

EATING

top picks

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Dubai's culinary landscape mirrors the imported expat population – Indian, Thai, Chinese, African, Lebanese – not local Emirati culture. In fact, you'll be hard pressed to find anything indigenous. Unless you score an invitation to a wedding, you're unlikely ever to sample the local specialty, *khouzi*, a whole roasted lamb or baby camel stuffed with rice and spices. You might come across chicken, lamb or shrimp *mashbous* – spiced meat served with equally spicy rice – but they're nothing fabulous, mostly a mass of protein and starch. Blame it on tradition: the Bedouin diet once consisted only of fish, dates, camel meat and camel milk – tasty, yes, but even the Emiratis hardly eat it anymore. Now you spot them lining up at the fast food chains with great frequency, indifferent to the major increase in Type II diabetes locally.

The best food is Middle Eastern, and includes Lebanese, Persian (Iranian) and Syrian. The cooking of the Indian subcontinent is also superb, with nearly 30 distinct subtypes available in Dubai. Asian cooking varies: you'll find good Thai and lots of Japanese (especially sushi), but Chinese is lacking. Likewise European: though Italian restaurants draw big crowds, few merit a critical look. Seafood is wildly popular and the favourite local fish is the tender and meaty *hammour*, a member of the grouper family, which you'll find on nearly every menu.

There are two types of restaurant in Dubai: the hotel restaurant and the independent. Only hotels are licensed to serve alcohol, which is why they house the city's top dining rooms. Alas, many of these top-end spots lack the individuality and eccentricity you'd find in a first-class Western restaurant because they fall under the umbrellas of giant corporate hotel chains with strict S&P (standards-and-procedures) manuals that effectively flatten individuality. Creativity doesn't flourish in Dubai. Yes, there are standout exceptions, such as Gordon Ramsay's Verre, but even this is part of a small empire run from overseas. Head to the independent restaurants when you want ethnic authenticity and don't mind slumming it; head to the hotels when you want splash and panache – and a big glass of vino to wash it down.

Opening Hours & Meal Times

Restaurant hours are generally noon to 3pm and 7.30pm to midnight; inexpensive café-restaurants are generally open 9am to midnight. Shawarma joints open in the late afternoon and stay open well past midnight. Most restaurants open seven days a week, with the exception of Friday lunch, when some smaller local eateries close. In top-end restaurants, most locals book an 8.30pm or 9pm table. For Arabic and Lebanese restaurants with live music, an 11pm booking is the norm, as entertainment usually starts at 10pm and continues until 3am; book earlier for quiet conversation.

PRICE GUIDE

Reviews in this chapter are listed under each area in order of price for a main course, from the least expensive to the wallet-busters. Here's how we break it down:

\$	under Dh30
\$\$	Dh30-60
\$\$\$	over Dh60

How Much?

Street food, such as shawarma, costs around Dh4; an inexpensive curry at a cheap Indian restaurant runs about Dh10. At midrange restaurants, mains run Dh25 to Dh40, at top-end spots Dh65 to Dh150. Alcohol will spike your cheque sky-high. Because booze is only sold in bars and restaurants attached to hotels (generally three-star or better), and a few stand-alone clubs, prices are outrageous (see p126). Expect to pay Dh20 for a beer or glass of wine, more at a club. If you're on a budget, pick up duty-free booze on your flight in. We wish we could tell you to carry a hip flask into clubs, but it's illegal.

Booking Tables

Make reservations for hotel restaurants; at the indies, it's generally not necessary. Be prepared to give your mobile number, and expect a call if you're late. Make weekend bookings – Thursday and Friday nights, and Friday brunch – for top tables at least a week ahead. Some restaurants have one-off nights geared to foodies; check *Time Out* magazine to see what's doing during your visit.

Tipping

Tipping is a tricky business in Dubai. Many restaurants, particularly in hotels, tack on a 10% service charge, but depending on the hotel, the employees may never see this money. Service is weak in Dubai not because the waiters are being obnoxious, but because employers in Dubai are cheap. They hire poor people from developing countries and don't spend the money to train them properly. Many workers had never set foot in a five-star hotel before working in one. Don't hold their inexperience against them. The average hotel waiter works six days a week and makes Dh900 to Dh1000 per month, including housing; they have no access to their own passports or their own money because employers lock up the staff's travel documents and pay into savings accounts, not checking accounts. Can you imagine living in Dubai with no pocket money and no escape route? Waiters at independent restaurants make Dh2000 per month, but must pay for their own housing. A studio apartment in Dubai costs at least Dh4000 a month. This means that waiters leave home and wind up sharing a studio with four or more strangers, just to make ends meet. Frankly, we don't know how they remain so cheerful.

When it comes to the tip, leave an additional 10% to 15% in cash, under the ticket, particularly at low-end restaurants – some unethical bosses will take the money away from the waiter if they see it. If you must tip on your credit card, first ask the waiter if the manager will pay out the money that night or not. If not, then pony up cash. If service is perfunctory, it's okay to leave a mere 5%. But if you really feel pushed around by your waiter or otherwise badly treated, leave nothing.

Self-Catering

The small grocery stores around Dubai are good for a box of washing powder, but

VEGETARIAN EATS


Good news: restaurants with poor vegetarian selections are the exception in Dubai. Blame it on all that cooking from the Subcontinent, the Middle East and Thailand. The city's many Indian restaurants do fantastic things with spiced vegetables, potatoes and rice. At any Lebanese restaurant, you can fill the table with all-veg mezze for a small feast. At Thai places plan to eat rice dishes and coconut curries. Vegans may have to ask more questions, but will be surprised by the choices. Alas, Dubai has barely started to catch on to the idea of organics; plan to eat conventional produce or shop for yourself at [Organic Foods & Café \(p99\)](#). Here's a list of all-vegetarian restaurants so you won't have to endure even a whiff of meat.

- [Magnolia \(p118\)](#)
- [XVA Cafe \(p113\)](#)
- [Govinda's \(p113\)](#)
- [Rangoli \(p113\)](#)

they're not much fun to browse if you're a foodie trying to suss out Dubai's culinary landscape. The closest thing you'll find to a farmers market is the [Shindagha Market \(Map pp62-3; ☎ 7am-11pm\)](#), where there are daily fish and meat markets. If you're buying, plan to bargain. Further up Al-Khaleej Rd, near Hamriya Port, the [Wholesale Market \(Map pp54-5; ☎ 7am-11pm\)](#) is even cheaper, but most sales are in bulk. The huge parking area is full of trucks hauling produce from Oman. It feels very industrial, but this is the mainline source of Dubai's food.

The best consumer shopping is at the major grocery stores. The expat favourite is [Spinneys \(☎ 8am-midnight\)](#). It's the most expensive, but wow, what a selection, from frozen Oregon raspberries to South African oranges. And they carry pork. [Carrefour](#) and [Géant \(☎ 10am-10pm, to midnight Wed-Fri\)](#), the French-based hypermarket chains, are great for stinky cheeses

CHILD-FRIENDLY RESTAURANTS

Emiratis prize the family. While you can take kids to most restaurants in Dubai, we've indicated with the  icon restaurants especially good for families. What this means is that your kids can safely 1) scream without freaking anyone out; 2) have fun; 3) possibly meet other children; and 4) find something on the menu to please them, if only a plate of noodles, that longstanding favourite of kids everywhere. If you're not sure where to eat, malls are a sure bet; most listed in this book have surprisingly good food courts. Though all hotels have at least one restaurant good for families, those we've selected in resort-heavy New Dubai ([p119](#)) are best for adults. But if you show up at the hotel during meal times and ask the front desk, they'll direct you to the most appropriate dining room. In short, fear not. Your hardest task will be strapping the kids into the taxi, not finding something to eat.

RAMADAN & IFTAR

Muslims are required to fast during Ramadan, and everyone, regardless of religion, is expected to observe the fast when in public. That means no eating, drinking or smoking during daylight hours. Some hotels still serve breakfast and lunch, but this is in specially designated rooms; most of the time eating during the day means room service or self-catering. Non-Muslims offered coffee or tea when meeting a Muslim during the fast should initially refuse politely. If your host insists, and repeats the offer several times, you should accept, so long as it doesn't look as though you're going to anger anyone else present who may be fasting.

Ramadan would seem to be the ideal time to lose weight, yet a lot of locals pile on the pounds. For many, avoiding food from dawn to dusk results in immense hunger come sunset, and with hundreds of restaurants putting on good-value iftar buffets, the temptation to overindulge is everywhere. Iftar, the meal that breaks the fast, is traditionally very light – just a couple of dates, some *jallab* (date drink) and a bowl of lentil soup. But Dubai's commercially savvy restaurants have turned iftar into an all-you-can-eat glutton-fest. From huge spreads at the Burj Al Arab to bottomless buckets at KFC, there are plenty of ways to catch up on missed meals.

Ironically those with a passion for Middle Eastern cuisine will find Ramadan a great time to visit. Restaurants may be closed during the day, but in the evenings they're at their busiest, liveliest and cheapest: this is the chance for Muslims to socialise with family and friends. Many hotels set up Ramadan tents for the entire month. They're often superbly situated beachside and serve Lebanese mezze and *sheesha* until the wee hours. Here are our favourite hotels to take in the action:

- **Le Royal Meridien** (p162)
- **Emirates Towers** (p158)
- **One&Only Royal Mirage** (p162)
- **Grand Hyatt Hotel** (p156)
- **Ritz-Carlton Hotel** (p120)

and European imports. **Choithram** caters to Indian and Pakistani communities. While we recommend buying curry at the Spice Souq, you can pick it up here at a pinch. For organic produce and groceries, there's one choice: **Organic Foods & Café** (p99). The selection is limited, but it's huge for Dubai.

Spinneys locations:

Abu Baker al-Siddiq Rd (Map pp54–5) In Deira.

