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why live in

Al Barsha 2: serenity

In this inviting, traffic-free neighbourhood, it's easy to forget you're in the city, yet you are close to all manner of shopping malls and entertainment venues, discovers **Erin Mc Cafferty**

It's two in the afternoon and there's hardly a soul in sight. As a middle-aged, traditionally dressed Indian man on a bicycle pedals laboriously by, you're struck by the quietness of this suburban-style street.

It's unusual to find a deserted road in the hectic city of Dubai, but here in Al Barsha 2 it's the norm. Characterised by wide open streets, lined by grass verges in front of walled villas – each one grander than the other – its soundtrack is a very distant roar of traffic and the faint, far-off clanging of construction work.

Few Dubai neighbourhoods allow you to forget you live in a city; Al Barsha 2 is one of them. It is quiet, relatively free from traffic and altogether civilised, yet it lies close to all manner of amenities, as well as providing easy access to most areas of the city.

Bordered by Mafrqa Road and Al Khail Road (or 50th Street and a strip of wasteland, to be more precise) and flanked by Al Barsha 1 and Al Barsha 3, it's a large and rather sprawling neighbourhood.

And it's relatively privileged. While there is a smattering of town houses, most of the homes are substantial villas, standing in their own walled grounds, many with cultivated gardens.

The number of cars in their driveways is further evidence that it's a prosperous area.

Inhabited by a mix of Emirati and expat families (the latter renting, since only Nationals can buy here), most villas were built in the last three years; five years ago, a mere handful of homes dotted the sand.

Despite there still being some empty lots and new villa construction, the neighbourhood has a feeling of freshness, rather than the rawness of some of the city's newest areas. That's partly due to the differing styles of the houses and the fact that they have been built over a few years, rather than all at once.

Nevertheless, there's still a scattering of hardware shops, proving that until recently the area was a hive of building activity.

There's only a handful of other shops, including Barsha Sky Grocery on 42a Street, a couple of takeaway food outlets, such as Al Barsha Cafeteria and – somewhat incongruously – a perfume shop, Al Hajis.

If you need more than a handful of basic groceries you'll have to get into your car and drive. Fortunately, Mall of the Emirates and a large branch of Lulu are just a five-minute drive away – except during peak traffic hours, when it can take 10 or 15 minutes.

It's one of the advantages of Al Barsha 2 that Mona Al Sherif, an Emirati, enjoys. "I like the fact that I don't have to go far to go if I want to shop. Yes, there are few shops in the immediate area, but Mall of the Emirates has everything I need."

Mariam al Hussein has lived for four years with her husband and three young children in an expansive villa on 8B Street. She says that her husband bought the land and had the house built to his own design, so it is exactly as they wanted it to be.

"It has five bedrooms, a large garden for the children to play in and a swimming pool in the back. It's the perfect family home," she says with a smile, adding that the location also suits her husband. "He works in Media City and can be there in just 10 minutes."

Her children attend Al Quaymm school, which is on the street where she lives. "I come to collect them each day and I don't even have to get in my car. It's very convenient."

The only down side about living there, she says, is that her neighbours keep to themselves. "I don't know them and there is little sense of community. I think it comes from the fact that each of the villas has its own gardens; we're never



Above, this quiet neighbourhood is cocooned from the noise and bustle of the city. Many of the large villas have luscious gardens and ample driveways with space for several cars. Below, a plant shop serves the many gardens that are still being established; although there are a few local shops, Mall of the Emirates is a five-minute drive away. Stephen Lock / The National

on the street at the same time so people don't meet. Maybe if there was a community meeting hall or something similar it would help. I think the problem is typical of Dubai, however. People are not friendly in this city. It is a pity but it is life."

That sense of neighbourhood is bound to be enhanced, however, following the opening on Monday of the new Al Bashra Pond Park.

As day turns to evening, the neighbourhood changes a little. There are still very few people on the streets, but a glance through the open gate of a villa reveals two little boys playing while an Indian gardener waters the plants. A woman's voice can be heard calling to the children and laughter is coming from somewhere. It's easy to see that there is much life behind the garden walls.

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What the residents say

Adiba Muhammad al Jameel, UAE

"I've lived in Al Barsha 2 for the past four years, in a villa with my husband and our two children. It is a nice quiet, safe area. It has everything we need so I cannot complain. Before this we lived in Mirdif. It's also a good area, but I much

prefer Al Barsha 2 because I don't have to travel far to shops, restaurants or the beauty salon. I simply get in my car and go to Mall of the Emirates or Dubai Mall, which are both very near."

Chandak Bhanjee, India

"I share a villa with eight other Indian men. We all work in the area and like it a lot. It's very quiet and we have everything we need nearby – shops, a mosque et cetera – except if we want to go out at night. There is nowhere to go here and we must travel. But most evenings we are tired. We play a little cards and go to bed ..."

Benjamin Wilson, UK

"I've lived here for just over a year with my wife and two kids; we rent a villa. It's not a bad place to live as it's very family-oriented. There are schools nearby and, of course, shops. It suits me as I work in Jebel Ali and can get there very easily, bypassing the traffic. My wife works in Knowledge Village and she can be there by car in 10 minutes."

Al Barsha 2



Source: Google

* the facts

Property prices

Expect to pay at least Dh110,000 per annum when renting a two-bedroom villa in Al Barsha and Dh130,000 for a three-bedroom, says Catherine Quadros of Better Homes. A five-bedroom villa can cost up to Dh350,000.

Schools

Schools include the Al Mawakeb School, the Al Qayyem school on 8a Street and GEMS World School on Al Khail Road. The American University of Dubai is just a 10-minute drive and there are a number of nurseries in the area, including Seashells.

Medical facilities

The new Saudi-German hospital will open soon on the corner of 316 Road. Al Zahra Private Hospital is nearby.

Leisure Facilities

Mall of the Emirates is practically on its doorstep, with Ski Dubai, CineStar cinemas, the Magic Planet amusement centre and Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre, which offers art and craft classes, as well as a theatre and library. The new Al Barsha Pond Park sits between Al Barsha 2 and 3.

Transport

It's rare to find taxis on the streets; most of the residents drive, or use the F29 Bus that passes through the area.

