



ao 7rius

MAY 2014 DH15

REAL SOLUTIONS
FOR REAL WOMEN

STYLE YOUR SPACE

INSTANT (& EASY)
HOME MAKEOVERS

159

FASHION
AND BEAUTY
BUYS FROM
JUST **DH10!**

WHO HAS
THE BEST
EXPAT
DEAL?
(Is it you?)

THE MIRACLE
CURE THAT
IS IN YOUR
KITCHEN

“Why I believe
in destiny”

NAOMI WATTS
ON LIFE WITH HER BOYS

MONEY MATTERS
**CAN YOU
AFFORD
TO HAVE
A BABY?**

7 SIMPLE
STEPS TO
GREAT HAIR

THE *Budget* ISSUE

HOW TO SPEND LESS, LIVE RICH
AND BE IN CONTROL



KEEPING UP WITH THE JUMEIRAH JANES

So, you've got a fast car and a snazzy home. Your kids go to an 'outstanding' school and your nails are simply dazzling. Everything's looking and feeling, well, pretty great. Everything except our bank balance, that is...

If you are wondering whether this article applies to you, ask yourself one question: How often do your friends in your home country get their nails done? We are not disparaging about it – we also have loyalty cards at N.Bar (and all the other nail salons), get our hair blow-dried for the weekend (they just do it better), and eat out three times a week (it's actually cheaper than eating in).

This is the life we lead in the place we live. We're not going to feel guilty, or apologetic for the high-end lifestyle we are privy to. Dubai is here for anyone's taking – we *choose* to live here and enjoy our cheap shawarmas and free ladies' nights, while other people *choose* to live in cities where life isn't as glamorous, or 'easy'. That's their choice, this is ours. Deal with it.

But with a recent survey* finding that 97 per cent of UAE-based Western expats spend their money on 'luxurious lifestyle options' (as opposed to 49 per cent in Singapore and 53 per cent in Hong Kong), there's a nagging question casting a shadow over our sunny patch on the beach. Are we living a life beyond our financial means?

THE DUBAI DREAM

After years of coming to the UAE on holiday to visit family friends, Nicola, 31, from London, made the leap and moved here with her husband in April. She says, "We both had jobs back home, but we think we will be able to earn more here. We're not planning to stay forever – we'll probably be here for two or three years. Just long enough to save enough money to buy a house back home."

For those of us already living in Dubai, this story sounds familiar – we've heard it a thousand times before and probably even said the same thing ourselves when we arrived. But how many of us actually leave Dubai after two years with enough money to buy that house in our home country? How many of us leave Dubai with anything at all?

Jessica Cook is a glamorous-looking, smart-talking money expert, based in Dubai. As a private client adviser at AES International (financial-advice-dubai.com), she has a good understanding of the spending culture of the UAE and says that our lavish lifestyles are eating into our financial futures. "People can get into a habit of justifying

IN NUMBERS

35%

of *Aquarius* readers say they thought they would be able to save more than they are.

20%

of *Aquarius* readers say they are more in debt now than when they arrived in the UAE.

80%

of *Aquarius* readers say they have more mani/pedis here than they did in their home country

60%

of *Aquarius* readers say they feel judged on their car – almost as many feel judged on where they live

80%

of *Aquarius* readers say they find themselves comparing their lifestyle with others



#DUBAI TRAGEDIES
EVERY TIME
I TYPE 'HABIBI'
MY PHONE AUTO-
CORRECTS IT
TO 'HABITS'

#DUBAI TRAGEDIES
ALL THE BEAN
BAGS IN BARASTI
ARE TAKEN

#DUBAI TRAGEDIES
THE IPAD IS
TOO BIG, THE
IPAD MINI IS
TOO SMALL

#DUBAI TRAGEDIES
THE SAND
GOT INTO MY
SHOES AND
RUINED MY
NEW PEDICURE

expenses to themselves. I do it myself – I get my nails done every week here, which I would never do back home. It’s the clothes you wear, the beauty treatments you tell yourself you need... The problem is, these things are just so accessible. A lot of expats come out with a master plan to save lots of money and many go back with nothing, or are even worse off.”

THE DUBAI DREAM

Fact is that while most of us arrive with a ‘master plan’, that goal of living within our means and saving money soon gets lost in a haze of expensive brunches and luxe living. The affluent lifestyle that is on offer becomes too much of a temptation to turn down and, before you know it, your expectations of life have shifted. Suddenly it is absolutely imperative to buy a new dress for the World Cup/try out the hottest new eatery at DIFC/ have a four-wheel drive. Why? Well, why not?

