2nd December Street, Dubai. The artwork in the cover photograph is by Lithuanian artist Ernest Zacharevic and it depicts Dahouri, a traditional game which involved boys pushing and racing after discarded bicycle wheels. The logo for Academy of International Business (AIB) Dubai 2017 was also designed by Mouza Saif Al Hamrani.

This project was made possible with support from Zayed University through the Research Incentive Fund (RIF) Grant: Destination Branding: Perception Mapping of Visual and Auditory Communication Elements.

The UAE is a young country, founded on 2 December 1971 as a Federation. Prior to the formation of the UAE, the seven Emirates that now comprise the Federation were ruled by the British and these sheikhdoms were known as the Trucial States. The two largest Emirates are Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The other five Emirates are Ajman, Fujairah, Ras al-Shammar, Sharjah, and Umman al-Qasim. The discovery of oil in Abu Dhabi and the first export of oil in 1962 was significant in the formation and development of the UAE.

The rapid growth and modernization of infrastructure have led to noticeable changes in the Emirati way of life. Preserving heritage is a key focus in the UAE Vision 2021 plan* which states that the UAE strives to preserve a cohesive society proud of its identity and sense of belonging. The UAE has become one of the most competitive countries in the world according to the WEF Global Competitiveness Index 2016-2017 - ranking the UAE 16th out of 138 economies. The challenge, with more than 85% of the population hailing from foreign countries and over 200 nationalities co-existing, is to preserve cultural values and heritage important to the Emirati identity.

The challenge is captured in a series of photographs by young Emirati students and interviews conducted with the older generation who remember the country and the way of life in its early years, and in some cases, before unification. This data was collected by twenty Zayed University College of Communication & Media Sciences students in Dubai during the fall semester of 2016. The students interviewed their family members such as parents, grandparents and close relatives and collected photographs from their family and personal albums. We have curated material from a collection of 600 primary images and 300 interviews to provide a glimpse into Emirati heritage and culture.


Under ‘The Environment’, we explore the natural environment of the UAE and its associated animals and sports through these sections: Beach, Desert, Falconry, Camels and Sports.

* For more about the UAE Vision 2021: https://www.vision2021.ae/en
This project has helped young Emiratis reconnect with the older generation and learn more about their heritage. The comments from the young people who undertook the project were positive. Here are some examples:

“I’m proud of my country because of its huge development through 45 years.”

“This project made me learn a lot about my heritage. It was also a nice family time with dad and mom because through each picture they got to share their memories with me, which was amazing.”

“We looked through our family albums and were able to reconnect with family members and see how they lived and what they loved. Through this process, I was able to see how not much has changed and our principles and family values are just as strong as ever even as our society evolves.”

“I found this project useful since I had the chance to talk more to my parents and discover more about our culture.”

We would like to thank everyone involved in the production of this project. Special thanks to our students from the Tourism and Cultural Communications concentration in the College of Communication and Media Sciences, Zayed University, Dubai Campus:

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Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the Dean of the College of Communication and Media Sciences, Pam Creedon. Without her support, this project would not have been accomplished.

We would like to dedicate this book to the families of the students that took part in this project.

Filareti Kotsi*
Melodena Stephens Balakrishnan

December 2017

This United Arab Emirates Cultural Reflection booklet was an exceptional opportunity for the College of Communication and Media Sciences’ students to create a brochure that would help visitors embrace the United Arab Emirates. The students, who majored in Tourism and Cultural Communications, set their goal to inform global audiences about the UAE as a travel destination. They did incredible storytelling interviews and photography with senior residents, families and communities to showcase Emirati culture and traditions. On behalf of the College, I thank them for their exceptional effort, which demonstrates their commitment to the future of the UAE. Also, a special thanks to the College’s Associate Professor Filareti Kotsi and Dean Melodena Stephens Balakrishnan, at the Karlshochschule International University, Germany, who compiled our students’ work and oversaw its production.

