



## **A Postcard from Dubai**

by Lee Jackson – Bliss Travel

For the third time this year I am returning somewhere after a gap of over twenty years and of the three destinations nowhere will show such a significant change as that of Dubai.

Whereas the first time around my stay at the Jumeirah Beach was to an extent a trip to an upcoming destination, this time around I am visiting a location that is certainly one of the most popular locations amongst our customers at Bliss Travel.

This time around I am travelling with over 200 travel industry peers for an industry get together and with it an opportunity to sample Dubai hospitality and take a look at what all the fuss is about.

Even our arrival late in the evening tells how

things have changed. Flights from Emirates Airlines, Virgin and British Airways all land within a matter of minutes of each other and offer a sign of how demand for the destination has grown exponentially over recent years. And with a new airport underway there will be an even greater concentration of aircraft heading for Dubai in the years to come.

It's only a twenty minute taxi journey from the airport to our home for the next few days at the Conrad Hotel in the business district, not ideal for the delights of either downtown or the Palm but good value if you are willing to use the services of the impressive monorail that sits adjacent to the hotel.

While others head for the golf course or the Spa I decide to take the tour of old Dubai in

favour of another option, which is an afternoon at the waterpark at the world renowned Atlantis Hotel. Although the weather is unseasonably cool, only in the early thirties! I ask myself why I am boarding a tour bus instead of throwing myself into clear blue water.

That said 20 minutes later I am satisfied that the trip is a good decision especially as it includes Dubai new and old and through our guide we get a very good summary of this Emirate's development and its place in the world. Our visit to the museum in old Dubai, though not high on the must visit list of many UK visitors, proves a good way to get acquainted with how a simple fishing village by a creek in the Middle East became one of the world's biggest tourism draws.

As the discovery of oil transformed the wealth of the region and provided the first infrastructure of the city the vision of the rulers was to create a destination that would create a prosperity that could outlive the oil supply.

This vision also included an acceptance that Dubai could not compete with the cultural, architectural and scenic draw of neighbouring destinations, be that Egypt, Mauritius or India. Instead Dubai would need to provide a unique visitor attraction where the destination became a bi word for supreme quality and its attractions truly in a league of their own.

A gap of 20 years is a great way to witness this vision come to life. The giant wave that is the new Jumeirah Hotel stands in replacement of my original accommodation, and an entire skyline, including the Burj Kalifa, the world's tallest tower, stands in the place of what was almost nothing at all. Add to this not one but two copies of the Chrysler building, the world's largest shopping mall and of course the Purpose built Palm that extends out into

the Arabian Gulf and the magnificence of Dubai is simply jaw dropping.

Back in the old town following the visit to the museum we wander into the souk and I stock up on Saffron and spices after haggling my way down to a price that seems half way to a reasonable deal.

We cross the creek, witness the traditional sailing vessels and wander the "gold" souk, but I am left in no doubt that there are other destinations in the Arabic world where these activities can be better experienced and that the best of Dubai is certainly about what has been created in the past decade.

Back in downtown Dubai the following day we enjoy dinner at "The Address" with a fantastic early evening view of the water fountain show at the base of the Burj Kalifa and a stroll around the restaurants of downtown Dubai. If anything typifies the extent and scale of change in Dubai it is the fact that our coach driver spends almost 30 minutes trying to find a way to our destination due to the fact that the road access changes on almost a daily basis as the construction moves on.

On the accommodation front over the course of the trip we are invited to sample two hotels, first of all the Jumeirah Beach, and secondly the Grosvenor House Hotel. At the Jumeirah Beach we are treated to an Arabian Buffet though had we actually stayed as paying guests we would have had the choice of Latin American, Italian and Asian food and in total a range of 19 different dining options. The newly refurbished rooms that we visited were spacious and with superb views of the nearby Burj al Arab. And with excellent public areas, extensive pools and being adjacent to the Wild Waddy Water park it really is justified in promoting a five star family holiday experience.

At the Grosvenor House we split into groups and I get to sample the Toro Toro restaurant and a fantastic array of succulent South American flavoured skewered meats fresh from the grill. Fellow attendees all reported similar satisfaction in the hotels other restaurants and we are then completely sold on the fantastic location that overlooks the beach and sits right by the Marina. We are equally impressed with the luxurious rooms and the superb hospitality offered during our short visit.

We also visit the Atlantis for dinner on the final evening, a specially arranged buffet by the beach which offers a glimpse of what the hotel has to offer including its amazing location and abundance of beach side facilities, maybe I should have taken up the invite to the water park on day one!

So 20 years on Dubai justifies the fuss, it is a destination transformed and though those who can live with the extreme heat a passport to luxury and extravagance. One note of caution and a question for the future is Dubai's boundless ambition and it's intention to develop more four star options to serve the low cost airline market. As it grows and the destination adapts to become more inclusive only time will tell whether the opulence and wonder will survive in another twenty years time.