Noman Ali, 36, is a Dubai-based blogger whose site (www.thatguynoman-blog.com) shot to local fame in September of last year when he created a series of memes poking fun at the privileged nature of Dubai living, inspired by the ‘First World Problems’ memes. The ‘Dubai Tragedies’ series went viral with over 88,000 hits and, months later, people are still tweeting amusing examples of spoilt behaviour and hashtagging #DubaiTragedies on Twitter. Ali says, “There’s a huge conformist thing that goes on here, with people trying to fit in and keep up with each other... We’ve got a lot of luxuries and people can afford a lot. Would I be able to afford a big apartment and a live-in nanny in the West? Probably not. People come here and suddenly they can afford things they couldn’t before and it goes to their heads.

“I know a couple that moved here and bought a Jaguar, just because they could. They said, ‘It’s fine... we wouldn’t be saving any money if we were still living in India anyway, so we are no worse off.’”

However, Ali says he isn’t pointing accusatory fingers at anyone; the Dubai Tragedies memes were based on real-life quotes from his friends and family. “Dubai is a brand at the end of the day. Every one of us helps to build that brand. We are all party to it.”

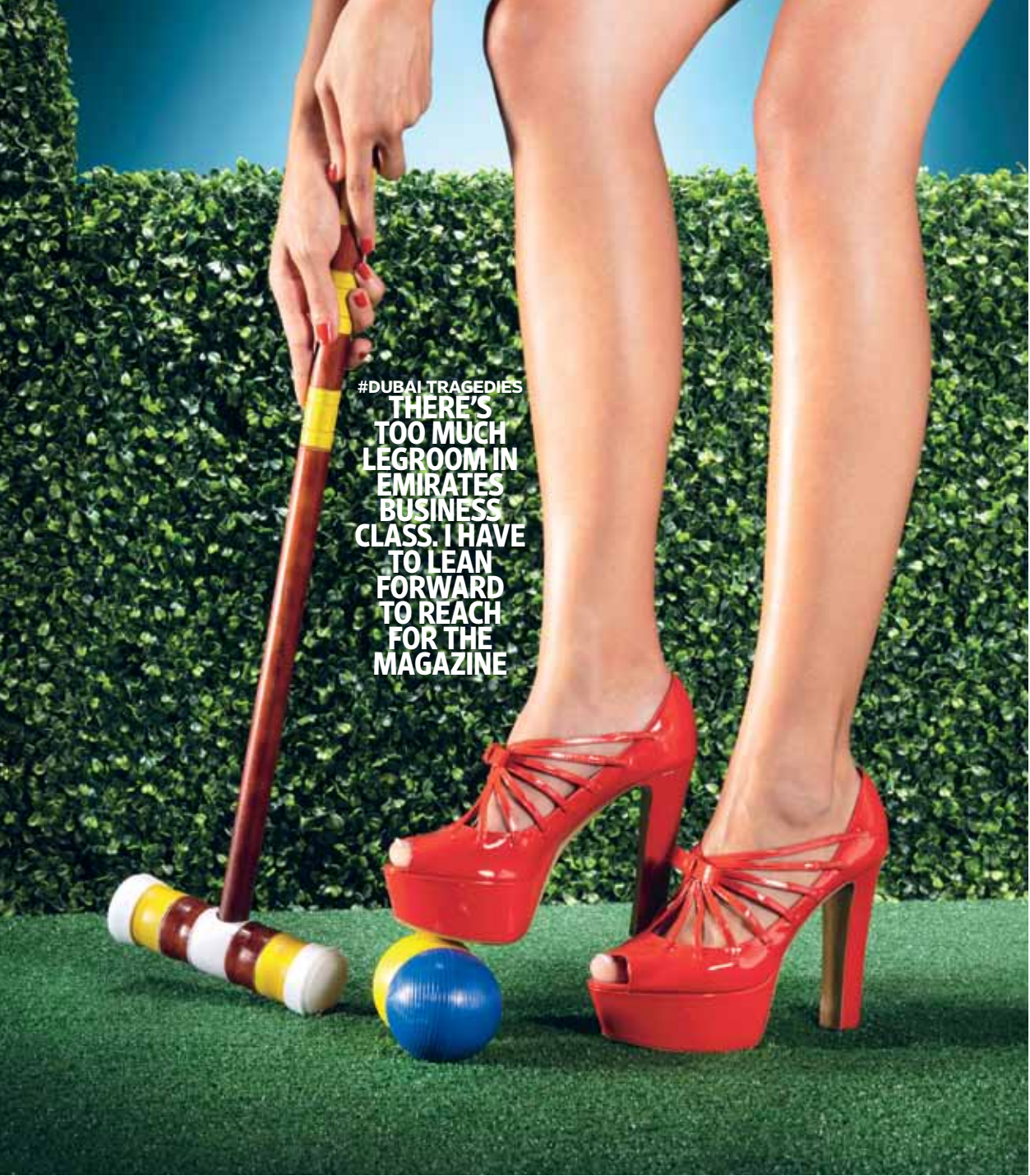
KEEP IT REAL

Put simply, we Dubai-ites have got it really really good. We have expendable income. Our ‘public toilets’ are grandiose, marble-clad, jasmine-scented oases of calm. Our kids go to private schools. We have help in the home. And, when we aren’t working or parenting, we have so many concerts, festivals, malls and social events to choose from that we literally have to schedule downtime into our busy calendars.