Pam Creedon
Acting Dean, College of Communication and Media Sciences

Contents

The Family
Home 6
Extended Family 7
Emirati Food 10
Emirati Attire 13
Henna 16
Artifacts 19
Mosque 23
Gatherings & Majlis 24
Family Occasions 26
National Day 28
Education 29
Business & Trade 31

The Community
Mosque 23
Gatherings & Majlis 24
Family Occasions 26
National Day 29
Education 31
Business & Trade 33

The Environment
Beach 35
Desert 36
Falconry 38
Camels 40
Sports 42

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This United Arab Emirates Cultural Reflection booklet was an exceptional opportunity for the College of Communication and Media Sciences’ students to create a brochure that would help visitors embrace the United Arab Emirates. The students, who majored in Tourism and Cultural Communications, set their goal to inform global audiences about the UAE as a travel destination. They did incredible storytelling interviews and photography with senior residents, families and communities to showcase Emirati culture and traditions. On behalf of the College, I thank them for their exceptional effort, which demonstrates their commitment to the future of the UAE. Also, a special thanks to the College’s Associate Professor Filareti Kotsi and Dean Melodena Stephens Balakrishnan, at the Karlshochschule International University, Germany, who compiled our students’ work and oversaw its production.

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Education 31
Business & Trade 33

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Mosque 23
Gatherings & Majlis 24
Family Occasions 26
National Day 29
Education 31
Business & Trade 33

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The traditional Emirati dwelling housed an extended family. Prior to independence, homes were often made of sustainable materials, including tents and huts made of palm thatch. The more elaborate homes were made of coral stone (if near the beach), mud, and locally sourced mangrove wood*. The traditional wind tower or barjeel was a prominent feature of most homes and often cooled the houses**. This functional barjeel has now almost disappeared with rapid urbanization; however, the characteristic wind tower design is increasingly being utilized to emphasize the importance of Emirati heritage.

The Family

Photograph: Maitha Bint Khalid

Home
"I regret losing the simple housing that we used to live in. Houses were much simpler than now but we enjoyed living in them. The positive change is that now everything in modern houses has become more luxurious and easier than before. For example, instead of lanterns or fanoos, we now have electricity which makes our lives easier." - Mother’s cousin, housewife (68 years old)

"I miss living with my whole family in one house, with my uncles and aunts, and grandparents and I feel sorry for newer generations because they are not experiencing this. A positive change compared to the older days is, that houses now are much bigger with more space and come in a wide variety of different designs. However, I still love seeing homes with a touch of heritage." - Mother, housewife (42 years old)

* You can read more about traditional housing here: https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/middle-east/dubai/deira/heritage-house/traditional-emirati-houses/
** You can read more about the traditional wind tower here: http://www.cultures.ae/index.php/elements-of-culture/issue-12
The family is still the heart of the Emirati home and even though there are more and more nuclear homes, Fridays and festivities are still occasions for the extended family to get together and share a meal. A mother is known by the title *Umm*.

“Having meals on the floor was commonplace among people in the UAE and some families still hold on to this way of eating.” - Father, retired diplomat (64 years old)

“We used to hold each others’ hands and help each other all the time.” - Grandmother (75 years old)

“Family dynamics haven’t changed a lot. We are still very family oriented and gather midday at my uncle’s house and every Friday at my grandparents’ house. I regret losing the daily interactions with my extended family as we now have our own house.” - Cousin, housewife (34 years old)

“Our houses used to be small with no swimming pools and not enough rooms to fit the whole family, but we loved it because it brought us closer together and united us as a family.” - Grandfather, retired teacher (78 years old)

*You can find out more about a number of rituals and customs in ‘Lest we forget: Emirati family photographs 1950-1999’.*

“My extended family in one house taught us a lot, we learned very many useful things from growups as we were forced to do different chores, but it returned as a benefit. Nowadays there are nuclear families consisting only of parents and their children. However, a new person has also been introduced; the housemaid.” - Mother, housewife (42 years old)

“Having an extended family is lost now.” - Mother’s cousin, housewife (58 years old)

“‘In the old days, families were extended. That is, all family members lived together in the same house including grandparents, parents, children, and perhaps aunts and uncles. Social relations were stronger than nowadays. Family members used to gather and stay indoors until late night. I regret losing the extended family and strong social relations. The sense of having a strongly linked family is lost now.’” - Mother’s cousin, housewife (58 years old)

