

Dubai 2019

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New Zealand to Dubai

(Shari) Our caravan is over. My group duties are complete. I decide to contribute to this journal so you find out what goes on besides pictures of birds. We did so much on the caravan that Bert did not report. Did he tell you about our meals? Potlucks? Cultural shows? Funny guests? Our RVs? The list goes on and on. Today we are on our way to Casablanca, Morocco to join our friends Jeff and Barbara on an Overseas Adventure Tour (O.A.T.). However, first, we will spend a couple of days in Dubai. Our plane does not depart until 6:45 PM. We eat a leisurely breakfast and say more goodbyes to this wonderful group. We make promises to keep in touch or to visit each other or even have a Florida reunion. Later we walk about a mile to pick up cough drops and cold medicine. As it is with just about every caravan, I manage to avoid the bugs traveling amongst the group until the end. Nonetheless, in the end I manage to get it. Departing on an Emirates flight, where I purchased extra legroom and got front row seats, I expect to have a “comfy” 18 hours. First to Sydney then on to Dubai ...

(Bert) Today in our around-the-world travel, we fly from Christchurch, New Zealand to Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). Our flight departs at 6:45 PM and we arrive tomorrow at 5:15 AM. Those times are deceptive as the difference in New Zealand and Dubai clocks is 15 hours. We are flying via Emirates airlines in an ultramodern Airbus A380-800 jet certified for up to 868 passengers at upper and a lower levels. Our flight takes us west to Sydney where we wait in the lobby for the interior of the jet to be cleaned and soon take off again. The second flight is 8687 miles, passing south of Java, the southern part of India, and then across the Arabian Sea. The movie screen at each seat also displays statistics: We travel at 0.852 Mach (536 mph) at 38,000 feet and it is -60°F outside. With such an early arrival in Dubai, we are fortunate when the hotel opens up a room for us in a couple of hours.



Dubai 2

(Shari) The long plane ride was not bad. I ate, slept, watched two movies, slept, and ate again. We land at 4:55 AM. The Dubai Airport is huge, huge, huge. It takes us 45 minutes to walk, take the room-sized lift down, walk, take the train to baggage, reclaim, and walk some more. Our slow walk means the whole planeload of people have already retrieved their luggage, so our two suitcases look lonely on the carousel. No one checks our baggage or asks agriculture-check questions. No visa, no passport stamp. In addition, it is an announcement-free airport, so no one calls "Cheng Chan Chow please report to gate 15", nor is there elevator music broadcast throughout. The taxi ride to the hotel is short and the nice clerk lets us check in early. We shower and nap before we walk the two blocks to the start of our day on the hop on hop off bus tour.

Dubai is a new city that really entered the international stage after the 1966 discovery of oil. Although oil was the start of its economic boom, it now contributes less than 5% to Dubai's GNP. Most important is real estate and tourism. Everywhere I look, I see construction cranes and skyscrapers reaching upwards. Everything is also in the superlative: the tallest, the most expensive, the longest in the world. The town is all about spending money, especially in its mammoth shopping centers (plural) bigger than Mall of America in Minnesota.

Although a Muslim country, the city boasts 25 Christian churches, nine of which are Catholic. However, I find it disconcerting to hear Arabic chanting prayer blasting through outdoor speakers. I guess about 10% of the population wears traditional dress and ways. I see some influence of the United States, but not much. In our all day travel, McDonalds shows up, as does Five Guys, Tim Horton, Dunkin Donuts, and Dominos.

The only time we get off the bus today is at the spice souk, an open-air Arabian market, and then for lunch at a traditional Chinese restaurant. Even with that stop, we only take two of the three hop-on-hop-off routes and catch the last bus back to where we got on near our hotel.