Al-Mankhool Rd (Map pp62–3) Opposite Al-Rolla Rd.

Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Rd (Map pp62–3) Near Kuwait St.

Jumeirah Rd (Map pp76–7)

Al-Wasl Rd (Map pp76–7) In Safa.

Mercato Mall (pp76–7) On Jumeirah Rd.

Carrefour locations:

Bur Dubai (Map pp62–3)

Deira City Centre (pp56–7)

Mall of the Emirates (pp82–3).

Ibn Battuta Mall (pp82–3)

Choithram locations:

Al-Rolla & Al-Mankhool Rds (Map pp62–3) Next to Al-Khaleej Shopping Centre.

Al-Wasl Rd (Map pp76–7) Jumeirah, near Safa Park.

DEIRA

Deira has a great street scene: snag a sidewalk table beneath flickering neon and soak up the colour. Deira is where many poor people live, and here you eat their food – Chinese, Arabic, African and especially Indian. With several notable exceptions, most of them listed below, Deira lacks upmarket restaurants; for a white-tablecloth dinner with wine, head to the beach. If you're on a budget, you can do well for under Dh20 (see the boxed text, p109). But even if you're not, an unpretentious dinner in conservative Dubai can be as special as a fancy meal at home.

CAFÉ CHIC Map pp56–7 French \$\$\$

☎ 217 0000; **Le Meridien Dubai, Airport Rd, Al-Garhoud**; lunch set-menu/dinner mains Dh110/180; ☎ lunch Sat–Thu 12.30–3.30pm, dinner nightly 8–11.30pm

Two-star Michelin-rated chef Philippe Gauvreau oversees Café Chic, a stalwart of haute-contemporary French cuisine. Top ingredients are flown in daily from France – line-caught fish from Brittany, Red Label guinea hen, Valrhona chocolate – and they're transformed into art by executive-chef Pierrick Cizéron. Go for a set menu, and request the sommelier pair wines – his

list is one of Dubai's best. The room is dated, but the culinary acumen is spot-on. Come at lunch for a three-course set menu, with wine, for a mere Dh110.

VERRE BY GORDON RAMSAY

Map pp54–5 Fine Dining \$\$\$
☎ 212 7551; **Hilton Dubai Creek, Baniyas Rd; mains Dh175**; ☎ 7pm–midnight

The pinnacle of Dubai's culinary scene, Verre stands out for embracing the gentele *art de la table* in all its sensuality – from your first sip of champagne to your last bite of chocolate, this is one meal you won't soon forget. Verre plays to European sophisticates who recognize subtlety, not to Dubai's ubiquitous parvenu: there are no distracting gimmicks, no silly flourishes and no dumbing down of the West's great culinary traditions. Near-perfect executions of French-inspired classics are served with choreographed precision in an austere white-tablecloth dining room. Expect lovely surprises from the chef, such as an *amuse* of finger-sized *pithiviers* of quail and foie gras; and a plate of *mignardises* with lip-smacking *fruit-gelées* and dense truffles after dessert. In between, it's up to you – everything is heartily recommend. One of the city's foremost sommeliers oversees the heady wine list, and an ambassadorial *maitre d'* keeps the ballet in synch. If you're serious about eating, don't miss Verre.

JW'S STEAKHOUSE Map pp56–7 Steak \$\$\$

☎ 262 4444; **JW Marriott Hotel, Abu Baker Al-Siddique Rd; mains Dh150**; ☎ noon–midnight
In the classic American tradition, the dimly lit JW's is done in dark-wood panelling with green-leather Queen Anne wing chairs. The menu is equally orthodox, with succulent fat-man-sized steaks and chops, best preceded by Scotch and followed by cigars. Expats know JW's best as the home of the 12-hour Friday brunch, the longest in town (note: no alcohol served between 4pm and 6pm; call for details).

SHABESTAN Map pp54–5 Persian \$\$\$

☎ 222 7171; **Radisson SAS Hotel, Baniyas St; mains Dh90**; ☎ 12.30–3.15pm & 7.30–11.15pm
Shabestan is Dubai's top Persian restaurant. But don't take our word for it. Ask Sheikh Mohammed, who regularly pops in for lunch. But go at dinner time, when

the window-lined dining room reveals a panorama of glittering lights over the Creek (book a window table). Hot fresh bread and homemade yoghurt hit the table as you arrive. Mountains of perfumed rice accompany melt-off-the-bone braised lamb. Save room for vermicelli ice cream with saffron and rose water. The Persian house band is first-rate.

MIYAKO Map pp54–5 Japanese \$\$\$

☎ 209 1222; **Hyatt Regency, off Al-Khaleej Rd; mains from Dh90**; ☎ 12.30–3pm & 7pm–midnight
The coolly minimalist, compact dining room of Dubai's best Japanese eatery narrowly escapes being bland, but feels very Tokyo, with sleek surfaces of stainless steel and glass-enclosed *shoji* screens. The sushi is stellar (as are its prices), but this is a place to branch out. *Shabu shabu* is superb, made with tender and tasty beef; the crumbed fried oysters and braised pork belly (*kakuni*) merit a special trip. The drawback? Traffic. Avoid coming during evening rush hour; book after 9pm or on the weekend.

SUMIBIYA Map pp54–5 Japanese Grill \$\$\$

☎ 222 7171; **Radisson SAS Hotel, Baniyas St; mains Dh80**; ☎ 12–3pm & 7–11pm
Japanese BBQ-grill cooking (aka Yakiniku) is the specialty at Sumibiya, and every table has a recessed fire grill. Though the Wagyu beef and seafood run high (Dh100+), the set menus of various meat-and-veggie combos are a relative bargain. There's nothing romantic about the narrow windowless room, but it's great fun for families or groups of foodie friends. If you can't bear to cook your own dinner, fried-rice dishes spare you the trouble.

ASHIANA Map pp54–5 Indian \$\$\$

☎ 228 1707; **Sheraton Dubai Creek; mains Dh80**; ☎ 12.30–3pm & 7.30pm–midnight
In a town that knows good Indian, Ashiana's stands out as one of the best. Presentations of the northern Indian fare are brilliant: *dum biryani* is cooked in a pot sealed with bread, elegantly perfuming the meat. Sophisticated, complex curries justify the prices, as do the solicitous service, atmospheric dining room and live sitar music. Plan to linger long. Good vegetarian food too.

FARSI FOOD *By Matthew Lee*

Relations between the UAE and Iran haven't always been congenial – they're still disputing the ownership of three tiny islands in the Gulf. But the Iranian contribution to the success of the United Arab Emirates shouldn't be understated. Large numbers of Iranian migrants moved to Dubai in the 1920s and 1930s and some of today's most influential and wealthy Emirati families have Iranian roots. There was another brief period of mass migration when thousands moved to Dubai to flee the Islamic Revolution of 1979. There are Persian buildings all over the city, such as the beautiful Iranian Hospital, and, of course, lots of fantastic restaurants. Dubai is a great place to sample this deeply underrated cuisine.

At most Persian restaurants in Dubai, your meal will begin with *noon-o-panir-o-sabzi*, or bread, cheese and herbs – roll the cheese and herbs together in the hot bread that waiting staff deliver – soft, puffy, warm-from-the-oven – to the table every few minutes. It's hard to resist filling up on it. Soup, or *ash*, is also a staple of a traditional Persian meal, and at some restaurants a bowl of barley soup (*ash-e-jow*) comes with every order. It's also worth trying *kashk-e-bademjan*. *Bademjan* is aubergine in Farsi and *kashk* is a type of whey; the result is an alluringly creamy and smoky dip.

The preparation of rice becomes an art form in the Iranian kitchen, from the fluffy and light *chelo* rice to the herb-saturated *pollo* rice and the sticky *kateh* rice. Even the burnt rice at the bottom of the pan is wondrous – it's called *tahdig* and is buttery, crunchy and zinging with saffron. The closest thing Iran has to a national dish is the *chelo kebab* (meaning 'kebab with rice'), a simple portion of grilled lamb or chicken usually marinated in lime and onion. There are also plenty of hearty lamb stews on the Persian menu; expect subtle spices and combinations of okra, aubergine and spinach. You can wash everything down with *dogh*, a yoghurt drink like the Indian *lassi*, and finish your meal with *falooda*, an icy dessert of frozen vermicelli noodles, rosewater and cherry syrup.

For a Persian dining experience so authentic it's got the stamp of approval from Tehran, lunch at the **Iranian Club** (p114), where women have to cover their heads and a portrait of the Ayatollah greets you on arrival. If you're not in touch with your conservative side, you can't go wrong with a meal at **Shabestan** (p107); **Golestan** (☎ 282-8007; near Computer College, Al-Garhoud; mains Dh35; 🕒 noon-midnight); or **Special Ostadi** (☎ 397-1933; Al-Mussallah Rd, Bur Dubai; mains Dh30; 🕒 noon-4pm, 6.30pm-1am)

KIKU Map pp56–7 Japanese \$\$\$
☎ 217 0000; Le Meridien Dubai, Airport Rd, Al-Garhoud; mains Dh75; 🕒 12.30-2.45pm & 7-11.30pm

It's a good sign when the patrons in a Japanese restaurant are Japanese. Sushi is Kiku's primary focus, with *fugu* the signature, and here they're done right, with thick slices of off-the-boat-fresh fish. The classic shoji-screen decor is crisp and clean, but reserve a tatami room for more elbow room and maximum romance. For drama – and hot food – book a teppanyaki table.

