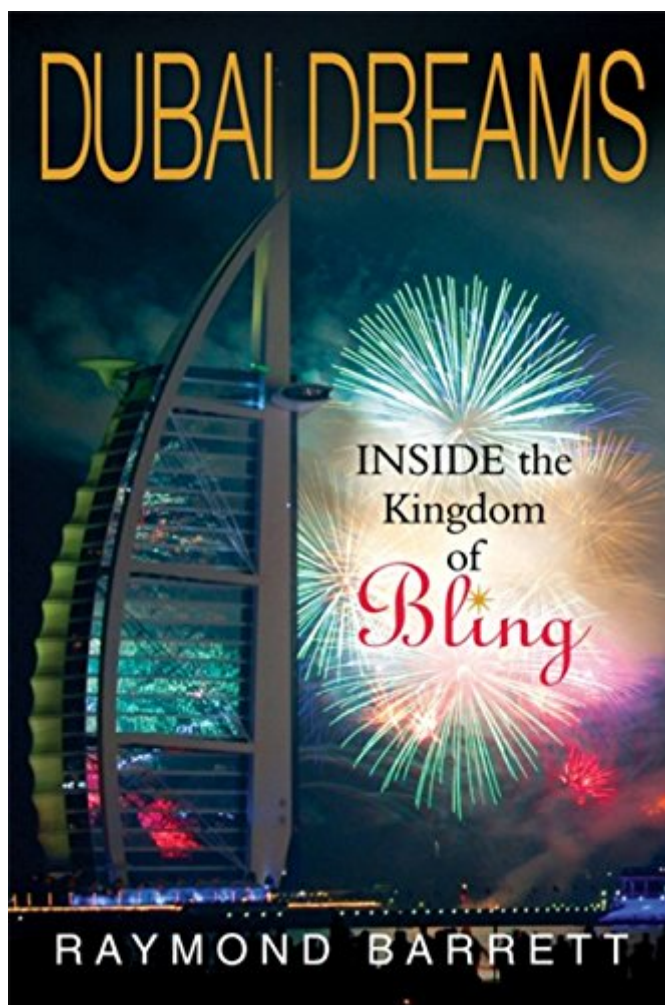


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Dubai Dreams: Inside The Kingdom Of Bling



Synopsis

Dubai has become the watchword for all things new, glittering and very bling - a billionaire's dream world and a haven for international expatriates promising a fantasy land of tax-free fun, sun and sin. In less than a generation, this small city-state on the Arabian Gulf has been transformed from a sleepy smuggler's cove to a global financial and entertainment hub home to a number of world records, including the world's tallest building, the largest man-made island and the biggest shopping mall. But what is life really like for the people who live and work in the city of Dubai, beyond the towering skyscrapers, luxury resorts and opulent mansions? Rather than just desert Sheikhs and designer-clad Emiratis, Raymond Barrett also encounters a dizzy melange of expatriates - Iranians, Ethiopians, Indians, Afghans, British and Chinese - all living their own version of The Dubai Dream. Behind the hyperbole and marketing spin, what are the real stories the city has to tell? From seven-star hotels to immigrant labour camps, from Sunni mosques to Hindu temples and from the courthouse to a back-alley speakeasy, Barrett draws a fascinating picture of the brave new world emerging from these desert sands. He reveals the hidden side of this playboy paradise and considers whether Dubai is a doomed Plastic Arabia or an authentic 21st century success story.

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Customer Reviews

I absolutely loved "Dubai Dreams"! The book gives fascinating insights into the unique intersection of politics, business, religion and culture in the region, all told in a creative nonfiction style through the personal experiences of the author and his intriguing encounters with a motley cast of locals and ex-pats. What I liked the most is the author's eloquence and gift for gripping story-telling, which made the book an instant page-turner for me. By the end of it, not only did I feel like I had learned a lot about Dubai and the Middle East, but also that I had been thoroughly entertained.

Thoroughly enjoyed reading this prior to a brief trip to Dubai. It gives you an insight into to more than you could possibly see yourself in a short visit, but ultimately, as with any book, can only scratch the surface. I now want to know more. I particularly enjoyed the Irish tone of voice which comes across at various points throughout the book.

The Story is well writtten, however i would like to have seen the author acknowledge more what a working Government can achieve considering the low level of illiteracy in Dubai locals. Also How Dubai great mistake other than the real estate misadventure was trying to be more London than London. Dubai instead should have a played a better role as the engines of growth for Africa& the Sub-continent two places that are vital to Dubai but for some reason are never acknowledged maybe now with the hangover Dubai can retrace itself. It is not a doomed case as the author suggests

You hear quite a lot about the emirate on the news. I did. But I couldn't find a good book about the place. This is a good introduction of Dubai and the region. Don't miss it.

