

## Dubai - First Trip

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greetings from afar!

as is customary for this point of the voyage, sea stories must be told!

yesterday morning we arrived in the great city of Dubai, U.A.E. at around 9:00 AM. after doing a little bit of work, i was knocked off to go do whatever i wanted in town.

first thing that went on was not exactly exciting, but proved to be rather peaceful. i was asked to go to the duty free store at the Seaman's Center and pick up a few goods for a couple shipmates who couldn't leave the ship.

i agreed to do so and found the center to be rather large and nice. i sat outside and attempted to check my e-mail, which proved to be fruitless as their internet didn't want to work for me. either way, it was nice to sit outside and relax for a bit.

after returning to the ship i waited around for a while for the deck cadet to get done with work and then we started making our way to the highly acclaimed Gold Souk. this voyage hit a roadblock rather early on though. as we're standing in the immigration building and after all of our "testing" (retina scans, fingerprints, etc...) they tell us that we do not have the appropriate sized pictures attached to our visa applications and that we must go like 3 blocks away to a photo booth and get some made. this wouldn't be a problem if the machine took american money. we didn't have any Dirahms at this point because we hadn't gone anywhere, so we had to find someone that could make change for us.

when we got back to the immigration office at first i wasn't so sure they were going to be nice and let me through the gate.

i just followed the verbal instructions that the photobooth gave me. it said make sure to smile. hehehe... i don't think i need to say any more.

anyways, after they all laughed and pointed at me, they stamped my shorepass and i went on my way to the Gold Souk. traffic was horrible and the taxi must have been kept at 100 degrees. ugh!

finally we get to the Gold Souk and we were not even 3 steps out of the cab when we're approached by a man "you want bags? gucci, prada, chanel, louis vettion (i know i spelled it wrong, so sue me), etc..." i wasn't interested because i know how those deals go and i got lots of purses in china last year. anyways, garret was interested, so off we go following this man to his shop. after 3 blocks of following him i start to get suspicious. then he turned down a fairly dark alleyway and red flags are going up in my mind.

casually i slipped my right hand into my pocket and held my pocket knife.

just playing safe.

luckily he was legit and took us to a store that was off the beaten path, hence why they needed to lure people in from the street. garret walked out of the shop with nine purses, i walked out empty handed.

from there we went into the Souk and it was Mr. T's paradise... literally over 500 shops side by side, both sides of the walkway as far as you could see of nothing but gold. it was downright ridiculous.

we started looking off the main drag for other types of shops. we definitely found them. the sketchier our surroundings, the better we felt about sniping some sweet deals.

because this e-mail is going to a significant number of people that i purchased the gifts for, i cannot go into detail for a vast number of my transactions, however, i can give you some of the funnier stories of the night.

so me and garret walk into this super sketchy "Wholesale" store, i use the quotes because i don't see how it qualifies as wholesale. anyways. i see one particular item in said shop that is rather

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interesting to me. i ask the man how much he wants for it. he said the lowest he could go was 375 dirahm (approximately \$130). i laughed at him (the exchange rate is 3.66 dirahm= 1 USD). he then pulled the typical "what do you want to pay for it?" to which i replied, "you won't like my price at all, \$25 US" he argued and fussed and ranted and raved and all sorts of ugliness. i wound up getting the item for \$38 and he also threw in a free pepsi for me and for garret. immediately upon paying him for the item he told me to leave his shop and never return. haha! what can i say, a playa's gotta do what a playa's gotta do, so i hustled the man! throughout the night, garret was repeatedly mistaken for an Arab. locals would try to barter with him in arabic all the time. it was rather funny.

one time a man asked him "where are you from?" to which garret replied, "America." the man then asked again, "where are you FROM?"

"AMERICA."

"no, originally, where are you from?"

"America!"

"i do not believe you, my friend, you are arab!"

hahaha

there was only one time where i was genuinely very angry. i went into a small convenience store to buy a simcard for my phone to call home. the man behind the counter said it would cost me \$30 dollars for 50 minutes of talk time on the card. i had no problem with that. we start the whole process which is rather involved. it required a photocopy of my passport and so on.

anyways, he hands me the card then tells me it's \$70! i immediately became outraged and threw it back at him. he stood there baffled and i explained that i was told \$35, and that's all i was willing to pay for that 50 minutes of talk time. he then tried to give me some stupid story about why it really was \$70. i told him i wanted that copy of my passport so i could destroy it and i'd be on my way. he made me pay \$1 for the copy but that was it for me.

i walked out about ready to start throwing punches. i was with a local at the time that pointed me to the shop to buy the card in the first place. he tried to support the shop owner's side by saying "this card is good for one year, etc..."

needless to say, i don't give a rip. i just wanted a card that would last me one night and it was hardly worth the aggravation. so that's why i didn't get to call anyone from Dubai.

all in all, a good time was had in Dubai. i got to see the indoor ski slope (we're going snowboarding next time), i saw the world's only 7-Star hotel, the tallest building in the middle east, more gold than you can shake a stick at, and got to witness my friend being called a liar for saying he was an american. i hope this story reaches you in good spirits and that all is well!

much love!