AL-MIJANA Map pp56–7 Lebanese \$\$\$
☎ 282 4040; Le Meridien Dubai, Airport Rd, Al-Garhoud; mains Dh75; 🕒 noon-3pm & 8pm-12.30am

The wooden ceiling, keyhole windows and sweeping arches lend the dining room an abbey-like simplicity, but the Lebanese party scene is anything but subdued. Book a 10pm table, just before the belly dancer arrives, and fill the table with mezze and kebabs; if you're an intrepid foodie, order the pomegranate-lemon sauté of sparrows. The food's great, but the real reason to come is to whoop it up, spontaneously

dance, and laugh too loud. Even the waiters join in.

CASA MIA Map pp56–7 Italian \$\$\$
☎ 702 2506; Le Meridien Dubai, Airport Rd, Al-Garhoud; mains Dh75; 🕒 12.30-2.45pm & 8-11.30pm

Though one of the most dependable Italian joints in town, Casa Mia is well off the beaten path in Le Meridien Village. Friendly service and reliable cooking justify the trek. Start with beef carpaccio, then move on to wood-fired pizza or housemade pasta – soak up the sauce with fresh-baked bread. Mains run high, upwards of Dh130 for a steak (albeit properly juicy and tender); stick to starch if you're on a budget.

CREEKSIDE Map pp54–5 Japanese \$\$\$
☎ 207 1750; Sheraton Dubai Creek, Baniyas Rd, Deira; mains Dh70; 🕒 12.30-3pm & 6.30pm-midnight

Despite its name, there are no Creek views at this austere Japanese restaurant with overly bright lighting. But sushi cuts are thick and hearty, the chef's signature rolls inventive, and the teppanyaki table great

DEIRA'S BEST CHEAP ETHNIC EATS

If you want to sample some of Dubai's best ethnic cooking, hit the backstreets of Deira, and eat beside the working-class expat workers who've imported their culinary traditions to Dubai. The following are for adventurous travellers, not the skirt-and-sweater crowd. At first glance, some might look scary – Westerners don't usually wander into these joints – but we've sampled all of them: they're the real deal. In a city that embraces artificiality, it's refreshing to find authenticity. Best of all, you'll likely get change on your Dh50 note. No credit cards.

Aroos Damascus (Map pp54–5; ☎ 227-0202; Al-Muraqabat St, at Al-Jazeera St; mains Dh20; 🕒 6am-3am; 🍴) Syrian food is similar to Lebanese, but they use more cumin in the fatoush and spice in the kebabs. Our favourite dish: *arayees* – Syrian bread stuffed with ground lamb and grilled. The sweetness of the bread plays off the gamey flavour of the meat. Great tabouleh, fantastic fresh-from-the-oven bread, huge outdoor patio, cool flickering neon.

Abesinian Restaurant (Map pp54–5; ☎ 273-7429; 10 St (Somali St), near 23 St junction; mains Dh15; 🕒 10am-midnight) The staff is welcoming and warm at this homey Ethiopian restaurant, where the big platters of curry and stews are best sopped-up with *injera*, spongy flat bread of native grain. Tricky to find but worth it.

Al-Baghdadi Home (Map pp54–5; ☎ 273-7069; Al-Mateena St, opposite Dubai Palm Hotel; mains Dh40; 🕒 noon-3am) In Little Iraq, on one of Dubai's best, lesser-known walking streets, Al-Baghdadi spit-roasts whole fish beside an open fire (the traditional preparation) in the restaurant's window, and serves it with bread and lentil salad. (NB: don't order randomly – *pachaa* is sheep's head.)

Afghan Kebab House (Map pp54–5; ☎ 222-3292; behind Naif Mosque, off Deira St; mains Dh15; 🕒 noon-3pm, 6pm-midnight) Big hunks of meat – lamb, beef, chicken – charred on foot-long skewers come served with rice and bread. That's it. Think caveman food. Eat with your hands. Tricky to find, but locals can direct you.

Pinoy Grill (Map pp54–5; ☎ 222-2225; Al-Rigga Rd at Al-Jazeera St; dishes Dh18; 🕒 noon-2am; 🍴) A friendly and welcoming intro to the weird, wonderful world of Filipino cuisine, which borrows from Spanish, Indonesian and French, mixing pungent ingredients, like garlic and chillies, in sweet and savoury combinations not always tastebud-friendly to foreigners. But the menu is in English, and the super-fun staff will guide you.

Xia Wei Yang (Map pp54–5; ☎ 221-7177; Baniyas Rd; hot pots Dh40; 🕒 noon-2am; 🍴) Chinese hot-pot restaurant. Order everything raw, then boil it at the table. Begin with veggies to enrich the broth, then add the meat – they have everything from meat- and fish-balls to tendons, hearts and testicles (fear not: they also serve beef and chicken). Hardly anyone speaks English: plan to point.

fun for watching chefs throw knives as they cook. The expansive bento box is great at lunchtime (Dh90), but at dinner the service needs help.

CHINA CLUB Map pp54–5 Contemporary Chinese \$\$
☎ 222 7171; Radisson SAS Hotel, Baniyas Rd; mains Dh60; 🕒 12–2.45pm & 7.30-10.45pm
Lunchtime yum cha – especially on Fridays – is the big draw at this red-silk-fancy dining room that's an aesthetically smart, but faded holdover from the *Dynasty* era. At dinner, the classics are spot-on, including a standout Szechuan-style boiled lamb and a crispy-delicious Peking duck carved and rolled tableside. Private dining rooms are ideal for a group, with lazy susans in the middle of the tables.

THAI KITCHEN Map pp56–7 Thai \$\$
☎ 602 1234; Park Hyatt Dubai; mains Dh60, brunch with/without alcohol Dh180/120; 🕒 7pm-midnight, brunch 12.30-4pm Fri

The decor is decidedly un-Thai, with black-lacquer tables, a swooping wave-form ceiling, and not a branch of bamboo, but the two open kitchens dominating the room are run entirely by Thai nationals. This is the real deal: dishes are based on Bangkok street eats, served tapas-style. Come for Friday brunch and sample the entire menu. Standouts: prawns in pandan leaves, and crispy catfish in baconlike strips with green-mango salad. One complaint: they under-spice. Ask for it hot!

GLASSHOUSE MEDITERRANEAN BRASSERIE Map pp54–5 Modern Mediterranean \$\$
☎ 227 1111; Hilton Dubai Creek, Baniyas Rd; mains Dh50; 🕒 7am-midnight

It must be hard for the folk at Glasshouse not to want to throw stones at their neighbouring restaurant, Gordon Ramsay's **Verre** (p107). While Verre gets all the media attention, Glasshouse has quietly reinvented itself as one of Dubai's most accomplished

brasserie-style restaurants. The British-heavy comfort-food menu lists dishes like risotto with mushrooms, and rib-eye steak with chips. It's executed with style, unlike the service, alas. Great wines by the glass.

CELLAR Map pp56–7 Fusion \$\$

☎ 282 9333; Aviation Club; mains Dh50; ☎ noon-2am

Known best for its Friday brunch, this casual expat favourite serves gastro-pub fare, British classics with a contemporary twist. The braised lamb shoulder in filo pastry is tender and juicy, a solid choice. Order simple: sometimes the kitchen over styles. The crowd loves to party.

YUM! Map pp54–5 Noodle Bar \$\$

☎ 222 7171; Radisson SAS Deira, Baniyas Rd; mains Dh42; ☎ noon-1am; ♿

Though not as dynamic as [Noodle House](#) (p117), it's a good pick for a quick bowl of noodles when you're wandering along the Creek – and you can be in and out in half an hour.

GRAND ABU SHAKRA Map pp54–5 Egyptian \$\$

☎ 222 9900; Al-Maktoum Rd, next to Al-Khaleej Palace Hotel; mains Dh35; ☎ 7am-3am

Black-and-white TVs show classics (sound off) from the golden age of Egyptian cinema, a fitting backdrop for Dubai's best-known Egyptian restaurant. Come at lunchtime on Tuesday or Thursday for the classic carb-rich *koshary*, a combination of rice, lentils and pasta, with chilli sauce, lemon and fried onion. The adventurous should order the charred whole pigeon (Dh90), but be forewarned: it's unboned – and still has its head. The red, gamey meat is richly flavourful, but boy, it's a struggle to get at it. If you're hungry, stick to the fava-bean falafel instead.

BOMBAY Map pp54–5 Indian \$\$

☎ 272 0000; Marco Polo Hotel, Al-Mateena St; mains Dh30; ☎ 7pm-midnight

It's worth a detour deep into Deira for Bombay's orthodox North Indian cooking. Come hungry and start with the kebab sampler (mutton, chicken, fish) then move on to mint-marinated fish cooked tandoori style, or a cardamom-rich *saag gosht* (lamb and spinach). There's lots for vegetarians. The French-style service by tuxedo-clad waiters is a surprise at this price, but we're not arguing. We're just happy they serve beer.

CAFÉ HAVANA Map pp56–7 Café \$

☎ 295 5238; Level II, Deira City Centre; coffee Dh12; ☎ 8am-midnight

The coffee's okay and the food nothing special; it's the people-watching that's great – Emirati men kick back here for hours on end, providing a rare opportunity to rub shoulders with them.

BUR DUBAI

Possibly the most eclectic eating area of Dubai, restaurants here run the gamut from dirt-cheap curry joints to white-tablecloth restaurants worthy of a Michelin star.

FIRE & ICE Map pp64–5 Contemporary European \$\$\$

☎ 341 8888; Raffles Dubai, Wafi City Mall; mains Dh200, tasting menu from Dh550; ☎ 7-11pm

If Michelin gave stars in Dubai, they'd surely consider bestowing one on Fire & Ice, Raffles Dubai's floor-to-ceiling-brick dining room that feels strangely like a styled-out New York warehouse. The menu plays on opposites (hot-cold, sweet-sour etc), and though the highly composed presentations can get too theatrical (think pop rocks on *torchon de foie gras*), the culinary acumen is spot-on. Using French technique, the chef expertly explores the delicate balance point between Eastern and Western ingredients. A tasting menu (Dh550+) might include yellow-fin sashimi with tomato salsa, ponzu jelly and wasabi foam, or Wagyu sirloin with pan-fried pistachio-polenta and vanilla jus. Service is among Dubai's best, comparable to top tables in London; likewise the sommelier, who oversees a fantastic collection of New World wines you won't find elsewhere in the Middle East.