(Bert) I cannot describe Dubai in a single word or a single sentence. So many adjectives come to mind ... ultramodern, architect's fantasy, big money, courteous people, conservative, traffic congestion, a vacationer's paradise, the first of firsts. What strikes me first is the glitzy architecture, so many shapes and sizes, so much glass, so many skyscrapers. We ride a Big Bus, hop-on hop-off, touring the city, with every turn another artificial phenomenon. I take dozens of photos, trying to capture the magic and marvel of the city. Some of the architecture is stunning, beautiful, and aesthetically pleasing. Others are gaudy and poor imitations of the original, such as the Egyptian sculptures and temples and the Big Ben skyscraper. Some seem absolutely useless, such as the largest picture frame in the world that is without a picture. It is a bit like a Disneyland imitation of a future world.



Raffles, the most expensive shopping center in Dubai



The largest picture frame in the world



Unusual architecture



Burj Khalifa, tallest building in the world



Skyscrapers everywhere



Museum of the Future, under construction



Shaped like a ship, it includes a casino



Spice souk



Dubai Creek with traditional dhow wooden boats against a modern backdrop



Dubai Creek edged by docked yachts





Date palms, a few of the thousands planted in Dubai



Bus stop

Dubai 3

(Bert) We eat breakfast in the mall across from the hotel and then wait for the bus outside. I did not carry my binoculars and long lens yesterday because I did not anticipate seeing any interesting birds in the city. Therefore, I missed photographing a life bird, an Indian Roller. Another lifer was a Socotra Cormorant. Today I am better prepared. While waiting for the bus I find three dove species, including Laughing Dove and Eurasian Collared-Dove, the latter introduced and now common throughout the U.S. in the past ten years.



Laughing Dove



Eurasian Collared-Dove

(Shari) After breakfast at the first of many glitzy shopping malls located across the street from our hotel, we catch our second day of hop-on hop-off bus. What a bargain it is! Two cruises, three routes and English commentary for a full eight hours per day gives us a good feel for the city. Even then, we wish we had another day or two to catch what we miss. Today we focus on the newer Dubai that was developed during the last 15 years. Stretching along the coast south of the city and built on manmade islands, it is a mammoth project of glassy skyscrapers. Unbelievable to me is that there was nothing here in 2005. Building has not stopped as noted by all the cranes, sounds of pounding, and unfinished structures. Many are in preparation of Dubai 2020, an international exhibition that is expected to draw millions of people.

(Bert) From the bus, I photograph architecture wonders. One of these is a small-scale imitation of Sydney's Opera House. It stands beside a vibrantly green golf course studded with palm trees. Water in Dubai comes from desalination of seawater, an expensive process. In fact, water is more expensive than gasoline in Dubai. I wonder what the water bill for this golf course is.



Sydney-opera-house-like building



Many hotels front on coastal inlets and creeks



Numerous multiple-lane expressways move traffic across the city



(Shari) We stop to get pictures of the most expensive hotel in the world built on a manmade island. To stay there puts one back around \$14,000 per night. Yikes! Our pictures are free.



Burj Al Arab

(Bert) They call the hotel Burj Al Arab and it represents sails on a ship. Her iPhone photo, shown above, includes a wedding couple that happens to be there. The hotel is so tall that my camera cannot get it all in, so instead I focus on the helipad at the top, just as a helicopter arrives. Residents can schedule the helicopter to take them to/from the airport.



Helicopter landing at Burj Al Arab

We visit another mall, this one called the Mall of the Emirates. Featuring mostly Arabic jewelry and crafts, most items were outside our budget. However, Shari found a couple of times for herself, our daughter and granddaughter. A falcon held by an Arab in native dress fascinates me. For a price, I could also hold the falcon, but I decline.



Mall of the Emirates

High above us, soaring over the city, is a raptor. I cannot identify it, so I downloaded my photo to my computer, cropped, and edited it. I am still not sure of its identity, so maybe someone reading this can take a crack at it. In fact, I get two responses, both of which say it is an African form of Golden Eagle.



Golden Eagle

Dubai 4

(Bert) Taking advantage of being situated on the Arabian Gulf, the city has built several inlets to create boat docks, waterways, and beaches. Each of the beaches is crowded with sunbathers, although I see few actually swimming.



