

CLIA DESTINATION FACTSHEET

MIDDLE EAST



Dubai

BEST TIME TO GO/WEATHER

This region's desert climate leads to scorching summer heat that can top 50 degrees Celsius between June and September with high humidity in coastal areas. From December to March, temperatures hover between 22 and 30 degrees Celsius, making this a natural spot for winter sun cruises. Spring is also a good season to visit as temperatures start to rise, but are still more moderate than the summer peak. Rainfall – what there is of it - occurs mainly during winter months in short, heavy bursts.



Red Sea

10 REASONS TO CRUISE HERE

Balmy winter days – a dry desert climate makes the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea ideal winter escapes with virtually guaranteed sunshine and blissful warm temperatures that hover in the 20s Celsius.

Cultural kaleidoscope – a rich tapestry of Arabian traditions and customs shaped by the all-consuming influence of Islam. You'll find nomadic Bedouin tribes plus vibrant souks with haggling traders, accompanied by exotic cuisine and quintessential coffee culture.

Glitz and glamour – Dubai leads the pack, followed by Abu Dhabi and Bahrain with plush hotels, gleaming shopping malls bursting with designer brands and jaw-dropping futuristic architecture.

Desert adventures – the wild, rugged playgrounds of this region make a starkly beautiful backdrop for safari tours with Bedouin camp experiences, camel safaris and quad-bike escapades along with adrenaline-filled wadi-bashing and hot-air balloon rides.

Historic treasures – from Jordan's legendary Red Rose city of Petra to the Al-Rahma floating mosque in the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah. Centuries-old forts, castles and tombs dot the landscape across the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman.

Modern marvels – relish the views from the world's tallest building at Dubai's Burj Khalifa; stand in wonder at the expansive Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi; marvel at Qatar's Museum of Islamic Art in Doha; and admire Oman's Royal Opera House in Muscat.

Souks and shopping malls – gold jewellery, Arabic coffee, spices and electronic gadgets are top buys in the bazaars, while modern malls make swanky shopping spots, including the Dubai Mall with its aquarium, ice-skating and virtual reality rides.

Watery thrills – noted as one of the world's top underwater destinations, the Red Sea is a diver's dream, though aquatic thrills await at water parks dotted through Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and traditions linger on wooden dhow boats.

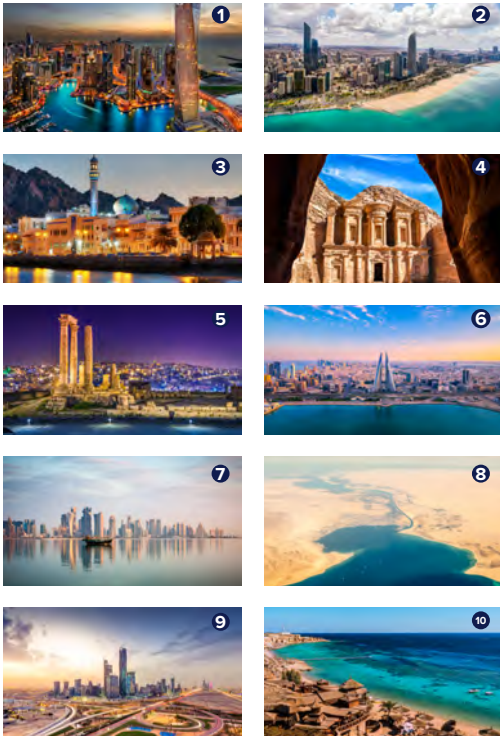
Tickle your tastebuds – with Middle Eastern flavours of flatbreads and dips; aromatic parsley-based tabouleh salad; chickpea-based falafel; sweet pastries, and the Emirati dish kabsa, a fragrant one-pot concoction of rice, meat, veg and spices.

Café culture – savour shisha lounges with "hubble-bubble" Arabian water pipes in flavours as diverse as apple and mint, aromatic Arabian coffee or cooling cocktails while lounging on rugs and cushions at al fresco Bedouin cafeterias.

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10 KEY ATTRACTIONS



1. Dubai – a buzzing tourist playground of iconic landmarks and visitor attractions, including the lofty Burj Khalifa tower (the world’s tallest building); the vast Atlantis, The Palm resort with the emirate’s largest waterpark, shopping malls, beaches and desert trips.

