



Souks and a School

Visit the Fabric, Spice and Gold souks – cross the Creek in an Abra and explore some of the heritage of the Al Ras area.

This leaflet takes you on a walk through the souks around the Creek and discovers a poet's house, the first school in Dubai and ends at a Heritage House.

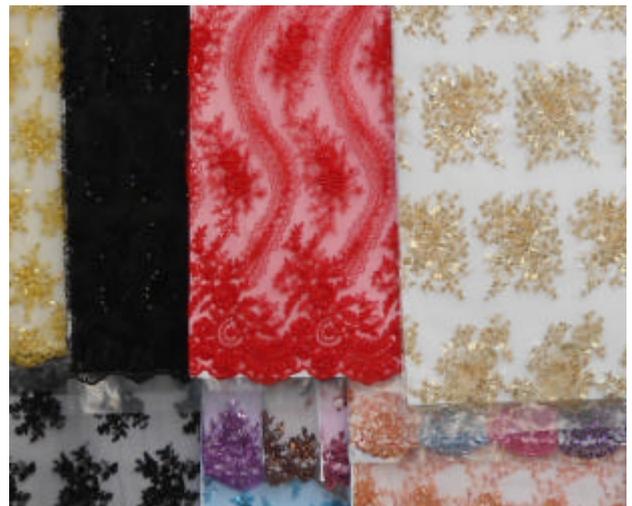
Fabric Souk

The Fabric Souk on the Bur Dubai side of the Creek can easily be reached after a visit to the Dubai Museum.



Fabric Souk

The shops are often wholesaler only or will wish to sell the whole roll, but the range available is impressive. The fabrics are very colourful and often covered with heavy embroidery and jewels. The souk is busiest in the early evenings and many stores will be closed on Fridays as well as for a few hours in the afternoon.



Colourful Fabrics

Within the Fabric Souk you will have to run the gauntlet of the pashmina and T-Shirt salesmen – if you want a shawl, or cheap T-shirts, then you will have lots to choose from – but do haggle. You can also buy some souvenirs and Arab clothing, Pakistani and Indian saris and salwar kameez, the traditional baggy shirt and trouser outfits worn by women in Pakistan, Afghanistan and India.

In amongst these shops is the entrance to the Bayt Al Wakeel Grill. You can just stop for a freshly made fruit juice or have a full meal. Though, if a tour party has just arrived you might find it difficult to get a seat. There is a balcony that is built over the Creek and is an excellent place to watch all the activity on the water. This house was built in 1934 as the first commercial office building on the Creek and was used as an office by Grey Mackenzie.



Bayt Al Wakeel Grill – by the Creek

Abra Crossing

Once you have made it through the fabric souk, you will be close to an Abra station. These small boats are the traditional wooden water taxis that scuttle back and forwards across the Creek and are the quickest way of crossing the Creek. They were originally rowing boats, though are now motorised. Prior to 1962, they were the only way of crossing the Creek



Abra on Dubai Creek

Don't be put off by their appearance, over 17,500 people still cross the creek by Abra every day. There is a sort of queuing system, and you will be encouraged on board. Just sit on the bench that runs around the boat, it may be a little grubby and so don't wear your best clothes! The fare is 1 Dhs and you pay the driver on board – best to have the right change with you as he won't be happy to be given a large denomination note. The boats do carry lifejackets and are part of the RTA network. The crossing is short, but gives you a good

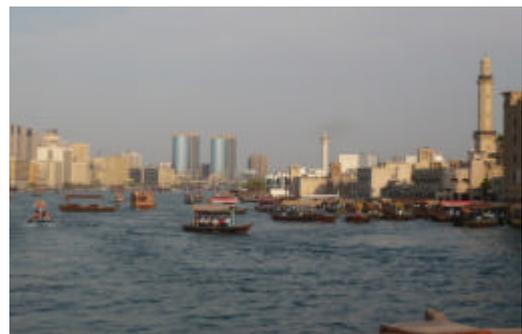
view of the trading ships lined up along the north side of the Creek.



Abra with trading dhows

There are two Abra stations on each side. On the Bur Dubai side, the first half way through the Fabric Souk – called Dubai Old Souk Marine and Abbras from here cross to the Al Sabkha station on Baniyas Road near the intersection leading to Al Nasr Square. The second is at the end of the Fabric Souk and is called Bur Dubai Station and Abbras from here cross to the Deira Old Souk Station – this is the best station to use to reach the souks.

If you feel like a longer trip, you can hire an Abra for a tour up the Creek. Ask a boat captain and agree the price and the length of the tour before you start.



Dubai Creek

Spice Souk

Once on the north side of the Creek, head across the main road and visit the Spice Souk. This occupies an alley alongside the perimeter road in the Al Ras area. The souk was established in 1850, close to the dhow moorings for easy trading and unloading.

There are still a few spice shops left with their large sacks of spices displayed outside the tiny shops. The number is reducing as people buy from their local supermarkets – but those that remain are keen to sell you their ware.



Spice Souk

Within the spice souk you can smell the spices and the frankincense. As well as the traditional spices look out for dried limes, dried rosebuds, dried chillis, camomile tea, saffron and various types of frankincense (a gum resin obtained from trees of the genus *Boswellia*). This is one of Arabia's most prized perfumes and it is the base for some of the world's most expensive scents and might be familiar from high church services. You can also buy the incense burners here.

As you continue down into the rest of the souk it turns into a general market (Deira Old Souk) – with kitchen pots and pans – some big enough to feed an army; bed linen, toys – almost anything that can be traded – straight of the dhows on the quay.



Pots and Pans in Old Deira Souk

There are many alleys to discover although there is probably little that you want to buy and much is for wholesale only. The area is best explored in the late afternoon or evening when the temperatures are cooler and trade is at its busiest.

