

Mother of pearl

Dubai’s more conservative, discerning neighbour, Sharjah, has long inspired the UAE business boom. **Upward Curve** reveals where to stay, what to see and where to eat



Since pearl trading led Sharjah’s business evolution centuries ago, the third largest Emirate has quietly made its way to the top table. Happy to stay in the shadows of its gregarious neighbour, Dubai, Sharjah blends commerce and culture into a harmonious work ethos.

Despite difficult times of late, with non-oil activity continuing to hit government revenues, GDP growth remains between 1-2%. It’s a far cry from the 12-13% annual growth rate enjoyed in the late 2000s, but government finances have not deteriorated as much as other Emirates, and the UAE’s cultural capital has so much more to offer with a strong tourism trade that began in 1932.



WHERE TO STAY

Situated on a pristine white-sand beach, just 15km from Sharjah International Airport (SHJ) and 18km from Dubai International Airport (DBX), the Radisson Blu

Resort could be mistaken for a luxury cruise-liner from offshore. Its rhomboid exterior disguises opulent décor, fine dining and eight meeting rooms, in addition to two ballrooms and a palm garden for up to 800 private guests.

Further inland, and just a ten-minute drive from Dubai, the landmark Hilton Sharjah hotel celebrates views of the magnificent Khalid Lagoon and the city skyline from its floor-to-ceiling panoramic windows.

The Royal Beach Resort & Spa and Grand Excelsior Hotel offer a more authentic Arabian experience, from another private sandy beach in the heart of the Emirate. With three restaurants at each, plus gyms, pools, spas and business suites, there is no

shortage of choice from which to run business for a few days, or even longer. The Royal Beach features a Presidential Jacuzzi and a restorative oxygen treatment room.

Royal Beach Resort & Spa
royalbeachresortspa.com
Radisson Blu Resort
radissonblu.com

UPCOMING HIGHLIGHT

Leading experts and regional steel fabricators will showcase their latest offerings at the upcoming 13th edition of SteelFab, the Middle East’s largest trade show for the metal working industry, to be held on 16-19 January 2017, at the Expo Centre, Sharjah. *steelfabme.com*

Grand Excelsior Hotel
grandexcelsioralsharjah.com
Hilton Sharjah
hilton.com

DINNER AND DRINKS

Sharjah may be a ‘dry Emirate’, but the city’s dynamic dining focuses on high-quality Middle Eastern and Indian fare, so eating out is an authentic, aromatic experience. While the aforementioned hotels all offer quality cuisine, ElManza and Shababeek are the real thing.

ElManza leans towards Moroccan flavours and ambiance, with a healthy dash of Argan oil in most dishes to deliver that smooth, lasting taste. Amid open terraces overlooking the Sharjah Fountain, ElManza offers one of the finest dining tables in the city.

Shababeek delivers a wide range of mouth-watering Lebanese delights set in Al Qasba, a popular and vibrant waterside development.

If you want to sneak a drink, get yourself an invite to the members and guests-only Sharjah Wanderers Club. Founded in 1977 as a sports club for rugby and diving, it has

Main: The third largest Emirate offers a great stay, whether for business, culture or sport

Left: Ships of the desert

Below: The Al Qasba boat tour is the way to see Sharjah at night

a pool, tennis courts and lit rugby fields – and boasts a well-stocked bar.

Elmanza
elmanza.ae
Shababeek
shababeek.ae
Sharjah Wanderers Club
sharjahwandererssc.com

EXPLORE

Renowned across the Arab world for its commitment to art, culture and preserving local heritage, Sharjah is the Emirate in which to explore, experience and discover the secrets of a unique Arabian lifestyle and Islamic culture. The city first grew around its creek, where restored homes and many of the 20 museums are today devoted to Emirati customs.

It is also home to the imposing Sharjah Fort, a 19th-century royal residence-turned museum. Down the road, the Al Mahattah aviation museum archives the history of flight in the UAE which dates back to 1932. The Al Qasba boat tour is a great way of seeing Sharjah’s stunning mosques under starlight.

Away from the hustle, bustle – and dust – water sport is king. When the F1 Powerboat season (December) is not in full throttle,

it is safe to venture into the cool blue waters of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Sailing, water skiing, jet skiing (Khalid Lagoon), kayaking, snorkeling and diving off the majestic east coast; Sharjah has every aqua-based pastime on offer.

The east coast is considered the most beautiful area of the whole country. Golden sand beaches line the bays, which break the steep rocky folds dipping into the clear blue waters of the Indian Ocean.

Back on land, two-night safaris, ‘Wadi Bashing’ (dry river bed 4x4 driving) and ‘ships of the desert’ (camel riding) provide plenty of fun in between meetings.

Don’t forget to leave time for shopping, with everything from gold, silver and precious stones to jewellery, carpets and rugs available in the souqs and malls of this magical city.

Museums
sharjahmuseums.ae
Sharjah Mega Mall
megamall.ae

Al Qasba Boat Tour
alqasba.ae

Desert Tours
desertsafaridubai.com
Water Sports
alkhanbeach.com

