



Al Ain Enthusiast



by Christopher John Payne
alainenthusiast.com

Al Ain Enthusiast

How to settle into life in Al Ain – easily and gracefully

by Christopher John Payne

Version 2.0: Monday, April 09, 2012

Cover photos: top: Al Ain Fort near Rotana Hotel; middle: Waterfall Roundabout, in the south of Al Ain; bottom: Etisalat Building (signifying earth, water, air – with fire in the belly of the drivers speeding past the Etisalat Building). At the time of writing, all photos in this ebook were taken by Chris, apart from the aerial view of Bawadi Mall, and the shot of the Alliance Francaise and accompanying map.

Introduction

I have had a lot of fun putting together the website, alainenthusiast.com, and this ebook over the last 2 years: all 44,000 words of it – in 150 articles, with 640 photos! I hope you find some useful information here and that it helps you have a lot of fun while you're living in, or visiting, Al Ain.

I do intend to produce occasional updates. These will be especially useful and frequent if I get feedback from you and others by way of new information, corrected information, photos, questions and so on. I will mention



your name in the Acknowledgements unless you request I don't!

Thanks for downloading this ebook, and do come over and say hello if you see me around the town.

Four apologies:

1: The chapter listing has no matching page numbers. Use the search facility in your pdf reader to jump to relevant sections – or just scroll through to find the section you want.

2: As articles are in alphabetical order according to each article's title, you may have to jump around to find other similar information. However the Contents section below is sorted by category.

3: It would be great if some of the photos in this ebook appeared on the right-hand side, next to the text rather than ranging left or centre with all the words underneath. However this would take more time on the editing front than I'm willing to spend! Also this pdf mentions embedded videos: go to the main site to watch these.

4: I have taken the liberty of promoting my own services on a few pages. Simply ignore these if they have no interest to you.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Payne". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Chris" and last name "Payne" clearly distinguishable.

Dedication

To my darling wife Catherine, and young sons Toby and Felix, who put up with my constant snapping of photos while we're out and about, and my distracted air as I'm off in the clouds thinking of things to write about in my ebooks and courses, or scribbling away in my constantly-present notepad.

Contents by category

- Category: [Arriving in Al Ain](#)
 - [Disclaimer](#)
 - [Al Ain survival guide](#)
 - [Choosing where to live](#)
 - [Sending and receiving post](#)
- Category: [Challenges](#)
 - [Getting rid of termites, cockroaches, stray dogs and cats in Al Ain](#)
 - [English speakers aren't always easy to find](#)
 - [Electricity spikes](#)
- Category: [Children related](#)
 - [Al Ain Paintball paintballing](#)
 - [Al Ain Raceway, Al Ain](#)
 - [Al Ain Vipers ice hockey team](#)
 - [Swimming team at the Hilton Hotel, Al Ain](#)
 - [Burj Khalifa / Khalifa Tower, Dubai](#)
 - [Dubai Aquarium, Dubai Mall](#)
 - [Music and dance at the House Of Arts, Al Ain](#)
 - [Football at the Palm Resort in Al Ain](#)
- Category: [churches](#)
 - [St Mary's Catholic Church in Al Ain](#)
 - [Al Ain Evangelical Church](#)
- Category: [cost of living](#)
 - [How to buy used / secondhand mobile phones in Al Ain](#)
 - [Al Ain Distribution Company: how to pay your electricity and water bill](#)
 - [How to pay your Etisalat bill in Al Ain](#)
 - [Tailoring, stitching and sewing work in Al Ain](#)
 - [Pinkberry non-fat yoghurt in Al Ain](#)
 - [Looking for a vet / veterinary clinic in Al Ain?](#)
 - [Apple Store opens in the UAE, selling iPads, iPhones, Macs etc](#)
 - [Getting eLife from Etisalat in Al Ain](#)
 - [Directory enquiries via Etisalat in Al Ain](#)
 - [Sophie Studio for printing photos in Al Ain](#)
 - [Buying spectacles in Al Ain: Al Hakeem Opticians](#)
 - [Renting property in Al Ain](#)
 - [Refilling ink cartridges in Al Ain](#)
 - [Boys and men's haircuts in Al Ain](#)
 - [Getting help with household jobs](#)
 - [Comparing shopping prices with the UK](#)
 - [Accessing the internet in Al Ain](#)

- [Utility bill prices in Al Ain](#)
- **Category:** [Driving directions](#)
 - [Directions to the Municipality Theatre if you live in Al Ain](#)
 - [Directions from Dubai to the Al Ain Municipality Theatre](#)
 - [Directions from Abu Dhabi to the Al Ain Municipality Theatre](#)
- **Category:** [Driving related](#)
 - [Car accidents in Al Ain](#)
 - [Where to get your car electrics checked or fixed, and your air conditioning too](#)
 - [Renting a car from Fast Rent A Car in Al Ain](#)
 - [How to renew car registration in Al Ain](#)
 - [Car insurance in Al Ain](#)
 - [Getting your UAE driving licence in Al Ain](#)
 - [Avoid this parking mistake in Al Ain!](#)
 - [How to get a UAE driving license if your UK etc one has expired](#)
 - [Driving on the roads in Al Ain](#)
 - [Garmin nuvi 1410 GPS navigation](#)
 - [Fill 'er up](#)
- **Category:** [Dubai](#)
 - [Dolphinarium, Dubai](#)
 - [Burj Khalifa / Khalifa Tower, Dubai](#)
 - [Dubai Aquarium, Dubai Mall](#)
 - [Dubai Fountain](#)
- **Category:** [Evenings out](#)
 - [Taj Spices Indian, Chinese and Arabic Restaurant, Al Foah, Al Ain](#)
 - [Steak and Grill at the Palm Golf Club in Al Ain](#)
 - [Grand Cinemas at Bawadi Mall, Al Ain](#)
 - [Al Ain Mall cinemas](#)
 - [Classical music concerts held in 2011 in Al Ain](#)
 - [WOMAD Festival, Al Ain](#)
 - [Grand Cinemas Rotana, Al Ain](#)
 - [See a good movie for free at the Alliance Francaise, Al Ain](#)
 - [Al Ain Choral Society](#)
- **Category:** [Hospitals](#)
 - [Oasis Hospital in Al Ain](#)
- **Category:** [Hotels](#)
 - [Rotana Hotel in Al Ain](#)
 - [Intercontinental Hotel, Al Ain](#)
- **Category:** [Libraries](#)
 - [Living Water Library in Al Ain](#)
 - [Zayed Library in Al Ain](#)

- [Al Ain English Speaking School Community Library](#)
- **Category:** [Mental/physical health](#)
 - [Skin treatments in Al Ain](#)
 - [Gulf Dental Clinic, Al Ain](#)
 - [Royal London Dental Clinic, Al Ain](#)
 - [Dental treatment in Al Ain](#)
 - [Triumph over life's challenges](#)
 - [Music and dance at the House Of Arts, Al Ain](#)
 - [Learn Pilates with Thuy Burritt in Al Ain](#)
- **Category:** [Miscellaneous](#)
 - [Hiring a plumber in Al Ain](#)
 - [House moving and removal service in Al Ain](#)
 - [Oasis Living magazine feature on me and this website](#)
 - [Water delivery in Al Ain](#)
 - [The National newspaper, Abu Dhabi](#)
 - [Salaries in Al Ain](#)
 - [British and American slang terms](#)
 - [Would you like a website?](#)
 - [Triumph over life's challenges](#)
- **Category:** [Oman](#)
 - [Crowne Plaza Hotel, Sohar, Oman](#)
- **Category:** [Points of interest](#)
 - [UAE National Day](#)
 - [Transporting livestock in Al Ain](#)
 - [Al Qattara Arts Center, Al Ain](#)
 - [Etisalat junction, Sanaiya, Al Ain](#)
 - [Clock Tower 'Roundabout', Al Ain](#)
 - [Waterfall roundabout](#)
- **Category:** [Schooling](#)
 - [Al Ain English Speaking School](#)
 - [The Choueifat School in Al Ain](#)
- **Category:** [Shopping](#)
 - [Marina Mall in Abu Dhabi](#)
 - [Patchi chocolates in Al Ain](#)
 - [Abela Supermarket in Al Ain](#)
 - [Sharaf DG store in Al Ain for electronics](#)
 - [Buying alcohol, wine, beer at Spinney's in Al Ain](#)
 - [Buying rugs in Al Ain](#)
 - [Buying indoor and outdoor plants in Al Ain](#)
 - [iStore in Al Ain selling Apple Macs, iPhones, iPads and iPods](#)

- [Noticeboards in Al Ain for buying / selling cars, furniture, etc](#)
- [Buying from ebay](#)
- [Spinneys and La Brioche, Al Ain](#)
- [Choithrams in Al Ain](#)
- [Daiso in Al Ain for knick knacks](#)
- [Buying jewellery in Al Ain](#)
- [Buying alcohol: the Al Ain Hilton Liquor Store](#)
- [Bawadi Mall in Al Ain](#)
- [Chocolate lovers](#)
- [Shopping locally](#)
- [Bottled water](#)
- [Comparing shopping prices with the UK](#)
- [Mobile phones](#)
- [Newspapers and magazines](#)
- [Where to buy English books](#)
- **Category: [Sport](#)**
 - [Hamdan Bin Mohammed Bin Rashid Sports Complex, Dubai](#)
 - [Al Ain Swimming Club](#)
 - [Sand Golf Club, Al Ain](#)
 - [Al Ain Vipers ice hockey team](#)
 - [Swimming team at the Hilton Hotel, Al Ain](#)
 - [Football at the Palm Resort in Al Ain](#)
- **Category: [Videos](#)**
 - [Etisalat junction, Sanaiya, Al Ain](#)
 - [Clock Tower 'Roundabout', Al Ain](#)
 - [Burj Khalifa / Khalifa Tower, Dubai](#)
 - [Dubai Aquarium, Dubai Mall](#)
 - [Crowne Plaza Hotel, Sohar, Oman](#)
 - [Music and dance at the House Of Arts, Al Ain](#)
 - [Al Ain Wildlife Park Bird Show](#)
 - [Dubai Fountain](#)
- **Category: [Weekend fun](#)**
 - [Falconry Festival in Al Ain in 2011](#)
 - [Al Ain Palace Museum](#)
 - [Picnicking or camping in the desert near Al Ain](#)
 - [Shakespeare and Co. tea rooms in Al Ain](#)
 - [Jahli Park, Al Ain](#)
 - [Al Ain Paintball paintballing](#)
 - [TEDxAlAin TEDx conference, Al Ain](#)
 - [Ice Land Water Park, Ras Al Khaimah review](#)
 - [UAE Digest magazine, Dubai](#)

- [Al Masaood travel agent in Al Ain](#)
- [Journey from Al Ain to Fujairah](#)
- [Le Meridien Al Aqah Beach Resort Hotel, Fujairah - views from balcony](#)
- [UAE Offroaders](#)
- [Hili Fun City, Al Ain](#)
- [Al Ain Wildlife Park and Resort](#)
- [Palm Resort / Rugby Club, Al Ain](#)
- [Intercontinental Hotel, Al Ain](#)
- [Al Ain Wildlife Park Dinosaur Exhibition](#)
- [Le Meridien Al Aqah Beach Resort Hotel, Fujairah](#)
- [Le Meridien makes our 10th wedding anniversary extra special](#)
- [Green Mubazzarah in Al Ain](#)
- [Al Ain Wildlife Park Bird Show](#)
- [Hili Oasis](#)
- [Al Ain Paradise Hanging Gardens](#)
- [Hilton Hotel in Al Ain](#)
- [Weekend activities](#)
- **Category:** [Where to live](#)
 - [Which is better: Al Ain or Abu Dhabi?](#)

Abela Supermarket in Al Ain

A very popular supermarket for ex-pats in Al Ain is Abela which is located in the far west of the town, near Tawam Hospital, and next to the large Oasis Village compound where many doctors and others live.

Here's the outside...



Here's the entrance to the store on the left...



Also inside this building is a pharmacy/chemist, a toy shop, a florist, and a bank. And on the right hand side is Abela's pork shop. The sign above the entrance says it's for non-Muslims...



We love shopping at Abela as the bread is superb. Amir, Abela's manager, is a lovely guy, and he says the bread is baked fresh every day, and any bread that is unsold each day is thrown away. He told me that there are 2 Abela supermarkets in Abu Dhabi. The owner is Lebanese.

Abela has a great range of magazines and newspapers. Prices are similar to Lulu's but Abela can be more expensive for non-mainstream fresh vegetables. By that I mean that prices are similar for tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, potatoes, onions, apples, bananas, etc – but Abela is more expensive for strawberries, aubergines (zucchini), green beans, etc.

Accessing the internet in Al Ain

Accessing the Internet here in Al Ain is more expensive than in the UK or US. We are paying in the region of £25 a month for a one meg line. We managed quite fine with a 512k line for a few months, but accessing YouTube was a little too frustrating at times at this speed so we upgraded. One of the Abu Dhabi guidebooks says that you can only get an Internet connection if you also pay for a landline. This may have been the case a year or 2 ago, but it is no longer true now.

One downside of living in Al Ain is that you can only have an Internet connection once you get your residence visa, so until then you will need to access the Internet in an office, at an Internet cafe, or at a local coffee shop where you will get free Internet access when you buy a drink or snack.

The first thing that we did when we got our residence visas was to sign up for an Internet account at the impressive Etisalat building in Sanaiya, a district in the south part of Al Ain.

Here is a shot of the building taken from the west...



Notice the canopy for the Al Ain Club's football stadium to the right of it.

Here's the building from the north...



Notice the cranes towering over the new mall called The Mall! This will open in the summer of 2012 and will house a Carrefour supermarket. Next door (south of it) is a Lulu hypermarket which has been there for a few years.

As the building we live in has no name or number, and the road we live on has no name, I was fascinated to see how the staff at Etisalat would find out where we lived. We were asked to describe where we lived and from a brief description we were shown a computer monitor screen with an overhead map of the town and then we drilled down to identify our building which had its

own unique number. The very next day the engineers from Etisalat came round and within 30 minutes we were online – which was a tremendous relief.

Al Ain Choral Society

Al Ain Choral Society is a mixed adult choir. Each year the choir normally does a Christmas concert in December and a less formal musical event in the late spring. The members rehearse on Sunday evenings from 7.30 to 9pm in the Music Room at Al Ain English Speaking School. New members are always welcome: adult and young adult, male and female.

The repertoire is varied: from traditional to modern, classical to popular.

Says contact Geraldine Kershaw, "Some of the songs we sing are in harmony but others will be unison, and we include a wide range of pieces from traditional to classical to modern. If you like singing why not come along? We look forward to welcoming some new singers this year!"

For further information or for directions to the school, contact Geraldine at gkershaw [at] emirates.net.ae, or telephone her on 050 563 9719.

Al Ain Distribution Company: how to pay your electricity and water bill

All the supply of electricity and water in Al Ain is handled by the Al Ain Distribution Company. (It's not like in the UK etc where there are a number of suppliers charging different prices.)

There are 2 ways to pay your bills. Option 1...

- Go to an Al Ain Distribution counter: there's one below Megamart in Al Ain Mall: go down the moving walkway: it's opposite Gloria Jeans coffee shop.
- Give the staff there the number of your account which is on the electricity meter at your property. The bill they give you will cover electricity and water. Sometimes that bill is entirely in Arabic, so there's an element of trust when you pay!. At least you'll be going away with a receipt. :)

Pay

Option 2...

- Go to an Etisalat payment machine: there's one in Jimi Mall next to the far right entrance.
- Enter your account number
- Feed in bank notes
- Collect your receipt

Let me know if you know of other places where there is a payment machine or payment counter, or any other info to improve this article.

Al Ain English Speaking School

This is the main school that children from the UK attend in Al Ain. (Our children spent a year at the Choueifat School in Al Ain as there were no spaces at AESS in September 2009. Only one other child at that school was from the UK.)

AESS is an excellent school with enthusiastic teachers and a lively community.

(If you have searched the net for information about this school you may have come across some criticism. Most of this is very out of date now.)

Walking round it 'feels' like a British school.

I drop my sons off at the school entrance at 7.15am. Our 8-year-old in Year 3 finishes at 2.30pm, so to keep out of the heat we go into the school library for 20 minutes until our 11-year-old in Year 7 finishes at 2.50pm.

A few afternoons a week one or both boys stays after school to play football (soccer) or cricket.

There are lots of out-of-school activities including overseas holidays, trips to museum, trip to an explosive, fun-packed science show called Brainiac in Dubai. Music lessons take place during the day. There's an orchestra. The football teams compete against other teams in Dubai. There was a Quiz Night for parents at a local golf club at the start of term. The parents evening in October was very well organised and attended. A large book supplier in Abu Dhabi brought thousands of books in October and completely filled the large hall with popular British children's books, with part of the takings going to school funds.

Here are some photos.

This one shows the left of the main entrance...



...and this shows the main entrance, and what's to the right of it...



Inside the grounds...



And to the right of the above shot...



A covered play area for younger children...



See a separate article on the [Community Library](#) at this school.

Al Ain English Speaking School Community Library

The Al Ain English Speaking School Community Library is currently open Fridays, 11am to 1pm, and Sundays 2.30pm-4pm. The library is always open on Fridays, even during holidays.

(The library is generally open most days from 2.30pm to at least 3pm as children pop in after they finish school.)

You don't have to have children at the school to take out books. The yearly joining fee is about £25 for a family. Contact Asa, one of the librarians, at asalives at hotmail.com for more information.

This is a shot of the building containing the library...



Here are 3 of the 6 tall bookcases containing books for adults...



And there are loads of books for children too...





Books suitable for secondary school age children are in a different library inside the main part of the school and aren't currently accessible to families who don't have children at the school.

Al Ain Evangelical Church

The Al Ain Evangelical Church is located behind the Oasis Hospital, which is across the road from the Etisalat Building...



It has 2 services every Friday: at 9am and 11am.

I'm not a church goer, but I was very keen to check it out, so I went along this morning to the 9am service. This is what it looked like before it started, and most of the seats got filled up...



The church has 5 different rock-type bands, and one of these, led by a guy called Campbell from Australia, ran through several songs for the first half an hour, with the lyrics projected onto the screen you can see to the right of the cross in the photo above.

After a rundown of church activities over the coming weeks, Reverend Brad Hillman gave a 40-minute sermon, again using Powerpoint. The band repeated one of the earlier songs, and the service ended: it was 10.30am.

I found the whole thing to be quite heart-opening, so I'll certainly visit again. I was brought up a Catholic, so this was a very different experience: modern music and a long sermon, compared with generally traditional hymns, prayers, and a short sermon.

I have been told that the 11am service is much more packed out.

Oh yes, all the children go into a separate room for activities and stories to suit their age and level of understanding.

Finally, behind the church is a small swimming pool, so I popped in as I left to see Reverend Steve Tripp baptising a young woman in it.

Their website is at www.aaec.ae.

And their telephone number is 03 722 3337

Al Ain Mall cinemas

Al Ain Mall has a cinema on the top level which has 4 screens.

You can go to the [Grand Cinemas website](#) to see what is showing. As of the time of writing this short article, this website does not have a separate listing for the Al Ain Mall Cinema. Al Ain Mall Cinema staff told me today that if you go to this site and look at the listing for the Rotana Grand Cinemas, then the Al Ain Mall Cinema shows the same films at the same times.

(I would recommend you ring to confirm a film time just in case!)

Call them on 03 751 1228.

Ticket price: 30 aed

Other cinemas...

[Bawadi Mall](#)

[Rotana Grand Cinemas](#)

Al Foah Cinemas (5 screens; opened in January 2012)

[Alliance Francaise](#)

Al Ain Paintball paintballing

There's a great Paintballing Centre in Al Ain called Al Ain Paintball: Desert Storm – which is in the same complex as the Al Ain Raceway karting track.

Here's what the reception building looks like, with my eldest son, Toby, on the left approaching the entrance, attending a birthday party treat here with several mates. My second son Felix is on the far right, feeling a bit left out, I guess...



I'm not really into guns, but this shot somehow gets my heart racing and the fingers on my right hand twitching!...



Side of bulding...



One of the netted battle areas round the back...



Close-up...



A second, covered battle zone...



I didn't notice a third battle zone with more varied obstacles in it.

Here are some battle dress on the line...



And a target practice area...



During one battle, Toby got dust in an eye and took off his mask for a few seconds – and got hit on his cheek by a paint pellet. These pellets hurt! Ouch! So if one of your children attends make sure you tell them never to take his/her mask off during a battle!

As well as being a great day out for adults or children on a weekend, this place would be ideal for team building in businesses too.

Al Ain Paintball's opening times are 4pm to midnight. During Eid it's open from 12 noon to 12 midnight.

Call 050 773 2818.

Al Ain Palace Museum

The Al Ain Palace Museum is a wonderful place to visit. It was opened to the public in 2001.





Entry is free. The Palace Museum consists of 4 watch towers and 37 rooms, so allow 1-2 hours to walk round it.



Sheik Zayed's jeep is in the courtyard...











In the room above, at the far end on the right, is a framed photo of Sheikh Zayed with British royalty: the Queen Mother, the Queen and Prince Philip...



The guard with his rifle looks very smart...



Al Ain Paradise Hanging Gardens

The **Al Ain Paradise Gardens** is probably Al Ain's most famous attraction, attracting 7,000 visitors in one day when it reopened in February 2012 after being closed for months for refurbishment. About 1,000 people visit each day now.

Opening times: 9am to 9pm, but recently I visited the Gardens during the week and they were closed until 2pm. Entry is free. You can take drinks into the gardens, but you can't take food.

Fridays is for families only. Borrow some children for the day if necessary: the gardens are a must see! :)

How to get to the **Al Ain Paradise Gardens**...

- Put these co-ordinates into your satellite navigation device: N24.16557 E055.70950.
- If you are travelling east to west along 'school road' in the southern part of Al Ain, go past the Al Ain English Speaking School on your left, turn left at the next roundabout, and go across the next roundabout, this is the next roundabout you come to...



You should see red, white and blue spheres in the middle of the roundabout, as well as a small pagoda.

You have just driven southwards, but this photo is taken from the other side of the roundabout, looking back northwards.

As you go across this roundabout, still heading south, turn right after 100 metres where you see this sign...



Turn right at the next little roundabout, then turn into the car park next to the entrance to the gardens.

The **Al Ain Paradise Gardens** not a big place, but I think it's beautiful.

This is what the entrance to the **Al Ain Paradise Gardens** looked like in the summer of 2010...



And this is what it looks like now...



A close-up of the new sign...



The Guinness World Records notice...



...which says...

Guinness World Records Certificate

The largest display of hanging baskets consists of 2,968 arrangements, and was achieved by Akar Landscaping Services Agriculture (UAE) in the Zakher area in Al Ain, UAE, on 28 February 2011.

Here's what you'll see at these gardens...





























There are toilets / rest rooms here...



...and there are free water dispensers if you need a drink.

Outside the grounds...





Al Ain Raceway, Al Ain

If you travel east of the Hilton Hotel in Al Ain, drive past the Danat Hotel (previously called the Intercontinental Hotel), and carry on for about a kilometre, you'll see the Al Ain Raceway on your right (just around the time you say to yourself "It can't be this far out of town!").

It's a great place for a birthday party treat. One of my 11-year-old son's friends invited him and 2 others to create a party of 4. They had a blast: 2 15-minute sessions in karts which travel up to 40kph. (Though you'll swallow hard when you discover the damage to your wallet.)

Here's the reception area...



There's even a model of the entire circuit. It's a big, complex track you can drive round!...



And there's a large showroom on the right if you fancy buying your own kart...





Here are 4 karts ready to set off...



Racing round the big track outside...



My Toby sharing the highlights of his experience in the waiting room before the second 15-minute session...



Each racer gets a sheet at the end showing all his/her racing statistics...



...and a PC screen hung on the wall shows who did the fastest lap time, who was fastest overall etc – perfect for competitive youngsters!

In terms of sheer professionalism I couldn't fault the place: it's brilliantly kitted out and very well maintained. A spot-on day out when you're feeling flush!

What's more, this place hosts professional races every year or 2, with serious kart racers flying in from all round the world to compete!

Update: I received an email from a reader...

"Re: Your site is fabulous! My name is David and I will be visiting Al Ain later this year for the Karting Rotax Max Grand Finals at the the Al Ain Raceway which will reunite the 265 best karting drivers from all 5 continents and some 60 countries. Your website is a gem for all that have apprehensions concerning a trip to that part of the World.

Al Ain survival guide

I've spent many years counselling / supporting people with challenges in their lives.

I thought I'd write a few words for people who are considering coming here, and also for those already here.

By all means, stop reading now if you just want to know about what's happening in Al Ain.

If you're thinking of coming here...

Al Ain is no better or worse than anywhere else: it's just different. Articles and photos on this site focus on the positive, though I do list many of the challenges here, via the Challenges tab on the Navigation Bar at the top of the screen.

I have spoken to people who have come here to escape from issues back home. They soon find the same issues showing up here too.

I have also spoken with people who had a lot of trepidation about coming here – and were delightfully surprised by all the good things that are in this town. (I partly created this site to support people with some apprehension about coming here.)

If you're already here...

In my experience, when I have seen more positives than negatives to a situation then, at some point, something will happen which will bring me back 'down to earth'. So I put energy into seeing events in my life as neutral rather than fabulous or terrible which are both distortions of reality.

Hero's Journey model

I am sure you know the Star Wars films. When George Lucas was writing the script he got stuck with piles of notes and ideas but no clear structure.

Then he came across a man called Joseph Campbell, a mythologist considered by many to be the foremost expert on myths and legends in the world.

He had written a book based on his research called *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* in which Campbell said that pretty much every myth, legend and fairy tale have the same structure which he called the Monomyth or 'Hero's Journey'.

George read this book, and applied the Hero's Journey model to his script. As a result he created one of the highest-grossing films of all time.

So what?

Occasionally I use the Hero's Journey model when I work with clients so they can see where they are on the journey, where they've been and where they're heading.

Let's look at the model, relate it to the first Star Wars film, and later link it to life in Al Ain. I've broken the model into 10 steps. (Other writers break into more or less steps.)...

1. Stuck in the wasteland
2. A call to adventure
3. Refusal of the call
4. Acceptance of the call
5. Meeting a mentor
6. Enter a magical new world
7. A road of trials
8. Achieving the goal / learning something new
9. Return to the ordinary world
10. Using what you've learned back in the ordinary world

The above steps will make more sense when we slot the plot of the first Star Wars film (A New Hope) into those steps...

1. Stuck in the wasteland (Luke is bored, going nowhere)
2. A call to adventure (stumbles across the robots R2-D2 and C3PO and hears their story)
3. Refusal of the call (...and goes back to his aunt and uncle's farm, but it has been destroyed by Stormtroopers)
4. Acceptance of the call (he agrees to go on the adventure)
5. Meeting a mentor (he meets Obiwan Kenobi, a wise old man)

6. Enter a magical new world (meets Han Solo in a cantina full of other-worldly characters)
7. A road of trials (various adventures, fights, narrow escapes)
8. Achieving the goal / learning something new (taps into his 'inner core' / soul / higher self / Force – and destroys the Death Star)
9. Return to the ordinary world (gets a medal)
10. Using what you've learned back in the ordinary world

You'll find many, many blockbuster films and books that use this model. There are even books and even online courses which show how various films use this model to great effect.

Now let's look at how the Hero's Journey might relate to someone moving to or living in Al Ain...

1. Stuck in the wasteland (bored in their country of origin, going nowhere)
2. A call to adventure (sees ads in the newspaper, online; or a friend / colleague mentions working overseas)
3. Refusal of the call (initial hesitation or dismissal of the thought, idea, suggestion)
4. Acceptance of the call (says yes, and starts a train of actions)
5. Meeting a mentor (reads a book, finds info online, gets advice off an employer or someone already in Al Ain)
6. Enter a magical new world (different terrain, temperature, currency, customs, working days, language, driving conditions)
7. A road of trials (difficulty of settling in, problems getting residency visa, problems getting suitable accommodation, children don't settle in the school well, homesickness, and so on)
8. Achieving the goal / learning something new (learn more about self; learn new skills; make new friends; get more qualifications; get more experience for a curriculum vitae / resume; and so on)

9. Return to the ordinary world (go back to their country of origin)

10. Using what you've learned back in the ordinary world (share what you've learned; tell funny stories; see the world, people, other cultures, your homeland in a new way)

Now you can look at the above and see where you are...

- If you're feeling bored / stuck – even if you're in Al Ain now – you could look for the Calls To Adventure all around you.
- If you are ignoring such Calls, that's okay. At some point you'll say yes to a Call.
- Trials and challenges are part of the journey of life: they're inevitable.

Sometimes we have a fantasy of wanting 'an easy life' – but to keep things simple, this isn't possible: we'll always have challenges, even if we were to win US\$50 million on the lottery: challenges such as: where to invest the money; which new house(s) to buy; finding and employing staff to run the house(s); friends / family wanting money; feeling bored after being on holiday after holiday; putting on weight through so much rich living; and so on.

So if we can look at our day-to-day life through the Hero's Journey model we can see that we're on this journey no matter what

We're always learning, growing, applying what we've learned, sharing that with others and, as a result, making a difference in the world.

Which means that, with some study of the above, and inner reflection, we can enjoy the journey of life more.

If you want to know more about my philosophical approach to life, or you have a challenge you'd like support with, go to my main site where there are articles and videos you may find of use: www.triumphoverchallenges.com.

If you have any comments about the above, let me know by commenting below, [contacting me directly](#), or phoning me .

Al Ain Swimming Club



Mansour Sultan Al Matbouie (right) is the director of the Al Ain Swimming Team at the Al Ain Club. He says, "We are the best team in the UAE: we won the cup this year. We have 12 players in the national team. This season we broke 27 records. We have a swimming school with 5 age and ability levels.

Ashraf Salah (below) is the head coach for the team, having been with the club for 7 years in all. He was a coach for the national team for 3 years before that.



This is the pool where the training takes place. It's behind the Al Jimi Police Station – 2 blocks north of the Al Jimi Mall...



My son Toby who is on the team is on the left in this photo...



Contact Ashraf on 050 5498 486 if you want to know more.

Al Ain Vipers ice hockey team



Al Ain has its very own ice hockey team, the Al Ain Vipers. They run youth teams and a men's team and provide training from absolute beginner upwards.

They are now taking applications for new members from boys and girls between the ages of 4 and 18 to play what they call "the coolest game in town".

All players welcome regardless of experience – they provide training from beginning to advanced level players. Equipment is available from the club.

Weekly training takes place on Saturday mornings at the Hili Ice Rink. Additionally players participate in weekly Viper League games, tournaments in the UAE and around the Gulf, and occasional hockey camps run by professional players and coaches.

Players between 12 and 18 practice Saturdays 9-10.30am; Sundays 6-7pm; Mondays 5.30-6.30pm

Players over 9 under 12 practice Saturdays 10:30 am -12 pm; Tuesdays 6.45 pm - 7.45 pm

Players under 9 practice at Al Ain Mall Tuesdays 5.30 pm - 6.30 pm

For more information or to register your child go to www.alainvipers.com.

You can also contact Tim Klassen, Vipers President, at: 050 763 6120 or via [vipertklassen @ gmail.com](mailto:vipertklassen@gmail.com)

Al Ain Wildlife Park and Resort

Here is a selection of photos to show what a great place this is...

Here's the entrance to the Al Ain Wildlife Resort. You can see the hollow 'cookie cutter' animal sculptures on the central reservation...



You get a terrific map when you hand over your money...



This is what you see as you walk through, having paid your money: a pleasant covered area with a waterfall and lion sculptures...



You'll see this immediately to your right. Beautiful flamingos...



Further to your left... Which way now? Clear signposts...



And to the left of this...



And a little further to the left... Notice the mosque in the Wildlife Park...



A train to drive you round on a whistlestop tour. All aboard!...



Monkeys...



White lions...



Giraffes..



Rhinos...



Lovely view of the mountains...



Covered area nearby, and grass to lounge on...



The spray can cool you down when it gets hot...



A pretty fountain...



The play area...



To the right of here, past the orangutans is the arena to watch the Bird Show (link to separate article)...



Next to this arena is a building containing birds...



...and penguins...



Entry fees are very cheap for a family.

There's a restaurant there for lunch, serving burgers, pizzas etc. And there are kiosks selling drinks, snacks, ice-creams, cuddly tigers, etc.

Enjoy!

Al Ain Wildlife Park Bird Show

At 7.30pm at the Al Ain Wildlife Park most evenings, you can watch a 25-minute bird show which is in Arabic and English. The female presenters are terrific, using just the right language to engage and inform children.

I shot the following video to give you a little idea what the show is like. It's pretty poor footage, and the battery ran out on my camera as I filmed this show, so I missed some of the best bits. But I have included this video anyway...

By the way, the birds in the background at the end of the video are ibis.

Al Ain Wildlife Park Dinosaur Exhibition

The dinosaur exhibition at the Al Ain Wildlife Park and Resort ran for a number of months until the summer of 2010. So it's not there now, but it may come again in the future.

So I'm posting these photos so you can see what it was like. It was very impressive! These creatures moved about (complete with quiet hydraulic hissing sounds), and made 'raaaring' noises too...

