

# Retreat By The Bay

Just a couple of hours drive from central Dubai, Oman's Six Senses Zighy Bay is a blissful escape in which to rejuvenate the body and mind

By Yi-Hwa Hanna

As the sun rises at dawn, it begins to light up the stretch of powdery white sand, blue waves gently lapping at its shore. On either side of the bay, craggy mountaintops hug the landscape like nature's answer to a frame for its picture-perfect surrounds. Birds begin their morning song, crabs are scuttling in and out of their hastily-dug homes for the night, and there's even the gentle bleating of a goat off in the distance. No, it's not an island idyll in the Maldives—it's just a standard morning at the peaceful enclave that is Oman's Six Senses Zighy Bay.

Nestled into the northern Musandam Peninsula, the resort may be only a couple of hours drive away from the hustle and bustle of central Dubai but it couldn't be a further escape in terms of atmosphere, scenery and its way of life.

In fact, it's so set apart

from the frenetic pace of the city that to get there, guests are asked to park up at a welcome point just past the Sharjah-Dibba border (Ed's Note: You'll require a border pass to cross this area, but the resort will help sort this out for you once you've made your reservations and confirmed your travel plans with them) before they're driven up and back down a winding mountain path to the resort's entrance. As if that isn't enough to make you feel as though you're leaving the hectic pace of your normal life behind you, thrill-seekers can even enter by quite possibly one of the most unique arrival methods we've yet seen: A



paraglide ride. Unfortunately, the wind conditions were so strong on the day of our visit that we were only able to opt for the drive, but this made it no less impressive—as we slowed

our way around the dusty path to the tall gates at its entrance, an entire army of goats having arrived seemingly to welcome us there, we felt as though we'd stumbled across a palace from



the Bedouin days.

Inside the resort, plush pools (yes, plural—there are two main pools within the actual resort, in addition to each villa boasting its own private mini infinity pool in its backyard) surrounded by luxurious loungers beckon, with guests ambling along contentedly at their own pace. So self-contained is the resort that each villa even comes with its own bicycles tethered to a post outside of its door, many of them bedecked with initial plates for its returning guests. This back-to-nature feel is part and parcel of the Zighy Bay philosophy: The resort takes pride in the rugged beauty of its surrounds and encourages guests to get back to nature. While there isn't a set barefoot policy, it's the sort of place where you could walk around digging your toes into the soft sand all day and no-one would bat an eyelid. Just down the path from our villa is an organic garden growing row upon row of fresh, local fruit, herbs and vegetables, from tomatoes, pumpkins and basil to bitter

gourds, carrots and water spinach. Many of these ingredients are used in the resort's kitchens, with restaurants serving up a unique concoction to dip their fresh breads into each day. Sustainability and environmental responsibility are important here, with the resort running off its own self-sufficient water supply thanks to a reverse osmosis plant and water refinery. In the rooms, drinking water is provided in refillable glass jars, while welcome snacks and smoothies are made using dates picked from 11,000 date trees that are located throughout the grounds.

A strong sense of pride for the Omani culture is evident throughout, not least in our villa. Here, rather than hotel rooms, guests are invited to ensconce themselves in traditional, indigenous village-style accommodations with warm, cavernous walls and locally-made handcrafts scattered throughout—even our villa key resembled a *khanjar*, the traditional Omani



dagger. This strong sense of history doesn't take away from the sense of luxury and comfort, however—not in the slightest. Our villa—a spa villa, one of four that the resort created for guests specifically

coming to seek out some wellness amidst their R&R—was split into two stories, with one large bed on its upper floors and another below, each with their own lounge and wet areas, all drawn together with a



stunning private infinity pool, back yard, balcony and even our own private hammam room within the villa itself, should we have been craving too much privacy to head to the spa. Outside, our private majlis provided the perfect place to wile away the hours with a book (or a laptop, if you're so inclined) after soaking up the sun by the swimming pool.

