

Dubai before the boom: Staggering pictures show how emirate went from desert backwater to the Manhattan of the Middle East in just 50 years

By **KERRY MCQUEENEY**

It's widely known as the Middle East's capital of excess; an emirate state where money and opulence reign supreme. Dubai's unfathomably high skyscrapers, reaching into the clouds, are matched only in size by its vast, sprawling shopping malls and its residents' bulging bank balances. It's renowned as a playground for the rich, a place where entire communities of expats enjoy the trappings a tax-free haven can offer.

However, as these pictures taken during the 1960s show, the emirate city has undergone a remarkable transformation in a very short space of time.



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Dubai's waterways: Dhows pictured on the city's creek (above) was once the centre of Dubai's pearl trade and it divides it into two sections; pictured below is a crew taking part in a traditional dhow race



In these images, taken from the [Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding](#), Dubai is almost unrecognisable in its former life as a fishing settlement, not long after the Gulf states struck gold with the discovery of oil

While it is known today more for its fast cars and life of luxury, it was not that long ago that the city was as familiar with camels and dhows as it is now with Rolls Royces, Ferraris, Mercedes Beznas and indoor ski slopes.

Dubai was a small fishing settlement when it was taken over in 1830 by a segment of the Bani Yas tribe from the Liwa Oasis. By 1892 foreign traders had begun to flock to Dubai after the emirate declared they would be exempt from tax. As a result the population doubled and the burgeoning pearl industry started to boom.

This lasted until the 1930s, when the recession and subsequent depression hit Dubai's pearl industry causing it to fall into decline, leading to feuds between the royals and social problems.



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Desert development: The Clocktower roundabout in the neighbourhood of Deira stands surrounded by sandy, undeveloped lots.

Today (below) the clocktower is ringed by towering hotels but, for a time after it was built in 1964, the area was considered remote from the city centre

