5 HOT CHOCOLATES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BY LORRAINE ALLEN

THERE'S NOTHING more comforting on a snowy winter afternoon than a steaming mug of hot chocolate. Around the world, no two cups are made the same. Here are five ways this drink is enjoyed in other countries and where to find a cup if you visit.

MEXICO: CHILE

Mexican hot chocolate is strongly influenced by original recipes used by the Olmec, Maya and Aztec civilizations. The mix can include bitter chocolate, water, chile powder, cinnamon and, sometimes, vanilla. For an authentic cup, head to Mexico City's Dichoso Cacao, a hip cafe dedicated to showcasing the country's cocoa and hot chocolate.

COLOMBIA: CHEESE

What makes *chocolate santafereño* — the Colombian version of hot chocolate — stand out is the salty white cheese stirred in just before drinking. Colombians usually have it during breakfast and add spices like cinnamon and cloves for a kick. Try a cup at La Puerta Falsa, one of the oldest restaurants in Bogotá, the country's capital.

ITALY: WHIPPED CREAM

Italian-style hot chocolate, known as *cioccolata calda*, is ultracreamy — like pudding. The thickness comes from using loads of chocolate, whole milk and either cornstarch or whipped cream. For a cup, head to Zaini, a 100-year-old chocolate shop and former chocolate factory in Milan.

SPAIN: PASTRY

Churros con chocolate is a syrupy, slightly grainy chocolate beverage paired with greasy fried-dough sticks (*churros*) for dunking. You can try this classic combination anytime at Chocolatería San Ginés, a 24-hour cafe in Madrid that has been open since 1894.

PHILIPPINES: CHOCOLATE DISKS

Filipinos keep their hot chocolate — *tsokolate* — simple. The frothy liquid is made from water, milk and chocolate discs called *tablea* mixed with a *batiol*, a wooden whisk. Some people add sugar and salt and, depending on the region, crushed peanuts. Find a traditional version of this rich hot chocolate at one of Tablea Nut Batuta's locations in Manila. ◆

HOW TO SPEND

2 DAYS IN DUBAI

THIS MIDDLE EASTERN CITY IS FULL OF ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS

BY KITSON JAZYNKA, QUINN JAZYNKA (AGE 12) AND MAX JAZYNKA (AGE 16)

Quinn (inset, left) and Max saw the Burj Khalifa tower (left), camels and much more on their visit.

DUBAI is a city of extremes, home to boundary-benders like the world's tallest building, artificial islands and indoor ski slopes. The desert city (one of seven emirates, or territories, that make up the federation known as the United Arab Emirates) was also built with extreme speed. Sixty years ago, the city didn't have running water or paved roads. In 2020, it's a glittering, futuristic oasis and an international hub in the Middle East visited by millions of tourists every year, especially for shopping. We explored Dubai for two days in December on our way to celebrate Christmas with friends in Uganda. Here are our favorite activities from our itinerary.

THURSDAY

8:30 A.M. — CITY OF GOLD

When we arrive in Dubai after the 13-hour flight from Washington, the airport feels luxurious, with sleek, shiny high-tech design and golden palm trees. Men wear airy white robes known as *kandura* or *dishdasha*. We hear Arabic, the U.A.E.'s official language, all around us. We get in a taxi and head to our hotel, the Sofitel the Palm. The resort is on Palm Jumeirah, a group of artificial islands that was constructed out of tons of sand and rock and is shaped like a palm tree. From our room, we can see the Persian Gulf and the city skyline filled with skyscrapers, including the Burj Al Arab (a hotel shaped like the sail of a boat). We drop our bags, taste dates stuffed with nuts and candied ginger and then pile back into a taxi.

10:30 A.M. — MARKET ADVENTURES

We walk through a maze of alleys that wind through the historic port along the Dubai Creek. Pushy vendors in the souk (market) ask where we're from and yell, "I've been waiting for you!" They grab

our hands and arms, trying to tempt us with golden camel statues, watches, sunglasses, flip-flops, colorful scarves and candies in bright wrappers. Shiny pots puff aromatic frankincense smoke into the air. A vendor wraps checkered-cloth *ghutras* on our heads. Middle Eastern men wear these traditional headscarves to filter out dust and protect themselves from the sun.

