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Reinventing himself in Dubai

MENTION the word Dubai and the brain immediately locks in visions of desert, sand dunes, camels, oil wells, tall buildings, wealthy sheiks and their many wives and luxury cars. Dubai (pronounced doo-by) is an emirate within the United Arab Emirates (UAE). An emirate is a nation or territory controlled by an emir, which is an Islamic name for an independent ruler, chieftain or governor. It is also the name of a city within the emirate’s boundaries.

The city of Dubai is situated on the emirate’s northern coastline. The emirate is located south-east of the Persian Gulf on the Arabian Peninsula and has the largest population and is the second-largest land territory by area of all the emirates, after Abu Dhabi.

As of 2005, just 17 per cent of the emirate’s population was made up of UAE nationals. About 85 per cent of the expatriate population was Asian, chiefly Indian (51 per cent), Pakistani (16 per cent), Bangladeshi (nine per cent) and Filipino (three per cent).

Although Dubai’s economy was built on the oil industry, the emirate’s model of business drives its economy, with the effect that its main revenues are now from tourism, real estate, and financial services, similar to that of Western countries.

Oil was discovered in the region in 1966, which caused a massive influx of foreign workers and the population quickly expanded by 300 per cent. But, these days oil revenues account for just six per cent of the emirate’s revenues. The major earners are real estate and construction (22.6 per cent), trade (16 per cent), entrepôt (15 per cent) and financial services (11 per cent).

Entrepôt is a port where merchandise can be imported and then exported without paying import duties.

Because the area has been built on such a multicultural population it was no surprise to learn that former Baimbridge College teacher and Casterton Secondary College principal, Andrew Rogers, had re-invented himself as a teacher at a private school in Dubai, several years after he packed away his chalk and duster and retired after more than 30 years as an educator in Victorian schools.

“I saw the job advertised and decided to apply for it,” he said.

“I am head of a department and am teaching psychology at a private school in Dubai. I used to teach some psychology in Victoria and I published several VCE textbooks on the subject when I was living in Australia. I have gone a little further with that over there and I teach something called International Baccalaureates over there.”

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) is a two-year educational programme for students aged 16 to 19 that provides an internationally accepted qualification for entry into higher education, and is recognised by universities worldwide. It was developed in the early to mid-1960s in Geneva, by a group of international educators. Although every university in Australia recognises the IB diploma, entry criteria differ between universities. Some universities accept students on their IB point count, while others require the points to be converted and in most states this is based on the Equivalent National Tertiary Entry Rank (ENTER).

“This is my third year and I have just signed a contract for another two years.” Andrew said.

When asked how he found living in Dubai, his one word answer was “hot”. “Probably, for eight months of the year it is very similar to a nice sunny day in Australia and, the thing I like about it is, it carries on being pleasantly warm in the evening,” he said.

“But, having said that all that, at the moment the temperatures are pretty horrific and get as high as 46, and I have heard of 50, so for three months of the year it is a good place not to be.” Whenever he does have some time off at weekends and the like, Andrew doesn’t do too much, the weather and the location see to that. But, he has travelled to several nearby countries such as Oman and enjoyed the experience.

“I went swimming in the very clear waters there; you can swim with the little pink dolphins there too. You go on small barges that take you out to sea to view them and swim with them,” he said.

“A typical weekend for me is similar to everybody else’s; I go shopping or visiting friends for a barbecue. Shopping is a big pastime for the Arab community; they seem to enjoy it a lot.

Andrew said the Dubai mall, supposedly the world’s biggest, was another favourite place for people to visit during the hotter months.

“It is like a world within a world and people like to visit and escape the weather,” he said.

Shopping for food causes no problems for Andrew; he finds everything he wants in the mall’s supermarkets. The shops cater for all populations and even though Islamic people do not eat pork, it is freely available in separate sections set aside for Asians and Europeans who wish to buy pork products.

Alcohol is also available, but buyers have to be licensed to buy it. Interestingly, football and cricket are the most popular sports in Dubai. Cricket is followed by Dubai’s large community of Indians and Pakistanis, alongside the residents from other cricket playing nations (Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, England, Australia and South Africa).

In 2005, the International Cricket Council (ICC) moved its headquarters from London to Dubai. The city has hosted several Pakistan matches and two new grass grounds are being developed in Dubai Sports City.
Also, the former Cunard ocean liner, Queen Elizabeth II, is berthed in Dubai and is expected to open soon as a five-star, 300-bed luxury hotel next year.

Andrew was born in the UK and arrived in Australia at age 24, after living in numerous countries where his father served in the UK Army. He had trained as a teacher in England and when he arrived in Australia found work almost immediately.

He spent a great deal of time teaching in Hamilton at the old Hamilton Technical School and its successor, Baimbridge College. He moved to Horsham as assistant principal at Horsham Secondary College, then was appointed principal of Casterton Secondary College in 2003. After five years in the job, Andrew decided enough was enough and decided to pack his chalk and duster in the cupboard and take an early retirement from teaching.

He moved to Grovedale, outside of Geelong and worked in the Barwon South West regional office for some time, before taking on an acting principal’s role at the small Beeac Primary School for nine months while the principal was on leave. He then retired from the Education Department and, after several months, saw the Dubai position advertised and successfully applied for the position.

For the time being, Andrew enjoys the challenge of living and working in the Middle East and will wait until his next contract expires before he decided what to do next.

As of 2009, there are 79 public schools run by the Ministry of Education that serve Emirates and expatriate Arab people as well as 145 private schools. The medium of instruction in public schools is Arabic with emphasis on English as a second language, while most of the private schools use English as their medium of instruction. Most private schools cater to one or more expatriate communities.

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Calls to restore TAFE funding

BY BENJAMIN MILLAR

PRESSURE is building on the state government to reverse funding cuts after thousands of TAFE teachers and students last week marched on Parliament.

Last Thursday’s rally followed the delivery of a petition containing more than 1000 signatures to Premier Ted Baillieu.

The petition of Victoria University staff and students and western suburbs residents calls on the government to abandon about $300 million in funding cuts that are expected to heavily affect students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Western Metropolitan Greens MP Colleen Hartland, who delivered the petition to the Premier last Tuesday, said the 1000 signatures were just the tip of the iceberg of people who wanted TAFEs to be well funded and to continue providing quality education in the west.

“Victoria University staff and students are already feeling the pain of the TAFE cuts as redundancies take effect and courses are cut.”

She told Parliament about 50 per cent of Victoria University students were on a low income and may no longer be able to access education.

Federal Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans warned that Victoria’s share of vocational funding was being placed at risk by its cuts to the public TAFE sector.

But state Higher Education Minister Peter Hall said the government was making a record ongoing investment in vocational training while introducing essential reforms designed to save the system from collapse.