SALALAH LAND

Until fairly recently, Salalah was basking in the quiet backwaters of tourism. But with the arrival of **Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara**, all this is set to change.

Words by POLLY SWEET
climate has long made it a summer favourite with locals and expatriates alike, it is so lush and so green as to feel a million miles from the Gulf – more Sri Lanka than Sharjah, more Mauritius than Manama.

Paying tribute to traditional Omani custom, the main part of the hotel is the tallest building to be seen for miles and the only one to emerge from the canopy. The rest of the resort, including all 96 private villas, the recreation centre, the spa and the library is all below tree level – it is a nod to days gone by when only the chieftain's house could be seen from the sea. It is thoughtful details such as this that lend Al Baleed its own, warm and welcoming, identity, rather than allowing it to become yet another luxury hotel with a view. Nevertheless, those travelling from the GCC and accustomed to its standards of hospitality will find the hotel reassuringly familiar – all of the amenities that are associated with this part of the world are present and accounted for, from wonderfully welcoming staff to sumptuous accommodation and a fleet of white tuk tuk to make sure that guests never have to walk too far. But don’t expect some sprawling resort with a different dining option for every night of the week – the hotel is intimate, with just three signature restaurants, yet it strikes just the right balance between a 5* resort and a relaxed coastal hideaway. It is definitely big enough for an

unrestrained sense of privacy, yet small enough that you can quite happily walk the whole thing barefoot.

Beyond the walls of the hotel, there is plenty to do in Salalah. From a morning spent dolphin watching, to a tour of the ancient souks, to a visit to the Al Baleed Archeological Park there is something for everyone. A visit to the Museum of Frankincense is a must, if only to appreciate the importance of the essential oil in Oman’s history and fortunes. On the way home, be sure to stop at the local sweet shop for karak tea and halwa.

If all this sounds like too much hard work however, then an afternoon by the hotel’s infinity pool or a game of tennis on its brand new court is always on offer and for little ones and teens there are a specialised kids club complete with miniature swimming pool and sun loungers. On rainier occasions (and this being the tropics there is bound to be the odd shower) there is a cosy library to retreat into and, of course, the gleaming spa, which is the first of its kind in Salalah. Boasting the region’s only Hammam and royal treatment rooms (as well as beautifully ornate inlaid furniture from Muscat that would make a wonderful take-home souvenir were it not so heavy) it is the shiny jewel in Al Baleed’s crown.

With an increasing number of international flights arriving into Salalah every day there really is no excuse for not discovering this little emerald gem. Just be sure to do so before the crowds arrive.

Premier Sea View Room from Dhs1,450 per night