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Sex and the City 2 in Abu Dhabi? Carrie, this is wrong

There's been little controversy over the setting of Sex and the City 2, despite the UAE's appalling record on women's rights



Nicholas McGeehan
guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 18 May 2010 14:34 BST



The poster for Sex and the City 2, which was actually shot in Morocco after the producers were refused permission to film in the UAE

"What happens after you say 'I do'?" This is the plot-setting teaser posed by heroine Carrie Bradshaw in the trailer for the new [Sex and the City 2](#) movie, to be released on 27 May. Well, if the trailer is anything to go by, you end up in a childless, sexless limbo until one day, over lunch, you and three glamorous friends are offered an all expenses-paid holiday in what the [official plot synopsis](#) calls "one of the most luxurious, exotic and vivid places on earth, where the party never ends and there's something mysterious around every corner".

Sex and the City 2

Production year: 2010

Country: USA

Cert (UK): 15

Runtime: 146 mins

Directors: Michael Patrick King

Cast: Chris Noth, Cynthia Nixon, David Eigenberg, Evan Handler, Kim Cattrall, Kristin Davis, Liza Minnelli, Miley Cyrus, Omid Djalili, Penelope Cruz, Sarah Jessica Parker

[More on this film](#)

So far, so Sex and the City, but the picture gets a little less alluring when the holiday location is revealed as Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates. There has been remarkably little controversy over this choice of setting, despite the country's appalling record on [women's rights](#) and [human rights in general](#).

In contrast to the image it attempts to project globally, the UAE is a country where human rights are systematically violated and where women are routinely discriminated against.

The situation is bad enough if you are a citizen – your husband has a legal right to beat you and cannot be prosecuted if he rapes you – but it's significantly worse if you are a non-national in a country where racial discrimination is endemic. In one [notable example](#) in 2006, a woman went to the police alleging that five men had subjected her to a series of sexual assaults. According to one press report, "due to her conflicting testimonies, the authorities suspected that the woman was a professional sex worker

and put her behind bars on charges of adultery". The judge warned the five men not to repeat such violations in the future, but only three were convicted, with sentences of three months in jail and 150 lashes. The woman was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and 150 lashes. Such incidents are not isolated.

A hidden army of domestic workers from India, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Indonesia are excluded from the country's labour laws and routinely endure horrific physical, sexual and psychological abuse, not to mention appalling working conditions, which often equate to a life of perpetual servitude punctuated only by whatever sleep is granted to them.

Human Rights Watch has reported domestic workers being beaten with vacuum cleaners, basins, wires, chairs, wooden planks, broomsticks, knives, and iron bars, and the argument that their treatment constitutes slavery under international law is highly persuasive.

In January this year, the United Nations committee on the elimination of discrimination against women delivered unreserved criticism of the UAE's record on women's rights, even going so far as to directly question the UAE delegation on the reasons why the founder of the country's only shelter for abused women had effectively been hounded out of the country and the women formerly under her care transported to a detention centre where at least one took her own life by drinking bleach. The UAE delegation's response was to suggest the shelter had been a front for money laundering.

The makers of Sex and the City 2 had initially hoped to film in the neighbouring emirate of Dubai rather than Abu Dhabi itself, but were refused permission after a copy of the script was submitted to the authorities. Eventually, shooting took place in Morocco (sand: check. Arabs: check). There are now doubts as to whether the completed film will be shown in Abu Dhabi.

This is yet another example of the Janus-faced character of the UAE's rulers. To the outside world they want to portray themselves as progressive (and in Dubai's case their survival depends on that), but internally, their legitimacy to rule still hinges on tribal loyalty and they cannot be seen to abandon what they characterise as Islamic principles.

Domestic opinion aside, and despite the rulers' efforts to formally distance themselves from the film, Sex and the City 2 seems fully on message in terms of the UAE's ongoing legitimisation project which seeks to convince the outside world that the country is a progressive state, friendly to rich tourists and open for business.

The country's rulers believe flashy public relations will always prevail over wishy-washy notions of equality, justice and fundamental rights, and that it is possible to go on violating those rights in the most obscene and flagrant manner, as long as the brand remains untarnished. You can beat women, you can rape women, and you can throw them in jail when they protest, but as long as you dress the country up all shiny and sparkly, and put it in a pair of Jimmy Choo shoes, nobody will be all that bothered.

