

Move Over Dubai, Ajman Is The New Emirate On The Block

White sand beaches, turquoise waters, stylish hotels, elegant restaurants... the images in a recent series of television adverts fulfill all the usual sun, sea and sand holiday dreams. But few people will have heard of the destination - Ajman. Dubai has a new rival within the United Arab Emirates, hoping to attract British visitors away from all the flashy tower-block hotels and razzmatazz attractions to its quieter beaches and more laid-back atmosphere. While Dubai has made headlines with its multimillion-pound projects such as palm tree-shaped islands on reclaimed land, the world's tallest building (the Burj Dubai, still under construction) and indoor ski slopes, tourist officials in Ajman believe holidaymakers will appreciate the less chaotic feel of the smallest of the seven United Arab Emirates. Ajman is 259sq km, has a population of about 80,000, and is a half an hour's drive from Dubai's international airport. Long-haul tour operator Kuoni, and Emirates Tours, recently began trips to Ajman, offering stays at the Kempinski hotel, the emirate's only five-star property. Ursula von Platen, a Kempinski spokeswoman, who has lived in Ajman, said: "It is smaller, quieter, more authentic, and not as bustling as Dubai. It's far better for a beach holiday. In Dubai there's so much work going on and the water is a little bit murky - you don't really want to go to the beach at all." Visitor figures were not available for Ajman, which the Lonely Planet guidebook describes as "laid-back and unassuming" with a "pretty, palm-lined, white-sand beach". The main attraction, aside from the scenery, is a museum in the former ruler's palace. A typical week-long package staying at the Kempinski is from about £730, with flights from the UK included. Ajman joins the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Ras al Khaimah and Fujairah in promoting tourism - each of which have piggy-backed on the tourist success of Dubai - as well as the neighbouring countries of Bahrain, Qatar and Oman. Lonely Planet says Ras Al Khaimah is "the most fertile emirate" with "spectacular" mountain views, and Fujairah has "pristine stretches of beach, although development is starting to take its toll". Abu Dhabi, which already attracts 118,000 UK visitors each year to its many five-star hotels, is described as an "attractive, green and distinctly Arab city". Dubai had 799,582 visitors from Britain out of a total 6.95 million tourists last year.