

Every month a new trip will be uploaded to this site: enjoy!

You may have seen ranges of sand dunes elsewhere in the UAE, or even the world, but nothing is like the Liwa desert. It's like comparing a beach bungalow to a skyscraper. A bit far-fetched you say? Well, if we assume a storey of a building is about three metres, then our destination is a 36-storey building of pure red sand. In fact, Tal Moreeb is a sand mountain almost 110m tall, and just one of many to be found in the area north of the Saudi-UAE border up to a tarmac motorway that borders the north, known as the Liwa Crescent.



The BMW X5M is one of the most technically perfect SUVs I've driven - and this is why: let's take an average SUV, in fact, any of the most popular models you see on the roads. They are not built for the speeds routine in the Emirates - yes, they can easily manage to cruise at 160kph, but the suspension, the choice of tyres, the chassis, the entire car is a compromise.

You will realize this when a quick swerve is required: the car will sway, the traction is iffy, the brakes are soft. But just look at the disc brakes found on the BMW X5M, and you will see what I mean - they practically fill the entire 20-inch rims! This car offers fantastic performance on the tarmac, equal to many sports cars. Plus, although not its finest point, it does offer at least some of the dual-purpose we expect from an SUV. Having said that, it is definitely not suited for careless dune bashing, with its low fascia and bumpers and lowered

suspension. But that's OK for this trip, because it's all smooth tarmac to the Moreeb Dune; but you can always play a little off-road with due care!



The BMW X5M pulls hard on sand tracks, as well as highways.

For those adventurers wanting to spin some sand, I've added three extra routes, of differing difficulty levels, all starting from Tal Moreeb, which is reachable by a tarmac road - so, from first-timer to expert driver, this destination will be an unforgettable experience for all. The three routes are color-coded like the ski slopes: copyright Paolo Rossetti, ask first for reproduction of contents (text, photos, etc.) - prosett@weekenduae.com

green is easy, blue is intermediate, and red is advanced; they'll make sense once you have them downloaded to your GPS device. But please note that the main trip is fully on tarmac and ending at Moreb Dune, which is smack bang in the middle of Liwa!

Download the KML file for your GPS by clicking [here](#). Once downloaded, you can import the file into your GPS device and take it on the road, or double-click that file and it will open automatically in Google Earth if you have that installed (all adventurers should! [Google Earth](#)).

And here is an interactive map of the routes.

View [Moreb, Liwa](#) in a larger map



A convoy of 4x4 vehicles navigate the Liwa dunes: any trip to the northern edge of the Empty Quarter (Rub al Khali) requires careful preparations and respect for the harsh desert conditions.



A traditional tent set up on the sunset side of Liwa dunes - sunrise and sunset are magical times in the desert.



Abundant ground water resources make the Liwa crescent a rich agricultural land.



Fodder for livestock is bundled after harvest in Liwa.



A Paper Wasp greedily laps up nectar at a flowering tree in Liwa: their sting can be vicious although they are not aggressive unless provoked.



One of three super-sized trucks built especially for HE Sheikh Hamad bin Hamdan, the Dodge PowerWagon can tow the world globe caravan parked at the front of the Car Museum. On the way down, as indicated in the GPS route, make sure you stop to visit this amazing museum!



Click on the image for a better view.

Please take due care when entering the sand at Liwa; the dunes are fierce and although it seems you will stay right next to the road, once you pass a few dune lines you are well and truly in the thick of the Empty Quarter, copyright Paolo Rossetti, ask first for reproduction of contents (text, photos, etc.) - prosett@weekenduae.com



and that is no place to go unprepared. My disclaimer is [here](#).

Please read the original article: [The Looming Shadows](#). Published by The National, Apr 17, 2010.

Or view a pdf file of the original article [here](#), as published in The National.