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myfellowprisoners

18 May 2010, 2:38PM

This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.



1nnit

18 May 2010, 2:42PM

Do keep up Nicholas, they're not woman, they're drag queens performed by women actresses. Quite different.

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Triffid100

18 May 2010, 2:42PM

If you care about "Sex and the City" you truly can not be male.

Really.

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Brusselsexpats

18 May 2010, 2:42PM

I think it probably fair to say that slaves working for rich families in Ancient Rome had better treatment.

Why does the West continually suck up to countries where such abuse is endemic?

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AbuDhabiMike

18 May 2010, 2:43PM

Good article. I'm afraid it's all true.

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duroi

18 May 2010, 2:43PM

Maybe they should rename it "Forced Sex and the City"

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footienut

18 May 2010, 2:44PM

So basically, this article has nothing to do with 'sex and the city' and everything to do with the author's diatribe against dubai.

Incidentally, I do not disagree with the author's diatribe, but bringing sex and the city into it has the aura or introducing a crimson coloured fish whose name rhymes with 'bearing'.

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xenium1

18 May 2010, 2:44PM

Eventually, shooting took place in Morocco (sand: check. Arabs: check).

This is how the Hollywood money-machine works. I thought we'd all stopped caring or being outraged years ago. Just don't go & see the film, which is sure to be a pile of crap anyway.

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unexceptional

18 May 2010, 2:44PM



Contributor

I'm in complete agreement with Nicholas McGeehan on this.

To demonstrate this, I'm going to take no notice of Sex and the City whatsoever herewith.

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tapout

18 May 2010, 2:46PM

I have no idea why anyone would want to visit that country, let alone make a film there.

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farga

18 May 2010, 2:53PM

I fear that your outrage is all a bit by the by here.

the people who care about women's rights in the UAE, generally couldn't give a monkeys about Sex and the City.

And the people who care about Sex and the City, generally couldn't give a monkeys about women's rights in the UAE..

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lagrandeflaneuse

18 May 2010, 2:53PM

Despite being female, and therefore supposedly obsessed with chocolate and high-heeled shoes, I have never been remotely interested in 'Sex and the City'. Neither,

nowadays, are many people, by all accounts. If you don't agree with what they've done in

setting the latest film in Abu Dhabi, my advice would be to completely ignore it , and make the producers realize that the clapped-out old SATC franchise has had its day.

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[Semioclastm](#)

18 May 2010, 2:56PM

Human Rights Watch has reported domestic workers being beaten with vacuum cleaners, basins, wires, chairs, wooden planks, broomsticks, knives, and iron bars
The funny thing is, you can get away with it if you're Naomi Campbell.

I bet Iron Man 2 poons this nonsense sequel at the box office anyhow.

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[Thisoundslikespin](#)

18 May 2010, 2:57PM

In fairness the entire premise of SATC is hollow, shrill and depressing. It embodies that pseudo-liberation that being independent and fancy free is also somehow wearing shoes that you need a second mortgage to pay for. That is not just acceptable but desirable to be unattached heading toward 40, behaving like your 20 year old self, bar hopping and shagging about, then pontificating with an irritating voice over 'why, oh why have I not found the one?'

Basically, it is a good health warning. Don't be like these sad, old hags-who clearly crave convention despite trying to embrace the alternatives with open arms (and crying inside no doubt). Once that horse has been well and truly flogged, we now somehow have to care that the old mutttons are starting to settle down. Why?

Total shit. Why anyone wants to watch this is beyond me. And to think it is from HBO-home of The Wire and The Sopranos. Fucking travesty.

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[Oisin75](#)

18 May 2010, 3:00PM

I notice there are four women in the UAE cabinet and four women in the UK cabinet but the UK cabinet is twice the size.

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[MsRobinson](#)

18 May 2010, 3:01PM

Err, Sex and The City is not a treatise on feminism. Ok? if it were then maybe there's an issue. As for Abu Dhabi well it's full of crass foreigners who love to go there so maybe they should care about women's rights which don't allow couples to kiss in the street but have produced a society with some of the mightiest whorehouses in the world.

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liberalcynic

18 May 2010, 3:01PM

Most critics seemed to think the Sex and the City jumped the shark in the first film, so making a sequel is tantamount to going back and jumping it all over again, just to be sure.

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jgriffin

18 May 2010, 3:04PM

Why should anyone care???

