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Sex And The City 2 (Full Review)

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If the fifth lady in *Sex and the City* has always been Manhattan, then the sixth lady in *Sex and the City 2* is Abu Dhabi – and boy, do the New York foursome try to show her a thing or two about sexual freedom and all-round Western fabulousness. It's Blahniks meets burkas in this ludicrous sequel.

The film opens with the campest wedding you're ever likely to see. Stanford and Anthony get hitched with none other than Liza Minnelli officiating. As Miranda explains, "When there's so much gay energy in one place, Liza Minnelli just materialises". *Sex and the City* purists may find the nuptials between the show's two main gay characters a bit too forced and convenient considering that they spent most of the TV series hating each other, and *still* no one bothers to explain what happened to Marcus, Stanford's previous long-term boyfriend.

Nonetheless, the wedding is a hoot and sets up the film's central conundrum – what happens after you say "I do" and how do you reconcile the "marrying", if you will, of a traditional institution with more liberal attitudes?

We learn that Charlotte is feeling guilty about finding motherhood tough and Miranda – who thankfully has her smile back after the drudgery of the first film – is trying to find a balance between her home life and demanding job, as well as deal with the sexist new senior partner at her law firm. As for Carrie, well, if you found her annoying before, you're *really* not going to warm to her here. As usual, she makes a mountain out of a molehill, acting like a spoilt brat when she feels that her marriage to Big has fallen into a rut.

Samantha, who is taking on menopause with an arsenal of vitamins and ointments, has the perfect distraction for her BFFs – an all-expenses paid trip to Abu Dhabi. "I can hear the decadence calling", she states. "I need to go someplace rich". Despite two throw-away lines about the recession, *Sex and the City* is still *all* about consumption and excess, which is times 10 in this film – and I'm not just talking about the obscene amount of product placement. Arabic Pingles, anyone?

It's almost embarrassing to watch Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda swan into the airport with trolleys piled high with luggage for a seven day trip. What's more, they get their own separate cars and servants on arrival at their opulent five-star digs. For what seems like forever, they and the audience are given a grand tour of Abu Dhabi-style luxury, with Miranda all the while providing a running commentary on the language and culture. It becomes painful to watch – and weird.

Sex and the City 2 gets more bizarre as it goes on – and on. With a running time of two and a half hours, I felt like I was watching a never-ending commercial for tourism in the United Arab Emirates, despite the fact that filming really took place in Morocco. This was interrupted only occasionally by something actually happening, such as Carrie and Aidan's run-in at the spice market which we all saw in the film's trailer.

The film's tradition vs. progressiveness theme still runs underneath its glossy exterior during the Abu Dhabi scenes. Carrie and co. discuss niqabs and the idea of women being silenced, while Samantha unapologetically shocks the locals by flaunting her sexuality in ways that are at times cringe-worthy and offensive to Muslim culture. It's all well and good to draw attention to the oppression of women in the United Arab Emirates, but the film fails to balance this with a respect for the culture.

Sex and the City 2 is basically the Samantha and Carrie show, which often feels like a shame considering that Charlotte and Miranda have potentially more interesting storylines to explore. The scene in which they share their experiences of motherhood is one of the film's few genuinely touching and honest moments.

That said, something must have been in the hookah pipe Michael Patrick King was smoking when he wrote the screenplay. The loyalty of *Sex and the City* fans is put to the test as the film plods from one random desert adventure to the next, topped off with a madcap finale that has to be seen to be believed – and not in a good way. But it doesn't really matter what I say here – you're going to see this movie anyway because *Sex and the City* is an unstoppable force that no fan can stay away from. Hell, I'm even seeing it again with some girlfriends this weekend!

To end on a positive note, *Sex and the City 2* is funnier than the **first movie**, and the fashion is more outrageous and deliciously hit-and-miss than ever. Watch out for a hat that looks like Carrie fished a crumpled piece of misshapen cardboard out of a bin and put it on her head. Oh, and there's even more hot male flesh on display this time 'round, including an entire Australian sports team stripping down to their budge smugglers.



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