IZ Map pp64–5 Contemporary Indian \$\$\$

☎ 317 1234; Grand Hyatt Dubai, Al-Qataiyat Rd; dishes Dh40; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 7pm-1am, to 2am Thu & Fri

The modernist-feeling wood-and-stone dining room glows by candlelight at this tapas-style contemporary Indian eatery. The tandoori-oven specialties are perfectly executed – order the always-succulent skewered roasted prawns – as are classics like *murgha tikka*, aka butter chicken in a creamy tomato sauce perfect for sopping up with the fresh-from-the-oven bread. Sit at the open kitchen's counter and watch the chef's theatrics. One drawback: all

LEBANESE FOOD LINGO 101

Break the hummus habit and try something new. Here's a primer to help you navigate some lesser-known dishes on Dubai's ubiquitous Lebanese menus. Spellings may vary.

Baklava The Lebanese use pistachios and almonds, not walnuts, in this classic honeyed pastry. Say bak-la-WAH or nobody will understand you.

Bastirma Air-cured beef (think pastrami).

Fattoush Chopped salad topped with fried Arabic bread and a dressing of olive oil, lemon and sumac.

Falafel Deep-fried balls of seasoned, mashed chickpeas, best served with tahini sauce.

Kofta Grilled skewers of spicy minced lamb.

Kibbeh Balls of minced lamb and onion, rolled in cracked wheat and fried. These are the measure of a good Lebanese kitchen; they should be golden-brown and nongreasy outside, warm and juicy inside.

Kibbeh Nayeh Ground raw lamb served with egg and condiments.

Labneh Thick, strained yoghurt spreadable like cream cheese.

Mujadara Seasoned lentils and bulghur topped with caramelised onions.

Muhammara Paste of red-bell pepper, ground nuts, bread crumbs and pomegranate.

Sambusak Pastries stuffed with ground lamb or cheese.

Shawarma Rotisserie-cooked seasoned lamb or chicken, carved onto flatbread and rolled up with salad and sauce.

Shish Taouk Spiced chunks of char-grilled chicken.

Sujuk Heavily spiced, air-dried beef sausage.

Tabouleh Parsley salad with cracked wheat, tomato, mint, onion, lemon and olive oil.

Tahini Pulverized sesame seeds, often used to enhance dips or thinned into a sauce for falafel.

Warak Enab Rice-stuffed grape leaves (*dolmas* in Greece).

those little plates add up fast. Plan Dh300 a head.

AWTAR Map pp64–5 Lebanese \$\$\$

☎ 317 1234; Grand Hyatt Dubai, Al-Qataiyat Rd; mains Dh65; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 7.30pm-3am, closed Sat

Emiratis love the opulent Bedouin tent-like atmosphere and warm welcome of this formal Lebanese restaurant, complete with a Brazilian belly dancer and blaring Lebanese pop – it's not uncommon for women to stand up, clap and sway to the music. The menu lists the usual mezze and kebabs, as well as a full page of raw-meat dishes, all served in mountainous portions. If you're loath to shout, book at 8pm, but for maximum fun round up a posse and come at 10pm when the scene gets rockin'. Request one of the swoop-backed booths for the best views.

BASTAKIAH NIGHTS Map pp62–3 Arabian \$\$

☎ 353 7772; near the Rulers Court, off Al-Fahidi St, Bastakia; mains Dh60, set menu Dh138; ☎ 12.30-11.30pm

One of the city's most romantic restaurants, Bastakiah Nights occupies a restored home in this historic district, and the old Arabian-style atmosphere is fabulous. It also includes a few Emirati dishes on its Lebanese-based menu. Though you can order à la carte, we recommend the set menu, which includes soup, copious mezze,

top picks

ORIENTALIST'S DELIGHT

In a city that's always reinventing itself, old-guard *Thousand and One Nights*-style dining rooms can be hard to find. Here are our top picks to indulge your Arabian fantasies.

- **Awтар** (left) Fancy, fabric-draped Lebanese.
- **Bastakiah Nights** (left) Restored, historic old-Arabia-style house.
- **Al-Qasr** (p117) The Lebanese big night out.
- **Shabestan** (p107) Old Persia with a view.
- **Tagine** (p121) Fez-wearing waiters and moody Moroccan atmosphere.

and choice of entrées, such as mixed grill or lamb stew. It's not the best food in town and service is sometimes weak, but on a balmy evening, the candlelit courtyard, with the indigo night sky overhead, can't be beat. No alcohol.

TROYKA Map pp62-3 Russian \$\$

☎ 359 5908; **Ascot Hotel, Khalid bin al-Waleed Rd (Bank St); mains Dh55**; ☎ noon-3pm & 7pm-3am
A little slice of Moscow for the ever-increasing number of Russian tourists in Dubai, Troyka has everything you need for a night on the town: copious amounts of vodka, caviar, hearty mains (try the tongue), and best of all a fabulously camp floorshow that would do Bob Fosse proud. Arrive around 10pm.

ASHA'S Map pp64-5 Contemporary Indian \$\$

☎ 324 4100; **Pyramids, Wafi City Mall, Al-Qataiyat Rd; mains Dh55**; ☎ 12.30-3.30pm & 7.30pm-12.30am

Namesake of owner Asha Bhosle of Bollywood fame, Asha's packs a see-and-be-seen crowd of rich Indian expats into its sexy, low-light, tandoori-orange dining room, with ethnic-fusion dance music playing in the background. On our last visit, we had a gorgeous meal of spicy-ginger-garlic marinated prawns, followed by a gorgeous *muscat gosht* (tomato-and-butter-braised spicy lamb) – both Asha's personal recipes. Some complain that the cooking occasionally misses (think foie gras and lentils), but all agree that this is a fab place to party.

THAI CHI Map pp64-5 Thai & Chinese \$\$

☎ 324 0000; **Pyramids, Wafi City Mall, Al-Qataiyat Rd; mains Dh50**; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 7pm-midnight
We're generally sceptical of restaurants that serve two differing cuisines, but Thai Chi does Thai and Chinese right – probably because it has two separate kitchens. The extensive Thai menu does great things with prawns; the Chinese menu stands out for its irresistible Peking duck and wok specialities. A solid choice for a midrange meal at Wafi.

ANTIQUÉ BAZAAR Map pp62-3 Indian \$\$

☎ 397 7444; **Four Points Sheraton, Khalid bin al-Waleed Rd (Bank St); mains Dh50**; ☎ 12.30-3.30pm & 7.30pm-3am
As the name suggests, this deservedly popular Indian eatery resembles a wildly coloured antique bazaar, with dynamic

Indian cooking to match. The preparations are classics, and they're deftly prepared. What really makes this place special is the combination of the food, raucous house band and Indian dancer. Note: bring ear-plugs if you're sensitive to noise.

LEMONGRASS Map pp64-5 Thai \$\$

☎ 334 2325; **near Lamcy Plaza; mains Dh35**; ☎ noon-midnight; ☎
Though pricey for an independent, Lemongrass's soothing lime-coloured dining room, brightly flavoured cooking, and solicitous service make it one of Dubai's best for Thai. Pad Thai is presented in an omelette wrapper – a nice touch – and curries have marvellous depth of flavour. If you like spicy, say so; the kitchen is shy with the heat. Good for vegetarians. Note: the toilets are shared with the building and not maintained by the restaurant. Pee before you come.

COCONUT GROVE Map pp62-3 South Indian \$\$

☎ 398 3800; **Rydges Plaza Hotel, Al-Diyafah St, Satwa Roundabout, Satwa; mains Dh35**; ☎ noon-3pm & 7pm-12.30am
Fragrant curries and biryani pack in regulars who love the authentic Keralan and Goan cooking – the Goan fish curry is thick, creamy and spicy, with hunks of supple and tender fish. Alas, waiters are pushy, always trying to upsell and force more beer on you. Overlook this in favour of the stellar rooftop views and reasonable prices. Call early to book a window table.

PAUL Map pp62-3 French Café \$\$

☎ 351 7009; **BurJuman Centre, Trade Centre Rd; mains Dh35**; ☎ 9am-midnight; ☎
European expats flock here in droves on Thursday and Friday nights to linger over French pastries and dream of home. By day, it's a good spot to refuel on *salade Niçoise* and quiche while shopping in the BurJuman Centre.

KAN ZAMAN Map pp62-3 Arabic \$

☎ 393 9913; **Heritage Village, Al-Shindagha; mains Dh27**; ☎ 11am-3am
While on a trip to Heritage Village, stop by this Creekside favourite to munch on mezze and grills and watch the passing parade of boats. During the cooler months, sit on the big outdoor patio and puff on a *sheesha* pipe.

GAZEBO Map pp64-5 Indian \$

☎ 397 9930; **Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Rd (Trade Centre Rd), opposite Spinneys; mains Dh22**; ☎ 10am-3.30pm & 7pm-midnight
You'll forgive the unexciting interior when you taste the brilliant North Indian cooking. Standouts on the huge menu include a great tawa lobster masala, with succulent chunks of lobster, black pepper, tomato and rich masala sauce; Banjará Gosht, mutton in masala gravy, rose petals, cashew nuts and tomato; and Gosht Achari, mutton in coriander, tomato and pomegranate. Good value. Note: vegetarians should hop next door to Kamat, its sister restaurant.

