



In traditional Arab fashion, Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, minister of higher education for the United Arab Emirates and a member of Abu Dhabi's ruling family, served guests meat - camel, lamb, beef and chicken - in the gilded dining hall of his palace. Others served people at the ends of a long table, with more than a dozen

bowls of condiments before each plate. To the right was the Ukrainian minister of education leading one delegation, and to the left (partly obscured by his hand) was Rona Ambrose, Canadian minister of intergovernmental affairs.

— Photo by Liz Parker/Recorder Community Newspapers, Stirling, N.J.

Tour reveals modern cities rising out of Arabian desert

By STEVE HAYNES

s.haynes@nwkansas.com

Touring the United Arab Emirates last summer, we saw a country of contrasts, starkly modern cities rising out of the desert, flowering with palms and green lawns, sandwiched between the desert and the Arabian Sea.

High rise after high rise sprout from the sand, with new boulevards and freeways between. It is said that fully one third of all the world's single-leg construction cranes reside in the two main cities, Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

The contrasts extend to custom and dress: Arab men dress mostly in traditional white robes and head dress. Underneath, for centuries, sandals, though if you get a peek today, they're often European designer models.

Arab women dress in a traditional black robe and head covering, without a veil. Some are heavily decorated in gold or silver, others quite plain. They look hot in the summer sun, but as one well-placed executive put it: "It's my heritage."

Two-thirds of the population is "guest workers," expatriates from nearly every corner of the world. These men and women wear their own native dress, muslim garb of every type for the eastern set, western suits and business outfits for the English, Germans and Americans.

You might meet a sheikh at his palace for dinner, dressed in the flowing, gold-edged black robes of a royal, one night, and see him the next day on television in a business suit. One famous picture showed the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, at the dedication of the indoor ski run in his city, on skies in his black robe.

Natives make it clear, this is not the repressive, males-only society of their Saudi cousins, but tradition still reigns in a country open to modern ideas and business skills. The rulers make decisions with little voter input.

Filthy rich from oil found mainly in Abu Dhabi, but shared among all seven emirates, the government encourages Arab citizens to get an education (free through a master's degree), gives each family a dowry and a house and pays them for each child. Polygamy remains legal, though not encouraged (there's a dowry only for the first of a possible four wives). Everyone has a job, with many Arabs in government service as well as business.

Among native citizens, poverty is



A RECEPTIONIST at a business office wore the traditional Arab garb for women, black robes and head covering. Women from other countries wear their own native dress or western clothes.

unheard of. Among guest workers, who live in their own camps and communities, divided by national origin and status, there is a different story. Many workers in restaurants and other businesses, mostly Muslims, live as families with both man and wife working.

There has been unrest among the thousands of mostly young, single men recruited from Pakistan, India and other Muslim nations, who do construction and labor jobs. The government has cracked down on prostitution, drugs and unscrupulous contractors, but problems remain.

These men are not exactly poor

by their home standards, but their life as temporary residents is not plush.

As these crews move on to another project, a new world fills the hotels and skyscrapers they leave behind. The world's tallest building is under construction in Dubai, replacing the Taipei 101 in China — for a short time, anyway.

The hotels, oh the hotels. They range from adequate tourist places with beaches and business centers, to the truly grand, each new hotel more opulent than the last.

On the beach at Dubai, the Burj al Arab rises like the sail of an Arab dhow from a manmade island.