“Family dynamics haven’t changed a lot. We are still very family oriented and gather midday at my uncle’s house and every Friday at my grandparents’ house. I regret losing the daily interactions with my extended family as we now have our own house.” - Cousin, housewife (34 years old)

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Pre-independence family holidays were mostly local and in some cases, families went to neighboring countries like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states or Indian subcontinent nations to visit their extended families or to go shopping. The desert still provides a great weekend getaway. As per capita income increases, holidays have become more global. The UAE now has several home-grown airlines – Emirates, Etihad Airways, flydubai and Air Arabia - that make traveling the world a single flight away.

“All trips before used to be in the desert.” - Mother, housewife (42 years old)

Family Trip, Al Seji, Ras al-Khaimah, (1977)

Emirati food reflects its Arab heritage, but has evolved with influences from the Levant, the Indian sub-continent and North Africa following the ancient Spice Road. The cuisine originally reflected locally-grown produce. Rice was introduced later by traders.

Preparation of a traditional dish Maleh (salted fish), Hamriyah Beach, Sharjah

Photograph: Mouza Saif

Photo Credit: Shatha Nabil, Family Album

Pre-Independence Family Holidays

Emirati Food

Preparation of a Traditional Dish Maleh (Salted Fish), Hamriyah Beach, Sharjah

Photograph: Mouza Saif

Photo Credit: Shatha Nabil, Family Album
“Cooking has changed so much, we used to cook all of our meals on wood, there is a method that we used to save the wood after it burns. When the wood burns and we have finished cooking we cover it with a round cover. We keep it covered for one or two days, after that we open it and we get charcoal from it, so we can use it again and again.” - Grandfather (78 years old)

“We used to eat on a round shaped carpet that was handmade from palm leaves. I regret losing our simple type of food and how delicious we thought it.” - Grandmother (65 years old)

“Nowadays we not only cook our traditional food, but we also use ideas for dishes from other cultures and countries.” - Grandmother (68 years old)

“Cooking traditional food is our link to our heritage and culture and cooking traditional recipes makes me feel nostalgic and long to go back in time.” - Mother, housewife (45 years old)

“I wish time could take me back to the days where family and friends gathered to cook before weddings.” - Uncle (58 years old)

Coffee is part of Emirati hospitality**. It is often freshly ground and served unsweetened with cardamom. You only serve the cup 1/3 filled. Normally you would drink three servings and when finished you would shake your glass several times from side-to-side to indicate you have had enough***.

* You can try cooking an Emirati meal or read more about Emirati Cuisine here: http://www.cultures.ae/index.php/cuisine
Want to try my local Emirati cuisine? You can book a reservation at Al Fanar Restaurant www.alfanarrestaurant.com

** You can learn more about preparing coffee here: http://www.cultures.ae/index.php/elements-of-culture/issue-20

*** You can learn more about the customs and etiquette through this book: CultureShock! UAE: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette by Kimberley Brown.
Men in the UAE wear the traditional kandoora which is a white gown that covers the whole body. Depending on the season the kandoora can also be blue, grey, black, and brown. Men also wear the ghutra which is a white cloth that covers the head and the agal which is a black cord wrapped around twice which helps keep the ghutra on the head. The young Emiratis nowadays also wear a red and white ghutra which they tie around their head.” - Grandmother (68 years old)

“Men still hold onto the national dress of the UAE, which also represents the heritage and culture of our country”. - Father (50 years old)

“There is nothing that I regret about the old days, and I’m happy and proud that we still wear the traditional kandoras.” - Father (47 years old)
“The traditional attire for women is an abaya, which is a black outfit that women wear over their clothes and a shaila, a piece of fabric that covers the hair. Old women wear an abaya that is different to those that young ladies wear. Old ladies also wear a burga which covers part of their face.” - Mother (42 years old)

“Women today still wear the shaila and abaya which are seen as symbols of their culture and Emirati identity.” - Zayed University graduate (25 years old)