This is a brachiosaurus...



Triceratops...



The 'king', T-Rex...



Another fierce one...



This next one squirts venom or something: see the water coming out of its mouth!...



Cute eggs that wiggle about. Oh boy, they're hatching! Where's David – or Richard – Attenborough?...



Another T-Rex...



Dinosaurs galore...



You can even ride on their backs. Thankfully they've been well fed first...



...and control an 'uncovered' a stegosaurus with a joystick and 2 buttons...



...and uncover new bones in the sand...



As I said at the beginning of this article, a wonderful exhibition which gives you a flavour of how modern and professional an operation it is at this park.

Al Masaood travel agent in Al Ain

After we had settled here in Al Ain, I spoke with or visited 4 different travel agents in Al Ain. I asked one about flights to the UK: they just told me to go to the Etihad website. Two others I asked to quote for a holiday to Egypt: I chased both a few times and didn't get what I wanted. The fourth was just

disinterested in my call, telling me to call back another time!! None of these companies really seemed that bothered about getting my business!! :)

Then... a friend mentioned Al Masaood travel agent in the centre of Al Ain. So I popped along to book a Christmas holiday. It was a toss-up between the Hilton Hotel in Salalah in Oman and our favourite hotel: Le Meridien Al Aqah Beach Resort in Fujairah for a 6-night break.

This is the place...



This is what it looks like inside...



What a breath of fresh air! The sales person I met was professional, funny, patient, spoke brilliant English, and handled my enquiry brilliantly.

How to get there...

Al Masaood is located on Sanaiya Street, about 300 metres south of the central Post Office in Al Ain, on the right hand side, as you travel south towards Sanaiya / the Etisalat building.

Here's a link to the [Al Masaood website](#).

Telephone: 03 761 0001.

Al Qattara Arts Center, Al Ain

In the northern part of Al Ain, roughly 2 roads north of Al Jimi Mall, and to the left (west) of the road going out to Duabi, is the Al Quattara district with the Al Quattara Oasis.

This is the location for the Al Qattara Arts Center. You see the back of the building from the road, and you have to go over the sand and round the 'back' to find the front. This is what you'll see...



As you step inside the entrance you enter a courtyard with this view to your right...



...and this view to your left...



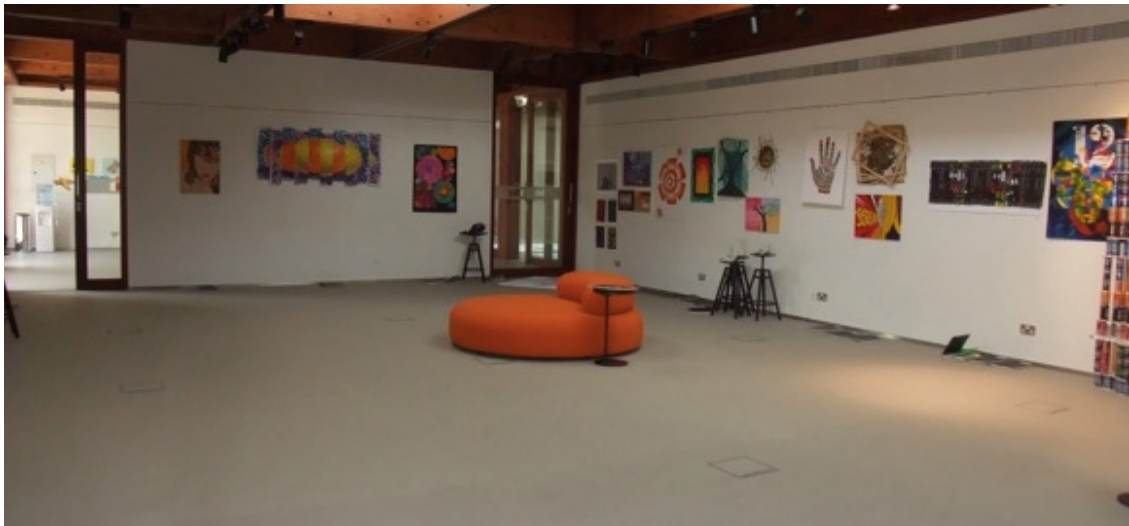
Slide back the glass door you'll see in the photo above, and you'll see this on your left...



This gallery is on your right...



Here's a view from the bottom end...



These are some of the exhibits there when I went in June 2011, about 2 months after it opened. They will give you an idea of the kind of art to expect which may encourage you to visit this delightful place.

This piece, presumably of Dubai with the Burj Khalifa in the middle, is about a metre across...



I think this is a dissected camel's heart (as big as a human's head)...



Bath time...



And more...



Walking further into the Center is this corridor. I loved the shadows cast from above...



Two beautiful sculptures...



One of them in detail...



There are various studios where you can learn to paint etc...





There's more art on another corridor's walls...



Amazing, huh!

Do go and have a look sometime. They have classes running during the week.

Apple Store opens in the UAE, selling iPads, iPhones, Macs etc

Apple opened an online store in the UAE in September 2011.

Now you can get a high-end MacBook Pro for about 500 dirhams less than previous local prices.

The Apple Store's prices are about 10% less than UK prices, but 15% higher than US prices: though if you ordered an Apple product from the US you may have to pay local sales tax, plus shipping costs from the US to the UAE, then 5% customs duty once the goods arrive in this country.

Orders over 520 dirhams are sent out free of charge, and most goods should reach you in about 3 days.



Go to <http://store.apple.com/ae>. Happy shopping!

Avoid this parking mistake in Al Ain!

Take a look at this photo and see if you can see what's wrong with it!...



If you're like me, you won't see 'it'.

What's the price for not seeing it? 1,000 dirhams. That's £175 or US\$270.

What do I mean?

There's a parking offence being committed in the photo with a 1,000 dirham fine.

Me not realising this one dark night taught me an expensive lesson a few months ago!

Click here to reveal/hide what the offence is. [slide] The sign with the red circle and red 'x' in the middle means 'No Parking'. So that middle car is parking illegally.[/slide]

One morning I went out shopping to pick a few up a few things from Daiso (see separate post), across the road from the Choithrams supermarket, and Al Noor Hospital. All the parking slots were full... apart from one – so I grabbed it. It was dark, but I did see the red sign. However I thought, "Nar, I'm sure my car will be fine here", and walked into Daiso. I came back 10 minutes later to find a slip of paper, all in Arabic, under my windscreen wiper.

You may or may not know that all driving and parking fines can be reduced by 50% if you ask for this reduction when you go to pay your fine.

You can do this in Abu Dhabi or Al Ain.

Any fines you get in Dubai you have to pay in Dubai, and you cannot negotiate the fines down.

So I paid 500 dirhams a couple of days after I committed the offence.

I should have known better as I'd learned all the signs a month earlier at the Driving School (again see separate post)! So I hope this article saves at least one ex-pat from a 500AED fine over the next year!

Bawadi Mall in Al Ain

Bawadi Mall is currently the most recent mall to open in Al Ain, having opened in April 2009. It's also the largest too. It is located 5 minutes south of the Hilton Hotel.



There are more than 400 outlets on 2 floors, with many stores familiar to Westerners: Marks and Spencer, Early Learning Centre, The Body Shop, Toys 'R Us, Zara, Mango, MAX, New Look, H&M, ACE Hardware, Adidas, Guess, Nokia, British Home Stores, and more.



...and a great bookshop for English speakers in Magrudy's....



On the ground floor is a large Carrefour supermarket.



There's an extensive food court with 16 outlets including McDonalds and Pizza Hut – and there's even excellent Indian food on offer at inexpensive prices.

Behind the food court is Fun City...



...with a wonderful rollercoaster...



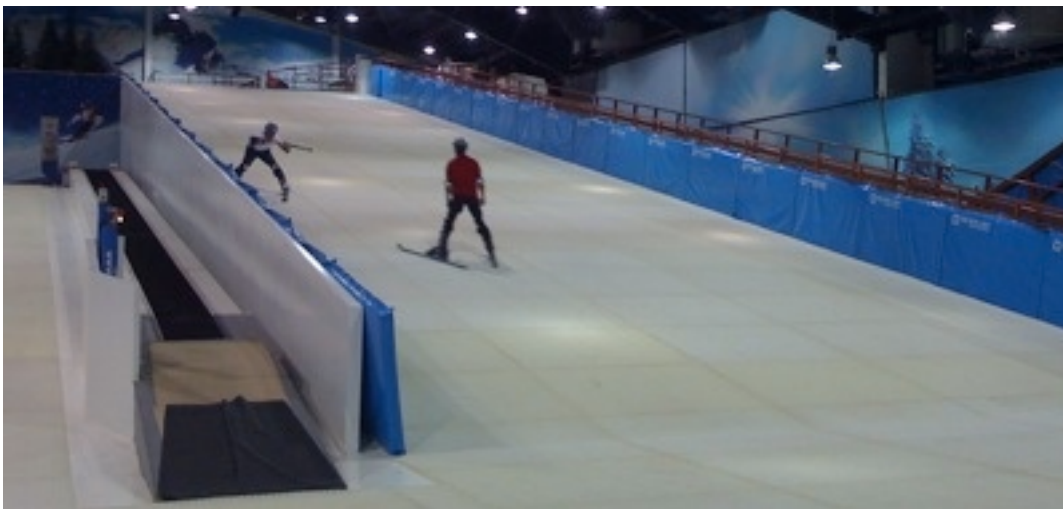
...other small rides including dodgems...





...a 12-lane bowling alley and lots of interactive games to play.

On a third level above the food court is a Ski Village area with skating rink, ski slope...



and tubes...



...plus a circuit for electric powered quad bikes.

The mall, like all the Malls, is fairly quiet during the day, but positively buzzing in the evening.

There are even occasional shows on a stage as you walk into the Mall. The current one is called Around The World In 60 Days...



The mall is still packed out at 10.30pm. (It saw a footfall of 360,000 people during its opening month.) There are 3,500 car parking spaces, yet you'll find it a challenge to find an empty space for your car after 8 o'clock at night!

One nice feature is a mobile car cleaning service: when you park your car you will most likely be approached and asked if you want your car cleaned. If you do, you pay your 24 AED approx, plus tip which they ask for, and you come back after your shopping trip to find a gleaming car.

The General Manager of Bawadi Mall is Mr Bashar Tamimi from Jordan. His eldest son, Saif, is in Toby's year, so we got chatting when I bumped into Saif talking with what turned out to be his dad while visiting the mall.



I'm sure you'll enjoy your trips to this mall. It's my favourite in Al Ain.

Bottled water

When we first moved to Al Ain we bought bottled water from the local supermarket which is very heavy as you can imagine!



(Tap water isn't ideal for drinking, but fine for a nice cup of tea or for boiling the carrots. The other thing is that the cold tap is rarely cold. In the summer the 'cold' tap is very warm as the tank is on the roof.

We quickly discovered that it made more sense to buy a water cooler for around £30 and then have 5 gallon bottles of water delivered to our apartment every week. There are a number of water suppliers and we chose Oasis. We go through two 5 gallon bottles every week which cost 9 dirhams for each bottle which is less than £2 a bottle, or £4 a week. To start you off you need to buy the plastic bottles themselves first. We bought 3 at about £6 each, so now we've got these bottles we only pay 9 dirhams per replacement bottle. When we eventually leave Al Ain we will get our £18 deposit back.

All you do to get water delivered by Oasis is to ring them on 600 5 222 61 and tell them where you live. You can even give them the name of a neighbour who has an account with them so they can easily locate where you live.

When the agent comes round on the appropriate day of the week you can buy books containing 10 coupons for 90 dirhams...



...which currently includes to 2 additional coupons, which means you'll get 12 5-gallon refills for 90 dirhams (£16).

On the allotted day each week you simply leave the empty bottles outside your front door with the coupons underneath one of the bottles and you'll be given new filled replacements when the lorry comes by.

When you buy your floor-standing watercooler, ensure that you get one which will work with the hot water tap turned off should you wish this. The first unit we bought, an Ikon (see the photo above) has both hot and cold taps, but you can't switch off the hot tap, which we rarely use – so we are paying unnecessarily to keep this water at boiling point 24 hours a day – though the electricity cost is minimal I'm sure.

Our Ikon started leaking after a year of use, so we have just bought a Sanyo for a similar price. On this unit we can switch off the hot water heater. The Sanyo has a 2-shelf storage unit at the bottom which is quite useful, though it isn't refrigerated even though it looks like it might be!...



The Sanyo dispenses water at a slower rate and my eldest son doesn't think the water is as cold as the Ikon. And there's no hot water safety slide on the hot tap as there is on the Ikon.

So if you...

- don't mind having hot water being heated all day (with the sound of the heater kicking in from time to time)
- want a safety slide on the hot tap if you have young children

- don't need the storage space offered by the Sanyo
...then get the Ikon or something similar!

One day last year we had two 5-gallon bottles of water delivered. One was wet underneath. I carried it into the kitchen, and as I lowered it to the floor, the wet bottle slipped out of my hands and fell about one foot (20cm) maximum to the ground. The bottle cracked wide open and 5 gallons of water poured out over the kitchen floor. Luckily there's a drain thing in the centre of the floor so within 20 minutes my young sons and I had cleaned it up, and dried the floor with cloths. I rang Oasis, told them what happened, and within 15 minutes a guy came and delivered a new bottle of water at no charge. That's service!

Boys and men's haircuts in Al Ain

Men and children can get their hairs cut for as little as 10 Dirhams on the local streets – less than £2. And sometimes our boys get a free can of Coca Cola each from the hairdresser.

There are men's hairdressers all over town, and you'll often see men getting a shave with a cut throat razor if you're walking past in the mornings.

The hairdressers always wear a disposable mask for some reason. As a bonus they stick their scissors up my nose to trim my nose hairs: they don't do that at Toni and Guy in the UK!

You can see both my sons having their hairs cut through the window of this salon...



Felix, aged 7, isn't smiling, is he?...



The hairdressers finish off with a horizontal cut to the hair covering the forehead which can look a bit harsh. Despite me telling them to do a few vertical snips with the scissors to soften the line, they're very reluctant to do this, so I now take my boys to the Paris Salon at the Hilton (see separate post) who knows how to do the forehead cuts to our liking!

British and American slang terms

Brits and Americans: divided by a common language!

Soon after we arrived in Al Ain we made friends with an American guy called Jake Gilson and his family. During our chats I realised how much British slang I used. And Jake being Jake he'd tease Catherine and me about the funny words and phrases we used.

Me being me, I never go anywhere without a notepad and pen, so I wrote many of these phrases down, typed them into my laptop and, over the months, kept adding to the list.

So wherever you come from in the world, here is a long list of words and phrases which may help you understand your British or American colleagues better.

Please note: towards the bottom of this list are a few adult-rated phrases

Numbers in square brackets [1], [2]... refer to well known British songs featuring this word or phrase. I have added youtube videos to the end of this article. You may find this songs amusing – and educational!

British expressions some Americans don't understand...

Brits say... --> Americans say...

You're motoring --> You're getting results / moving forward

Stop whinging --> Stop whining

We'll get there under our own steam --> We'll get there using our own methods
e.g. our own car

Middle eight --> The bridge in a song

Top notch! --> Excellent!

That cost a quid! --> That cost one pound = \$1.50

That cost a fiver/tenner --> That cost five/ten pounds \$7.50/\$15

Are you taking the Mickey/Michael/piss? --> Are you making a fool out of me?

That lady went berserk --> That lady got really mad

Are you on your tod? --> Are you the only one here?

Are you on your own? --> Are you the only one here?

My children drive me round the bend --> My children drive me crazy

I fancy a walk. Are you up for that? --> I would like to go for a walk. Would you like to do that too?

Hello Tosh --> "a friendly expression that grownups used when they ruffled the hair of children"

Jake, I haven't seen even one of your paintings yet – not a sausage!

I haven't heard a dickie bird from my friend --> I haven't heard from my friend

You've got egg under your chin --> the zip in your trousers is down

Give me that right now, or I'll your guts for garters! --> Pass that over or you're in big trouble!

Other British slang

I'm dying for a slash --> I need a wee

I didn't have the bottle --> I didn't have the courage (to do that)

My old man said to me... --> My father said to me...

I don't give a monkey's what you do --> I don't care what you do

That cost 3 grand --> That cost 3 thousand pounds (\$4,500)

You warm the cockles of my heart --> I feel warm inside!

That story tickles me, it does --> I find that story amusing

You don't half tickle me --> I find you amusing

Does this tickle your fancy? --> Would you like this?

Oy! Jack it in! --> Stop that!

It's a hard job. I have to grin and bear it. [22] --> I have to put up with it.

Cor blimey, guvn'r --> said to be an abbreviation of 'God blind me'.

Did you see that bloke/geezer? [19] --> Did you see that man?

That film/book is the dog's bollocks --> That film/book is brilliant

What's your crack? --> What's your story? (comes from craic, Irish for good times)

Do you fancy a fag? --> Do you want a cigarette?

Shut your gob / trap / cake hole! --> Close your mouth!

Keep your trap shut! --> Keep your lips sealed!

I'm gobsmacked / flabbergasted! --> I'm astonished / speechless!

My mate half-inched it --> My mate stole it

You jammy beggar! You lucky bleeder [19] --> You lucky thing!

That flannel is really manky! --> That small towel / face cloth is very dirty!

That bloke is well minted! --> That man is very wealthy!

Did you nick that out of my bag? --> Did you steal that out of my bag?

I was down the Nick the other day --> I was round at the police station the other day

I'm absolutely knackered --> I'm tired out (may come from knacker's yard: where old horses were taken)

Get on with yer! There's nowt wrong with yer, my young fella me lad! --> Get away! There's nothing wrong with you!

Did you get owt while you were shopping? --> Did you get anything

We had some argy-bargy this morning --> We had some trouble / quarrelling

He argued the toss --> He argued loudly

I pinched it off me mate --> I stole it from my friend

I should have gone out last night, but I couldn't be arsed --> I couldn't be bothered

This punter came into my shop --> This customer came into my shop

I'm going to see a man about a dog --> I'm going to a meeting or the toilet

I'm going to the little boy's room --> I'm going to the toilet

Paul McCartney is a Scouser --> Paul McCartney comes from Liverpool

I'm shagged out --> I'm very tired

I'm shattered --> I'm very tired / exhausted

Look at his shiner! --> Look at his black eye!

Don't slag him off --> Don't be critical of him

He had the screaming abdabs --> He shouted a lot

We bought a house with all mod cons --> with all the fixtures and fittings

I've been all over the shop --> I've been looking everywhere

This holiday has gone all to cock / pot --> It has all gone wrong

Is that book any cop? --> Is that book any good?

Any road up... --> Anyway...

Would you like a sarnie? A cake? Whatever takes your fancy --> Would you like a sandwich? A cake? Whatever appeals to you

I don't give a monkeys what you think [5] --> I don't care what you think

When we divorced, my wife took me to the cleaners [9] --> When we divorced, my wife got a very large settlement

Blinking heck, what are you playing at? [14] --> Heck, what are you doing?

That deal sounds a bit dodgy to me --> I think that deal could go bad

You need to buck up your ideas, young man --> You need to pull yourself together

I was pipped at the post --> I was narrowly beaten

When we were young we went out on the nick --> [18] --> We went out to steal

Alcohol related...

I was on the piss last night --> I was out drinking last night

I got plastered last night --> I got drunk last night

I was down the boozier / pub last night --> I was in the bar last night

I was out on the raz last night --> I was out drinking last night

Okey-dokey! --> OK

I'm really miffed about that! --> I'm pissed about that!

I'll love you till the cows come home [20] --> I'll love you forever

Magic our Morris --> That's wonderful (came from a BBC TV series from 1974 called Oh No It's Selwyn Froggitt)

Rarely, older Brits will say...

"That cost 10 bob." 10 shillings in 'old money' before decimalisation in the early 1970s. Means 50p = 75 cents.

Calling people names

You plonker! --> You silly person!

You're a right pillock, you are! --> You are a silly person!

You silly sausage! --> Ditto!

He's a slap head --> He's bald

That's a bit airy-fairy --> That's not very specific

She's all fur coat and no knickers --> She's rather superficial

He's all mouth and no trousers --> He's boastful

You daft apeth! --> Ditto! (comes from haypneeworth (half a penny's worth))

You right numpty! --> That was a silly thing to do!

You're a nutter, you are! --> You're crazy!

You made such an arse of yourself last night --> You made such a fool of yourself

You moron [1] --> You crazy person

That guy is completely crackers --> That guy is crazy

You div head! --> You silly person

Don't be daft --> Don't be silly / crazy

You crackpot --> You crazy person

You? Ask her out? You haven't got the bottle, mate! --> You aren't brave enough to do that

You daft toe-rag [13] --> You silly person

You little sod --> You annoying person

Other British expressions...

There's many a slip between cup and lip – mistakes can easily happen along the way

How's that for a bunch of soldiers --> What do you think of that?

I'll give you a bunch of fives if you don't watch out – I'll punch you

Don't get your knickers in a twist – don't get all het up --> Don't get so upset

This is not my cup of tea --> That's not the kind of thing I like

Don't spoil the ship for a ha'penny worth of tar – don't skimp and ruin a plan

Cockney rhyming slang (quite common)

[A Cockney is someone born within the sound of the Bow Bells (St Mary le Bow Church in the East End of London). Cockney rhyming slang is made by taking an expression that rhymes with a word and then using that expression instead of the word: eg the word look rhymes with butcher's hook. In many cases the rhyming word is left out - so most Londoners will just say "Having a butcher's" rather than "Having a butcher's hook". The rhyming word is not always omitted though, so Cockney expressions can vary in their construction.]

Parent to child: "Time to go up the dancers"(at bedtime) --> dancing bears = stairs

or "Time to go up the apples and pears" --> stairs

Would you Adam and Eve it? --> Would you believe it?

I fancy a nice cup of Rosie --> Rosie Lee = tea

Don't be daft! Use your loaf! --> loaf of bread = head

Come and have a butcher's in this shop window / at this! --> butcher's hook = look

Don't tell porkies! --> pork pies = lies

Have you got any bread? --> bread and honey = money

That boy's a right tea leaf! --> thief

Come here, my current bun! --> son

What are you rabbitting on about? [4] --> What are you talking about?: rabbit and pork = talk

I'm off for a Jimmy Riddle --> piddle = wee

They had a right old barney (argument) last night --> Barney Rubble = trouble

Cockney rhyming slang (less common)

Take off your titfer --> tit for tat = hat

What a lovely whistle! --> whistle and flute = suit

Let's go eat a Ruby --> Ruby Murray = curry

She has a pretty boat race [3] --> face

I'm going home now to my trouble and strife --> wife

Look at his barnet! --> barnet fair = hair

Hold on a sec! I'm just on the dog and bone --> phone

jam jar --> car

Can you lend me a lady? --> Lady Godiva = fiver (five pounds)

I got Brahms and Liszt last night --> pissed (drunk)

Hello, me old china! --> china plate = mate

Poo! You don't half pen and ink! [7] --> stink

Want to know more?... See the Oxford Dictionary of Rhyming Slang, published by the Oxford University Press.

Common British words...

Brits say... --> Americans say...

boot of the car --> trunk

stand (at an exhibition) --> booth

crisps --> chips

biscuits --> cookies

chips --> fries

nursery --> kindergarten

shopping centre --> shopping mall

full stop --> period

courgette --> zucchini

aubergine --> eggplant

Please will you get me the bill? Please will you get me the check?

iced lolly --> lollipop/popsicle

I'll have a take out --> I'll have it to go

I'll have a 99 --> vanilla ice-cream in a biscuit cone with a stick of flakey milk chocolate added

I'll ring you on my mobile --> I'll call you on my cell

Let's go to the flix/flicks --> cinema [flickering images]

shandy [15] --> a mix of beer and lemonade

Hoover --> vacuum cleaner

what's on the telly? --> TV

nappy --> diaper

dummy --> pacifier

small garden --> back yard, yard

estate agent --> real estate agent, realtor

shed --> shack

tuck shop --> snack shop

bovver boots --> jackboots

dressing gown --> robe

trainers --> sneakers

track suit --> sweats

vest (under shirt) --> T-shirt

plimsolls --> tennis shoes

zip --> zipper

waistcoat on a suit --> vest

homework --> assignment

tick --> checkmark

blackboard --> chalkboard

rubber --> eraser

first year at college --> Freshman

second year at college --> sophomore

Maths --> Math

I'm reading Philosophy at Cambridge --> I'm majoring in...

state school --> public school

public school --> private school

headmaster/headmistress --> principal

American expressions Brits don't understand...

Americans say... --> Brits say...

Teeter totter --> seesaw -->

7th, 10th grade --> Brits have no idea! Say, "When my child was 7..."

valedictorium --> (a student, typically having the highest academic achievements of the class, who delivers the valedictory at a graduation ceremony)

heads up --> can you update me?

rain check --> "you can come back another time and use this ticket"

nickel or dime --> 10 cents or 25 cents

boo boo --> bruise

car is fully loaded --> has all the accessories/luxury additions

American expressions or words Brits understand but don't say...

Americans... --> Brits say...

“my son went back to school at the age of 23” --> --> college: ‘school’ stops at age 18 approx

That’s deluxe --> That’s excellent, superb, tremendous, fabulous, fab, fantastic, brilliant

Other words Brits may use...

anorak – waterproof coat with hood

conkers [2] – horse chestnuts on string. Each child has one and each takes turns to whack their conker against their opponent’s to see which conker smashes first. If one conker has smashed nine others, it’s a niner etc.

Different spellings

Americans say / write... --> Brits say / write...

The check is in the mail --> The cheque is in the post.

One hundred seventy nine --> One hundred and seventy nine

I have 30-some oranges --> I have 30-odd oranges

Adult slang

Brits say... --> Meaning...

She lost her cherry --> She lost her virginity

Don’t be such a tosser --> Don’t be such an idiot

How are your meat and two veg? (parents sometimes say this to their children if they get hit there) --> Male genitals

She was in the nuddie / buff --> She was naked as a jay bird

I got my end away --> I had sex

I had a shag with x --> I had sex with x

fanny --> vagina; [fanny = butt in US]

She's a right old slapper / tart / slag --> She's a bit loose

I had a good snog --> I had an enjoyable French kiss

He went apeshit --> He got very angry

He went arse over tit on the ice --> He fell over on the ice

arty farty --> pretentious

I'm going for a piss / leak / wee --> I'm going to the John

He's an effin' thicky! [8] --> He's a f--king idiot!

I was scared shitless [21] --> I was very scared

She's a nice bit of posh! [12] --> She looks like she came from a good part of town

randy [15] --> aroused

I passed her a Mandy [16] --> Mandrax, "a tranquiliser notorious for reacting with alcohol" according to <http://starling.rinet.ru/music/ianduryc.htm>

goolies, knackers --> testicles

hard on --> boner

They were fishy kissing outside the pub --> Their mouths were open and moving like a fish as they kissed

Adult insults

Brits say... --> Meaning...

You silly sod / twat --> You foolish person

Get stuffed / Sod off --> Go away

He's a right tosser / toss bag / arsehole --> He's an idiot

He's an arselicker --> He's sycophantic

He's a right yob --> He's a lout

Check if Americans understand these

I'm going for a number one / number two --> stand up job vs sit down job

I'm going for a kip --> I'm going for a short nap

Cast your eyes over this --> Look at this

Songs referenced

[1] Jilted John by Jilted John, the singer, Graham sings, "Gordon is a moron". Which lead to a front page headline in The Sun newspaper in the spring of 2010, referring to the outgoing Prime Minister, Gordon Brown.

[2] The song Stringing Up Conkers by the British band The Boy Least Likely To was featured in the first longish iPad advert shown on Apple's website. Here's a video of the whole song...

[3] One hit wonder song: Nice legs, shame about the face by The Monks which has the line, "Nice legs, shame about the boat race", at 1 min 19 secs into the song here...

[4] Chas N Dave have a song called Rabbit, with the lines, "You won't stop talking, why don't you give it a rest. You got more rabbit than Sainsbury's, it's time you got it off ya chest." (Sainsbury's is a well-known supermarket chain.)

[5] In Chas n Dave's The Sideboard Song, they sing, "You're sister's courtin' a scruffy looking ted, father don't give a monkeys [doesn't care] and this is what he said: I don't care."

[6] Ian Dury also uses some Cockney Rhyming slang. In the song My Old Man, he sings, "My old man wore three piece whistles [suits]".

[7] In Blackmail Man by Ian Dury & The Blockheads, Ian Dury sings, "I think you stink. You pen and ink."

[8] In Billericay Dickie by Ian Dury, he sings, "I ain't an effin' thicky". Here's a live version of this song...

[9] In Billericay Dickie by Ian Dury, he sings, "She took me to the cleaners, and other misdemeanours."

[12] From Billericay Dickie by Ian Dury: "Oh golly, oh gosh come and lie on the couch, with a nice bit of posh from Burnham-on-Crouch."

[13] From Billericay Dickie by Ian Dury: "I know a lovely old toe-rag, obliging and noblesse, kindly, charming shag from Shoeburyness."

[14] From Billericay Dickie by Ian Dury: "I'm not a blinking thicky, I'm Billericay Dickie, and I'm doing very well."

[15] From Billericay Dickie by Ian Dury: "I bought a lot of brandy, when I was courting Sandy. Took eight to make her randy, and all I had was shandy."

[16] From Billericay Dickie by Ian Dury: "Another thing with Sandy, what often came in handy, was passing her a 'Mandy', she didn't half go bandy."

[17] From Billericay Dickie by Ian Dury: "So you ask Joyce and Vicki if I ever took the mickey" [You'll find that this Aussie ad for Spray'n'Wipe uses the tune of this song: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIp4CMLd6W8&hd=1>]

[18] From Razzle In My Pocket by Ian Dury: "In my yellow jersey, I went out on the nick."

[19] From There Ain't Half Been Some Clever Bastards by Ian Dury: "Lucky bleeders, lucky bleeders... That was an Italian geezer... Okey-dokey!"

[20] From That's Not All by Ian Dury: "I love you till the cows come home."

[21] From There Ain't Half Been Some Clever Bastards by Ian Dury & The Blockheads: "Einstein can't be classed as witless. He claimed atoms were the littlest. When he did a bit of splittingness: frightened everybody shitless."

[22] From Reasons To Be Cheerful by Ian Dury & The Blockheads: "A bit of grin and bear it. A bit of come and share it."

[For some funny anecdotes about Dury, go [here](#).]

What have I missed out? Which popular songs, either British or American, feature some interesting slang? Do let me know!

Burj Khalifa / Khalifa Tower, Dubai

The **Khalifa Tower**, the tallest building in the world, was renamed the **Burj Khalifa** before it opened.

You'll need to book your trip up the Burj Khalifa – the tallest building in the world at least 48 hours before you plan to go. If you just turn up on the day, you may not get a free slot until 9pm at night or later.

We booked for a Friday at 11.30am, having left Al Ain at 9.15am to ensure we got there on time.

We handed over our tickets at 11.20 which gave us time to look at the very impressive interactive displays before we went the security queue to enter the **Burj Khalifa** itself.

We came out again at 12.45pm – nearly an hour and a half later. You may take a little less time than this.

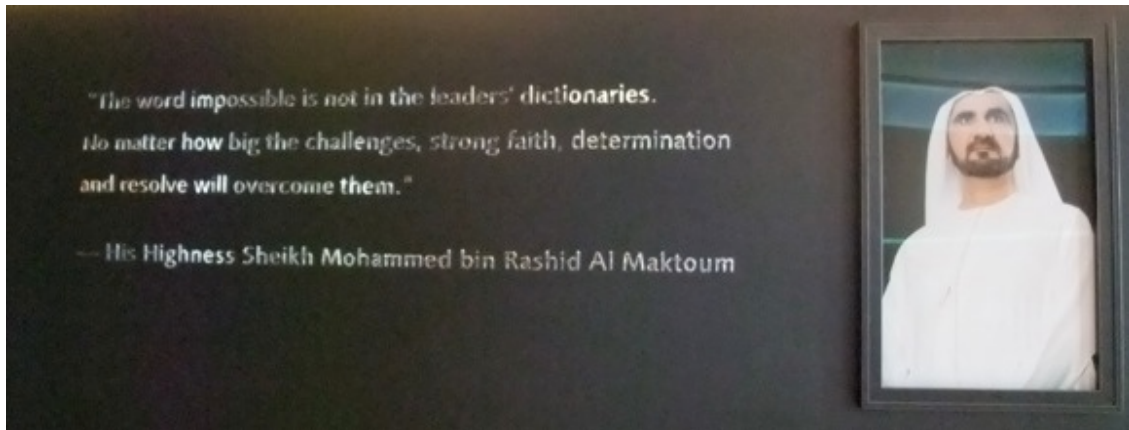
Here is a video which is spread over 3 large screens you'll see as you queue for the lift to ascend to the 130th floor – which takes all of 60 seconds. I swallowed hard about 10 times to ease the pressure on my ears as we flew up at somewhere approaching the speed of sound. Okay, maybe not quite that fast.

The video lasts about 3 minutes, so this film I captured shows about half of it to give you a flavour. I thought it was beautifully put together...

