

The Telegraph

Harleys and leathers and riffs for brunch in Dubai

Expat Anne O'Connell unexpectedly stumbles across a biker bar in the heart of Dubai



Anne O'Connell was surprised to find a vibrant biker community in her adopted home of Dubai Photo: THE MIDDLE EAST/Balan Madhavan / Alamy

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As you get settled into any new city, whether it's just for a visit or living day to day, you start to realise that no matter how hard you try to assimilate into a new culture, you can't help but look for others who are like you. Remember those weird high-school science movies, where molecules are bouncing around in the cytoplasm and doing this agitated dance until they find other "like" molecules, then they "glom" on to each other and become an even bigger molecule? It's like that.

It's pretty easy to find "like molecules" in Dubai. With 80 per cent of the population made up of expats, there's bound to be a few from your home country.

It's not even just from your home country, though. While doing research for my new book, *@Home in Dubai*, I discovered that there is a networking or social group for any nationality, hobby, cause or business you can

conjure up. So, I'm not sure why I was so surprised when I unexpectedly happened upon a true blue biker bar (I lived in Florida, the home of Daytona Bike Week, for 14 years, so I know what one looks like).

I had headed out for brunch one sunny Friday with my neighbours, Bud and Jane, to the Crown and Lion in Al Barsha. They were advertising brunch for only 120 dirhams, which included a full English breakfast or chicken or roast-beef dinner and five drinks of your choice – beer or wine. It was a deal we couldn't pass up (me, a Maritimer from the east coast of Canada and my Zimbo companions).

An added bonus was that a friend of Bud's, who was also from Zimbabwe, was playing that afternoon and I love live music. The band, called the Screaming Eagulz, played everything from Tracy Chapman to Billy Idol. It promised to be a great afternoon.

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The first clue that we had arrived at a real live biker bar was the string of four or five Harley-Davidson motorcycles lined up along the sidewalk. There were probably a hundred when we left several hours later, but it didn't really click right away. I figured the local Harley dealer must be a sponsor of the brunch or something and had brought a few bikes to display.

We went in and got a good seat, ordered our food and drinks and settled in for the show. As I started to take

in my surroundings, I noticed a few leather-clad, bearded gentlemen a few tables away. Very soon after, the scene unfolding around me became pretty colourful as more “lookalikes” started to arrive, all wearing the telltale crests or “colours” of various bike gangs with names such as the First Four, the Outsiders, Expatriates and Fin Hogs, as well as the Arabian Gulf – Dubai, UAE chapter of the Harley Owners Group (HOG). Along with their respective colours, each rider had their name emblazoned on their leather vests. Names such as “Elvis”, “The Preacher” and “Gandhi”, and they wore skullcaps and had full-sleeve tattoos... in Dubai!

I squirmed a little initially, wondering if these bikers were the brawling kind that you see in the movies or more the weekend-warrior types. I figured in a place like Dubai that doesn't tolerate bad behaviour and public intoxication, along with the fact that it was the middle of the afternoon, I was safe. I relaxed and enjoyed the crazy juxtaposition in which I found myself.

The band started and the whole crowd was singing along, including the bikers. Soon, tables got moved back for a dance area, which quickly got crowded.

I've always believed that the great leveller is music and this strange day proved it. The band played all the oldies from the likes of The Doors and The Eagles, and I chuckled to myself as I watched the lead guitarist, who was sporting “old-fart” glasses on the end of his nose and squinting at the sheet music.

At one point, the lead singer yelled, “The more you drink, the better we sound!” Everyone roared with laughter. The “Preacher” sitting at the table next to ours clinked his glass against mine, gave me a toothless grin and winked. I smiled back and realised we probably had more in common than I thought... except I had all my teeth.

This article was originally published in the [Telegraph Weekly World Edition \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expatsubscriptions\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expatsubscriptions)

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