

NORTHERN AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST



YOU'LL FIND SOME OF THE LOWEST PRICES AVAILABLE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.



DUBAI

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Such is the prevalence of towering skyscrapers in Dubai, visitors would be hard pressed to visualize the tranquil fishing village it once was.

Shiny and new, they soar high above the palm-frond huts of Bedouin fishermen and the coral-and-gypsum courtyard houses built by Persian traders.

The skyscrapers are not the only marvels of modern Dubai. When they ran out of beachfront, they built vast artificial islands with 74.5 miles (120km) of beaches. Want a break from the heat and sun? Go ski at the Snow Dome in downtown Dubai.

However, it's the shopping that has made Dubai the incredibly popular tourist destination it is. Over 50 major shopping centers and a huge number of souks, the traditional Arab markets, are a duty-free paradise. What's more, because Dubai imports such large volumes, you'll find some of the lowest prices available anywhere in the world.

The most popular mall is centrally located Deira City Center. 280 outlets, mostly the big names in retail and restaurant, as well as a huge cinema and entertainment center make it a favorite with the whole family.

Juman Center or Emirates Tower has designer clothes cheaper than anywhere else in the world. Jumeirah Center's great for discounted fashion and other fabulous bargains. Ibn Battuta has five themed shopping zones. And, according to Time Out, 'The Village is an avant-garde shopaholic's dream.'

Then there are the souks ... bustling, spice-scented lanes that feel like another world altogether. There's an overwhelming array of products and



you'll definitely be expected to haggle. Make sure you get to the Gold, Perfume and Spice Souks. Many a happy shopper has walked away with a diamond ring at less than quarter of the price you'd pay in Europe.

If you ever tire of the manmade, there are a host of other activities. Go to a desert feast under the stars. See if you can spot the rare white-collared kingfisher in the wildlife sanctuary. Thrill-seekers should try wadi driving or sand skiing.

The Dubai golf courses are renowned – day or night. And deep-sea anglers will be delighted with the teeming life in the Gulf waters.

One last thing. We suggest you pack light ... or you'll have to buy another suitcase to carry all your shopping home!

EGYPT

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What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word Egypt? Probably, ancient pyramids and pharaohs under a ferociously blazing sun. Or, maybe the River Nile, with its fertile banks and slow-moving dhows.

However, there is another part of Egypt that's rarely thought about. And that's the Red Sea. Its warm, inviting waters are home to crystal clear seas, untouched island reefs with spectacular coral formations just offshore, and numerous shipwrecks, making it a haven for divers and snorkelers alike.

Hurghada, on the northern shores of this inland sea, and the Sinai Peninsula, on the northern tip have become two of the most popular places to enjoy its delights. The Ras Mohamed Marine Natural Park is a must-do in Sinai. Careless Reef, Omo Gamaar and Abu Rimata bear special mention for Hurghada.

Giftun Island National Park is also a good place to go in Hurghada, and a tour of Nama Bay in Sinai is a delight. Kids will love the action at Cleo Water Park in Sinai.

As the desert is all around, there's plenty to do that's not water-based. Sigala, in Herghada is good for souvenirs. Pricewise, it probably rivals Cairo's famous Khan el-Khalili. Go on a jeep tour or camel trek to discover more about the local Bedouin tribes near Sinai. You can even stay for dinner!



IN THE END, WHATEVER YOU CHOOSE TO FILL YOUR DAYS WITH, YOU'LL LEAVE REFRESHED, SUNTANNED AND LADEN WITH TREASURED MEMORIES.



Must-sees in and around Herghada are Gebel Abu Dukhan, with its purple igneous rock and crystals of plagioclase that were prized by the Romans; the monasteries of St Anthony and St Paul, where monasticism was born; and Luxor's Valley of the Kings and ancient palaces.

In the Sinai, climb Mount Moses, once home to hermits and monks; Mt Sinai and the ancient St Catherine's Monastery are fascinating; and historical Petra in Jordan is just a stone's throw away.

In Cairo, see the Pyramids of Giza, the sole survivor of the Seven Wonders of the World and watched over by the feline Sphinx. Then there's Dahshur - the Black, Red and Bent pyramids are the best ones to explore further. And the remarkable Egyptian Museum has over 120000 fascinating relics.

If you have any time left over, go on day trips to Abu Sir, Memphis and Saqqara. Otherwise, head over to Fayed on the edge of the Great Bitter Lake. It makes a great base for exploring central and northern Egypt.

Mara Matrouh, on the other hand, perches on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. Clear turquoise waters and a beautiful sandy beach are perfect to idle the hours away. Combine it with time at Aswan, on the edge of Lake Nasser, the world's largest manmade lake.

2027 square miles (5250 sq km) of water cover the ancient land of Nubai, with hundreds of tombs and temples moved to Kalabsha,

Wadi as-Subua, Amada and Abu Simbel, where you'll find the famous Temple of Rameses.

In the end, whatever you choose to fill your days with, you'll leave refreshed, suntanned and laden with treasured memories.

GAMBIA

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This tiny country, perched on the western shores of Africa's bulge, offers an authentic African version of the quintessential tropical vacation.

Beautiful expanses of palm-fringed beaches, water sports and warm sunshine, with the excitingly primal pulse of Africa beating in the background. You'll see it in the marketplaces, touch it in the exotically beautiful crafts and feel it in the wild of the national parks.

Abuko Nature Reserve gives you a chance to see the dreaded Nile crocodile, as well as hippos, hyenas, antelope and monkeys. The meandering waterways of the magnificent River Gambia's estuary are home to a spectacular variety of birds, fish and mammals. ►

In fact, Gambia is so small you can go from long golden beaches to lush blazes of green jungle relatively quickly.

