

The Emirates Palace, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates - World Class Perfection

By Barry Kay

The Seven Stars and Stripes reviewer team was well on its way to discover this enchanting palace for the first time. They landed at Abu Dhabi International Airport after a relaxing and luxurious flight on Etihad Airways, the official national airline of the United Arab Emirates. Debarking the flight, they had their suitcases in hand within minutes.

For newly invited guests of the hotel, passport control and customs were handled quickly and professionally. As the gates of the arrival hall swung open, a well-dressed gentleman of eloquent demeanor established eye contact immediately, and welcomed each of the team by last name. This gentleman acted as driver, guide and butler for the team. He guided the team to two gleaming white Maybach stretch limousines that were waiting at the main entrance. The weather was beautiful and hot, and gave every indication of a great sunny day. Sunny weather and clear blue skies are the order of the day 360 days each year, with temperatures averaging above 104 degrees F from April through September.

Abu Dhabi is truly a paradise waiting for discovery by western tourists and businessmen. It is the capital of the emirate of the same name and is the largest of the seven emirates in the United Arab Emirates. It is also the capital of the UAE and is reputedly the richest city in the world. The history of Abu Dhabi dates back as far as the 3rd millennium BC when it was merely a vast desert country inhabited by nomads who made their living fishing and herding.



In the mid-20th century, the economy still sustained itself mainly by camel herding and the production of dates and vegetables. The typical dwellings at that time were made of palm fronds with mud huts reserved for the very wealthy. Abu Dhabi struck it rich in 1958 when oil was first discovered. At first, oil revenues had little economic effect, as little of the revenue was put back into infrastructure. This changed in 1966 when Sheik Zayed replaced his conservative brother as ruler. Sheik Zayed had a vision for developing Abu Dhabi, and when the British left the country he helped found the United Arab Emirates. In 1971, the Emirates gained their independence, and oil wealth flowed into the area with mud huts replaced with high-rise office buildings, designer boutiques, banks and resorts. Today each of Abu Dhabi's 420,000 citizens is worth an estimated \$17 million, and more than \$1 trillion is invested worldwide in this city alone.

The Emirates Palace is a "Seven Star" luxury hotel located in the city of Abu Dhabi, and built and owned by the Abu Dhabi government. It is currently managed by the Kempinski Group. The hotel was built at a cost of U.S. \$3 billion, with 302 superior rooms and 92 magnificent suites. The Palace is reputed to be the most expensive hotel ever built and it is reflected in the gold and marble interior décor. The hotel is also home to a highly technologically advanced conference center where business conventions are held, as well as world-renowned concerts with international stars in the fields of opera and ballet.





As the team drove to the hotel, Suhojit, the chauffeur/guide and butler, offered the review team iced towels on a silver tray to refresh themselves after the long plane ride. The Seven Stars and Stripes team arrived during the time of Ramadan, where practicing people of faith refrain from consuming food or drink from sunrise to sundown. Non-practicing guests from around the world are asked to respect this time of fasting until their arrival at the hotel.

The world outside seemed incredibly distant as Abu Dhabi, once a desert, has been recently transformed into a city of skyscrapers, with lots of green. Over 120 million trees have been planted in the parks of Abu Dhabi. This cosmopolitan city features malls, boulevards and promenades and is recognized worldwide for its great shopping, featuring every luxury designer brand possible and bargains in gold and jewelry. Seeing the Palace for the first time brought to mind a combination of *Utopia* and *A Thousand and One Nights*. It literally takes your breath away. A dedicated elevator took the team to the seventh floor Palace Suites. Suhojit was in the main dining room of the suite with a sparkling date cider called Bateel Juice.

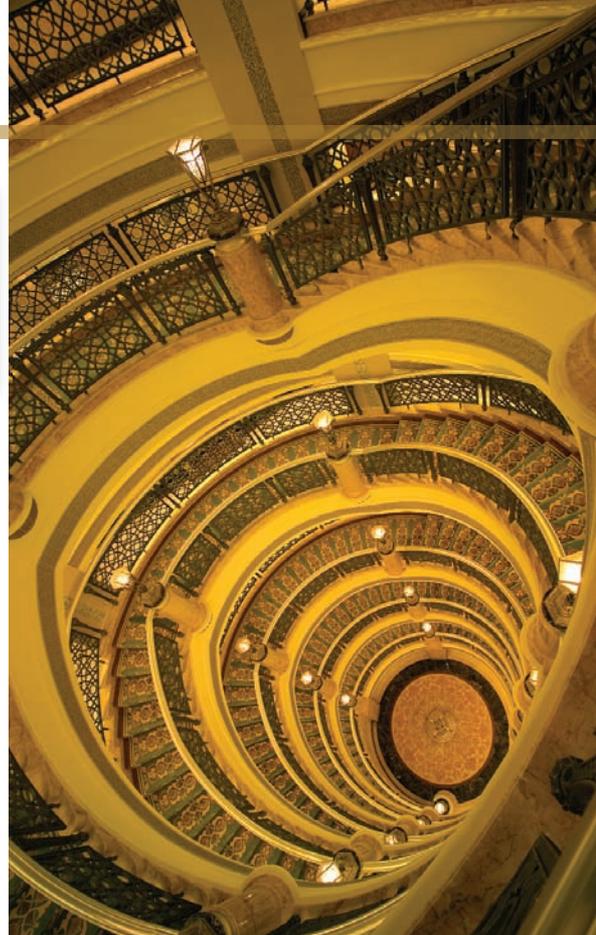
After settling in, the team was given a grand tour of the hotel which was designed by WATG (Wimberley Allison Tong & Goo) and opened its magnificent gates in 2005 after three years of laborious construction. Twelve thousand laborers representing 43 nations were involved in the construction of the hotel. WATG is one of the leading hospitality design firms worldwide. The group created a few of the most famous resort hotels in the world including the Venetian Resort in Vegas, and the Mansion at MGM Grand in the same city. Kempinski is famous for managing such legendary properties as the Adlon in Berlin and the Baltshug in Moscow, to name just a few. The design of the hotel incorporates traditional Arabian elements such as a 60-meter tall Grand Dome and 114 smaller domes over the entire palace, held in the natural colors that are found in the Arabian Desert. The Palace employs approximately 2,000 staff members representing 50 nationalities. This diversity is also reflected in the international cuisine offered at the hotel. Aside from its magnificent rooms and suites, the hotel offers a 1,200 seat, state-of-the-art auditorium for business conventions and concerts.

“An enchanting palace, a wonder to behold for all who venture through its magnificent gates.”

The Emirates Palace offers an amazing “man-made picture-perfect beach” and saltwater lagoon pool to plunge into after a hot day. The waters are warm, crystal clear and turquoise. The sands at the beach resemble the beaches at the finest resorts in the Caribbean. Pool does not adequately describe the waterpark at the Emirates Palace. There are water sports and rides, and indescribably delicious temperature-controlled water to enjoy. Guests can enjoy the pool and then sit in air-conditioned tents at poolside with drinks and snacks.

The hotel also offers an exquisitely designed haute cuisine restaurant, Sayad, where the review team dined on fantastic continental-inspired cuisine and the finest caviar and champagne later that evening. Sayad features spectacular aquariums filled with live and fantasy creatures of the deep in surreal lighting.

The Seven Stars crew departed Abu Dhabi with unforgettable memories of a hotel that one thought only existed as a fantasy in the *Arabian Nights!* ●



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