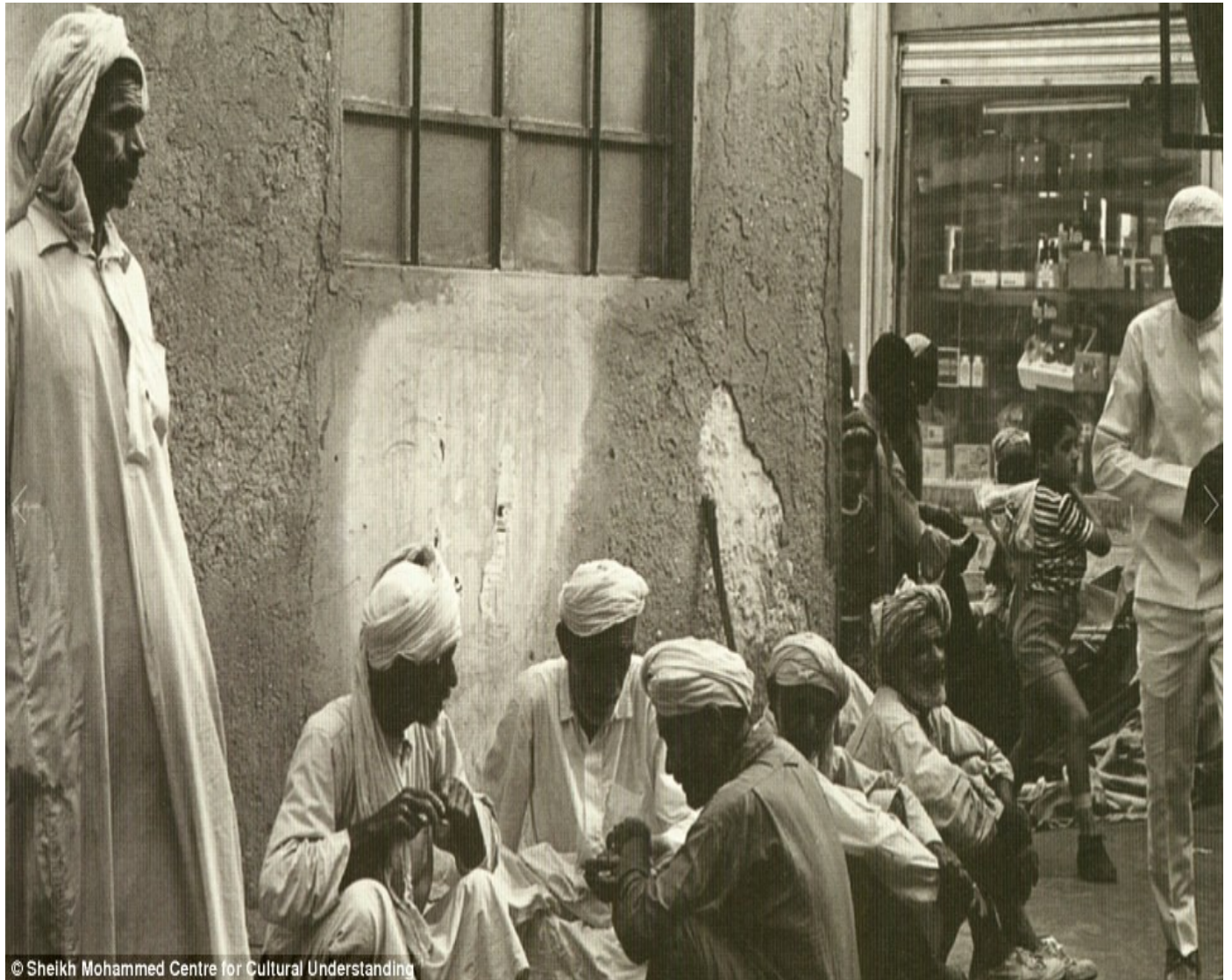


In 1959 Dubai embarked on a bid to become a major trading hub and millions of dollars were lent to the then-leader Sheik Rahid by the Emir of Kuwait to renovate the city's creek, to enable it to accommodate large ships.

Everything changed for Dubai with the discovery of oil in the Gulf in the late 1960s, bringing a soaring economy and an army of traders who flocked to the emirate to settle there. As it began to export crude oil, the petro-dollars flooded in to Dubai and by 1973 the Dirham became the official unit of currency. However, by 1980 the annual oil income dropped to an all-time low, forcing the emirate to think of other ways to make money. By the mid-1980s it began its reinvention as a tourist destination and the Emirates airline was established.

The emirate's continued status as a tax-free haven brought even more ex-pats to settle in Dubai and in 1999 one of the tallest hotels in the world opened, cementing the city's reputation as a tourist destination.

The following photographs, which were taken in the late 1960s and early 1970s, show a very different Dubai. It was a society on the cusp of an ambitious development and financial transformation.



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Cultural landmark: Men gather in al-Naif souq, one of the oldest traditional markets in Dubai. It was partially damaged by a fire in 2008, but the wealthy emirate paid to rebuild the souq in 2010. A modernised market is pictured below





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An open market in downtown Dubai... a far cry from the glitzy malls that now make the city a hub for global luxury shoppers (pictured below)





Major trading hub: In 1959 millions of dollars were ploughed into renovating Dubai's creek to enable it to accommodate large ships

