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## DESERT RETREATS

Shimmering heat, shape-shifting dunes... These getaways promise all the seduction of the sands, without the grit. **Tristan Rutherford** chills out

### 5 Abu Dhabi, UAE Desert Islands Resort

**Best for...** Safaris on-site.

**Camp it up:** Any emir worth his salt knows that the ultimate status symbol is a not-quite-tame big cat to call your own. Make like a sheikh on Sir Bani Yas Island, 240km southwest of Abu Dhabi, where the boutique retreat-cum-wildlife reserve is home to a reintroduced pride of cheetahs. Extinct on the Arabian Peninsula since 1972, they no doubt came as a rude shock to the island's gazelle population... In the park, there are 15,000 indigenous animals, including Arabian oryx and more than 170 species of birds, so there's plenty to spot from the reserve's easily explored 4WD trails, mountain-bike routes and walking paths.

Anantara's palatial Desert Islands Resort comes with

in-room rain showers and Nespresso machines, and the Bedouin-style spa and fine-dining restaurants make other desert retreats look low-rent.

**Doing the dunes:** Herds of oryx will part like the Red Sea as you and your guide pedal (£18) or drive (£40) through the reserve. Gentler self-guided walks meander past mangrove lagoons and flocks of flamingoes – or try sea-kayaking (£27) or snorkelling (£22) in the turtle-populated waters.

**Get me there:** Desert Islands Resort & Spa by Anantara (00 971 2801 5400, [desertislands.anantara.com](http://desertislands.anantara.com)) has doubles from £210. B&B, BA (0844 493 0787, [ba.com](http://ba.com)) has Heathrow returns from £439; the hotel can arrange light-aircraft transfers from £36pp one-way.

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