



8 OF THE Best WOW FACTOR HOTELS

Laura French picks the Middle East's most awe-inspiring properties

When it comes to elaborate hotels, the Middle East knows a thing or two, with its Arabian palaces, futuristic masterpieces and all-out extravagance.

Here we round up some of the best to sell to those looking to push the boat out with a property they'll struggle to forget.

1 YAS VICEROY, ABU DHABI
Wow factor: Formula 1 racetrack.

The lowdown: Jutting out over the water with its modern-looking, LED-lit glass facade and set right on the Yas Marina Circuit, this hotel stands out in more ways than one. Floor-to-ceiling windows allow guests to watch the races without leaving their rooms, while contemporary cuisine gives it appeal for those wanting to experiment on the food front.

Trendy pool lounges and a rooftop bar with a resident DJ up the wow factor another notch, as does the only nightclub in the world set over a racetrack. And there's a comprehensive family offering too, with a kids' club and plethora of attractions in the area, including Ferrari World and Yas Waterworld, to which guests get a complimentary shuttle bus.
Book it: A five-night family break with Carrier starts at £3,130, based on two adults and one child sharing a Marina Room, including Etihad flights from Heathrow and private transfers, valid until January 1, 2019 (excluding certain dates in November).
carrier.co.uk

2 AL MAHA, DUBAI DESERT
Wow factor: Arabian elegance.

The lowdown: It's all about Arabian sheikh chic at this desert camp, designed in the style of an old fortress and made up of Bedouin-style tents dotted across the sand, each with its own private pool.

Set within the Dubai Desert Conservation Area, it's ultra-serene, with a host of desert activities on offer, from dune driving and camel trekking to archery and falconry.

Inside the camp it's just as inspiring, with an eclectic mix of Bedouin antiques, brass tables and statement carpets, and the food is pleasingly local – think regional delicacies dished up on the veranda against a backdrop of desert vistas.

Book it: Three nights' full-board in a Bedouin Suite with Gold Medal costs from £1,299, with KLM flights from Heathrow. Valid for travel May 22-June 23.
goldmedal.co.uk

3 WALDORF ASTORIA RAS AL KHAIMAH
Wow factor: The Royal Suite.

The lowdown: An 18-hole golf course, 350-metre private beach, decent selection of restaurants and opulent spa complete with flotation bed give this Waldorf Astoria property some serious welly. Add in one of the grandest lobbies you'll ever see – all calligraphy artwork, Arabic-script

walls, gold-coloured marble floors and eye-popping grand pillars – and you have something rather special.

But the best part is the King Royal Suite, a 270sq m slice of luxury which features two bedrooms alongside its own VIP lift, private spa access and wrap-around balcony.

The location isn't bad either, with desert safaris and other off-road activities on hand to keep fidgety types occupied.
Book it: Room rates with breakfast start at £224 a night.
waldorfastoria.com

4 SIX SENSES ZIGHY BAY, OMAN
Wow factor: The experiences.

The lowdown: If arriving James Bond-style is your clients' thing, suggest Six Senses Zighy Bay, where guests can paraglide down into the hotel. For a (slightly) less extravagant arrival, they can take a speedboat trip from the port, or wind down scenic, hilly roads with views over the bay.

Other experiences include a private dhow cruise, mountain biking, rock climbing, scuba diving and a 4x4 expedition to the village of Sabatyn, where ancient farmhouses meet stone towers and historic petroglyphs.

It's all set between the sandy beach of Zighy Bay and the mountains, offering the best of both worlds, alongside a private marina, hilltop restaurant and all the spa glory you'd expect from a serenity-loving Six Senses outpost.

FAST FACT
ME by Meliá Dubai is set to open at the end of 2018 in the late Zaha Hadid's ultra-modern building. The Opus

Book it: If Only offers five nights' B&B in a Pool Villa at Zighy Bay from £1,499, including Emirates flights from Gatwick to Dubai and private transfers to the hotel, valid for stays from May 11-23.
agents.ifonly.net

5 JUMEIRAH ZABEEL SARAY, DUBAI
Wow factor: The enormous spa and 59-metre infinity pool.

The lowdown: There are spas, and then there's the Talise Ottoman, an award-winning, 8,000sq m space comprising 42 treatment rooms, saunas and snow rooms, two thalassotherapy pools and its opulent centrepiece, the Turkish hammam, embellished with elegant mosaics.

