

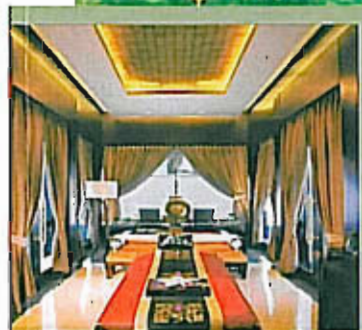
Luxury Travel

INSPIRATION FOR THE EXPERT BUYER

APRIL/MAY 2008



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North African grandeur

Diversity draws in the upmarket crowd 66



A trio of treats



luxury travellers can expect traditional hospitality of the highest quality in the varied open-market resorts of North Africa. Its highlights are numerous – from the busy souks of Marrakech to the monumental Pyramids of Giza – but for the modern visitor, three destinations in particular have captured the attentions of the high-end market: Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. They might not have common borders, but they certainly share the ability to stir the senses. And while there's no shortage of cultural similarities, each provides travel experiences that are very much of their own making. Be it opulent riads, Red Sea diving, Pharaoh trails, camel trekking, spa cruises or even Star Wars tours, they're all here.

Security concerns remain a niggling factor for more nervous travellers, but in wider terms the region's product and accessibility have never been better. Visitor figures for this year – Morocco reported more than 150,000 UK arrivals in the first

half of 2007, Tunisia recorded its best year to date and Egypt showed a 5% increase in UK tourist nights.

"For clients it's a region of astounding diversity," says Caroline Grayburn, sales and marketing manager at Tui Best Travel. "You've got everything from Roman ruins to music festivals, the Atlas Mountains to the Sahara. It's spectacularly beautiful – and just a few hours away from the UK."

Morocco's main luxury draw remains the area in and around Marrakech, although the likes of Fez and Essaouira – among many others – won't leave expectations unfulfilled. Egypt, meanwhile, has the most widely developed high-end infrastructure in the region, boasting the traditional Agatha Christie-era posh of the Cairo and Luxor properties with the modern sheen of Sharm El Sheikh and El Gouna. The opening of the Port Gharbia development (see hotels box, p68) is a major investment in the five-star future.

Visitors to Tunisia are likely to find them three based either out of capital city

North Africa

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Above: The Es Saadi Gardens & Resort, Morocco

For high-end clients seeking diversity, North Africa is a land of contrasts. From mountains to desert and the traditional to the trendsetting, there's something for all. By Ben Lerwill

WHAT'S NEW TO DO

If you're looking to send clients somewhere that's hot in more than one sense, you could do worse than the Four Seasons Sharm El Sheikh. At the end of 2007, Conde Nast's Awards for Excellence named it the "Best Hotel & Resort in the Middle East & Africa." www.fourseasons.com/sharmelshikh/

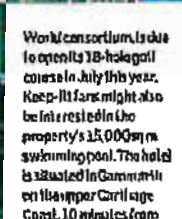
Tunisia waxes its traditional proudly, so the upcoming Falconry Festival in El Haouaria promises to be a spectacle worth the same UK price (about £1) to see the flying displays, which annually attract enthusiasts to the picturesque coastal village, located close to Tunis. The festival is due to take place between

could well boost interest to mature clients looking to experience the charms of the region. "Castledel Coastiers", the region has burgeoned in popularity with its spas, tennis courts, climate and laid-back lifestyle. Naturally, there are a number of five-star hotels for those on a prospective visit.

The Residence at Tunis, a key part of the Leading Hotels of the

world's reputed regional and international players. A number of the city's landmark hotels, among them the Novotel Hotel & Casino and Hotel Rih & Spa, will be hosting lunch and dinner concerts as part of the schedule. www.inyaz2.com

Set up in late 2007, Dabaiba Palace offers a list of exciting tours around some of the more remote areas of Egypt. Seven, 10 and 14-day walks are available, taking place either across mountain ranges or in the desert around Mount Sinai (below). Local co-operation and input has been fully encouraged, while a healthy percentage of profits go towards funding English classes



World consortium is due to open its 18-hole golf course in July this year. Keep the fans entertained in the property's 15,000sq m swimming pool. The hotel is situated in Gammara, an 18-minute drive from the Carthage ruins and 15 minutes from the centre of Tunis. www.residence.com



for Egyptian children and the construction of local facilities. www.bestofegypt.com



23 and 25 June. Visitors can also appreciate the art and live music. www.tunisia.com

Tunisia's no shortage of reasons to visit the sunny Moroccan port town of Essaouira, but its new-found status as a hotbed for retirement

Tunisia – giving easy access to the Roman remains at Carthage and the photogenic coastal village of Sidi Bou Said – or the island of Djerba, which recently topped an online list of the Top 10 World Destinations for 2006. "What appealed to us was Tunisia's culture," says Mark Stacey, Middle East product manager at Cox & Kings, which has introduced the country for 2006. "There's a lot of interesting architecture and UNESCO sites, and it fitted our client profile really well."

