

Shopping in Dubai: A Classifieds Guide

Among the many charms of Dubai is shopping. Whether it's haggling over Persian carpets in the centuries-old souks or shopping for French perfumes in the air-conditioned hush of the most modern department store, Dubai offers every shopper a great experience. And as an open port with low import duties, prices are very attractive. Trade is at the heart of Middle-eastern culture, so the variety of products is staggering.

So if you're moving for that new job in Dubai, or just spending a few weeks vacation, shopping will be one of the highlights of your visit. Here's the lowdown on the shopping scene in Dubai. First, let's look at where to go. We'll refer to locations relative to the Dubai Creek, the waterway that splits the city into the two halves of Deira and Bur Dubai.

For sheer comfort, you can't beat Dubai's many modern shopping plazas. Air-conditioned and furnished with escalators, these multi-storey emporia sell everything from designer fashions to the latest Japanese televisions. They also house restaurants, cafes and movie theaters for the total day out. Among the most prestigious in Bur Dubai is the centrally-located Bur Juman Center, an enormous shopping mall with 180 prestigious stores selling high fashion labels for the uber chiq.

Leading malls in the Deira district include Al Mulla Plaza, the Intercontinental Plaza, Abu Hail Shopping Centre, The Galleria, and Al Ghurair Centre. Bur Dubai features the Wafi Mall and Holiday Centre. Plus there are a host of top class department stores and boutiques spread throughout the city. Emirates mall is one of the most exclusive shopping properties in Dubai, and should not be missed.

Modern malls offer the most convenient and comfortable way to shop. But to uncover the exotic past of this futuristic city, and to savor the sights and smells of the authentic Arab world, you need to head to one of Dubai's souks. These are the traditional markets of Dubai and you'll find them on both sides of the creek.

Souks are usually organized into areas selling similar items and are often named after a product. Thus the Gold Souk is the place to pick up gold ornaments. Here you can browse earrings, rings, necklaces, bracelets and pendants in a stunning variety of designs. A specialty of the local gold craftsmen is creating items in shades of pink, white, yellow or green by varying the alloys.

The nearby Spice Souk is filled with baskets piled with cloves, cardamom, cinnamon, incense, dried fruit and nuts. Browsing here is an aromatic adventure which you can continue in the Perfume Souk. And there's even a Fish Souk to sell the morning's catch of fish from the Arabian Sea.

So there's no shortage of places to shop in Dubai. Now let's look at some of the practicalities of shopping.

Traditional shopping hours from Saturday to Thursday run from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. with a break between 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. Most modern outlets such as malls and supermarkets stay open all day. All outlets close for prayers on Friday between 11.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. and many shops stay open late on Fridays.

Bargaining is a traditional part of shopping in Dubai. While most modern outlets have fixed prices, for family businesses and markets, negotiation is a key component of the buying process. One good tip is to check out prices at the fixed-priced outlets before heading to the souks. This will give you an idea of a fair price before you start haggling.

As an entrepot port, you can buy products from all over the world in Dubai. And electronic goods, watches, cameras and such items are competitively priced. You can often pick up fashion items for less than you'd pay in the country of origin due to the low taxes. But don't leave Dubai without picking up some local delights.

If you're looking for authentic local souvenirs you have many choices. You can't go wrong with Arabic coffee pots to remind you of the aromatic local brew. Then there are silver and brass sword and daggers, prayer beads, frankincense, Arabian perfumes, rugs and Persian carpets. And don't forget pearls. Before oil was discovered in the UAE in the 1950s, the country's economy was built on fishing and pearling.

The important thing about shopping in Dubai is to enjoy yourself. There are bargains to be found and you can acquire rare and exotic items that will grace your life for many years to come.

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