KWALITY Map pp62-3 Indian \$

☎ 393 6563; **near Ascot Hotel, Khalid bin al-Waleed Rd (Bank St); mains Dh20**; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 7-11.30pm
The food is dependable and the service swift at this long-standing Indian restaurant (though the walls need a good scrubbing; sit upstairs). It's hard to go wrong with hearty portions of favourites like chicken makhani (butter chicken) or rogan josh (lamb curry). Good vegetarian options and tandoori too.

BASTA ART CAFÉ Map pp62-3 Café \$

☎ 353 5071; **Al-Fahidi St, Bastakia; mains Dh20**; ☎ 8am-9pm; ☎
A cool respite while exploring the Bastakia, this café occupies a garden courtyard outside an old Dubai house. The food is respectable café fare – the salads are refreshing on a hot day – but it's the sun-dappled garden that makes this place special. Good breakfasts. No credit cards.

XVA CAFÉ Map pp62-3 Café \$

☎ 353 5383; **behind Basta Art Café, Al-Musallah Roundabout; mains Dh20**; ☎ 9am-9pm Sat-Thu, 9am-6pm Fri
For a respite from Dubai's chaotic street scene, seek out this hidden gallery-cum-café in the courtyard of a 120-year-old house in the Bastakia Quarter. The all-veg cooking lists a mishmash of salads and grain-based dishes with vaguely Southeast Asian overtones. You'll especially like the *mojardara* (rice topped with sautéed veggies and yogurt) and the dense-green mint-lemonade – a must-order.

AL-MALLAH Map pp62-3 Lebanese \$

☎ 398 4723; **Al-Dhiyafah St, Satwa; mains Dh20**; ☎ 6am-4am; ☎
Local-favourite Al-Mallah gets packed on its outdoor seating area, even during the scorching summer. The things to order: shawarma (served after 4pm), wrapped or on a plate; falafel dripping in tahini; and fresh juice. Skip the mezze (go to Sidra p118, across the road). Great for people-watching after a night drinking. No credit cards.

GOVINDA'S Map pp64-5 Indian-Vegan \$

☎ 396 0088; **off Trade Centre Rd, two blocks behind Regent Palace Hotel; mains Dh15**; ☎ noon-3.30pm & 7pm-midnight Sat-Thu, 1.30-3pm & 7pm-midnight Fri; ☎
Jains (no-kill-anything) run this Gujarati-Indian restaurant that uses no onion or garlic in its all-vegan food, but the cooking is rich in character, with intense flavours and heady perfumes. The staff couldn't be friendlier. Save room for homemade ice cream from the adjacent, affiliated ice-cream parlour.

CURRY LEAF Map pp62-3 Sri Lankan \$

☎ 397 8940; **Al-Mussalla Tower, Bank St; mains Dh15**; ☎ 8am-12.30pm; ☎
Hoppers – crispy rice-flour pancakes with fried egg – best accompany the smoky-hot, spice-rich curries at this food-court Sri Lankan place in an electronics mall. A few Dutch colonial dishes round out the menu; try the *lumpries* (spiced rice with meat, egg and aubergine). There's zero atmosphere, but kids love to play in the adjacent fountain.

RANGOLI Map pp62-3 Indian-Vegetarian \$

☎ 351 5873; **Meena Bazaar; mains Dh12**; ☎ 8.30am-3pm, 5pm-midnight
There's not a Westerner in the house at this all-vegetarian Gujarati Indian eatery, with a take-away window on the sidewalk. Inside there's a tiny cafeteria jammed with tables. Fill your tray with rice, daal (lentil broth), potatoes, curry and bread – filling, satisfying, cheap. Afterward, wander the hub of Dubai's Indian community and shop for fabric and spices. NB: tricky to find, but locals will direct you. No credit cards.

KARACHI DARBAR Map pp64-5 Pakistani \$

☎ 334 7272; **Karama Shopping Centre & various locations; mains Dh12**; ☎ 4am-2am

LET'S DO BRUNCH...

The workweek in Dubai runs Sunday through Thursday, which means (nearly) everyone is off on Friday. An expat institution, Friday brunch is a major element of the Dubai social scene – particularly among Bacchanalian revellers – and every hotel-restaurant in town sets up an all-you-can-eat buffet with an option for unlimited champagne or wine. Some smaller, independent restaurants also serve brunch, but without alcohol, making them popular with local families. Here's a very short selection of some of the best brunches in town.

Spectrum on One (Map pp72–3; ☎ 332 5555; Fairmont Hotel; buffet with alcohol Dh400; 🕒 noon–3pm) The most popular brunch in town includes free-flowing bubbly and eight different buffets with six different cuisines. Phenomenal sushi. Book weeks ahead.

Glasshouse Mediterranean Brasserie (Map pp54–5; ☎ 227 1111; Hilton Dubai Creek; brunch incl bubbly and cocktails Dh195; 🕒 from 12.30pm) After Spectrum on One at the Fairmont, Glasshouse tops many European-expats' lists – blame it on the bloodies, Pimm's and smart British-brasserie fare.

Yalumba (Map pp56–7; ☎ 217 0000; Le Meridien Dubai, Airport Rd; nonvintage/vintage champagne Dh366/700; 🕒 12.30–3.30pm) One of the few to offer an à la carte menu so you won't have to schlep plates. Go whole-hog with vintage Bollinger champagne.

Thai Kitchen (Map pp56–7; ☎ 602 1234; Park Hyatt Dubai; per person with soft drinks/beer & wine Dh120/180; 🕒 12.30–4pm) Sample an enormous repertoire of Thai cooking, served tapas-style. Mellow scene, good for non-drinkers.

Waxy O'Conner's (Map pp62–3; ☎ 352 0900; Ascot Hotel; with beer Dh65; 🕒 from 12.30pm) For the hungry, hard-drinkin' pub crowd. Includes a full fry-up, five pints, and carvery dinner in a windowless bar.

Iranian Club (Map pp64–5; ☎ 336 7700; Oud Metha Rd; brunch Dh60; 🕒 1–4pm) Feast at this Persian-cuisine showcase owned by the Iranian government. Start by rolling cheese and mint in hot bread, then sample soups and marinated salads, followed by tender kebabs and stews from an enormous buffet. Pace yourself. Women must wear headscarves, men long pants, and there's no alcohol, but it's worth altering your habits – especially if you're American – for a culturally rich afternoon and the chance to glimpse Iranians at table.

A favourite of guest workers and expats with an eye for a biryani bargain, Karachi Darbar keeps 'em well fed with a huge menu of Pakistani, Indian and Chinese specialities – but stick to the Pakistani. Point to what others are eating and order – it's the only way to know what you're going to get. Fear not: it'll be good. Don't do Chinese or Indian here. No credit cards.

SHEIKH ZAYED ROAD

The tower hotels lining the Sheikh Zayed strip are the psychological centrepiece of Dubai. Dinner here positions you well to travel elsewhere afterward, but with so many nearby hotels bars and nightclubs, you may as well stick around. But good luck crossing the road: there's only one pedestrian overpass. Take a taxi instead.

AMWAJ Map pp72–3 Contemporary European \$\$\$ ☎ 343 8888; Shangri-La hotel; mains Dh150; 🕒 Sun-Fri 12.30–3pm, 7.30pm-midnight It's rare in Dubai to find an adroit kitchen staff properly schooled in classic European

technique, which is exactly why we love Amwaj. Seafood is the specialty on the French-derivative menu. Dishes may include *torchon de foie gras* with warm brioche toast, sautéed scallops fanned on the plate and topped with an elegant saffron-orange foam, or rack of lamb on eggplant compote with black-olive sauce. The only drawback is the dining room: it overhangs a hotel lobby, and sound echoes upward. Request a table away from the railing. Vegetarians: look for the all-veg tasting menu.

THIPTARA ROYAL THAI Map pp72–3 Thai \$\$\$ ☎ 428 7888; The Palace Old Town hotel, downtown Burj Dubai; mains Dh150; 🕒 7–11.45pm The prices are as high as the adjacent Burj Dubai, but if you're looking for a reason to linger long beneath the world's tallest tower, Thiptara's elegant interpretations of classic Thai dishes and its location in a lakeside Thai-style pagoda provide just the excuse. The note-perfect *som tum* (green-papaya salad) is as good as we've had in Bangkok; the smoky-hot *ka pohn nau* (beef in spicy brown sauce) is intensely spiced

top picks

MEALS WITH A VIEW

Dubai has restaurants with breathtaking views. Here's our top five:

- **Pierchic** (p118) Off-shore views of the dramatic Burj Al Arab and the moody Madinat Jumeirah.
- **Vu's** (below) Top-of-the-world vistas from Emirates Towers.
- **Shabestan** (p107) Gaze at the ballet of dhows on the Creek.
- **Thiptara Royal Thai** (opposite) Dine on a lakeview deck beneath the world's tallest tower.
- **Magnolia** (p118) Sit outside and watch silent *abras* floating by.

with on-the-vine peppercorns. Alas, the interior is too austere (sit on the deck) and the plates look chain-store cheap, but the solicitous service by an all-Thai staff and the exceptional cooking make up for it. Note: budgeteers, order the Dh50 pad Thai.

EXCHANGE GRILL Map pp72–3 Steakhouse \$\$\$

☎ 311 8000; Fairmont hotel, Sheikh Zayed Rd; mains Dh150; 🕒 7pm-midnight

Dubai's top steakhouse has a clubby feel, with oversized leather arm chairs at giant linen-draped tables, and big picture windows overlooking the glittering strip. The classic American menu features Wagyu beef, which may sound attractive, but is more than twice the price of the more-flavourful USDA prime: save your dirhams. Seafood rounds out the menu, but really, beef is the big draw – and it's fabulous here. The wine list is mind-bogglingly extensive, and the service exemplary. Can't wait to return.

