



MIDDLE EAST

Tailor-make the chill and thrill factor to create the perfect Oman holiday, says Joanna Booth



PICTURES: SIX SENSES ZIGHY BAY



OMAN: PAUSE AND PLAY



It's no surprise that a destination can cater to more or less active holidaymakers – few spots tie guests to their sunloungers, or force them up at dawn for a trek, for that matter.

But hotels often veer one way or the other – leaving you to choose between waterslides or an infinity pool, in effect.

Oman's hotels are different. Almost all of them somehow manage not only to offer both relaxation and action, but also to do each of them well. This means it's a particular hit for couples or families who face

internal strife when it comes to the pace of a holiday – here, one member can chill while another is thrilled.

● SIX SENSES ZIGHY BAY

This luxury 82-villa resort sits in its own bay in the Musandam Peninsula, which is cut off from the rest of Oman by the UAE.

Play: It's rare that the airport transfer becomes one of a hotel's major selling points. But ▶

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Desert Nights Camp



Alila Jabal Akhdar



Chi spa at Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah



Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah



Desert Nights Camp

TOP TIP
Premier Holidays offers an incentive of between £25 and £150 per Oman booking, dependent on value

then Six Senses Ziggy Bay is not your average hotel. There are three ways to arrive, and only if your client is the very scariest of cats should you consider recommending the jeep transfer. The other two are very James Bond: they can arrive by speedboat, or paraglide in from a mountain ridge above the hotel. This is, quite literally, just the start of the experience. The thrills can continue, with microlight flights over the Musandam Peninsula, mountain biking, rock-climbing, scuba-diving, sea-kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding, fishing and treks long and short.

Pause: They'd rather relax? The all-villa resort takes seclusion to the nth degree: set in its own bay, miles from anywhere, all villas are within their own courtyards, so you can exist within a little bubble of your bedroom, living area and private pool should you so wish. If they can bear to drag themselves beyond those four walls, guests benefit from the huge Six Senses spa, with pampering massage and facial treatments alongside more extensive yoga and detox programmes. Then there's the tremendous effort of a sunset

cruise or dinner at Sense on the Edge, the signature restaurant set on the mountain above the hotel, with sweeping views over the bay. **Book it:** Travel 2 offers five nights with breakfast in a pool villa from £1,549, including flights from London, based on travel in September.

travel2.com

● SHANGRI-LA'S BARR AL JISSAH

This three-hotel resort is located a couple of miles down the coast from Muscat. Six-star Al Husn overlooks five-star properties Al Bandar and Al Waha. **Play:** Al Waha means 'the oasis' and suits Oman's most family-friendly hotel. For starters there's the Splashpad aqua play area, a lazy river and a network of pools. Then there's the Cool Zone

Kids Club that will give frazzled parents the same sense of relief as water in the desert. There's an Adventure Zone with a climbing wall, drop slides and PS3, and a programme of daily activities from face painting to movie time. Parents can get active too, with regular yoga and spin classes and daily beach volleyball for over-16s. Two-hour snorkelling trips run every day, and scuba diving is on offer.

Pause: Al Husn, or 'the castle', is the spot for seclusion with a side-order of superiority – you're perched on a cliff above the rest of the resort. Butlers materialise poolside with cool boxes of chilled drinks, and golf carts whisk you to the private beach or to board one of the daily dolphin-watching cruises. They can also drop you off at the labyrinthine Chi spa. When it comes to cuisine, guests can hit the daily complimentary afternoon tea – surely the definition of having your cake and eating it too.

Book it: Gold Medal offers six nights with breakfast at Al Waha from £699 or five nights with breakfast at Al Husn from £999, both including Gatwick flights with Turkish Airlines and transfers. goldmedal.co.uk

● ALILA JABAL AKHDAR

A two-hour drive from Muscat, 78-room Alila Jabal Akhdar overlooks a dramatic gorge in the Al Hajar mountain range. It's worth noting this hotel doesn't yet have a liquor licence, so it's good for detoxing clients.

Play: Guests are staying in a rugged, natural paradise. The hotel can organise half or full-day treks in the mountains or visits to a Damask rose farm or to the local Friday goat market in Nizwa, where they'll also see the famous fort and souk.

Pause: The Alila Spa uses age-old recipes and natural ingredients to make the products for its treatments, with therapists trained in physiology, massage and meditation. The hotel offers a Conscious Living course for those keen to really zen-out, or they could opt for a romantic starlight dinner or a dip in the heated outdoor infinity pool instead.

Book it: Kuoni offers five nights with breakfast in a mountain-view room from £1,454, including Oman Air flights from Heathrow and transfers. The price is based on a September departure. kuoni.co.uk

● DESERT NIGHTS CAMP

Set in the heart of Wahiba Sands, Desert Nights Camp is Oman's most luxurious desert tented camp with 26 tented suites.

Play: If you can do it on sand, you can do it here – dune bashing in jeeps or on quad bikes, trekking, camel riding or even sliding down dunes at speed as you sand-board. Other activities include visits to wadis, forts and souks, and you can even drop in on a Bedouin family to see how desert-dwellers live.

Pause: There's no silence like that of the desert, and once the oud player has packed away his instrument and the last reveller has left the bar, quiet descends. Clients can either get an unbroken night's sleep, or make the most of the dark skies and take the resort's telescope out for some star-gazing. Even the laziest visitor will want to enjoy a pre-dinner scramble up a dune to watch the sunset – a paint-catalogue range of tones from apricot through to lilac.

Book it: Premier Holidays offers four nights' half-board from £1,175, including BA flights and private transfers, for travel between August 11 and September 30. trade.premierholidays.co.uk

ASK AN EXPERT

Michael Fleetwood, Middle East product manager, Cox & Kings

"For clients staying on the Musandam Peninsula, suggest a full-day dhow cruise, where the turquoise waters contrast with the white limestone cliffs and there's the chance to explore small fishing villages. There will be stops for swimming and snorkelling to explore the fantastic variety of colourful fish. Along the way there is also a possibility of seeing dolphins racing alongside the dhow. A barbeque lunch is served on board.

For those staying in Muscat, why not suggest an evening trip to see giant turtles laying their eggs? Your guests will be driven for around an hour to the viewing beaches at Ras Al Hadd where a ranger will take groups onto the beach."

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