

WIN! A NIGHT'S STAY AT GROSVENOR HOUSE WIN! DINNER AT ST REGIS

OK!

MIDDLE EAST

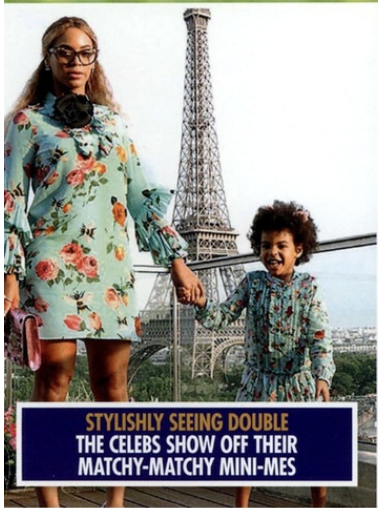
FIRST FOR CELEBRITY NEWS

ISSUE 189 • AUGUST 24 2016 • WEEKLY

AN ITP CONSUMER PUBLICATION
AUGUST 11 - 24 2016
VOLUME 5, ISSUE 189



MILEY MARRIED
INSIDE HER PLANS
FOR TWO SMALL
BUT STAR-STUDED
WEDDINGS



STYLISHLY SEEING DOUBLE
THE CELEBS SHOW OFF THEIR
MATCHY-MATCHY MINI-MES



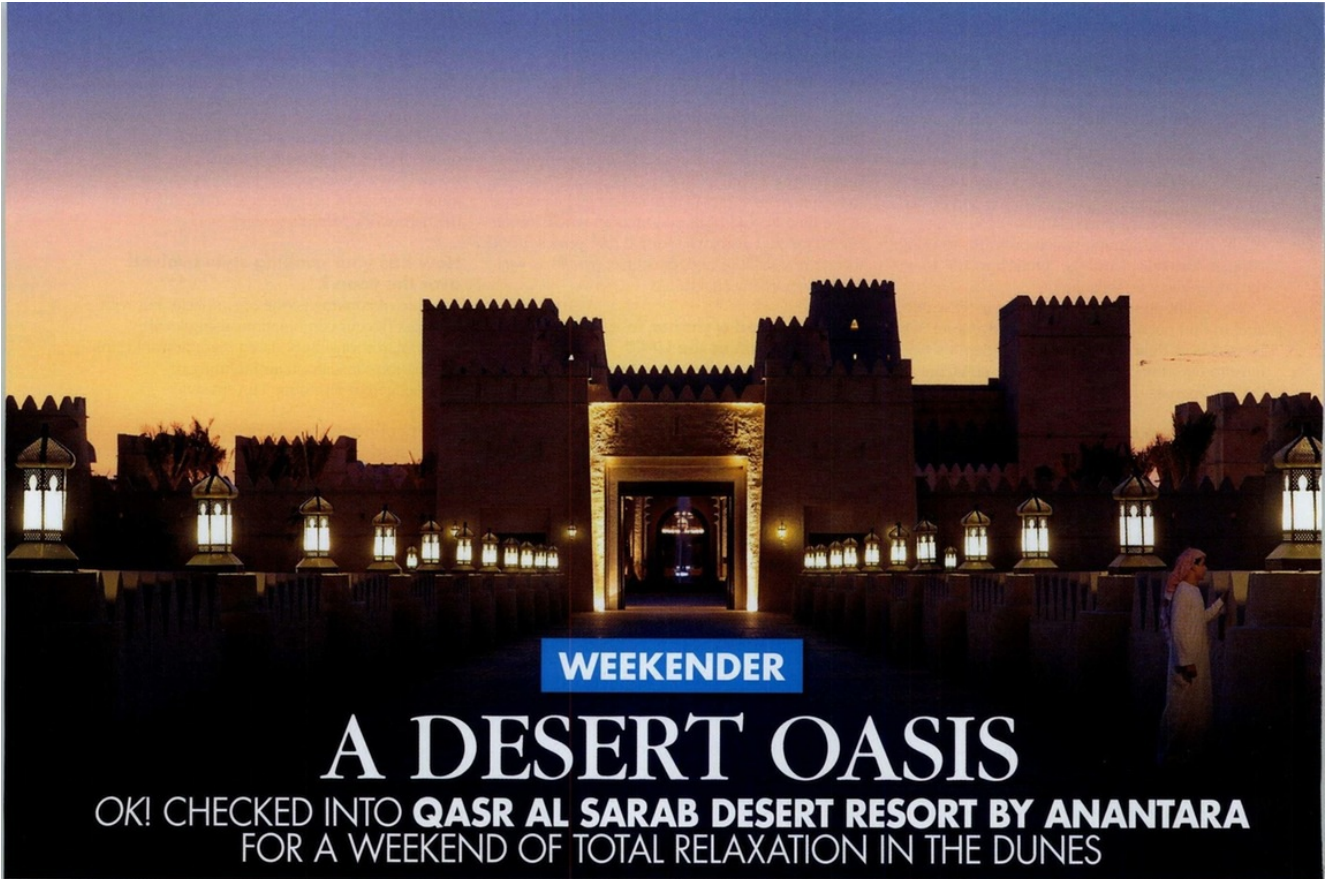
THE DRAMA QUEEN RETURNS
A BROKEN ENGAGEMENT, A FAKE PREGNANCY
& AN INSTAGRAM MELTDOWN - LINDSAY
LOHAN'S BACK TO HER BAD OLD WAYS



