

By Rhiannon Oliver

A visit to Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort and Spa isn't complete without experiencing an Arabian nights at Al Falaj. Food is the focus, but the Bedouin style set-up nods to many Arabic traditions without being touristy.



Follow the Falaj system away from the hotel to a peaceful area at the edge of the resort. Or, if you're tired after a long day by the pool, order up a nifty buggy for a neat door-to-door service.



The informal outdoor dining area has amazing uninterrupted views over The Empty Quarter (the largest uninterrupted sand desert in the world), so it's worth arriving in time to catch the last of the sunset (food service starts at 6.30pm).



Guests are welcomed in traditional Arabic style with dates and coffee, before being shown to their own cosy seating area. The traditionally upholstered sofas are well-spaced, so whilst there is atmosphere, there is also a sense of being in your own world.

Large carpets spread over the sand, and three tented areas around the perimeter complete the look. Low lighting adds to the ambience. (But occasionally makes it difficult to see what you're eating!)



Drinks are offered up by well-informed and cheerful staff, and a sharing style starter of cold Arabic mezzeh are brought to the table. Stuffed vine leaves, spicy potatoes, moutabel, houmous and fattoush are all good - and muhamarah, a spicy red pepper and nut dip, provides something a little different from the usual mezzeh offerings.

Mains are cooked to order at the big open grill: wander over and take your pick from beef steak, shish taouk, lamb chops, and lamb kofta, and be sure to leave room for Omani lobster that softly flakes from the shell.



All cuts are fresh, excellent quality and gratifyingly simply cooked. Return as many times as you wish, but factor in sides of oriental rice, fire-roasted potatoes, marinated vegetables and thin saj bread, (thrown, stretched, and baked in front of you) and you'll probably need a pause before desert (fresh fruit, Arabic sweets and Muhalabia, a traditional creamy pudding).





The food is accompanied by delightful and unobtrusive entertainment. A musician, elevated on a small stage built from sand, plays the qanun, a traditional Middle Eastern stringed instrument descended from the ancient harp. A bonfire is lit, and a lone camel, accompanied by a falconer, drifts into view. They settle on the sand dunes and a waiter does the rounds explaining that we are free to approach them for photographs. Their presence really adds to the atmosphere.





When the music pauses, there is a genuine tranquility here – a feature that becomes clear towards the end of the evening when lights are further dimmed and guests are encouraged to sit back and star gaze. This is a fantastic choice for a relaxed, good quality dinner that gently embraces desert life and serves as a great introduction to Arabic cuisine!

