

CELEB HEAVEN!

OK! FOLLOWS IN SOME FAMOUS FOOTSTEPS IN STAR-STUDED DUBAI



Skyscrapers, celebrity visitors and souks await in the glittering city state of Dubai

While we shiver in the UK, the sandy shores of Dubai are currently bathed in warm sunshine. The Middle Eastern playground is a huge favourite with both British holidaymakers and *OK!*'s best-loved stars, all of whom are drawn to the city state's lavish hotels, top-notch restaurants, mega malls and desert adventures. *OK!*'s Lina Darton flew out to explore...

WHICH STARS WILL I SEE?

BFFs Selena Gomez, Gigi Hadid and Kendall Jenner have celebrated the past two New Year Eves in Dubai and have been photographed on camels in the desert and swimming in the sea. Mark Wright was in town last month with his pals and often visits with wife Michelle Keegan, footballer John Terry and his wife Toni have also been enjoying some Dubai downtime, while Denise Van Outen and her boyfriend Eddie Boxshall enjoyed a week in the UAE sunshine, before her former husband Lee Meade and their daughter Betsy flew out to join them. Abbey Clancy and Peter Crouch were in town over Easter to attend the Dubai World Cup, with newly



Enjoy calamari by the sea at Anantara The Palm's Beach House

single Millie Mackintosh also joining the fun, as she holidayed with a group of pals including her former boyfriend Hugo Taylor.

WHERE CAN I STAY?

OK! swapped the pouring London rain for the blue skies and glittering skyscrapers of Dubai, checking into the Anantara The Palm Dubai Resort & Spa, located on the man-made series of palm-shaped islands collectively called Palm Jumeirah. Both Peter Andre and *EastEnders* actress Rita Simons have stayed at this Thai-style hotel. The Anantara boasts 10,000sqm of pools, including three lagoon pools – *OK!*'s bedroom had direct access to one of them – that meander around the 293-room resort, as well as a beach-side infinity pool and the only over-water villas in Dubai.

OK! loved lunch at the hotel's Beach House, where we just had to try the calamari rings served in a giant cocktail glass. Our favourite eatery, though, was the super-stylish Mekong. Here, we felt like we'd been transported to Asia, with its rickshaw-style seating, paper lanterns and bird cages hanging from the ceiling and tempting Oriental cuisine served on Asian tableware.

WHERE CAN I RELAX?

Although there's an impressive spa at the Anantara, we opted for a complete change of scene and booked in for a massage at the Lime Spa



Chill out at the Lime Spa at the Per Aquum Desert Palm resort

at the Per Aquum Desert Palm, a boutique hotel set in a 150-acre polo estate, a 20-minute drive out of town. The six spa suites overlook the polo fields and *OK!* felt as if we were a million miles from downtown Dubai.



Michelle Keegan and Mark Wright are Dubai fans

WHAT MUST I DO?

A memorable way to see Dubai's skyscraper-studded skyline is by taking a sunset boat trip on a traditional wooden longboat from Anantara's private jetty. In our one-hour round trip to Dubai Marina, we admired many of the architectural landmarks along the coastline, including the iconic sail-shaped Burj Al Arab hotel.

One of our ultimate Dubai highlights had to be our Seawings seaplane tour, that took off from the water by the Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club. Having never been on a seaplane before, we were slightly apprehensive, but once we were airborne we were so distracted by the stunning views that we

Soar above Palm Jumeirah on a seaplane adventure



short boat ride across the creek to wander around some traditional souks, where the narrow alleyways overflow with stalls selling colourful fabrics, aromatic spices and dried fruits. We bartered at one stall for an ultra-soft teal scarf and also bought some camel milk chocolates. It's also where you'll find the gold souk, where we were entranced by the selection of bling, from dazzling emeralds to diamonds and gold.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Leaving behind the soaring glass towers, OK! was driven 40 minutes out of town into the desert for the Heritage Dinner Safari, following in the footsteps of Michael Bubl , Selena Gomez and Kylie Minogue.

With a scarf wrapped around our hair, OK! powered across the dunes in a vintage Land Rover, soaking in the desert scenery as the sun set. Back at the camp, we had a mug of strong Arabic coffee before a camel ride, which we actually found more nerve-wracking than the seaplane adventure! Afterwards, we relaxed at the Bedouin camp – scattered with Persian carpets and illuminated with lanterns – while



Selena Gomez made a friend in the desert

a lady decorated our arm with a henna tattoo. Dinner highlights included tender spiced lamb that had been simmered in an underground pit overnight and delicious Arabic donuts with honey and date syrup, which we ate under the stars as we watched a traditional dance show.

HOW DO I GET THERE?

Emirates (www.emirates.com) fly to Dubai from London Heathrow five times a day. Return economy flights from London Heathrow start from  355pp, while return business class flights start from  1,699pp.

