

Up-and-coming

A CORNER OF DUBAI REMAINS BLISSFULLY SKYSCRAPER-FREE

Not so long ago, wild goats were roving around Bastakiya, now one of Dubai's priciest districts. Originally built to house prominent Iranian tradesmen, the 100-year-old village, located on the banks of Dubai Creek, was on the verge of destruction when, in 1996, the Dubai Municipality deemed it a historical zone and prevented hungry property developers, and goats, from tearing it down.

In keeping with the UAE spirit of speedy construction, almost all of Bastakiya's 58 buildings have now been fully restored. For Ahmed Mahmood Ahmed, head of the Historical Buildings Section, the plan was simple. 'We wanted people to feel the old Dubai. The original Dubai,' he says.

Indeed, a walk through its narrow lanes offers a glimpse into what life was like before petroleum. Dotted with traditional Emirati wind towers (*badgeer* in Arabic), courtyards, coral stone walls and wooden doors made from Zanzibar teak, Bastakiya's sand-coloured structures are a far cry from the crane-lined skies in the rest of the city. The area also houses many ex-pat-owned galleries, restaurants and museums.

The best place to soak up Bastakiya life is at XVA gallery (tel: 97.14 3535 383), where visitors can browse the Middle Eastern art exhibits as well as stay in its stylish hotel. Bastakiya is also soon to open a souk selling traditional Emirati goods, such as clothing, carpets, sweets and henna tattoos.

'In the entire Gulf,' Ahmed declares, 'we are the ones leading the way.' Marisa S Katz