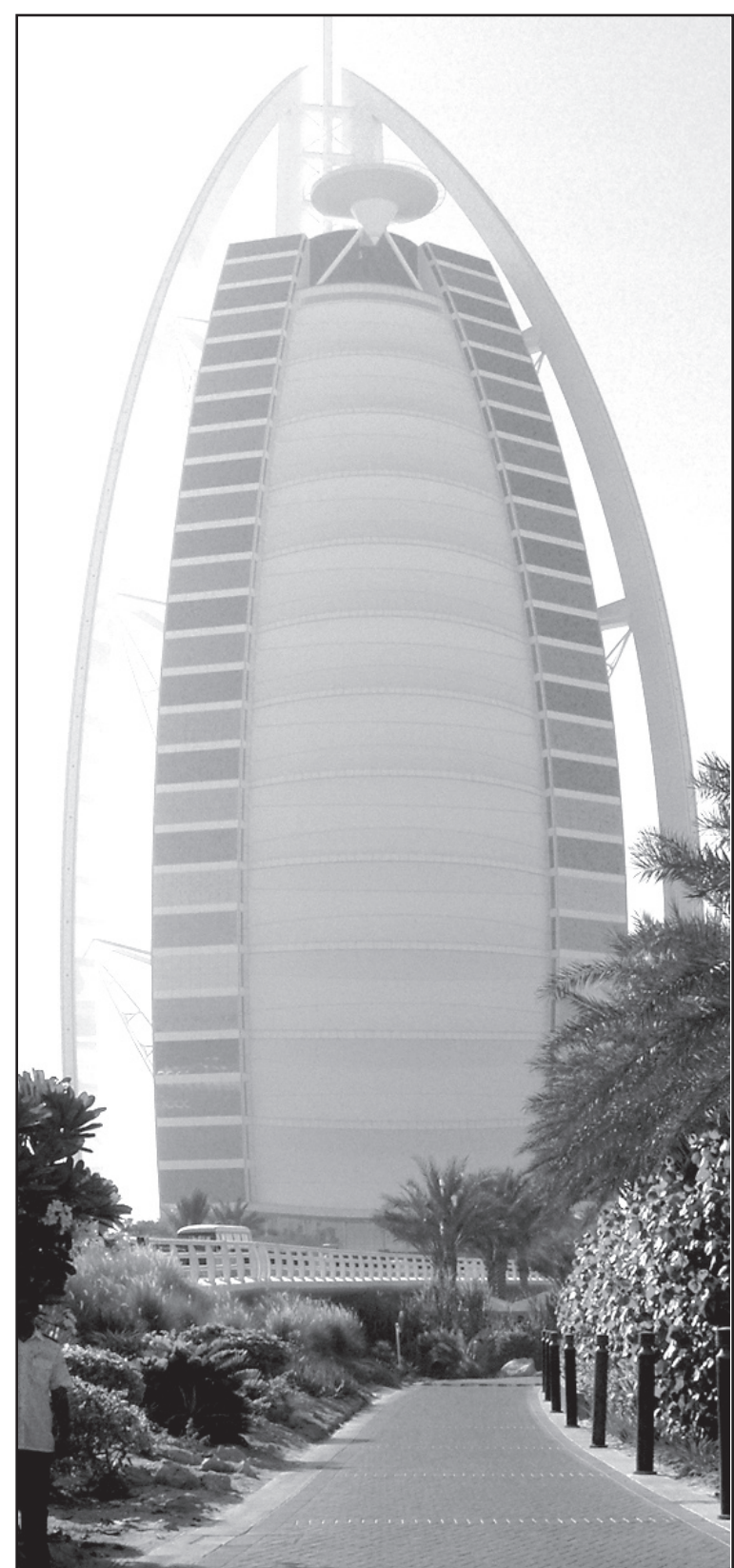
Suites — there are no "rooms" — start at \$2,000 a night and if you have to ask, you don't need to know about the \$38,000 units on the upper floors.

Tours are \$25, though as guests of the government we do not have to pay, and no, we can't see one of the suites because they are all full. Every night. A couple from New York, hearing our plight, invites us to see their two-story home for the week. It's easy to see why this, the world's tallest hotel, and the most expensive, it billed as the only seven-star hotel in the world.

Below the hotel, a theme-park submarine takes guests to the sea food restaurant, while on the 42nd floor, another restaurant offers sweeping vistas of the beach. The view would be truly spectacular if it weren't for the constant haze, a mixture of dust, humidity, pollution and heat that persists along the shore. Five miles inland, they say, it's dry as dry could be, but near the sea, the humidity is overpowering.

The opulence, even excess, of development exists alongside history and tradition. Some Arabs still live a tribal life in the desert — our guide says his father refuses to move to town — and a few camps about the new international airport. Goats wander in the yards.

Developed blocks give way to the raw sand and concrete of construction, building everywhere, bringing yet more opulence and yet more guest workers. It's astounding, really, an experience unequalled anywhere.



THE BURJ AL ARAB hotel rises like a giant (above) sail over the beach at Dubai. Tiger Woods famously hit balls off the helicopter pad, but it's not open to ordinary golfers. Tours of the hotel are \$25. A woman took a picture with her cell phone call (left) from the Al Mahara restaurant on the 42nd floor of the spectacular hotel. Behind her, the beaches of Dubai rolled out into the mist, which hid the new palm-shaped island development under construction just a couple of miles away.

— Herald staff photos by Steve Haynes