

CALL OF THE WILD

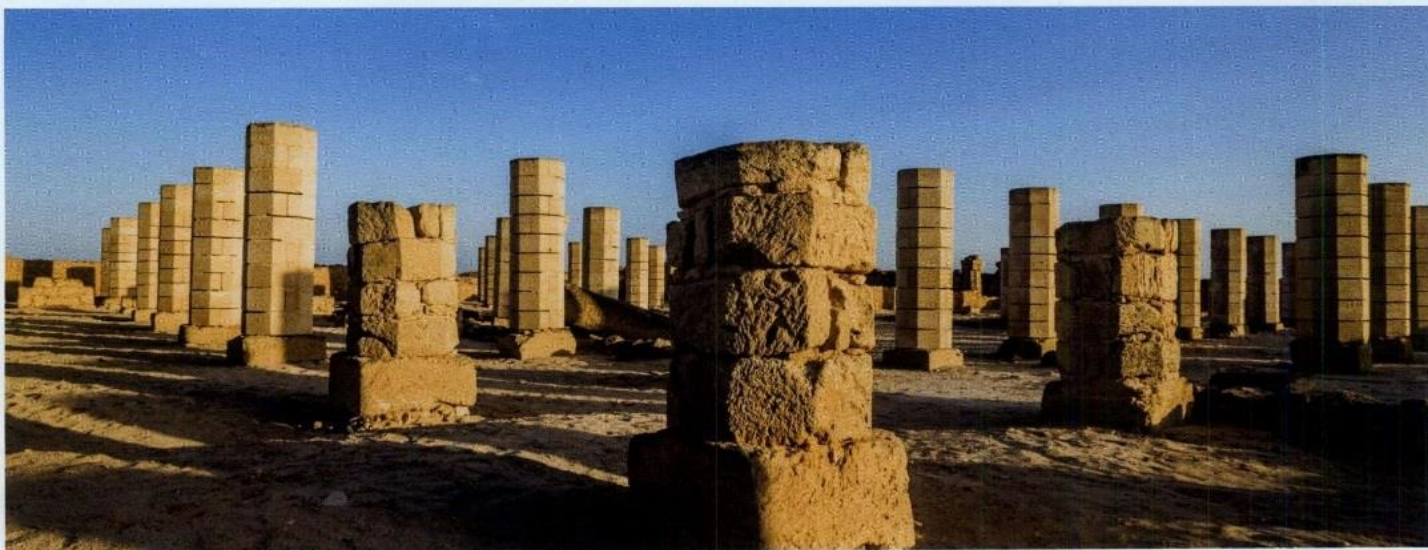
*There are desert escapes and then there's Salalah in Oman.
An exotic blend of lush foliage and arid beauty. We stayed
at Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara and experienced a
world away from the wider Gulf - bliss*



TRAVEL *Escapes*

It started off in true style. Business class, a lounge and ultimate comfort. We went off to Salalah via Dubai with Fly Dubai where we were pampered with sumptuous business class seating, wonderful food (we had prawn machboos, from a selection of four international dishes) and a Wifi connection that could easily rival the speed down at sea level! All in all, the start of our trip was smooth, easy and comfortable – the perfect way to prepare for a luxurious trip ahead.

As we touched down in Salalah, we were super impressed by the airport, it was modern and much bigger than we expected, they are clearly planning for the future, which is great to see. The moment we stepped off the plane, the Omani hospitality was on overdrive and made us feel so welcome. We've often been told that in the entire GCC, the Omanis are famously warm and hospitable and we can definitely attest to that – if not more.



"The beach was uninterrupted for as far as the eye could see"

As far as drives goes, the journey from the airport to the resort was seamless and beautiful. Salalah has so much greenery on offer, far more than we expected but also, a unique blend of lush foliage with arid beauty – something we are not always privileged with on our shores. There's a real natural vibe about it too, as if we were on a tropical island.