Traditionally, the use of henna dye belongs to the Middle East, Indian Subcontinent and African region and is often associated with weddings. In fact, a traditional Islamic wedding has a henna night three days before the big event. Natural henna leaves are crushed, mixed with water and something acidic like lemon juice. Using a pointed cone, this mixture is applied to the skin, particularly the hands, in intricate designs. The designs are special and often brides will replicate some of the designs from their mothers’ own marriages. There are several henna styles like Al Ghannaa (painting the hand and forearm to the elbow), Al Gous (lines over the whole fingers till they reach the center of the hand), Rawiyah (colours only the first tip of the fingers and then draws a line that extends to the middle of the palm). Other styles include Al Jutti, Bittat or Bittat style*. Henna is also used as a natural hair dye**.

“Henna plays a big part in culture of the Middle East and in India as well. Henna is a plant which people take and process to use for body art and hair dye. Henna is a very important aspect of our heritage. It is an art that is drawn on the body. Girls and women apply henna mainly at weddings, religious celebrations, parties and Eids.”*** - Mother (48 years old)

* For more on henna styles read: http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/culture/henna-makes-its-mark-on-special-days-1.502536
** For more about the history of henna read: https://www.visitdubai.com/en/articles/history-of-henna
*** You can learn more about Eid festivities here: http://www.cultures.ae/index.php/elements-of-culture/issue-35

Emirati woman wearing the traditional Abaya, Sharjah Art Foundation

Photography: Moniza Safi

Traditional Henna Pattern

Photo Credit: Shaikha Khalid, Family Album
"The medkhaneh is an object in the form of a pyramid that is used to cover the medkhan, a small container made of pottery. We put the medkhan, underneath the medkhaneh, and in the medkhan we put the bukhoor*, a type of perfume for clothes. We then hang our clothes on the medkhaneh to catch the perfect essence of the perfume. The medkhaneh represents the authenticity of the Emirati woman and how she likes to take care of her family in every aspect of life. My daughter received a medkhaneh as one of the gifts for her wedding from the groom’s family and we have kept it as a memory." - Grandmother, housewife (69 years old)

The strong scent of Arabic perfume lingers. It is a prized commodity and historically many of the base ingredients were imported. The perfumes are rooted in the region and in the religion of Islam. These fragrances have usually been made of frankincense, amber, sandalwood and musk or a similar valuable material known as oud. Pure oud can cost more than AED 3,700 ($1,000) an ounce. Many young Emirati women entrepreneurs are in the perfume business today. Guests are often welcomed into the home with incense or bukhoor. Arabic perfumes are used by both men and women - not just to scent clothes (dokhoun), but also to celebrate marriages and festivals. It is not unusual to be presented with a tray of perfumes to sample after a meal. Emiratis, as most peoples of the Gulf region, are known to spend considerable amounts of money on luxury perfumes**.

* You can read more about the bukhoor here: [http://www.cultures.ae/index.php/elements-of-culture/issue-52](http://www.cultures.ae/index.php/elements-of-culture/issue-52)


"Applying henna before the wedding ceremony or wedding day is customary among many families in the UAE and many women enjoy that day because they feel celebrated and beautiful. Also, the friends and family of the bride come and see the bride getting henna applied and join her if they wish. This shows how women are unified in celebrating the good times with each other…. I always liked to dress up and always loved the process of getting henna done as well as the smell of henna. It is a form of art that has always fascinated me and whenever I get henna done I always remember those particular days." - Aunt (50 years old)

"I like to get henna done regardless of whether or not I have an occasion to go to. Henna is beautiful and a creative way to stand out and show your personality. I know many girls that think it does not look very appealing or the smell might put them off. But, to me it smells and looks amazing. I love getting different designs every time and I also like to get it done at other times rather than having it only for weddings or other special occasions". - Friend (21 years old)
Talli* embroidery was used to decorate the chest, cuffs and even the edges of the pants of women’s clothing. In some cases, silver or gold thread imported from India was used. Women worked on making talli together on the floor using a stand with a cushion. By crossing and weaving the coloured threads, they were able to embroider intricate shapes and designs**.

