

UAE: GROWING CULTURAL DIVIDE AFFECTS TOURISM



For travelers it is very important to keep in mind that cultures differ in various parts of the world. Recently a British couple was arrested and accused of having sex outside marriage, public indecency and public drunkenness. Many things Westerners consider normal are illegal in some conservative and Islamic countries.

The UAE and especially Dubai witness the growing cultural divide between native Muslims and foreigners. Westerners tend not to respect the strict laws that consider e.g. homosexuality or kissing in public immoral. Native Muslims feel they may become foreigners in their own country, as for example, in Dubai 90 per cent of inhabitants are expatriates.

The number of foreigners has risen considerably in recent years. There are for example huge numbers of Indian laborers. They are probably the largest ethnic group in Dubai but the UAE government prefers not to speak about the issue. The only political power lies in the natives but their language habits, and religion are under severe cultural pressure.

In the UAE foreigners usually live and work on three-year visas. Many Westerners live and work in enclaves where they do not mix with locals. Nevertheless, the Western influence may be seen in the growing use of drugs like ecstasy and there are also numerous bars where non-Muslims drink alcoholic beverages.

Not only business people come to the UAE. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council prediction, the tourism industry will represent more than 20 per cent of the UAE's economy in 2008. The country's image as an ideal tourism destination may however be damaged by the bad reputation. Perhaps tourists will not like to risk getting arrested for kissing in public. The Dubai natives, however, do not want any softening of the rules. They do not want the rules of their own country to be changed in favor of foreigners.

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