

Dubai may have its shopping festivals, Tokyo may pull in the masses with its bright lights and mega malls and New York satisfies those with Carrie Bradshaw aspirations (and credit card limits to match). But on our very own doorstep lies an insatiable wealth of shopping experiences.



Retail space in Abu Dhabi is set to increase 80 percent to more than 1.8 million sq m by 2015

Whether you're after a taste of the traditional, or ready to flex some shopping muscle in the ever-growing selection of malls scattered around the city, there's no end of choice to help you part with your cash. Abu Dhabi Week checks out the retail market to see why the city is such a great place to shop – and what's still to come from the growing retail scene.

Of course, it's not all about spending in the capital. Enjoying an increasingly popular way to spend leisure time, many Abu Dhabi folk head to the malls to relax, socialise and dine as well as shop. And why not? With a host of entertainment on offer, from ice rinks to cinemas, plus numerous coffee shops and food halls, it's easy to see how you can pass the time.

“Malls in Abu Dhabi don’t just offer shopping – it’s a whole social leisure scene,” agrees Livio Favi, mall manager for Khalidiyah Mall. “We see loads of custom just from people coming to our cinema. There are always plenty of people here window shopping or just grabbing coffee – it’s a way of life in Abu Dhabi.”

And the shoppers seem to agree.

“I like to meet friends in the malls,” says 15-year-old Ahmed Salah, as he stops to chat while shopping in Al Wahda Mall. “My friends and I hang out in coffee shops or head to one of the cinemas. It’s nice because the malls are nice and clean and cool – even in the summer we’ve got somewhere to hang out.” And does he like to shop? “Sure,” he smiles, “if I’ve got some spare pocket money!”

Sarah Phillips, 37, also enjoys heading to the malls without hitting the shops all the time.

“If I’ve got time spare before picking up the children, I like to meet up with a few friends and we’ll grab a coffee. There are so many nice new coffee shops opening up in some of the malls and souks that there’s plenty of choice. I particularly like this new souk,” she gestures from inside Central Market. “It’s got a lovely atmosphere and it feels a million miles away from the noise of the outside traffic.”

So what makes Abu Dhabi such a great shopping destination when you’ve got money burning a hole in your pocket?

Marcello Larizza, the mall manager for Mushrif Mall – which is due to open in March this year – believes the reason is the ever-growing choice in the capital.

“The market is still really young and there’s plenty of room for growth. Once upon a time Dubai was seen as the place to go and shop, but now I don’t think people feel the need to go that far – Abu Dhabi is far more accessible for shopping these days,” he says.

“In three to five years time, I think there’ll be no need to go elsewhere to shop at all – Abu Dhabi will have it all. It’s an exciting time for the retail market right now – Mushrif Mall for one will be a fantastic, unique addition for shoppers.”

Favi from Khalidiyah Mall agrees. “Dubai has some fantastic malls but they’re more suited to tourists,” he explains. “Here in Abu Dhabi we have everything the every day shopper wants, as well as catering for visitors.”

Favi also believes that the arrival of new malls on the scene isn’t causing competition for older malls in the city – rather, they’re adding to the choice and ease of access for consumers.

“More malls right now are simply balancing out the shopping experience in Abu Dhabi. We have a great central location and a great customer reach. But those around the new Mushrif Mall site until now have not had that ease of access to good shops and entertainment. I think more malls are good for the city.”

And it’s not all about marble-floored malls. For a more traditional experience, there’s the likes of Madinat Zayed for a spot of haggling, or the Hamdan Centre for a barrage of kitsch products.

Abu Dhabi has also stepped up on souk experiences – from the likes of Souk Qaryat Al Beri and the recently opened Central Market, the capital now boasts a selection of more traditional choices. With arts and crafts, gifts, high-end chocolatiers and much more on offer, Abu Dhabi shopping has its own identity away from international brands and destinations – meaning you can pick up everything from an abaya to a zephyr (most likely) just a stone’s throw away from your front door.

Up and coming



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