

READERS' TRAVEL AWARDS 2016 WINNERS INSIDE

Condé Nast Traveller

WIN
A STAY
AT THE GRAND
DRAGON
LADAKH

THE LAST WORD IN TRAVEL
DEC-JAN 2016-17 | ₹150

INDIAN EDITION

50 SHADES OF BLUE

The best beach holidays
around the world



ADVENTURE ALERT

RAJA AMPAT

A diver's paradise

SKIING IN ITALY

How to do the
Dolomites

BEST OF INDIA

WHAT MAKES
SPITI SPECIAL

WHERE TO
SHOP IN DELHI

GOA WITH
YOUR KIDS

Aditi Rao Hydari at
the Park Hyatt Goa
Resort and Spa beach

PLUS WHAT'S HOT (AND NOT) IN LONDON

★ CNT EXCLUSIVE ★

Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort and Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara

Two brand new Anantara properties help you explore the beautiful Sultanate of Oman, from beaches to rocky hills and more. By **Jyoti Kumari**

To say that I was blown away by my experiences in Oman is not an exaggeration. I thought that I knew what I'd get to see in this land of frankincense. That I would be getting my fill of art, culture, even adventure sports. But I did not expect the diversity that this small country offers up in spades: from its four UNESCO World Heritage sites to its ancient Al Hajar Mountains and pristine beaches, all of which dramatically change in look and feel with every season. One thing that was, is, consistent though, is the beauty that will challenge your senses (and the storage space on your phone). Point. Shoot. Share. #nofilterneeded

I was in Oman to get an exclusive first look at two new resorts—the Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort in Nizwa in northern Oman and the Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara in the south. Well located, both are perfect for your next family vacation.

ANANTARA AL JABAL AL AKHDAR RESORT

"I discovered the waterfall when I was young," said Tariq, my guide on a hike across the wadi—a set of monsoon waterfalls that, at the onset of winter, had been reduced to a single stream. Tariq was born in this area, and like much of the staff at this property, has lived here most of his life. His stories made me feel like I knew the land around

me intimately. Or maybe it was the resort's layout, built like a traditional village with a central courtyard with villas and rooms set around it. Or maybe it was the mountain air (we were almost 6,600ft above sea level) that took me back to my North Indian roots. Whatever the reason, I was made to feel at home. And what a home—with 82 rooms and 32 villas (with private pools) and views of either the stunning canyon or an equally beautiful private garden.

Apart from guided walks, the hotel offers activities like stargazing, treasure hunts and archery. Walk around the nearby villages and chances are you will be invited into the homes of locals for coffee and Omani →

Diana's Point, Anantara Al
Jabal Al Akhdar Resort



SNEAK PEEK



Clockwise from left: **The entrance to the lobby at Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara; a pool outside a villa in Al Akhdar; hiking near Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort; a woven artwork display in the Al Akhdar property**

halwa, so similar to the Karachi halwa that is popular in India. Along the way, pluck a wild fig and discover its tingly taste, stop and savour the fragrance of the region's famous roses. For the adrenaline junkies, sports such as abseiling, rock climbing and mountain biking will leave you on an unbelievable high. Later, book yourself into the spa for a Rose Rescue Ritual and let the goodness of the local Damask rose heal your skin. Or choose the in-villa slumber session, in which a therapist literally helps you sleep with the aid of a massage, bath, herbal tea and a snack of lavender cookies. Bliss.

The mountain air is bound to do wonders for your appetite, so it's a good thing there are six dining options, serving cuisines ranging from Italian to Arabic. Breakfast at Al Maisan, which catches the first light of the day, lunch at Bella Vista, where a decadent tiramisu is served amid breathtaking views, and spend your evening lounging at Al Baha, which is ideal for a cosy chat around a bonfire. But if you really want to go all out, book a meal at Diana's Point, an elevated platform that overlooks the valley. Dining under a starlit sky, warm in the orange glow from the heaters (and a pashmina that the hotel provides if you feel extra cold)—it's a memory that will stay with you for years.

AL BALEED RESORT SALALAH BY ANANTARA

Lush banana and coconut plantations, white-sand beaches and flamingos—you'd be forgiven for thinking you're in the tropics. The only luxury resort in Salalah, in southern Oman, it offers 136 rooms and villas with views of the lagoon, beach, private gardens and in a few lucky cases, a glimpse of the 2,500 year-old archaeological site next door. The villa interiors are traditional—a majlis-style living room with kilim-upholstered couches and marble beds inspired by the mud beds common in Omani villages. There are three dining options—Sakalan, the all-day restaurant with its naturally lit interiors, Mekong that serves South Asian and Al Mina, the beach bar that does Mediterranean cuisines and shisha.

In the unlikely event you tire of relaxing, book yourself for one or many of the experiences organised by the resort. From a drive along the coast to a picnic by the stream where the water is so clear that you can see the rocks on the bed. Also, visit the nearby Al Baleed Archaeological Park, spread over 60 acres and home to the Land of Frankincense Museum. Come back and try a hammam. Insiders tell me many high-powered deals are made behind its closed

doors, but even if you're not working your negotiation skills, the bathing ritual is an unmissable experience.

You could also sign up for yoga on the beach at sunset. It's a magical experience—to hear only the sound of the waves and see only the sky changing colours above you. For a moment, you will forget everything and reach for the stars. And make a silent promise to come back to this magical, beautiful country. 📍

ANANTARA AL JABAL AL AKHDAR RESORT

Al Jabal Al Akhdar, Nizwa (<http://jabal-akhdar.anantara.com>); doubles from OMR256 or ₹44,430)

AL BALEED RESORT SALALAH BY ANANTARA

Al Mansurah Street, Dahariz South, Salalah (<http://salalah.anantara.com>); doubles from OMR209 or ₹18,920)

GETTING THERE: Fly with Jet Airways (www.jetairways.com) or Air India (www.airindia.in) to Muscat from major Indian cities. The Al Akhdar resort is a three-hour drive from there. Salalah is a short domestic flight from Muscat, and the hotel is a 15-minute drive from the airport. Indian passport-holders can apply for a visa online (www.rop.gov.com). Visas take up to 10 days to process and cost ₹3,470.