

Smooth operator

Four specialists give their recommendations for winter holidays in the Middle East

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Winters might mean cold and wet in Blighty, but over in the Middle East, it's all fun in the sun. With such a big region to contend with, though, how do you know where to start? We've scoured the industry to find out, asking some of the region's key operators to match the client with their dream Arabian break - and here are the answers.



▶ THE FAMILY HOLIDAY: OMAN
Deborah Wadhams, product manager for the Middle

East and Indian Ocean, Travel 2
"Superb facilities and an ideal climate in February make Oman the perfect destination for families heading out in the Christmas

holidays or winter half-term.

In terms of activities, there's plenty going on. No visit to Oman would be complete without a visit to the capital city, Muscat. We offer a city tour (from £58) that gives guests an insight into the rich historical and cultural heritage, with visits to the Grand Mosque, Muttrah Souk and the sultan's official palace. I also thoroughly recommend the dolphin-watching excursion (from £56).

When it comes to hotels, the Al Waha at Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort and Spa is a great choice for families with lots of activities including kids' clubs, a lazy river, aquatic play area, mini-golf and a family adventure zone. Under-12s are accommodated free of charge when sharing their parents' room. For clients looking for a little more space, the hotel

offers family rooms comprising two interconnecting bedrooms, including a twin room with DVD player, PlayStation, games and other items designed especially for younger guests.

Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel is also a good family choice. The hotel boasts five pools, as well as a separate kids' pool and play area, and the Ritz Kids club offers plenty of adventurous activities. There's also an in-room kids' tent with pirate and princess themes, and three restaurants featuring dedicated children's menus.

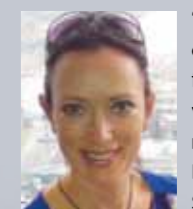
Just remind clients that visas are required on arrival (a 30-day visa costs about £60). Another good tip is to study the modules at oman-experts.co.uk to gain a better understanding of this diverse destination."

Book it: Three nights' B&B at

the five-star Al Waha at Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort and Spa starts at £599 per person in an Executive Sea View Room, including return flights from Heathrow with Oman Air. The price includes an early-booking discount and two under-12s staying free, for travel from January 8-February 6, 2018.

travel2.com

▶ TWENTYSOMETHINGS' GETAWAY: DUBAI
Nikki Hain, product manager for the Middle East, Premier Holidays



"For younger clients looking for a trendy vibe in Dubai, I'd recommend Nikki Beach Resort & Spa, which has its own beach club with a bar, →



LEFT:
Burj Khalifa

RIGHT:
Nikki Beach
Resort & Spa

BELOW:
Emirates
Palace



PICTURES: LUCA LOMBARDI PHOTOGRAPHY; ROISINANN HUGHES; BOVA

→ terrace and pool with swim-up bar.

Location-wise, it offers the best of both worlds – it's only 15 minutes from the airport and 10 minutes from the Burj Khalifa in the downtown area, and it's on one of Dubai's best beaches. It's also the only hotel in the Pearl Jumeira area, so you feel as if you're the only ones there. There are lots of types of accommodation, so there's something to suit most budgets, from city-view rooms to three-bedroom villas. The latter feature their own private pool right in front of the beach so are ideal for a group of friends travelling together to celebrate an occasion.

I'd also recommend Jumeirah Creekside Hotel. It's in a more traditional area, away from the



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Palm, and offers lots of benefits including early check-in, which means if a client arrives on a flight at 6am, they don't have to hang around until 2pm or pay for the night before. That can save them a lot of money – especially in winter, when rates are higher.

As the hotel is part of the Jumeirah group, there's a

shuttle service to the Wild Wadi Waterpark, at which guests get free entry. The hotel's half-board option is on a dine-around basis, so clients can eat at any of the Jumeirah properties. There are also lots of other perks including a sweet trolley every night. But the biggest selling point for me is that you can upgrade to a club room for £14 per night, which is basically the cost of a glass of wine in Dubai. The upgrade includes all drinks and snacks, so it's great for younger clients who want to go out and drink without breaking the bank."

Book it: Four nights at Nikki Beach Resort & Spa in Dubai starts at £2,699 per person with Premier Holidays, based on four adults sharing a two-bedroom

garden villa. The price includes flights from Heathrow with Virgin Atlantic, and is valid for travel in December 2018.

trade.premierholidays.co.uk



THE LUXURY COUPLES' ESCAPE: ABU DHABI
Uma Campbell,
product and marketing

manager for the Indian Ocean, Arabian Gulf, India and Sri Lanka, Lusso Travel

"If clients have been to Dubai and are looking for a luxury winter stay, Abu Dhabi is a great alternative. It's much quieter with more space, and there are some unique attractions, including →



→ the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, which is popular because it's such an opulent piece of architecture, and the Formula One race track on Yas Island, where visitors can drive around the track themselves. The island is also home to Ferrari World and Yas Waterworld, while back in the centre, the Louvre Abu Dhabi opened last month, so that's creating a lot of buzz.

Hotels tend to be quite corporate but the leisure options are growing. The Emirates Palace is an attraction in itself. It might not be everyone's cup of tea, but people are intrigued to see what one of the most expensive hotels ever built looks like. There's gold everywhere you look; even your coffee is served with gold leaf. It's set on the coast and is ideal for families, as well as couples, with extensive kids' facilities and two pool areas. The hotel is also conveniently located for visiting the Grand Mosque, shopping malls and other attractions. The top-end suites are big enough for families, but they're also great for honeymooners.

One of the most unique properties, though, is the Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara, located outside the city in the Rub' al Khali desert. The hotel itself has a huge spa and is at the top end of the market. Recommend one of the royal residences for couples

RIGHT:
Sheikh
Zayed
Grand
Mosque

BELOW:
Ritz-Carlton
Ras Al
Khaimah



after something a little special with in-room spa treatments and other extras. If you combine that with a stay at the Emirates Palace, you have a really luxury break in the city."

Book it: Three nights' half-board in a Coral Room at the Emirates Palace combined with three nights' bed and breakfast in a Deluxe Garden Room at Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara starts at £1,585 per person, including a half-board upgrade. The price is based on two sharing and includes private transfers and BA flights from London in April.

lussotravel.com



▶ THE ACTIVE BREAK: DUBAI AND THE DESERT
Iain Raeper, product manager for Arabia, Indian Ocean & Thailand, If Only

"From water parks, theme parks and tobogganing in the Snowdome to golf, fishing and dune-bashing, there are plenty of adventures on offer in Dubai, making it an ideal destination for those who prefer to be active. Adrenaline junkies can even do a tandem sky dive over The Palm Jumeirah or try the XDubai zipline over the Dubai Fountain.

For a really active experience, I'd suggest heading out into the desert.



We've seen an increase in clients enjoying a twin-centre holiday combining city and beach or city and desert

The new Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah, Al Wadi Desert resort offers activities including archery, biking, falconry, fishing, bird-watching walks, nature drives, stargazing, horse riding and yoga, making it ideal for adventurous clients. This year, we've seen an increase in clients enjoying a twin-centre holiday within Dubai and the UAE, combining city and beach or city and desert."

Book it: Three nights' bed and breakfast in an Al Rimal Pool Villa at the Ritz-Carlton Ras Al Khaimah starts at £1,169 per person, based on two adults sharing. The price includes flights from Gatwick with Emirates, private transfers and airport taxes, and is valid for stays from January 7 to February 15, 2018, when booked by December 31.

agents.ifonly.net