VU'S Map pp72–3 European-Fusion \$\$\$

☎ 319 8771; Emirates Towers, Sheikh Zayed Rd; mains Dh130; 🕒 12.30–3pm & 7.30pm-midnight As the name implies, the views are stellar from this gorgeous tower-top white-tablecloth dining room, a favourite of wheeler-dealers celebrating the closing of a multi-million-dollar contract. The Australian chef weaves Asian overtones into his Franco-Italian-inspired cooking, and while it's solidly good, the kitchen lacks discipline: some dishes clash or miss entirely – inexcusable at this price. Service is slightly pretentious and drinks are wickedly

overpriced, but oh! those views. Save this one for an expense account, or if nothing you can do will impress your spoiled-rotten girlfriend. Note: jackets required, no jeans.

TOKYO@THETOWERS

Map pp72–3 Japanese \$\$\$

☎ 330 0000; Emirates Towers, Sheikh Zayed Rd; mains Dh125; 🕒 12.30–3pm & 7.30pm-midnight, Sun lunch 1–3pm

We're torn about T@T. While it serves brilliant sashimi and some of the freshest, perkiest, shiniest sushi in town, the prices are ridiculous, there's no din and the views from the corridor-like dining room are of a shopping mall – a big letdown when you consider its location in one of Dubai's iconic towers. Try **Kiku** (p108) first, but keep this in your back pocket if they're booked.

HOI AN Map pp72–3 French-Vietnamese \$\$\$

☎ 343 8888; Shangri-La hotel; mains Dh100; 🕒 7.30pm–1am

Teak latticework, plantation shutters, and spinning wooden ceiling fans evoke a *très civilisé* Colonial-era Vietnam at this upmarket French-Vietnamese restaurant. The flavours are lively and bright. Start with the crispy crab rolls, then move on to the signatures: lotus-wrapped sea bass with ginger-lemon sauce, or tamarind-spiced rack of lamb. Deliciously low lighting and genteel service make this an ideal place for a third date.

MARRAKECH Map pp72–3 Moroccan \$\$\$

☎ 343 8888; Shangri-La hotel; mains Dh85; 🕒 1–3pm & 8pm-midnight

A languid counterpoint to Dubai's go-go scene, Marrakech feels more like a hammam than a high-rise, with key-hole doorways, north-African wall tiles and flickering candle lanterns casting moody shadows. The subtle and earthy cooking includes *harira*, a coriander-spiced lamb soup; the Moroccan signature dish *pastilla* (pigeon pie); and of course couscous royale and tagine – and we recommend the melt-off-the-bone lamb shank with preserved lemon. One caveat: book a table inside the main dining room (ideally in view of the soulful Fez-wearing oud player), not on the balcony overlooking the office-tower-like hotel lobby.

BENJARONG Map pp72–3 Thai \$\$\$

☎ 343 3333; Dusit Dubai; mains Dh70; 🕒 7.30pm-midnight

Gold-leafed columns, drop-dead views and a carved wooden ceiling make quiet Benjarong the prettiest Thai restaurant in town, ideal for a tête-à-tête with your paramour. Start with *gung hom sabai* (deep-fried prawns in egg noodles) or *tom yam goong* (spicy prawn soup with lime, lemongrass and chilli), then move on to the specialty: coconut curry – red or green – best served with duck and pineapple. For maximum atmosphere, book the tatami-style Ayotoya room and sit on cushions on the floor.

AL-TANNOUR Map pp72–3 Lebanese \$\$

☎ 331 1111; **Crowne Plaza Hotel, Sheikh Zayed Rd; mains Dh60; ☎ 8.30pm-3am**

While its traditional village-style décor doesn't excite, the smell of freshly baked bread does. So does the rest of the food – this is some of the most authentic Lebanese food in Dubai. Go with a group that likes to get noisy, and fill the table with mezze from the unusually long list; round out the meal with a couple of grilled dishes (try the chicken). Book for around 10.30pm for maximum fun, when the band and belly dancer really get going.

SPECTRUM ON ONE

Map pp72–3 International \$\$

☎ 332 5555; **Fairmont hotel, Sheikh Zayed Rd; mains Dh60; ☎ 7pm-1am; ☎**

Ideal for families and groups that can't decide where to go, Spectrum on One is the classic jack of all trades, master of none. The food is solidly good, with no disappointments from its eight kitchens, which feature six distinct cuisines from around the world, but don't expect to be wowed. Still, kids love it, as do big tables of Dionysian revellers who flock here for Friday brunch.

LOTUS ONE Map pp72–3 Fusion \$\$

☎ 329 3200; **Dubai International Convention Centre, off Sheik Zayed Rd; mains Dh55; ☎ noon-2am**

The cool lounge beats, bamboo-ceilinged dining room and high-backed velvet chairs create an invitingly lush backdrop for drinks and dinner at Lotus One, known better for its candy-coloured cocktails than its Asian-fusion menu. An English chef took over in late 2007, promising to reinvigorate the once overly ambitious menu. The jury's out, but if you like to get dolled up, linger

over dinner, then hit the bars for a night of dancing, Lotus One sets the right mood for you.

OPTIONS Map pp72–3 Contemporary Indian \$\$

☎ 329 3293; **Dubai International Convention Centre, off Sheik Zayed Rd; mains Dh50; ☎ noon-2.45pm & 7-11.45pm**

Beaded glass curtains, tufted red-vinyl walls, and glittering crystal chandeliers set a Subcontinent-fancy mood at Indian celeb-chef Sanjeer Kapoors' Options. Though noteworthy for consistency, the kitchen's real excellence lies in the chef's exquisite spicing. Standouts include tandoori-grilled citrus-marinated prawns with green cardamom, cream and cashew paste; chicken tikka with saffron gravy and rose petals; and vegetarian slow-cooked black lentils with pomegranate, finished with housemade butter.

NEZESAUSI

Map pp72–3 Australian-South African \$\$

☎ 428 5888; **Al-Manzil hotel, Burj Dubai Blvd; mains Dh45; ☎ 6pm-2am Sun-Thu, noon-2am Fri & Sat; ☎**

The name is an amalgam of New Zealand, South Africa and Australia, and the menu plays on those countries' classics. Standouts include dynamite slow-cooked five-spice pork ribs, giant Monte Cristo sandwiches, and grilled New Zealand lamb. Portions are huge. The place is basically a high-end sports bar, where football fans throw back VBs and holler, but the heavy flatware, linen napkins and solicitous service make this a worthwhile dining destination as well. Plan to shout across the table on match nights.

AL-NAFOORAH Map pp72–3 Lebanese \$\$

☎ 319 8088; **Emirates Towers, Sheikh Zayed Rd; mains Dh35; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 8pm-midnight**

Tucked at the base of Emirates Towers, Al-Nafoorah's clubby, wood-paneled dining room feels like a Wall St power-lunch spot. The mezze stand out – try the *kibbeh* (raw lamb) – more than the kebabs on the classic Lebanese menu, but really, the kitchen does everything very well, if not beautifully. It's quieter and more formal than most Lebanese restaurants (to wit, dessert pastries come on three-tiered stands, like at a fancy tea party), making this a great choice for a dressy-casual night out without the noisy fanfare of the big Lebanese party places.

RELIGION ON THE PLATE

You may never realize just how much you like pork until you travel to Dubai and are rarely allowed any. As an alternative to pork bacon, some supermarkets sell beef- and turkey-bacon, both poor substitutes for the real thing. To serve pork in a restaurant, you must have a pork license. Likewise alcohol, which is generally only served in hotels. If an item on a restaurant menu has been prepared with either alcohol or pork, it must be clearly marked.

Muslims never eat pork: it is *haram*, forbidden by Islam – purely for health reasons, as pigs were considered disease-carrying animals. Alcohol is forbidden, not for health, but because it makes followers forgetful of God and prayer. The other major dietary restriction applies to meat: it must be *halal*, meaning religiously suitable or permitted. The animal must be drained of its blood at the time of slaughter by having its throat cut. This is why much of the red meat slaughtered and sold locally is very pale in colour. In restaurants you'll easily find non-*halal* beef – just don't expect your tenderloin to be wrapped in a fatty strip of bacon before it's grilled. If it is, savour it.

NOODLE HOUSE Map pp72–3 Asian \$\$

☎ 319 8757; **Emirates Towers, Sheikh Zayed Rd; mains Dh30; ☎ noon-11.30pm; ☎**

Sheikh Mohammed sometimes lunches at this reliably good, always-packed pan-Asian noodle joint at the base of Emirates Towers. The concept is simple: everyone sits on long wooden communal benches and orders by ticking dishes on a tear-off menu pad. There's great variety – curry laksa to duck pancakes – to please disparate tastes, and there are good wines by the glass and several Asian beers, including Tiger on tap. Plan to wait at peak times: leave your mobile number and head next door to **Agency** (p127) for pre-dinner drinks.

MORE Map pp72–3 Café \$\$

☎ 343 3779; **Doha Rd, next to Al-Murooj Rotana Suites; mains Dh30; ☎ 8am-11pm; ☎**

An industrial-like space with poured concrete floors, More feels like the giant café-restaurants of the West, which explains why European expats flock here in droves for brunch. There's a little of everything on the menu – Thai curries, Italian pastas, good burgers and great eggs Benedict. Portions are huge: one dish is enough. The execution is okay, but not everything works: if it looks experimental, skip it. Save room for homemade ice cream. Free wi-fi.

ZAATAR W ZEIT Map pp72–3 Lebanese \$

☎ 343 1259, 343 6265; **near Shangri-La hotel, Sheikh Zayed Rd; mains Dh15; ☎ 24hr; ☎**

Pick the spicing on your flatbread at this Lebanese fast-food joint: top with cheese, tomatoes, minced meats, or of course zaatar (thyme, sumac and sesame). Think Lebanese pizza. *Labneh* (salted yoghurt drink) goes best with 'em, not cola. Sit outside and gaze up at the towers.

