

Piers Morgan Visits Dubai

Craig Hamnett / 19th January 2009

Piers says: "I came to Dubai to find out if it really is all it's cracked up to be, and the answer, if you like sun and fun, glitz and glamour is a resounding 'yes'. As for the credit crunch, everyone I have met here says the same thing, Dubai won't just survive, it will thrive and that's because it's bursting with ambition and drive all lead by one man's extraordinary vision and utter determination to turn this place into the biggest and most successful city in the world."

In this brand new series for ITV1, Piers Morgan acts as our access-all-areas VIP pass to some of the most glamorous locations in the world.

Getting under the skin of Dubai, Monte Carlo and Hollywood, Piers takes viewers with him on a journey that offers a rare insight into the hotspots, people, and extremes of three of the most desirable places on the planet.

In the first programme, Piers jets out to Dubai to explore the city of jaw-dropping sky-scrapers, luxury hotels and astounding affluence created in the middle of the desert in just 20 years.

Piers takes in some of the extraordinary developments in the city, meets people of wealth and influence and looks at the party life-style of the ex-pats co-existing alongside Muslim culture.

He also examines the affect the worldwide credit crunch might have on Dubai – with 120,000 Brits living the dream there will the economic problems turn it into a nightmare?

The programme follows Piers as he gets a taste of the city's luxury lifestyle – travelling by helicopter, sports car and yacht and sampling a £12,000-per-night suite in the only seven-star hotel in the world.

He visits the world's biggest shopping centre which contains a giant aquarium and a shop selling jewel encrusted mobile phones for £110,000.

He sips champagne on the beach with one of the residents of Palm Jumeirah - the lavish housing development on an island shaped like a palm tree which can be seen from space. David Beckham, Ashley Cole and Michael Owen are rumoured to own properties there and a Palm address is seen as the ultimate status symbol. Houses are now worth six times more than when the development was first built six years ago.

Piers also travels up the world's tallest building, which is still under construction but already has more than 160 floors and is 611m tall. He explains that the building is part of ruler Sheikh Mohammed's plans to put Dubai on the global map - as is the world's biggest theme park which is currently being built and will be bigger than Birmingham. Piers looks at the model for the park, which will include life-size replicas of the Taj Mahal, Big Ben, the Eiffel Tower, the Egyptian pyramids and the Las Vegas strip.

He also speaks to celebrity chef Gary Rhodes and nightclub owner Mark Fuller who have been enticed to Dubai to open a restaurant and nightclub similar to those they own in England to draw people into the city.

Piers meets some Dubai residents, including two men from London who moved to the city four years ago and have just spent \$50m buying a sand island. Their purchase is one of 300 man-made islands which have been created four miles off the coast of the city and have been positioned to represent the countries of the world when viewed from above.

Safi Qurashi and Mustafa Nagri bought the island which represents England and tell Piers they are planning to build 100 luxury villas on it which could sell for up to \$5m each.

Piers tells the programme: "Safi's a perfect example of a Dubai dream. Four years ago he arrived here skint having lost everything in a failed internet firm, now, thanks to a series of shrewd property deals he's the King of England."

Piers also meets Dr Sulaiman Al Fahim, one of the men behind the recent takeover of Manchester City Football Club, as he takes him for a ride in his private jet and explains his personal take on the importance of money and living a lavish lifestyle.

He says: "It's not about the egos, it's about showing capability. We want to show the royal family that we can do it, and what they're looking for is to build something unique, something extraordinary and with this kind of development we attract foreigners."

He takes Piers for a spin in his car – one of only three Versace Lamborghini Murcielagos, which cost him \$600,000 more than a standard model just for the Versace interior trimmings. He also reveals how he splashed out \$2m on a number plate.

Piers looks around a sprawling £17m apartment being managed by an ex-pat who gave up her job as a secretary in England and has since established a lucrative and successful business renting out property in Dubai. She now owns her own polo team with eight Argentinean horses and Piers goes to one of the matches to see them in action.

Piers also has a night out and meets the ex-pats living the party lifestyle in Dubai despite the strict religious beliefs and culture of the Arabs. The British social circuit revolves around the 50 five-star hotels which are among the few places you're allowed to buy alcohol. Local rules mean that it's illegal to drink alcohol in public, kiss in public or share a home with your partner if you're not married.

He discovers that many ex-pats worry about being deported and talks to one journalist whose computer review magazine got shut down some years ago because he criticised a computer which didn't work. The businessman behind the computer had connections which spelled trouble for the journalist - but he tells Piers he believes Dubai has changed and voicing one's opinion is less perilous today.

Piers also talks to Patty Parfitt, the ex-wife of Status Quo member Rick Parfitt, who has started a new life in Dubai but warns other Brits to do their homework before they think about moving. She reveals that she pays £32,000 a year to rent her home - a figure set to almost double and says life there hasn't met her expectations.

Piers examines what the future could hold for Dubai during the credit crunch – the city doesn't manufacture anything of any value and oil forms around only six per cent of its income. Property accounts for a third of its income and some projects have already been shelved or scaled back.

But he speaks to one billionaire businessman from the ninth richest Arab family in the world who says that he believes Dubai will survive the credit crunch.

Mishal Kanoo says: "The credit crunch isn't coming, it's here, it already exists...it's not going to be the death of the area. There's going to be a natural timeout...to allow things to comeback to its normal position and then move forward."