This is a movie of the digital telescopes you can use at the top: they are free to play with, though it says on a ground floor sign that you have to pay...

Here are some photos...

An inspiring message on the wall as you wait to enter the Burj Khalifa...



The 4 video screens as you queue for the elevator...



The digital telescopes you can use for free...



The Dubai Mall from above...



The amazing Dubai Fountain...



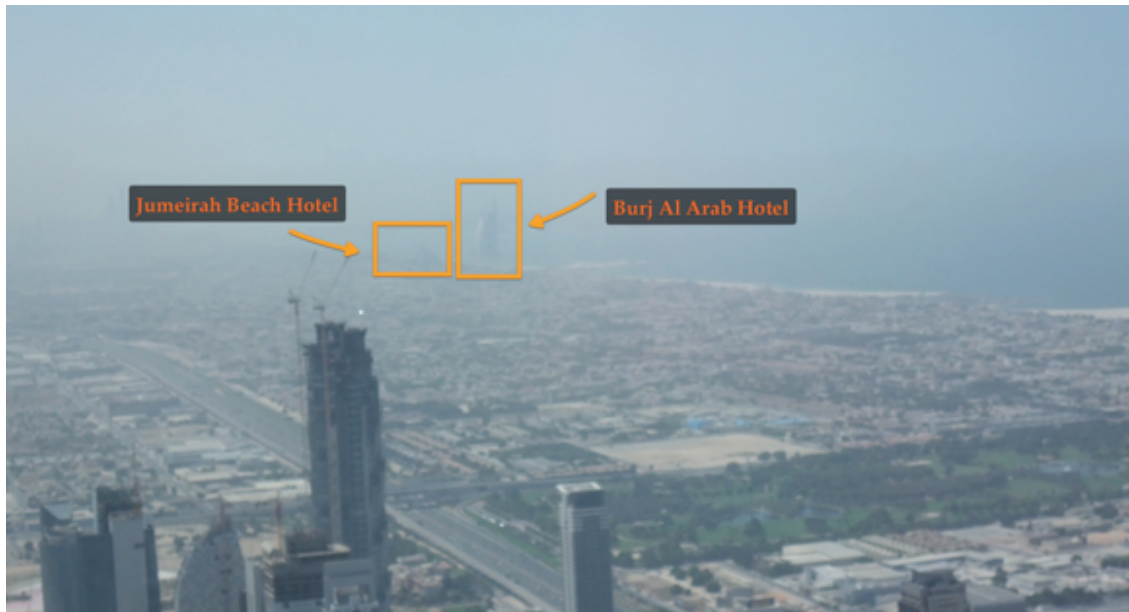
Looking south east (I think!)



We pointed out to the boys that slightly to the right of centre in this next photo is where we love to go swimming when we come to Dubai, on the public beach at Jumeirah...



This one shows 2 of the most famous hotels in Dubai: the Jumeirah Beach Hotel and the Burj Al Arab Hotel. The Atlantis Hotel is behind these, but hidden by the haze...



As you enter the building you and your family will be photographed against a green screen. At the top, you'll be asked if you want photos taken of you with the landscape behind. At the end of the tour you'll be offered these photos for a price higher than we were willing to pay! You can also get the images on a memory stick too (ideal if you want to email them to friends and family back home). I sneaked a snap of the framed 'green screen' shot with evening panorama added behind, in a leather-effect frame/folder. The image is a bit distorted as I took it at a slight angle...



What I didn't photograph are some of the excellent multimedia displays, miniature models used for the wind tunnels, and the short but excellent video interviews with people who worked on this once-in-a-lifetime project for the architects and builders.

All in all, a fab trip, worth the money.

Buying alcohol, wine, beer at Spinney's in Al Ain

There are several places to buy alcohol in Al Ain. One of them is Spinney's which is behind the Home Mart furniture store, north of the Diwan roundabout, and south of Jimi Mall.

Next to Home Mart is the La Brioche café, and there's a Pizza Hut nearby too.

Spinney's doesn't look like a regular shop: there are just 2 nondescript doors...



Inside...



The wine selection is different from what you can buy from the store behind the Hilton Hotel. Here, prices for red and white wine start at 27 dirhams (£4.75 / US\$7.25) a bottle.

Buying alcohol: the Al Ain Hilton Liquor Store

There are a number of places in Al Ain to buy liquor from. One of them is the Al Ain Liquor Store which is located in a separate building behind and to the left of the Hilton Hotel if you are on the road facing it.

Here is a photo of it: it's the lower building in the centre. To the left of this are the residences for the Hilton's staff...



When it's closed, the staff put a blackboard outside the entrance listing the opening times...



General opening times are 9am to 1pm then 3pm to 9pm, open Saturday to Thursday, but closed on Fridays. During Ramadan the store is open from 9am to 5pm, but closed in the evening...

This is what it looks like inside...



And this is a shot (no pun intended!) of the counter...



Alcohol is supplied in thick black plastic bags to respect local customs...



Prices? We only buy wine, but that seems to cost a bit more than the prices you'd pay in the UK: around £6.50 for an okay bottle of wine.

You don't need to show a licence to get served here which, according to the guidebooks, isn't the case at other outlets.

Do pop along: the staff are friendly with a sense of humour: for example, they tease me when I log my purchase in a notebook for our budget (this is one of the few places where they don't give you receipts for purchases).

You can also buy alcohol at a Spinney's outlet in Al Ain – and also get served in all the hotels.

Buying from ebay

I have bought a number of things from ebay.co.uk while I've been in Al Ain. I have simply chosen products from companies, say, in Hong Kong, who will ship worldwide for free or a low cost.

I've bought...

A waterproof camera case (£3.99 + free p&p) (pictured with my camera inside and lens extended: worked great on the 'rides' at the Aquaventure waterpark in Dubai!)



A rubber case for my iPhone 4 (£2.49 + free p&p) [50AED in shops in Al Ain]

A rubber case for my iPad (£2.99 + 99p p&p) [about 200AED in shops in Al Ain]...



A slip case for my iPad (US\$1.98+\$1.99 p&p) [again about 200AED in shops in Al Ain]...



Delivery takes about 1-2 weeks, and everything I've ordered has arrived.

So whatever hobby etc you're into, consider using ebay.

Buying indoor and outdoor plants in Al Ain

There are lots of places to buy **indoor and outdoor plants** in Al Ain.

One great place is a small nursery near to the Al Ain Mall...

If you are approaching the Mall, where it is coming up on your right-hand side, turn left at the lights just before the Mall, heading north in the direction of Lulu Hypermarket.

At the next lights, turn left and within 10 yards turn right into the nursery.

The white building on the left houses the indoor plants...



Prices are good. These pots can cost 35% less than similar ones in Ace Hardware in Bawadi Mall...



The guys here will re-pot up plants for you...



Hasan, on the right, is from Alexandria, Egypt. He did a 4-year agriculture degree there. He knows his onions (as we say in the UK), when it comes to which are the best plants to buy. And he has a great sense of humour. Ajim, his assistant, is on the left...



So if you want to get any indoor or outdoor plants to make your villa/ apartment more like a home, do pop along and meet Hasan and his colleagues.

Buying jewellery in Al Ain

My wife decided to surprise me with a diamond ring for my recent 50th birthday. She asked a work colleague for advice about where to buy such a thing, and her friend recommended she visit Mr Ashok Kumar at the Lifestyle jewellers in the Intercontinental Hotel...



Ashok is from Delhi in India and has been in Al Ain for 2 years. This is him with one of his most expensive items: a Coronet Solitaire which retails for 51,200 AED (£9,000) which he is offering with a 70% discount at 15,300 AED (£2,700)...



I'm delighted with the ring my wife gave me. Go visit Ashok if you're in the market for some jewellery, or try many of the other jewellers in the town where I'm sure you'll find some great prices.

Buying rugs in Al Ain

There are dozens of shops where you can buy rugs in Al Ain. Whatever price you are quoted, beat them down to at least 67% off this price. If you can, pay only a quarter of that first price offered.

A friend of mine called Nick went shopping for rugs, and invited me along. We went to the shops behind Bawadi Mall...



Here's Nick walking barefoot on one rug to see how soft it felt underfoot...

Buying spectacles in Al Ain: Al Hakeem Opticians

Yesterday my 8-year-old son, Felix, sat on my reading glasses and broke them. This was just a few days after my wife suggested I get a new pair as my current set were looking a little tired. So Felix did me a favour. I might have put off getting a new pair for several more weeks or months if he hadn't accelerated my decision-making process.

So I sent an email to the alainexpats yahoo group and asked everyone where I could find the best opticians in town.

Within an hour I received an email from Geraldine Kershaw who helps run the Al Ain Choral Society and has lived in Al Ain for many years: she said the place to go was Al Hakeem Optical, opposite the Jashanmal store on Khalifa Street in the centre of Al Ain.

An hour later I drove into town, had my eyes tested, and my new specs will be ready within 24 hours! Yippee!

Here's the outside of the store I went in...



Here's the second store which is 4 stores to the left of the one above: this one has a workshop in the back where the glasses are made to ensure the 24-hour turnaround...



There are also branches in the Al Jimi Mall and in the Al Ain Mall too.

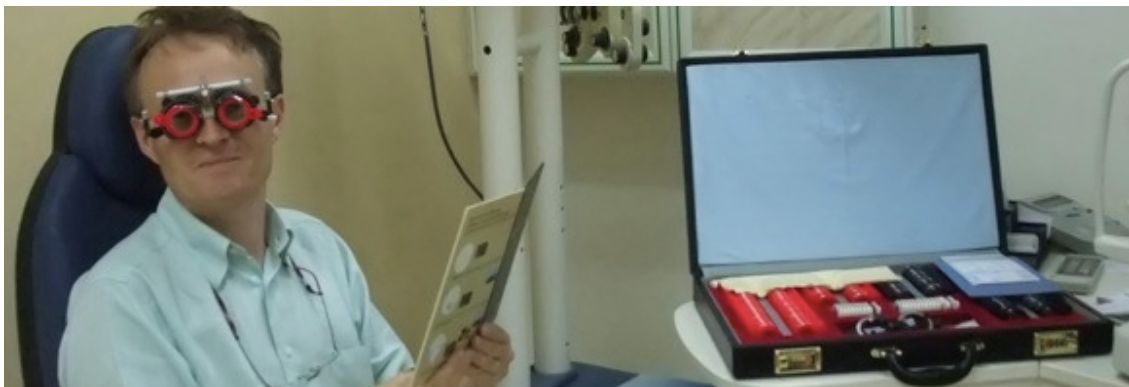
This is the team which served me in the first store. From left to right are Yasmin, Yovi and Venus...



Venus carried out the eye test. Thankfully my new prescription will be almost identical to the measurements I had done 3 years ago, so my eyes aren't getting worse...



This is the set I've chosen from their vast selection...



My wife objected: quite rightly. Venus suggested I get glasses with a frame as they're less delicate, especially with young boys that like to wrestle. I agreed. These are made from titanium, and are nice and flexible...



The price? 100aed for the spectacle frames, reduced from the ticket price of 150aed. Plus 80aed for the lenses with anti-glare and anti-reflection. (I passed on the anti-freeze option: rarely needed in the heat of the desert.) Total: 180aed (£30, US\$45).

Venus said that, if the workshop didn't have my lenses in stock, my spectacles would take another day: a total of 48 hours. That's service.

Telephone this branch of Al Hakeem Optical on 03 766 2051.

If you pop in, do tell them you found out about them on this site. Thanks!

Car accidents in Al Ain

I received this email yesterday from a woman I'll call Jane...

Thanks so much for your website and the book. It has been very helpful. I do have a few question for you and I hope you have time to respond. I just got hired to teach at either the Abu Dhabi or Al Ain public schools and I have family questions. I have a 6 and 4 year old as well as an 8 month old and I am curious about safety for them. I keep reading about the large about of car accidents and how it is the worst driving in the world. As far as being an expat how are you treated? I want this to be an enriching, safe experience for them. We live overseas right now, but it wasn't much of a culture shock and so it was an easy transition for them. I just want to make sure I am making the right choice for my family and any personal input would be great. Thank you.

I replied as follows...

I'm delighted that you like the site and ebook. The quality of driving here is... different to be sure! It is not the worst driving in the world though. I was talking with a guy who was in Turkey, and another who was in Korea, and they were saying how much better the driving here was compared to where they were before! Yes, there are far more crashes here than in the UK, US, but I still feel safe driving. I believe you should get a 4x4 for safety. My car been hit from behind once in 2 years, and it wasn't so bad. My wife's car has been hit once too. Again not so bad. Other friends haven't had any crashes at all. Cars do race up behind you and flash their lights and can drive so close that they almost touch, but you just need to get out of the lane. It could be a lot worse! If you were to talk to one of these drivers you'd find he (generally he) is very pleasant and friendly, and not at all aggressive! If you were to gently tick him off, he would be very apologetic too! (But don't curse him, or you could get into more trouble with the law than you'd imagine: Emiratis don't name call each other from what I understand, and take a dim view of it.)

The roads can be very crowded in Abu Dhabi. A number of people have told me that, because they would come down to their cars in the morning and find a new dent or scratch.

This doesn't happen in Al Ain.

Every place has its positives and negatives. All I can say is that this country has its challenges, but we love living here. And you may very well feel the same when you've settled here after a few months.

Warmest,
Chris

Car insurance in Al Ain

I was recommended to use **Oman Insurance** by the guy from whom we bought our second car: a Nissan Pathfinder.

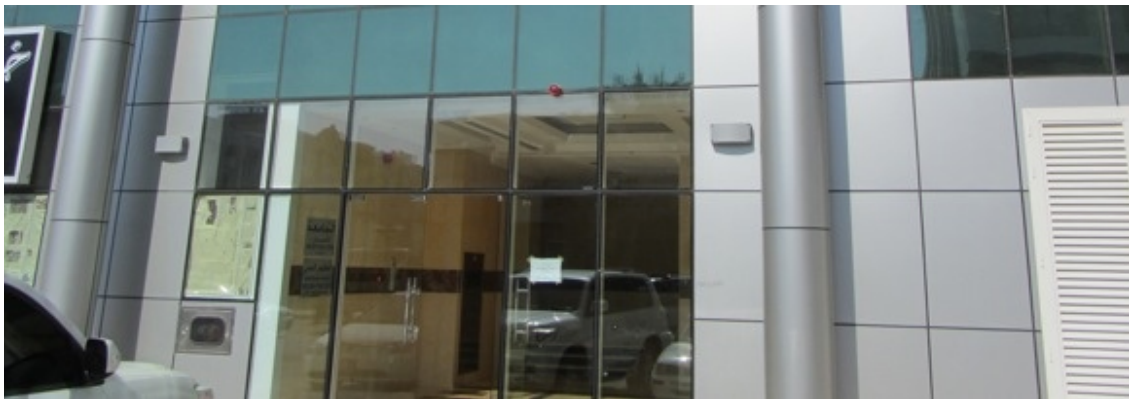
Oman Insurance is situated in a new building...



...located on the same road as the Al Ain Mall, but at the west end of that road, the building next to the old Lulu in Nyadat, located on the corner. This next photo is taken to the right of the photo above, and you can see Lulu on the right...



Enter the building round the back...



Go up to the mezzanine floor...



This guy, Mohammad Naser, is really helpful. His English is good too...



Say hi from me if you go!

Tel.: 03 765 5259

Mohammad's email address is menacer [at] tameen.ae.

Their website is at www.oicem.com.

If you know of any other good places to get insurance, let me know!

Chocolate lovers

Whenever there's something to celebrate, the locals bring chocolates to the office: often on a tray with an ornate layout. There are lots of chocolate shops round Al Ain selling such displays.

The closest to us is Marionnettes Chocolates, run by Ansar from India, who has been in Al Ain for 15 years, working in chocolate shops. This is his shop...



This is Ansar with one of his creations...



..and 2 more...



If you ever want any chocolates, give him a call on 050 172 5587. He's a lovely guy.

Choithrams in Al Ain

If you fancy some pork, a good place to go is the Choithrams supermarket. There's a branch next to Al Noor Hospital in the centre of town. (See my map which comes with the ebook version of this site.)



There's the main wide entrance, but just to the left of this is another, much smaller door, where you can buy 1,001 different pork products. I didn't see any fresh pork: it's supplied frozen, unless I'm mistaken.

Choosing where to live

We live in Kuwaitat which is on the east side of the town, behind the Hilton Hotel. We love where we live. We are also close to the Al Ain Mall, the largest Lulu Hypermarket and 10 minutes from the large Bawadi Mall.

Here's what I recommend, if I may be so bold (and I hope it's not too much to take in!). Get hold of a map of Al Ain and locate the 3 main hotels which have pools: the Hilton, the Intercontinental, and the Rotana. This way, if you get info on specific villas you can see how far you are away from what may be your frequent weekend activity.

Also locate the main malls: Bawadi Mall is the newest and biggest; Al Jimi Mall (I think!) is the next newest; Al Ain Mall is the oldest (and it's a great mall) ; plus the enormous Lulu Hypermarket in Kuwaitat, and the smaller Lulu Supermarket in Sanaiya (opposite the Etisalat building which will most likely be on the map). Very recent is the Al Foah Mall in Al Foah, on the road heading out to Dubai.

These are the main places ex-pats in Al Ain shop as each mall has one big supermarket in it, as well as other shops. (There are other, smaller

supermarkets like Choithrams, and the new Spinneys supermarket on the road out to Abu Dhabi.) Again you can then get a sense of how far you'll need to travel to do your main weekly or twice weekly shop.

Al Ain isn't that big a town (there are 400,000 people at the moment). So you should be able to get round fairly easily.

See other posts for info on specific malls, and photos.

Classical music concerts held in Al Ain

Here are details of 2 classical music events which took place in Al Ain in 2011 so you have an idea what may happen in 2012 and beyond...

Symphonic Masterworks - Classical hits

Location: Al Jahili Fort

Orchestra: Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI

Juraj Valcuha, conductor

Evgeni Bozhanov, piano

What they played...

- Dmitri Shostakovich, Festive Overture
- Sergei Rachmaninov, Piano Concerto No. 2
- Alexander Borodin, Polovtsian Dances
- N. Rimsky-Korsakov, Sheherazade, excerpts
- Peter Tchaikovsky, Overture 1812 with Fireworks

Yo-Yo Ma Cello Recital

Location: Al Jahili Fort

Tickets for these 2 events were available online and at the [House of Arts](#).

This website has more info: www.abudhabiclassics.com.

There is a free shuttle service from Al Ain to the many concerts in Abu Dhabi.

Clock Tower 'Roundabout', Al Ain

For me, the Clock Tower junction, which used to be a roundabout until 2-3 years ago (I hear), represents the centre of Al Ain.

Here's a short video I created which shows the landmarks at each corner of this junction....

I say in the video that the Etisalat building is 200 yards / metres south of this junction: it's more like half a mile!

Also, if you go west from this junction, I mention the Deer Roundabout, but you'll also see Al Jahli Park on your left and after that the Thai Massage for ladies building on the left. On the other side of the roundabout is the Rotana Hotel.

There is a companion video [here](#) which does a 360-degree spin at the Sanaiya junction which you may wish to check out.

Comparing shopping prices with the UK

I think you'll find that your shopping bill is about the same or as much as 25% less than it was back home. Our supermarket bill comes to about 700 dirhams a week which is about £125 for a family of 4. This is based on us cooking most meals from raw ingredients (e.g. uncooked meats etc) and eating 90-100% of all meals at home.

We do all our weekly shopping at the Lulu Hypermarket in Kuwaitat as it's the biggest.

Thanks to Jonathan, a reader of this site, for encouragement to add the following...

Price comparisons

Sainsbury's July 2010 --> Lulu / Carrefour, Al Ain

Aubergines £3.28 per kilo --> 1.95 dirhams (35p) per kilo [nearly one tenth of the price]

Tomatoes £1.86 per kilo --> 3.20 dirhams (56p) per kilo [a third of the price]

Broccoli £1.80 per kilo --> 14.95 dirhams (£2.62) per kilo [more expensive]

Hardy's Merlot red wine £6.49 --> £6.14 at the Liquor Store next to the Hilton
can of Coca Cola 49p --> 1 dirham (18p)

I'm not up on meats, but we buy Brazilian tenderloin beef steaks at Lulu for 60 dirhams (£10.52) a kilo. Fillet steak (similar??) at Sainbury is £25.90 per kilo.

Batteries seem cheaper here.

The price of other shopping items seems similar to those in the UK.

I'll add more price comparisons over time.

Shopping at service stations in the UK vs service stations between Al Ain and Dubai / Abu Dhabi

UK --> Al Ain

2 x 500ml bottles of Coke for £2.40 --> 2 dirhams (36p)

2 x 750ml bottles of Buxton still water for £2.60 --> about 4 dirhams (72p)

(In other words, service stations between Al Ain and Dubai / Abu Dhabi are run by ADNOC which charges no more than supermarket prices, compared to the high premium you'll pay in motorway services stations in the UK.)

Clothing

Very briefly: my wife feels that clothes prices in Marks And Spencer in the Bawadi Mall are similar to the prices she'd expect to pay in the UK.

There seems to be a sale on at one or more of the clothes shops in the Bawadi Mall whenever we shop, so bargains can be had for named brands.

T-shirts in Carrefour start around 10 dirhams (£1.75) each.

Petrol

This costs about 30p a litre for Special. If this is the equivalent of Super in the UK, then this costs £1.20 to £1.40 a litre there now. (You'll likely be driving a 4x4 here so petrol consumption is greater in this type of car, of course.)

Why the difference in price between the UK and Al Ain?

The core price of petrol in the UK is 40p a litre. Duty is 57p. Value Added Tax (VAT) is 18p and the retailer makes 5p a litre. Total: £1.20 a litre.

Can you add to the above? I'd love to hear from you!

Crowne Plaza Hotel, Sohar, Oman

This terrific hotel is only a 65-minute drive from the Hilton Hotel in Al Ain – so it's much closer than Abu Dhabi or Dubai for a quick getaway.

You can get across the border 2 ways...

- by driving past the Hilton, heading east
- via the Hili border crossing

Don't try crossing at the border next to the Lulu Hypermarket as we did – unless you're a GCC resident!

The hotel is very new, and has real 5-star appeal. We got a deal including half-price massage: and this was an excellent 60-minute session.

Here is a snap of it...



...and this one is what it looks like as you drive from Al Ain: the hotel is up on a little hill on your left, about 25 minutes from the final border crossing...



The hotel is 25 minutes from the sea, which was fine by us: we just drove down the next day to check it out.

You may find the price here to be cheaper than the Sohar Beach Hotel which is on the coast, but that is a little 'tired' by all accounts, and not quite what we want from a hotel.

I didn't take many photos there. But you can play table tennis...



...and snooker...



...and there are 4 lanes for 10-pin bowling....



Just a short video from the pool area...

Daiso in Al Ain for knick knacks

If you're looking for good quality knick knacks in Al Ain, then Daiso may be just what you're looking for. There are 2 stores in the town: one in the Bawadi Mall...



...and one in the centre of the town, opposite Al Noor Hospital and Choithrams.

Here is a list of some of the items you'll find there, and most items cost 7 AED (£1.25) (up from 5 AED a year or 2 ago)...

Post-It Notes, binders, photo frames, spectacles, pencil cases, CD/DVD cases, headphones, cables, mouse mats, kitchen timers, batteries, bookstands, wooden back massagers, flip flops, slippers, cushions, folding stools, door mats, crockery, origami paper, Rubik's Cube, pots and pans, cuddly toy. Didn't they do well?

Daiso is a Japanese brand, so all the packaging has Japanese writing on it and looks very appealing. Daiso has 3,500 stores around the world, and produces 90,000 different products, but only 30,000 of them are available in Al Ain. Here is a display of pens in the Bawadi Mall store...



The town centre store covers 3 floors but has the same number of lines as the Bawadi branch, according to the manager I had a chat with the other day.

Daiso serves a billion customers around the world, and did US\$3 billion of sales in 2004 in Japan alone, which I'm sure is the result of great quality and keen prices.

Bawadi Mall branch telephone number: 03 784 0510

Al Noor branch telephone number: 03 766 2855

The company has a website at www.daisome.com which shows many photos of the kind of products they sell.

Dental treatment in Al Ain

Do you need dental treatment in Al Ain?

I've written about 2 dental practices that I've come across...

- Royal London Dental Clinic
- Gulf Dental Clinic

I'm sure there are many other which are great, so let me know of your favourite, and I'll add them to this site.

Directions from Abu Dhabi to the Al Ain Municipality Theatre

(The Municipality Theatre is where the TEDxAlAin 2011 conference was held, and where some music concerts are held too.)

Drive from Abu Dhabi towards Al Ain. As you approach Al Ain you'll see an exit with a sign showing an aircraft on it and saying 'Airport' or similar. Take this exit and carry on into the centre of Al Ain. It's pretty much a straight line all the way to the venue.

Eventually, you'll see the 2 towers on the left of Al Jimi Mall...



...and as you drive past it you'll see the big sign for the Carrefour supermarket there. You'll just be able to make out the letters 'Carr' on the left of this photo...



Go through the next lights.

Then, at the next lights, turn right here where the sign says 'Civic Centre'...



And after 100 metres or so, you'll see the venue on your left...



Drive past it, do a U-turn at the roundabout, then take the second turning on the right to get to the car park in front of it.

OOPS!...

If you go past the 'Civic Centre' turning by mistake you'll reach this roundabout with storks on it, and the Al Massa Hotel behind it...



Do a U-turn, and turn left at the next set of lights.

Directions from Dubai to the Al Ain Municipality Theatre

(The Municipality Theatre is where the TEDxAlAin 2011 conference was held, and where some music concerts are held too.)

Drive from Dubai to Al Ain. Journey time is less than 90 minutes.

As you approach the centre of Al Ain, you'll see this sign on your right. Notice it shows that you turn right to go towards Abu Dhabi and the Al Ain International Airport. You are now about 500 metres from the venue...



About 50 metres further on the signs look like this...



You turn right at the roundabout ahead.

About 300 metres down this road, you will come to this roundabout: you're almost there!!...



Go across this roundabout, then at the next traffic lights...



...you turn left.

And after 100 metres or so, you'll see the venue on your left...



Drive past it, do a U-turn at the roundabout, then take the second turning on the right to get to the car park in front of it.

Directions to the Municipality Theatre if you live in Al Ain

(The Municipality Theatre is where the TEDxAlAin 2011 conference was held, and where some music concerts are held too.)

Do you know how to get to Al Jimi Mall?

If you know the route where you reach the roundabout with the white storks on it and the Al Massa Hotel next to it, turn towards the mall.

At the next traffic lights...



...you turn left.

And after 100 metres or so, you'll see the venue on your left...



Drive past it, do a U-turn at the roundabout, then take the second turning on the right to get to the car park in front of it.

Not sure how to get to the Al Jimi area?...

Do you know how to get to the Lulu Hypermarket next to the Buraiymi border crossing?

Go past Lulu with it on your right.

Go through the lights.

At the next roundabout, turn right. You are now heading towards Dubai, yes??

The Zayed Library is on your right, then after that is a park.

At the next roundabout, turn left.

The next roundabout is the flamingo roundabout with the brown Al Massa Hotel on your right...



Go across this roundabout, then at the next traffic lights...



...you turn left.

And after 100 metres or so, you'll see the venue on your left...



Drive past it, do a U-turn at the roundabout, then take the second turning on the right to get to the car park in front of it.

Still stuck?... Type into the comment box below and I'll get back to you.

Directory enquiries via Etisalat in Al Ain

You can ring Directory Enquiries at Etisalat by dialling 181.

Be aware that their database isn't as extensive and up-to-date as it is in the Western world!

For example, I rang Directory Enquiries to get the telephone number for the Adidas Outlet Store in the centre of Al Ain so I could find out their opening hours. The person I spoke with said the only Adidas they could find was in Dubai!

Yet there are 3 Adidas Outlet Stores in Al Ain: one in the centre, a second in Al Ain Mall and a third in Bawadi Mall.

I mentioned this to the manager of the first store when we later visited them, so he might have fixed this by now.

You also may need to ring a couple of times to get the exact number you want: when I rang one time to get the number for the Jashanmal Store in Al Ain, I was given the head office number in Abu Dhabi.

What this means for you: don't rely on Directory Enquiries here as much as you would back home: think ahead and get telephone numbers in advance wherever possible: from a store when you visit, or from friends/colleagues.

Disclaimer

A few points...

1. This site is for entertainment purposes only. Really!
- 2, I cannot be held liable for any loss or damage or personal injury as a consequence of you acting or not acting based on anything you read on this site or the accompanying ebook and maps.

I do hope that's clear to you!

So do get a second opinion before acting/not acting – and go into any new situation with your eyes and ears open.

3. I am not connected in any way with the companies, organisations and places mentioned on this site – so please don't send me CVs (resumés); ask me to put aside shop items for collection; send me seeds from the Al Ain Paradise Gardens; etc! :)

Thanks for reading!

Dolphinarium, Dubai

The Dolphinarium provides a great show for all the family. We paid extra for premium seats, but once we were inside we realised that this wasn't necessary: everyone there got a great view.



Once you've paid your money, the only other thing that's there is a fastfood-type restaurant. Across the expanse of grass is a children's museum which looked impressive, but happened to be closed when we visited the Dolphinarium.

Before the show started...



There was a wire act first...



Then the seals...



Another wire act...



Then the dolphins!!...











We had a blast!

Driving on the roads in Al Ain

Let me say that this is an adventure!

On a 3-lane road, if you are in the middle lane, you can expect to be overtaken on both sides at the same time which can be a little unsettling occasionally! If you are in the outside lane you can expect to be tailgated on a regular basis by a

driver in a hurry who flashes his lights and will sit on your tail closer than you would ever think possible, until you move to the middle lane. As he races past you, often in a large white Toyota land cruiser, you may wish to take a sideways look to see what kind of a person would drive so dangerously – but in most cases you'll find that the side window was blacked out!

Soon after we arrived in Al Ain, I heard about the quiz night for mainly British expats at the rugby club, so I went along with a new friend I had made here. We got chatting with a delightful couple from the UK who had been here for a couple of years. The husband, called Phil, informed me that it wasn't a matter of if I had a car smash in the coming months, but when! Sure enough, a few weeks later, I pulled up gently at some traffic lights, and about 30 seconds later, I watched a saloon car raced down the road towards me, slam on his brakes, heard the screech of his tyres on the road and watching smashes the back of me, with my two sons in the back seat.

I got out of the car, as did the driver of the car behind me, and found out that he spoke very little English. In this country you're not allowed to move any cars involved in an accident. (Even if you have been shopping, and you come back to your car, only to find that there is a dent in your car, you are not allowed to move it until you have rung the police, waited for an official car to turn up and give you an accident report which will enable you to get your car fixed. You will not be able to get your car repaired by any repair shop without this receipt.) So the other driver rang the police and an official car arrived about 30 minutes later, and they stayed with us logging in the details for the next 15 minutes. Over the course of these 45 minutes the driver of the car that crashed into me was constantly on the phone, which led me to guess that he was on the phone when he hit me. I have seen a number of drivers reverse out of tight car parking spaces into moving traffic while holding their mobile phone against an ear, so I'm not surprised that there are so many traffic accidents in this town.

I once saw the results of 3 car crashes in the space of 2 hours. My eldest son says he has seen 8 car smashes on one stretch of road over a two-month period.

My original plan was to buy a saloon car soon after we arrived here but my wife felt that we would be safer in a 4x4 because there are so many car smashes here. So I bought a Toyota Prado, and I'm very glad I did.

Dubai Aquarium, Dubai Mall

This is a quick post I'll add to one day!...

In the Dubai Mall, not only is there the enormous aquarium, but you can go behind it to see sea creatures and penguins, and have some great close encounters!

Your children will probably be as amazed by these archer fish as we were [video]...

And we could pick up the horse shoe crabs and feel their wiggly 'feet'!

This is a very short video of the garden eels in one tank...

Dubai Fountain



The Dubai Fountain is a magnificent fountain display which lasts for about 3 minutes and takes place every half hour from about 4pm at weekends (Thursday to Saturday) and from 6pm during the week (Sunday to Wednesday), continuing until late at night: 10 or 11pm. It is best enjoyed after nightfall.

On the right you can see the sign in the Dubai Mall with the schedule, a photo of the display, and my reflection!

I bumped into Rob, the general manager at the Lulu Hypermarket in Al Ain, a couple of weeks ago, while I was shopping there and we had a great chat. He told me that recently one of his sons and his girlfriend had been over from the UK to visit. So one night Rob booked a table for the 3 of them at a Lebanese restaurant next to the large manmade lake where the fountain is situated. But he didn't tell them about the upcoming display! So at 8pm the fountain came to life, giving them a delightful surprise as they sat with their drinks, ready to order their food. And they were treated to further displays during the rest of their time there.

Next to the lake is the Khalifa Tower, the largest structure in the world. Here's a photo I took at 7.30pm one evening...



...and the Lebanese restaurant must be on the left in this photo...



This is what the fountains look like from the 140th floor of the Burj Khalifa when we went up there on a different trip to Dubai...