11:15 A.M. — CREEK CROSSING

A small water taxi called an *abra* ferries us across the water. The boat, a wooden barge with a motor, costs 1 Arab Emirate dirham (AED) per person. That's about 27 cents each. We find the Grand Souk Deira, with more endless rows of vendors and stores. We buy rose tea for Grandma and chocolate made with camel's milk. Smells include tempting fried street foods and cologne and spices like saffron, dried lemon and cloves. There are also souks nearby that sell only gold or only perfume.

12:15 P.M. — LOCAL LUNCH

We get a table at Bayt Al Wakeel, a busy restaurant overlooking the creek. We order minty lemonade, lentil soup, chicken kabobs and chicken biryani served in a cast-iron pot. The sounds of the midday call to prayers (adhan), broadcast by loudspeaker from a nearby mosque, fill the air. This formal announcement traditionally calls Muslims to their five daily prayers throughout the day and lasts about five minutes. We swap delicious bites of spiced chicken and watch the colorful abras motor past. The weather is sunny and in the high 70s. In the summer, scorching desert temperatures usually go over 100 degrees.

2:30 P.M. — GO FISH

Back in a cab, we head to the Dubai Mall (the world's largest shopping mall, which has more than 1,300 stores and a gigantic aquarium). Well before we get there we see the gleaming steel-and-glass Burj Khalifa, which is the world's tallest building. It rises 163 stories above ground — that's 61 more than the Empire State Building — and cost about $1.5 billion to build. Inside the mall, we get in line to go to the top of the Khalifa (an entrance to the observation decks is within the mall), but the prices are really high. To go to the top viewing deck, it will cost 618 AED per person, which is almost $170 each. We go to the aquarium instead, where we walk in through a clear tunnel that lets you watch sharks and fish from below. The place is home to more than 300 sharks and rays, and visitors in scuba gear can interact with them. We pet a baby bamboo shark.

FRIDAY

7 A.M. — DESERT JOURNEY

On Friday morning, we meet Syed, the driver who will take us to Al Badayer, a part of the Sharjah Desert about 40 minutes outside Dubai. Before we leave the city, Syed points out the construction site for what could someday be the new tallest building in the world, planned to be about a kilometer high. The outskirts of Dubai unfold around us. We pass air-conditioned bus stops and huge gated compounds. Syed tells us about all the colors of sand in the U.A.E., which range from white and cream to reddish, brown and black depending on the geology of the area. Farther out of the city, we pass open-top trucks carrying camels and see families picnicking in the dunes. Weekends in the U.A.E. occur on Fridays and Saturdays. Fridays are a holy day. Behind us, we can still see the needle-topped Burj Khalifa.

9:30 A.M. — TIME IN THE DUNES

Close to the place where we'll drive out into the "red dunes" to try sandboarding, Syed stops to deflate the S.U.V.'s tires. This will keep the vehicle from sinking in the sand. While we wait, we ride four-wheelers through the dunes. Then Syed shows us where to hold on to the S.U.V.'s roll cage, reminds us to put on our seatbelts and points out the barf bags. We are going "dune bashing." Arabic pop music blasts as the vehicle bounces up, down and around the dunes. At the top of one high dune, we look over the edge as from the top of a roller coaster. We plunge down and then back up again, making sharp twists and turns. It feels as if the car will roll or tip or crash, but it doesn't. At the top of another dune, we get out and admire tracks made by a scorpion. Next, we board down the dunes as if we were snowboarding. It's pretty fun, but not as wild as the dune bashing.

4:30 P.M. — ONE LAST BOUNCE

Back at our hotel, we try to complete the inflatable obstacle course, which is like a trampoline park but on the gulf. We'd love to visit Dubai again, but we agree that we'd stay longer — maybe a whole week. That way, we would have time for camping in the desert, more sandboarding and checking out the world's largest indoor amusement park. ◆