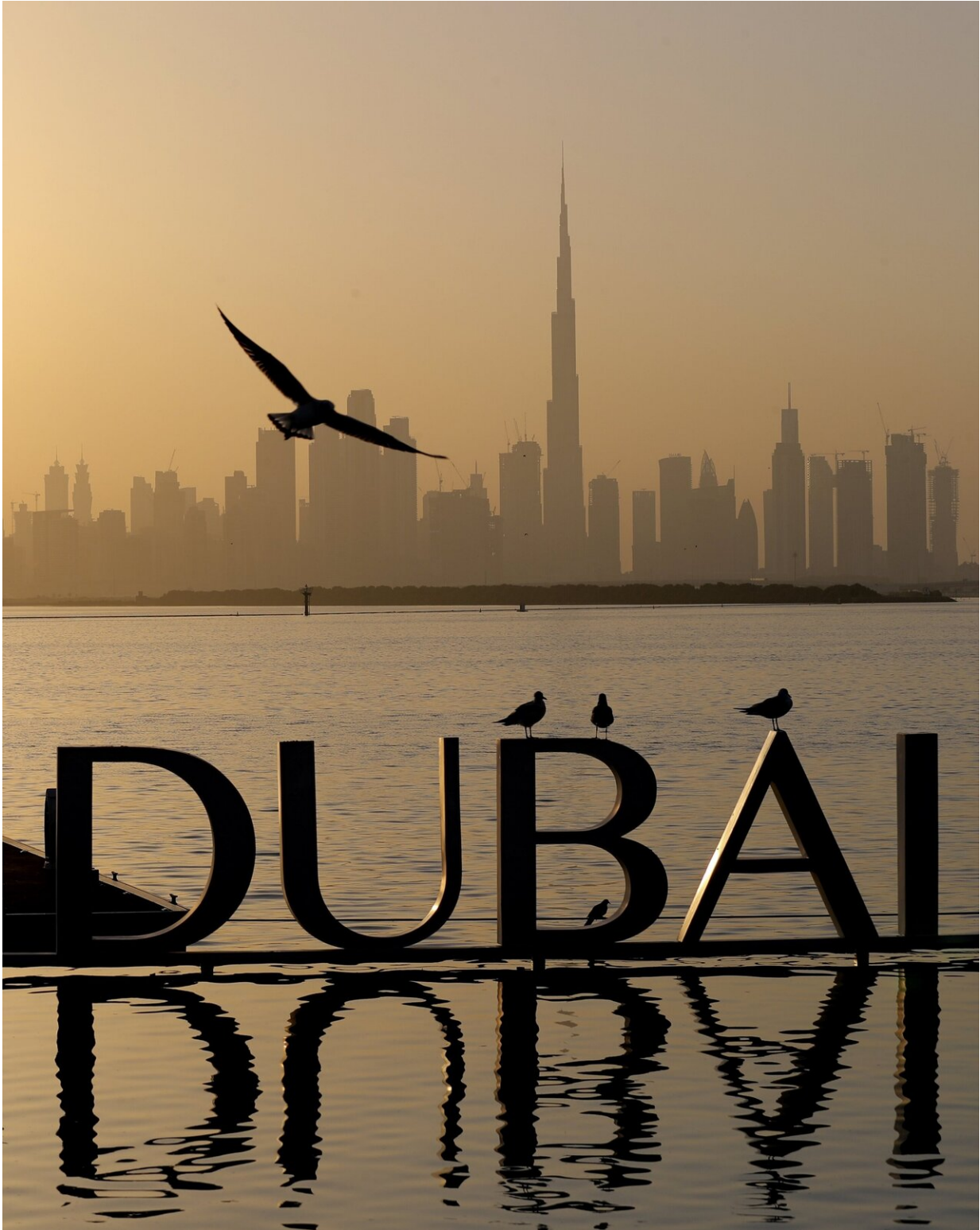


Dubai closes bars, limits activities after virus cases spike

February 1 2021, by Jon Gambrell



A seagull flies pass the view of city skyline and the world tallest tower, Burj Khalifa, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Friday, Jan.29, 2021. (AP

Photo/Kamran Jebreili)

Dubai announced Monday it would close all bars and pubs for the entire month of February and limit other activities after a spike in coronavirus cases followed New Year's Eve celebrations that drew visitors from around the world.

The sheikhdom also ordered restaurants and cafes to close by 1 a.m., as well as instituted crowd limits on cinemas, hotels, malls and other destinations.

The decision comes after Dubai insisted as recently as last week that "we can confidently say the current situation is under control." That was as [coronavirus](#) testing facilities and hospitals came under pressure from 17 straight days of record reported daily coronavirus figures across the wider United Arab Emirates.

The announcement from the government's Dubai Media Office blamed "a marked increase in the number of violations of precautionary measures" for the decision made by the city-state's hereditary rulers.

"The measures seek to further enhance efforts to combat COVID-19, and protect the health and safety of all citizens, residents and visitors," the statement said.

Dubai, known for its long-haul carrier Emirates, the world's tallest building and its beaches and bars, in July became one of the first travel destinations to describe itself as open for business. The move staunched the bleeding of its crucial tourism and real estate sectors after lockdowns and curfews cratered its economy.



A seagull flies pass the view of city skyline and the world tallest tower, Burj Khalifa, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Friday, Jan.29, 2021. (AP Photo/Kamran Jebreili)

As tourism restarted, daily reported coronavirus case numbers slowly grew but mostly remained stable through the fall.

But then came New Year's Eve—a major draw for travelers from countries otherwise shut down over the virus who partied without face masks in bars and on yachts. In recent days, countries have blamed Dubai for imported coronavirus cases, including variants feared to be faster spreading.

As daily reported coronavirus cases neared 4,000, Dubai fired the head of its government health agency without explanation. It stopped live entertainment at bars, halted nonessential surgeries, limited wedding sizes and ordered gyms to increase space between those working out. It also now requires coronavirus testing for all those flying into its airport.

Questioned about hospital capacity after earlier shutting down a field hospital, Dubai on Sunday announced it established two dedicated centers to treat coronavirus patients. On Monday, lines remained long at coronavirus testing facilities in the emirate, with one major hospital telling patients some results only would come after 72 hours.

The UAE had pinned its hopes on mass vaccinations, with Abu Dhabi distributing a Chinese vaccine by Sinopharm and Dubai offering Pfizer-BioNTech's inoculation. The UAE says it has given over 3.4 million doses so far, ranking it among the top countries in the world.

While the restrictions likely will affect Dubai's vital tourism sector, countries already have taken a hard line on travel to the emirate. The United Kingdom, a major tourism source for the UAE, already has stopped flights to the country over concerns about coronavirus variants there.

Dubai also urged the public to report those violating coronavirus rules to the police.

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