...and you can get an idea of just how many hundreds of jets there must be in the fountain. By the way, the outdoor restaurants we have sat at are on the left side, just outside the Mall. See another article for more on the Mall, and the one on the Burj Khalifa At The Top tour for more photos from up high.

Every half hour features a different song, each with its own unique fountain dance. Some music is Arabic, and some is Western music.

This video I took features music by Sarah Brightman...

This one features Western music, starts slowly, then explodes into life after one minute...

This video I took a different night has Arabic music...

This final video was taken during the day in October. My family and I were sitting outside at 1pm, about to order lunch at a lovely Italian restaurant, when the fountain bursts into life. Our waiter told us that he has worked at the restaurant for 18 months and this was the first time he had ever seen the fountains go off during the day. They went off again half an hour later with an Arabic song, but I didn't bother filming that. So here's a video of that first

daytime show, featuring the theme music by Elmer Bernstein from the film *The Magnificent Seven*...

I hope you and your family get as much enjoyment from these displays when you see them live as we have!

Electricity spikes



There are occasional electricity spikes. About 3 weeks after we arrived here, I found that one of the mains adapters on one of my Apple MacBook pros had blown completely, the fuse had blown in the mains adapter for our second MacBook Pro, and the mains adapter for one of our iPods also blew completely.

I had to drive 90 minutes to Dubai to buy a new mains adapter from iStyle, an Apple dealer in the Dubai Mall, at a cost of about £85. It also took me about 2 hours to find a 3-amp fuse in the centre of Al Ain, as most fuses are 13 amps here. The thing is, I had bought a surge protector for one of my laptops from the local Lulu hypermarket, but it was unusable.

Here's why: if the voltage coming into the protector is more than 250 V or less than 230 V (or thereabouts) the surge protector doesn't allow any electricity to flow through the laptop adapter. But what I found was the surge protector was cutting in for several hours a day which meant that the laptop was running off the battery for most of the time. So the surge protector was unusable. Thankfully we have had no main surges sufficient to blow any fuses or adapters since that time in September 2009.

As of writing, the electricity supply seems a lot better: my wife does the occasional 30 minutes of ironing every few days. Our iron, bought locally, comes with a 2-pin plug. All the sockets are 3-pin ones! We have a number of 2-to-3-pin adapters, but the iron's plug falls out of these (!). However the surge protector has a tighter grip, so she is using this device regularly and says at the moment she's always getting current coming through it. It looks like it's time for me to start using it again on my everyday Apple MacBook Pro!

Update: my friend Jake has told me that his internet radio and the mains charger on his Mac laptop blew recently, and it cost him 500AED plus a trip to Dubai to get a replacement.

English speakers aren't always easy to find

You will find that most of the taxi drivers, local shop owners, cleaners, ironing shop workers, tailors, etc speak very little English. So it helps if you are good at playing charades! If you have an iPhone, you will find a range of free or low-cost translators which you can download and use which will not only show you what you can say using phonetic language, but often the application will speak in the requested language as well.

English-speaking schools

You have two choices when it comes to schooling for English-speaking children:

- the Al Ain English Speaking School
- the Choueifat School

They are about a quarter of a mile from each other on what is called School Road. The first one is the main choice for English-speaking children. If you look on the Internet you may find a few grumbles about this school, but in talking with different parents who have children at the school, all we have heard is good things. When we first decided to move to Al Ain in the summer of 2009, there were no places for our two boys at the Al Ain English Speaking School, so we enrolled them at the Choueifat School and they have both had a very happy year there.

Our son Toby, then aged 10, had exams most weeks, but he was fine with that. Both boys made fabulous friends at the school. Only a few of the children in school came from the UK or America, but all of the children spoke excellent English, so our boys settled very well.

Despite our happiness with the Choueifat School, my wife and I decided to move our boys to the Al Ain English Speaking School in September, for more immersion in English culture and access to things like music lessons which aren't as easily available at the Choueifat school. They have now spent a happy two years there.

Etisalat junction, Sanaiya, Al Ain

Here is a video I filmed at the junction in Sanaiya with the impressive Etisalat building on one corner, in which I slowly turn 360 degrees, pointing out different landmarks.

You may find it helpful to download the maps I've created so you can orient yourself as you watch the video...

There's a companion video to this [here](#) which does a 360-degree spin at the Clock Tower 'roundabout' which you may wish to check out.

Falconry Festival in Al Ain in 2011

Al Ain hosted The Third International Festival Of Falconry in December 2011. Falconers came from all over the world. For some of them, this was the first time they had left their village or town. Amazing.

For more information, go to www.falconryfestival.com.



This guy from Scotland gave a great talk about his falcons and sent them swooping off across the arena to collect meat...





At the end of the festival, all the guests paraded round the arena in their traditional costumes, with placards showing which country they came from...











Here's me with a hooded falcon in the exhibition stand area...



The stages of growth of this bird was fascinating to look at...



Fill 'er up

It costs just 60 dirhams, a little over £10, to fill the tank of a small size car at a local Adnoc petrol station. The one pictured below is a few hundred yards west of the landmark Etisalat building in the Sanaiya district...



It costs about 100 dirhams to fill a 4x4. That's less than £20 for a tank of petrol. As a free bonus, petrol is put in your car by an attendant...



...who will then wash your front and back windscreens...



...so you can stay cool in your car, until it's time to wind your window down again to pay by cash or credit/ debit card.

Football at the Palm Resort in Al Ain



For those families with boys – or girls – aged from 3 to 12 who love to play football (soccer), there are opportunities here in Al Ain to play often.

Doctor Abdel Noureldin (on the right in the photo), who works at Tawam Hospital, one of a number of hospitals in town, runs a fabulous club which meets 3 nights a week: Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday from 6pm to 7.40pm at the Rugby Club at the Palm Resort. I think Sunday nights is for the older children and Tuesdays for the younger children, then everyone plays on a Thursday evening.

The children are split into teams: under 5s, 5-7s, 8-9s, 10-11s. (There is also a team for older boys.)

Then they play in their age groups on a superb stretch of grass that I consider to be better quality than anything my sons have played on in the UK. It's the size of 2 rugby pitches because that's what it is!

About 120 children are registered and most turn up twice a week.

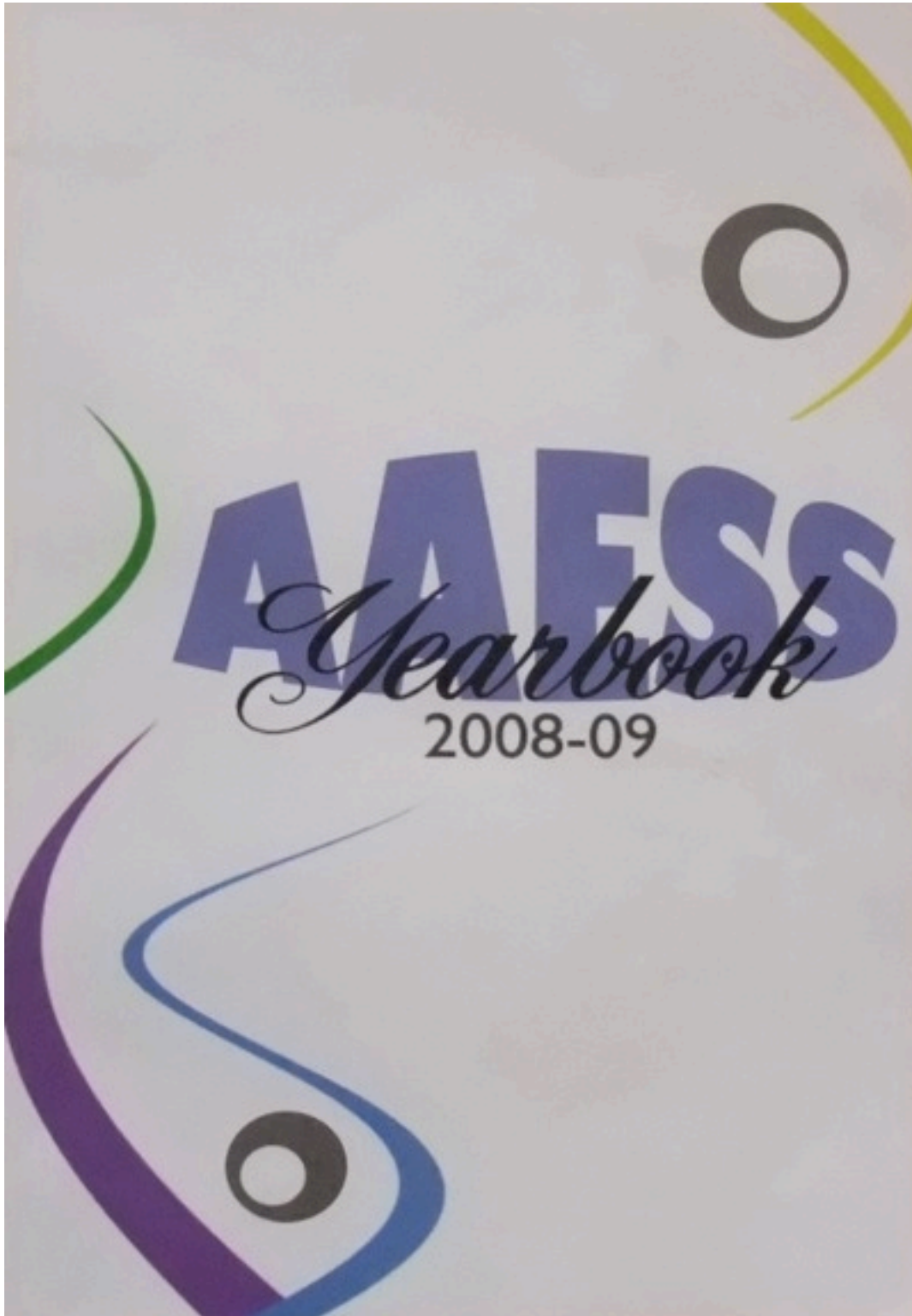
If you are not a member of the Rugby Club, you pay a reasonable fee to be able to use the pitch for the year.

Contact the good doctor at ahn31 at hotmail dot com.

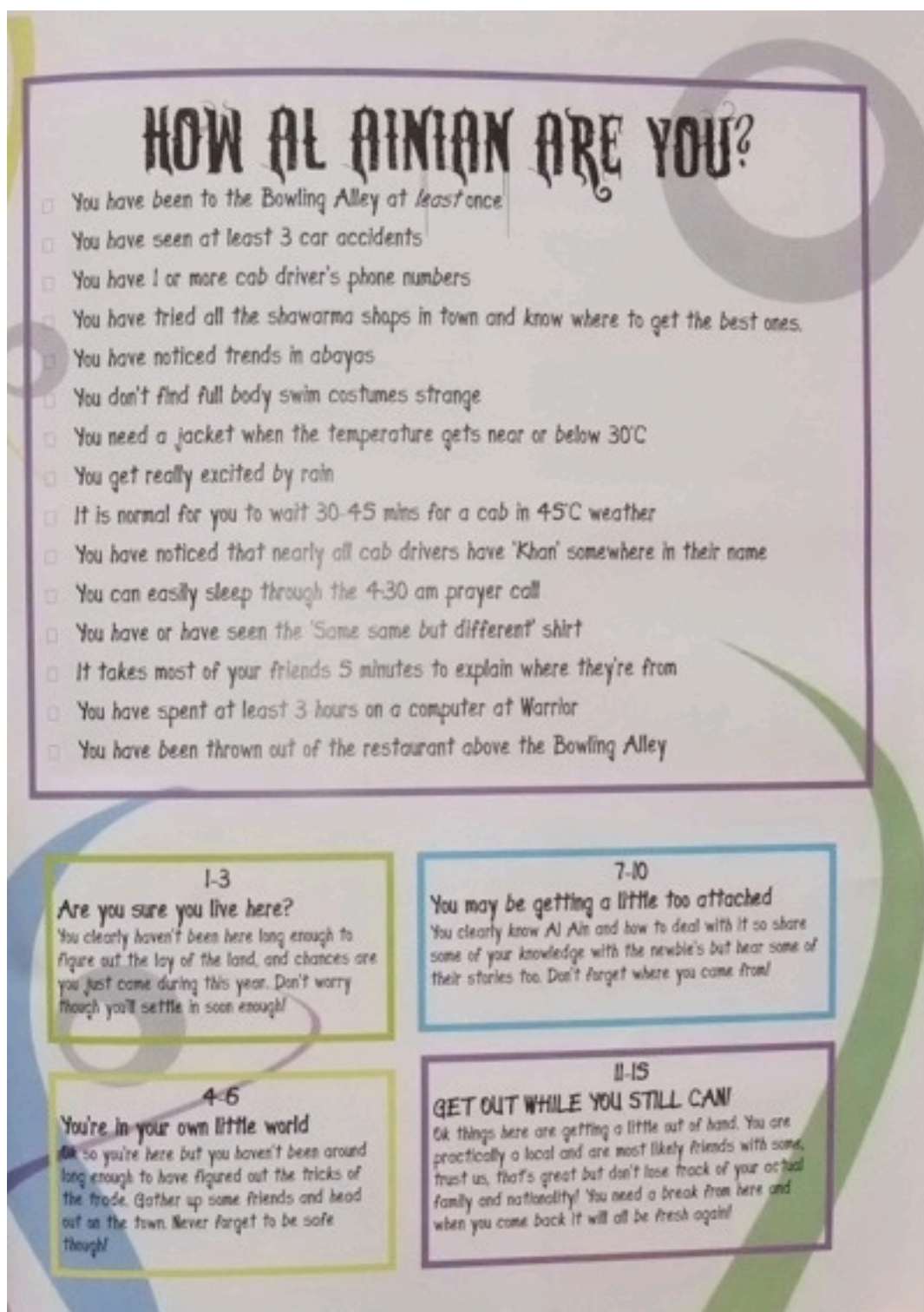
(I think there's also a young team at the Hilton and one at the Intercontinental too.)

Funny quiz about life in Al Ain for the young

In the Al Ain English-Speaking School 2008-2009 Yearbook...



I found this quiz which I think is hilarious!...



It's called **How Al Ainian are you?**

The idea is that you count up how many of the following 15 statements apply to you ('you' being a pupil at the school)...

You have been to the Bowling Alley at least once.
You have seen at least 3 car accidents.
You have 1 or more cab driver's phone numbers.
You have tried all the shawarma places in town and know where to get the best ones.
You have noticed the trends in abayas.
You don't find full body swim costumes strange.
You need a jacket when the temperature gets near or below 30 degrees C.
You get really excited by rain.
It is normal for you to wait 30-45 mins for a cab in 45 degrees C weather.
You have noticed that nearly all the taxi drivers have 'Khan' somewhere in their name.
You can easily sleep through the 4:30am prayer call.
You have seen the 'Same same but different' shirt.
It takes your friends 5 minutes to explain where they're from.
You have spent at least 3 hours on the computer at Warrior.
You have been thrown out of the restaurant above the Bowling Alley.

1-3: Are you sure you live here?

You clearly haven't been here long enough to figure out the lay of the land, and chances are you just came here during this year. Don't worry though, you'll soon settle in!

4-6: You're in your own little world

Ok, so you're here but you haven't been around long enough to discover the tricks of the trade. Gather up some friends and head out on the town. Never forget to be safe though!

7-10: You are maybe getting too attached

You clearly know Al Ain and how to deal with it, so share some of your knowledge with the newbies, but hear some of there stories too. Don't forget where you came from!

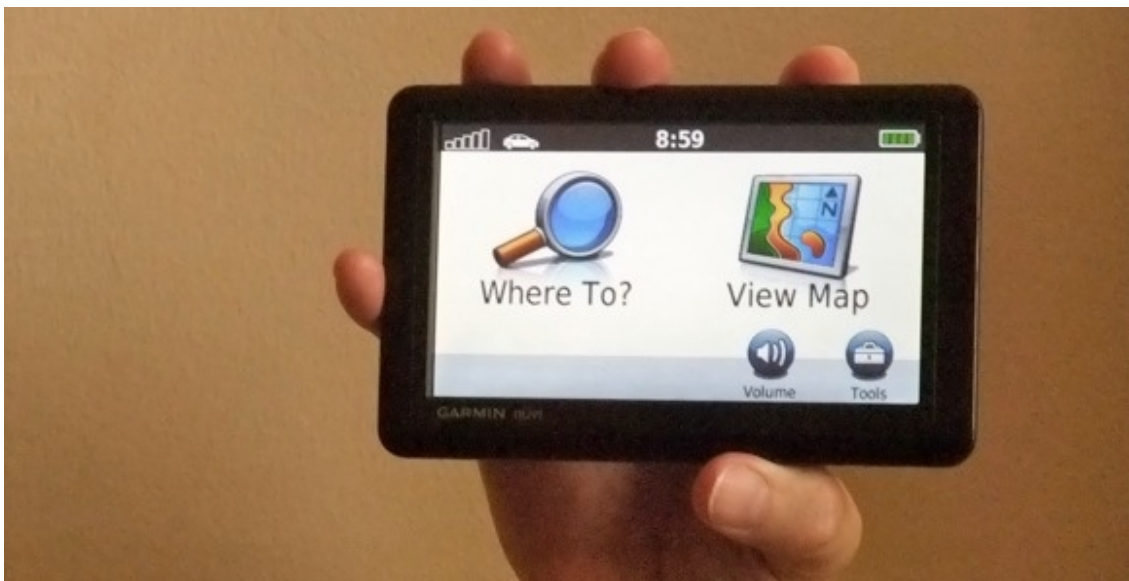
11-15: GET OUT WHILE YOU STILL CAN!

Ok, things here are getting a little out of hand. You are practically a local and most probably friends with some, trust us. That's great, but don't lose track of your family and your nationality! You need a break from here and when you come back it will all be fresh again!

I don't know what 'Warriors' is – but I'm sure we'll find out soon once our boys are settled in their new school!

Garmin nuvi 1410 GPS navigation

We bought a 5-inch Garmin nuvi 1410 GPS device to use in our car, mainly so we could find our way round Abu Dhabi and Dubai. This is what mine looks like...



It came with a suction cup to attach to the windscreen, and a cigarette lighter charging lead – and cost us about £200 from our local Lulu hypermarket. We bought it in December 2009. We registered it online. The unit comes with one free downloadable upgrade to the maps. It really is great to have this unit however the maps are very out of date. The map for Al Ain is about 2 years out of date. We know this because in the centre of town there used to be 3 roundabouts which were replaced by traffic lights about 2 years ago, but these show up on the Garmin as roundabouts still.

Dubai has changed massively road wise in the last 2 years so one of the main motorway routes to the Dubai Mall isn't on the Garmin map, as are many other roads in Dubai. On many journeys into Dubai the Garmin has been more of a liability than a help and has added sometimes another 15 minutes to the journey as the route has constantly recalculated itself as we went on to roads

which don't exist on the map. Eventually we do get the destination but the route is a little long winded.

One more thing, I recently needed to renew my passport and my eldest son's passport. The website for the British Embassy in Abu Dhabi gave the address for the embassy, but when I entered this address into the Garmin, the device couldn't find the road name. Then I noticed that the map on the Embassy's webpage with the address on it had a *different spelling* for the road name, it being an Arabic name. When I put **this** address into the Garmin, the device found the road name and was able to navigate me safely to it.

Finally... I took the Garmin back with me to the UK in July and was able to download the UK road map into it for a cost of about £36. If you go to the site, it may quote you \$99, but if you add the map to the shopping cart, then go to the checkout, you'll see that the price has been changed to £36. Downloading is not brain-dead simple: for some reason I remember having to download the map twice to get it to work on the Garmin, so be careful to follow the instructions carefully.

My family and I travelled between Scotland and England. The Garmin treats these as 2 countries, so if you're driving in England and you try to enter a new destination in Scotland then the Garmin says it can't find that place. So what you have to do is change the country to Scotland on the main menu (easy to do) then enter the destination again, and you will get route instructions.

Remember to switch from kilometers to miles from the Settings menu, otherwise the Garmin will show you the speed limit for each road you're on in kilometers per hour which looks weird.

Update: if you want to tell people where you live so they can drive to your home, simply select the GPS map coordinates icon on the main screen to see the map reference, then text or email this to people – or put it on a printed map. Then people can tap this into their satnav device and get directed to it.

Note: there are a number of ways to convey the final part of a map reference: in decimal or as 'minutes/seconds' – check you get this right: I didn't understand this when I was trying to get to a new friend's house recently. He gave me a map with map reference in minutes/seconds whereas my Gamin defaulted to decimals, so I put his numbers in as decimals and ended up 150 metres from his home, on a different street! My friend explained what I'd done wrong when I eventually found his home.

Further update: I would recommend that you don't buy a dedicated GPS like this: the maps will be out of date. Instead, if you have an iPhone or an Android phone, buy the TomTom app for the region: this comes with free updates for life. (If you buy a dedicated unit, you will be paying about \$99 for every map update!)

What's more, with the TomTom app, if someone emails you a photo of their home or a tourist attraction, if you copy that to your phone, you can tell TomTom to navigate to the photo!

How????!!

If the photo was taken with a smartphone or a digital camera with GPS built-in, the location of the shop is stored in the jpg image – so TomTom can help you get there!

If you don't have an iPhone or Android phone, I highly recommend you buy one: you'll be amazed how useful it will be!

Getting eLife from Etisalat in Al Ain

Most of Al Ain has been re-wired for optical fibre, so if you want a fast broadband connection, you can get, say, an 8mb connection for less than an 8mb copper wire connection would have cost you last year.

Be aware that you will need to direct the installers to your home by phone. This isn't helped by the fact that these people speak very little English! :)

So I arranged to meet my installers at the nearby Al Ain Paradise Gardens, or at the 'zoo roundabout' and let them follow me to our home.

But when another gang needed to come to do the next part of the job, they were starting from scratch, so they had no idea where they were coming, so we had the usual series of conversations before we got to the point that they understood where we would meet.

Me: "We'll meet at the zoo roundabout, yes?"

Installer: "Hello?"

Me: "Zoo roundabout?"

Installer: "Okay"

Me: "When will you be there? In 5 minutes? 10 minutes?"

Installer: "Yes"

...etc etc! :)

We're on a plot of land with 2 villas on it. The villa next to us had an optical fibre cable running to it. But the installers told me that there was no optical fibre cable running across to our building. They would happily dig up the flagged driveways, but I would have to drive into Sanaiya to buy a few metres of plastic corrugated piping 2 inches across for the optical fibre cable to run through! :)

So off I went to buy it!

A team of 4 workers spent ALL DAY digging up the flag stones, most of the time taken up with trying to put the tightly packed flags back into place again.

Their English may not be great but, boy!, do they work hard in the scorching sun!!

I bought these Indian/Bangladeshis bottles of water and a couple of packets of dry Digestive biscuits: they're not keen on chocolate or sugar coating which amazed me.

Getting help with household jobs

You may wish to employ a cleaner. Employing a cleaner costs in the region of 50 dirhams for two hours, which works out at less than five pounds an hour.

(I'm not aware of the specifics, but I hear that if you employ anyone who doesn't have a work permit then you could be liable to a hefty fine if you are found out.)

You may also wish to have your clothes ironed which will generally cost 1 dirham per item (less than 20p vs about 75p in the UK at a cleaner local to us), or about 30 dirhams (£6) a week to iron the main items for a 4-person family.

The picture below is of Suresh Kumar from India who does our ironing for us. He recently came back from a 3-month trip home to see his wife and children. He will visit again next year.



Here's the outside of the shop where he works...

Getting rid of termites, cockroaches, stray dogs and cats in Al Ain

Termites can be a problem in Al Ain. We got these unwelcome visitors in our new villa recently. Here's what we found behind one of my bookcases...



You can see the gap at the end of the row of tiles in the skirting board where they were coming through. (Houses aren't brilliantly put together here in Al Ain from my experience.) The gap was big enough for this gecko to crawl through too!...



Here's what you do if you have a problem with termites yourself...

Ring 993: a freephone number. (If the person who answers the line does not understand the word 'termites', as one man on this line didn't, use the word 'ants'.)

I rang on a Thursday afternoon and got a visit from a pest control company, **Orkin**, on a Saturday morning at 8.30am. (We rendezvoused at a local landmark, the Al Ain Paradise Gardens – and it so happened that the **Orkin** office is next door!)

There is no charge for this service: it's free – paid for by the Municipality. Here's the **Orkin** pickup truck outside our home...



The queen in the termite colony needs to be killed to stop the infestation from spreading: it's not enough to just seal up the gaps: they'll just find somewhere else, up the walls or round the door frames, to get through.

A team of 4 technicians and one driver came to our home.

They drilled into the grouting between various tiles...



...and then injected a chemical called Premise...



Then they mix Premise with fresh grouting...



...and plug all the holes.

There is no smell. The grouting needs to be left for 2-3 hours to dry.

I spoke to one of the team while the others did the work. Orkin UAE is a franchisee of Orkin Inc., so it is an American brand that is locally owned and operated.

The workers that came to our villa were all Filipinos. There are 20 teams in Al Ain. Some teams handle termites, cockroaches, etc. Others handle rats, stray cats and stray dogs.

Tom Kruszewski from Orkin UAE told me by email: "We have numerous nationalities working for us... at last count I believe the number is 21 different nationalities (which makes us unique because we are familiar with the different

languages and customs of various cultures.) What's more, we may be the only Pest Management Company in the Eastern side of the world that employs female technicians."

Termites and rats are a problem in the district of Shaib Al Alaskhar where we live. In town, cockroaches are a problem, especially in apartment blocks where restaurants and snack bars are on the ground floor.

The team were in our home for about 20 minutes. Amazingly they brought a vacuum cleaner to suck up all the dust from the drilling as the drilling was being done: the professionalism was similar to that at a dentist's when having a filling done! (I'm used to workers coming to our home and leaving us to clean up after them!)

You will be asked to sign a form and sign on the screen of a Pocket PC when the job is done – and encouraged to write a comment about the quality of work done etc.

I love this kind of professionalism.

The team told me to ensure that furniture isn't pushed against walls, but pulled out an inch or 2. Walls should be checked regularly for the tell-tale trails. That way you can nip problems in the bud before they become a real nuisance.

Their website is [here](#).

Getting your UAE driving licence in Al Ain

Once you get your residence visa, you then must get a UAE driving licence. (In other words, it is against the law to drive without one if you have a residence visa.)

A friend of mine called Paul told me that his wife got her residence visa the other day, so today he went with her to get a UAE driving licence for her.

He said the process took 6.5 hours from 9am this morning. Ouch!

Steps included...

Go to the Al Jimi area to get fingerprinted, palm printed and photographed for a UAE Identity Card. You will be given a receipt which you can then take to the traffic department to get a UAE driving licence. (Your Identity Card will be likely be delivered to you by motorcycle courier about 2 weeks later.)

Have your eyes tested at the traffic department. This is the only test you will need to undertake.

I will post all the steps once Paul has read my summary above of what I remember from our chat, and he has got back to me with more info.

Grand Cinemas at Bawadi Mall, Al Ain

At the south end of the upper floor at the Bawadi Mall in Al Ain is Grand Cinemas with 8 screens. It's 30 AED for a ticket, and 35 AED for a seat in the VIP section which takes up the back 3 rows.



One challenge: when our sons were aged 10 and 7, we took them to see the remake of The Karate Kid at the Bawadi Mall Cinemas. Before the film started we were treated to several trailers as per usual... including for a pretty graphic 18-rated horror film featuring zombies and a few sudden, very brief scary bits. The boys didn't say anything at the time, so I said nothing, but 6 months later my youngest son mentioned that trailer in passing.

In the spring of 2012 we 4 were again in Bawadi Mall Cinemas, and again our children saw the gruesome trailer for an upcoming horror movie.

So be aware that, very occasionally, you may be in the cinema with young children and see a trailer which isn't really suitable.

You can only pay for tickets in cash. The staff, like in a number of outlets in Al Ain who only take cash, can be reluctant to give change, and do occasionally seem to be low on change, so it's best to have the right change with you when you visit

Lastly, you cannot find out what films are showing here by looking online. You could find details online until around May 2010, but since then, and as of the time of writing, April 2012, there have been no listings on the [Grand Cinemas website](#).

You can pick up a colour brochure showing current and upcoming films and showtimes, but the staff have told me that there are occasional errors in the showtimes printed.

So if you want to find out what's on, you'll have to call them on 03 784 0300.

The staff's accent is often so thick that it's very difficult to work out a movie title. So when I rang the other day, I was told about one new movie that sounded like Threat of the Takehouse. I tried to get the guy to say the words more slowly but this was the best I could do. I checked online for movies showing at the Rotana, and found a movie there called Wrath Of The Titans! That was what he was trying to convey to me! :)

Apart from these minor issues, this is a superb cinema.

Grand Cinemas Rotana, Al Ain

I think that the Grand Cinemas is one of the first movie theatres in Al Ain, if not the very first. It's situated below ground, next to the Rotana Hotel...



They have 4 screens there. One of the smaller screens had a rip about a foot long (30 cms) in the centre right of the screen when I went with a mate to see a non-blockbuster movie in early 2011. I thought it might spoil our viewing but we didn't notice it during the film.

You'll find a list of what they're showing online at the [Grand Cinemas website](#).

If you look at the site on a Wednesday, you'll only see information on films which open the next evening, so if you want to find out what's on that night, you'll have to call, and talk with someone whose English isn't great. As films sometimes have unusual titles, this can be a challenging process!!

Also, if you see a time listed for a film that you want to see, and you have a spare moment, take the time to ring the cinema to confirm the time. Why? Because the staff here do say whenever I ring to always check the times by phone as the website isn't always accurate. (The staff at the Bawadi Mall Grand Cinemas say the same thing.)

Phone the Rotana Grand Cinemas on 03 754 4447.

Green Mubazzarah in Al Ain

If you look south when you're looking out of an upstairs window in Al Ain, you'll see the mountain Jebel Hafeet (or Jebel Hafit), with the Le Mercure Hotel at the top. This mountain is 1,240 metres high.

It's a 25-ish minute drive from the Hilton Hotel in Al Ain. The steep, windy Jebel Hafeet Mountain Road is more than 7 miles long, and features 21 corners before you get to the top!

At the base is Green Mubazzarah, with hot springs, a lake, swimming pools, chalets to stay at, and more.

To get to either, you drive west from the Hilton towards Abu Dhabi. After you pass the Al Ain English Speaking School on your left, at the next roundabout turn left. You're now driving south. As you go across a couple of roundabouts you'll see the Al Ain Paradise Hanging Gardens on your right (see separate post), and soon after, if you have keen eyes, you'll see this villa with a dhow (boat) on the top, set back from the main road...



Carry on and eventually you get to a roundabout with rams in the middle. You can see Jebel Hafit in the background...



Here are the rams from the side...



Turn left here (it's all well signposted), and you drive along this road with sculpted bushes...



...and if you look to your right...



Then you arrive at a sign indicating Green Mubazzarah to your right. If you turn right and then right again at the next roundabout, you reach this roundabout...



The next roundabout to the east is this one, and you can see the single-storey chalets behind...



Nested among the chalets is this play area...



Nearby is a man-made boat lake...



...but the blue boats (shown very small on the left below) look unused...



And there's another play area next to the lake...



Head towards the mountain and you go past this restaurant...



And here it is again from the left-hand side...



100 yards further on the right is this sign...



...with the 'trains' behind...



...and the track to the left...



Another few hundred yards later you reach this large area. I think that's some kind of palace on the hillside, and there's a play area below it...



...and another to the side of it...



Close by are 4 buildings containing swimming pools: 2 for men and children, and 2 for women only (aged 12 and upwards). The building below is for men. The pool inside is about two thirds the size of a tennis court. The attendants wouldn't let me take a photo, referring me to the clear regulations printed on the wall outside. However I went inside and dipped a foot in the water: it was pretty hot. Entry is 5 AED (less than £1). You can see an attendant sitting outside the pool building below...



This is one of the women's pools...



Opposite are these 2 views...



There's a restaurant nearby...



Here are 4 photos from a recent family outing...







Green Mubazzarah is a lovely place to visit, and it's only about 20 minutes from the Hilton Hotel. You can drive from there to Le Mercure Hotel to spend the afternoon by the pools if you wanted.

Call 03 783 9555 to make bookings for the chalets.

(I have had a request to use one or more of these photos in a magazine, and asking for the hi-resolution original files, which I happily emailed along in exchange for a credit line in the magazine. If you too would like copies of the hi-resolution originals, drop me a line.)

Gulf Dental Clinic, Al Ain

The Gulf Dental Clinic is situated on Main Street in Al Ain, opposite the National Jewellers.

It's run by Dr Christian Jaber who I've chatted with many times at the Hilton Hotel: he regularly plays squash there. The strap line on his business card is "Dentistry with a smile", which matches Christian's playful personality.

His hours are 10am to 12.30pm, then 6pm to 9pm. I think that's Sunday through Thursday.

Telephone: 03 765 4373 and 050 753 0922.

His prices are keener than some other practices.

Hamdan Bin Mohammed Bin Rashid Sports Complex, Dubai

The very impressive Hamdan Bin Mohammed Bin Rashid Sports Complex in Dubai contains 2 big swimming pools, one 100 metres long. One side has a window so you can watch racers swimming underwater from the viewing window.