With several other villa options available that offer everything from their own gym and kitchen areas to private massage rooms, it's easy to see why many guests opt to come here and hardly ever leave their villa premises—but you'd be remiss not to take a wander. While both pools are expansive and offer a stunning setting in which to catch some rays, the salt-water swimming pool rests so close to the sea that you can practically hear the waves lapping as you lie on a lounge, the odd goat that managed to find its way into the resort grounds snuffling around the bushes by your side. But it isn't all about rest and relaxation—the resort's recent addition of

wellness programmes mean that this is also an ideal place in which to come away if you like to keep busy and stay on top of your fitness regime while taking a break, as well. After a gruelling few months of training, hard work and races involving plenty of running, a consultation with the resort's wellness teams saw us opting for a yoga-centric programme. While we had loosely planned out our itinerary before arrival, the staff here understand the need for flexibility and were more than happy to switch things up upon our arrival. We were soon booked into a meeting with Linh, the resort's resident yoga expert and wellness guru, and settled on a selection of yoga classes designed to help us achieve our goals (in this case, improving flexibility and stretching out our aching limbs while improving strength), as well as a guided meditation session to help us relax. The well-equipped gym was a serious draw, as were morning runs along the beautiful beach, but the highlight of our programme was undoubtedly the hot yoga performed in



their stunning hammam. Unlike traditional Bikram yoga, the wet and steamy environment of the hammam made it easier for us to breathe, while warming up our muscles so thoroughly that both my companion and I were able to reach new levels of flexibility, holding positions we'd never been able to before, by the hour's end. Afterwards, refreshed and invigorated, we headed down to the beach for a spot of stand up paddle boarding, only taking a short break before indulging in a spot of archery. If you're not keen on booking a class, the resort offers all guests a



chance to get active in various ways: Archery sessions are available in 30 minute slots at no extra cost, while an outdoor training ground complete with monkey bars, and a boules course provide further ways to keep busy. If you're keen to head out of the resort, there's plenty to explore beyond the grounds as well, with diving, snorkelling and boat trips available, along with countless watersports, and land-based activities such as mountain biking, hiking and rock climbing. If you're trying to quiet your mind, the spa's serene surrounds can play host to a meditation session, a candle-lit hour of self-reflection that can be guided so as to teach you how to achieve a state of truly mindful quiet.

All of this excitement left us hungry, and fortunately, dining options at Zighy Bay don't disappoint. At Summer House, you'll find international cuisine from hearty and wholesome pasta dishes to East Asian fare and fresh seafood—on our visit, the stand-out dish was a stir-fry of buckwheat-based soba noodles tossed with crunchy vegetables, fat and juicy prawns and crispy onions, all tied together in a light and sweet chilli-infused sauce—while if you're looking for something more traditional, the beachside Shua Shack (set atop the powdery sand) serves up classic Omani shua—a tender lamb that's cooked under the ground for hours on end until it practically falls off the bone—several nights a week. If you're looking for more standard Arabic fare, Spice Market serves up excellent Lebanese-inspired food with a touch of Maghreb influence. But if you think this will be your standard shish tawouk, think again: While the menu does consist of classics such as the

mentioned grilled chicken dish, along with a variety of other kebabs and hot and cold mezze, the quality is so high that you'll be eagerly mopping up your plate with heaps of the homemade Arabic bread even when you're practically full to the brim. During the day, the beachside cabanas serve up free ice cream for guests at your leisure, along with pitchers full of iced water and freshly squeezed fruit juices. If you're after something a little more grand, Sense on the Edge is a must-try experience: A unique dining excursion that will see you and your companion enjoy a meal perched atop a cliff 300 metres above the ground, the view is second to none with the cuisine to match. In-villa dining is also an option, with your personal butler (who is always available with a direct button on your villa phone) able to organise a meal right in your backyard or inside the villa itself.

No trip to Zighy Bay would be complete without a paraglide journey, and happily, the wind conditions were on our side by

our last day. My heart jumped into my throat as my instructor and I raced off the clifftop, but the moment I sat back into the harness and peacefully took in the birds-eye view of the stunning landscape below, I was already planning my next trip back. Despite having only headed to the lush surrounds for a couple of days, by the time my companion and I were headed back to Dubai, we felt as though we'd been gone for more than a week and both felt entirely rejuvenated from the inside out.

*Six Senses Zighy Bay offers an array of wellness packages that can be tailor-made to your preferences, involving anything from yoga classes, meditation and personal training sessions to spa sessions, healthy meals, cooking experiences, and more. Wellness packages typically consist of 3, 5 and 7 stays (although this can be extended if need be); for pricing options, visit their website at [sixsenses.com/resorts/zighy-bay](https://www.sixsenses.com/resorts/zighy-bay) or contact +968 2673 5888.*