Al Oqaili House Museum

Open Sun – Thurs 8am – 2pm Free.

Located in the Deira Old Souk Area in Al Ras



Interior Courtyard

As you explore Deira Old Souk, you should spot signs to a poet's house – this is the house of a famous poet and if you are lucky and can follow the signs you may track down the

entrance. There is no entry fee and the house is not very big. However, it does display some poetry and show you how the poet lived with a little kitchen and coffee pot warmers in the sitting areas.



Coffee Pot warmer

Once you have found your way out of this maze of shops back on to Old Baladiya Street you should make your way to the



old Gold Souk – turn left along the street away from the Creek. When you reach the edge of a mosque you should be able to see the wooden framework that is the start of the Gold Souk.



Gold Souk

This is a wide alley covered by a roof and supported by carved wooden pillars lined with small, but modern shops selling mainly gold jewellery. Much of the gold is the orangey-yellow 24-carat gold, but you can also find 18, 21 and 22 carat pieces. There are many incredibly ornate designs - large collars and bracelets aimed at the Indian market. However, you can find some more western style items and they are reasonably priced. The price is based on the Gold price of the day and the weight of the item with a small element for the workmanship. Dubai is one of the cheapest places to buy gold, but take into account the import restrictions of your country.

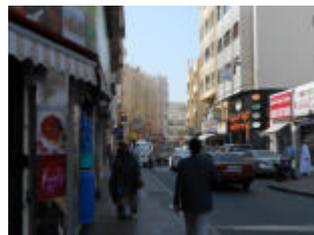


Gold jewellery in the Gold Souk

Leaving the Gold Souk turn right down Old Baladiya Street (left will take you back to the Creek and the Spice Souk)



The road will bear left into Al Ahmadiya Street



A short way down the road you will reach the Heritage House and behind it the School. There is a café just before you reach the museum.



Al Ahmadiya School and Heritage House

School open: Sat – Thu 8 – 7.30, Fri 2.30-7.30 Free Heritage House, 28 Sikka Street Sat – Thurs 8-7.30pm Fri 2.30-7.30 Free (Note hours are reduced during Ramadan)

There are guides and touch screens that will take you through both of the museums.



Classroom at the Al Ahmediya School

The Al Ahmediya School was established around 1912 by a wealthy philanthropic pearl merchant called Ahmed bin Delmuk. The school taught the Arabic language and grammar, Islamic studies and basic mathematics as well as the pearling trade to about 200 boys. Unlike the pupils of Qur'an schools, who sat on the floor, these boys sat at proper desks. This first school in Dubai was established for the children of Dubai's ruling classes and the current ruler of Dubai – Sheikh Mohammed attended for his elementary education. Over the years the building was extended and the curriculum expanded from the teaching of Islamic law and the Qur'an to include English and science. By 1963 the number of students had outgrown the premises and the school was relocated.

The Heritage House is a restored traditional house originally built in 1890 by Mattar bin Saeed bin Muzzaaina and restored by the Dubai Municipality in 1994. There are exhibitions in each room that explains how an Emirati family lived.



Heritage House Courtyard

The meeting room or majlis is separate from the living quarters so that the women did not mix with visitors.



Main Majlis



The house is very informative and gives a real insight into the traditional approach to Arab life.



The kitchen of the heritage house

From these museums, you need to retrace your steps and return to the Creek so that you can return to the Bur Dubai side by Abra.

Area around the Creek

Throughout the souks and in and around the roads you will be approached by many young men selling 'copy' watches and 'copy' handbags. If you are interested they will take you to a shop – usually above another or down an alley. These goods are all copies. If you say you are not interested they will leave you alone.

This area of the city almost feels more like India or Pakistan, and is a world away from the marble and gilt shopping malls and hotels. It is much scruffier than the glitzy malls and feels more lived in. You will see men pulling wooden barrows piled high with goods, boxes stacked by the road and pick-up trucks overloaded with boxes



Transporting Goods from the Dhows

The goods have usually been off-loaded from the dhows lined up along the creek.

Quayside



Before you take an Abra back to Bur Dubai take a walk along the quay. You can see a wide variety of goods –fridges and microwaves, tractor tyres, mattresses, sacks of almonds, crates of juice – anything that can be traded and money made.



Dubai Quay

On some of the older boats you can see the wooden 'chairs' hung over the back of the boat for ablutions.

A large number of the dhows trade with Iran – bringing in cargos of pistachios, raisins, courgettes etc and leaving with televisions, shampoo and toothpaste. Other destinations include Pakistan, Oman and India – if you have

seen Michael Palin's series 'Around the World in 80 Days' you may remember he took a dhow from Dubai to India.

Trading Dhow



In the small lanes behind the Creek are many small wholesalers that deal with the goods off-loaded at the Creek.



Rice Wholesaler

Cross the creek by Abra and you will be back at the start of the Walk. If you want to move on to Walk 3, turn right along the Creek towards the sea.

Area Information

Access - Driving – there is parking near the Al Ghubaiba metro station – the roads are very narrow around here. Alternatively, take a taxi and ask them to drop you at the Abra station by the Fabric Souk.
Metro - use Al Ghubaiba on the Green Line and walk back along the Creek until you reach the Fabric Souk. The entrance near the Abra station is shown right.

Refreshments – Bait al Wakeel restaurant on the Bur Dubai side (with the Fabric Souk) and a café next to the Al Ahmediya School in Al Ras. A kiosk sells drinks near the Bur Dubai Abra station. You can also buy cold drinks from street vendors in the Gold Souk.

Toilets – There are toilets at the restaurants and at metro stations for passengers (through the ticket barriers)

