

Jumeirah Beach
and cityscape

ESCAPES

DUBAI For shopping

Rising up from the desert like a supercharged Emerald City,

Dubai has quite literally forged its place in the world out of sand, sweat and, well, gold. From seven-star hotels dripping in gold leaf to gold-dusted cocktails at cloud level, the whole city gleams with the stuff. An unabashed monument to all things fabulous, its streets are paved with marble, its skyscrapers actually touch the sky, and the shopping? Think Cher's *Clueless* wardrobe times infinity. Say what you want about Dubai, this place has style.

Take the Burj Khalifa – the tallest building on earth, it's dizzyingly beautiful, and home to the only Armani hotel outside Milan. Every last detail is the work of Mr Armani himself, but while check-ins don't come cheap, there's no showing off here; just comfort, elegance and impeccable service. Our room is simply but chicly kitted out in luxe shades of mahogany and grey, and, come evening, huge wraparound windows offer sparkling views of the city below.

Views from the terrace at the hotel's contemporary Indian restaurant, Amal, are just as impressive. Giant, Bellagio-esque fountains dance before us while the Burj towers above. It's all so entrancing, we take a few hours in the slick, cavernous spa just to bring us back down to earth, and prepare us for the main event: shopping.

You're never far from a mall in Dubai, and the Armani boasts a direct, air-conditioned link (September temperatures are sweltering) to the world's largest (thedubaimall.com). All the major players are here – Bloomingdale's,

Galleries Lafayette, even M&S – while the appropriately titled Fashion Avenue takes care of all (tax-free) designer desires, from Alexander McQueen to Zadig et Voltaire.

But it's not all big names and fancy boutiques. We take an abra (water taxi) across the Creek to the Gold and Spice Souks of Old Dubai for a mere one dirham (around 19p), to gawp at the myriad little windows stuffed with gold, frankincense and gobstopper diamonds. On the return crossing, we wander through the Textile Souk – where I defy you to exit without a new pashmina or three – to Arabian Tea House (arabianteahouse.co), a blossom-strewn courtyard café that serves up hearty local fare.

If fine dining is your thing, though, the world's top chefs all have restaurants here, and the best way to experience them is over brunch. I'm not talking avo on toast; in Dubai, brunch is an all-day, all-you-can-eat smorgasbord – think chocolate waterfalls, not to mention bottomless champagne. We discover Al Qasr (jumeirah.com) matches an epic foodie selection with a palatial waterside setting.

Despite the indulgence, we save room for a post-brunch sundowner at Gold on 27 (burjalarab.com) – the cheapest route into the reservation-only Burj Al Arab. As the name suggests, it's an homage to the hotel's favourite decorating device and as wonderfully OTT as you'd expect, but somehow it just works. A lot like Dubai itself. EMMA LAURENCE »

TRIPNOTES Armani Hotel Dubai, from around £455 per night, b&b; dubai.armanihotels.com. Emirates flies from five UK airports from £575 return; emirates.com. Plan your trip at visitdubai.com

Shopping in Dubai Mall is out of this world; the entrance to Armani Hotel (far right)

What to wear

Max Factor Masterpiece High Definition Mascara, £9

Cotton- and silk-mix top, £90, Gant

Polycarbonate suitcase, £355, Rimowa

Ruthenium and Swarovski crystal earrings, £39, Swarovski

Leather shoes, £88, Mephisto

Traditional shoes in the Textile Souk

Burj Khalifa