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OfficeEd

18 May 2010, 3:07PM

hopefully the film ends with them being stoned for pubic indecency.

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monkey2

18 May 2010, 3:08PM

Sex and the City 2 in Abu Dhabi? Carrie, this is wrong

Quite a good name for a spoof.

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NeverMindTheBollocks

18 May 2010, 3:08PM

There has been remarkably little controversy over this choice of setting...

And despite this po-faced attempt to generate controversy, this will most likely remain the case too.

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mgodi

18 May 2010, 3:11PM

This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.



arkbarclay

18 May 2010, 3:17PM

Sex and the City 2 seems fully on message in terms of the UAE's ongoing legitimisation project which seeks to convince the outside world that the country is a progressive state, friendly to rich tourists and open for business.

Perhaps not progressive, but definitely friendly to rich tourists and open for business... Isn't that the point? The West only speaks the language of money... Our leaders may talk endlessly about upholding human rights, but the these countries just call their bluff.

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jackfertig

18 May 2010, 3:19PM

Says Nick: The country's rulers believe flashy public relations will always prevail over wishy-washy notions of equality, justice and fundamental rights, and that it is possible to go on violating those rights in the most obscene and flagrant manner, as long as the brand remains untarnished.

It works for the USA, why not Abu Dhabi?

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BeeStrikeMan

18 May 2010, 3:20PM

How about this?

<http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?>

[AID=/20100518/NATIONAL/705179850/1010](http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100518/NATIONAL/705179850/1010)

"ABU DHABI // An 18-year-old Emirati woman has been charged with having sex outside of wedlock after reporting that she was raped by six men, Abu Dhabi's Criminal Court was told yesterday. "

That's in the news today, chaps and chapesses.

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Ca1eb

18 May 2010, 3:29PM

Bah!

Why not set 'Sex and the City 2' in Helmand Province? I'd have gone to watch it with my wife and it'd be a great way of ending to the series and ensuring that there were no more sequels.

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Cyrr

18 May 2010, 3:31PM

I spent a month working in Abu Dhabi and I can safely say that it's not a place I would go on holiday, even if it was free. Yes there are 5 star hotels where you can indulge, but they are expensive and horrendously tacky.

If you stray outside the 5 starers you'll realize that the whole place (98% of workers are immigrants) is staffed by people who are subjected to modern day slavery conditions.

There are camps in the desert where the workers live (~2 million) and you'll see them being bussed in early in the morning to earn their \$1 or \$2.

Take a trip to a local bar (well, I mean a tacky Irish/English/whatever themed pub in a hotel) or night club (\$50 entrance if you are a man) and you'll find arrogant Arabs with wads of cash, and an extensive range of 3rd world prostitutes vying for your wallet. You can amuse yourself by playing the war zone game, by asking every girl that approaches you where she is from (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan). Once you've ticked off recent war zones (it really won't take you long) move onto the Human Development Index from the bottom.

In short? don't visit Abu Dhabi (or Dubai, it's a little more developed, but none the less still pretty rubbish) unless you dig things that cost a lot of money but have absolutely no taste. Also by going remember that you are directly supporting modern day slavery, sexism and racism.

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[KrustytheKlown](#)

18 May 2010, 3:34PM

Err, Sex and The City is not a treatise on feminism. Ok? if it were then maybe there's an issue

Totally agree. Sex and the City was an often funny, clever and addictive (but not remotely feminist) TV series which morphed into a lousy film or ten. Its heroines are not women's rights activists, but four privileged, self-obsessed New Yorkers who spend all their time in restaurants whinging about how they can't seem to find Mr Right. In other words, it's Pride and Prejudice for the new millennium.

And nothing wrong with that: I consider myself very much a feminist, but I also am the proud owner of an SATC boxset too. I don't consider that a contradiction, anymore than the fact that I wear makeup and like being with attractive men (there: I've said it). But complaining that SATC is being made in what is admittedly a nasty little country is a bit like complaining that WAGS go on holiday to Dubai. It's simply a non-issue.

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[cbarr](#)

18 May 2010, 3:34PM

I probably won't be shown in the countries in question and I thought they'd had all sorts of filming issues securing locations - anyways I'll still be going to see the film it might be complete crap but a little bit of escapism from reality is what I could use right now and that's what films are to demand absolute realism or to deny them the ability to show the exotic is to take an element away from cinema. How many people who go see the film are ever going to get to see a beautiful desert location?

