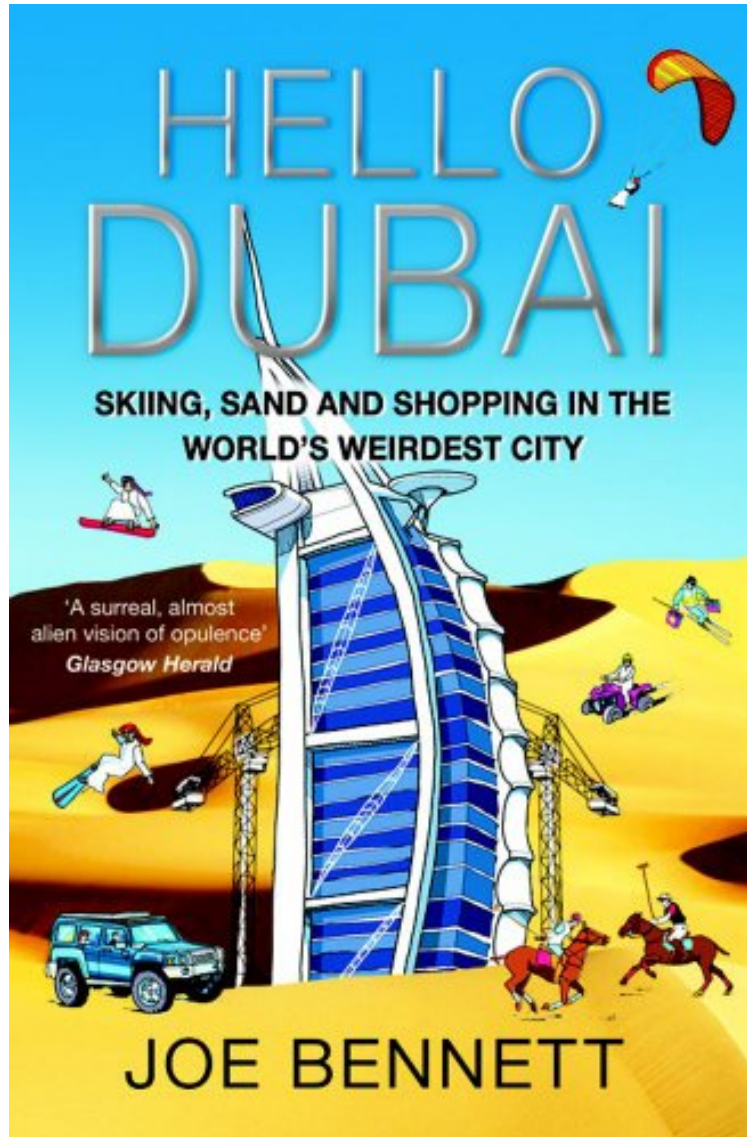


Hello Dubai

Joe Bennett

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Joe Bennett : Hello Dubai before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hello Dubai:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. I'd rather spend a wet Sunday afternoon in LutonBy Mr. Joe"... sadder than a wet Sunday afternoon in Luton." - Joe Bennett, describing an "erotic" dance bar in Al Ain in the Abu Dhabi emirateJoe Bennett, an ex-pat Englishman now living in New Zealand, has previously written several travel essays on such places as China (Where Underpants Come From: From Cotton Fields to Checkout Counters -- Travels

Through the New China and Into the New Global Economy), England (Mustn't Grumble: In Search of England and the English), and New Zealand (A Land of Two Halves). In all of his books, he goes and experiences things - perhaps not the same experiences you or I would choose and not even necessarily representative of the country being explored - and then tells us the readers all about them in a most congenial and humorous manner. In HELLO DUBAI, the place of the moment is the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the city of Dubai (in the emirate of Dubai) in particular. By and large, Bennett doesn't disappoint. For roughly the first half of the narrative, the author concentrates on Dubai. Then he rents a Nissan and does a haphazard driving tour of the other emirates: Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Fujairah, Ras-al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Quwain. At least it seems haphazard; the volume's greatest failing is that no map of the UAE, however rudimentary, is provided and I soon lost my bearings. But no matter, really, as there's always the Internet. At some point in his wandering, Joe always manages to record his feelings for a single experience that seems to more than justify the effort he put into the whole. In HELLO DUBAI, the defining moment comes on the seafront in Ras-al-Khaimah: "(The seafront is) not in a great state of repair. A low wall separates the crumbling pavement from the beach. On the beach fifty kids of all ages are playing football. Behind them, a glassy sea of mauve, like shimmering ink. And on the horizon a sinking sun, a vermilion glory, dropping through clouds. The undersides of the clouds pulse scarlet, orange and pink, like embers. The kids play in virtual silhouette ... I sit on the wall and delight in it. I'm not sure why it pleases me so to sit on this wall in a spectacular sunset as the players pound pointlessly up and down the beach like puppies. But it does." As I've said on more than one occasion when reviewing travel essays by a clutch of authors, a narrative is successful if it makes me either want to catch the first plane out or, conversely, avoid the place like leprosy. No feeling of ambivalence at the conclusion will do. Because of HELLO DUBAI, I wouldn't care to drop into the place on a dare, a bet, or any other pretense; the place strikes me as being crass and charmless to the extreme. And as for the other emirates, I'm more likely to want to visit West Texas - or perhaps Luton on a wet Sunday afternoon. But, that doesn't prevent me from applauding the author for engagingly sharing yet another exploration of a foreign place.

Boom town, modern marvel, commercial hub, where Middle-East meets wealthy West, playground for tourists, crawling with ex-pats, built by Indians, owned by Arabs, Dubai has risen from next to nothing to an awful lot in little more than 30 years. How? And can it go on? Joe Bennett goes to find out.