Below these 2 pools is a third, underground practice pool which is 100 metres long.



Here's a shot of the VVIP entrance...



Here's a shot of the VVIP entrance from the side, so the canopy looks like a flap folding down from the side panels...



Here's a map of the area...



The lobby area...



...and a design on the wall on the way down to the underground practice pool...



My son Toby swims for the Al Ain Club, and he and the team have competed at 2 tournaments at the Hamdan Bin Mohammed Bin Rashid Sports Complex.

If you're travelling from Al Ain, go past the Outlet Mall and take the exit which takes you on the east-west road to Abu Dhabi. Watch your speed as there are a lot of speed cameras on this road. After about 2 kilometres you will see the

complex on your left. There is a sign on the side of the road indicating that you are to come off at the next turning, but it's very easy to miss it! Come off at the next exit and turn left to travel under the motorway, then head back towards the complex.

Turn right off the motorway as you arrive, and first left towards the security gate. Travel anticlockwise round the grounds and park where you see other visitors.

Hili Fun City, Al Ain

The following photos are mostly family-type shots, but they'll give you a good idea of what to expect at Hili Fun City, which is a pleasant day out for families with young children.

You may, as I did, find other non-flattering photos on the net. Many of these are very out of date as this theme park was extensively refurbished in 2009. It's now an impressive facility.

Entry prices are very reasonable.

There are dodgems...



A carousel...



Flying boats...



More than one rollercoaster...





A paintball shooting gallery...



Electric quad bikes...



A boating lake...



...plus scary ghost tour, 3D film, and more.

Hili Oasis

If you drive out from Al Ain towards Dubai, you'll see this fort on your right...



Here's a photo of the sign you can see to the far left in the photo above...



It says: "It says that this tower was re-built by the Department of Antiquities and Tourism on top of ruins of an old tower that once protected the oasis. The ruins had to be removed due to its bad state of preservation, and replaced with the existing tower. Although stones are used in the foundations, mudbricks and clay are the main construction materials used."

Here's a photo of part of the oasis, to the Tower's right...



Hilton Hotel in Al Ain

We spend one afternoon most weekends at the Hilton Hotel in the south east of the town...



...because of its excellent facilities.

There are 3 pools: a laps pool for adults...



a paddling pool for infants...



...and a large family pool with water features and a water slide.





Here's a video lasting a few minutes, showing the hotel and main pools...

There are some swings and a climbing frame too...



Inside you'll find two table tennis tables, squash court...



...a fully equipped gym...



...sauna, Jacuzzis, steam room etc.

When children want a break from the heat, or if they just want to slow down after a couple of hours in the pool, they can watch a DVD in a special play room (there are 12-15 DVDs to choose from, ranging from Shawn The Sheep to The Aristocats)...





The lunchtime menu in the restaurant next to the pool...



...is excellent, and the staff are a delight: here are 3 of the 5-strong team: from left to right: Joy, Rameez and Diago...



Our children have tennis lessons there every week and they also have fun on the swings and climbing frame. There is also a small putting green for golf enthusiasts. My wife and I have enjoyed massages there from Elizabeta, a skilled masseuse from Romania.

At the entrance to the Hiltonia Club is a busy noticeboard offering cars, apartments, discount furniture and white goods (often at a half to one third of the original purchase price for goods which maybe be only 8-12 months old).



You can use these facilities by paying the day rate, but it's much more cost-effective to pay for a full year. Often there is a discount depending on which company the main breadwinner works for. And it's worth knowing that sometimes at the weekend the Hotel facilities are closed to non-members and non-guests.

Hiring a plumber in Al Ain



When we needed a good plumber when we moved into our new villa, I rang my friend Sunil. He recommended I use Salim who has an office in the south of Al Ain.

He did a terrific job plumbing in our washing machine, getting a water heater working, and wiring up an electrical cooker where there wasn't a proper connection.

His prices were very fair.

Ring him on 055 751 7870.

Please tell him that you find out about him via me, Chris Payne, at the Al Ain Enthusiast site.

House moving and removal service in Al Ain

If you're moving house in Al Ain, this is the guy we used: Sunil Sulekha. He was the 'go to' guy at educational supplier Nord Anglia's office in Al Ain before they closed it down. (He did a fab job supporting all the staff with document attesting, getting repairs done, getting furniture, etc.)

Sunil hails from India and lives in Al Ain with his wife and young family. He has a terrific sense of humour and perfect English. In our first 2 years in Al Ain, if we needed anything done in our home, Sunil handled it. Nothing was too much trouble for him.

Sunil now runs a business helping people with...

- house moving
- airport drop and pick up
- arranging all kind of maintenance for villas and apartments
- arranging documents attesting and legal translation
- villa and apartment cleaning

Here is a photo of his guys filling their truck with our belongings when he moved us into our new villa...



You can contact Sunil by emailing him: [suniljasmin2000 at yahoo.com](mailto:suniljasmin2000@yahoo.com).

Or ring him on 050 7138 155.

Please let him know that you find out about him via me, Chris Payne at the Al Ain Enthusiast site.

How to buy used / secondhand mobile phones in Al Ain

If you want to buy a used / secondhand mobile phone in Al Ain, you have a number of options

Email a request to Niala News and ask them to publicise it: this can take a week or 2 to get distributed

Put a message on the alainexpats yahoo group: you could get a reply within 5 minutes

Check out various shops selling used mobiles.

We bought a used Blackberry phone for our 12-year-old son from a kiosk at Jimi Mall. Go into the entrance on the far left. Turn to your right. Go to the second kiosk from the right. Alaa there was very helpful.

You'll find other shops selling used phones around Al Ain.

Whatever price you are quoted, know that it is negotiable: you could bargain down by about 10%.

How to get a UAE driving license if your UK etc one has expired

My UK driving license expired 2 days before my residency visa arrived. I tried to renew my UK license, but the DVLC or whatever said that, as I'm now living overseas, they wouldn't renew my license!

So I had to cough up a fair amount of cash (I can't remember how much at the moment: maybe £100-£150??) – and take 6 instructional lessons of about 90 minutes each over about 10 days, then sit a very easy multiple choice test which I completed in 10 minutes. I also booked one driving lesson.

This is what most of the learner driver cars look like...



I have been driving automatics for most of the time over the last 25 years, but my wife has a manual car in the UK. As I wanted to drive this when we're in the UK for the summer, this meant that I had to take lessons and pass my test in a manual/stick shift car.

Boy, was that hard!

My instructor gave me HELL! He was a very nice guy, but he constantly criticised my driving during those 30 minutes. I was only planning to take one lesson to get a few tips – after all: I'm a good driver! :)

However my guy gave me such strong feedback about the quality of my driving that I decided to book 2 more lessons! I'm glad I did this as you need to know the official way to approach a roundabout, say, if you are going across it regarding which lane to be in, when and how you indicate etc.

The driving test itself was hilarious: around 7.30am about 30 of us piled into a bus, each of us with a numbered ticket. The coach followed a car with 2 officials inside. Person number 1 got out of the coach and into the car and drove off for his *5-minute* driving test which was just round the local area, negotiating roundabouts mainly. After 5 minutes he got out, was passed a certificate from the official in the back seat if he passed, and he was left by the side of the road to get a taxi. Then number 2 person got out of the coach and climbed into the car for his test. I was one of the last on the coach so I watched nearly 30 people before me take their tests. Almost all my fellow passengers were Pakistani or Indian men.

Some drivers drove so badly that their test was over in less than one minute!! They'd drive out into the traffic without looking in their mirror or indicating. One veered across the dotted line into the traffic coming in the opposite direction! It was like watching a comedy sketch on TV! For one of the guys who failed so spectacularly this was his third test. And I believe that you *have* to have 40 30-minute driving lessons if you are starting from scratch, so gosh knows how they can drive so badly after so many lessons

After an hour and a half of going round and round the same area of Al Ain, following this car, it was my turn. My driving instructor of the days before told me to show the official my expired UK driving license and explain that I have been driving in the UK for more than 25 years, which I did. I was very nervous as I was so desperate to be driving a car again, but the official next to me was quite chatty and I soon calmed down, and it was all over after 5 minutes, I got out and was given my certificate. I was now dumped by the side of the road.

However enterprising taxi drivers had been following our coach over the previous 90 minutes, picking up the dumped drivers, so there was one ready to pick me up and take me back home. He was manically happy for me that I'd passed. Back at my place he demanded a fee of 25 AED (£5), which I refused to pay, and gave him 6 AED which would have been about the fee if he had put his meter on. He was furious with me and ranted away, but I just got out and walked off!

I forget how I got the paper certificate transformed into a silver plastic credit card with my photo on it, but it was very straight forward.

How to pay your Etisalat bill in Al Ain

You have a number of options when it comes to paying your Etisalat mobile phone or Internet bill.

First option...

- Go to the main Etisalat building
- Tell the receptionist that you want to pay a bill
- Get a ticket from him/her
- Wait in line in the correct area they point out to you
- Provide your phone number
- Hear the amount owed
- Pay

Second option...

- Find an Etisalat payment machine: there's one in Jimi Mall next to the far right entrance.

- Enter your landline number to see what you owe for your Internet account (which starts with 03). Or enter your mobile phone number to see the bill for that.
- Feed in bank notes to pay your bill.
- Collect the receipt.

Very roughly, if you let a bill go over 1,000 or 2,000 dirhams your account will be suspended, so it's best to pay these bills regularly!

Let me know if you know of other places where there is a payment machine, or any other info to improve this article.

How to renew car registration in Al Ain

Melissa asked by email... "Where can I renew my car registration in Al Ain?"

Here's what I believe is the answer...

From the Etisalat building, head west.

About 3-4 roundabouts from there, you'll see the Choueifat School on the far right of the roundabout (white walls with circular logo). Turn left here.

Go across 2 roundabouts. On the right is the Adnoc car testing centre.

Enter the main building there, and get a ticket from reception.

You'll get served soon after that.

I think they open at 7.30am and are open all day (i.e. they don't close from 1-5pm as most places do).

Ice Land Water Park, Ras Al Khaimah review

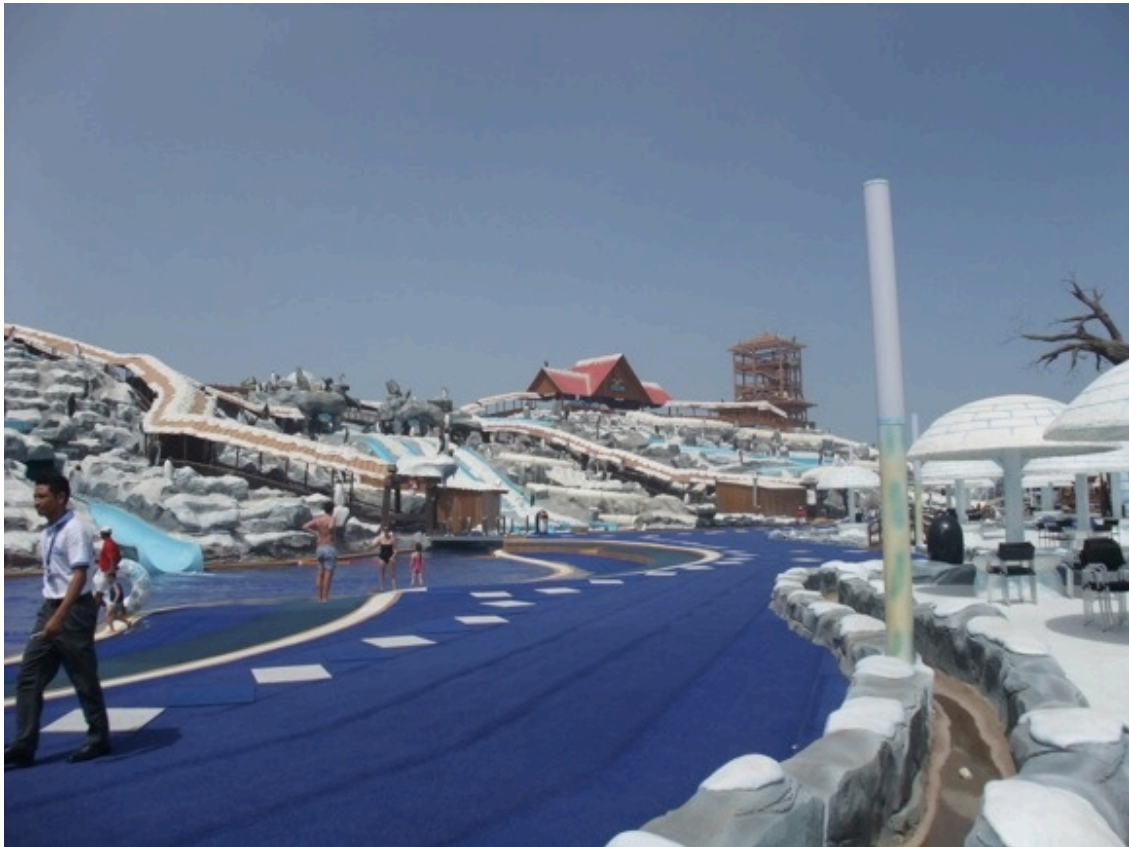
In October 2010, the Ice Land Water Park in Ras Al Khaimah opened. This joins the Wild Wadi and Aquaventure Water Parks in Dubai. How does Ice Land compare? This is my very personal review.

I drove from Al Ain with my boys, aged 11 and 8, along with another father (I'll call him David until he gives me the go-ahead to mention his name in this review) and his teenage son, in March 2011, 5 months after it first opened.

Here's what it looks like from outside...



And inside...





Here's what's good about the place:

1. My guess was that there were only a few hundred people in the water park all day when we were there. One of the staff told me that there were 2,000 visitors the day before, a Friday. They've had as many as 5,000 in the park.

We had a good time with so few people there. We only had very short waits to go on a slide, or no wait at all. I wouldn't want to come on a Friday!!

2. Most of the rides were excellent. The lifeguards were friendly, alert and attentive, and communicated with each other very professionally using a sequence of whistles. The level of safety was very good – apart from in one area which I'll come to later.

3. There is a large food court which has very friendly staff who were happy to chat and joke with. I bought a chicken green Thai curry with rice which I thought was very tasty, and a fair price at 35 dirhams. One of my sons had a chicken burger and chips, and the other had chicken nuggets and chips. The price of these was fair at 30 dirhams each (I think).

4. I rented a wrist band to activate a locker to store my mobile phone and wallet. This worked like a charm (better than the system at Aquaventure which I couldn't figure out without help!).

What's not so good...

1. You're supposed to be able to put credit on the wrist band so you can buy food and drink using it, rather than having to go back to get your wallet. I was told the network was down on the day we were there.

2. My friend David said, "This place looks like it has been here 10 years." When I told him that it had opened last October, he couldn't believe it!! Why would he make such a comment? Here's why... The place is not 5-star quality like Wild Wadi or Aquaventure. The design of the place is not what I would call 'modern' and 'tasteful' – it had a low budget feel.

3. The most popular side of the park is on the west side. I walked over to the east side where there are other 'rides' – but amazingly I got lost and couldn't find entrances easily. I don't think some of the signposting is very clear: the park has a 'not well thought out' feel to it.

4. There was some litter on the floor: for example, by the coral reef area was a plastic bag and straw. It was noon on a very quiet day. Walking further east there was more litter with staff walking past it. And near the entrance there was the plastic top from a food court meal, discarded. It's not a big deal, but I'd

say this park was less tidy than Aquaventure. My sense was that for staff walking by, keeping the place spotless wasn't their highest agenda.

5. The Tundra Baths building contains a number of jacuzzi baths. My 8-year-old came back during the afternoon to tell that only one of the baths contained warm water: the others were cold. And the warm bath had a lot of yellow scum on the top of it. My friend David confirmed this.

6. The water rides are great as far as they go. But they aren't as varied as at Aquaventure. In other words, for me, Aquaventure has far fewer rides, but they're a lot more varied and fun. At Aquaventure my children and I went on many of the rides time after time and didn't tire of them. But at Ice Land my boys said to me, "The rides aren't as much fun here. Most of the rides I only went on once." One of the reasons is that, at Ice Land, all the water rides go downhill. At Aquaventure and Wild Wadi, on many of the rides you are pushed uphill by strong water jets which makes them very exhilarating, surprising, and addictive.

7. My son Felix said he was shouted at by one of the staff for taking the wrong tube to go on a ride. Felix said that he'd never been shouted at before (and we've been to Wild Wadi once and Aquaventure twice). This is no great shakes, but when added to my above comments, I think you may get a good picture about this place.

8. The blue matting on the floor is quite uncomfortable to walk on. That's why you'll see the white tiles on the photos above: so you can walk from ride to ride by stepping on each white tile. Except that the tiles get knocked out of place. Why couldn't the designers have got this part right in the first place rather than the staff having to add these extra tiles for walking comfort?

Cool Pix photo counter

A staff photographer took 16 photos of our party: some of the boys on a ride, and some of them jumping from a 5 metre platform into a deep pool of water.

Here are a couple of photos the photographer took...





At the end of the day we went to the Cool Pix photo counter where I asked to pay for all 16 photos to be emailed to me. To get this, the very helpful young man called Jake said I needed to buy one 6-inch x 9-inch print, and a further 40 dirhams. That was fine by me. He emailed me the photos the next day.

However the photos were only 800x533 pixels: 72k each! This was not what I expected! This size is really only suitable for 6-inch by 4-inch photos. My 8-year-old pointed out the pixellisation on the 6x9-inch photo, without prompting, which he has never noticed before. I asked Jake about this. He said the (expensive-looking) SLR camera was set to its lowest resolution setting. Why?, I asked. "Well, because if we set the resolution higher, the photo software we use on our PC runs too slowly." Not only that but their photo system can't handle any cropping!

This is very surprising for a brand new water park. What kind of computer system can only cope with processing 72k images and nothing higher than that?! Oh well.

The consequence is that I cannot crop any of the superb shots of my 11-year-old jumping into the pool. I would have loved to have cropped them and printed them out, but the resolution isn't good enough to be able to do this.

Jake understood where I was coming from and offered to look into taking higher-resolution photos if I was to take my family again – but he couldn't see how to could do this due to the constraints of his hardware and software.

By way of contrast... I have paid for 2 DVDs of photos from the Aquaventure Water Park at the Atlantis Hotel in Dubai, and the photos from there were 3,600 pixels across, compared with the maximum of 800 pixels across which the system at the brand new Ice Land Water Park can cope with.

What my sons thought of Ice Land Water Park...

I shared none of my above opinions with my boys. But I asked them the next day to rate the park. My eldest son rated it 6 out of 10 and my youngest son rated it 6.5.

They have both been to Aquaventure twice. I asked them both to rate that in comparison. They said 8 and 8.5. (They haven't been to Wild Wadi for 7 years so they're too young to remember that.)

Ice Land's safety

One section of the park has 4 rides spiralling out from one place. I thought was dangerous and chaotic. Some staff were taking down some scaffolding, and as they dismantled it, the steel rods were only a metre from adults and children as they were moved.

Two rides had large moving platforms. One platform had a broken section on the edge. A child could have caught its foot in it. Notice the child's foot in the top left of this picture – and compare that with the size of the hole you can see bottom centre. Imagine a child putting their foot through that. Even worse if the platform is moving and this 'caterpillar' track runs 'over the edge'. Yuck!...



I went to see the manager. When we met he said he was concerned for safety. He said he had closed down one section of the park a few months earlier as the paint was peeling (I think). He said it would be good to see the concerns about the rides through my 'fresh' eyes.

I pointed out the hole in the platform in the photo above. He said that no-one would put their foot in that hole. I disagree. Strongly.

I pointed out the men moving the scaffolding (you can see how close it is to the rides as you'll see the white tubes on the right of the photo)...



The manager agreed with me, and told them to stop what they were doing. Great.

The idea was that people would walk onto the platform, climb into their blown-up ring, everyone would step away from the platform, the staff member would press a button, the platform would roll forward and the people in the ring would be set off down the ride.

But people were walking on the platforms as they were set moving forward. This is an accident waiting to happen, as far as I'm concerned!

The manager said "they shouldn't be walking on these moving belts: they should go round the back." I agreed but said that the reality was that people were walking in unsafe sections, so his safety system wasn't working. "But they shouldn't be walking here" he again repeated.

As he was saying this he was standing with one foot on solid ground and one foot on part of the moving platform which was stationary. Suddenly one of his team pressed the button which set the platform moving – so the manager I was talking to lost his balance! I said "See what I mean? This isn't safe!" to which he responded. "Yes, but I shouldn't be standing on this platform!" to which I replied, "but you are!"

In other words, his staff member should have looked around to see that no-one was standing on the platform – especially his blinking manager – before he pressed the button to put it in motion. But he didn't!! Why? I think he wasn't properly trained, and he was so stressed from trying to do so much at once that he wasn't thinking straight.

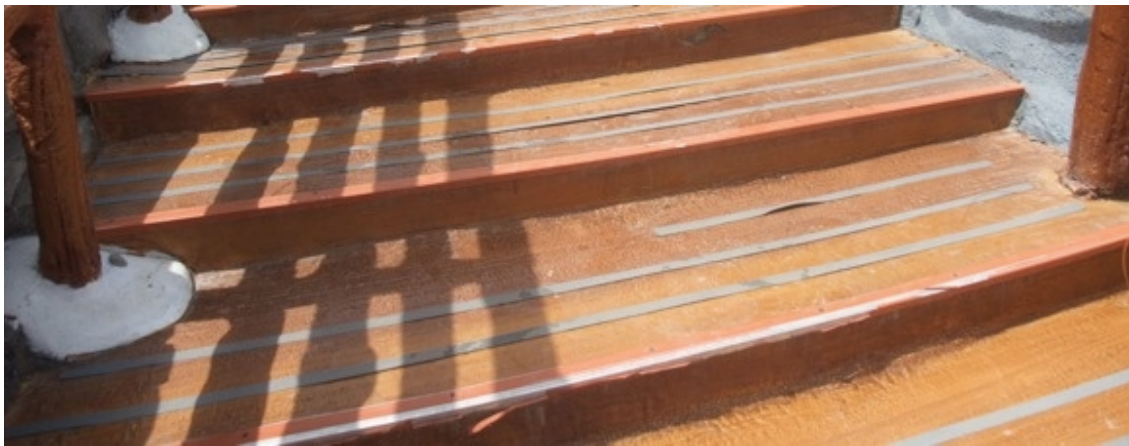
(From what I know of the brain, the thinking part, the pre frontal cortex, runs out of juice fast when under stress, which is why people come home from a challenging day at work and can't think straight!)

Then the manager turned to me and said, "I feel like you've come into my home and been critical, and you just don't do that." I think he took my comments personally, which wasn't what I wanted. I was concerned, but he got defensive. I think he was in a difficult position. I strongly believe the park wasn't well designed. I could be wrong, but if, say, a theme park safety officer came from the UK or US, I think they would shut this section of the park down. That's how strongly I feel about this part of Ice Land.

4 more things...

1. The place had a tired look to it, despite its newness...

The anti-slip tape on the steps to the rides was peeling off...



...which meant that the steps, which do get wet, could be slippery. So look what the staff did to make things safer... They put down carpet tiles which are bigger than each step...



...which doesn't make this place look very professional, does it?

2. The signs at the entrance to the park say that you must wear swimming costumes. But I saw children swimming in their cotton underwear. Not only is this not as hygienic, but it shows that this place isn't being tightly managed.

3. In one part of the park is a very long water slide. People wanted to cross the slide as a short cut to the highest slide in the park. Some staff shouted at people to stop them crossing the ride and possibly bumping into people coming down the water slide at speed. But some of the people ignored the staff. The staff were helpless. One young woman who did this, and totally ignored the member of staff, then went on the very biggest slide, similar to the Leap Of Faith. This is what it looks like (the tall construction centre right)...



What you're supposed to do is lie down at the top of the slide, cross your arms, and wiggle a bit to get you sliding down the slide at breakneck speed. This woman went down this slide holding onto the side to slow her down. For me, this is not safe. But her actions were a consequence of bad management here: this place is run in such a way that the chance of accidents happening increases.

It seemed to me that the staff here have a feeling of powerlessness: they don't have the authority to warn guests that they will be asked to leave if they break the rules here – and if they persist to actually get them to leave. Instead they raise their voices at the guests, then do nothing if they are ignored.

I know next to nothing about running places like this, but from what I know of managing staff, if you don't have clear boundaries and enforce them, all sorts of problems can arise.

It doesn't mean that accidents will happen here at Ice Land, but the probability of them happening is larger.

4. As we were about to leave, we walked through the changing rooms. There was a loud bang, and one of the ceiling tiles 3 metres in front of us fell down to the ground. It was amazing it didn't hit anyone. I grabbed my phone and took

this shot just as a staff member was picking the (large, metal?) tile up. You can see the brown dust/debris on the ground...



What caused such a loud bang that forced this tile out of place?? How could this happen in a new water park like this??

What I did get from this visit was an extra appreciation of Aquaventure and Wild Wadi: I'm far more amazed now at how well these water parks were thought out and designed before they were built. In England we have a saying: Don't spoil the ship for a halfpenny worth of tar. I think the Ice Land Water Park would have benefitted from more money spent on fittings, rides and training.

Finally, please leave your comments below. Have I reported on this water park fairly? Or not so fairly? I'd love to know what you think!

Danat Hotel, Al Ain

The Danat Hotel in Al Ain was, until 2010, called the Intercontinental Hotel (and still affectionally known as the 'Intercon'). The Danat is very busy with tourists and new arrivals to Al Ain who are sometimes lodged there temporarily until their apartments or villas are ready to move into.

Here are some photos of it...



The children's pool (I popped round one quiet morning as we're not members here)...



The grown-ups pool (a full-length Olympic pool no less)...



Looking back towards the hotel...



Children's play area...



The gym...





There's lots of other great stuff at this hotel: various restaurants, shops, various massage treatments (including with hot stones), martial arts lessons, and more.

iStore in Al Ain selling Apple Macs, iPhones, iPads and iPods

If you're a fan of Apple's products like the MacBook Pro, iMac, iPad, iPhone, and iPod, then you'll be well served in Al Ain.

iStore opened in the new wing of the Al Ain Mall in January 2012.

This was terrific news for Apple lovers like me and my family...

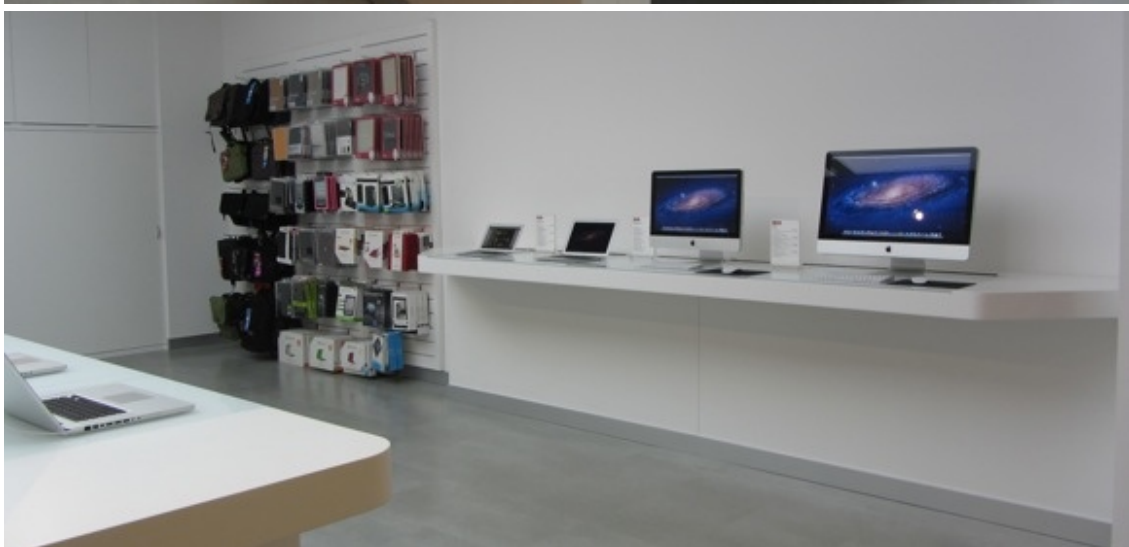


The store is located opposite the wonderfully stylish Shakespeare and Co. tea rooms.

Here's Shakespeare and Co...



...and here's iStore opposite...



An old MacBook Pro of mine developed a fault early in 2011, which meant a 90-minute drive to the iStore in the centre of Dubai to drop it off, then a 90-minute

journey back home again. Then another 3 hours of driving a week later to pick up the fixed device.

Now, with this new iStore in Al Ain, faulty devices can be handled with greater ease.

Here are 2 price lists...

iSTORE

iMac

21.5-inch: Core i5 From **AED 5,399**

- 21.5-inch LED-backlit display (1920 x 1080 resolution)
- 2.5 GHz Intel Core i5
- 4GB memory; 500GB or 1TB hard drive¹
- Apple Wireless Keyboard and Magic Mouse

27-inch: Core i5 **AED 7,799**

- 27-inch LED-backlit display (2560 x 1440 resolution)
- 2.7GHz Intel Core i5
- 4GB memory; 1TB hard drive¹
- Apple Wireless Keyboard and Magic Mouse

27-inch: Core i5 **AED 8,999**

- 27-inch LED-backlit display (2560 x 1440 resolution)
- 3.1GHz Intel Core i5
- 4GB memory; 1TB¹ hard drive
- Apple Wireless Keyboard and Magic Mouse

Time Capsule From **AED 1,499**

- Automatic, wireless backup with Mac OS X
- 2TB or 3TB server-grade hard drive¹
- 802.11n simultaneous dual-band (2.4GHz and 5GHz) Wi-Fi base station
- Share a printer wirelessly



iSTORE

MacBook Air

13-inch: 1.7GHz **AED 5,999**

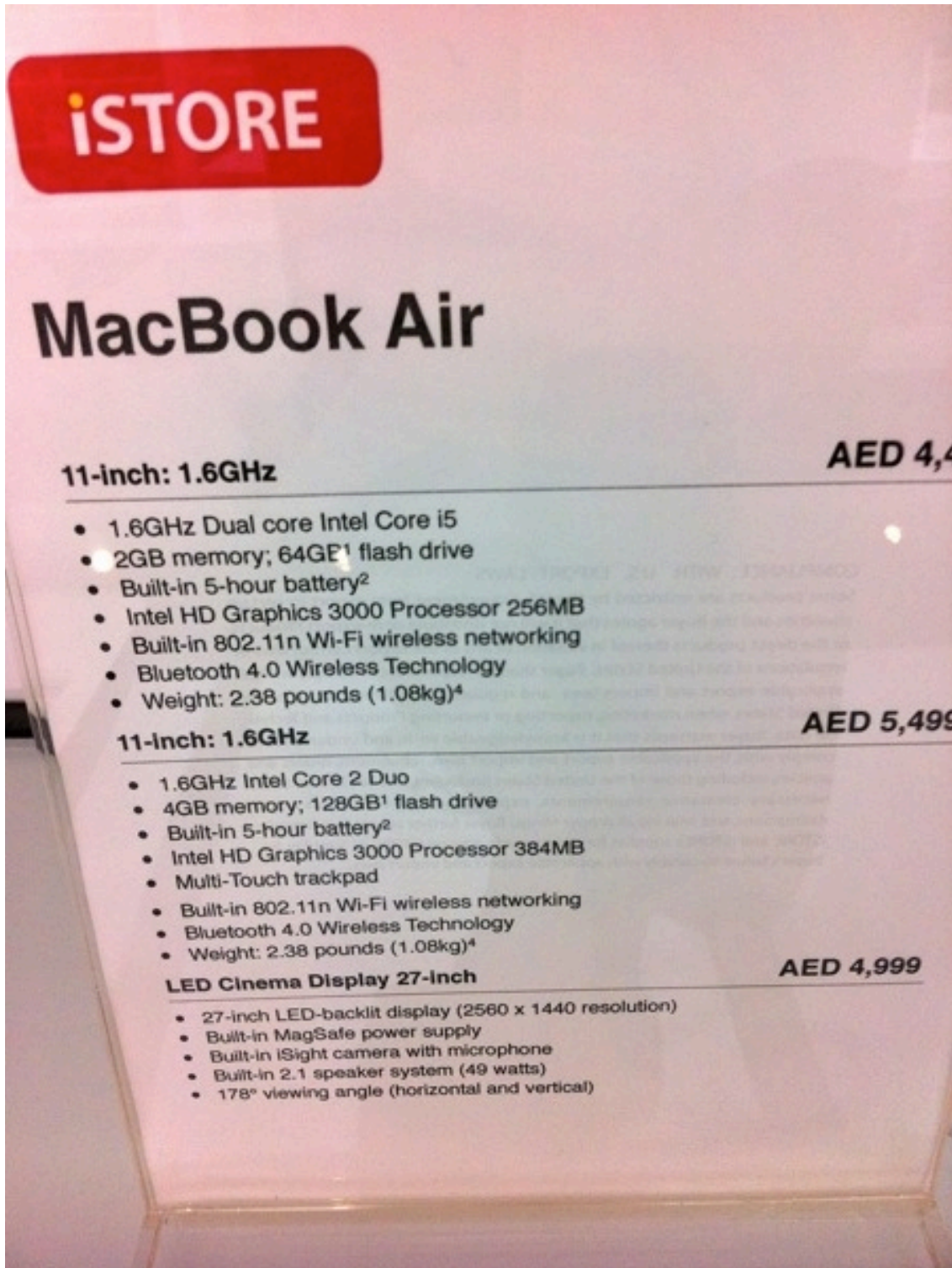
- 1.7GHz Dual Core Intel core i5
- 4GB memory; 128GB¹ flash drive
- Built-in 7-hour battery²
- Intel HD Graphics 3000 graphics processor
- Multi-Touch trackpad
- Built-in 802.11n Wi-Fi wireless networking
- Bluetooth 4.0 Wireless Technology
- Weight: 2.96 pounds (1.35kg)⁴

13-inch: 1.7GHz **AED 7,299**

- 1.7GHz Dual Core Intel Core i5
- 4GB memory; 256GB¹ flash drive
- Built-in 7-hour battery²
- Intel HD Graphics 3000 graphics processor
- Multi-Touch trackpad
- Built-in 802.11n Wi-Fi wireless networking
- Bluetooth 4.0 Wireless Technology
- Weight: 2.96 pounds (1.35kg)⁴

LED Cinema Display 27-inch **AED 4,999**

- 27-inch LED-backlit display (2560 x 1440 resolution)
- Built-in MagSafe power supply
- Built-in iSight camera with microphone
- Built-in 2.1 speaker system (49 watts)
- 178° viewing angle (horizontal and vertical)



You can also buy iMacs and MacBook Pros at Sharaf DG, the big electronics store nearby in the Mall, for about the same price (there were a few variations around 100 dirhams when I price checked recently).

