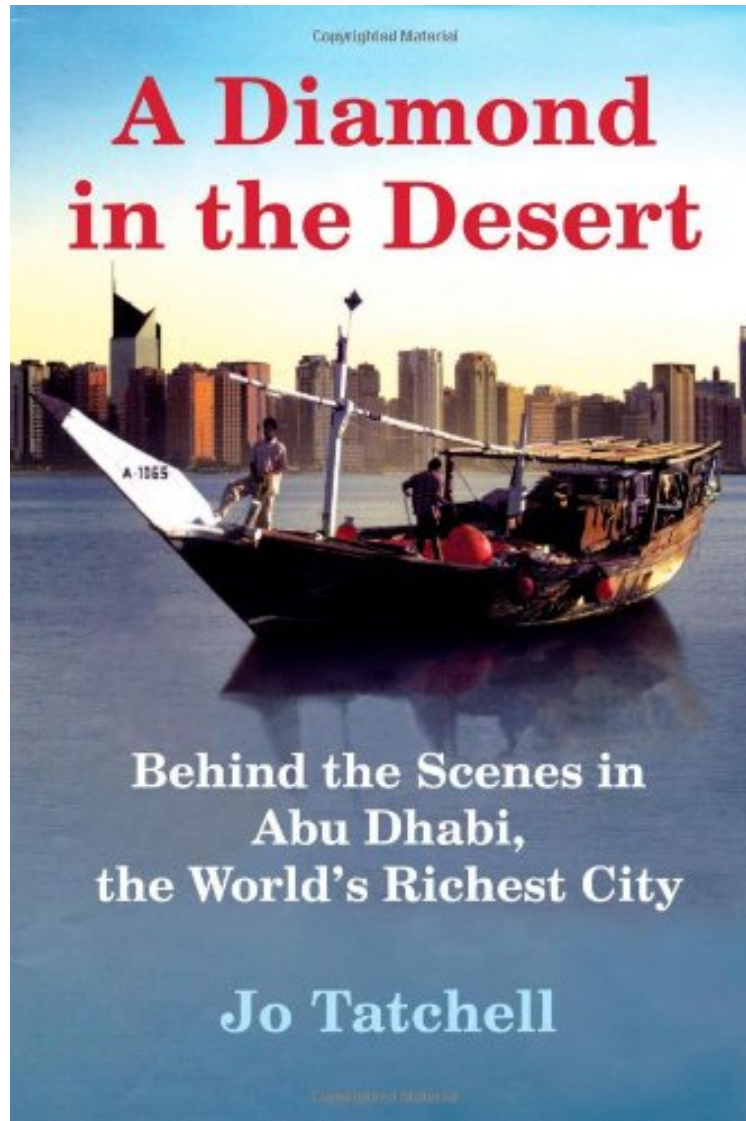


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# A Diamond in the Desert: Behind the Scenes in Abu Dhabi, the World's Richest City

Jo Tatchell

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**Jo Tatchell : A Diamond in the Desert: Behind the Scenes in Abu Dhabi, the World's Richest City** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Diamond in the Desert: Behind the Scenes in Abu Dhabi, the World's Richest City:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Enjoyable and informative readBy Elisabeth KhanIn the timeline of Abu Dhabi history, this book is a follow-up to M.A. Fahim's excellent eyewitness account, "From Rags to

Riches." Author Jo Tatchell revisits the country where she had arrived as a child in 1974 and spent her formative years. She is in an excellent place to compare the "then" and the "now" (meaning circa 2008), having absorbed a lot of fascinating information about the early days of the oil boom from her father, who managed Spinneys, the first supermarket catering to expats. She meets with some prominent locals and old-timers who have made the capital their permanent home; they are happy to reminisce. Her efforts at gaining access to old newspapers in the National Archives, however, are somewhat less successful (partly due to the digitization process which is underway). Jo Tatchell is an excellent writer and I really enjoyed the book. Her observations are spot on and her background information appears well researched and quite accurate. Part memoir and part travelogue, with a bit of history thrown in, the book sometimes left me hungry for "more," which is a compliment as well as a complaint. In the years since the book came out (2009) a lot has happened in the United Arab Emirates. There was the global economic crisis, which hit the country late, but hard, followed by an ongoing recovery. The emirate of Abu Dhabi has proven itself to be smart and resilient in the face of this adversity, opting to become the cultural capital of the area. Here's room for a sequel. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Intro to Abu Dhabi By Maggie Rose Loved A Diamond in the Desert. I read when I was new to Abu Dhabi and still overwhelmed with the culture. This book helped explain as much as is possible, why culture is the way it is here while weaving a very interesting and personal story. A great read for anyone who is living in or considering moving to the UAE. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. What a gem By C. Nelson I wish more people would write books like this about other parts of the world. I liked this book because it went from story to story to explain the history of Abu Dhabi. Reading it was like listening to a friend talk about their travels. The book includes a mystery, tragedy and quirky cultural perspectives.

