

UNESCO sites to be saved and savored

By Kari Bodnarchuk
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

A pristine section of land stretching from northern Montana into British Columbia, Canada, contains stunning mountain ranges, prairies, tundra, and lakes. It has endangered trout, the highest concentration of grizzly bears in the United States, and water quality that ranks among the best in the world. Gold exploration, coal-bed methane drilling, or construction of a coal mine might have irreversibly damaged this fragile environment.

This land, known as the Waterton Glacier International Peace Park, is on the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage List, a designation currently held by 890 natural and cultural sites worldwide because of their "outstanding universal value." In February, British Columbia and Montana signed an agreement stating that no mining will be allowed in the region.

"All of the values that make this park of international significance would have been threatened," says Stephen Morris, chief of the Office of International Affairs at the US National Park Service. "The World Heritage designation of Waterton Glacier definitely played a role

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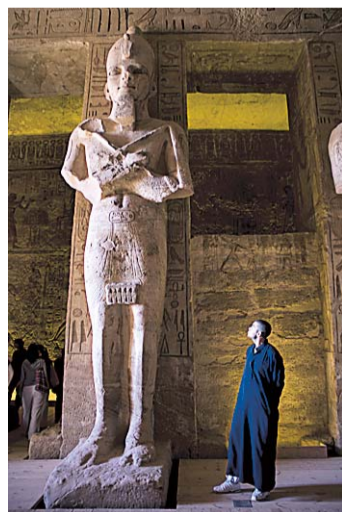
The Serengeti plains in Tanzania.



Darien National Park in Panama.



Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, Canada-US border; Abu Simbel temple, Egypt.



KARI BODNARCHUK/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE (PHOTOS 1, 2, 4); JANET MENDELSON/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



SCOTT E. BARBOUR/GETTY IMAGES

"Abra," or water taxis, will ferry people across Dubai Creek, which separates the historic settlements of Bur Dubai and Deira, with its spice and gold souks.

Where modern meets ancient

For millennia a crossroads and trade center, the Arabian Peninsula barter its deep black gold for soaring ambitions

BY CLAUDIA CAPOS | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

DUBAI — As the desert sun burns through the morning haze, Peter and Alysha St. Germain admire the lofty 360-degree view of Dubai from the 124th-floor observation deck of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest skyscraper. "This is really impressive," says Peter, formerly of Westhampton, now working in nearby Abu Dhabi. "Dubai has done so many amazing projects to attract world attention." Adds Alysha, "The view is awesome."

Piercing the heavens like a silver rocket, the half-mile-high tower, visible from 60 miles away, was formally dedicated in January, following six challenging years of construction. At 2,717 feet (and 162 stories), it easily topped its closest rival, the nondescript Tapei 101 Tower (1,670 feet). The Armani Hotel, which opened last month, is the first of many well-heeled tenants that will occupy space in this "vertical city." Little wonder the Burj Khalifa has quickly become the new emblem of this dynamic city on the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

Far below the tower, Susan Ceukar stands on the outer edge of the Palm-Jumeirah, a manmade, palm-shaped island extending into the Persian Gulf. The 12-square-mile isle of artificial turf, built with sand and quarried rock, is the first and the smallest of three palm islands under development in what has been billed as the largest-ever land-reclamation project. Nearby, another ambitious island grouping is being constructed in the shape of the world.

Ceukar, from Melrose, marvels at Palm-Jumeirah's luxury condominiums and hotels. "The

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CLAUDIA CAPOS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The desert is a recreational resource south of the city of Dubai.

Fast glimpses of the past

MARGHAM DESERT — "Are you all buckled up?" says our driver, Marwan, an ex-military tough guy turned desert guide. A second later, he stomps on the gas of our souped-up Chevy Tahoe and charges up the side of a towering red sand dune.

In the front seat, Marion Eickmann, from Berlin, shrieks and grabs for the dashboard to brace herself. With sand flying in all directions, Marwan jerks the steering wheel to keep the four-wheel-drive SUV on course. At the top of the dune, he accelerates sharply to tip the car over the crest. Then he guns the engine and sends us hurtling forward in a nosedive down the other side. The car bucks and slides. More screams, this time from Eick-

mann's husband, Andrea Tomasini, who is riding in back.

At the bottom of the dune, the car slows briefly and we sigh in relief. But Marwan puts the pedal to the metal and we assault an even higher dune. The roller-coaster ride continues for what seems an eternity. "It's a little like driving in snow," Eickmann gasps, as we narrowly miss another careening Tahoe in our caravan.

This is our first adventure in the golden dunes of the Margham Desert. Marwan assures us that dune-bashing is a relatively safe weekend pastime among the Emiratis. "When we are with friends and family, we do what we call a 'dangle berry,'" he says. "That is when you

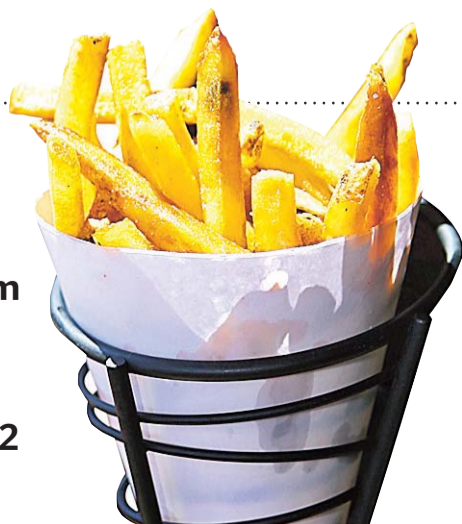
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INSIDE



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