

Arabian sights



Soup up a city break by adding on an adventure beyond the city limits, says **Laura French**

With so much focus on just a few short-haul favourites over the past few months, the Middle East might have fallen off the radar a little.

But that's all about to change as the United Arab Emirates, along with Qatar and Bahrain, have become the first countries in the region to be added to the government's travel corridor list. Although restrictions on travel from the UK still apply, it's a good sign that once lockdown is lifted and travel can resume, there's still time to squeeze in a winter-sun escape.

And why stop at a city break? From rock-climbing in the mountains to dune-bashing in the desert, kayaking through the mangroves to flying along the tracks at Ferrari World, there are plenty of ways to extend a city stay.

DUBAI: CITY + DESERT

With its soaring skyscrapers, sprawling entertainment complexes and glitzy beaches, Dubai needs little preface – from whizzing to the top of the Burj Khalifa to browsing the souks at Dubai Creek, clients aren't short of things to do. No visit would be complete without a trip into the desert, however.

For those wanting more than just a day trip, Gold Medal recommends the Bab Al Shams Desert Resort & Spa, where camel rides and 4x4 dune drives meet fat biking, falconry, archery and a host of other activities to keep all ages entertained.

Book it: Gold Medal offers three nights in a Club Room City View at the Grand Hyatt Dubai and three nights' half-board in a Superior Room at Bab Al Shams Desert Resort & Spa from £959, including flights from Heathrow on September 2, 2021. goldmedal.co.uk

ABU DHABI: CITY + FAMILY

From the dripping-in-gold Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque to the modern, silver-domed Louvre, Abu Dhabi is anything but understated, and there's a host of sights to explore. But for families wanting to break up the educational visits with adrenaline-fuelled thrills, Premier Holidays suggests pairing a stay in the centre with a few nights on Yas Island.

"Kids can meet their favourite characters at Warner Bros World, plunge down the chutes at Yas Waterworld and experience the world's fastest rollercoaster at Ferrari World – then end the day with a wander along the marina for stunning views over the Formula One circuit," says Nikki Hain, product manager for the Middle East. For an extra hook, Ferrari World has just added a new zipline and child-friendly Family Zone.

Book it: Premier Holidays offers three nights at Beach Rotana Abu Dhabi and two at Yas Island Rotana from £2,699, based on two adults and one child sharing all-inclusive, with flights from Heathrow on May 2, 2021. premierholidays.co.uk

DESTINATIONS

MIDDLE EAST | CITY ADD-ONS



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Zipline at Ferrari World, Abu Dhabi; Muscat, Oman; Jerusalem; Al Zorah Nature Reserve, Ajman

PICTURES: Shutterstock; Joanna Skladanek; Abercrombie & Kent



OMAN: CITY + MOUNTAINS

Billowing desert dunes, dramatic river gorges, red-rock canyons and crumbling mountain villages – for a taste of traditional Arabia, look to Oman. Modern capital Muscat offers plenty to lure visitors, from the chandelier-bedecked Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque to the frenetic Muttrah Souk, where ribbons of incense swirl above rows of spices and gold.

But for those wanting to tag on an adventure, pair it with a stay in the Al Hajar Mountains. Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort is perched on a mountainside and offers a host of activities from hiking and mountain biking to archery and yoga, plus a via ferrata route that has guests climbing, abseiling and ziplining their way across the plunging canyon edge.

Book it: Carrier offers a 10-night trip from £3,660 including two nights at Kempinski Muscat, five at Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar and three at The Chedi Muscat, with breakfast and flights from Heathrow, departing November 18, 2021. carrier.co.uk

AJMAN: CITY + WILDLIFE

For clients keen to go somewhere different, look to the UAE's smaller emirates. In Ajman, city highlights include the Corniche – lined with boutiques, cafes and atmospheric souks – and the 18th-century Ajman Fort, now a museum housing centuries-old weapons and other artefacts.

Yet there's plenty of life beyond the city, from hiking in the Hajar Mountains to camel riding in the desert. For an especially memorable trip, suggest kayaking in the mangrove wetlands of the Al Zorah Nature Reserve,



NIKKI HAIN

Middle East product manager, Premier Holidays

"The addition of the UAE to the travel corridor list is very exciting as it not only reopens the winter-sun market for these areas but also opens alternative routes to the Maldives and Seychelles for quarantine-free winter holidays. Interest in the Middle East was already high, with some very attractive price points out there.

"As always, Dubai takes the lion's share but we have noticed a shift over the last couple of years as clients seek a more authentic Arabian experience in the other emirates or Oman. More clients seem to want to move around the UAE now, including overnights in the deserts. It's so easy to get from one emirate to another; Abu Dhabi is less than an hour by car from Dubai, and Fujairah, at the base of the stunning Hajar Mountains, is only 90 minutes away. Agents should highlight that a holiday in this region can often be cheaper than in the Med."

where 58 species of birds nestle among the creeks and pink flamingos stand in the shallows.

Book it: Emirates Holidays offers five nights' B&B at the five-star, beachfront Fairmont Ajman from £623, based on two sharing a Fairmont View Room and including Emirates flights from Heathrow in May 2021. Quest for Adventure offers mangrove kayaking trips from £36. emiratesholidays.com

ISRAEL: CITY + HISTORY

Hipster hangouts, ancient religious sites, sand dunes and Red Sea coastal resorts – Israel is full of contrasts. And nowhere is that more evident than when you hop from modern Tel Aviv, with its street food markets, trendy coffee shops and cocktail bars, to Jerusalem, where pilgrims pray at the Western Wall and hectic bazaars line cobbled alleys. Abercrombie & Kent combines both in an eight-day trip, adding visits to the ancient cities of Caesara, Bet She'an, Acre and Nazareth.

Book it: Abercrombie & Kent's Classic Israel trip costs from £4,710 for eight days, including flights. abercrombiekent.co.uk