Tatchell takes us on a tour of the city with an outlook that's part native, part critic, part wide-eyed traveler. The result is a truly original collage of perspectives and images, from a regal expatriate whose husband was one of the first Brits to settle in Abu Dhabi to young Emirati artists celebrating their newfound freedom of expression. A compelling piece of history told with an intimate narrative voice, *A Diamond in the Desert* is an eye-opening and often haunting perspective on just how much this fascinating city has changed and, for better or for worse, how much it has stayed the same.

From Publishers Weekly A glittering emblem of global modernity carries a tinge of tribal clannishness and xenophobia in this revealing travelogue through the capital of the United Arab Emirates. Tatchell (*The Poet of Baghdad*), an English journalist who spent her youth in Abu Dhabi, compares the present city, with its skyscrapers, lavish malls, and Guggenheim branch, to the bedouin past it has all but obliterated. She finds that Abu Dhabi's 420,000 official citizens, with an average net worth of million in oil wealth, have traded their camels and tents for SUVs, condos, and glitzy, indolent jet-setting; surrounding them is a sea of exploited foreign guest workers, 80% of the population, who build and run the city while living in a stateless limbo. (There are secrets lurking behind the shopping and partying, she finds during a Kafkaesque quest to locate the national newspaper archive.) The author's teeming, sharply etched portrait introduces readers to tycoons, a wastrel playboy with a pet panther, a bored housewife trying to score bootleg liquor, avant-garde artists, nostalgic British expats, and a Lithuanian prostitute. Tatchell's keen powers of observation and personal connections enable her to convey the hidden reality of this mirage-like city. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist In a delightfully nostalgic narrative that carries a hint of mystery, former expat Tatchell returns to the city of her childhood to see how it has changed. Veering far from the travelogue and steeped in an appreciation for Abu Dhabi's past, Tatchell turns a keen eye on a place where money comes easily but cultural shifts are a different story. Grounding observations on everything from religion to politics is her initial, diversionary interest in a decades-old missing-child case. As Tatchell struggles to find any written evidence of the crime, she reframes her consideration of the city. In Abu Dhabi, she writes, people are not so much amnesiacs as revisionists. When nothing is written down, the past becomes mutable . . . it can easily be reworked to fit the present. It is an entirely Abu Dhabi outlook on history. As her family contributes revelations of their own, and old friends return to the scene, Tatchell returns to British explorer Wilfred Thesiger's recollections of the region while pondering its future. Thoroughly disarming for any armchair traveler. --Colleen Mondor Tatchell excavates the region's gritty history from the perspective of a foreigner who goes back to study its glimmering present and ambitious future [displays] an impressive breadth of research into the region's centuries-old tribal lineage, rocky political evolution and steep recent economic trajectory as a destination for opulent tourism and high culture a commendable survey of Abu Dhabi's origins, intricacies, achievements and vision. Kirkus [A] revealing travelogue A teeming, sharply etched portrait Tatchell's keen powers of observation and personal connections enable her to convey the hidden reality of this mirage-like city. Publishers Weekly Tatchell weaves a bit of danger in this part-memoir, part-travelogue, part-cultural study. . . an alluring read. If you're curious about Middle Eastern culture or if you want an inside peek at an oil-rich economy, you'll want this book. Terri Schlichenmeyer, *Bluffton Today* (S.C.) *A Diamond in the Desert* is a welcome addition to the short list of books on Abu Dhabi [tells] the fascinating story of how Abu Dhabi reached the current crossroad. Engagingly written and sympathetic to [its] subjects. Eugene Rogan, *The Guardian* This

is a place we need to know more about, and Tatchell here provides a small, well-informed and flavorsome guide to an El Dorado of the duneshers is the best thing Ive read on the Gulf Coast boom to date. Part history, part reporting, part autobiography, it leaves you feeling you have come to grips with the realities of a land steeped in fable. The contradictions of its Islamic culture emerge starklyvivid yet balanced.George Walden, Bloomberg NewsOffers acute insights on the identity crisis gripping the EmiratisTatchell pieces together Abu Dhabis rotten underbelly from a kaleidoscope of disquieting impressions.Rachel Aspden, The TelegraphTatchell explores the different faces of this shimmering prism of a city through the man different eyes of its inhabitants. She is unsentimental and writes very well, with a keen journalistic eye for detail and drama. She brings alive the weird collision of the disparate worlds of sheikhs, expats and Indian immigrants with stories of decadence and depravity. This is an unusually engaging book that makes a compelling read.Clover Stroud, The Sunday TelegraphPart history, part autobiography and part travel book, A Diamond in the Desert assesses modern Abu Dhabi through the eyes of both locals and foreigners. Tatchell retains an overflowing fondness for the country of her childhood and tries as best she can to recount even some of the less palatable elements of society in a non-judgmental way.Nathalie Thomas, The Scotsman