The kajojah is an old embroidery device used by women to make various designs or talli on dresses. It is made from a pillow that is supported by a metal base. There are gold and silver threads attached to the kajojah with which the talli is made. In the past, the kajojah was mostly used by women in their spare time.

“When my husband was pearl diving, I used to make lots of talli designs. In some families women used to embroider to make an income, but I simply made these designs for my daughters’ dresses.” - Grandmother, housewife (69 years old)

“Objects in the past were simple. I regret losing the old artifacts as they had a special value. They were very different to the ones we have nowadays but a positive change is that artifacts now are easier to use and more fancy than old ones. They also make our lives easier.” - Mother’s cousin, housewife (68 years old)

* You can read more about the talli handicraft here: http://www.cultures.ae/index.php/elements-of-culture/issue-30
** You can see a video on this traditional handcraft here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN4N1_UCubE

Photograph: Shaima Ibrahim

The Community

Embroidery Device Kajojah
Islam is the official religion of the UAE and you will find mosques everywhere. In the morning, you can hear the morning call to the faithful for prayer or adhan. A devout Muslim should pray five times a day looking towards Mecca. Men and women will sit separately in mosques as the Islamic religion dictates. The main day for worship is Fridays.

“The mosque is a place where Muslims do their prayers. I think that religion is part of our culture, identity and heritage. Before schools existed, mosques were the place where my father and mother used to learn how to read and write.” - Father (58 years old)

Al Badiyah Mosque, Fujairah, is estimated to date from the 15th Century and is the oldest mosque in the UAE. It has a floor area of only 53 square meters.

“Tourists visiting Al Fujairah Emirate, will always make sure to pass near Al Badiyah Mosque, since it is the smallest and oldest mosque and it is a landmark found in the UAE. I once visited Al Badiyah Mosque with my nephews to show them the simplicity of this mosque.” - Uncle (49 years old)

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque is a place for all visitors of different religions to visit and to learn more about Islam. Here visitors can enjoy modern interpretations of traditional Islamic architecture and learn about the development of mosques in the UAE.

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Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, is the biggest mosque found in the UAE. A long time ago the mosques were not so big and the only purpose of the mosques was for prayer. Sheikh Zayed Mosque is there so people can pray and non-Muslims can find out about the Islamic religion.” - Grandmother (68 years old)
Traditional Arabic houses had a central courtyard (housh) and veranda (liwan) and an important part of this area was the majlis. The majlis is a place where people gather, meet, communicate and share knowledge. It is a part of the Arabian culture and it is still found in every Emirati household in the UAE. Often there was one majlis for the women of the household and another for the men.

“During the old days, people used to care about spending their time with their family, neighbors, and friends, and learned how to welcome them and gather into their small majlis. However, people today care about the interior of the majlis, how unique it is decorated and how spacious it is. I miss the old way of inviting people into our majlis just to spend some time together and enjoy the gathering without having any competition about whose majlis looks bigger and better than the other. A majlis is a cultural space, it is a place for social gatherings, and it is one of the cornerstones of Emirati civilization. For years, friends, neighbors, and families would gather in a majlis at sunset.” - Grand aunt, housewife (70 years old)

“In the olden days, children and adults used to gather in their majlis, including poor and wealthy people. Mostly, the majlis were located in the houses of rich people and those of royal families. Also, individuals including poets, wise and experienced people used to gather in these majlis so that knowledge was spread among everyone even kids.” - Mother (42 years old)

“Majlis is an old term for a place where men used to gather for special occasions, or for normal gatherings. All kinds of Emirati food was served to the guests, and this still continues nowadays. I believe the majlis is part of our heritage and culture. It defines the strong relationships that people have between each other.” - Father, retired military (58 years old)
In the past, families would celebrate their newborn and this was the only birthday celebration children would get in their life. This would be on the seventh day after their birth. Birthday parties originate from the multi-cultural society in which we live and therefore we took it from foreigners. I wish there had been birthday parties when I was younger.

