

Tourist Sites and Options

Organized tours:

Most of these options can be easily organized through a hotel concierge, but individual companies run trips that can be booked by anyone. Hotels are often partnered with specific tour companies but popular options include Emirates Adventures (www.emiratesadventures.com) or Travco Tours (www.travcotravel.com). Both websites include descriptions of a number of tour options including guided trips to Dubai or the Empty Quarter of the UAE (near Saudi Arabia) but the most common trips are described below:

Abu Dhabi City Tour:

This tour usually includes guided visits to a number of the sites described below including the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, the Cultural Foundation, the Heritage Village, and the Al Meena Souks. This type of tour runs approximately 9am – 1:30pm and can only be done in the morning in order to include a visit to the Grand Mosque, a definite must-see in Abu Dhabi. Costs vary but budget for approximately \$50 per person (160 dirhams).

Big Bus Tours Abu Dhabi:

This relatively new addition to Abu Dhabi's tour options runs a hop-on hop-off tour to 11 locations in Abu Dhabi, including Sheikh Zayed Mosque, Emirates Palace, the Heritage Village, and the Iranian Market. Buses leave from the front of Marina Mall every 30 minutes from 9 am to 5 pm. You can buy tickets online (<http://www.bigbustours.com/eng/abudhabi/default.aspx>), or at the stop in front of Marina Mall. Tickets cost 200 dirhams (about \$55.00).

Desert Safari:

There are a few tour operators in Abu Dhabi who offer trips into the desert and all evening tours. Trip elements include dune driving, camels, and sunset photos followed by a barbecue and traditional belly dancing. This type of tour runs from 4:00 PM for five or six hours and has about an hour of moderate desert driving. Some find the belly dancing section a little bit "tourist-y" and may want a daytime option that skips the evening entertainment. Costs vary but budget for approximately \$80 per person (300dhs). Other tour options involve longer drives to big dunes followed by a few hours in the dunes.

Individual Destinations:

In addition to or instead of one of the complete tours described above, most sites can be visited individually and reached via taxi. Descriptions with estimated times for visits are below and unless otherwise noted, all sites are free and open to the public.

Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation (20-30 min visit, longer for events) (currently closed for renovation)

The foundation is housed in a modern building of Islamic design with arching white colonnades, cool courtyards and restful gardens. It has an important library, theatre, cinema, lecture rooms, meeting rooms, an exhibition centre and coffee shop and hosts numerous cultural events, including concerts with international and local artists, classic film festivals, art exhibitions and

workshops throughout the year. Be sure to check out the model of “Abu Dhabi in 1960” located on the second floor to see how much the city has changed since the discovery of oil.

Abu Dhabi Falconry Hospital and Museum (two-hour tour)

The largest falcon hospital in the world is dedicated to the highest standard of comprehensive treatment and care of falcons and other raptors, with over 4,400 patients per year. The tour of the hospital and the accompanying museum is not to be missed. Tours cost 150 dirhams (200 dhs with lunch) and the location is near the Abu Dhabi Airport. For more information:

www.falconhospital.com

Abu Dhabi International Marine Sports Club (Sailing and Sea Kayaking)

For those interested in getting out on the water, the Abu Dhabi International Marine Sports clubs can be an excellent and much cheaper alternative to the hotel affiliated beach clubs. Sailing boats available for rent include Lasers (100 Dhs/hr) and Laser Picos (75Dhs/hr), in addition to kayaks. (30 dhs/hr). As always on the water, be aware of your situation, and keep an eye on the ubiquitous jet skis zipping about the area. Straying out past Lulu Island and the Breakwater is advised against for all but the most experienced sailors, who should clear it with ADIMSC. Book rentals at least a day in advance with the sailing school office (02 681 3446, Open 9-3 on weekdays).

Al Meena Souks (Markets) (20-30 min)

Still an active port both for fishermen and industrial cargo, the Meena area hosts a number of small markets worth exploring. Admire the huge range of fresh fish pulled off traditional dhows that morning at the fish market or taste the finest region has to offer at the date market. If you do find something you like, make sure you are ready to negotiate!

Al Hosn Palace, The White Fort (temporarily closed)

One of the landmarks of Abu Dhabi, the Al Hosn Palace, commonly known as the White Fort, dates back over 200 years. Home of the former ruling family, it is the oldest building in Abu Dhabi and is located adjacent to the Cultural Foundation. Unfortunately, due to renovations, it is temporarily closed to visitors.

The Corniche

A park-lined coastal boulevard that skirts the city, with a backdrop of modern buildings facing the sea, it is one of the most picturesque sites in Abu Dhabi. Weather permitting, an evening stroll along the Corniche should be part of every visit to Abu Dhabi and is where many residents come to meet, have picnics and relax, especially in the evenings and on weekends. The Corniche also hosts a number of relaxing cafes and is the entry point for Abu Dhabi’s public beaches.

The Emirates Palace Hotel (30 min for visit only)

This hotel has the distinction of being only the second seven-star hotel in the world, next to Burj Al Arab in Dubai. It is certainly the most expensive one ever built at an estimated cost of three billion dollars, and is a source of great national pride and prestige. The Emirates Palace Hotel was constructed to the highest possible standards of luxury and technology. In addition,

the Emirates Palace plays an important public role in Abu Dhabi as it regularly hosts exhibitions, concerts, etc., and houses a number of the city’s premier restaurants.

