

THIS BEATS SHEIKH ZAYED
ROAD AS A MORNING VIEW

SLEEPING UNDER THE STARS

Pack your tent for a truly rejuvenating weekend away as *Stylist* picks the most stunning spots to suit even novice campers

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I get a little riled by the stereotype of the UAE as a country consisting entirely of air conditioned shopping malls. Sure, there's plenty of those (and when it hits 50°C in the summer, can you blame us?) but a drive out from the cities in any direction reveals a wealth of natural beauty. And not only are our surrounding landscapes stunning, they're also incredibly diverse. Take the drive from Dubai to Hatta, for example: on a single, straight stretch of road you'll see an unbroken horizon of voluptuous, ochre sand dunes suddenly give way to jagged mountain ranges rising through

the haze in gradated shades of purple, blue and grey.

In fact, the opportunities the UAE offers for those who prefer an outdoorsy lifestyle are my favourite thing about living in this country. And the best way

**“THERE'S SOMETHING
RESTORATIVE ABOUT COOKING
OVER A FIRE AND SWAPPING YOUR
SHOWER FOR A DIP IN THE SEA”**

to make the most of the stunning scenery, both in the UAE and in our neighbouring Oman? By spending the night in the midst of it, of course. I've become such a camping fiend that it's a running joke in the

office that I actually live in a tent in Ras Al Khaimah and commute to Dubai every day.

The thing is, just a weekend spent in the great outdoors is enough to blow away the cobwebs, and leaves me feeling

refreshed by the time I return to work on Sunday. There's something restorative about being woken up by sunrise, cooking breakfast over a fire and swapping your morning shower for a dip in the sea.

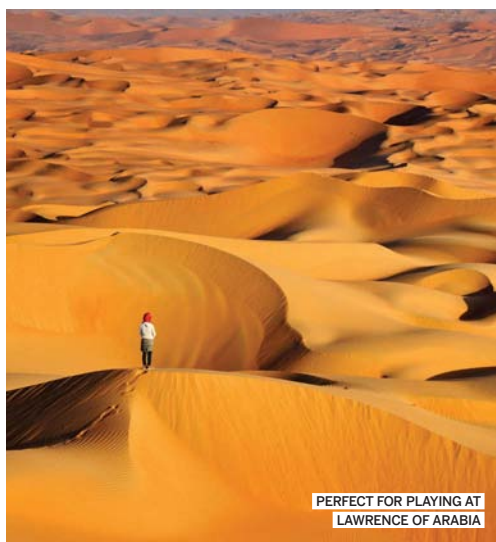
The beauty of camping in the Gulf is that, thanks to our highly predictable, dry climate, there's usually no need for any high-tech gear (although it's still not advisable to set up camp in a wadi bed – flash floods can and do happen). And most campsites are accessible by car, so there's no need to carry kit on your back – in other words, you have license to load the boot with duvets, pillows and even air beds, and go as luxe as you like (you can take the girl out of Dubai but you can't take Dubai out of the girl, after all...).

The one bit of kit I implore you to take? Bin bags. Leave the land as beautiful as you found it.

CRYSTAL CLEAR WATERS
OFF THE COAST OF KHASAB

SEASIDE SPOTS

For the most secluded seaside campsites, take a trip across the Oman border to Khasab on the Musandam Peninsula (3-4 hours drive from Dubai) and get a boat to drop you at one of the many small coves sheltered by cliffs and accessible only by water – just make sure he knows to pick you up in the morning! (Pro tip: instead of booking ahead with a dhow tour company, simply drive down to the Khasab docks and find a bloke with a boat – you'll get a more private experience and you can haggle for a good price.) Not only will you effectively get your own private beach, you'll also likely see schools of dolphins on the boat trip across and, if you're lucky, you'll be treated to a sighting of the bioluminescent phytoplankton that, at night, turn the waves into a sea of glitter. It's basically the Gulf's answer to the Northern Lights.

PERFECT FOR PLAYING AT
LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

AMONG THE DUNES

It doesn't get more quintessentially Arabian than desert camping, but it's easy to be put off by the fear of getting stuck in the sand. Yes, a 4x4 is always essential, but there are plenty of spots that are easily accessible and not too daunting for the dune-bashing beginner. Al Awir is on Dubai's doorstep (no more than an hour's drive from anywhere in town) and a quick turn-off from Al Awir petrol station (where you can let down your tyre pressure for desert driving) takes you right into the dunes. A little more remote, though still no more than an hour away, and ideal for channeling your inner Bedouin is Big Red sand dune near Hatta (so named because, erm, it's a big red sand dune). We recommend camping near to the farms along the road, though, unless you fancy being woken up by quad bikes.

STUNNING VIEWS FROM
JEBEL SHAMS – JUST BE
SURE NOT TO TRIP

RUGGED VIEWS

Up for a challenge? At 3,009 metres, Jebel Shams in the Al Hajar mountain range, northeastern Oman, is the highest peak in the Gulf. As it's 5-6 hours drive from Dubai, we recommend a two day trip – arrive in the evening, set up camp near the base, and hike the next day. As you'd expect, it's a full day's walk to the summit but there's no technical ability or climbing kit (besides a good pair of boots) required and the views are *totally* worth it. Not keen on a long drive (or a long hike)? There are plenty of picturesque spots right here in the UAE that offer sublime mountain views. We like Wadi Bih in Ras Al Khaimah (2-3 hours drive from Dubai). Sometimes nicknamed the Grand Canyon of the UAE, it's still a more manageable ascent at 1,000 metres, but the views are just as breathtaking.

PACK YOUR BAGS

Heading out for your first camping trip? Make sure you've packed these essentials

FOR THE CAR:

- ◆ A phone charger you can plug into the car
- ◆ Tow rope
- ◆ Sand plates or mats
- ◆ Shovel
- ◆ If you're driving in the desert, travel with a minimum of two cars, and reduce tyre pressure for the sand

FOR SETTING UP CAMP:

- ◆ Tent (tent pegs won't work in sandy ground, so weigh down the corners with rocks)
- ◆ Sleeping bag (or a sleeping bag liner during hot weather)
- ◆ Rechargeable emergency light
- ◆ Roll mats, plus any other bedding
- ◆ Pillows
- ◆ First aid kit

FOR COOKING:

- ◆ Bottled water, for drinking and cleaning. Bring at least 2 litres per person per day
- ◆ Cool box filled with ice
- ◆ Disposable plates, cups and cutlery
- ◆ Camping knife
- ◆ Firewood and kindling
- ◆ Fire lighters
- ◆ Matches
- ◆ A grill that can be placed over the fire (you can use rocks to raise it if necessary)
- ◆ Camping kettle
- ◆ BBQ utensils, especially tongs
- ◆ A frying pan or saucepan, depending on what you're planning to cook
- ◆ Cooking oil and seasoning
- ◆ Rubbish bags