SAJ EXPRESS Map pp72–3 Lebanese \$

☎ 321 1191; **Sheikh Zayed Rd; mains Dh15; ☎ 9am-2am; ☎**

Saj Express is one of Sheikh Zayed Rd's top fast-food joints, and the fresh bread (cooked on the *saj*, a curved, iron dome-topped oven) is what makes the shawarma here so special. The rest of the menu doesn't excite, but pair a shawarma with one of the fresh juices and you can't go wrong.

JUMEIRAH

The restaurants in Dubai's low-rise, high-rent district draw wealthy locals and tourists on holiday. Though the beach is never far away, it's barely visible from some of the following eateries: for ocean views, head to New Dubai or the Madinat Jumeirah. The restaurants at Madinat Jumeirah are generally good, entirely touristy and overpriced, but they're some of the most scenic – never mind the vague feeling of dining at Disneyland Arabia. Note: Al-Diyafah St, though not technically in Jumeirah, is the best walking street in the city and is tops for a late-night shawarma.

AL-QASR Map pp76–7 Lebanese \$\$\$

☎ 336 1111; **Dubai Marine Beach Resort; set menu Dh200; ☎ 7.30am-8pm**

For the full-on Lebanese big night out, book an evening – ideally Thursday – at Al-Qasr. The meal starts with bread and veggies, followed by a dozen cold mezze and half a dozen hot. Then comes the meat... the meal goes on for hours. Show up after 10pm, when the noisy-fun Lebanese pop band plays and an enthusiastic belly dancer flutters, twirls and spins. By evening's end, the whole place joins in, clapping, dancing and singing. For a quieter meal, sit outside

or come before 10pm. This is one of just a few places that carries Al-Maza Beer, which you should drink copiously.

PISCES & P2 BRASSERIE

Map pp76–7 Seafood \$\$\$

☎ 366 8888; Souq Madinat Jumeirah; mains Pisces/Brasserie Dh180/90; ☎ 7-11.30pm Stylish and slick Pisces is Dubai's top table for seafood. The chef has a knack for eking out intensely bright flavours from his ingredients; dishes are elegantly light and melt on the palate. We're not too keen on his overdependence on foams and nages, but with talent this good, we can forgive a few idiosyncrasies. The understated dining room echoes the colours of the sea: wear blue-grey Armani and blend right in. (No sneakers.) Note: there's a cheaper, more accessible menu upstairs at the adjoining less-formal French brasserie. Think duck confit and mussels marinière.

ZHENG HE'S

Map pp76–7 Contemporary Chinese \$\$\$

☎ 366 8888; Mina A'Salam, Madinat Jumeirah; mains Dh95; ☎ noon-3pm & 7-11.30pm; ♿ An army of 20 clatters pans and fires woks behind the glass of the open kitchen at Zheng He's, the spectacular contemporary Chinese restaurant known for its fresh, light dim sum and stellar seafood specials (many diners go for the live tank, but others prefer the wasabi prawns with black pepper). The Sino-chic room is gorgeous, with a pagoda-style ceiling and good symmetry; alas, the hard surfaces mean high decibels, and the location at Madinat Jumeirah means high prices. The sea-view deck is great at lunch, but overlit at night with compact fluorescents; sit inside. Book well ahead.

MAGNOLIA Map pp76–7 Vegetarian \$\$\$

☎ 366 6730; Al-Qasr, Madinat Jumeirah; mains Dh80; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 7-11.30pm Dubai's only high-end vegetarian restaurant, Magnolia overlooks the canals at the Madinat Jumeirah, and if you make reservations, you can arrive by *abra*. The so-called 'well-being' cooking takes itself a bit too seriously in its emulation of haute cuisine and lacks resonance on the palate, but the elegant presentations, romantic setting and top-end ingredients make up for the pretence and price – provided you're a vegetarian.

PIERCHIC Map pp76–7 Seafood \$\$\$

☎ 366 6730; Al-Qasr, Madinat Jumeirah; mains Dh80; ☎ noon-3pm & 7-11.30pm Looking for a place to drop a ring into a glass of champagne? Make reservations for access to this stunning seafood house at the end of a long pier jutting out to sea. The best tables line the outdoor decks and provide drop-dead-gorgeous vistas of the Burj Al Arab and the Madinat Jumeirah. The food is solidly good, but the overambitious menu gets a little heavy-handed with its ingredient combinations; order simple and you'll do better. But with so much romance, you'll hardly notice what you're eating. Note: sitting inside defeats the purpose of coming here.

BELLA DONNA Map pp76–7 Italian \$\$

☎ 344 7710; Mercato Mall, Jumeirah Rd; mains Dh45; ☎ 11am-11pm; ♿ Skip the overlit dining room in favour of the big outdoor terrace and glimpse the sea across Jumeirah Rd at this midrange Italian restaurant, good for tender-crust thin pizzas and house-made pastas at great prices (for Dubai). The strong coffee will jack you up for shopping in the adjoining Mercato Mall.

SMILING BKK Map pp76–7 Thai \$\$

☎ 349 6677; Jumeirah 1; mains Dh30; ☎ 11:11am-12:12am Locals will kill us for including this indie hole-in-the-wall Thai gem, but it's too good not to share. The walls of the cheek-by-jowl space are covered with hipster mishmash (think Van Gogh paint-by-numbers, postcards, and a moustached Mona-Lisa), and scratchy rock-and-roll blares on the speakers (sit outside for quiet conversation). A Thai national cooks your dinner. The food is good, sometimes very good, but what's great is the adventure of finding an underground bo-ho hangout hidden in this vast cultural wasteland. (It's just west of Jumeirah post office, behind the petrol station, off 2a Street, which runs perpendicular to the alley where the restaurant sits.)

SIDRA Map pp76–7 Lebanese \$

☎ 398 4723; Al-Dhiyafah St, Satwa; mains Dh22; ☎ 24hr; ♿ The top pick for mezze on Al-Dhiyafah St – Dubai's best walking street – Sidra does a

SHAWARMA SHOOTOUT

Shawarma is the snack food of the Middle East and the *de rigueur* snack after a night of drinking. Dubai is blessed with an enormous number of shawarma joints, so to help you enjoy this ingenious snack we undertook a massive research project involving countless late-night tastings to present you our favourite shawarmas.

Al-Mallah (p113) Our favourite in Dubai. Both the chicken and lamb shawarmas are sublime here. The juicy chicken is loaded with pungent garlic sauce and jammed with pickles; lamb is tender with tons of fresh tomato, parsley, pickles and hummus.

Ashwaq Cafeteria (Map pp54–5; cnr Al-Soor & Sikkat al-Khail Sts, Deira; ☎ noon-11pm) Everyone's favourite stop on a Gold Souq shopping excursion. The chicken is best, with a light spread of garlic sauce and fresh lettuce.

Beirut (Map pp62–3; ☎ 398 9822; Al-Dhiyafah St, Satwa; mains Dh20; ☎ noon-2am) Beirut is one of the major shawarma joints on Al-Dhiyafah St and battles with Al-Mallah for the title of best lamb shawarma. Available in two sizes.

Lebanese Village (Map pp62–3; ☎ 352 2522; Al-Mankhool Rd; mains Dh22; ☎ noon-3am) The lamb shawarmas are zesty with onion, parsley, pickles and tomato. The falafel is good too, but skip everything else.

Saj Express (p117) The excellent fresh bread makes these shawarmas special. Try the delicious chicken.

great *moutabbal* (eggplant dip), creamy-rich hummus, tangy tabouleh and fantastic fresh, hot bread. The kebabs are okay, but the dips are what's best. Inside is ugly; sit on the sidewalk and soak up the street scene. Ideal after a night out.

MARIA BONITA'S TACO SHOP

Map pp76–7 Mexican \$

☎ 395 5576; Umm al-Sheif St, Umm Suqeim; mains Dh20; ☎ 7.30am-8pm; ♿ Maria Bonita's is Dubai's only real Mexican restaurant, and the only one in town that's not Tex-Mex. The burritos could be fatter, but the flavours are spot-on – spicy, smoky and deep. Okay, so the squawking parrots and gimmicky, tableside guacamole service are a bit much without any alcohol on offer to soften the edges, but it's great coming here just the same.

LIME TREE CAFÉ Map pp76–7 Café \$

☎ 349 8498; near Jumeirah Mosque, Jumeira Rd; mains Dh20; ☎ 7.30am-8pm; ♿ You forget you're in traffic-snarled Dubai on the upstairs waterfront balcony of this mellow café on the Jumeirah strip, the best spot to spot shopping-bag-toting 'Jumeirah Janes' (rich expats' wives). Best too is its use of clean ingredients, including some organics, and its healthful cooking (it's great at labelling dairy-free and low-fat options). Salads figure prominently, as do toasted paninis and wraps (the goat-cheese variety is fab) and brilliant smoothies (try the blueberry). Portions are generous, prices good. Best carrot cake in town.

RAVI Map pp76–7 Pakistani \$

☎ 331 5353; Al-Satwa Rd, Satwa; mains Dh12; ☎ 24hr; ♿ Five-star chefs reference this legendary Pakistani cafeteria as their favourite day-off eatery. It ain't fancy – au contraire: expect to share your table with burly men. The kebabs are good, as are the simple curries, biryani and (especially) fresh-baked bread, best washed down with yoghurt drink. Alas, the meat is tough (think mutton, not lamb); order chicken. No credit cards.

NEW DUBAI

The city's sprawling beach resorts, with their many top-end restaurants, happening bars and popular nightclubs, dominate New Dubai. If you're not staying at a resort, spend an evening at one. They're far from the chaos of inner Dubai, and you won't have to hail a taxi till it's time to go home. This section also includes several restaurants at Mall of the Emirates.