The terms FOMO (fear of missing out) and YOLO (you only live once) could have been spawned by the ‘Dubai Dream’ – why shouldn’t we capitalise on our lot in life and get the most out of each weekend/month/lunch break? The only fly in the fun-loving, live-for-the-moment ointment is the future.

Finance expert Jessica says, “There’s nothing wrong with wanting to have fun, or look your best. But there is something wrong with getting to 50 and having nothing to fall back on. People can fall into the trap of living every day like they are on holiday, which prevents them from saving. You should prioritise your essentials, such as rent, then your savings, then your non-essentials. I’d say 95 per cent of people do it the wrong way around.”

At the risk of sounding boring, perhaps we need to replace our FOMO and YOLO attitudes with something a bit more... realistic. A bit more grown-up and, dare we say it, sensible. Fear of missing out on a good evening is a difficult thing to overcome. But what about fear of being penniless in old age because our retirement fund was eaten up at champagne



WORDS BY LOUISA WILKINS PHOTOS BY GETTY DUBAI TRAGEDIES TEXT BY NOMAN ALI
SOURCE: STANDARD LIFE SURVEY

GET REAL

Jared Alden, psychotherapist at German Neuroscience Centre (www.gncdubai.com)

“I would not say that Dubai and its people are much different from the rest of the world. But we live in a first-class city and that exposes us to some very nice things. Some of my clients say they feel so much pressure to have the nice things that they get into debt.

“We are influenced by what we see, and by what others do, around us. And, in the UAE, we are surrounded by beauty... lovely homes, cars that always seem to be clean, people dressing nicely. Our town centres and high streets are the biggest, we have the busiest malls in the world. Going to the

supermarket, or going out for dinner, often takes us through malls where we are exposed to the latest and greatest consumer items, or through luxurious five-star hotels. Is it any wonder that we often feel a need to live the high life?

“We tend to notice what is sparkly and new, but not everyone has the latest and greatest. There are restaurants outside of the malls and hotels. Why not give them a try? Instead of going to the gym, why not play volleyball at the beach with friends? Also, Dubai has some good volunteer opportunities – what a great way to give back. By changing what you see you can step away from the social competition. Competing can be fine on the sports pitch, or at work. But socially, it is a bit of a no-win game.”

HAVE YOUR SAY

We asked Aquarius readers to share their experiences

“Where to give birth is a status thing”

Gehan, 28, Dubai

“We didn’t have medical cover so when I got pregnant we went to the hospital with the best-value package. I was ashamed not to go to the same upmarket hospital as my friends.”

“Snobbery is contagious”

Ellen, 37, Dubai

“Since living in Dubai I have become much more self-conscious about status symbols. It’s easy to get caught up in comparisons about lifestyle when you’re surrounded by people with so much more than you.”

“I’m in debt”

Sangeeta, 26, Dubai

“I moved to Dubai with a plan to make money to start a business back home in India. However, since I’ve been here I’ve not been able to save a penny. Worse than that, I actually have debts now. I sometimes wonder how I got into this mess, but the truth is, I was living beyond my means because I wanted to keep up with everyone else.”

“I constantly compare myself”

Alma, 35, Abu Dhabi

“I’m paid relatively well, but not compared to most of my friends. As a consequence I feel at a disadvantage and sometimes am embarrassed that I don’t live in a big house and drive a smart sports car.”

THREE WAYS TO LIVE WITHIN YOUR MEANS

Cindy van de Kreke-Freens, a personal and professional development coach at Authenticity Coaching and Consultancy (www.authenticity.ae)

1

BE GRATEFUL

“When you feel sucked into an expense you can’t afford, practise gratitude for what you have in your life. It’ll help you be less stuck on what you think you are missing.”

2

HAVE A PLAN

“Make sure you have clear, defined financial goals. What is your purpose for being here? What is your plan? What will you say ‘yes’ to, and what will you have to say ‘no’ to in order to achieve those goals?”

3

TAKE ACTION

“Once you know what your goals are, take steps to make them happen. For example, arrange a monthly transfer from your account to your savings account. Don’t leave it to chance.”