WHO WILL MARRY HARRY?

WHY THE PRINCE
KEEPS PICKING THE
WRONG WOMEN

**PLUS: PRINCESS BEATRICE IN
LOVE SPLIT KELLY OSBOURNE
SUED BY DAD'S MISTRESS ABU
DHABI'S DREAM DESERT RETREAT**



WEEKENDER

A DESERT OASIS

OK! CHECKED INTO **QASR AL SARAB DESERT RESORT BY ANANTARA** FOR A WEEKEND OF TOTAL RELAXATION IN THE DUNES

We're heading into the desert for the weekend,' we told our friends, to which we were quickly greeted with a chorus of, 'It's 50°C, are you mad?' But we were far from it, we were venturing to Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara, a luxury five-star retreat set amongst the endless, rolling dunes of Abu Dhabi's Empty Quarter, or Rub al Khali desert. Just three hours from Dubai Marina, we were able to totally check out of reality and into a blissful desert retreat, right in the middle of the UAE's long, hot summer.

A PALACE FIT FOR ROYALTY

We arrived at Qasr Al Sarab on a Thursday evening and after a long but easy drive we were at our oasis for the weekend. As we drove over the final dune the hotel greeted us, glowing against the desert backdrop. We were shown into the palatial lobby and greeted the traditional Arabian way, with delicious dates, as we checked in.

It was then time to be shown to our room which was a short alfresco walk from the lobby. Now, as it was August in Abu Dhabi there's no denying that it was hot, despite being almost 9pm, but the hotel's very attentive concierge were more than happy to shuttle us around by buggy to help us beat the heat. Plus, it was dry, so infinitely more manageable than a humid evening. As we stepped into our room, we were instantly blown away by our enormous private terrace – somewhere we mentally made a note to enjoy a cool mocktail the following evening – and the spacious room, complete with a bathtub the size of a small swimming pool and uninterrupted views of the stunning rolling dunes.

It was then time for dinner – we had built up quite the appetite on the drive! A buggy arrived to chauffeur us over to Ghadeer restaurant. The international menu had a Mediterranean focus, with pastas and risottos to be enjoyed, as well as hearty grilled dishes. To begin we savoured the beef carpaccio and followed it up with cooked-to-perfection prawns, fresh from the grill. Ghadeer overlooked the glittering turquoise swimming pool, and we knew we'd be back the following day for lunch.

We then made our way up to Suhail's rooftop lounge for a digestif, before retreating to our room for the evening.

