

Lies to tell tourists



Robert Downey Jr is coming to Dubai to promote Iron Manakish, the first ferrous-based Arabic snack.

Spotted



Jazz legend George Benson jetting into Terminal 3 in preparation for his

performance at the Dubai Airshow Gala Dinner at Emirates Golf Club. Look at that grin.

Golfers Sergio Garcia and Henrik Stenson petting dolphins at Atlantis, just before the Dubai World Championship.

City Snap

This car has sat in Discovery Gardens for two months and has developed a fine layer of dust and some natty graffiti in the process. Snapped by William Todd.



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Hotseat Maha Gargash

Emirati writer **Maha Gargash** has just published her first novel, *The Sand Fish*. She tells us about her reflections of bygone Dubai

Can you outline *The Sand Fish* for us?

It's a story of a young lady called Noora who grows up isolated with her family in the mountains between Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah in the '50s. She grows up very independent – not wild, but very much with her own mind. When her mother dies, her father falls into madness and her brother arranges for Noora to marry a rich older merchant as his third wife. Of course, she resists because for her it's inconceivable. Her future husband comes to get her and takes her by boat, and she becomes his third wife. What he wants is a child – this is the motivation for him to go so far to find another wife and try with her. As the story develops, Noora becomes miserable and she falls in love with her husband's young apprentice. She is faced with the choice of whether she should go with the apprentice or stay with her husband.

You did a lot of research for this book, talking to some of the UAE's elderly locals...

I worked in television for 20 years as a documentary director. I made a lot of programmes on Arab communities in this area



No, she's not. She's completely fictional, but I'm sure she's taken a bit from people that I've met and admired. She needed to be a heroine, a protagonist. People need to like her. So she needs to have a lot of fire about her, to make her own decisions and eventually she does. But at the same time she's part of a certain

developing, but not as much as it has in the past 10 years.

Is there a danger that some of the beauty or culture of the '50s will be lost in all the rapid development here?

Yes, I think one can lose one's culture if you move too quickly. But you can regain it. Because the pace has become so fast, people don't have time to reflect. Hopefully, when they read the book, it will offer a chance to reflect on how their grandparents and parents lived, what life was like – what the past means to us. **Has exploring the hardship of life in that time revealed why development here was so fast-paced?**

I think it's necessary to develop. I think a lot of good has come out of this development – the UAE has been recognised as a world destination. I think in terms of facilities and the professionalism, all these are good points. Life is the future, isn't it?

It isn't about dwelling on the past or staying as you are.

The Sand Fish is available at Magrudy's, Dhs64



'Back then, Dubai was very different. The Jumeirah mosque area was far out of town'

and many of those documentaries were working with themes that relate to what I've written about. I worked on one about women's traditional costumes, the traditional music and poetry of the region. So all this helped, of course, because I had very good contacts with people who would be able to give me a sense of what life was like in the '50s. That included my own family, you know, because they also lived in the traditional way like everyone else here.

Is this headstrong character of Noora based on someone you met during that research?

society, so there's a balance there and it was a bit tricky to see how far she could go. Some Westerners may find her too passive, but I think she's very fiery.

You grew up in Dubai – what was the city like back then?

Very, very different. Basically, the old town was where the old Deira souk area is now. If you went as far as, say, where the Jumeirah mosque area is, it was like you were going out for a picnic. That was far out of town. But the big difference began 10 years ago with all the new developments near the JBR area. So for a while the city was