Jahli Park, Al Ain

In the centre of Al Ain, next to the central post office, is the beautiful Jahli Park.

Here is a video I created...

Now some photos...

Here is one of the entrances to it...



(Please forgive the smudge on the lens in some shots.) There are a number of 'don't's which help make the park more peaceful, including no ball games, no bicycles, and no dogs...



There are 3 play areas for children...



...and here's the same snoozing guy from another angle...



Jahli Park has some great views...











There are so many workers keeping the park tidy, and they're happy to smile and wave as the guy above did after I took his photo. I took the next shot of a guy with an umbrella. Generally it's the occasional Filipino woman who sports one of these...



Journey from Al Ain to Fujairah

Here is my first draft of an article to show you what the car journey looks like from Al Ain to Fujairah. It takes about 3 hours to get to the beach hotels there like Al Aqah Beach Resort (our favourite), Sandy Beach, etc.

If you have a [Garmin satellite navigation device](#), or the Tom-Tom app on your iPhone, enter N 25°30' E56°21' to be directed to Al Aqah Beach Resort, which is metres away from the other hotels on this short strip of beach.

I don't know how much use this will be to you, but it does show the kind of scenery along the way.

Here goes...

We set off Al Ain around 9am – and reached this petrol station just to the right of a roundabout around 10am...



90 mins later, here's the view. Notice the way the mountain has been cut out in 'steps' in the middle of this photo...



5 mins later...



5 mins further on...



2 mins later...



4 mins later...



Another 4 mins later (!), fruit and veg sellers by the road side with the sign to Le Meridien behind them...



On the other side of the road too...



2 mins later, the sea on the left...



7 mins later, we reached this roundabout: the hotels Mirimar, Al Aqah, Sandy Beach etc are 10-500 metres to the right of here...



Le Meridien Al Aqah Beach Resort Hotel, Fujairah

The reason we Paynes moved to Al Ain was because we discovered this hotel a few years ago and then came twice a year ever since, then finally decided to move to this country as we like it so much!

We've stayed at this hotel 11 times so far, ranging from 2 to 15 nights at a time.

We come because the service is beyond anything we've experienced anywhere else: way better than the likes of the Peninsula in Hong Kong, or the Atlantis and Jumeriah Beach Hotel in Dubai.

The hotel looks fabulous...



...and it has a terrific range of facilities which surpass those of other hotels we've tried.

Here's part of one pool...



Kid's Club inside area...



The outside area of the Kid's Club...



And here's a 1-minute video I took on a cloudy day one July when it was 50 degrees, and 110 per cent humidity – though still quite bearable to sunbathe in, surprisingly (we had got used to the heat after nearly a year in Al Ain)...

The manager, Patrick Antaki, is a stickler for detail, and comes across as obsessed with giving superb customer service.

Here's me with Patrick at a fair they held a while back with Bucking Bronco and tug of war...



I have been so amazed by the service that I've grilled the staff as to their philosophy, and also talked to Patrick about it.

Here are a few bits of information which may give you an idea that this is a hotel worth visiting...

If you are on the beach and you want, to take this to an extreme, a glass on beetroot and spinach juice, then the staff are trained to say "Yes, I can get that for you. It will just take a little time." (Of course, this drink is not on any menu.)

The lifeguard staff by the pools are rotated every 30 minutes or so to ensure that their concentration is 100%. (In other hotels, lifeguards can be at one post for hours at a time.)

If you see a member of staff walking by, and you ask for something, they make it happen. There is no "please go to reception and ask" etc attitude. They really go the extra mile.

They make it a priority to learn guests' names and greet them accordingly.

The staff are well paid, have their own gym, have a 24-hour lounge, get involved in inter-hotel tournaments, take part in events like a vertical marathon: running up the stairs of the hotel from the bottom to the top.

If a member of staff gets married in their home country, management make an effort to find employment for that partner in the hotel.

When a member of staff had kidney failure at the age of 29, all the staff chipped in to pay 70,000 dirhams for his hospital treatment.

When the tsunami destroyed homes in Sri Lanka, the hotel helped pay for the rebuilding of 7 of the homes of the families of some of the staff members.

Patrick reads most of the comment cards that people leave behind. The bad ones are displayed on a noticeboard for all staff to see. The person who made the complaint is rung up and invited to visit again.

Patrick told me, "If you treat people like kings and queens, they come again and tell their friends."

Patrick relates a whole series of stories which show his philosophy. "One man, who had stayed with us a few times, decided to try one of our competitors, who offered him a lower price to stay there. Within several hours the man rang Patrick up and said, "I don't care how much you charge me, just get me a room in your hotel because my wife is giving me hell here."

I spoke with one of the other guests at the hotel who told me this story: "We got stuck in this hotel when the volcano in Iceland erupted and so many flights were cancelled back to the UK. We had friends who were staying at hotels in Dubai, and some of those hotels put the room rates up much higher, which made their prolonged stay that much more expensive. This hotel, the Al Aqah, offered us special deals, free meals and free drinks. That's the way to treat guests."

Although, on average, this hotel is 150AED or more per night than the other hotels in the area, their occupancy level is far higher: a testament to the power of supreme customer service.

We Paynes have stayed in many hotels including the Atlantis and the Jumeriah Beach Hotel, and the service at these hotels is way behind that which we experience at Al Aqah.

Al Aqah offers some very special deals at times. The best rates we got were last July when we came for 3 nights and got free breakfast and evening meal included. We had such a wonderful time that we stayed an extra night before we drove back to Al Ain then caught a flight back to the UK for several weeks.

If you have a Garmin satellite navigation device, or the Tom-Tom app on your iPhone, enter N 25°30' E56°21' to be directed to Al Aqah Beach Resort, which is metres away from the other hotels on this short strip of beach.

Le Meridien Al Aqah Beach Resort Hotel, Fujairah - views from balcony

Here are some photos taken from the balcony at Le Meridien Al Aqah Beach Resort Hotel in Fujairah...

Looking to the north, the row of green trees in the middle of this shot marks the edge of Al Aqah's land...



Coming south down the beach, you can see the canvas tent covering the climbing frame and sand pit in the Kid's Club on the left, an outdoor restaurant in the centre right, and the edge of the large pool...



The pool, in 3 sections, and a blue table tennis table between the camera and the middle pool. You can see Snoopy Island in front of the Sandy Beach Resort in the top right corner. You can rent a kayak and paddle out to this big rock and go round it before heading back...



Snoopy Island in the distance; a new hotel being built next door...



All the rooms face the sea. As you come out of your room, you have a wall of glass in front of you: this is what you see, looking out to the front of the hotel: entrance canopy in the bottom right of the shot; the manager's home is the white building centre right; tennis courts on the right; mountain across the main road (we're looking west now)...



This next shot is to the right of the shot above, of course, so you can see the hotel next door...



Now you can see right up the beach to the north. You can walk along the beach to the mountain and back: it takes about 45 minutes there and back in 50 degree heat in the morning – as we did one July when I took these photos. The sky was hazy this day...



So you have now seen almost 360 degrees round the hotel. See my other articles for more info on this terrific hotel.

Le Meridien makes our 10th wedding anniversary extra special

When service is as good as it is at the Le Meridien Al Aqah Beach Resort Hotel, it really helps make a special occasion extra special.

The following story may inspire you to try this hotel out...

I booked a table on the beach for a moonlit dinner for my wife and I on January 2, 2007 (it doesn't seem that long ago!), and told one of the chefs, Pravin, exactly what I wanted for each of the courses. My wife had no idea of my plans which made it all a wonderful surprise for her.

On the morning of Jan 2 we looked out of our hotel window to see "Happy 10th Anniversary Mr & Mrs Payne" written on the beach...



It was still there after breakfast...



We had a fabulous meal in the evening, with flickering torches around us, and the sound of the sea just yards away. The superb house band, The Jatoba Quartet, came and played for us. They knew so many songs what we asked for our favourites and they played and sang them...



Maher, the pastry chef, made us a cake earlier in the day...



...which we had at the end of the meal...



We went back to our room to find a trail of petals leading to our bed, and a beautiful message on the bed itself...



The hotel staff made this an extra-special day for us, and Catherine and I are very grateful for all their efforts that day.

Learn Pilates with Thuy Burritt in Al Ain

If you'd like to tone up your body, you may want to try out Pilates, if you haven't already. A Vietnamese lady moved from the States to Al Ain several years ago, and now has a thriving Pilates practice in a mirror-lined studio in her home. She's called Thuy Burritt (pronounced "Twee"), and you can reach her on 050 321 8677.

This is a photo of Thuy demonstrating a Pilates position in the desert...



Thuy's email address is fit.plates at yahoo.com, and you can also find her on Facebook.

At the moment she has 30-40 clients, so she is fully booked, but you can go on her waiting list, and she'll get back with you when she has a free slot.

Living Water Library in Al Ain

The Living Water Library is a free lending library open to the community. I popped in this morning and discovered that they have a mixture of fiction and nonfiction for adults as well as children – as well as many Christian titles too as it's located on the Oasis Hospital Campus, where the Evangelical Church is to be found. Opening hours are: Friday: 9am - 1 pm; Monday: 8 am - 11 am; and Wednesday 5pm - 7pm. Call Patricia Morrow, library director, for directions at 055 736 2692 or email her at: livingwaterlibrary3 at gmail.com.

This is what the library looks like from the outside...



Here is Patricia with some of the books. Felix is on the far right, buried in a book...



Looking for a vet / veterinary clinic in Al Ain?

If you're looking for a vet in Al Ain, there are dozens and dozens of options.

One guy that's worth checking out is 'Dr Stas' – his full name is Dr. Stanislav Alexeevych Vyrva, which is a bit of a mouthful! Here he is with an enormous python belonging to one of his local clients...



He and I have met and chatted, though our family doesn't have any pets, so I can't comment on his skills!

Dr Stas is Ukranian. He used to be head surgeon of Kharkov Zoo, and has been in private practice since 1995. He has been living in Al Ain since 2004.

He is currently Doctor of Veterinary Medicine at Oasis Veterinary Clinic, here in Al Ain, behind Bawadi Mall. His English is fluent.

At his clinic he conducts advanced examinations (including X-ray and endoscopy).

Here's a map...



Here's a shot of the outside of the clinic...



And here's what it's like inside...







You can contact him on 055 727 9660 or 050 683 9899. His email address is stas_vr -at- mail.ru

Marina Mall in Abu Dhabi

Marina Mall is a popular mall in Abu Dhabi. It's situated on a marina a few hundred metres east of the Emirates Palace, and opposite the Hilton Hotel...



Inside...



Further inside...



There's an Ikea here, an iStore for Apple computer products, a Fudruckers restaurant (serving American beef), a cinema complex, and lots more.

Mobile phones

When we arrived in Al Ain we decided to buy two mobile phones for my wife and I from a local Carrefour supermarket. This was only slightly dearer than buying two Sim cards there and inserting them in our British phones. We spent about £10 a month in total on our combined phone bills. (We're not big gassers on the phone!)

If you choose to ring the UK using your mobile phone you can expect to pay about 50 pence per minute. There are two networks in Al Ain: Etisalat and Du. The first is the most popular and has the strongest signal, but Du is cheaper and I hear that coverage can be a bit spotty at times. But this may have changed significantly in the last year since we decided to go with Etisalat.

In October 2010 I bought an iPhone 4 on the Etisalat network, paying about £20 a month for 120 minutes of calls, 120 text messages and 1gig of data. If you can stretch to an iPhone (or at least an Android phone), go for it.

Benefits...

- built-in camera so you always have one at hand to take photos of signs you don't understand (to get them translated later by an Arabic speaking friend) – or photograph a building you're next to if you're lost which you can send via a text message to help someone guide you home or wherever
- select the Maps application to see where you are, and get it to give you directions to where you want to go
- can't make yourself understood? Type your question/statement in English and see it translated into Arabic as text
- click on an English phrase from a categorised list of hundreds of phrases – and have the iPhone speak that phrase in Arabic
- access the Al Ain Enthusiast ebook wherever you are (sign up opposite to get this)
- use the FourSquare or Gowalla apps – both free – if you're looking for, say, a local restaurant, to see comments of others who have been there
- use the Compass app so you know if you're heading in the right direction

...and much more.

Music and dance at the House Of Arts, Al Ain



If you or your child would love to learn to play a musical instrument or learn to dance, then the House Of Arts in Al Ain may be just what you're looking for.

Run by director, Gabriele ("Gaby") Malzahn (pictured right), it offers classes in piano, violin, guitar, voice, cello and theory.

To register, you are asked to fill in the Registration form and pay a non-refundable registration fee of Dhs 120 per family.

Before registering for individual or group music lessons, Gaby and her team ask that you call them to set up an appointment for an initial interview. They will conduct a short informal assessment and then discuss various issues related to enrolment in House of Arts classes, and will check the timetable for available slots.

No formal interviews are needed for other lessons.

Here's a video tour of this wonderful place which I filmed recently...

To give you a guide to pricing, 15 lessons during term time, at 30 minutes per weekly individual lesson, cost 1,200AED, which works out at 80AED (£14) a lesson.

Various dance lessons are available at the House of Arts. They are conducted in cooperation with the Dubai Ballet Centre.

Available classes are:

- Baby Ballet (age 2 1/2-3 1/2)
- Prep Class (age 3-4)
- Pre Primary Ballet (age 5+)
- Primary Ballet (age 6/7)
- Grade 1 Ballet (age 7+)
- Grade 2 Ballet (age 9+)
- Grade 3 Ballet (age 10+)
- Grade 5 Ballet (age 12+)
- Grade 7 Ballet (age 14+)

plus...

- Junior Tap (age 6-8)
- Junior Modern (age 7-10)
- Beginner Tap seniors (age 12+)
- Advanced Tap seniors (age 12+)
- Modern/Jazz dance (age 12+)

and...

- Hip Hop junior (age 6+)
- Hip Hop senior (age 10+)

New...

- Jewellery classes (adults)
- Drum lessons (6+)
- Fabric painting
-
- Vinyasa Yoga with Deborah (6-7pm, 5 classes for 180AED)

...and they also have Kindermusik for young children, and Music For Little Mozarts (group piano lessons for young children with a maximum of 8 in a group).

Gaby has done an amazing job setting this place up and developing it into a hive of activity: when I chatted with her, I discovered a woman who came across as committed, passionate and full of ideas – a real asset to the town: "the cultural centre of Al Ain" as my friend Jake says. The walls are covered in hundreds of picture frames showing children playing instruments or dancing. The studio for dance and yoga is excellent with floor to ceiling mirror.

Here's the outside...



As you go through the front door...



The coffee shop is on the left...



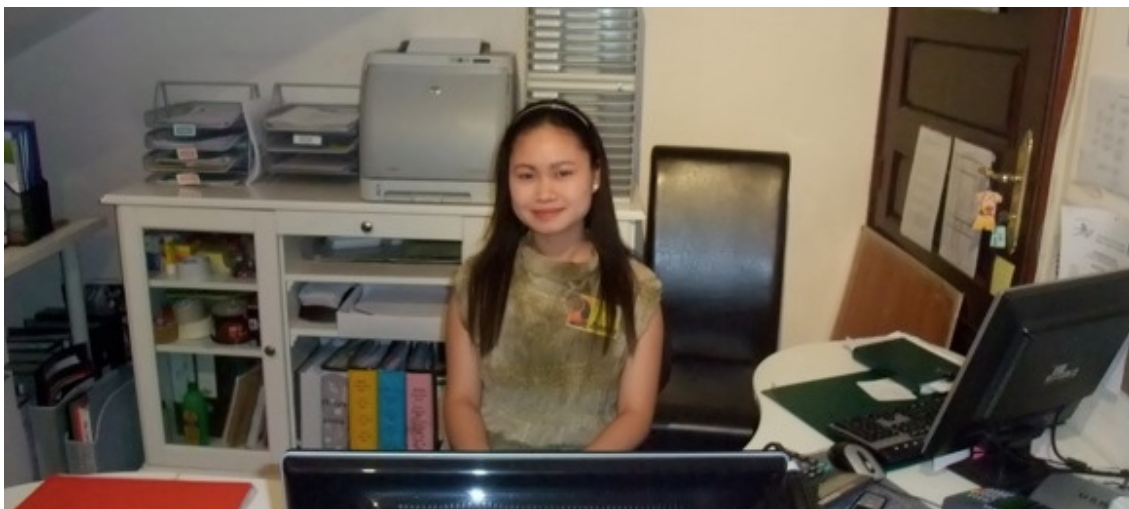
And here's the coffee shop from the other end of the room...



The reception area with masses of photos of students on the walls going up the stairs...



Jhenny at her desk at reception...



And Anne-Marie too...



Practice rooms...





The dance/yoga studio...



Gaby in her office...



The Kindermusik room...



Opening hours are Sunday to Wednesday: 10am to 8:30pm; Saturday and Thursday: 10am to 6:30pm.

You can ring the House of Arts on 03 762 6651, or get on their mailing list by emailing info@house-of-arts.net. You can visit their website [here](#) for more info on timings and prices, where you'll find a map to help you get there. (They're opposite the Al Ain Hospital.)

If you're still not clear where it is from the map there, then here are my directions for you...

Imagine driving past the enormous Lulu Hypermarket, which is on your right. Carry on until you come to a roundabout. You turn right to Dubai, yes? Instead, go across. As you approach the next roundabout, get in the middle lane, so you don't get filtered right, and go across this roundabout. Take the next road on your right. Turn first right. At the end, turn left. Carry on until you have to go left again – and turn left again. House Of Arts is a few doors down from the dead end, on your left. Have fun!

Newspapers and magazines

The Sunday Times UK-originated newspaper is printed and published in Dubai every Sunday, so you can buy this on Sunday mornings at various outlets around Al Ain. The price is 20 dirhams which is about £3.50.

There isn't a magazine inside: articles from the UK magazine are integrated into the Culture Section which is printed on newsprint.

You can also buy many popular magazines from the UK and America in the hotels and supermarkets, such as Oprah Magazine, Cosmopolitan, Men's Health magazine, and many others – but at a price.

You may prefer to download some of these magazines if you have a device such as the iPad. For example, the downloaded version of a magazine like Wired will cost you less than half the price of the printed version on sale in an outlet in the UAE.

Where to buy newspapers and magazines...

- Hilton Hotel: in the bookshop to the far right of Reception
- Intercontinental Hotel: in the bookshop: go past Reception and turn down the first corridor on your left: the shop is on your right



Inside...



- Lulu supermarket, Kuwaitat: immediately on your left as you enter the store, next to the first till
- Abela supermarket, near the Tawam roundabout
- Spinney's supermarket, on the road out to Abu Dhabi

- Carrefour supermarket, Bawadi Mall: newspapers immediately on your left as you enter the store, next to the first till; magazines are on the far right wall, half way up the store
- Carrefour supermarket, Al Jimi Mall: from memory these are just inside the entrance, a little to the right
- Jashanmal (a small 2-storey department store in the centre of Al Ain): to the left of the entrance



Inside...



There are no doubt other places, which I'll add as I come across them.

Noticeboards in Al Ain for buying / selling cars, furniture, etc

I am aware of the following places where you can put up notices around Al Ain...

1. The Hilton Hotel Hiltonia Club (5 dirhams a week): you may have to wait 1-2 weeks for your sheet to be put up as space is limited and demand for slots is high...



2. The Rugby Club at the Palm Resort...



3. Al Jimi Mall

4. Al Ain English Speaking School outdoor glass-covered noticeboards

Also, for completeness, The House Of Arts has a big noticeboard, so Gaby there may accept your poster if it's relevant.

Drop me a line below if you know of other places.

Oasis Hospital in Al Ain

The Oasis Hospital in Al Ain was the first hospital to open up in Al Ain.



It was established by missionaries. The Evangelical Church is right behind it. I understand that the pastor or visiting minister gives sermons to some of the surgeons during their working week.

Our family has had treatments there over the last year. This is an excellent hospital. You present your health insurance card which is supplied by your employer to get free treatment. If your cards haven't arrived, you pay the bill then get reimbursed by the insurance company via your employer.

Oasis Living magazine feature on me and this website

The November 2011 issue of Oasis Living magazine featured an article on me, where I talk about this website...



Can you tell us about your website?

When we arrived here, there was little information online about Al Ain, so I started the Al Ain Enthusiast website. That was 18 months ago. There are articles about schooling, where to get a car mended, photographs of workshops, GPS coordinates and so on – more than a hundred articles, twenty video clips and four hundreds photographs, and it's all downloadable.

What qualifies someone as an Al Ain enthusiast?

Anybody who celebrates the beauty and majesty of this oasis in the middle of the desert will qualify.

On a scale of one to ten, how happy are you?

Sometimes 11, and sometimes less.

Why 11?

For me, it is always about 11. Life works best when we are profoundly grateful for everything we have, and 11 is a summary of that. 10 out of 10 is simply not high enough to get to a place of deep love.

What kind of family do you come from?

My childhood was quite ordinary. There were four children. My parents spent all their spare money educating us, and sometimes they ran out of money before my father's next paycheck arrived. My mother taught us to do whatever makes us happy, and to trust that all things will ultimately work out. The biggest lesson my mother taught me is a love of reading.

What were some of your first jobs? How much did you make?

I worked in a record shop selling vinyl records [the equivalent of CDs today], and I earned 3 British pounds a day [about Dh17]. Then my first "real" job was doing marketing for a computer games company, and I made 6000 pounds a year [Dh35,000].

Tell me about the worst job you ever had. I don't have any issues with any past job or difficulty, because all the good and bad brought me here to Al Ain.

What is something that you are really proud of and why?

I am most proud of having written 250,000 words on how to live an inspired life, which I sold around the world to thousands of subscribers who paid about Dh120 a month.

What is something that you find yourself doing now that you said you would never do?

I hated sport as a child because I was hopeless at it. Now, I'm coaching a soccer team in Al Ain.

What's the latest application you downloaded on your iPad?

OmniOutliner, for creating the structure for the articles I write and the talks I give.

What are three common challenges newcomers might find here in Al Ain?

A recent one I had was where to find a kennel for a dog some expats were bringing with them. Another challenge was whether it was cost effective to bring their own cars. Third was how to choose between schools for their children.

Do you remember your first challenge when you arrived?

Our first one was leaving our apartment with our address on a scrap of paper and not being able to find our way back for 30 minutes – until we bumped into our neighbor by chance. The address we were given by my wife's employer was not good

enough as a mailing address – all our mail from the U.K. was lost for the first three months.

How do you approach a typical Brit and start a conversation?

"Can I get you a cup of tea?" They will beam and say, "How wonderful!"

When would someone's attitude offend you? Why?

We British are known for queuing patiently, so I can get wound up when people push in front of me with no consideration.

Have you experienced any serendipitous events in Al Ain?

I love this question because I collect serendipitous events. I went to re-register my car, and the guy who tested the emissions from the exhaust was in the audience at TEDx Al Ain. He asked me loads of questions about my talk at that event. It is amazing to me that people from all walks of life are fascinated by big ideas.

Another time, I rang Apple's technical support and, while waiting for the computer to do a job, I told him my son was swimming in a pool in Scotland that morning, and he said that he was a lifeguard at that exact pool a year earlier.

What is the most bizarre secret someone ever shared with you?

I will not share others' secrets. My own secret is that I used to be a director of the Vegetarian Society in the U.K. and now I eat lots of meat and fish!

Sponsored by



Palm Court Café in Hilton Hotel is famous for desserts and Vienna's Julius Meinl coffee.

Here's a blow-up of that in case you can't read it clearly...



Can you tell us about your website?

When we arrived here, there was little information online about Al Ain, so I started the Al Ain Enthusiast website. That was 18 months ago. There are articles about schooling, where to get a car mended, photographs of workshops, GPS coordinates and so on – more than a hundred articles, twenty video clips and four hundreds photographs, and it's all downloadable.

What qualifies someone as an Al Ain enthusiast?

Anybody who celebrates the beauty and majesty of this oasis in the middle of the desert will qualify.

On a scale of one to ten, how happy are you?

Sometimes 11, and sometimes less.

Why 11?

For me, it is always about 11. Life works best when we are profoundly grateful for everything we have, and 11 is a summary of that. 10 out of 10 is simply not high enough to get to a place of deep love.

What kind of family do you come from?

My childhood was quite ordinary. There were four children. My parents spent all their spare money educating us, and sometimes they ran out of money before my father's next paycheck arrived. My mother taught us to do whatever makes us happy, and to trust that all things will ultimately work out. The biggest lesson my mother taught me is a love of reading.

What were some of your first jobs? How much did you make?

I worked in a record shop selling vinyl records [the equivalent of CDs today], and I earned 3 British pounds a day [about Dh17]. Then my first "real" job was doing marketing for a computer games company, and I made 6000 pounds a year [Dh35,000].

Tell me about the worst job you ever had. I don't have any issues with any past job or difficulty, because all the good and bad brought me here to Al Ain.

What is something that you are really proud of and why?

I am most proud of having written 250,000 words on how to live an inspired life, which I sold around the world to thousands of subscribers who paid about Dh120 a month.

What is something that you find yourself doing now that you said you would never do?

I hated sport as a child because I was hopeless at it. Now, I'm coaching a soccer team in Al Ain.

What's the latest application you downloaded on your iPad?

OmniOutliner, for creating the structure for the articles I write and the talks I give.

What are three common challenges newcomers might find here in Al Ain?

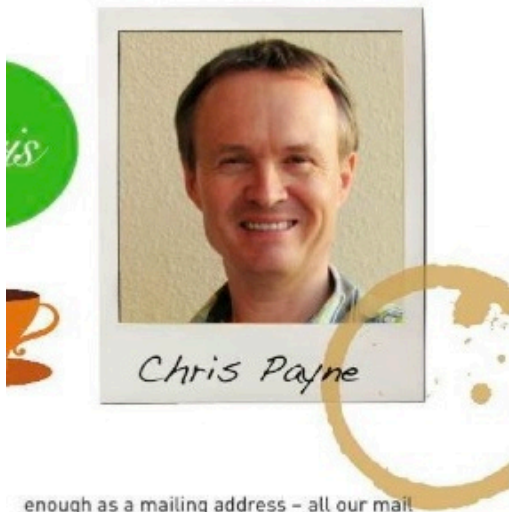
A recent one I had was where to find a kennel for a dog some expats were bringing with them. Another challenge was whether it was cost effective to bring their own cars. Third was how to choose between schools for their children.

Do you remember your first challenge when you arrived?

Our first one was leaving our apartment with our address on a scrap of paper and not being able to find our way back for 30 minutes – until we bumped into our neighbor by chance. The address we were given by my wife's employer was not good

Sponsored by





enough as a mailing address – all our mail from the U.K. was lost for the first three months.

How do you approach a typical Brit and start a conversation?

"Can I get you a cup of tea?" They will beam and say, "How wonderful!"

When would someone's attitude offend you? Why?

We British are known for queuing patiently, so I can get wound up when people push in front of me with no consideration.

Have you experienced any serendipitous events in Al Ain?

I love this question because I collect serendipitous events.

I went to re-register my car, and the guy who tested the emissions from the exhaust was in the audience at TEDx Al Ain. He asked me loads of questions about my talk at that event. It is amazing to me that people from all walks of life are fascinated by big ideas.

Another time, I rang Apple's technical support and, while waiting for the computer to do a job, I told him my son was swimming in a pool in Scotland that morning, and he said that he was a lifeguard at that exact pool a year earlier.

What is the most bizarre secret someone ever shared with you?

I will not share others' secrets. My own secret is that I used to be a director of the Vegetarian Society in the U.K. and now I eat lots of meat and fish! 🌿



I was interviewed for this article by Percy Chan, the founder and Editor of Oasis Living magazine. Oasis Living is published on the first of each month, and available free of charge around Al Ain. It's a terrific read.

Palm Resort / Rugby Club, Al Ain

The Rugby Club at the Palm Resort is a very popular destination for ex-pats. It's located at the far west end of Al Ain, on the way out to Abu Dhabi. (It's about a 15-minute drive from the Hilton Hotel.)

Here are some photos for you.

The entrance...



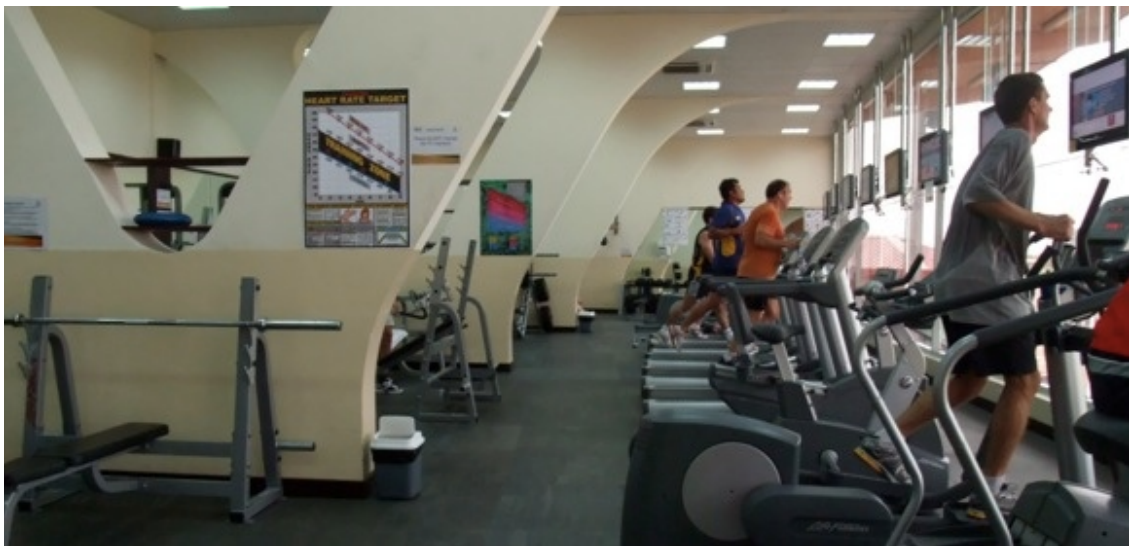
Turn left as you go through the entrance, and proceed about 1 km, past the shooting range...



The noticeboard on the left of the reception area...



The gym...



The main pool, and a much shallower, covered, round one for young children, with changing rooms next to it...



The left side of the rugby grounds...



...and the right side, with collapsed bouncy castles, almost ready for an evening do...



The covered viewing area...



Nice food is served in the bar, and there's a projector screen which shows children's films at times to keep them entertained...



Another section of the bar area...



The bar itself...



I went along with a friend to a quiz night many moons ago and the place was packed to the gills. We had great fun. Check it out, if you haven't already.

See [this post](#) about the football (soccer) club which meets there 3 evenings a week.

Patchi chocolates in Al Ain

Many locals and ex-pats give chocolates as gifts. Many people consider Patchi chocolates to be the best.

There is a Patchi shop in Bawadi Mall, located on the upper floor, very close to the balcony overlooking the stage on the ground floor...



Patchi chocolates are beautifully presented: the shop looks like it's selling high class jewellery!

Picnicking or camping in the desert near Al Ain

Wherever you live in Al Ain, it's easy to forget that as little as a 15-minute drive will take you into the desert. Many Al Ainians love going for picnics or overnight camps, especially during the winter months.

Here are a few notes from my limited experience!...

It's easy to get stuck in the sand – so do bring a tow rope like the one our friends brought when we went picnicking together recently...



When I turned my car round and reversed close, my car got stuck too! Our friend Jake let down all the tyres to 10-15psi to get more traction...



