

FEEL-GOOD  
FACTOR

*From sustainable design to wildlife conservation and local community support, the eco credentials of these hotels ensure a guilt-free stay, without compromising on comfort*

WORDS: PAMELA WILKES



## ALILA JABAL AKHDAR, OMAN

With panoramic views of rugged mountains and steep gorges from Oman's highest peak, the air scented by terraces of pink damask roses, Alila Jabal Akhdar offers an escape from modern life. A gateway to the region's rich history and cultural heritage, the resort is well-placed for visiting sights including Nizwa, Jabreen Castle and UNESCO World Heritage site Bahla Fort. Yet you don't have to venture far to begin to discover the area's ancient roots, as the property has been designed in harmony with its environment, according to Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) principles. Inspired by Oman's historic forts, the design blends traditional construction techniques using local stone with contemporary architecture. Authentic Omani hues, design features and décor – such as copper ornaments, and handmade pottery from Bahla – reflect the region's ethnic heritage. In the grounds, the hotel has constructed *aflaj* water systems, a traditional method of irrigation used in the region for 5,000 years, minimising the ecological impact on the surrounding environment.

**Make the most of it:** The hotel also embraces sustainability by encouraging guests to experience the location through its cuisine, tradition and daily life, supporting local communities in its "leisure concierge" activity programmes. This includes nature walks, wadi and village tours, mountain biking, exploring ancient donkey trails, cultural excursions, cookery classes and food trails.

*Doubles from AED 944; 00968-2534 4200, alilahotels.com*

## AL MAHA, A LUXURY COLLECTION DESERT RESORT &amp; SPA, DUBAI

Sheltered in a lush oasis at the heart of the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, amid rolling dunes and open skies, this eco-luxury resort strikes the perfect balance between its local environment and creature comforts. In addition to offering fine dining on the dunes and indulgences at the Timeless Spa, the hotel is dedicated to the conservation of its natural environment and the area's Bedouin heritage, reflected in its design and preserved through its collection of over 2,000 artefacts and antiquities. The Reserve was created around the property, establishing 75 species of native plants and reintroducing indigenous gazelles to the area; it's also home to the Arabian Oryx, the population of which has quadrupled since the Reserve was established. Several measures have been adopted to reduce the resort's environmental impact, such as re-using cooking oil as bio-diesel, reducing energy and water consumption, and using battery-powered vehicles, but the main focus is on the conservation of local flora and fauna.

**Make the most of it:** The setting provides guests the opportunity to interact with the environment, watching wildlife from their suite's private infinity pool or deck, or joining the programme of complimentary daily activities, from horse riding and guided nature walks to falconry, dune drives and camel trekking.

*Doubles from AED 2,816; 00971-4-832 9900, al-maha.com*

## MÖVENPICK RESORT AND SPA DEAD SEA, JORDAN

Living the high life at the lowest point on Earth, this coastal resort styled as an Arabic village is known for its 20-acre garden, private beach and expansive Zara Spa, where treatments harness the therapeutic benefits of the Dead Sea. More hidden benefits come via the hotel's environmental policies and practices. The use of local stone and indigenous plants to create an aesthetically and ecologically harmonious space and an overarching focus on social, environmental and employer sustainability explains why the property was the first EMAS-certified hotel in the Middle East. Solar-charged electric cars power the in-resort transportation, and a Sewage Treatment Plan has been developed for irrigation and outdoor cleaning using treated waste water. Thinking green is evident throughout, from reduced energy and

water consumption by using solar panels to water savers on shower heads and taps, from LED lighting to recycled waste. Employing over 250 area locals and working closely with regional conservation groups, the resort has established eco-tourism and handicraft businesses, supporting indigenous suppliers and producers, and bringing employment to local communities, thus providing alternative revenue streams to reduce hunting and overgrazing in the surrounding habitats. **Make the most of it:** The concierge books a number of excursions to visit local communities, where guests can meet artisans and sample authentically Jordanian-made crafts, and even take lessons.

Doubles from AED 415; 00962-5-356 1111, [movenpick.com](http://movenpick.com)

#### FEYNAN ECOLODGE, JORDAN

Off-the-grid travel doesn't usually conjure up images of luxury experiences, but Feynan Ecolodge, the flagship property of Amman-based EcoHotels, challenges those pre-conceived ideas. Feynan is, indeed, remote, generating its own electricity through photovoltaic solar panels and heating water for guests and for the hotel's kitchens and laundry via an extensive solar heating system. Water is sourced from a local spring near Wadi Dana, consumption is carefully controlled and drinking water is served in locally produced clay jars. Waste is recycled or composted and turned into organic fertilizer. Yet, lit by candlelight and disconnected from modern trappings, the resort allows you the luxury of reconnecting with a simpler life; slowing down to read a novel and sip sweet tea in the library lounge or to star-gaze from the panoramic rooftop terrace. The location of the 26-room lodge provides guests with the opportunity to explore local archaeological sites and the wilderness of the Dana Biosphere Reserve, home to over 800 plant varieties and 449 species of animals and birds, some endangered.

