

Gym 'll fix it

The vicious circle of adapting to Dubai



These are frightening words indeed. These are words that were never, ever uttered within my circle of friends in London. In fact, no I think Sarah said them once. We all looked at her, a bit confused, and kind of laughed as she walked away in a determined fashion, only to walk back into the pub again, an hour later, begging for a pint and looking kind of sweaty. We never heard her speak of it again.

In Dubai however, these dreaded words are uttered all around me, all the time. People are running on treadmills, dashing out to yoga, signing up for spin-class at all hours of the day. I get to work in the morning ...

"Hi, what did you do last night?"

"Me? Oh, I went to the gym."

"Hey, what are you doing for lunch?"

"Me? Oh, I'm going to the gym."

Those words are like a cruel taunt; a hypnotic song that echoes round my skull and haunts me, "Gym, gym, gym ... we're going to the gym ..." And I'm not. I feel a bit lonely, sometimes. When did everyone get so body conscious? Or were they always like that, and I just never noticed it within my circle of like-minded, chip-scoffing, pub-dwelling mates back in Blighty? Perhaps it's the sun. Those desert rays highlight every wrinkle, every ounce of unsightly flab that can't be hidden with layers of snow-protective gear; like in England. Of course, we eat a lot here, too. We gorge ourselves on five star brunches and then feel guilty, not to mention

lager. The Dubai Stone (6.35 kilos) is not just a myth you read about on Dubizzle before you arrive. It's a fact of life that begins being funny, and almost always ends with a Fitness First subscription.

It's a different world, here, after a while. We feel ourselves adapting to the environment and suddenly, our lives are nothing like they were at home. Back home, I ate chips and curry sauce on the back of a night bus at three in the morning, at least twice a week. Back home, I never went for massages and none of my friends had a housecleaner. But after a while, we begin to forget what was once normal. And a different, beauty-regime involving, gym-beckoning version of normality starts to take over.

My hair is thinner here. Sometimes clumps fall out! I'm told it's the water. A lady in the salon, the last time I went for a haircut, told me I should be washing my hair in spring water; in order to avoid the sanitized tap stuff drying out my ends.

I actually considered it for a while. The part of me that's changed actually played with the idea, pondered the notion, priced a few bottles of Evian's finest in my mind. And then I told her thanks for the tip, but never would a bottle be unscrewed before my tresses.

I'd like to think I haven't changed that much. And anyway, I'm not sure my friends back home wouldn't think that was even more ridiculous than attempting to go to the gym. 

MUST-DO'S IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS...

1 CHI@THE LODGE...

Make sure you get your kicks before the humidity hits, with Chi at the Lodge. Fridays are undoubtedly the most popular time to head over – the post brunch masses flock to dance as provocatively as they possibly can after 19 glasses of champagne, to a medley of Wham and Tina Turner. You might even catch Tim Chedder on his rollerblades – is it true that he's a teacher by day?

2 TRADITIONAL ARABIC DHOW CRUISE...

Most of us have taken our visiting parents on this cultural adventure down the Creek, and sat back in amusement as they 'oohed' and 'aaahed' over another wooden boat passing by in a cloud of suffocating fumes. Still, the old Arabic Dhow Cruise is a classic. Get your dose of culture via a romantic cruise with your beloved, and imagine you're on an exotic, Arabic adventure from days gone by.

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Timings: 5pm-6pm daily
Pricing: AED200 per adult (with pick up and drop off, from key landmarks within Dubai and Sharjah)

3 MOVIES UNDER THE STARS...

With two movies every Sunday night, one at 8pm and one at 10pm, this is the city's best option for a cheap night out in the open air – it's totally free. Order up a glass of wine or slice of pizza to enjoy while you watch. Be prepared for bouncing children unintentionally spoiling your experience, of course. They'll get bored eventually and sit down.

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Timings: Sundays at 8pm & 10pm
Venue: Wafi Rooftop Gardens