Consider buying a small pressure gauge (from the likes of Daiso) – and an electric tyre pump. My pump is powered from the cigarette lighter, and cost me about 60 dirhams. Jake's is powered from croc clips attached directly to the car battery – and this pumps up the tyres faster.

Bring a shovel too!

Our boys loved playing on the dunes: throwing a ball...



...and leaping off sand dunes...



The dunes provide a good backdrop for photos...





Jake's wife, Suzanne, brought pre-cooked chicken curry and rice which we ate on rugs. You can see the shopping centre with Spinney's and La Brioche inside in the background of this photo, so we didn't go far to get into the 'wild'!...



Marshmallows are fun to roast if you build a fire. My wife Catherine stuck several onto a branch...



Pinkberry non-fat yoghurt in Al Ain

A delicious treat is to be had at the Pinkberry non-fat yoghurt outlet in the Al Ain Mall in Al Ain...



They hand out a beautifully designed brochure...



When we go, we get 2 scoops of yoghurt with a few toppings for 23 dirhams. Not cheap, but a great treat!

The staff are often offering small samples for you to try: this was enough to get me and my family to buy more.

Phone: 050 967 6100.

A Pinkberry will open in Bawadi Mall in May 2012, between Daiso and the information desk – on the site where Top Man used to be.

Refilling ink cartridges in Al Ain

I saw a question about this on the alainexpats yahoo list. (See my [Links page](#) for more info about this.)

Here's how I replied...

There are lots of places that do this.

We live behind the Hilton, so there are several places there.

If you were to come out of the Hilton, and turn right at the roundabout, going across the bridge with the 3 Sheiks pictured, go across the lights, and take the turning on the right which enables you to park in front of Lulu Kuwaitat. Looking north at Lulu walk 10 metres east onto the north/south road. Turn right.

On your right-hand side you'll find a typing shop.

They will fill cartridges while you wait.

If you walk 20 metres further south you'll see steps down into an underground shopping area with a couple of computer shops and other workshops. One of those fill cartridges there and then.

I think I paid about 5 aed to fill a black HP cartridge and maybe 10 to fill a colour one.

Renting a car from Fast Rent A Car in Al Ain

There are dozens of car rental outlets in Al Ain.

The one that was recommended to us is Fast Rent A Car in Kuwaitat: go north from the Hilton Hotel towards the town centre, and it's on your right on a corner...



This is one of the team...



Their prices are lower than Europa Cars.

And when we got rammed in the rear one sunny afternoon, while sitting at the traffic lights near the Al Ain Mall, Fast swapped our car immediately.

The staff are very helpful, and the manager there speaks excellent English.

Renting property in Al Ain

If you're looking to rent property in Al Ain – an apartment or a villa – there are a number of people and organisations who can help you. (While I was looking for a new home for my family I took photos of the various agents I met, so the photos on this page were snapped during various viewings.)



Manuel D'Souza was recommended to me by a friend who said he was very reliable, and a very nice guy. So I gave Manuel a call, and he showed me round one property. Born and raised in India, he has lived in the Emirates for more than 20 years. In some cases he may be able to charge less than a 5% fee. I saw lots of other properties, but I ended up renting one of Manuel's.

He also sells land to Emiratis. (Ex-pats can't buy land here.)

You can ring him on 050 693 5435.



Thames Real Estate is run by Calum Ewing and Akram Matboue.

They are property agents who have various apartments and villas available, and they also give advice and information about living in Al Ain. They offer from 1-bed apartments and studio flats to 2-3-bedroom apartments to 2, 3, 4 and 5-bedroom villas.

All the properties they represent are immediately available, so you can move in right away.

When my family and I were looking for a new property to move to, I rang Calum, told him what we were looking for, and we met up the next day outside the Hilton Hotel. He then drove me to see 4 suitable properties, at a range of prices within our budget.

Calum, who hails from Edinburgh in Scotland, charges a 5% fee on top of the yearly rental cost. He vets the landlord, checks the property out, and handles all the paperwork so your moving and settling in process is smooth. He doesn't leave you in the lurch to handle switching on water, electricity, internet, etc.

(On the right is a poor photo I took of Calum as he showed me round a property.)

Email Calum at [calumewing at gmail dot com](mailto:calumewing@gmail.com).

Ring him on 050 700 3769.

Akram is on 050 563 1993.



Home Finder

Home Finder is run by Ghazi, Jason McKenzie and one other person (more info to follow).

Home Finder's office is on the top floor of the Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank Building at the Clock Tower roundabout.

Ghazi is from Iraq, but has lived in the Emirates for most of his life. He kindly drove me to see one property I was interested in. Very nice guy.

They charge a 5% fee on top of the yearly rental cost. Ring Home Finder on 050 763 4008.



Grant Spencer has a regular colour poster on the noticeboard at the Hilton Hotel. Ring him on 050 6730 641.

The [Al Ain Expat site](#) has a number of properties on it: do check that out.

Other companies...

Oasis Villas, a compound of 56 properties near Tawam Hospital. Handled by **SEBA**: www.seba.ae/en/projects/properties/al-ain-oasis-villas.html

TWKN: www.tmknproperty.com

Al Ain Home: www.alainhome.com/property1.html

Rotana Hotel in Al Ain

Of the 3 hotels in Al Ain – the Hilton, the Intercontinental and the Rotana, this is the one I know the least about.

I took this photo while there was some contruction work outside the hotel, so it's not brilliant...



What's different about this grand hotel is that the main pool is surrounded by buildings. Right next to it is the underground Grand Cinemas, the first cinema setup to arrive in Al Ain (see separate article).

I'll add more over the coming weeks.

Royal London Dental Clinic, Al Ain

Do you need dental treatment in Al Ain? What about the Royal London Dental Clinic between the Diwan roundabout and the Bookshop?

My family and I see 2 of the dentists here, and it's a slick, professional operation.

Address... Suite 07, Mezzanine Floor, Al Bhadi Building (next to Diwan roundabout and above the New Sweets Palace shop).

In other words, if you know this roundabout, called the Diwan roundabout...



...then you head towards the centre of Al Ain from here, i.e. drive east. Within 100 metres you'll see this building on your right...



You can see the sign for it on the right-hand side of the building, yes?



It's run by Dr Monika Giannopoulos (pictured on the right), so the website is at www.drmonika.com.

Tel: 03 755 7155

Opening times...

Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday: 9am to 9pm

Tuesday: 9am to 5pm

Closed: Friday and Saturday

Note: These times are correct as of April 2012: the times on Dr Monika's website are out of date.

Looking for an alternative? See my article on the Gulf Dental Clinic in the centre of Al Ain.

Salaries in Al Ain

How much money do people earn who live in Al Ain?



Here is what I've been told first hand, or second hand in one case...

Someone who does the ironing, six days a week, 8am to 1pm then 5pm til midnight: 500 dirhams (£88 / US\$140) a month

A worker in a shop, similar hours as above: 1,500 dirhams (£260 / \$400) a month

Someone with a reception-type job in a hotel, with free accommodation and food: 1500 dirhams (£260 / \$400) a month

A maid in a home, with free accommodation and food: 1500 dirhams (£260 / \$400) a month

A petrol pump attendant: 1,600 dirhams a month, plus maybe a further 600 dirhams a month in tips

A lifeguard at a hotel, with free accommodation and food: 2,000 dirhams (£350 / \$550) a month

A driver of a silver taxi: 2,000 dirhams a month, up to 4,000 dirhams

If you can add to this list, please let me know!

Sand Golf Club, Al Ain

The Sand Golf Club in Al Ain was the first golf club to be set up here – but there's no grass: all the 'greens' are brown: they're covered in sand.

You walk around with a square of astroturf and whack your balls from there.

To get there you travel due east from the Hilton Hotel, out of Al Ain, and past the Danat Hotel (previously called the Intercontinental Hotel).

Travel about a kilometre until you see the Falcon Centre on your right at a roundabout. Go to the next roundabout and turn right.

This view is what you'll see immediately on your left...



Notice the banked 'walls' in front of it – and the gap centre right of the photo which you drive to in order to get to its car park.

You need to get this as the first visit I made to this place was in the dead of night in winter to see the local covers band called Desert Groove. I had found vague directions to this place online and drove right past the entrance. Luckily I 'phoned a friend' who gave me clear directions (thanks Romney!). Another mate of mine was supposed to meet me there. He drove for 30 minutes from his home to get here, couldn't find it, gave up and went home! So I got there on my own and thankfully found some other people at the concert who I knew.

Anyway, here's the outside of the clubhouse...



And here's 2 views of the inside...



This is a shot of the greens...

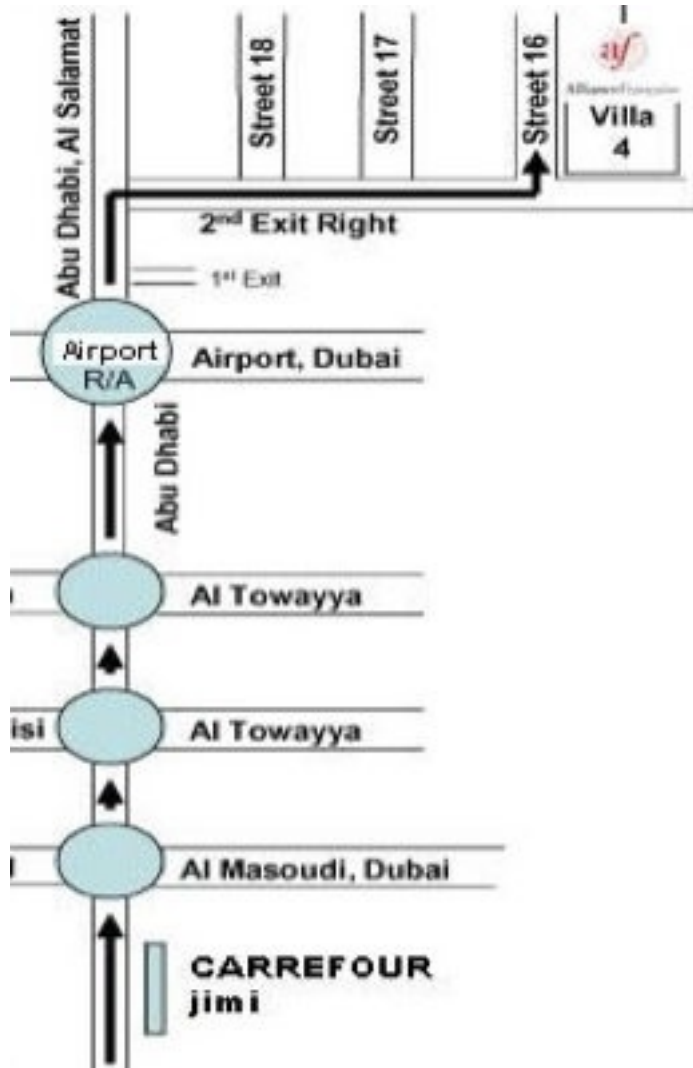


At the opposite side of Al Ain, on the west side of the town, is the Palm Resort with an impressive 'green as green' golf club which my golf-playing friends frequent.

See a good movie for free at the Alliance Francaise, Al Ain

Every second Thursday you can go to the Alliance Francaise in Al Ain, located near the airport, and watch a popular French film which is subtitled in English. There's no charge.





I went to see a film there earlier in 2010 with a friend of mine. The film is projected onto a large white screen in the middle of the upstairs library of 3,000 French books, with a bank of maybe 40-ish seats set out. About 12 of us watched the film. One of the staff offered us snacks to buy: chocolate, soft drinks, etc. The film was great.

(If I remember right, the film actually started at 7.30pm.)

If you sign up for the Al Ain Expats group, you'll get a regular email announcing the next film.

For more information, go to the [Alliance Francaise website](http://www.alliancefrancaise.com).

From their website, "Located next to the desert, in a beautiful villa shared with the French School Theodore Monod, the Alliance Française aims to be a meeting point for the various nationalities living in Al Ain, along with an area of friendliness and discovery of the French speaking and Arabic cultures."

The map on the right is pretty clear: by "jimi" they mean the Al Jimi Mall, which has a French Carrefour supermarket in it, which is located to the north of Al Ain.

Although it looks as though you are travelling north you're not: the top of the map is west of Al Jimi Mall.

Sending and receiving post

The Post Office will not deliver post to individual homes. So if you want to post to be sent to you from home then you will need to be sent to the office of one of the breadwinners in a family, or sent to P.O. Box. It costs only a nominal fee per year to have your own P.O. Box. However the only challenge with this is that you have to have a residence Visa first before you can apply for a P.O. Box.

The post office is located in the centre of Al Ain at what is called the Clock Tower Roundabout. Though there is no tower... and no roundabout (though there used to be one at the junction until they replaced it a couple of years or so ago with traffic lights)...



The post isn't 100% reliable. Two months ago my in-laws sent an envelope containing some football cards for our children, and I ordered two books to be sent from the UK. Neither package arrived.

To get to the PO Boxes you go in the doors with the sticking out canopy above them which you can see on the far left of the photo above. The boxes are located on 2 floors connected by an escalator. Each box has a unique number like 69975, and all the boxes are in numerical order, so you'll have fun finding your box the first time as you hunt down different corridors!...



When you sign up you will be given 3 keys for your PO Box which you can access from first thing in the morning to late at night, 7 days a week.

Shakespeare and Co. tea rooms in Al Ain

A great place to have a snack with family or friends is at the wonderfully stylish Shakespeare and Co. tea rooms in the new wing of the Al Ain Mall. It's opposite the iStore which sells Apple computer products...



I've eaten here once, and my friend and I loved the quality and presentation of the food.

Sharaf DG store in Al Ain for electronics

There's a very impressive electrical store in the new wing of the Al Ain Mall called Sharaf DG...



They sell Apple Macs too...



...and iPads...

THE BIGGEST ELECTRONICS EXPERIENCE

IPAD2 WIFI

Apple Ipad	16 GB	1,999/-
Apple Ipad	32 GB	2,399/-
Apple Ipad	64 GB	2,899/-

IPAD2 3G + WIFI

Apple Ipad	16 GB	2,599/-
Apple Ipad	32 GB	2,999/-
Apple Ipad	64 GB	3,299/-

APPLE IPAD 2

Prices on mobile phones, memory sticks (thumb drives), and other electrical goods, look good. You'll find Sharaf DG on the upper floor in the new section, next to an escalator off the central courtyard.

Another place for Apple products is the new iStore in the Al Ain Mall, located on the ground floor, only about 200 metres from Sharaf DG. (See separate article.)

Shopping locally



It wasn't many years ago that the only shops in Al Ain were the small 'corner shops'.

You'll find hundreds of shops like the one in the photo, which we use for the odd bottle of milk etc, around the town.

This shop recently closed down as the building was being renovated, and reopened 100 yards away in a new building. The owner told me the rent had gone up as a result from 24,000 Dirhams (£4,500) a year to 70,000 Dirhams (£13,000) a year. Ouch!

Skin treatments in Al Ain

If you are looking for skin treatments in Al Ain – whether you are male or female – one place you may want to try out is the Silkor Laser Medical Center in the Al Jimi area.

My wife Catherine tried the place out for a Diamond Micro Dermabrasion treatment (!) and she came back raving about the service from the women she met there: Leila, Joelle and Leah. Her luxury facial treatment lasted for 45 minutes. Catherine told me that the centre was spotless, and tranquil.

The treatment is designed to remove dead cells from the face in a pain-free way. She said that, after the treatment, her skin felt smooth and clean.

Here's a photo we got emailed from the centre to show you the process...



Catherine asks me to tell you that this is not her! :)

Ring 03 763 0123 for more info about this and the other treatments they offer, including laser hair removal.

Sophie Studio for printing photos in Al Ain

Perhaps the most popular place for ex-pats in Al Ain to get their photos printed is Sophie Studio, next to the entrance to the Hiltonia Club, which is to the right and behind the Hilton Hotel. This is what it looks like...



This is what it's like inside...



The room to the right is a studio with lights for taking portrait photos, with various optional backgrounds.

Prices are fair: 1 dirham (18p /US\$0.29) for a 6x4 inch print, 2 dirhams (36p /US \$0.58) for a 5x7 inch print.

Affixed to the wall in the photo above you'll see 8 versions of the same girl, printed at different sizes: all are mounted on foam, and can be fixed to a wall with double-sided tape as they are so light. The smallest block on the left, 5x7

inches, costs 22 dirhams (£3.90/US\$6), and the largest on the right costs 235 dirhams (£40/US\$65). (If you supply a digital file you'll get the finished results a week later (as the work is done in Dubai).

You can't email photos to the shop for printing: you have to take them in. However if you drop off a file by closing time at 10pm, you'll get the prints back the next day.

Opening times...



Sunday to Thursday: 9am to 1pm then 4pm to 10pm .

Friday: 4pm to 10pm.

You can ring the studio on 03 768 8866.

The owner of Sophie Studios is Georges Robehmed, who is well known in the town as Georges Marbles as he used to sell marble.

Georges is also a weddings and events organiser, as well as organising outdoor video and photography for all occasions.

Spinneys and La Brioche, Al Ain

If you drive past the Al Jimi Mall, with the Mall on your right, heading towards Abu Dhabi, about 4 miles later you'll see a shopping centre on your left. Go to the next roundabout and do a U-turn to get to it.

This is the right side of the building...



...and the left side...



The best reason to go is to sample the terrific cakes at La Brioche...



...don't these look delicious?...



I got some for my wife's birthday recently. (There is also a La Brioche at the Safar Centre near Al Jimi Mall.)

There's also a Spinney's supermarket there...



...which is beautifully laid out...



...and it has a fab newspaper and magazine stand...



It's probably the most upmarket-looking supermarket in Al Ain. Not a brilliant description, but I hope you get the picture!

Also in the centre is a large stationers, called Dubai Library Distributors, with mostly Arabic books...



...and there's a McDonalds too...



...and an amusement arcade upstairs.

St Mary's Catholic Church in Al Ain

St Mary's is the only Catholic church in Al Ain. It is situated opposite the Oasis Hospital, and diagonally across from the imposing Etisalat building in Sanaiya.

Most of the congregation is Filipino. Very few of the people there are European.

The main priest is from India. The only masses are on Fridays.



Steak and Grill at the Palm Golf Club in Al Ain

The Steak and Grill is a very popular restaurant in Al Ain. It's located at the Golf Club at the Palm Resort at the far west side of Al Ain.



It is known for giving you very hot slates so you can lay on raw steaks, chicken, shrimps or fish and cook it as you please. They will supply you with new hot slates if you ask.



On Saturday night they offer a buffet for 150 dirhams a head, including wine.

On the lawn outside is a large trampoline with walled netting, so your children can go off and play after their meal.

Swimming team at the Hilton Hotel, Al Ain

This is Rami Bou Khodr who teaches swimming at the Hilton Hotel in Al Ain...



He runs the American Swimming Academy. He is Lebanese, and has lived in Al Ain for the last 2 years. I asked him to tell me more about himself. He said, "I am a teacher and examiner for lifeguard courses from the STA in England, which was established in 1932. With that organization I got certified to deal with children with special needs. I also have a certificate from the American Swimming Academy as a pro swimming instructor. I did my first lifeguard course in Dubai in October 2010. I have programs for infants, toddlers, preschoolers and adults."

He added, "It doesn't matter what your child's swimming ability or level is, I can help with swimming coaching for children and adults and also water safety lessons for the younger children."

He's very passionate about starting up a swimming team/club for youngsters – and adults too – who are serious about improving their swimming, and are willing to put the energy in to hone that skill.

He offers competitive rates to both members and non-members of the Hilton.

This is his promotional poster...

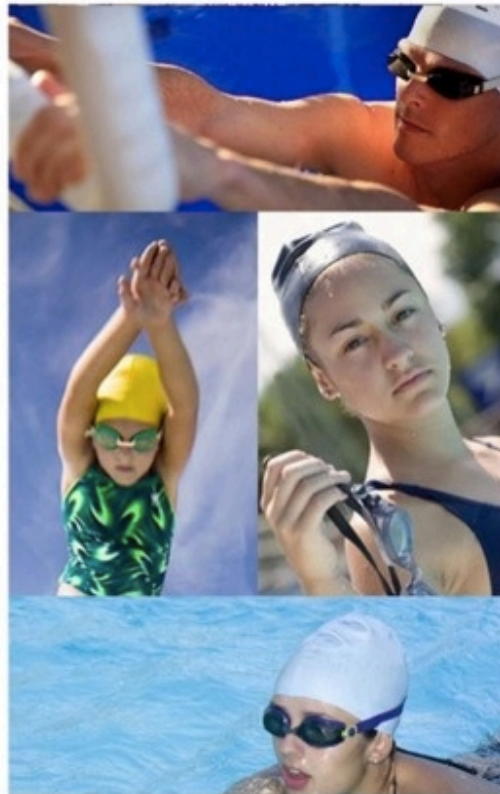
Learn to SWIM

with The American Swimming Academy

ABOUT US:

The American Swimming Academy (ASA) was established in 2004. It is the first Arab – American Professional to offer Learn to Swim programs in the Middle East. Since the opening of our first center, these programs have successfully taught thousands of children, teenagers and adults to swim. ASA methods of learn to swim are up to date and will prepare your child to swim for health, safety, fun and fitness as well as preparing them for competitive swimming. We specialize in small group teaching by experienced and qualified instructors. We give priority to our students' safety and optimal learning. Our instructors have exceptional qualifications with relevant experience teaching different class levels from beginners to competitive standards. They are under the supervision of our Aquatic Manager; Coach Sherif Habib who is certified by the American Swimming Coaches "ASCA" as a level 5 international coach.

Our programs core concentration is on the individuals swimming development.



LOCATION:

Hilton, Al Ain

TELEPHONE:

03 7067051 (Hilton Reception) or
050 6731010 (Swimming Instructor)

OBJECTIVES:

We would like to form a swimming team that will train 3-4 times per week in a competitive way and then we will see if we can increase the number of sessions or decrease depending on the swimmers time. In 2 months time we would like to prepare the swimmers to compete in races in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The duration of the class will be around 1 hour as we will do stretching in the pool before we start the swimming session. Everything will be done according to the American Swimming Academy system. No matter what your child's ability we will help to improve their level of swimming.

Call now for more information or to book an appointment with one of our instructors.

He's a lovely guy, and brilliant with the children – and we often see him in the water working individually with children aged as young as 3 or 4 – so if you want to know more, ring him directly on 050 673 1010.

Tailoring, stitching and sewing work in Al Ain

If you want trousers or skirts to be turned up, or you want a rip to be repaired, there are lots of little tailoring workshops in Al Ain.

We used to live in Kuwaitat which is right behind / north of the Hilton Hotel. There you'll find lots of tailor shops, and if you go down the stairs, beneath the tailors, you'll find little workshops with sewing machines.

We get our tailoring done here...



...and simple sewing jobs they'll do for free...



...as they can do the work in a couple of minutes. I gave 5 dirhams for a rip to be fixed in a pair of shorts. I give 10 dirhams to turn up trousers. These guys are probably earning about 500 dirhams a month, working 6 days a week from 8am to 11pm with a break from around 1pm to 5pm. So they're earning maybe 18 dirhams (£3/US\$5) a day.

Taj Spices Indian, Chinese and Arabic Restaurant, Al Foah, Al Ain

Rob Preston, the Retail Operations Manager at Lulu Hypermarkets in Al Ain, told me that there's a new restaurant in town which he highly recommends.

It's called Taj Spices, and it recently opened in the Al Foah Mall as you drive out of Al Ain to Dubai. (When you reach the coffee pot roundabout, turn left, and the Al Foah Mall is on the right.

He took some photos on his beloved Blackberry and emailed them to me...





You can see in this next photo the great view of the Al Foah area, looking towards the south. I'll bet you'll see some terrific sunsets from here!...



Many tables can be curtained off for privacy...



Do give this restaurant a try, and let me know what you think! :)

TEDxAlAin TEDx conference, Al Ain

Have you heard of the TED Conference and videos? If you haven't, go check out www.ted.com: you'll be in for a treat!

TED stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design and is a conference which has run in the States for many years, and now costs about \$4,000 to attend. It's always sold out. At the conference some of the best minds in the world come to talk about creativity, the future of education, how the mind works, why we buy what we do, how we make decisions, how to motivate ourselves and others, and much much more.

Each talk is between 7 and 18 minutes. No longer.

More than 900 of these talks are now online and millions of people around the world have watched them: they're very entertaining, informative and inspiring. The videos have had 600 million views so far!

About 2 years ago TED decided to allow TEDx events to take place around the world. These are independent TED events. But they have to follow certain guidelines including that no talk can last more than 18 minutes.

In May 2011 a guy called Sajjad Kamal and I were the co-hosts for TEDxAlAin.

On the Al Ain Enthusiast website you'll find the video of my talk.

(Go to [this page](#) if you want to find out how I got involved with this conference.)

Go [here](#) to find a few other short videos I've created.

A second TEDxAlAin took place in April 2012.

If you want to ensure you get a place at a future event, register at the [TEDxAlAin website](#) early. Keep an eye out too in the local Al Ain monthly magazine, Oasis Living, which did 2 great articles on TEDxAlAin 2011.

There have also been...

- 3 TEDx-related conferences in Dubai
- one in Abu Dhabi (TEDxAbuDhabiU) at the University
- one in Muscat
- one in Ajman

The last 3 in that list took part in April or May 2011. All were within driving distance of Al Ain, and all were free to attend, and featured inspiring talks.

Sajjad and I attended TEDxAbuDhabiU which was great, and next year's event will be even better, I'm sure!

The Choueifat School in Al Ain

Our first choice for schooling was the Al Ain English Speaking School, but by the time we booked in the summer of 2009 there were no places for our boys, so we signed them up at our second choice, the Choueifat School in Al Ain. They had a great year there. Half way through the year, our now 11-year-old, Toby, told me that he felt he had learned twice as much in the last few months there than he had done the previous year at the private school he attended in the UK. So he felt he was getting a good education.







The headmaster there is Mr Ramzi Eid. During the following year, our 7-year-old, Felix, complained to my wife and I that he was being bullied. I went to see Mr Eid, and this matter was quickly resolved.

This is a photo of the 2 of us in the main lobby of the school...



... and a close-up.



His wife, Mrs Indira Eid, is the exam officer at the school, and she was the one who showed us round the school when we first arrived in Al Ain.

During the year I would drop the boys off at 7.20am for a 7.45am start, then pick them up at 4pm. (The 7-year-old finished at 3.15pm, but happily went into the late room til 4pm.)

The Al Ain English Speaking School starts a little later and finishes up to 70 minutes earlier.

The National newspaper, Abu Dhabi

The National newspaper is a terrific daily paper. It costs 2 dirhams Sunday to Friday. The Saturday edition comes with a colour supplement magazine and costs 3 dirhams. You will pay an extra dirham if you buy the paper in the shop at the Hilton Hotel.



The journalism is excellent. The Arts and Books section which appears most days is always a good read. I was so impressed one day that I emailed the Arts and Books Editor to complement her and her team.

The paper has a full-time correspondent living in Al Ain who reports on events and crime here ("though there's not much of that!" he told me recently).

Transporting livestock in Al Ain

I love seeing camels and goats being transported round Al Ain, and taking photos of them. Here's one, and I'll post others soon...



Triumph over life's challenges



Chris Payne

This is pure self promotion!

Since I moved to Al Ain more than a year ago I've been helping people here and overseas (by phone etc) to triumph over the challenges/problems in their lives.

I have talked with people with relationship issues, depression, sleeplessness, money worries, problems with their children, and so on.

I see people in the day or evening.

I am not a 'pure' life coach, therapist or counsellor, though I have done courses or studied the texts such people have studied. I call myself a facilitator: I help people move forward in life by offering new perspectives and sharing various tools I've developed or learned from others. And I have done this for the last 17 years.

(If you want pure life coaching, therapy or counselling, you'll find suitable people in Dubai or Abu Dhabi.)

If you want to know more, you can download a pdf version of my 8-page brochure [here](#), which lists my qualifications, and tells you more about how I work. (If you have a Mac, press the Alt/Option key before you click on the link.)

You can also go to my main site at www.triumphoverchallenges.com where you'll find things such as videos which aren't in the brochure (of course), and articles. Or you can click on the Triumph advert I've placed on the right.

UAE Digest magazine, Dubai

UAE Digest is a full-colour magazine which is published in Dubai and sells for 5 AED (just under £1).

The editor found a photo of my second son, Felix, on this site while she was surfing google for photographs of Green Mubazzarah, a local area of natural beauty.

She contacted me to ask permission to use the photo, which I happily granted – and I emailed her the full resolution version so she could reproduce it as large as she wanted.

Little did I realise that she would then put it on the front cover!...



Go here to see an online version of this issue... <http://sterlingp.aspgulf.net/emags/ud1210.html>

You click on the arrows half way down the screen on the left and right to flick through it...



Or go to the [Sterling Publications website](http://SterlingPublications.com) to read the magazine every month.

UAE National Day

In November each year we celebrate National Day: the day when the Emirates was born.

The town is lit up at night, buildings covered in lights. Here are some photos from the 40th anniversary in 2011...



Cars are decorated...



This is what it looked like outside my son Felix's school gate...



UAE Offroaders

UAE Offroaders boasts more than 500 members. A number of them live in Al Ain.



I have nabbed the following text from an article at the [UAE Offroaders site](http://www.uaeoffraders.com).

"UAE Offroaders is a club of fun, desert-loving UAE residents, organised specifically to give newbies a safe and encouraging support network to get started, as well as running challenging trips for experienced drivers and a support network for 4×4-related issues.

"Membership with UAE Offroaders is free, and they boast more than 500 members. Lee Khalfan al Romaithi, aka Lionbar on the online forum, is one of the club founders. He explains that the goal of the club is to offer the chance for people in the UAE to experience and appreciate the various terrains and outstanding beauty of the country. The club also aims to show people that the desert is not desolate or lifeless; rather, it is teeming with wildlife, and that the desert deserves respect.

"And UAE Offroaders is much more than a hobby club. As a social network, the members trade advice and expertise; even jobs and company deals are found and made. As a community-oriented organisation, UAE Offroaders also organises events such as the Pink Drive, an off-road journey last weekend in support of breast cancer patients at Tawam Hospital – 60 cars plus marshals were involved, raising Dh9,105.

It was Jeff Evans, Secondary headmaster of Secondary at Al Ain English Speaking School, who told me about UAE Offroaders – and there's a quote from him in the article...

"The new hero is Jeff Evans, a 39-year-old Welsh educator. "We decided to join UAE Offroaders to experience the great rolling sandy expanses around Al Ain and Abu Dhabi and really take advantage of being in this country. It makes a welcome change from malls and hotels.

"We knew a few friends who drive and camp off-road and we wanted to learn a new skill and meet new friends. Our first trip was as passengers with one of the marshals, who made it look very easy in his modified Jeep with huge fat tyres. My kids and I had an amazing trip once we got used to the ups and

downs and being parked right at the top of a steep bowl, while our guide helped the newcomers manage the drive.”

Go to the site to read the full article.

Utility bill prices in Al Ain

When we lived in a large 3-bedroom apartment we paid in the region of 200 aed (£35/ US\$50) a month for electricity and water – and we had 3 air conditioning units on during the afternoon and evening: from 3pm to 11pm 5 days a week, and most of the day at the weekend. During the summer months, one unit feeding our bedrooms was on part or all night long.

Our current 4-bedrom villa, with 3 living rooms and a very large landing, is a **much** bigger space, and costs about 750aed a month during the hottest months and only 200 aed during the winter months. (We have 3 air conditioning units running through the night from April to October.)

We pay (and I think you will too!) by visiting the Al Ain Distribution Company office on Khalifa Street in the centre of Al Ain, and giving them the meter numbers. Some friends we have made here didn't go to pay their bill until a year after they arrived! They didn't get cut off!

Water delivery in Al Ain

New developments in Al Ain don't have mains water at first: it has to be delivered in tankers...



The hose is connected to taps outside the gates of villas...





The water is stored in units next to each villa. These are one next to our villa. When they overflow, our warden yells to the guy in the tanker to turn off the tap! Not a very elegant way to regulate how much water to transfer! :) ...



Such water which is delivered to us is paid for by the landlord. My understanding is that once the mains connections are established, we'll be individually metered.

Waterfall roundabout

If you travel west from the Hilton Hotel, the next major junction is at Sanaiya, and you'll see the Etisalat building on your right and The Mall (still under construction) on the left. The next roundabout after that is my favourite in Al Ain with 3 waterfalls on one side...



... and 2 on the other...



If you are mad enough to walk across to it...



you'll find steps going up to the top, where you can take in the views to the east...



...and west...



Occasionally I've seen people standing at the top admiring the view. And often in the evenings you'll see Asians sitting in groups of 2 to 4, relaxing and chatting on the grass on many of these attractive roundabouts, and other grassy sections by the roadside.

Weekend activities

Many families with children spend at least a few hours most weekends, or even after school in the afternoons, by the pool. Some villa compounds have a pool, but most people will use a pool at a local hotel or club.

The Hilton Hotel is excellent. See the separate post on it.

There are similar facilities at the Intercontinental Hotel and the Rotana Hotel. There is also a small pool at the rugby club at the Palm Resort. Many of our children's friends from school go swimming at the weekend so our boys are kept highly entertaining while my wife and I relax by the laps pool. The continual presence of lifeguards helps create a sense of safety and security.

