



**Clockwise from left:**  
The majlis-style living room of a Cliff Pool Villa; the villa's private infinity pool; beef carpaccio with mushrooms at Bella Vista



**Clockwise:** The resort features local architectural details like the fort-style structure and falaj waterways; private dining at Diana's Point; enjoy a Turkish or Moroccan hammam



EXCLUSIVE  
FIRST REVIEW

# ANANTARA AL JABAL AL AKHDAR RESORT

*Perched on a canyon rim overlooking the Al Hajar mountain range, JENNY JOHNSON discovers a rugged new retreat*

**G**ETTING TO THE NEW ANANTARA AL JABAL AL Akhdar Resort is an adventure in itself. A scenic two-hour drive from Muscat International Airport takes us past date plantations, wadis and historical forts with donkeys and goats roaming free as the resort's 4x4 climbs the winding mountain roads. At 2,000m above sea level, the lofty property is the highest five-star hotel in the Middle East and is carved into the mountain above a dramatic gorge.

Arriving at the hotel, we're treated to a traditional Omani welcome ceremony, set to the melodic beat of a drum, and are offered a refreshing rose water drink with pomegranate seeds, all grown in the local area. Authentic regional design is evident throughout, from the fort-like doors to the decorative latticework and the falaj-inspired

waterways that run the length of the property, an ode to Oman's traditional irrigation channels. Designed by French-Moroccan architect Lotfi Sidirahal from Atelier Pod, the earthy hue of the buildings help them blend seamlessly into the mountainscape; some parts are built with stone sourced from the mountain range.

Guests can check in to one of 115 rooms and villas, which feature custom-made Omani furniture, local artwork, Arabesque lanterns and Amouage bath amenities, and come with canyon or garden views. The Cliff Pool Villas are the ones to book, with state-of-the-art tech, walk-in wardrobes and a private infinity pool perched on the rim of the canyon from where you can enjoy the jaw-dropping mountain vista.

The idea here is that you can do as much or as little as you like. Just lie back and soak in rugged nature from the pool, relax with a hammam or traditional treatment at the Anantara Spa, or learn new skills in an Omani cooking class where chefs instruct guest-students

how to make dishes like camel *salona* (stew), Nizwa *bapalo* (soup) and frankincense, saffron and date pudding. Kids are entertained with guided sessions of arts and crafts, painting and nature walks. There's no chance of boredom for active types with a range of outdoorsy activities including abseiling and rock climbing off the canyon, the Via Ferrata climb on a steel cable that runs along the cliff edge, as well as an archery range. Excursions in the surrounding area might involve hiking to wadis and waterfalls or embarking on a cultural village walk with the hotel's Mountain Gurus who grew up locally and are able to give guests a truly authentic glimpse of life in these parts.

With six restaurants in the works, during our sneak peek we got a taste of the international cuisine at all-day dining Al Maisan, elevated above the central courtyard and overlooking the gardens, and Bella Vista, which lives up to its name with a Roman-inspired menu of salads, pastas and pizza served with the perfect sunset view. This month will see the opening of signature Al Qalaa, set in a fort-like structure inspired by Khasab Castle and serving inventive Omani fare. For a more tailored gastronomic experience, Anantara's Dining by Design can be arranged on the cliff-edge platform Diana's Point (named after the Princess of Wales, who visited this exact spot in 1986 with Prince Charles), complete with a private chef and personal butler serving a customised menu.

After dinner one night, I was treated to the hotel's signature in-room Slumber Guru experience, which began with a soak in the bathtub, infused with essential oils and surrounded by mood-setting candles, followed by a relaxing massage with calming music. I finished up with a soothing cup of chamomile tea and homemade cookies – different scents, drinks and snacks are offered depending on whether you opt for the Omani Dream, Herbal Dream or Chocolate Dream – before slipping between the 1,000 thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets sprayed with a lavender mist. It was better than any bedtime story. ☪

Doubles from AED 1,815; 00968-2521 8000, [jabal-akhdar.anantara.com](http://jabal-akhdar.anantara.com)

PHOTOS: AASIYA JAGADEESH

**"A PRIVATE INFINITY POOL IS PERCHED ON THE RIM OF THE CANYON"**