TAKE A DIP, IN THE DESERT

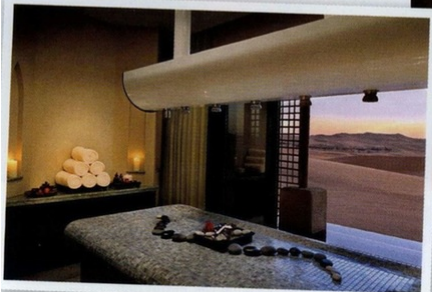
For our full day at the hotel we decided to dedicate it to the stunning freeform swimming pool. With sunshine butlers on hand to spray cooling rose water on our face, adjust the parasols to just the right tanning angle for our loungers and clean our sunglasses we felt extremely pampered all day. We alternated between taking cooling dips in the pool, reading on our lounge and sitting at the pool bar, where we enjoyed a few chilled drinks and even lunch, without even leaving the water – the Greek salad and steak sandwich both get the OK! seal of approval.



The inviting freeform swimming pool glitters against the sandy backdrop

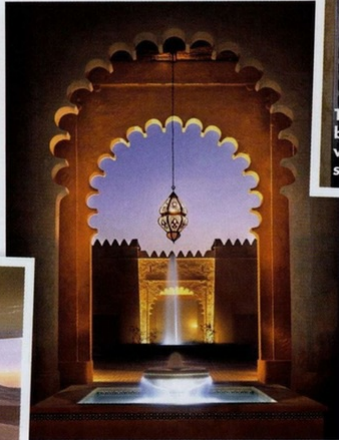


Below: OK! enjoyed a thrilling Dune Bashing ride in a 4x4 at sunset



AN ADRENALINE JUNKIE'S DESERT DRIVE

About an hour before sunset we tore ourselves away from the pool to embark upon a desert adventure, dune bashing in a 4x4. With a private guide, we were taken out into the Empty Quarter desert – known for having the highest dunes in the region – and enjoyed a thrilling drive over the towering sand. We stopped for a few perfect photo opportunities and to get up-close to some of the hotel's very friendly camels, as the sun quickly dropped behind the hills of sand. If there was a reason to return when the mercury drops a little, it's the desert activities that the hotel offers. During the cooler months you can experience desert horse rides, a falconry and saluki show, dune biking, desert walks, archery and more.

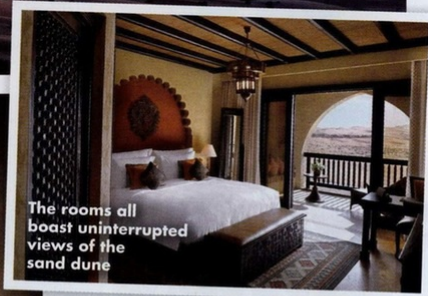


After about two hours on the road, we made our way back to the hotel to get ready for our dinner at the steakhouse, Suhail.

RAISE THE STEAKS

The culinary highlight of our weekend at Qasr Al Sarab had to be our dinner at Suhail. Primarily a steakhouse, the eatery also offers seafood and vegetarian dishes. We began our meal with crab cakes, while our guest enjoyed the pea soup – both of which were delicious; the crab cakes had a spicy kick and were absolutely packed full of juicy crab meat.

Our mains, however, were the main event. We ordered a 300g sirloin steak, while our guest went all out with a hearty Tomahawk steak. Choose our sides from a comprehensive selection, and we opted for truffle mashed potatoes, creamed spinach and mixed steamed vegetables. The meat was cooked to our exact preference and we finished the meal with a chocolate fondant – made to order – a wonderfully indulgent end to the meal.



The rooms all boast uninterrupted views of the sand dune



A TOUCH OF THAILAND

We began our final day at the hotel with a workout at the state-of-the-art gym, where we worked up an appetite for breakfast, which was served at Al Waha restaurant. And shortly after it was time for us to get a thorough pampering at the Anantara Spa.

The fact that Anantara is a Thai brand is never more clear at Qasr Al Sarab than it is at the spa where we were treated to a Traditional Thai Massage for 90 minutes. Shown into our treatment room, which dazzled us with desert views, we selected our choice of massage oils before we began. We opted for a hard massage, to relieve all of our body's tension – which it certainly did. After 90 minutes of long-overdue pampering we walked away from the spa, after a quick cooling visit to the ice room, walking on air. It was a brilliantly blissful end to our stunning weekend away in the desert. **OK!**

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT QASR AL SARAB DESERT RESORT BY ANANTARA, VISIT QASRAL SARAB.ANANTARA.COM
REVIEW BY FARAH ANDREWS