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WANTED SUNSHINE NOW? MIAMI, SEYCHELLES, GRAN CANARIA & BARBADOS (ON BUDGET!)

■ QASR AL SARAB, UAE

When it comes to absolute, zoned-out relaxation, nothing beats staring at sand. That's the secret of the Qasr Al Sarab, a twinkling 21st-century oasis deep in the middle of the Rub al Khali desert, where escapees from modern life soak in a puddle of pure contentment, attended by scurrying butlers and soothed by peppermint-infused towelettes.

Just getting to the resort is mind-altering: a two-hour drive from Abu Dhabi through the tantric sameness of the Empty Quarter. You'll arrive to find a fantasy Al Baba fortress spiked with battlements and watchtowers – the swankiest sandcastle ever built. Open sesame, and you're into a treasure cave of flaming torches, jewel-studded lanterns and giant urns that look like a genie might pop out of them at any moment. The hotel's dune-based diversions include camel rides through the peach-pink wilderness – but that's not really the point. The idea is to simmer in the shocking-blue swimming pool, swoon over the sunset from your private terrace, or recline on your daybed and order 'another of the same'. *Elegant Resorts* (01244 897111, www.elegantresorts.co.uk) has five nights from £1,035pp, B&B, including flights from Heathrow and transfers.

WORDS: VINCENT CRUMP PHOTOGRAPH: ABU DHABI TOURISM

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