- Grandmother (68 years old)

“I used to prepare simple birthday parties for my son and daughter. I used to bring a cake and plan small family birthday parties. I was surprised when one day I had planned a birthday party but my daughter and son had invited every single child in the neighborhood. So, I had to buy more cakes and that made me angry and happy at the same time! Birthday parties are now different and people try to make birthday parties in different ways. For example, they arrange birthdays at the beach or pay a lot of money and invite many people rather than making parties small and cozy. So, ideas for making parties have changed; in the past people used to do this for enjoyment - now people are more competitive about who makes a better birthday party.” - Mother, housewife (42 years old)

UAE National Day is celebrated by Emiratis on December 2nd and it is a very important day for all of the seven Emirates. This is the date when Emiratis were all united into one country in 1971. To celebrate this event Emirati men often performed traditional dances such as Al Ayalah, Harbiyya, Al Razfa, Liwa, Al Habban and Al Youlah. Many of these dances were part of battlefield lore - they are now performed at weddings and traditional events.

*A website was created by Multimedia Design and Communication and Media students at Zayed University. You can learn more about UAE National Day here: www.45years.info
**You can learn more about the formation of the union here: http://www.cultures.ae/index.html
***You can learn more about traditional dances here: http://www.alshindagah.com/may/dances.htm

Birthday Party, 2000
PHOTO CREDIT: Shatha Nabil, FAMILY ALBUM

Birthday Party, 2016
PHOTOGRAPH: Shaima Ibrahim

National Day Celebrations, Zayed Sports City, Abu Dhabi
PHOTOGRAPHS: Shaima Ibrahim
"The Union Day is the day we feel powerful, because before that we used to live in small separated cities that could easily be attacked. I am from Dubai, and before Union Day I used to consider people from Ras al-Khaimah as foreigners."
- Aunt (65 years old)

"It is important to celebrate Union Day because it is a day that means a lot to many people in this country. I like to take pictures of my children on this day and make sure they are dressed appropriately. This will make them even more grateful towards their own country and create more motivation for them to serve their country that keeps on giving them safety and many other profound services." - Mother, a retired teacher (56 years old)

"The spirit of celebrating the UAE National Day is part of our past and future, a spirit which starts with our heritage and will last forever." - Sister (24 years old)

Prior to the formation of the UAE, there were no schools. Individuals used to visit teachers who instructed them about how to read the Quran. Forty years ago, the literacy rate for Emiratis was below 50%; now it is over 93%.

"Before the Union of the Emirates, Kuwait started building the first schools in the UAE. After the formation of the UAE, more organized schools started opening and students were taught more subjects. Today, there are many schools in the country, both public and private. Also, private schools have different curricula, offering people a wide range of studies to choose from. I regret losing our simple schools and old teaching methods. Old teaching methods were more beneficial than the newer ones are. We still remember everything we learned." - Cousin (51 years old)

National Day Celebration at an Emirati School
PHOTO CREDIT: SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPHER.

EDUCATION

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“Education has been one of the most important pillars for developing this country. The Late Sheikh Zayed encouraged all Emiratis to focus on getting educated in order to be instrumental in the development of the country. I regret most about the past is the time I lost trying to run away from my school lectures. I wish I had spent more time in my classroom, because our teachers were very inspirational.” – Father (47 years old)

“Education is something important, and helps to build a great country. Education nowadays is different to the past. We used to learn only the Quran and Maths. The person that memorized the whole Quran would get a gift from the teacher. There was also a celebration or tomina, for the one that memorized the Quran. The celebration would start at school with the teacher and student going around the district chanting. The family of the student that memorized the Quran would become very proud of their son and everyone would respect them. The Sheikh would give the person who memorized the Quran a chance to go to Kuwait to study. Nowadays in the UAE there are many universities that provide great education.” – Housewife (50 years old)

One of the challenges the UAE has faced in the last decades is diversifying its economy and moving away from a reliance on oil. In 1973, the GDP was 11 billion dirhams, by 2015 it was more than 1.46 trillion dirhams. The pace of economic expansion, exceeding that of Singapore, is due in part to the expansion of the labor force*. Among Emiratis, there is still a preference for government jobs but this is slowly changing. The UAE economy is no longer oil dependent (only about 30%) and the focus is on reducing dependency to 20% by the UAE’s Golden Jubilee Celebrations (2021).

