

WANDERLUST



Watercourt, The Chedi

The Chedi, Muscat

Desert Nights Camp

The Tale of the Camel's Tump

It is late afternoon when we arrive at Wahiba Sands; the desert has a 22-carat glow, like the jewellery in the Dubai gold souk. We've been booked onto a sunset camel ride so there is hardly time to deposit bags in rooms before we ourselves are deposited onto the backs of two 'ships of the desert' and led out across the sand. Distance in the desert is deceptive; the dunes we're heading for don't seem to be getting any closer and our limbs, unaccustomed to straddling camels, are protesting. Many of the camels used in the high stakes races in the UAE are trained in Oman and I have a renewed respect for the young boys we passed earlier, exercising their steeds at high speed. It feels as if we've been on our camels an awfully long time. "Do you think this is what they mean by Camelot?" says Sonja. "I don't know, but if I were a King Arthur I'd give my kingdom for a jeep right now", I say waving to two amused Bedouins who have stopped in their battered 4WD to entertain themselves watching our inelegant progress. Rescue comes in the form of Ali who arrives in a spin of wheels and sand to speed us the rest of the way by Land Rover because "the sun has its own time and will not wait."

The Tale of the Shimmering Sand

From the top of the dune the desert stretches out in undulating waves as far as the eye can see. A warm wind

billows my scarf like a sail. The sky is purple, and the sand is a deep bronze as the light fades. Far below us the pointy white roofs of our camp looking like shells on a beach. We're expecting a gentle descent but suddenly Ali tips the land rover straight over the edge and we're on an exhilarating rollercoaster ride down the dune in a sea of sliding sand. Desert Nights is a new deluxe camp near Al Wasil with air-conditioned tent-roofed cabins corralled by a low fort-like wall. It is not quite five star but it is certainly better than pitching your own. Guests mingle in a central facilities block where local Bedouins play traditional music as the stars crowd the desert sky. An arabesque archway separates my bedroom from a small sitting area, a table is piled with dates and sweet spiced halwa. I share my tiled shower with a black scorpion, not dangerous but disconcertingly large – at least I know I'm really in the desert.

The Tale of the Magic Flight

I step off the edge of the mountain into mid-air. Miraculously I don't fall, I could be on a magic carpet as I fly over jagged rocks, a tiny fishing village and berber-blue sea. Over 2,000m below me is Six Senses Hideaway Zighy Bay, and I'm experiencing the resort's optional check-in by tandem paraglider; the ultimate way to make an entrance. The unconventional check-in is just one of the elements that make this resort special. Another is its location, surrounded by barren mountains on a secluded half-moon ▶