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[sodabicarb](#)

18 May 2010, 3:36PM

The film was shot in [Morocco](#) and may even be banned from Abu Dhabi.

Which begs the question: Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into Abu Dhabi.

As for the repressive regime there, are we as progressive LibDem Tory lites allowed to criticise any country's, let alone an Arab one that is steeped in religion and culture that is far superior to our own, way of life or system of governance?

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[ColonelWingate](#)

18 May 2010, 3:36PM

the holiday location is revealed as Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates. There has been remarkably little controversy over this choice of setting, Yes, personally I have not been able to sleep over this. I hope Cameron-Clegg have this at number one on their list of diplomatic issues.

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[operationjulie](#)

18 May 2010, 3:38PM

I remember the sacking of an Emirates air hostess while I was in Abu Dhabi. she came across a 12 year old indian girl she saw crying on the plane, who it transpired had just been married off by her parents to an 80 year old Emirati man. She was duly dismissed for trying to protect the girl.

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[EastEndGeordie](#)

18 May 2010, 3:38PM

She was raped but SHE is the accused? Wow, Islam rocks doesn't it.

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[TheMightySquirrel](#)

18 May 2010, 3:41PM

For those of you not interested or suicidal enough to actually see this film, I present - 6 Second Sex & the City 2!

1. Characters go to Abu Dhabi
2. Buy shoes
3. Indulge in a little introspective angst
4. Buy shoes
5. Have sex
6. Go home

FIN*

I've just saved you almost two hours from your relentless trudge towards the yawning maw of the grave. Y'all can thank me later.

* All scenes may or may not be true. I haven't seen it either.

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[ThamesSider](#)

18 May 2010, 3:42PM

Actually it seems as fitting and grounded in reality as anything else about the series.

Meanwhile, [about that poster...](#)

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[casestudy26](#)

18 May 2010, 3:44PM

Wasn't it in an episode of 'Family Guy' where SATC was described as a show about 3 hookers and their mother?

[Recommend?](#) (37)

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[Fulton](#)

18 May 2010, 3:46PM

Why did they pick Abu Dhabi though? I could understand it (at least in financial terms) if they had in fact got direct sponsorship from the Abu Dhabi authorities to make in effect a propaganda film for what a great place it supposedly is.

But in absence of that? I mean why not have them be going to Morocco if that's where they filmed the thing? It seems just as "exotic" a destination for them to go.

It just seems a bizarre thing from any angle.

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[Oisin75](#)

18 May 2010, 3:48PM

I live in the UAE and there's not a lot to argue with although I would mention the UAE has been making progress in this area. The country was only decolonised in 1971 and is barely one generation away from being primarily nomadic, desert based economy so it's come a long way. It should be moving faster. Parts of the government would like it to, economic interest and religious interest act as a brake. Laws have been changed to increase human rights for women (and others) but the judiciary are conservative, enforcement can be poor and fines are often seen as a cost of business or personal tax rather than a deterrent. The state is a relatively new invention and the ancient tribal way of government and traditional family norms can trump the laws of the state. Unlike in other colonies the British didn't impose a civil service or government upon Trucial Oman.

My question would be why is an article about human rights in the UAE so much more printable than an article elsewhere? I'm in the UAE as my work is across the Middle East and West Asia. I've previously worked in East Asia. I'd say human rights here are probably near the very top in the region. In a global human rights league table the UAE would be a mid level team. Frankly the majority of the world's population when it comes to human rights live a pretty miserable existence; they are poor and exploited often to satisfy the needs of Western consumers who want cheaper products. Go visit a mine in China or a ferroalloy plant in India to see how the people who provided the raw materials for your top of the range smart phone live. Western countries didn't get rich and don't stay rich by respecting human rights in developing countries but for some reason that doesn't make as good a headline as a diatribe about the UAE.

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bananachips

18 May 2010, 3:48PM

I have to confesso my ignorance of the location and nature of the Sex and the City film .
But I am not totally ignorant, its got something to do with shoes has it not ?
But TheMightySquirrel thanks for rueing it for me ,but tell me will it involve cake ?

[Recommend? \(2\)](#)

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KrustytheKlown

18 May 2010, 3:51PM

Why did they pick Abu Dhabi though? I could understand it (at least in financial terms)
if they had in fact got direct sponsorship from the Abu Dhabi authorities to make in
effect a propaganda film for what a great place it supposedly is.