**Make the most of it:** Join the daily schedule of activities – hiking, biking, cultural tours and cookery classes – or simply enjoy the Bedouin hospitality of the local staff, knowing that the hotel is contributing to local economies and is committed to sustainable travel.

Doubles from AED 675; 00962-6-464 5580, [ecohotels.me](http://ecohotels.me)

#### PARK HYATT ABU DHABI HOTEL & VILLAS

Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Beach is a natural habitat for coastal dune vegetation. This sensitive ecosystem, vital for the emirate's native flora and fauna and providing natural coastal defences, has been safeguarded by the creation of the Saadiyat Dune Protection Zone, giving access to the beach via specially designed boardwalks. Home to gazelles, birds, reptiles and small mammals, the Protection Zone is also a nesting site for the critically endangered Hawksbill turtle. The coastal waters off Saadiyat Island are crucial for native species including Indo-Pacific humpback and bottlenose dolphins, green turtles, stingrays and blacktip sharks. This 8km stretch of protected white sand beach is the setting for the contemporary Park Hyatt Abu Dhabi Hotel & Villas: a low-rise urban resort, it is carefully integrated into its natural surroundings and the design gives a strong sense of place, reflecting the arts and culture of the Middle East. The resort is working toward its LEED silver certification and, inspired by its location, is developing education programmes around the local habitat.

**Make the most of it:** Guests can join the resort's resident marine biologist for organised wildlife talks and beach



#### LIT BY CANDLELIGHT AND DISCONNECTED FROM MODERN TRAPPINGS, THE RESORT ALLOWS YOU THE LUXURY OF RECONNECTING WITH A SIMPLER LIFE

walks, or on boat tours through the mangroves or in Dolphin Bay, to learn about the marine ecosystems of the UAE.

Doubles from AED 725; 00971-2-407 1234, [abudhabi.park.hyatt.com](http://abudhabi.park.hyatt.com)

#### EASTERN MANGROVES HOTEL & SPA BY ANANTARA, ABU DHABI

Located on the shore of Abu Dhabi's protected Eastern Mangroves District, this resort feels like a secluded sanctuary yet is just 10 minutes from the heart of the capital. Covering thousands of hectares along the UAE coast, mangroves are a critical part of the region's ecosystem, and are home to turtles, snappers, grunt fish, sea bream, crustaceans and 60 species of birds. The mangroves protect coastal shorelines from erosion, provide sheltered areas for native fish to breed, act as carbon sinks and are destinations for migratory birdlife including flamingos. Committed to creating luxury travel experiences that also benefit the environment and local communities, and resolving to reduce water and energy consumption and waste, Anantara's sustainable management projects include its global 365 Days of Good Deeds programme, which has successfully undertaken mangrove planting in the UAE.

**Make the most of it:** The resort's unique location and its on-

Stand-up paddleboarding at Eastern Mangroves Hotel & Spa by Anantara.  
**Opposite from top left:** A staff member prepares tea at Feynan Ecolodge; Jumeirah Al Naseem has a turtle rehabilitation sanctuary; Al Maha is set in a desert reserve



site marina make it an ideal base for sailing or exploring the canals of mangroves by kayak or stand-up paddleboard.

Doubles from AED 450; 00971-2-656 1000, [abu-dhabi.anantara.com](http://abu-dhabi.anantara.com)

#### JUMEIRAH AL NASEEM, DUBAI

Based at Burj Al Arab Jumeirah and Madinat Jumeirah and run in collaboration with Dubai's Wildlife Protection Office, the Dubai Turtle Rehabilitation Project (DTRP) is the only project of its kind in the Middle East. Since it began in 2004, the project has overseen the release of over 560 rescued sea turtles back into the waters around Dubai. Globally, every species of marine turtle is listed as either vulnerable to extinction, endangered or critically endangered – the Hawksbill turtle, native to this region, is critically endangered with only about 8,000 nesting females remaining worldwide. The DTRP, working with the Jumeirah Group, aims to rescue, rehabilitate and release back into the wild any sea turtles that are found sick or injured throughout the region, monitor the success of rehabilitation through satellite tracking and educate local children and international guests about sea turtles and their habitats. Rescued turtles, many of which are treated by the team at the Burj Al Arab Aquarium, are transferred to the Turtle Rehabilitation Sanctuary at Jumeirah Al Naseem, the newest property in the Madinat Jumeirah complex, where the purpose-built sea-fed lagoon enables staff to monitor the animals prior to their release.

**Make the most of it:** The rehabilitation enclosure is open to the public daily, with scheduled sessions where children can feed the turtles each week.

Doubles from AED 1,340; 00971-4-366 8888, [jumeirah.com](http://jumeirah.com)