If you're traveling to or through Dubai and would like to learn something about this unique place but are limited in your reading time, this is the book I would recommend for you. It combines politics, a travelogue and social commentary with a little bit of history to create a satisfying portrait of life in contemporary Dubai. The book opens with a description of the view from the airplane when arriving in Dubai at night. I suppose it's similar to the experience of flying into Las Vegas at night with the bright lights stretching on and on, seemingly forever. In the prologue, Barrett points out the various ways in which Dubai differs from its Arab neighbors, particularly hotspots like Iraq, Lebanon and the Holy Land. For all its problems, Dubai and, to some extent, others of the Emirates have distinguished themselves in many positive ways. He also mentions the ambitious building projects,

noting that much of this growth is in trouble these days. He ends this section by alluding to the sheer diversity of Dubai, preparing us for the chapters to come which discuss the various foreign communities which make up the modern city of Dubai including Iranians, Indians, Filipinos, Bengalis, Westerners, and others. The book is in many ways a whirlwind tour of the various echelons of Dubai society from the underworld right on up to the ruling class. We meet Iranian smugglers, Indian restaurant owners, Russian real estate agents, Brits in the service sector, indigent Bengali laborers, and many others. We even get introduced to a few of the elusive locals whose culture has in large part been eclipsed by that of India and the West. Peppered throughout the book are accounts of early explorers who experienced the place before these foreign influences pushed any evidence of the real Arabia to the outer margins of civilization bordering the Rub' Al-Khali or Empty Quarter. The chapter entitled Maktoum Incorporated is an eye-opening account of a day at the horse races where it turns out that virtually every contender is owned by Sheikh Mohammed or a close relative. This being an Islamic country, gambling is officially prohibited. To avoid letting the ban on gambling take a bite out of the royal family's profits, however, they get around this with some tricky sleight of hand. Interestingly, the odds on each race are openly printed in the newspaper for everyone to see. Despite the blatant corruption, however, it turns out there are advantages to an absolute dictatorship. When the sheikh decided commuter rail was needed, it got built with no complications and no delays. You can walk around Dubai at all hours of the day and night without fear of being mugged or raped. Actual citizens, who make up a small minority of the residents of this emirate, have cradle-to-grave protections, including a free house, the guarantee of a job where they won't have to work too hard or know too much, and enough money to live comfortably. But all this comes at a steep price, and Barrett reminds in gruesome detail of early efforts of the ruling families of both Dubai and Abu Dhabi to secure power for themselves, events which are no less abhorrent than the bloody tales of the Saud family marching through villages with the decapitated heads of their opponents mounted on sticks. It should also be noted that the crime-free experience afforded Westerners doesn't extend to unlucky Third World nationals without the wasta (clout) to protect themselves, and terrible are the tales of abused maids who take refuge in their countries' embassies all over the Gulf region, unable to leave legally because their passports are being held illegally by their employers who have, in many cases, repeatedly raped or beat them. I don't want to give those new to the Arab World the impression that it's normal for Arabs or Muslims to abuse or disrespect the weak. Unfortunately, their legal systems have not yet developed sufficient protections for the poor and the powerless. A minority of locals and foreigners takes advantage of this situation to prey on those who can't protect themselves. Barrett's account of his

visit to a mosque at sunset during the holy month of Ramadan to dine alongside manual laborers who were being fed by a prominent local businessman are more in line with my experiences among the Arabs. Many of them go to great lengths to follow the admonition of the Quran to look after the needs of travelers and the less fortunate. Interestingly, it is quite often the poorest among them who go to the most trouble to do so.

With a host of -somehow wistful- characters, this book takes us through the author's unique perspective of the myriad dreams that shape this complex city. Dubai residents - Pakistani taxi drivers, Emirati Sheikhs, enterprising Persian businessmen, Ethiopian sisters, South Asian construction workers and former Dubai historians- flood into and mingle across each others "narratives" easily, and yet with persistent curiosity Raymond Barrett investigates these intersections, highly successfully, I might add, to answer in a way, his own question -posed earlier in the book- who's experience is essential, whose life to talk about?? Falling into conversation with just about all kinds of dreamers, Barrett paints a compelling mosaic of a city both old and new, constant and changing, familiar and different, localized and globalized... all of which complicates simplistic notions of a "Dubai, Inc"... Having been a resident in the Gulf for some years, this book definitely shakes loose some of the assumptions I have been carrying around myself. A definite must-read for locals, Gulf expats like myself, or anyone who wants to or has lived or visited in and around the area. A recommended read also for students and academics interested in Middle East Studies or international affairs.

This book delivers insight into the complex world of Dubai, the UAE and the Gulf as a whole. It is not all bling and Vegas-style freewheeling, as many people may believe. It was nice to read a book which didn't gloss over the underlying social problems just beneath the glossy surface. He provides a good historical background for context, as well as a look at what it's like for various expat groups to live and work there. As an expat who has lived in the Gulf for over 10 years, I think his account is spot-on. It shows the good, the bad and the ugly side of a city which has risen out of the desert. For anyone thinking of moving to the UAE or visiting Dubai, it would be a good idea to read this book first. Barrett gives an even-handed perspective of all the groups which have to coexist in this small part of the Emirates. A follow-up would be interesting, now that the bubble has burst.

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