Heritage Village (20-40 min)

Situated on a 1,600 sq. meter site overlooking the Corniche, near the Breakwater in Abu Dhabi, Heritage Village is where you can journey to the past and experience traditional life in Abu Dhabi before oil revenues altered the landscape, economically and socially. In addition to Bedouin tents, there are reconstructions of traditional palm houses, old fishing villages, traditional souks and other shops. Most strikingly, the seafront location of the Heritage Village offers fantastic views of Downtown Abu Dhabi. For shoppers, the Marina Mall is nearby.

Mangrove Kayak Tour with Noukhada Adventure Company (two-three hours)

Kayaking in the Mangroves just off the “old” Corniche provides a haven from the city life. Here, in the winding water alleyways, among the flamingos, herons, (many) crabs, and the occasional fish, the only reminder of the city is the faint noise of traffic in the distance and a glimpse of cranes on the horizon. Options exist for the short trips, meandering through the Mangroves near the shore, or longer trips to the outlying islands, with the crystal clear water and pristine, remote beaches. Kayaking here is also an education in the environmental impact of development, which has inhibited tidal flow (temporarily), and contributed to a high population of algae in the Mangroves close to the shore. Noukhada Adventure Co also runs mountain biking, sailing, and camping activities throughout the year. See their website <http://noukhada.ae/> for booking and contact details, as well as planned upcoming trips.

The Malls

There a serious mall culture in Abu Dhabi and in addition to great shopping, an air-conditioned mall is the place to see and be seen during warm summer evenings. The Marina Mall (located near the Heritage Village) and the Abu Dhabi Mall (in the Tourist Club area) each have over 250 shops, restaurants, movie theaters, and cafes. The “Gold Souk” in the Madinat Zayed Shopping Center is the place to go for jewelry with an entire floor lined with jewelry stores. Finally, for those visiting the Grand Mosque, the recently opened Souk Al Qaryat located at the Shangri La Hotel combines the traditional souk experience with some of the best shopping and dining in the city.

Manarat al Saadiyat (30 minutes)

This exhibition space is the first gallery to open on Saadiyat Island, future home of branches of the Louvre and Guggenheim, a Performing Arts Center, the Sheikh Zayed National History Museum, and, of course, NYU Abu Dhabi. At the moment, the only open exhibition explains the vision and future of the Saadiyat Island project. More details are available here:

http://www.saadiyat.ae/en/content/manarat_al_saadiyat.aspx. Open daily, 10am to 8pm.

Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque (mornings only; 20-40 min visit, 30 min drive from downtown)

Abu Dhabi hosts the third largest mosque in the world, after the ones in Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque is named after the founder and first president of the UAE, HH Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan. He chose the location and had substantial influence on the architecture and the design of the mosque. Inside the Mosque, visitors will

find the largest handmade carpet in world; a much smaller replica of which is located in the office of NYU President John Sexton. The Mosque is open to the public Saturday – Thursday, 9am-noon only. Free hour-long tours start at 10am at the entrance.

Outside Abu Dhabi City

Al Ain (two-hour drive)

The second largest city in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, Al Ain is pleasant destination for a day trip, or a long weekend. Al Ain is a city of great natural beauty; from the mountain range on the border of Oman, to the oases and mineral springs, to the date plantation at the center of the city, there is much to see that offers a different perspective on the emirates and their environment. Al Ain also has a rich cultural history – there are several forts that are open to the public. The Eastern Fort, located within the compound of Al Ain Museum, and Jahili Fort are the most popular. There is also an enjoyable zoo that is undergoing continual expansion and renovation. More information about Al Ain can be found here:

http://www.uaeinteract.com/culture/al_ain.asp

Dubai (two-hour drive)

Probably the best-known Gulf city around the world, Dubai is an interesting counterpoint to Abu Dhabi. Popular destinations include the Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world, and Dubai Mall right next door, which is the largest mall in the world and has an aquarium, in addition to dozens of popular international stores. The Mall of the Emirates contains Ski Dubai, the indoor ski slope. For a different look at the famous city, visit the souq areas on either side of the Dubai Creek and the Bastakiya area, which is the oldest part of the city and was once the trading center of the city. For more information:

<http://www.uaeinteract.com/culture/dubai.asp> and <http://www.dubai-online.com/shopping/malls.htm>

Getting there:

Buses leave from the Abu Dhabi Bus Station, the large green building at the corner of 4th (Muroor) and 11th (Defense). To Dubai, tickets are approximately 20 dirhams; to Al Ain, about 10 dirhams.

Taxis can take you between cities as well. All taxis can go to Dubai for about 200 to 250 dirhams, depending on traffic.

Rental cars are available at many locations throughout the city, as well as at the airport and some hotels. Thrifty has an office right next to campus, and daily rental rates start at about 150 dirhams. On a tourist visit visa, it's possible to drive in the UAE using an international driver's license as long as you present your original passport and photocopies of the identification page and of the tourist visa. More information about driving regulations is available here:

<http://www.uaeinteract.com/travel/transport.asp>