Air access to the region has increased greatly in the past few years, and further options continue to develop. Recent news includes British Airways' announcement that, from April, it will take over the GUL Airways Gatwick to Tunis route, increasing the service to five times weekly. Within Tunisia itself, Serrval has replaced Tunisair and now runs regular internal flights from Tunis to Torsus, Djerba, Tabarka, Sfax and Gabbu. Egyptair has announced an expansion of its fleet to include five new Airbus A330s, while Easyjet begins its Gatwick to Sharm El Sheikh service (formerly a GUL Airways route) in April.

HOTELS

□ In Morocco, luxury investment is centred in and around Marrakech – there are currently more than 40 high-end construction projects under way in the city. The latest is the 10-villa Es Saadi Gardens & Resort (www.essaadi.com), unveiled in late 2007 and already boasting the likes of Matt Dillon, Martin Scorsese and Leonardo DiCaprio in its guest book. Properties such as the Angsana portfolio (www.angsana.com/en/marrakech/index.html), Riad Meriem (www.riadmeriem.com) and L Mansion (www.lmansion.com) are also proving popular choices for exclusive guests, while the likes of Four Seasons, Rocco Forte and Banyan Tree are all in the process of offering fresh luxury products of their own. The W brand will debut in North Africa with a 150-room hotel, golf and residence property in Marrakech in mid 2010 (www.whoahotels.com). The six-suite Maison MK opened in February (www.maisonmk.com). An hour south of town, meanwhile, Oukaimeden ski resort is currently undergoing investment to the tune of \$4bn.

□ Meanwhile, Tunisia continues to strengthen its five-star product. The Hasdrubal Prestige is due to open on Djerba in April, as is sister property The Hasdrubal Thalassa & Spa Yasmine Hammamet (www.hasdrubal-hotel.com). The Iberostar Tabarka Beach (www.iberostar.com) has opened on the Coral Coasts, and the boutique Tunisia Palace (www.goldenyasmin.com) has been inaugurated in the capital.

□ The Port Ghalib Resort (www.discoverportghalib.com) opened in mid-November on Egypt's Red Sea Riviera, offering three five-star hotels: The Palace at Port Ghalib, the Sahara Sun Sands and the Sahara Sun Oasis.

□ Located on the Nabq Bay beach, a 297-room Mövenpick will open later this year. Mövenpick Resort Um El Sied will also open in 2009, while an expansion project on the refurbished Mövenpick Resort on Elephantine Island is due for completion in 2010 (www.moevenpick-hotels.com).

□ Other openings include Le Meridien Dahab Resort (www.starwoodhotels.com) and the Coral Beach Diving Resort in Marsa Alam. Meanwhile, Four Seasons Hotel Alexandria has opened a spa and wellness centre. The Egyptian market can also expect more properties in the mould of the Siwa Oasis Ecolodge (www.adrereamellol.net). The Oberoi Zahra (www.oberoizahra.com) offers deluxe Nile cruises.

□ Kempinski opens Soma Bay in July; Kempinski Hotel Royal Palace, Agadir, in mid-2009; Kempinski Hotel Sharm el Sheikh and Kempinski Hotel Marrakech in 2010 (www.kempinski.com).



Top: Es Saadi Gardens & Resort; above: Four Seasons Nile Plaza, Egypt; below: La Résidence des Cascades, Egypt



BEST ROOM IN THE HOUSE

Seaside Villa

Le Royal Hammamet, Tunisia

Client fit: Large groups.

Why: An alry hideaway for six, with private beach access and three bedrooms.

Price: From 1,500 Tunisian dinars (£625) per night.

Contact: www.leroyal-hammamet.com

Corniche Suite

Four Seasons Nile Plaza, Egypt

Client fit: Long stayers in Cairo.

Why: Sumptuous river-view suite with a private terrace and marble bathroom.

Price: From £510 per night.

Contact: www.fourseasons.com/cairo

Gary Player Suite,

La Résidence des Cascades, Egypt

Client fit: Fairway fanatics.

Why: 120sqm of luxury, giving sea views over the championship golf course.

Price: From £195 per night.

Contact: www.residencescascades.com

Berber Room

Dar Les Cigognes, Marrakech

Client fit: Arabian knights.

Why: An extraordinary room with painted ceiling panels, authentic local décor and a king-size bed with carved frame.

Price: From £140 per night.

Contact: www.lescigognes.com

Deluxe room

La Maison Bleue, Fez, Morocco

Client fit: Those who are searching for somewhere that offers traditional luxury.

Why: Elaborately furnished Moorish decadence.

Price: From 2500 Moroccan dirhams (£165) per night.

Contact: www.maisonbleue.com