“If you asked any UAE citizen about its major trading partner in the past, they would immediately answer India. India was developed earlier than the UAE; therefore, it was the best place for the UAE to trade with. In the district where we used to live, there were a few grocery shops, not more than three. The owners of these shops get their merchandise from India, and would sell this to the people. All the merchandise was simple.”
- Uncle, trader (52 years old)

“In the past, the UAE was not open to different countries for trade but mainly trade was with India, Pakistan, and Iran. They also used to bring oil from Holland through Britain during the time of the British colonization of the UAE. These were the countries where trade took place with the UAE. Nowadays, the UAE trades with the whole world and trade is not limited to certain countries.”
- Mother, housewife (58 years old)

* You can learn more about the spice trade in the UAE and the Spice Souq in Dubai here: http://www.cultures.ae/index.php/elements-of-culture/issue-39
“Going to the beach is something important to me; the beach has had something special about it since I was young. I spent most of my time playing there and building sand castles, because our house was beside the beach. The beach was my second home. What I regret losing most is the original beauty of the beach when there were no buildings and no man-made islands. However, a huge positive change is that these man-made islands and buildings have increased the economy of Dubai.” - Aunt, housewife (45 years old)

“My friends and I used to spend our days playing football at the beach. We grew up playing there feeling it was our second home. Nowadays, the beach and the sand always make us feel relaxed and away from modern day stress. The beach has always been part of our culture, my father was a fisherman and our home was in front of the beach.” - Brother, who works for the military (34 years old)

“I regret that the sea now is different; now there are man-made canals, islands and towers in the sea. In some ways, it makes it look more beautiful; however, the sea has started to lose its identity.” - Grandfather, retired teacher (78 years old)

“Nowadays, the beach has become one of the tourist and family attractions in the UAE. It is a perfect choice for families to gather and hangout when the weather cools down. There is even a beach called Kite Beach that has a track for walking, running and jogging.” - Uncle’s wife, housewife (36 years old)

The UAE has a coastline of over 1,318 km stretching along the Arabian Gulf with numerous islands. The Emirate of Abu Dhabi, alone, has more than 200 natural islands. There is a long and productive relationship between the sea and Emirati culture. Fishing and pearling were occupations before the discovery of oil and the introduction of artificially cultured pearls. Emiratis have long been known for their seafaring and navigation skills. The coral reefs, the seasonal heavy winds or *shamals* and sandstorms made navigation particularly difficult. One of the most famous navigators was Ahmad Ibn Majid from Ras al-Khaimah (1421-1500) who was noted by the Ottoman historian Qutb al Din to have helped Vasco da Gama navigate from India to Africa.
Most of the UAE is desert. The Empty Quarter, Rub’ al Khali, is the largest continuous stretch of sand desert in the world and passes through the UAE, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Oman and Yemen. Here sand dunes can reach heights of 250 meters. There are indications that this area was fertile at one point. This is an oil rich area of the region. The largest desert oasis in the UAE is in Liwa, the Western Region, Abu Dhabi.

“The desert is a part of our daily environment, we have a strong relationship with it. It is not just the geographical nature of our country, but it goes beyond that. We still love going to the desert, because it is our traditional home, especially in winter times. We feel relaxed and feel at peace when we spend winter nights in the desert. Every winter we go and camp in the desert and put our tents together and gather together on the desert sand.” - Friend, teacher in primary school (25 years old)

“People used to meet during the winter in the desert area where it is completely surrounded by sand. Lately, people have been going on desert safaris to enjoy the old traditions and to experience how things used to be.” - Father, businessman (40 years old)

* For more about UAE deserts: http://www.uaeinteract.com/travel/deserts.asp
Falconry is a traditional sport. It was part of desert life and often falcons were trained to hunt to supplement the family meals. Today, falconry is still a popular sport and falcons still continue to be trained in the traditional way. Falconry is controlled by UAE law and the individually micro-chipped falcons are returned to the wild at the end of the annual hunting season.