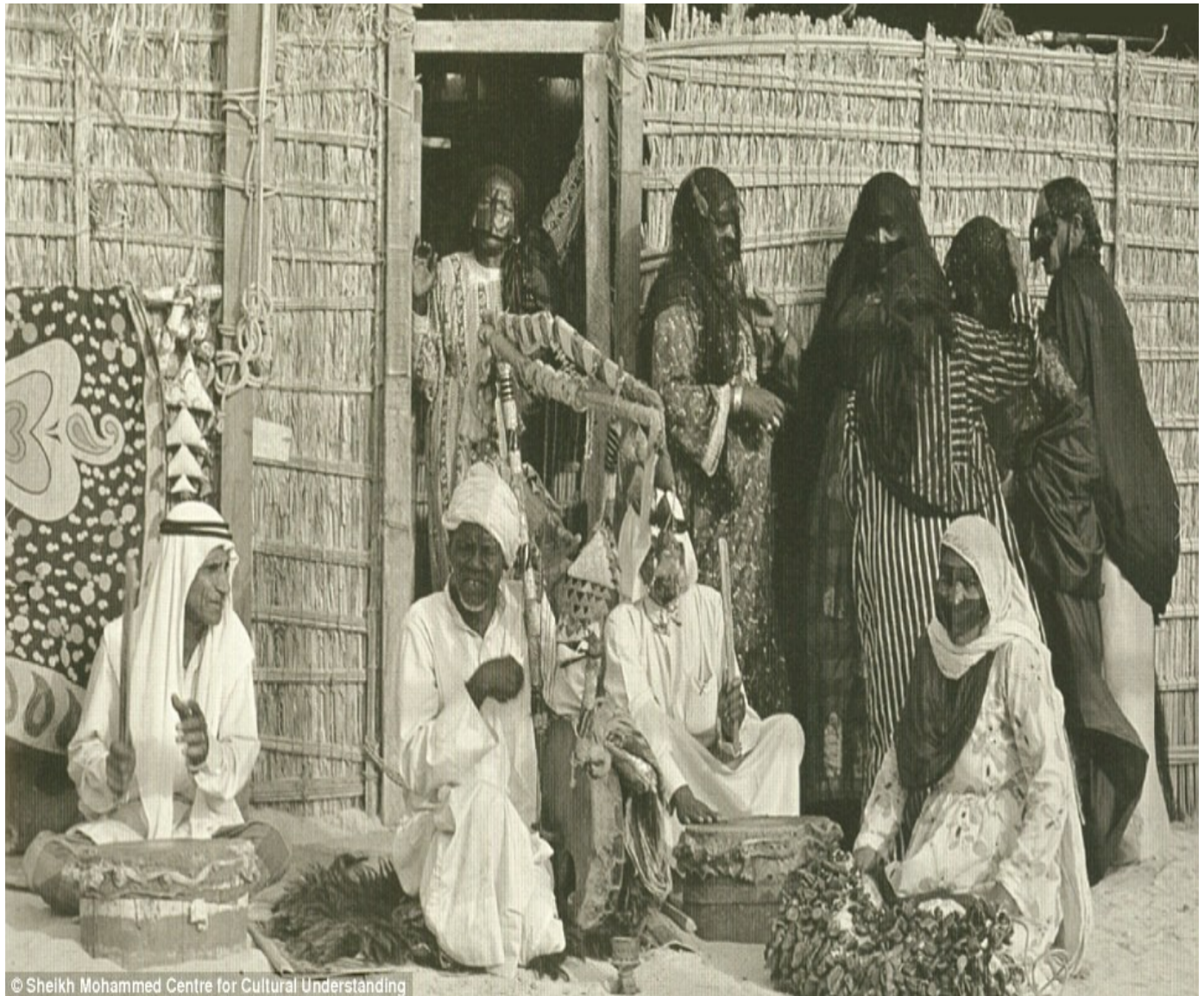


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Changing landscapes: Bur Dubai - the historical heart of the city, translated as 'mainland Dubai' - is shown the early stages of its development boom. Today what's left of the old city contains several renovated traditional homes, boutique hotels and cafes



Livestock are transported by dhow from Deira to Bur Dubai: The regional oil boom changed everything in Dubai. As the Gulf states found themselves flush with trillions in petrodollars, the tiny emirate positioned itself as a financial hub for construction and tourism



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Steeped in tradition: A group of Bedouin play music outside a house. Dubai was once a land of Bedouin tribes who made a living by fishing and pearl searching. Bedouin fishermen and pearl divers in the city mainly lived in huts made from palm-fronds



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Dubai people: Shoppers flood the walkways of an open market in Deira (top). It is transformed decades later (lower)



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A man selling dried herbs and lemon pauses to smoke a shisha pipe: By 1892 foreign traders had begun to flock to Dubai after the emirate declared they would be exempt from tax, a move which doubled its population



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Mode of transportation: It was not that long ago that Dubai was as familiar with camels and dhows as it is now with Rolls Royces, Ferraris, Mercedes Benzs, and indoor ski slopes







A Bedouin man poses with his falcon (top). For centuries, the birds have been used as a hunting tool among the Bedouin communities in the Gulf. Pictured (lower) are women at a wedding, wearing traditional veils



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Men reciting prayers for the Muslim festival of Eid in Dubai: Though the emirate now boasts residents of many different religions, its origins are in Islam



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Male guests at a traditional Emirati wedding: These pictures were taken as Dubai's society was on the cusp of an ambitious development and financial transformation



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A camel caravan ambles through Dubai: It was not until the mid-1980s that Dubai reinvented itself as a tourist destination