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## Welcome to Abu Dhabi

Luxury travel advisor at Royal Travel & Tours, **ASHLEY GALLO** explains what makes Abu Dhabi so special—and why she recommends it for all types of travelers.

For specialty travel consultant Ashley Gallo, it comes as no surprise that Abu Dhabi was ranked among the Top 10 Cities in Africa and the Middle East by the readers of *Travel + Leisure* in the 2022 World's Best Awards. Gallo had the privilege of living and working in the region for three years. For her, it's more than just a buzzing vacation destination, it's a warm, welcoming place with substance and soul. Gallo enjoys returning to the region at least once a year, and as a Middle East expert for Signature Travel Network and an advisor with Royal Travel & Tours, she gets to share her love for this particular emirate.

"It's such a vibrant city, with people from all over the world living and working there," she explains. "It's got a worldly feel, with luxury shopping and hotels, and restaurants by Michelin-starred chefs, but it's not showy. They honor their traditions in Abu Dhabi, so it's a mix of old and new in one city."

### CULTURAL GEMS

Among Gallo's favorite sites is the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, one of the largest mosques in the world and a marvel of architecture and design. She also recommends the Al Ain Palace museum, set in what was once the private home and gardens of the founding father and first president of the UAE, and the Qasr AlHosin, the oldest stone building in the

city and now a museum. "Heritage Village is also really interesting," says Gallo. "It offers wonderful insights into the early Emirati way of life." Of course, the jewel in the crown is the stunning Louvre Abu Dhabi, the only outpost of the famed museum outside of Paris.

### SPECTACULAR NATURE

While primarily a desert destination, Abu Dhabi is about more than sand—though

activities like dune bashing, camping, evenings at a Bedouin camp, and hiking in the mountains will help you connect with that side of things. ("Don't miss a sunrise or sunset in the desert," Gallo advises. "The colors are spectacular!") But you'll also find mangroves you can kayak through, lush oases that are impossibly green, wildlife safaris (with gazelles and more), and islands with "pristine beaches, the softest sand, and crystal-clear waters." All

of this natural beauty means you can rent a boat to go snorkeling or diving, spend a day on a quiet island, enjoy wakeboarding and stand-up paddleboards, and more.

### A CITY BY THE SEA

Back in the city, you'll definitely want to visit the Corniche, the city's popular 5-mile beachfront boardwalk. During the day, you can stroll or ride a bike along the separate cycle and pedestrian pathways, let kids roam in the dedicated play areas, or relax on one of three separate beach areas. Come evening, it's the perfect spot to sit and enjoy dinner or a drink while taking in the lively scene.

When it comes to dining, Abu Dhabi offers one of the most diverse and exciting restaurant scenes in the world, with cuisines that range from French and Lebanese to Greek and Argentinian. Gallo recommends a visit to the beachfront community, Mamsha Al Saadiyat, for a delicious variety of global cuisines. "There are restaurants and cafés all along a promenade overlooking the Arabian Gulf," she says. "It's stunning!" For traditional Arabic and Middle Eastern cuisine, she advises visitors to explore the traditional markets or souks where you'll find cozy spots serving mezzes, grilled meats, rice dishes, and more.

### PERFECT FOR FAMILIES

Gallo also notes that Abu Dhabi is "one of the most family friendly cities in the world," as there are tons of waterparks, kids' zones in malls, and amusement parks like the award-winning Ferrari World. International, superstar events—from golf championships to Formula One to headliner concerts—are also great for families. "In the Emirati culture, family is very important," adds Gallo. Follow Ashley Gallo on Instagram [@ashleygallo319](#).

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