The local food is spicy and delicious. Chicken or Fish Yassa, Benechin and Domada. Or freshly caught seafood, including huge Atlantic prawns. Sweet, seasonal fruit is often sold as juice by beach vendors – refreshing mango, papaya, pineapple, orange and watermelon juice. Just the thing to quench your thirst!

Apart from the craft markets in Serrekunda, you can go to Banjul, Bakau and Brikama. Albert Market tailors can whip you up an outfit at a very reasonable price. Try your hand at bargaining for tie-dye, woodcarvings, filigree jewelry, batiks, leather goods, basketry or sand paintings. But remember ... items made from wild animal skins, ivory or feathers are illegal to take out of the country, so avoid them.

You must visit the ancient Wassu Stone Circles. The largest concentration in West Africa, each stone circle has between 10 and 24 massive stones that have been there for about 1200 years.

The tiny fishing village of Kartong offers a more recent flavor. Vibrant and colorful, it has safe swimming beaches and some beautiful countryside to explore.

The only other thing you'll need to make your vacation complete is a camera. Enjoy!

ISRAEL

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The Wailing Wall. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Dome of the Rock. No wonder this significant land of ancient cultures is settled by many and visited by even more.

Way north is Tiberias, spread around the base of a mountain slope along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Even if you only come here to enjoy the natural mineral hot springs, you cannot escape its religious and historical significance.

Religious shrines and historical sites aside, Tiberias is a fantastic year-round vacation spot. The 32 mile (51.5km) shoreline is a paradise of beaches, natural trails and interesting caves. As the largest sweet-water lake in Israel, it's also an excellent place for fresh fish restaurants, most of which are kosher.

Traverse the boardwalk between Zemach beach and Dganya Aleph Kibbutz. The mosaic floor in the synagogue built in the 3rd or 4th century is beautiful. And Haifa, on the Mediterranean coast, is a short drive away.

Perched on the slopes of the Carmel Mountain, some of the panoramas are breathtaking. The medieval walled fortress city of Acre lies across the harbor. The snow-capped peak of Mount Hermon towers over Israel's largest national park.

On the opposite end of the country, past Nazareth and the Dead Sea, lies Eilat. Set on the northern tip of the Red Sea, it's famous for its magnificent coral reefs and lovely beaches. Not as well known is that it's the world's best place for bird watching.

Connecting three continents, it's the principal migration route for billions of birds. Over 30 species of raptor alone can be found circling above the Eilat mountains and it's a refuelling stop for many other species.

For those who're not so keen on diving, there's an underwater observatory 20 feet (six meters) below sea level. Unlike most aquariums, you're actually looking deep into the waters of the Red Sea itself. At the other end of the scale, a 90 stair climb will take you to the Lookout Terrace with a view of four countries.



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The stark desert landscape is also great to explore, especially the Rift Valley area with its steep red canyons and multicolored rock formations. North of Eilat, you'll find flat desert savanna and thorny Acacias containing a surprisingly large amount of wildlife. The Hai Bar wildlife reserve also houses many rare and endangered desert animals.

One last thing about Eilat. Shopping is much cheaper than the rest of Israel because there's no VAT.

MOROCCO

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Exotic and colorful, you'll be excused if you fall in love with the land of a thousand and one nights. And, behind 7.5 miles (12km) of red ochre walls, Marrakech has to be the jewel in Morocco's crown.

At the heart of the city lies Djemaa el-Fna. Quite unlike its name, the 'Square of the Dead' quivers with life and color. Performing artists, snake charmers, musicians, storytellers and healers form small islands in swirling crowds. Freshly squeezed orange juice vendors encircle them all and, at night, food stalls offering everything from kebabs to boiled snails spring to life.

A seat at one of the square's cafes is the perfect place to watch the spectacle. And, when you've had enough of that, the surrounding streets and narrow alleyways hold another adventure . . . the souks of Marrakech.

ACROSS THE MAJESTIC RIF MOUNTAINS, LIE THE CLEAN FINE SANDS, AZURE WATERS AND BREATHTAKING VIEWS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN COAST. RESTINGA BEACH IS SAID TO BE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF THEM ALL.



Nicely shaded, they're the perfect place to lose yourself for an afternoon. Beautiful hand-woven rugs, dates, handcrafted jewelry, leather, spices, clothes, marinated olives - it's all there, and more. The prices are lower the further away from the square you go and remember to bargain. The stallholders expect it!

Beaches are a bus ride away in Essaouira or you can ski in Oukaimeden in the Atlas Mountains. Relaxing hammams (bath houses) are plentiful. And you're surrounded by magnificent mosques, fountains and palaces.

Further north, across the majestic Rif Mountains, lie the clean fine sands, azure waters and breathtaking views of the Mediterranean coast. Restinga beach is said to be the most beautiful of them all.

Tangiers is the principal town of the area. Perched on a hill, this white-walled city springs from a multitude of civilizations. Many a writer has found their inspiration here. Music is prevalent, especially at night. And the casino has four floors designed to while away any hours left.

Not far away is Tétouan, overhanging the verdant valley of Oued Martil. Thanks to Hispanic/Moorish influences, you'll see ceramic splendors jostling alongside brilliant whitewash. It's an enchanting place, where Tapas is as easy to get as Tajjins.

Chefcoaoouen is home to the original inhabitants of Morocco, the Berbers. Deep in the Rif Mountains, its whitewashed walls and rich blue doors set this old town apart from the rest. Make sure you visit its Kasbah and ethnographical museum. They'll give you a real feel for this magnificent country. ■