They probably did, even if it won't be admitted.

The city states that make up the Emirates are very very keen to have the approval of the
White Man, and are prepared to pay up front for the privilege. The same type of thing
was at work when David Beckham and other slebs allegedly were given gifts of their
Dubai beach homes, although the official line was that they had bought the houses
themselves.

Abu Dhabi used to be happy to take a back seat to Dubai in the international profile
stakes, but particularly with the collapse of Dubai's economy, Abu Dhabi and some of
the smaller Emirates (and nearby Qatar) have been looking for a piece of the action.
Expect to see more and more minor fim festivals, golf and tennis tournaments and
fashion shows - all designed to show the White Man how liberal and Westernised these
mini-sheikhdoms are. There are even rumours the UAE is bidding for a future World
Cup, and FIFA is said to be giving the matter serious consideration. Now *that* would be
a travesty!

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TheMightySquirrel

18 May 2010, 3:55PM

@ bananachips

but tell me will it involve cake

Almost certainly.

Damn - perhaps six seconds was a little hasty of me. This plot is evolving into a non-stop
rollercoaster of ever-developing twists and turns.

Nobody ask about the cocktails, please, or I shall have to extend it even further.

[Recommend? \(2\)](#)

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Khan74

18 May 2010, 3:58PM

@ Brusselsexpats

*I think it probably fair to say that slaves working for rich families in Ancient Rome
had better treatment.*

Absolutely right!! All that was required was that female (♀) slaves were available
sexually for their master, masters sons and friends. Any children they had were also
slaves and so could be sold at anytime and so parents often never saw their children ever
again. Beatings were regular for the slightest infringement and we perfectly legal under

the law as the slaves were legal property and rich capitalist societies always about protecting property rights.

(by the way did you watch the HBO/BBC dramaseries Rome a few years ago??)

Why does the West continually suck up to countries where such abuse is endemic?

Importing of Oil and the exporting of arms. The British arms industry is dependant on the Middle East arms trade.

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[Khan74](#)

18 May 2010, 4:01PM

I had quite a few relatives working in the Middle East during the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s.

These were male relatives who have now retired and live in Pakistan.

No one had a single good word to say about the Saudi's or rich Gulf Arabs.

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[Iceberg5](#)

18 May 2010, 4:05PM

footienut ...

I don't know what fish you mean. Herring doesn't rhyme with bearing.

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[dellamirandola](#)

18 May 2010, 4:05PM

I agree about the rather dodgy implications of the Abu Dhabi setting but:

What happens after you say 'I do'?" This is the plot-setting teaser posed by heroine Carrie Bradshaw in the trailer for the new Sex and the City 2 movie, to be released on 27

May. Well, if the trailer is anything to go by, you end up in a childless, sexless limbo

So, you're linking what you obviously see as the terrible fate of being childless and

sexless (without having sex, I suppose you mean) with being the kind of heartless crone

who has no interest in human rights? Yes, you're right, only those who have their own

children and shag regularly are sufficiently human to care about other people.

(And just to be factual, the trailer does feature at least two of the characters' offspring.)

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[LoveAndProtectEarth](#)

18 May 2010, 4:07PM

The only logical reason for setting the holiday in Dubai is product placement. Due to poor management and the global financial crisis, Dubai is in dire economic straits . The

Emir known for his flamboyant money making schemes probably paid the film's

producers to set the holiday in Dubai to sell it as a vacation destination.

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KrustytheKlown

18 May 2010, 4:17PM

The only logical reason for setting the holiday in Dubai is product placement. Due to poor management and the global financial crisis, Dubai is in dire economic straits. But it's not being made in Dubai - it's Abu Dhabi, Dubai's neighbour and bank roller.

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topograph

18 May 2010, 4:17PM



Staff

Sex and the City: An hour and a half of rampant misogyny hidden under a veneer of consumerist 'empowerment'.

Dubai: A rampantly misogynistic society trying to hide under a veneer of consumerism.

Seems fairly appropriate to me.

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topograph

18 May 2010, 4:18PM



Staff

er. I mean Abu Dhabi, of course...

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Streetheart

18 May 2010, 4:35PM

'In contrast to the image it attempts to project globally, the UAE is a country where human rights are systematically violated and where women are routinely discriminated against.

Oh Nicholas, that's such a Miranda thing to say!

You're right though.

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