Nightly rates at Anantara The Palm Dubai Resort & Spa (www.anantara.com) start from  262 in a premier lagoon-view room on a bed and breakfast basis. **OK!**

SKYMAX (WWW.SKYMAXHOLIDAYS.COM) CAN ARRANGE AIRPORT TRANSFERS AND THE OLD DUBAI CITY TOUR. TO BOOK THE PLATINUM HERITAGE DINNER SAFARI, VISIT WWW.PLATINUM-HERITAGE.COM. FOR THE SEAWINGS TOUR, VISIT WWW.SEAWINGS.AE.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL DUBAI TOURISM ON 020 7321 6110 OR VISIT WWW.VISITDUBAI.COM.

REPORT BY LINA DARTON EDITED BY ANNABEL MACKIE, OK! TRAVEL EDITOR TRAVELLERS' TALES AND FIVE OF THE BEST BY NANCY BROWN PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY, BARE MEDIA, GETTY IMAGES

soon forgot about our nerves. From the cloudless sky, we felt as if we could practically reach out and touch the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, while flying over the Palm Jumeirah – the world's largest artificial island that's home to more than 20 hotels – was awesome.

After we'd seen the Burj Al Arab from the sea and the sky, OK! felt we should check in out in person. After walking along a golden tunnel and entering the lavishly decorated Al Mahara restaurant, our jaw dropped as we took in the floor-to-ceiling aquarium – and our lunch was just as memorable!

WHERE CAN I SHOP?

If the heat gets too much, head inside to the air-conditioned Dubai Mall, with more than 12 million square feet of shopping and entertainment. Home to around 1,000 stores, ranging from top-end fashion labels (Chanel and Chlo ) and High Street favourites (Mango and Top Shop) to upmarket department stores (Bloomingdale's and Galerie Lafayette), it's the biggest mall in Dubai. You can also keep the kids amused as there's an aquarium, indoor theme park and an Olympic-sized ice rink, plus it's home to 200 restaurants.

WHICH SIGHTS MUST I SEE?

Dubai is not all marble and malls, as we discovered on a walking tour of Old Dubai. Led by a guide, we visited the Dubai Museum, housed in an 18th century fort, where we learned how the state has grown from a fishing village to a fast-paced metropolis. We then took a



TRAVELLERS' TALES

LILAH PARSONS

THE CAPITAL DJ ON DETOX BREAKS AND JAUNTS WITH THE GIRLS...

What's been your most fabulous holiday yet?

My first trip to Ibiza for a fitness retreat with 38 Degrees North was amazing – I never knew it was such a beautiful island. You hear all about the partying, but where we were staying in Santa Eulalia, it was really peaceful and such a stunning area. Rooftop yoga and paddleboarding in the sea definitely beats partying!

Where's the best place you've been on a girlie holiday?

A week in Rhodes a few years ago with a couple of school friends. We found the funniest little house to rent and the swimming pool looked more like a bath, but we had the best time. We went to the beach and took a trip to the water park, but we also did a bit of culture, visiting some of the island's ruins.

Who's your perfect holiday partner in crime?

My brothers – it's so relaxing but lots of fun. They tease me constantly, but we get on so well.

Have you ever had a holiday disaster?

Not so much a disaster, but I had lots of rainy holidays in Scotland as a child, being eaten alive by eedges!

LILAH TRAVELLED TO 38 DEGREES NORTH, THE LUXURY FITNESS RETREAT IN IBIZA. OPTIMAL FITNESS WEEKS ARE AVAILABLE FROM APRIL TO OCTOBER, WITH PRICES STARTING FROM  1,685. PRICE EXCLUDES FLIGHTS. SEE WWW.THIRTYEIGHTDEGREESNORTH.COM.

LILAH PRESENTS THE CAPITAL FM BREAKFAST SHOW WEEKDAY MORNINGS WITH DAVE BERRY AND GEORGE SHELLEY.



5 OF THE BEST HOLIDAY MUST-HAVES



1 STORM MINI TREXON WATCH,  169.99, www.stormlondon.com. Water resistant to 50 metres, this is a great new travel find, with its multifunction date and dual time, it allows the wearer to keep track of the time in two different time zones.

2 PIA CITRUS LEATHER BAG,  110, www.piajewellery.com. When life gives you lemons, get a matching handbag! We love this bright tasseled beauty – it's the perfect size for a day of sightseeing and sits across the body so your hands are free for those holiday cocktails.

3 KATE SPADE EMBROIDERED LOVELY SUNHAT,  70, www.katespade.co.uk. Shield your face from the sun while looking super-chic in this raffia sunhat. You'll be the belle of the pool with this lovely addition to your holiday wardrobe.

4 MARKS & SPENCER SUN SMART MOISTURE PROTECT NOURISHING DRY OIL SPF 30,  12, www.marksandspencer.com. Formulated by Australian sun-care specialists, this long-lasting SPF contains Vitamin E and Omega oils to nourish and protect, and a tan-enhancing complex to support the skin's natural tanning process.

5 TAMARIS GLADIATOR SANDALS,  39.99, www.tamaris.eu. Channel your inner warrior with these lace-ups. Great for taking your beach cover-up from day to night.