

TRIBE ON TOUR

Shoppers are treated to a glimpse of Native American heritage in a Dubai mall

By I-Cheng Chan
Staff Reporter



It's not everyday you get to meet a Native American so I was fascinated to see what Dubai Summer Surprises' (DSS) Navajo Week was all about.

I headed down to Mall of the Emirates to see members of the largest tribe in the US performing one of their nightly shows last week. But once there, I had no idea where to find them as the galleria, usually reserved for entertainment, was full with other exhibitions and there was no relevant signage in sight. Lucky for me, I spotted one of the tribe among crowd from their distinctive clothing and followed their lead to the heart of the action.

After a somewhat delayed start, the Chinle Valley Singers began their performance at the entrance to Ski Dubai. With no stage to elevate them or micro-

phones to increase the volume, it took a moment before the shoppers crossing their path realised a show was underway and respectfully gave them space.

The six-strong group, from the Navajo tribe in Arizona, sang in their native tongue to the beating of a drum as their youngest member, 20-year-old Darren Deswood, performed the hoop dance. Using five rings, he hopped and jumped to the rhythm while creating shapes and silhouettes with his circular props.

GIGGLES

The dancer further displayed his dexterity by balancing the hoops and holding them in position with his legs. And at one stage he created the form of a bird and "flew" at the younger audience members, sending them into fits of giggles.

Then, a man and a woman dancer linked arms and made simple steps to the drumbeat. Saad Al Adwani, visiting Dubai on a two-day break from Kuwait, was pulled out of the crowd to join in the dance.

The 46-year-old was happy to take part, in full view of his bemused wife and four children.

"It's the first time I have danced with Native Americans and it was very nice," he said. "I have never seen that kind of dancing before so it was interesting to see."

The spectacle ended all too soon and as quietly as it began, but for applause from those who stopped to watch the show.

CURIOS

Julie Zainal, from Al Barsha, saw the performance with her children. The American mum-of-four had read about the Navajo Indians coming to the mall but caught the show by chance after recognising their outfits while out shopping.

"I wanted purposely to see it because you won't see it again," she said. "People lose their heritage so it is nice to see this now. I thought it was good but they should have explained who they were and I was curious to know if the second dance was a wedding dance."

Her daughter Hafsa, 12, said: "It was interesting but I didn't really learn that much. I like what they did with the hoops."

PROUD

One of the troupe members, Dovetta Davis, said she had been dancing since she could walk. The 29-year-old felt strongly about her heritage and was pleased to be keeping it alive through the Chinle Valley Singers.

"Most (American) Indians right now don't have a language they can sing and dance to — adults of my age don't do that anymore," she said. "I like that at my age, I am still very traditional. My 4-



The Chinle Valley Singers perform in the mall.

PHOTOS BY AHMED RAMZAN/GULF NEWS



Hoop dancer Darren Deswood performs an intricate routine.

year-old daughter sees me singing and dancing and is already learning to dance. I hope she carries that on."

With a more suitable platform from which to share their show during future visits, let's hope Native American heritage can be celebrated generations down the line in Dubai.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Chinle Valley Singers was formed in 1980. They are all related, with the eldest and youngest being mother and son, 60-year-old Elsie and 20-year-old Darren Deswood.

Costumes include a hair bun which folds and ties the hair with white wool to represent knowledge, focus and strength of mind.

In the last 12 years, the group has performed in Estonia, Italy, England, Holland, Latvia and the Philippines.

Weaving wonderment

Beverly Allen (above), 47, uses pure wool yarn shorn from Navajo sheep and dyed with vegetable extracts to weave rugs, dresses, clothes and wall hangings. Tucked away on the first floor at one end of Mall of the Emirates, I found the Native American from Tsalle, Arizona, working her magic with a wooden-framed loom.

The cordoned-off location close to the car park doors was blatantly inappropriate, but luckily that didn't stop passers-by noticing the little piece of mesmerising creation going on within.

The mum-of-five, who has been weaving for 30 years, said the tradition of weaving in the Navajo tribe dates back more than five generations.

"I learnt it from my mother, my grandmother and my mother-in-law,"

she said. "It is important because knowing your tradition helps to focus your life and who you are, and it's creating a piece of art."

The wall hanging she was working on was already looking good after around six hours of steady work over two days. Among those who stopped to admire her almost hypnotic technique was Colombian-born Dennison Vanegas, a quality specialist who has been in Dubai for three years.

"It is absolutely amazing and beautiful," he said. "It is very common to see these in Chile, Peru and Bolivia but here, you see it only once. It is nice because it brings cultures together."

"With this, you can realise many things about their culture and you can understand how things are working around the world."

DSS events calendar for today

EVENT NAME	VENUE	TIMING
Modhesh Fun City Events	Modhesh Fun City	10am-10pm
Mega Events: Disney Movie Magic	Mercato	4pm-10pm
Mega Events: Kids Olympics	Reef Mall	4pm
Modhesh Fun City Stage Shows	Modhesh Fun City Airport Expo	1pm-10pm

SURPRISES

GLOBAL SURPRISES

Lebanese Cultural Corner	BurJuman	5-10pm
Algerian Cultural Corner	BurJuman	5-10pm
Workshop: Flags of the Globe	BurJuman	5-10pm

NATURE SURPRISES

Dinosaurs Walk Events	Reef Mall	5-10pm
-----------------------	-----------	--------

KNOWLEDGE SURPRISES

Physical Phenomena Exhibition	Dubai Festival City	5-10pm
Machine and Mechanism Workshop	Dubai Festival City	5-10pm
Star Lab	Dubai Festival City	5-10pm
Pottery House	Dubai Festival City	5-10pm

FOOD SURPRISES BREAD AND CHEESE WEEK

Food Craft Workshop	Mall of the Emirates	6-10pm
Cooking Demonstration	Mall of the Emirates	6-10pm

HERITAGE SURPRISES MOROCCAN HERITAGE WEEK

Arts and craft workshop	Bin Sougat Centre	4.30-6pm
-------------------------	-------------------	----------

FLOWER SURPRISES

Flower Garden	Al Ghurair City	5.30-9.30pm
Magic Flower Workshop	Al Ghurair City	5.30-9.30pm

CARTOON SURPRISES

Cartoon Exhibition	Century Mall	5-10pm
Cartoon Interactive Workshop	Century Mall	5-10pm

COMEDY SURPRISES

History of Comedy Exhibition	Deira City Centre	5-10pm
Comedy Interactive Workshop	Deira City Centre	5-10pm

ARTS SURPRISES

Exhibitions (clayboard, mosaic)	Hamarain Centre	5-10pm
Film animation for kids	Hamarain Centre	5-7.30pm
Film animation for adults	Hamarain Centre	7.30-10pm

ADVENTURE SURPRISES

Pirates Activities	Ibn Battuta mall	5-9.30pm
Surfboard Activities	Ibn Battuta mall	5-9.30pm
Rodeo Bull Activities	Ibn Battuta mall	5-9.30pm



Saad Al Adwani, from Kuwait, learns a few Navajo dance moves.



Luna, Sabine, Maya and Jochen.



Farah and Reem.