It's not the hotel's only draw. Just as impressive is its infinity pool, a stretch of blue blending into the sea beyond, and its smattering of restaurants and bars, which span funky-looking Voda Bar to Italian-inspired Plaj.

"This hotel is the height of opulence," says Tricia Birmingham, senior product manager for the Middle East and Indian Ocean at Travel 2. "It's also a great choice for families, with an enormous kids' club, mini water park, climbing wall, gaming stations and more."

There's a whopping choice of cuisines and, for added selling power, it's worth noting that guests who book half-board can dine at other Jumeirah properties at no extra cost.

➔ **Book it:** Three nights' half-board in a Superior Room costs from £639 with Travel 2, valid for stays May 13-June 12, with KLM flights from Heathrow.
travel2.com

6 ANANTARA AL JABAL AL AKHDAR, OMAN
Wow factor: The mountain setting.

The lowdown: When it comes to stop-in-your-tracks scenery, nothing beats this place. Perched on the edge of a canyon 2,000m above sea level – making it the highest five-star in the Middle East – it offers breathtaking views over the Hajar Mountains.

Those looking to make the most of its unique setting can opt for a private dinner at Diana's Point, a mountain-edge platform named after the princess, who visited in 1986, or head out for a hike with photo opportunities ranging from cascading waterfalls to colourful indigenous plants.

But it's the Canyon View Villas that give this place its greatest appeal, according to Nikki Hain, Middle East product manager at Premier Holidays. "Each features a private plunge pool which gives

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Each villa's plunge pool gives the illusion of dropping right off the side of the canyon – a real wow factor

the illusion of dropping right off the side of the canyon,” she says. “That was the absolute wow factor for me.”

Book it: Premier Holidays offers three nights at Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar from £675, including half-board and private transfers from Muscat, valid for travel May 16-June 21.

trade.premierholidays.co.uk



7 EMIRATES PALACE, ABU DHABI
Wow factor: The design.
The lowdown: Few hotels

in the world can make your jaw drop quite as dramatically as this palatial masterpiece, where Swarovski crystal-encrusted door handles, Rolex clock faces and dancing water fountains meet a marble-domed lobby bedecked with colourful palm trees.

Its exterior is no less impressive, with Arabian-style architecture and perfectly manicured grounds telling passers-by this is no wilting flower. It's not just about the appearance: a sweeping activity programme spanning camel riding to yoga classes, alongside two pools and a kids' club, make it a hit with families, while its spa, marina, beachside location and 14 restaurants bring couples flocking too.

Book it: Kuoni offers three nights' half-board in a Coral Room at Emirates Palace, with BA flights from Heathrow and transfers, from £849 per person, based on two adults sharing in September.
kuoni.co.uk

sail-shaped behemoth, which soars 321m into the sky, making it the third-tallest hotel in the world. Eclectic cocktails are served up with panoramic views over the glittering Gulf at its futuristic Skyview Bar, while chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royces and helicopters are on hand for those wanting to arrive or depart in style. Guests can even hire a Ferrari or Lamborghini to whizz around town.

Those wanting to stay closer to earth (physically, at least) can sunbathe on the terrace, which juts out into the jade-coloured sea and boasts a pool, restaurant and beach alongside private cabanas. Or head to Nathan Outlaw at Al Mahara, one of the city's most-acclaimed seafood restaurants, themed on the underwater world.

It doesn't disappoint on the things-to-do front either, with Wild Wadi water park right on the doorstep and a string of other activities on hand. The only downside is the price tag, but you pay for what you get, right?

Book it: Caribtours offers five nights at Burj Al Arab from £3,115 per person, based on two adults sharing and including breakfast, return scheduled flights, private transfers and lounge passes.

caribtours.co.uk

8 BURJ AL ARAB, DUBAI
Wow factor: The views.
The lowdown: No list would be complete without this show-stopping,



ABOVE:
Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar, Oman

LEFT:
Nathan Outlaw at Al Mahara in the Burj Al Arab, Dubai