-T

## Dubai - Second Trip

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hey howdy hey everyone!

so here is the Dubai tale.

we got to Jebel Ali terminal at a respectable hour (something that is rare and very much appreciated) and i was released from work as soon as the gangway dropped. this was a pretty cool thing with only one hangup. i could not leave the terminal for over three hours because the ship had not yet cleared customs. luckily for me, Jebel Ali is an absolutely enormous terminal with a very nice seaman's club, so all is well there. i went to the seaman center and ate lunch and checked a few things on the computer after a short visit to the duty free store (i was asked to pick up some things for people that couldn't get off the ship). as i was eating my lunch i started talking to the gentleman next to me. he was pretty cool. he was the Chief Engineer from the Maersk Arkansas, and he talked about some of the crazy things he's seen and done in his time at sea. it was definitely nice to talk to someone new for a change.

after the seaman center i went back to the ship to drop off my goods and see how my sea partner, garret, was coming along with his work (he had to help replace the cables that are used to lower the lifeboats to the water).

i go and find him, and he's still about two hours from being able to leave.

so i did what any respectable sea partner would do. i bailed and told him to meet me at the Mall of the Emirates when he got off. i went into this mall thinking it would be pretty good sized, but was taken aback when i actually saw what this mall held inside. holy cow this place was enormous. not only was the largest mall i've ever been to, but it was also the nicest. very well lit, marble flooring throughout, and the whole mall smelled like a flower garden. it was rather impressive. the only thing that i was not impressed with in this mall was the prices. everything was way overpriced and the store owners there DO NOT barter or haggle. i went into a carpet store and was rather impressed with the rugs they sold there, but for a floor-sized carpet, the least i would have spent is \$8,000 US. yeah, not so much. in that place though, i did by my dad a rather awesome antique. as i was talking to the shop owners while trying to find a way to get a decent sized carpet for \$100, i made up a story as i talked to the guys. i told them that i didn't have much money because i was a sailor and at the bottom of the pay scale. one of them then asked me if i had children. this is where the story comes into play. i've tried many times to explain about my little sisters and my nephews, but for some reason it gets lost in translation. they do understand son and daughter though. so i said i had two little boys (my nephews, whom i was looking for presents for them in this place at the time). they then asked if i was married, with rather stern looks on their faces. i had to say yes i was married so i wouldn't totally alienate myself from them. they all seemed very happy with that and started saying that i was a good man for getting married and having children. i had to chuckle to myself a little, but once i started the story i had to stick with it.

after that i spent the next hour or so wandering around the massive complex that is the mall. after stopping at the ethnic treat, Hardees, for a burger i met up with Garret and we proceeded to Ski Dubai. at one end of this mall there is a large, indoor ski slope. for the two of us to snowboard for two hours, all equipment included (excluding gloves) it cost 400 Dirahms (roughly \$110). we grabbed our boards and clothing and headed for the lift.



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as we are riding the lift for the first time, i notice how pleasantly empty the place is. there might be 10 other people on the slope at first. it'd been many years since i was last on a snowboard, and it became rather apparent that i sucked after about the first 300 yards. wipe out. as i said, they did not rent gloves, and i didn't bring any on the ship seeing as every where we go is stinkin' hot. this is when the pain began. my fingers were tingling and then after a few runs went numb. it was not the comfortable, no pain kind of numb either. it was the it hurts all the time, but you can't really move them kind of numb. oh well. i got better and better as the night wore on. garret then informed me that he told his cab driver to pick us up at 8:00 PM. i looked at my watch—8:45. oops...

so we go for one last ride and then bail out of there and sure enough we find Raheem sitting outside, waiting for us with an irritated look on his face. he looked at his watch and said in his super heavy indian accent "you said come at 8 o'clock, so i come at 8 o'clock." and then looked at his watch again and then back at us with a not so happy look. oh well.

we had Raheem take us to the Gold Souk, which we visited last time we were in dubai. i must say, it was not nearly as exciting the second time. i actually found it to be rather irritating. thankfully we were there at the end of the day and only spent about an hour there. i bought a few little knick-knacks for people and garret bought more purses to send to his sister and so on. i did buy two things for myself there. i bought a Louis Vuitton (i'm sure that's spelled wrong, so sue me.) belt and a Burberry tie with matching cuff links. i think i'll be able to put them to good use. from the Gold Souk we went back to the seaman's center just before closing time to watch all our drunken shipmates make fools of themselves. our micronesian chief steward and a filipino AB started slowdancing together right up against the stage, which was the cause of great laughter from all.

from there we went back to the ship and now we're motoring towards Kelang, Malaysia!  
all in all, Dubai is, in my opinion, OK. i wouldn't go out of my way to visit the place again, but i'm glad i got to go there so i could see it for myself. bottom line is, regardless of how much money they throw into the place, it's still a sand dune in the armpit of the world. either way, it was a good experience and i'm glad i got to do it. i hope you enjoy the stories!

much love,

-T