

This weekend trip is from my publication portfolio - it was published by The National newspaper as the links show.

Every month a new trip will be uploaded to this site: enjoy!

Please read the original article: [A short but challenging overnight loop into the high dunes of Liwa, on the edge of the Empty Quarter. Published by The National, Aug 26, 2011.](#)

*In Canada and other northern countries, there is a tradition that balances precariously on the very edge of sanity - it's an annual event called the Polar Bear Swim. On January 1, holes are broken into thick ice-covered ponds, bonfires are set along the frozen beaches and then hoards of people run into the absolutely freezing-cold water for a quick dip.*

Why? To experience what the water feels like at the coldest time of year.

Conversely, maybe it could also inspire people in one of the most arid environments on the other side of Earth to experience the desert at the hottest time of year. Which is why, this summer, we are going to Liwa - in the Empty Quarter, or the Rub al Khali - the world's largest continuous body of sand.

Do you know what "extreme heat" really feels like? How the summer wind mercilessly sucks moisture out of your skin? Would you like to deepen your respect for desert people and creatures that survive in these extremes?

My family and friends gave it a try, but we were cheating because I was driving a brand-new Land Rover LR4, with air-conditioning that won the battle with the 50°C-plus temperatures.

Besides the boasting rights with the set of wheels, on this trip we had several pleasant surprises: finding large desert roses, a lively scorpion and a pregnant gazelle.



Dar Rossetti, 12, holds a sand rose. Formed by crystallized gypsum, sand roses are found at the depth of the water table, which obviously is underground - except where a previously-flooded low-lying plain (like those in between high dunes, called "sebkha" in Arabic) became a lake after intense rains, and then promptly evaporated, leaving behind sand rose formations.

Download the KML file for your GPS by clicking [here](#).

Once downloaded, you can import the file into your GPS device and take it on the road, or double-click that file and it will open automatically in Google Earth if you have that installed (all adventurers should! [Google Earth](#)).

And here is an interactive map of the route.

View [Off the beaten path - Liwa](#) in a larger map



This is not a drive to be taken lightly, especially in summer. You must be in a convoy of experienced drivers, with serious 4x4 vehicles, fully equipped, and even then plan carefully to be prepared for any eventuality. I'm not kidding. The Land Rover LR4 I was driving performed admirably well, with only one stuck to report.





The Land Rover LR4 runs a 5.0-liter V8 engine which delivers 25% more horsepower and 20% more torque than its predecessor, offering an abundant 375 hp and 375 pound-feet of torque. In Liwa sands you need every pony at your disposal, and although it is not normally considered among the UAE dune-bashing machines, the LR4's performance was stellar.