Where to buy English books

There are two main bookshops for English speakers in Al Ain:

- Magrudy's in Bawadi Mall
- Books Plus in the Al Jimi Mall

Magrudy's is the biggest bookshop with an excellent selection. You will be offered a loyalty card which will enable you at times to get up to 25% discount off books and other goods. The very helpful staff there can do you any book from the UK or US at a price not much higher than you would buy back home. You will just have to wait three weeks to get the book, and they will text message you when the book arrives.

Books Plus has a much smaller selection, but it still has some excellent choices.

The biggest bookshop in Dubai is called Kinokuniya in the Dubai Mall which has 500,000 titles. You can e-mail them a list of any books you are looking for and they will e-mail you back to tell you which ones they have in stock and at what price. Posting four books to you costs just 24 dirhams which is less than £5. They cannot take credit card numbers over the phone, so you have to do a bank transfer and e-mailed them a scan of the bank transfer docket. Then your books will be sent to you by Federal Express.

FedEx won't deliver to a PO Box: they'll deliver to your home: the deliveryman will ring you to get directions if he can't find your address on a map.

Where to get your car electrics checked or fixed, and your air conditioning too

If you want anything sorted out with your car – or you want to buy a car, and need it to be checked out – then Ibrahim Khalaf is your man. He is great with air conditioning, electrics, fuel injector cleaning (using a Würth machine), and more. His business is called Top Light. It's located in Sanaiya, which is the area south of the Etisalat building in Al Ain.

This is him...



Ibrahim comes from Syria, and has lived here for 10 years...

He was recommended to me by the guy I bought my Toyota Prado from. When I was buying a Nissan Pathfinder for my wife, I took that round to him to check it out. Also, when my brake pads wore out on my car, I went round to see him, he drove me round to a spare parts dealer, asked for 4 sets of pads, and his 2 staff fitted them. All done in an hour.

It cost me 260 dirhams for all 4 sets of pads, and 150 dirhams for Ibrahim to fit them (£26 for nearly 2.5 hours work by 3 people).

His English is pretty good. Not brilliant, but good enough. And his prices are fair.

He has testing equipment for Toyota, Mercedes Benz, BMW and Nissan. He is a lot cheaper than going to an official dealer.

His workshop is on the left with my Prado in front of it...



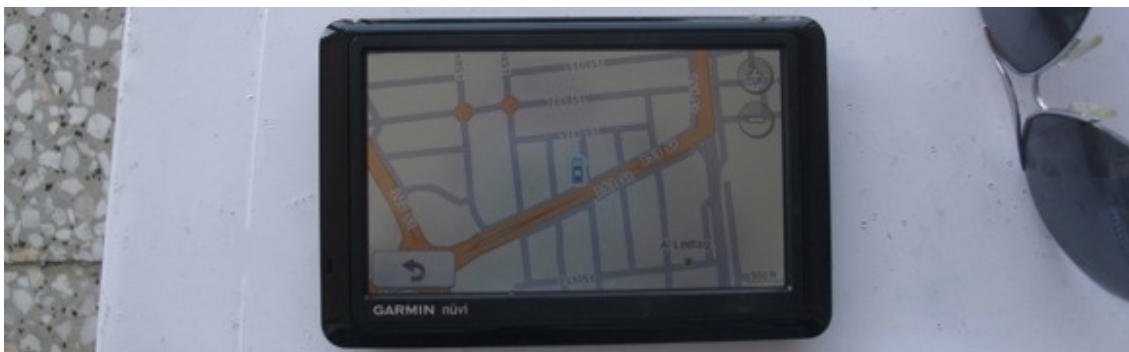
Directions to his workshop...

- Travelling west from the Hilton, come off at the Etisalat junction
- Turn left at the lights, heading south into the Sanaiya industrial area
- Go through the next set of lights
- Turn right at the next set
- Turn in on the right, so you're now running parallel with the main road
- Take the third turning on your right
- Top Light is the 6th workshop on your right

If you look to the right of the ZEIN shop on the right of the photo above you'll see the main road running east/west...



You can see the location in the middle of this photo on my Garmin...



If you have a Garmin, or the Tom Tom GPS app on your iPhone or Android smartphone (about \$60, so it may be well worth your while getting this), he is located at...

N24 degrees 11 minutes 21.0 seconds = N24.18917 degrees

E055 degrees 45 minutes 32.7 seconds = E055.75908 degrees

Whatever kind of servicing work you want doing on your car, go and see Ibrahim first. If he can't handle your issue, he'll know a trustworthy person who can.

Two new stories about Ibrahim...

1. He told me recently that a man drove all the way from Dubai to get his car fixed by Ibrahim. He said he had seen this page on my site. Ibrahim charged him 250 dirhams for the job. The man said this work would have cost him 1,200 dirhams in Dubai.

2. The ignition key unit stopped working on my Toyota Prado: when I put my key in the ignition, the key just spun round. Ibrahim said I needed a new unit. He located a new part: 1,800 dirhams. He rang around and found a dealer across the border in Buraimi who was selling the same part for 1,350 dirhams. Ibrahim negotiated the price down to 950 dirhams. So I saved 850 dirhams! Another workshop wouldn't have gone to this trouble, I believe. Rather than just fit the new part, which would mean I would use the original key for opening the car and a new key for the ignition, Ibrahim managed to get the old key working in this new ignition. His charge for ringing round, collecting the part from Buraimi, and installing the new part: 200 dirhams.

Lastly, if you do call Ibrahim or visit him, please mention my name and this site.

(Please read my [disclaimer](#) before seeing anyone I mention on this site.)

Which is better: Al Ain or Abu Dhabi?

I received this email today from a subscriber to this site...

I will be arriving in Abu Dhabi next week as a newly hired teacher and we have been told we can plead our case for the city we want to live in. I am unsure if I would prefer Abu Dhabi or Al Ain. I am 50, female, single, very active in that I rock climb, hike, bike, swim, kayak, camp and such. I tend to get heat stroke though. I very much enjoy concerts, lectures and cultural events but am not into the 'bar scene' or clubbing. I am outgoing, happy and very excited about this journey. If you have any advice for me that would be swell. I have enjoyed looking at your web site.

I replied as follows...

I have no easy answer for you.
Here's a few tips...

Abu Dhabi downsides...

- very congested
- your car WILL get dented overnight wherever it's parked
- it's very humid in the summer months: maybe March to September

Upsides...

- a LOT more going on: music concerts, etc
- Time Out Abu Dhabi magazine features lots of stuff: see their website and mag: which lists almost no event in Al Ain as so little goes on

Al Ain downsides

- much quieter
- far less cultural events: one WOMAD world music festival a year, maybe a few classical music concerts a year, no talks/lectures by book authors etc, very small English libraries, occasional natural history talks and walks

Al Ain upsides...

- not as congested
- no humidity: very dry, so you don't suffer in summer
- your car won't get dented
- I think you can climb at Jebel Hafeet, the nearby mountain maybe not, but Al Ain borders Oman where you can do a lot of climbing

Does that help?

Our sons are 11 and 8. We wouldn't live in Abu Dhabi if you paid us a ton of

money to do so: more expensive schooling, plus the other downsides. We love it here in Al Ain. YOU may much prefer Abu Dhabi.

Do let me know what you decide!

And please publicise my site if you can, via Facebook, Twitter, emails, if you're in a position to do so.

Warmest,

Chris

WOMAD Festival, Al Ain

Early in 2010 and 2011, the WOMAD (World Of Music, Arts and Dance) Festival came to Al Ain – and took place inside this magnificent fort, on the road heading south from the Rotana Hotel...



The events were free, and suitable for children, so all 4 of us went along for one of the 2 nights the festival were on. There were about 300-400 people there, and the music was wonderful.

Last minute additions...

Pedal bike / cycle repairs in Al Ain

You can buy pedal bikes and cycles – and get them repaired or serviced – at a number of outlets around Al Ain.

The one I use is a couple of doors down from the Welcome Traders store which itself is several shops south of the Lulu Supermarket in Kuwaitat/Nyadat.

The Nepalese guys there are very friendly and prices are very good: I got a puncture sorted for 15 aed (£2.50) – and jobs like this can be done while you wait.

Fly to Nepal for a holiday

Many ex-pats who live in Al Ain have travelled to Nepal for a holiday as it's only a 4-hour flight, and the price is keen.

We 4 Paynes went one Easter break for a week and had a fabulous time.

First up are some shots from Kathmandu (we stayed there for 2 days, which was enough as the city is very polluted, smelly, noisy and crowded, but delightful all the same).

This is a temple called Shree Boudhanath...



An enormous prayer wheel for us to spin...



Sadhus: holy men...





Offering for the gods were on sale...



On our second day we drove out to Changuanarayan, a temple with craft village on the walk up to it...

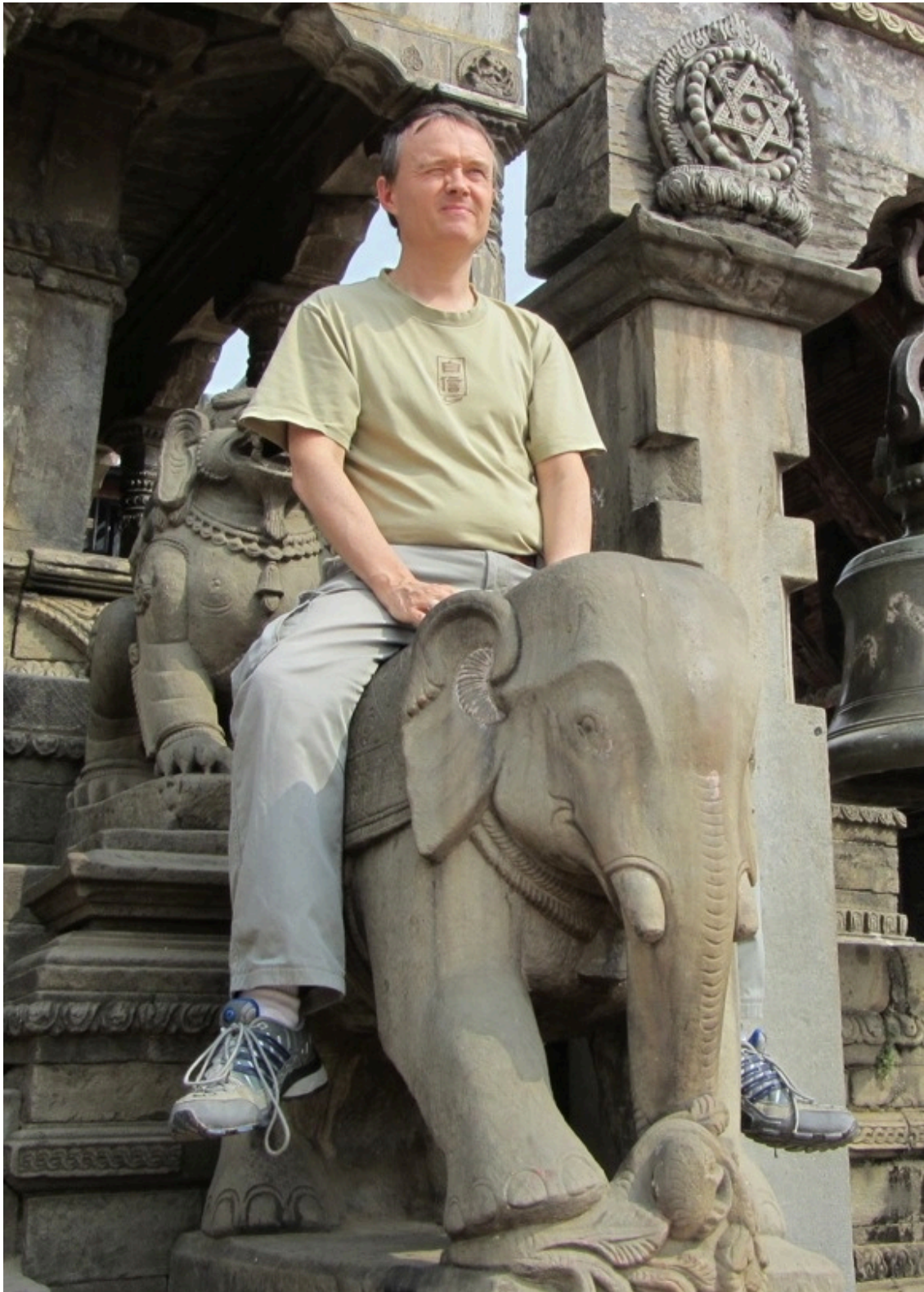




Then we drove to Bhaktapur for lunch, and to see more temples...







On day 3 we flew to Pokhara, a 30-minute flight, costing \$100 per person each way...

Here's the view through the plane's window...



The airport in Pokhara...



Our plane...



We hired bikes after we had settled into our hotel. That's Toby on the left having negotiated round the cows!...





We rode to see the waterfall at Devi's Fall...





We stayed at Temple Trees Hotel for 3 nights for about \$140 a night. You can pay \$5 a night in a guest house and be very comfortable! We wanted some luxury! :)

While there, on day 4, we went pony trekking for two and a half hours...



We reached a viewing point...



Here's the view of the town of Pokhara below...



Then we rode back down into town...



We went for an afternoon hike on day 4 to see how remote villagers lived. Here is inside one small home...



...and admired the views...



On the morning of our final day in Pokhara, I hired a motorbike for 350 rupees for an hour (£3 / US\$4.50) so I could spend time with our second son, Felix...



And I went for a 30-minute flight in a microlight with our 12-year-old, Toby, each in separate microlights, costing about \$100 for each of us.

Here's the microlight Toby was to fly in...



And these all show Toby's microlight and the magnificent views...





We flew round a stupa on a hill overlooking Pokhara...



This was a terrific holiday. I hope these photos and price guidelines inspire you to visit Nepal!

Buying outdoor plants

You can buy outdoor plants in the area behind Bawadi Mall...



My wife, Catherine, chose some great plants and pots. See if you can spot her below :) ...



The Afghani owner of the nursery repotted the plants for us...



This is a snap of we bought, when we got them home...



12 plants in all, 6 in pots which we chose, plus a big sack of compost, plus the white and pink stones to hold in the moisture – all for 300 dirhams / £50 / US \$75.

Here are 3 Jasmine plants which we bought the week before, and the table we also purchased from Ace Hardware at Bawadi Mall...



Six of the plants we put on top of the divider between our villa and the one next door. Eventually they'll trail down the sides which should look great. You'll also see 2 bamboo torches with kerosene canisters inside on the right of our front door which we also bought from Ace...



Would you like a website?



Chris Payne

This is my second bit of self promotion. (This is my first.)

If you'd like a website like this one, do get in touch with me. I spend most of my time helping people triumph over the challenges in their lives, but I also have clients who want to have a website which brings in business for them.

I will talk with you and explain how to create a site that gets visited by interested prospects, and how to turn them into paying clients/customers.

I would do a bit of the work myself on the site, but most of the work I outsource to a team of people I know and trust.

Some of my other sites are at...

www.applemacenthusiast.com

www.ipadenthusiast.com

and

www.triumphoverchallenges.com.

On this last site you can click on the About box and find out the businesses I've run, and the successes I've had – as well as some of the many 'mistakes' I've made!

Zayed Library in Al Ain

The Zayed library is open most days, though some opening times are for women only, or men only. It is the biggest library in Al Ain, but the books there are much older than in the other 2 libraries here, and it is better as a source of reference material rather than for casual reading.



I liked this camel opposite the entrance (there are many of these around Al Ain)...



There is also excellent media library containing documentaries and courses on DVD and CD-ROM which you can watch on the computers in the media room.

Fun

Here is a list of fun things to do in Al Ain, or within driveable distance.

Many of these things have an article about them on this site – so put a word/phrase that interests you into the Search box on the Navigation Bar above.

In Al Ain...

Sports...

- rugby
- football/soccer
- ice hockey
- Paintballing
- baseball
- karate
- go karts
- walking (Al Ain Natural History Group)
- camping (you can get an inexpensive tent and camp in the desert near the Al Ain International Airport, or go further afield)

Healthy body...

- yoga
- Pilates

Music-related...

- instrument lessons
- singing lessons
- Choral Group (Sunday nights at the Al Ain English School Hall)
- music concerts
-

Cinemas...

- Bawadi Mall
- Al Ain Mall
- Rotana Hotel
- French Cultural Centre (a English subtitled popular French film at 7.30pm every other Thursday: free entry)
- Al Foah Mall

Places...

- Various forts and museums
- Hili Fun City
- Al Ain Wildlife Park
- Parks like Jahli Park (with great climbing frames)
- Al Ain Paradise Hanging Gardens

Large arcades with dodgems etc...

- Bawadi Mall (also has a small rollercoaster)

- Al Ain Mall
- Al Jimi Mall

Yearly events...

- Al Ain Air Show
- WOMAD Festival (World Of Music, Arts and Dance)

Abu Dhabi (90 minutes away by car)...

- Sheikh Zayed Mosque (third largest mosque in the world)
- Hilton Hotel (superb beach / pools / water slide)
- Ferrari World (enormous theme park)

Dubai (90 minutes away by car)...

Beaches...

- Jumeirah Beach (low cost)
- public beach (free)

Dubai Mall...

- Kidzania (small 'town' where children try out different jobs and earn money: leave them for 2-3 hours while you shop for a fixed fee: just amazing)
- Sega Zone (stay for hours and play video games and ride the roller coaster etc for a fixed fee, then with tokens)
- Aquarium Tour
- 22-screen cinema

Dubai Creek...

- Dolphinarium (excellent dolphin show with top notch highwire acts)
- Science-type museum (like Eureka in Halifax England) (correct name to follow!!)

Water parks...

- Atlantis Hotel: Aquaventure (awesome water park)
- Wild Wadi water park (smaller and more crammed with people, but the same price)

Umm Al Quwain (90-120 minutes away by car)...

- Dreamland Aqua Park (cheaper than Aquaventure or Wild Wadi, and fewer adrenalin rides, but a fun day out)

Fujairah (3.5 hours away by car)...

- Le Meridien Al Aqah Beach Resort Hotel (the best hotel we've ever been to, so we've been 11 times, supreme service. Wonderful kid's club. Fab water sports.)
- Sandy Beach Resort
- Miramar Hotel
- Rotana Hotel

...and a few other hotels

Oman...

- Crowne Plaza Hotel, just before you reach Sohar: 65 mins from the Hilton Hotel, Al Ain
- Muscat (2 hours from Sohar)
- about 500 forts, plus wadis galore: see an Off Road Guide from a local bookshop for maps and descriptions

In summary: I think you'll find that there's a lot to do in Al Ain.

Now, if any of the above interest you, enter a keyword into the search box on the menu bar at the top of the screen to see if I've put any more info about that subject or place in an article – in many cases there's lots of words and photos too.

Do post a comment below or email me if you can improve this list! Or ask me a question!

Appreciation

Having completed our first year in Al Ain, I am very grateful to be living here.

As I was thinking about writing the first draft of this page, I had a moment of serendipity...

It was the last day of the school year – and so the last day of my sons' first school year in Al Ain. I was driving 5 boys back to our home for a change of clothes before taking them to the cinema to see the new version of The Karate Kid starring Jaden Smith, son of Will Smith and Jada Pinket Smith. As we drove along we played a fab song on my iPod that my 10-year-old son Toby has introduced me to: Dead And Gone by T.I. (featuring Justin Timberlake).

All 5 of us sang along loudly: "The old me is dead and gone, dead and gone" – and I felt present, alive and my heart opened. A perfect line, a perfect moment, the joy of driving, listening to music, being with my boys and their friends.

Living in Al Ain, for me, is a different life from the one I had in the UK.

There have been many moments during the last year that I really appreciate, some of them a little tongue in cheek!

- * not wearing socks and shoes, just sandals in nearly a year
- * not tucking my shirt in either
- * meeting some wonderful new friends
- * speaking more French in the last 10 months than I have done in the whole of the last 25 years (one of Toby's classmates's mother only speaks French)
- * sitting chatting with a delightful German family while our mutual sons played tennis in the early evenings
- * meeting new people and listening to great world music at a local fort at the WOMAD (World Of Music, Arts And Dance) Festival
- * taking driving lessons (four) for the first time in 30 years so I could pass my test – and realising how badly I drive a manual car!
- * standing with my boys, backs to the high waves on a windy day on a beach in Dubai, and constantly being knocked off our feet. Hilarious and exhilarating
- * trying to pay for an upgrade to my desktop publishing software (QuarkXpress) having received a call from a saleswoman from India while the Red Devils screamed overhead at the Air Show, relaying my credit card number during the rare quiet moments
- * lounging by the pool in the glorious sunshine, drinking a mocktail, buried in a wonderful book, interrupted by friends passing by who stop to chat
- * watching my 7-year-old run full pelt across the playground with pure care-free abandon once I'd picked him up at the end of his school day
- * listening to my wife enthuse again and again how much she loves her job teaching local Emiratee teenage girls

- * marvelling at the sheer, slick professionalism and devoted care given by the staff at the Al Noor Hospital when my eldest tore the ligament in his leg
- * the beauty of the neon lights above the shops while driving through the town centre at night
- * the delightful friendliness of the staff at the Hilton Hotel, Magrudy's bookshop, and other places

...and many more.

Welcome to Al Ain: shed your old skin, step into a new life, and enjoy the simple pleasures of daily living here.

"The old me is dead and gone, dead and gone."

If you live in Al Ain, do tell me what you appreciate/love about living here. I'd love to know!

Challenges

There are a small number of challenges to living in this town.

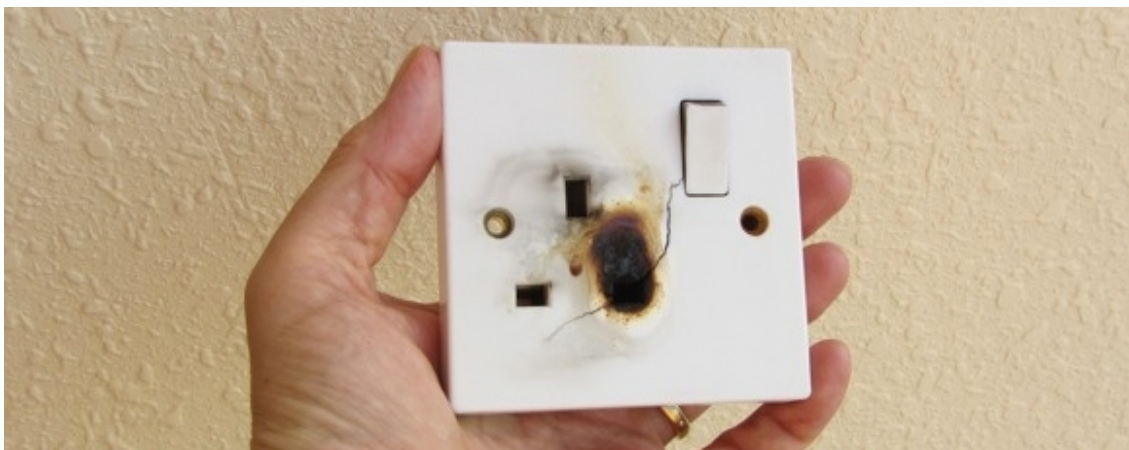
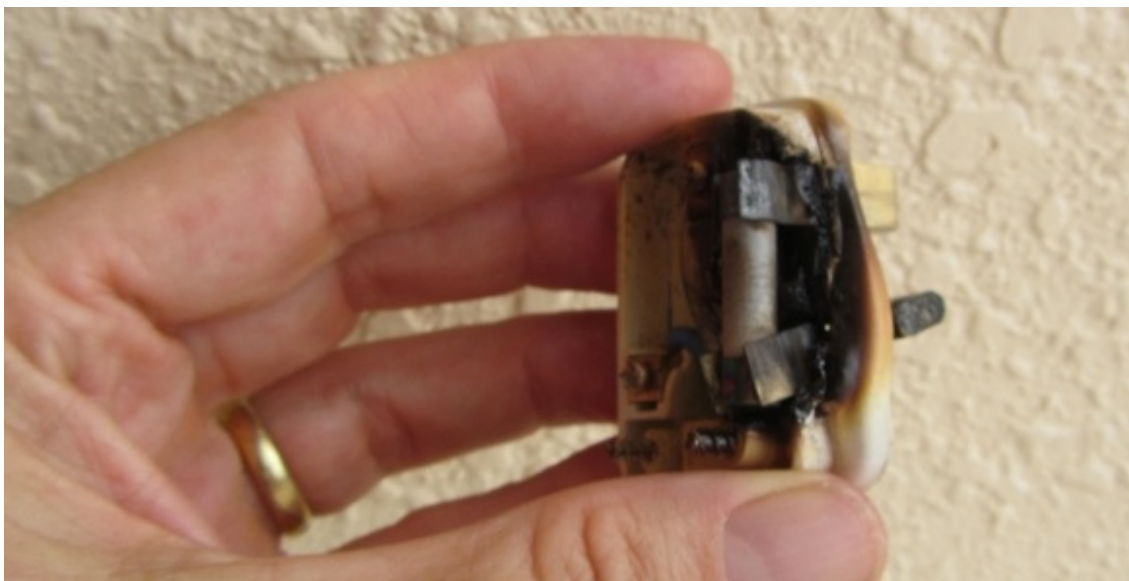
Here are some...

- The quality of driving here means that you'll will quite likely be involved in a crash during your first year (see separate article for details!) – so you may decide to invest in a 4x4 for added safety.
- Rare electricity spikes which can destroy a laptop charger.
- English speakers aren't always easy to find.
- The internet is more expensive than back home, and can be slow in the evening.
- You may need a residence visa (which can take 4-6 weeks) before you can get an internet connection installed.
- You will need a residence visa to buy a car.
- You will need a residence visa if, say, you've bought an iPhone 4 and you want a monthly mobile phone account so you can use the phone and surf while out and about

- You will need to renew your visa on a 'visa run' into Oman every month until your residence visa arrives – and this can take 2 hours in total, from leaving your home to getting back again.
- Some sites like Skype.com, and maybe a few other sites you'd like to access, are inaccessible.
- The heat in the middle of summer can be intense.
- Your car may get a little dent while parked. You can only get this fixed if you have a police report.
- If you want another front door key cut, you'll need a letter from the building's owner.
- Your home can get visited by little cockroaches.
- When it rains heavily (1-2 days a year?), water can pour into your home as the buildings here aren't sealed as well as in the West – so keep papers/books off window ledges and the floor near windows. (Luckily only one new book of mine was ruined in November 2009!) Plus the underpass next to the Etisalat building can get very flooded, and various side roads too. And some shops get flooded too. Quite a sight!
- Occasionally some imported food items are out of stock at supermarkets: Heinz Baked Beans for example, and some cereals. Brown rice is not easy to find either.
- You cannot be seen eating and drinking outside before dusk during the month of Ramadan.
- You cannot have any alcohol with your restaurant meal during Ramadan if you're on a trip to Oman: it will only be served in your hotel room.
- Mail from home can only be delivered to a post office box, not your home. And it sometimes never arrives.
- Getting a speeding fine in Dubai seems inevitable (as I got one on my second trip there, and I was very careful to stick to the speed limit – and other friends have been caught out too). You will have to drive back to Dubai to pay the fine, and you may never know on which road you got photographed!
- Water from the cold tap can, at times, be very warm: a bit of a problem if you've put too much hot water in a bath for your children: it's not as easy cooling the bathwater as it would be in the West!

I've elaborated on some of these points in my blog posts. Click on 'challenges' in the Tag Cloud to see all the entries there.

We had a new electrical socket fitted for our washing machine in our new villa. After 2 months we got this...



I was looking to leave our walled-in villa the other day, only to find that some workers had dug away the sand in front of the gate...



A neighbour and I complained as we needed to leave, to which the worker said "I bang on gate. No-one come." Anyway, the guys got an enormous digger which scooped up some sand, and they created a ramp so we could drive out!...



My wife told me of a woman she knew who drove up to her gate to get out, pressed her remote control and drove out. However, as above, the ramp had been removed so the car bottom banged against the edge of the concrete and so the car got stuck! :)

If you can think of any challenges, let me know either in a comment below, or by contacting me directly via the About page.

And if you're struggling with any challenges here, [this page](#) is a bit of self promotion!

Links etc

You'll find a lot of help here...

The Living in Al Ain section of the [British Expats site](#).

Niala News is excellent. Emails are sent out daily with news about the town. Niala is Al Ain backwards. These emails go out to more than 1,000 ex-pats in Al Ain. You'll get emails about...

- maids needed
- maids being offered – as a family is leaving town
- items for sale (often as people are leaving)
- activities like used uniform sales at the Al Ain English Speaking School
- new delivery services for top-quality food
- services offered, like personal fitness training, Reiki treatments
- and much more!

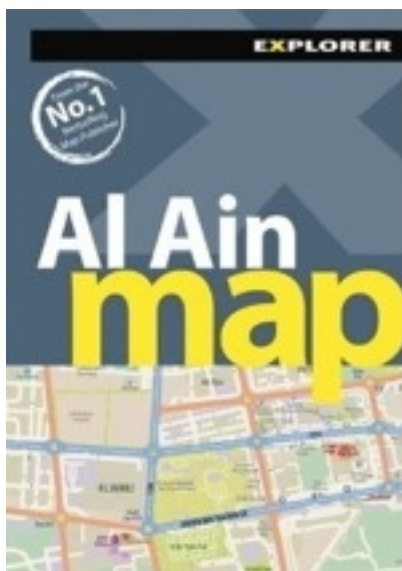
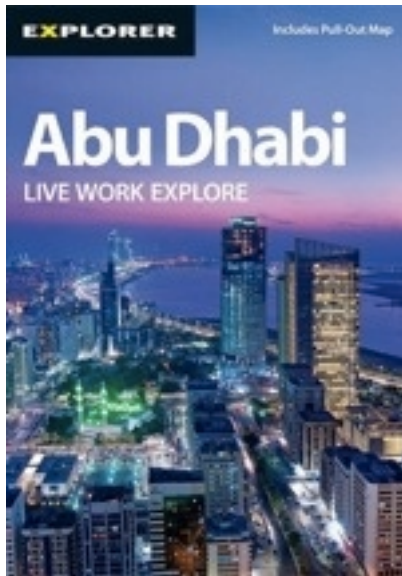
There's a group on Yahoo Groups called alainexpats. You'll get a post or 2 every couple of days. This is a great place for asking questions, and most questions do get answered.

There's also Al Ain Blogs, run by Mohammed Randeree, born in Bradford, England of all places, who now lives in Al Ain.

If you want to buy a car, a great place to go is dubizzle.com which is very like ebay. When I was searching for a Toyota Prado, I searched dubizzle regularly, and I was the first to visit one car and agreed to buy it straight away as it was exactly what I wanted. A few days later the seller told me he had had 'a thousand' calls about the car. Maybe he really meant he had a couple of hundred calls. But it shows how popular this site is for car buyers!

You can buy the main guide to the Abu Dhabi Emirate (which includes info on Al Ain), Abu Dhabi Explorer, from amazon.

The publishers also produce a nice little folding map to Al Ain (pictured).



About



Chris Payne

Chris Payne and his family lived in the UK until August 2009.

While there, Chris was managing director of the second largest supplier of personal development products in the UK. He booked more than 400 adverts in national magazines and newspapers promoting relaxation devices, a speed reading-type course called PhotoReading, and other products. At one point he had 13 staff and offices covering 7,000 square feet.

In one year he mailed almost one million sales letters to people around the UK.

In 2004 he created his own personal development course called The Effort-Free Life System which consisted of up to 19 CDs, a DVD, a 69-page workbook, coaching calls and a seminar. This course has been promoted heavily in the United States, and also Australia, and Chris has run 3-day seminars in the UK, America and Australia.

Then in 2008 he got really sick. He and his wife re-appraised their life, and one of their decisions was to move to Al Ain.

He now works with clients around the world in 2 ways...

- helping people triumph over challenges in their lives (relationship issues, money issues, parenting issues, career challenges and more), via one-on-one sessions, ebooks, and e-courses, and...
- helping people turn their knowledge into ebooks, audio courses, etc in order to make a part- or full-time living (having created various CDs, DVDs, ebooks, mp3 courses, etc himself), and building websites for them if necessary.

He has given presentations to audiences as large as 2,200 people on internet marketing, and how to live an effort-free life.

You can find out more about Chris at his TriumphOverChallenges.com website.

Chris is available for...

- one-on-one sessions: emailable brochure available on request
- small or large group talks on handling challenges, personal growth, "What popular movies can teach us about the purpose of life", the 'hidden' meaning behind popular fairy tales, and internet marketing

Chris has used an Apple Mac for 23 years, so he has a new site at AppleMacEnthusiast.com. He also has a site at iPadEnthusiast.com.

He loves making new friends, and chatting about philosophy, classic stoicism, psychology, relationship dynamics, personal change, movies and celebrity gossip – but he is almost completely ignorant about sport (to the amusement of his family), cars, politics and world affairs. If any of Chris's interests interest you too, and you want to get together for a chin wag, give him a call, or email him anytime. (Contact details are on the Triumph site.)