RHODES MEZZANINE Modern British \$\$\$

Map pp82–3 ☎ 399 8888; Dubai Marina, Grosvenor House, Jumeirah; mains Dh150; ☎ 7pm-midnight British cuisine is no longer an oxymoron at Rhodes Mezzanine. Celebrity-chef Gary Rhodes breathes new life into traditional dishes like shepherd's pie, toad in the hole, oxtail, Yorkshire pudding – even roly poly. The emphasis is on freshness of ingredients and bold flavours. Unlike its competitor **Verre** (p107), there's nothing understated

about the room, which looks more like a High Street hair salon than a top-end restaurant, with bright-white mirror-polished floors, lipstick-red velvet accents, French-baroque chairs and transparent room dividers of coloured Lucite. Austin Powers could walk in the door at any moment – but with food this compelling, your attention squarely on your plate, you probably wouldn't notice.

EAUZONE Map pp82–3 Fine Dining \$\$\$

☎ 399 9999; **One&Only Royal Mirage**; mains Dh130; 🕒 noon-3.30pm & 7.30pm-midnight
The premier dining room at a favourite resort sits atop a vast free-form swimming pool, with decks jutting out over illuminated blue water like little islands. (Sit outside. Period.) The menu is decidedly California-Asian, incorporating European technique and drawing heavily on the flavours of the Pacific Rim. This is smart cooking, some of the best in Dubai. The four-course tasting menu (Dh450) is the way to go. Dishes may include saffron-sautéed scallops with pineapple gazpacho; a perfect *torchon de foie gras*; or green-tea-and-salt-seasoned lamb with truffled mashed potatoes. Make reservations.

INDEGO Map pp82–3 Contemporary Indian \$\$\$

☎ 399 8888; **Dubai Marina, Grosvenor House, Jumeirah**; mains Dh120; 🕒 7.30pm-midnight Sun-Fri
Michelin-starred Vineet Bhatia is the consulting chef at this gracious Indian restaurant with a spacious and open dining room, lorded over by big brass Natraj sculptures. Though the recipes are traditional, the ingredients and style veer toward European. You might find a house-smoked tandoori salmon; pan-grilled sea bass with tomato and coconut; or samosas with chocolate and nuts. Note: unlike most Indian cooking, here plates are delicately composed and not designed for sharing.

BUDDHA BAR Map pp82–3 Asian \$\$\$

☎ 399 8888; **Grosvenor House, Dubai Marina, Jumeirah**; mains Dh120; 🕒 8pm-2am
At last a restaurant that knows the power of good lighting. So what if it's too dark and the bmm-bmm music requires you to shout over the table? You're in the shadow of a giant Buddha, rubbing shoulders with Dubai's beautiful crowd, and you look fabulous in that new outfit. Oh, the food? It

(nearly) measures up to the room – a mish-mash of Thai and Japanese with a dash of Chinese – but really, who cares? Like I said, you look a-m-a-z-i-n-g. Uh, you didn't forget your platinum card, did you? And I hope you have a condom (or two) if you plan on sticking around past midnight when the beautiful people abound.

GRAND GRILL Map pp82–3 Steak \$\$\$

☎ 399 4221; **Habtoor Grand Hotel**; mains Dh120; 🕒 noon-3pm & 7pm-midnight
Wine racks line the walls of this South African steakhouse, a favourite of carnivores in search of half-kilo slabs of perfectly grilled meat and *boerewors* sausage. Detractors point to disappointing appetisers and overly inventive mains that just don't work, but there's no denying the pleasure of biting into a juicy steak the size of a fat man's thigh.

BICE Map pp82–3 Italian \$\$\$

☎ 399 1111; **Hilton Dubai Jumeirah**; mains Dh120; 🕒 noon-3pm & 7pm-midnight
Expats from Italy call BiCE the best Italian restaurant in town. We can't disagree. In the classic tradition, the cooking is clean. The chef uses just a few top-quality ingredients and lets them shine. The recipes are traditional – beef carpaccio, veal Milanese, house-made pasta, wild-mushroom risotto – but this is not your grandmother's Italian cooking. Dishes are presented with a contemporary style that matches the splashy, always-packed dining room. Book well ahead or eat at the bar. Save room for the exceptional cheese or tiramisu.

SPLENDIDO Map pp82–3 Fine Dining \$\$\$

☎ 399 4000; **Ritz-Carlton Hotel**; mains Dh120; 🕒 7-11pm, closed Sun
Tall palms sway in the breeze around the outdoor patio at the Ritz-Carlton's northern Italian restaurant, an ideal spot to hold hands by candlelight. It's not as formal as you'd expect – linens are cream, not white – and the cooking is more trattoria style, earthy and rich as in the morel-and-porcini-mushroom ravioli in a pan-reduced brown sauce. Pastas are perfectly al dente, and the tiramisu feather-light. Some of the flourishes are unnecessary, like the waiters' 3ft-long pepper grinder, but for an al fresco dinner in a tropical garden, it's hard to beat Splendido.

top picks

FOR SERVICE

Bad service is all too common in Dubai, but not at these stellar standouts:

- **Fire & Ice** (p110)
- **Verre** (p107)
- **Exchange Grill** (p115)
- **Nezesaussi** (p116)
- **Pisces** (p118)
- **Hoi An** (p115)

TANG Map pp82–3 Experimental \$\$\$

☎ 399 3333; **Le Meridien Mina Seyahi**; mains Dh100; 🕒 7-11pm Sun-Fri
Tang raises the level of culinary discourse in Dubai, but does it feed you dinner? The chef is more scientist than cook – he unabashedly calls his cooking style 'molecular' – fetishising food for its atomic structure, not for its sustenance. This amounts to a lot of complicated (and expensive) cryogenics: instead of a hunk of tomato with basil, you may get a paper-thin tulip made from tomato purée blasted with liquid nitrogen, then garnished with a crumbled, flash-frozen basil leaf. Portions are minuscule, and service is abysmally slow: after four excruciating hours, we wound up stopping for shawarma on the way home. Save this one for an expense-account dinner, and don't come hungry.

CERTO Map pp82–3 Italian \$\$\$

☎ 366 9111; **Radisson SAS Dubai Media City**; mains Dh85; 🕒 noon-3.30pm & 7pm-midnight
Overlook the dining room which is reminiscent of an office-tower lobby, and just enjoy the house-made pastas, properly cooked al dente, and tender thin-crust pizzas with inventive toppings. But the real standouts are the mains – go for the lamb *alla brace*, four chops with wilted romaine, fava beans and pancetta. Some dishes fall flat – if a dish sounds too starchy, it is – but it's worth coming if only for the succulent prosciutto, a rare treat in pork-shy Dubai.

TAGINE Map pp82–3 Moroccan \$\$\$

☎ 399 9999; **One&Only Royal Mirage**; mains Dh75; 🕒 7-11pm
You feel like you're in Tangiers at Tagine. Cozy up between throw pillows at a low-

slung table in the shadowy-dim dining room, and tap your toe to the live Moroccan band. Fez-capped waiters jump in and dance (sometimes neglecting your table) between runs to the kitchen for big platters of tagine and couscous. This is the real deal. Book ahead, and request a table near the band.

ALMAZ BY MOMO Map pp82–3 Moroccan \$\$\$

☎ 409 8877; **Harvey Nichols, Mall of the Emirates**; mains Dh65; 🕒 noon-midnight
Though it lacks the celeb factor of Momo's London flagship, high-energy Almaz draws party-hearty Emiratis who guzzle nonalcoholic champagne by the bottleful. Hardly any Westerners come here for dinner for the very reason Emiratis do: there's no booze. Don't be deterred. The moody-dark dining room, with its dizzying *zelaeg*-tile floor, feels like a cool Kasbah Lounge. Tender-sweet pigeon pastilla has great depth of flavour. The succulent Almaz lamb tagine melts off the bone. And the honey-sweet Moroccan pastries go down easy with the nose-tickling cinnamon tea.

NINA Map pp82–3 Contemporary Indian \$\$\$

☎ 399 9999; **Arabian Court, One&Only Royal Mirage**; mains Dh60; 🕒 7-11.30pm
Floor-to-ceiling purple fabric, lush red-orange light, and beaded curtains set a seductive backdrop for Nina's dynamic cooking. The chef combines Indian with a touch of Thai, and tempers it with European technique. The results are heady: rich spicing means flavours develop slowly on the palate with an elegant complexity that demands savouring. Choose the chef's selection of starters (Dh45) and curries (Dh85) for a sense of his broad repertoire. Though the ethnic beats thump too loudly, Nina remains a favourite spot for a date.

KARAM BEIRUT Map pp82–3 Lebanese \$\$\$

☎ 341 2202; **Mall of the Emirates**; mains Dh55; 🕒 noon-midnight
Outpost of the famous Beirut restaurant, Karam's extensive menu showcases everything you'll find in Lebanon, including its most ambitious dishes – even lamb's brain – all meticulously presented. There are six types of *kibbeh* (raw lamb), stellar mezza including a velvety hummus, and creative kebabs, one flavoured with pistachio and white cheese. The room's look is decidedly upmarket

(comb your hair), but a wall of windows overlooking Ski Dubai adds levity (call ahead for a window table; bring a sweater). Full bar. Note: service is erratic and the kitchen sends everything at once; order piecemeal.

ROYAL ORCHID [Map pp82-3](#) Chinese/Thai \$\$
☎ 367 4040; Marina Walk, Dubai Marina; mains Dh40; 🕒 10am-midnight; ♿

It's an institution in neighbouring Abu Dhabi, but Royal Orchid's Dubai branch is heavier on Thai than Chinese. Though the Peking duck is a standout, it's probably a good idea to stick to Thai here, including the fun build-your-own curry. The food, while tasty, won't win any awards, but the marina views are lovely on a balmy evening.