



24 hours in ... Abu Dhabi



The largest of the seven states that comprise the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi brings together the ancient culture and heritage of Arabia with cosmopolitan sophistication - a distinctive blend of East and West.



Ali Al Saloom is the founder of Embrace Arabia (embracearabia.com), a company offering intercultural training and cultural consulting services; he was born and raised in Abu Dhabi.

05:30

Abu Dhabi wakes early, with dawn signalling the first call to prayer. The mosques' decorative minarets have loudspeakers, so you'll never miss the distinctive and atmospheric call, which occurs five times a day. "Before breakfast, I choose my kandurah [national dress] that I will wear for the day and match it up with my traditional headgear," Al Saloom says. "I then visit the majestic Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan Mosque, which is one of the most important architectural treasures of contemporary UAE society."

07:30

For breakfast, indulge in a delicious hot sesame or cheese sandwich from the famous Al Saadah Bakery, translated as the "happiness bakery", on Defense Road. "Baked in an authentic Arabic oven and costing only two dirhams [84 cents], it's a great way to begin the day," Al Saloom says. Another traditional breakfast dish that should be on everyone's list is balaleet: fine pasta made from eggs, onions, cinnamon, sugar and oil.

10:30

Off to the bustling fish souk (commercial quarter) at Al Meena. The atmosphere is electric as families arrive and trading goes on the same way it has for years. On most days, Al Saloom will swing by to pick up fresh fillets for his mother's scrumptious machbous, a dish that uses Arabic spices and is served on a large tray with garnishes of nuts, raisins and fried onions. "The recipe, which can use fish, chicken or meat, has been passed down through the generations and is extremely popular."

13:00

Food, glorious food! Abu Dhabi's restaurants and cafes reflect every taste and culture, with cuisines from around the world. Simple fare can be found at small street cafes, while award-winning chefs at the emirate's exclusive restaurants create elaborate menus. "Alfresco dining in the cooler months is perfect as you get to experience the spectacular sea and desert views," Al Saloom says. "To escape the hot summer months, indoor dining is popular and for lunch you must try the healthy food at Art Gallery Cafe in the Marina Mall, located in the Breakwater area."

14:00

Abu Dhabi's shopping scene includes malls stocked with international designer labels and traditional and fascinating souks. Head to the Abu Dhabi Mall in the Tourist Club Area, with more than 200 shops, or haggle at the carpet souk on Al Meena Road, where you can have majlis cushions made to order. "If gold is your thing, stroll through the jewellery shops on Hamdan Street or venture to the Madinat Zayed Gold Centre," Al Saloom suggests.

15:30

It must be time to rest. Al Saloom's tip is to stop by Emirates Palace, the ultimate in luxury and style. "They do a great Arabic-inspired high tea with a variety of breads, sweet dates and coffee." If you're still full from lunch and couldn't possibly find room for a date, admire the palace's 1002 Swarovski crystal chandeliers or take a well-earned rest on the beachfront.

16:30

With a stunning sunset approaching, you have just enough time to see the Saadiyat Island Cultural Exhibition at Emirates Palace



Lying to the west of Abu Dhabi City, Saadiyat Island is a natural sanctuary being developed as a tourism and leisure hub. The island is set to become an invaluable cultural asset and will be home to the region's first Guggenheim Museum and Louvre.

Al Saloom enjoys checking out the latest art exhibition showing at the Cultural Foundation, which also has permanent local displays to give you a taste of the emirate's past, present and future. Also at the palace is the Yas Island exhibition, with its plans and models for the hotly anticipated formula one Abu Dhabi Grand Prix in November. In a first for formula one, the purpose-built track will allow yachts to berth alongside as it winds through the marina.

18:00

An evening walk along the Corniche is where the city's residents come to meet, share picnics and relax at sunset. With the green and tranquil Corniche running alongside the clear blue waters of the Gulf, and the adjacent high-rise bustle of Abu Dhabi City, this is an area of contrasts. For something special, Al Saloom recommends putting your feet up by the

beautiful Shangri-La Hotel swimming pool and watching the sun set over the impressive Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan Mosque.

21:00

It must be time for your next delicious meal. For an authentic Emirati dinner, try the famous Al Dhafra restaurant at the Al Meena Dhow Harbour. "Their harees dish, cooked in an underground oven, will melt in your mouth," Al Saloom says. "This dish is especially popular during Ramadan, Eid and at weddings."

23:00

At the end of the day Al Saloom relaxes with friends at one of the many roadside cafes. Here locals gather to sip coffee, nibble on Iranian sweets or stuffed dates and share the day's stories.

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