Beach next to active construction site building more hotels

(Bert) At Dubai Marina, we transfer from the bus to a boat with a large top deck and, sitting on deck chairs, we scan the skyline, glide smoothly along the canal, and even see a sky jumper glide by in Superman fashion. One end of the cable is attached mid-height on a skyscraper and the other to one of the bridges. Black-headed Gulls gather in small flocks at the edge of the canal and later I see a flock of about 200 flying between the tops of the skyscrapers.



Cruising canal at Dubai Marina



Restaurant on riverboat called a dhow



Mosque dwarfed by skyscrapers



Skydiver on a cable, Superman style



Black-headed Gulls in winter plumage

(Shari) We take a cruise along one of the manmade canals and touch the Arabian Gulf before turning back. Lunching at a French restaurant eating Italian spaghetti, I am fascinated with the smoking thing that people buy at lunchtime. It must come in flavors, as I smell strawberries coming from the smoke at the next table.

(Bert) We are back on the bus and while waiting for a stoplight, I notice crows but not the familiar ones back home. From my app, I deduce they are House Crows, a native of India that has expanded its range.



House Crow

The bus takes us onto the manmade islands shaped as a palm tree with the main highway following the trunk and numerous outlying palm fronds each a private housing and shopping community. All properties in Palm Jumeirah front on the Arabian Gulf.



Gateway to Palm Jumeirah

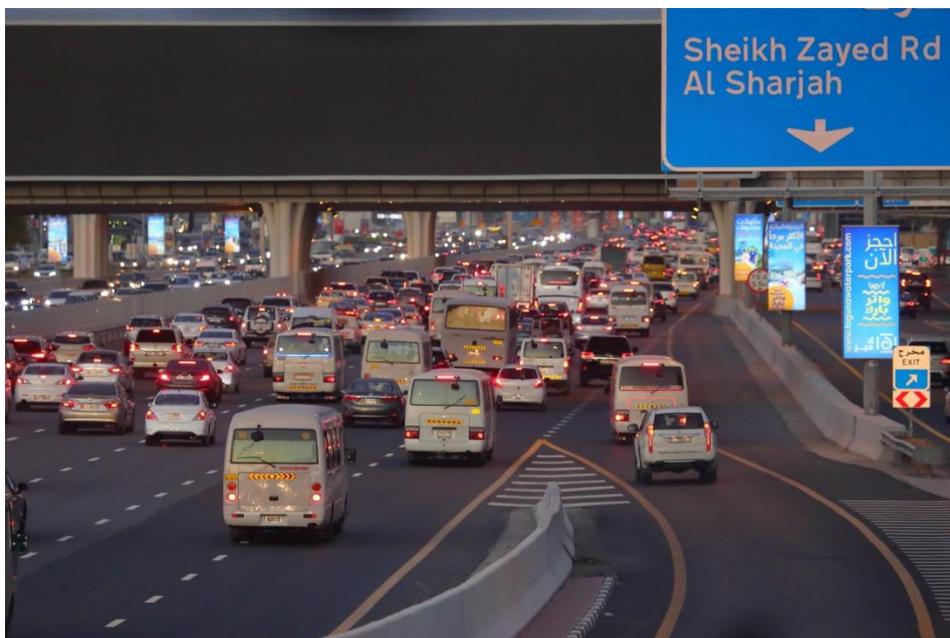


Hotel on Palm Jumeirah



Arabian Gulf on coast of Palm Jumeirah

(Bert) On the way back we are short on time. We switch from the third route to the second and will just make it to the first if traffic doesn't interfere. We miss the 6 PM deadline just as we reach the Dubai Mall. Plan B is to visit the mall, see the city skyscraper lights and watch the Dubai Fountain Waterdance. Hundreds of people line up along every available position to see the water show, so I wait in line at the balcony of the enormous Apple store for the next show while Shari checks out the new iPhone. The water show is set to music as the water sprays from a large reflection pool, with city lights providing the backdrop.



Freeway traffic

(Shari) It is 6 PM by the time we finish our bus tours. We miss our last bus of the day. That clinches our decision to watch the dancing fountains at the Dubai Mall before catching a taxi to our hotel.



Entrance to Dubai Mall