2. Abu Dhabi – the largest emirate and cultural hub with the awe-inspiring Louvre Abu Dhabi and opulent Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque; fun-filled Yas Island with Grand Prix circuit and Ferrari World roller-coasters; and natural allure of wildlife sanctuary Sir Bani Yas Island.

3. Oman – Middle Eastern charm exudes through Arabic archways and the domes and minarets of the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in capital Muscat, while strolls along the seafront Muttrah Corniche showcase the city’s best views and flavours.

4. Petra – Jordan’s world wonder doesn’t disappoint. Carved out of rose-red sandstone cliffs by the Nabateans thousands of years ago, this ancient city is reached through a narrow gorge from where visitors gaze in awe at the pink-tinged tombs, temples and churches.

5. Jordan – 4x4 tours and camel rides explore the mountains, rock formations and sand dunes of Wadi Rum, a desert wilderness reached from the Red Sea port of Aqaba, and former haunt of British army officer TE Lawrence, better known as Lawrence of Arabia.

6. Bahrain – a mesmerising mix of old and new, with the pearl-trading past of capital Manama now defined by an ultra-modern skyline of steel and glass. Don’t miss the impressive Al Fateh Grand Mosque and huge Bab el-Bahrain Souk.

7. Qatar – beneath futuristic high-rises lie modernist draws, such as the Museum of Islamic Art, that vie with time-honoured traditions of falconry and dhow boats reflecting its pearl-fishing past.

8. Suez Canal – built in 1859, it is one of the world’s most famous waterways, stretching 120 miles between the Red Sea and Mediterranean, featured on voyages between Europe and the Middle East and Asia.

9. Saudi Arabia – its Red Sea coast offers Unesco heritage sites, ancient souks and unspoilt scenery with port calls including Jeddah and its Al Balad old quarter; Ras Al Abyad’s pristine beaches; historical mosques and castles of Al Wajh; and Yanbu Al-Bahr’s centuries-old souk.

10. Sharm el Sheikh – on Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula, this purpose-built resort has plentiful restaurants and shisha bars, and is fronted by sandy beaches and Red Sea waters rich in corals and marine life making it one of the world’s top dive spots.

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Nabatean tombs, Al-Hijr

10 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO:

Don't expect lush scenery – the overriding terrain in this region is desert, so expect stark, dramatic and rocky landscapes broken only by the verdant green foliage of an oasis. Beautiful in its own way.

Culture shock – but in a good way with hospitable locals and a feeling of safety and orderliness. For Westerners, Arab traditions feel very different and tenacious hawkers in the bazaars can take some getting used to.

Friday feeling – in Muslim countries, their Fridays are our Sundays, so expect some shops and restaurants to be closed. Markets may also be quieter, though a benefit is that stall-holders may be less persistent.

Dress discreetly – revealing attire is a no-no for women. Loose-fitting long-sleeved tops and trousers that cover ankles are best and for mosque visits, scarves to cover your hair.

Passport check – ensure that passports do not have Israeli stamps as this can cause problems when entering some Middle Eastern countries and could lead to denied entry.

Dune-bashing blues – it's an adventure like no other, but anyone who suffers from motion sickness should beware as the constant racing up sand dunes and rolling down the other side can leave you feeling queasy.

Unesco sites – from ancient Petra in Jordan and the lush oasis city of Al Ain in Abu Dhabi to the Christian monastery of St Catherine on the Sinai Peninsula and ancient Nabatean tombs at Al-Hijr (also known as Hegra) in Saudi Arabia.

English widely spoken – particularly true in tourist areas and while the main language is Arabic, many locals speak English as do the large expat communities that give the main cities an international feel.

Picture perfect – in trying to get the perfect shot don't take pictures around sensitive official or military buildings. Always ask permission before photographing locals, and remember it is regarded as improper to photograph women.

Two-centres – cruises from Dubai and Abu Dhabi lend themselves to add-ons, along with stays at Sharm el Sheikh or Aqaba on the Red Sea or Jordan's capital Amman.



Monastery of St Catherine, Sinai Peninsula