"I remember how my father really adored falcons and waited eagerly for the season to go hunting in the desert to train his falcon to hunt. This passion grew in me as well, like my father. I began training falcons to hunt and would go on trips with friends who shared this passion. In this picture, you can see the amount of pride my father had, while holding his falcon. Owning a falcon is seen as a sign of pride and wealth. As you can imagine the better the breed, the more expensive the falcon would be. As Emiratis, we grow up to really love falcons and see them as prized creatures full of pride and strength. They still hold the same importance in our society and in Arabia as a whole.” - Father, retired diplomat (64 years old)

Camels are part of Emirati heritage and the desert way of living. Traditionally, they have not just provided transportation, but also served as an important source of nourishment. There is currently research into the health benefits of camel milk. Traditionally camels were part of the bride’s dowry. There are still traditional camel fairs. For example, the Al Ain Camel Market and camel beauty competitions at the Al Dhafra Festival attract 25,000 camels. A prizewinning camel can cost up to US$2.5 million.

* You can learn more about the importance of the camel here: http://www.cultures.ae/index.php/elements-of-culture/issue-22

“Camels and sheep have always played an important role in our heritage, since they were part of our economy when we used to live the lifestyle of the Bedouin nomads in the Gulf. Our homes housed sheep and small baby camels and as those animals grew, we took them to the farms. These animals were not only a source of food, but also of clothing and other necessities. Camels were our source of income in the old days. We used to sell them to the farmers in the area. Now, people use them for business and owners make them participate in camel races. Camels were our source of living in the old days. From them we would get our daily needs such as milk, cheese, and chamy (goose milk with a similar texture to yogurt)." - Grandmother (68 years old)

“People used to keep camels as a source of income, but now they use them for business and owners make them participate in camel races. Camels were our source of living in the old days. From them we would get our daily needs such as milk, cheese, and chamy (goose milk with a similar texture to yogurt). We eat chamy with dates or dihn khanen (butter). I miss something I used to do every morning with my wife, which was waking up and collecting our breakfast meal from the farm, or picking up eggs under the chickens, and getting fresh milk. Nowadays, we get everything from the local store which is not as fresh." - Grandfather (78 years old)
While there are a large number of traditional Emirati sports like falconry and camel racing, many modern sporting events including rugby, football, soccer, tennis, golf, and Formula 1 are also showcased in the UAE. Camel racing and horse racing continue to be popular. Arabian camels are dromedaries and have one hump. They are known to travel up to 100 desert miles without water. The Arabian horse is one of the oldest breeds in the world and used to be used for war*. Now these horses are valued as racehorses and also used for endurance racing. The UAE’s national animal is a medium-sized antelope known as the Arabian Oryx (Al Maha).

"People in the UAE care about camels and camel riding and races. Racing is considered one of the most popular sports in the UAE. Our Sheikhs care a lot about camels and camel racing**. It makes me happy to think that this traditional sport is still practiced in our country. I don’t get the chance to practice my favorite sport of horse riding because I am focusing on my own work and business. However, I still go to the desert sometimes and enjoy looking at these beautiful animals that remind me of the past." - Uncle (39 years old)

"I inherited my passion of horse riding from my grandfather because he was my role model. I remember my grandfather and I, used to go on a daily basis to practice this sport. Once I fell off the horse, and I refused to ride again, but my grandfather forced me to break that fear and never stop following what I am passionate about." - Father (56 years old)

You can also learn more about the Arabian horse here: http://www.cultures.ae/index.php/elements-of-culture/issue-29
Filareti Kotsi (PhD) is an Associate Professor in the College of Communication & Media Sciences at Zayed University in Dubai, UAE. Dr. Kotsi teaches courses related to tourism, heritage and culture in the undergraduate and graduate specialization of ‘Tourism and Cultural Communications’. Her current research is dedicated to the UAE and her projects are mainly related to destination branding. Dr. Kotsi has received several research grant awards, has presented her work in leading international conferences and has published widely in the field of tourism. She holds degrees from the Aristotle University in Greece (BA), the Catholic University of Louvain (MA) in Belgium and she received her doctorate in Communications from the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Lyon, France. She is the Senior Manager in Communication and Outreach of the Middle East North Africa (MENA) Chapter of the Academy of International Business.

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