The resort, is a sight to behold. Situated in the heart of the perfume capital of Arabia, Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara is a playground of culture, history and adventure for inquisitive travellers, whilst empty white-sand beaches, shady palm trees and sun-kissed waters cater for those who wish to unwind. From historic forts and citadels, endless dunes and untouched beaches to soaring mountains, vibrant bazaars and lush coconut and banana plantations, this spellbinding Omani enclave oozes colourful stories intertwined with history and legend.

We were welcomed by our own dedicated butler who handled the

check in process in the villa. During the check in process itself we had a relaxing welcome foot soak which we were told is a Thai traditional welcome – not your everyday welcome, that's for sure, but it was a special touch nonetheless.

The resort's interiors boast traditional elements incorporating a communal seating area originally used to greet guests with Arabic coffee or tea, dressed in bright kilim fabrics and soft cushions. Recessed walls, once used to store supplies, are adorned with local antiques and artwork, with lanterns scattered throughout to create a peaceful ambiance.

The use of symmetry is also an important feature throughout the grounds with raised black-stone water features mimicking the ancient falaj irrigation system running towards important focal points, the ocean and the lagoon.

The stunning entrance arches embrace the beauty of Islamic





TRAVEL *Escapes*



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architecture to complement the natural landscape and the palm trees, imitating the curve of their graceful branches. The arch was designed for structural and functional purposes and is a key feature of this type of architecture, but it is now predominately used for decorative purposes. The arch features throughout the hotel, with the most spectacular examples found in the lobby and the spa, helping to create an authentic atmosphere.

That night, we indulged in a seafood buffet dinner at Sakalan – a mix of local and Asian flavours, adhering to the overall of the hotel. Sakalan, which translates to 'The Land of Frankincense' is an all-day dining restaurant, with open kitchens and deli counters serving an array of cuisines from near and far. Breakfast greets guests with lavish choice – freshly baked bread, croissants and homemade jams alongside pita, creamy hummus and shakshuka. For lunch and dinner, guests can enjoy dishes from around the world, fresh sushi and authentic Arabic to fiery Indian and contemporary Western, all set by the infinity pool.

The next morning, we took to a 10km run along the unending beach. We really appreciated the natural beauty of the coast where we saw so much wildlife. The beach was uninterrupted for as far as the eye could see. The hotel has no competing hotels either side, so it has a monopoly on the stretch that goes for miles and it makes it feel that much more exclusive.

Later that day, we took to a tour of the Land of Frankincense Museum and Al Baleed Archaeological Park with Salalah Guru. Located within a short distance from the resort, the 60 hectare UNESCO World Heritage Site features ruins of an ancient city which dates back to 2500 BC and was the centre of frankincense trade. Just inside the park is the Land of Frankincense Museum with a comprehensive view of the history and cultural heritage of Oman as well as maritime legacy across the centuries. It added a lot of flavour to our experience overall and was filled with interesting stories.

We closed the day with 30 minutes of yoga on the beach which calmed our mind and soul, against a gorgeous polychrome sunset. This was followed by Dining By Design on the beach. Surrounded by flickering candles, couples can enjoy a choice of connoisseur menus served by a personal chef and villa host in a secluded beach or garden setting for the ultimate dining à deux experience.

A day by the pool is always our fast track to unwinding, and of course, when an infinity pool is involved, life becomes that much more sweet. What's more, is this relaxing morning was followed by a trip to the spa – one that lasted many hours. Anantara Spa takes guests on a holistic journey to restore strength, beauty and balance to the body, mind and soul. Featuring five suites alongside separate male and female wet areas, relaxation areas, Thai massage suite and nail spa, and guests can experience a range of treatments in total privacy with the highly skilled therapists. Harnessing precious ingredients such as frankincense as well as bananas, coconuts and pomegranates from nearby plantations, each treatment has been designed to renew from tip to toe, whether it's a stimulating body polish, therapeutic massage, replenishing wrap, radiant facial or ancient Ayurvedic treatment.

In all, the Anantara experience in Salalah is nothing short of fantastic – from the breath-taking villas to the all-encompassing nature, this trip was faultless and we cannot recommend it enough.

For more information or reservations call: +968 23 228222