truly traditional experience.

Where to Shop

Dubai is known for its tax-free gold and electronics, so if you have money saved up for those items, you are in luck. The Gold Souk in Dubai is famous for its gold shops and the viral perfumery, Yusuf Bhai's, but may not be the most cost-effective option for a slimmer pocket.

Head instead to Meena Bazar for

gold, electronics, and very cheap, good quality personal care items. Department stores such as Day to Day, Hollywood and 1-20 AED stores are almost always engaged in price wars where the only true winner is the customer!

Choose the Grand Souk Deira for kunafa chocolates, dried fruits, and Pashmina items at steal prices, and then take a water taxi for just 1 AED for an exciting ride across Dubai Creek. Hop off at Naif Market, where you can pick up engraved shawls, cheap, great quality luggage, perfumes, watches, A-Grade brand replicas, and so much more.

Where to Eat

When in Dubai, eat as the locals do. With kebabs, falafel, shawarma and more, Middle Eastern cuisine has something to offer to every taste profile. From the OG Pakistani restaurant in Dubai, Ravi, which is as cheap as 15 AED per head, to branches of Karachi Darbar at similar prices, food lovers can enjoy a variety of gastronomic delights at a reasonable cost.

Popular breakfast point, B&B in Oud Metha, the viral Iranian kebab joint Ostadi near Al Fahidi, and Chapli kebabs from Lamcy also offer food lovers a variety of delicious eats without burning a hole in their wallets.

By Munira Fidai
Photo: Collected

