

I HEART UAE

To mark National Day on December 2, we asked the female UAE entrepreneurs who are bossing life to tell us why they're proud to call the country home

This December 2, the UAE will celebrate its 45th birthday as it marks the anniversary of the official union of the Emirates on National Day. There's no denying a lot has changed in the region since the UAE was first formed in 1971 – skyscrapers, megamalls and theme parks have sprung up in what was once barren desert. And as the sprawling metropolis has multiplied, so have the opportunities available to its residents. Here, eight of the UAE's modern inhabitants talk about what makes the country unique and why they love the region they call home.

'EVERYONE BELONGS HERE IN THE UAE'

Amna Abdullah Al Hashemi, 30, is the UAE's first female Emirati Chef Patron. She is the founder of Mitts & Trays café.

"As an Emirati, the UAE has given me free healthcare and a higher education, but it's also given me the opportunity to work in the field that I am most passionate about. I am so thankful for that.

"Living in a multicultural community like the UAE, everyone feels that they belong. People here are welcoming, kind, caring and accepting. What really makes the UAE unique is the government services. I have travelled to many beautiful places but have never experienced the services that we have in the UAE. I also love that it is safe."



'WOMEN CAN BUILD BUSINESSES AND SUPPORT FAMILIES'

Lily Kandalauft, 32, is Jordanian/Canadian. She has lived in the UAE for 25 years and is the founder of nursery and babysitting agency Malaak Mama & Baby Care.

"The UAE has provided me with the tools and the support to build my dream and turn it into reality. I believe that the UAE is the perfect place to start your own business because everyone here has the same drive. The atmosphere is very competitive which makes everyone work harder and better.

"Because of the UAE's strong economy, consumer demands, growing resources and support for entrepreneurs, women like me are able to build successful businesses like Malaak Mama & Baby Care that actually support families in the UAE so they feel at home. It's a great cycle that works really well!

"The UAE is unique in its ability to be modern and progressive, yet able to preserve its beautiful culture and tradition. That's thanks to the exemplary vision of its leaders."



WORDS: AOIFE STUART MADGE. IMAGES: SUPPLIED

‘THIS COUNTRY REALLY ENCOURAGES ENTREPRENEURSHIP’

Rosemin Madhavji, 36, is British/Canadian and has lived in the UAE for 10 years. She runs her own luxury consultancy firm, RR & Co.

“The UAE has given me so many opportunities, professionally. Before moving to the UAE, I never thought I would be self-employed, but this country really encourages entrepreneurship. I was able to launch my own business here. That entrepreneurial spirit is what makes the place unique, along with the best hotels, shopping and service in the world, of course.

“Dubai really is a first-class city. To me, the UAE is the perfect balance of East meets West. It’s multicultural, safe and inspiring, and the people are kind, empowering and extremely supportive.”



THE LANDSCAPER
KAMELIA BIN ZAA



THE PR QUEEN
ROSEMIN MADHAVJI

‘I CAN VOUCH FOR THE UAE’S CAN-DO ATTITUDE’

Kamelia Bin Zaa, 41, is Emirati. She runs award-winning landscape design studio, Kamelia.

“The UAE is my country of birth

and I’ve had the unique opportunity to be part of its growth through the various government entities I have worked in. I have experienced the beginnings of the Dubai Press Club, Dubai Internet City and Dubai Development and Investment Authority. When you are there at the start of new government initiatives it’s really motivating, and I can certainly vouch for our can-do attitude.

“I started my own garden design business with the support of the Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Establishment for Young Business Leaders. It’s the vision and support of our government that gives Emiratis the guidance and opportunity to grow – and that is crucial to our development, not just as individuals, but as a country as a whole.”



THE LIFESTYLE GURU
MARYAM FATTAHI SALAAM

‘THE UAE IS A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT TO RAISE KIDS’

Maryam Fattahi Salaam, 33, is Iranian/American and was born in the UAE. She is the owner of luxury fitness studio, Physique 57.

“The UAE has provided me with the opportunity to pursue my professional and personal dreams. The most treasured dream being the ability to raise my children in an environment that is healthy, peaceful and promising. I love that the UAE has given my family and I an idyllic place to call home.

“Living in the UAE has instilled in me the values of ambition, drive and dedication, but it’s really the people that make the UAE unique. From visionary leaders to dynamic natives and expats, no other country comes close. The people are optimistic, charitable, hospitable, devoted and incredibly loyal. To me, it’s a sun-shiny place where dreams really do come true.”

‘WHEN I SEE THE BURJ KHALIFA, I’M REMINDED THAT ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE!’

Amanda Navai, 35, is Iranian/Swedish and has lived in the UAE for 11 years. She is a luxury handbag designer.

“If you’re willing to put in the work, there are infinite possibilities here. The UAE can fast-track your career and if you work hard and you are ambitious you can climb the career ladder much faster than in Europe.

“When I graduated, it was so hard to find a job in the fashion industry in London – even getting an internship at a good fashion house is extremely difficult. I applied for work in Dubai and got a job that many people in London would only get after a few years of working in the industry. I felt very lucky to be given that opportunity, and it became the springboard for me to launch my own label.

“The UAE is a cultural melting pot. People from all over the world come to start a new life and get opportunities they can’t in their own countries. The country instils the feeling of infinite possibilities in you. Every time I see the Burj Khalifa I always remind myself that anything and everything is possible!”



THE DESIGNER
AMANDA NAVAI



THE EXPAT STALWART
KIM THOMPSON

‘THERE IS A HUGE SUPPORT FOR LOCAL START-UPS’

Kim Thompson, 53, is from New Zealand. She has lived in Dubai for 20 years and is the co-founder of Raw Coffee Company.

“I love living in the UAE. For 20 years my life has been here, so I have lovely friends from all over the world and the people who work with me are now my extended family. My three

daughters grew up here and consider it home. My eldest daughter is now married to an Emirati gentleman and I am expecting my first grandchild here, so I will always have a strong connection with the UAE.

“I really appreciate how multicultural and diverse the society is here: I have many Emirati friends as well as expat friends with their own religions, cultures, stories and beliefs.

“I started Raw Coffee Company in 2007 and it has been a long learning curve. It is a relatively immature coffee scene here but we are sensing a huge amount of interest and it is an exciting time for us as the market is hungry for both good coffee and supporting a local start-up. We are enjoying the emerging café scene here, and feel perfectly positioned to enjoy the growing market potential.”



THE NEW START-UP
EMAN AL OWAIS

‘THERE IS A STRONG FOCUS ON INNOVATION’

Eman Al Owais, 28, is Emirati. She is the founder of Jolie, a new café/flower boutique concept at the Boulevard, City Walk.

“The UAE’s economy, beyond the focus on oil, is shifting focus towards innovation and entrepreneurship. This has benefitted me greatly as a young entrepreneur to start up my own business and achieve the dream that I’ve had since childhood.

“The UAE is characterised by the deep interaction between the leaders and the people, but also through its unique spirit and how everyone, regardless of their background, is united in their love for this country. I am proud to be Emirati.

“What I love the most about the UAE is how more than 200 different nationalities live in our land in cultural harmony. It’s a place where everyone can live their dream. That’s why the people here are the happiest people in the world.”

