

WHERE TO STAY

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A World Away

As Anantara World Islands Dubai Resort opens its doors, **Sarah Khan** checks in to discover a fresh vantage point overlooking the city

PHOTOGRAPHS BY INGRID RASMUSSEN

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The arrival is part of the allure at Anantara World Islands Dubai Resort. The first luxury hotel to welcome guests to the decades-in-the-making World

Islands project has plenty of ways to make an impression, but it knows how important the first is. To visit the ambitious reimagining of the world map floating in the Arabian Gulf just four kilometres off the coast of Dubai, guests board a plush speedboat at Anantara The Palm before sailing to the archipelago's southwesternmost reaches. The holiday begins at open sea, before you even touch down at the jetty.

It took a mere 15 minutes of wind dancing through my hair and ocean spray streaking my sunglasses to transport me from the fringes of the Palm Jumeirah to South America, and in that jaunt from one

tangerine while peacocks roamed around me, I could have been in a laid-back hamlet in the Seychelles or Costa Rica; narrow pathways framed by thick emerald bushes and blue-and-white tiled staircases recall quaint villages in Greece or southern Spain. But tilt your gaze just a bit and there's a sliver of the Burj Al Arab looming at the end of the path, or that majestic presence of the Burj Khalifa as you swim laps in the pool. For all of its bohemian island trappings, Anantara World Islands is very much in and of Dubai.

The resort's 70 suites and villas evoke coastal chic, with thatched roofs, ceilings clad in bamboo sourced in Indonesia, stylish rattan furniture and a palette of sandy hues enlivened with turquoise accents, and many come with private plunge pools facing the aquamarine waves. Given the petite dimensions of the isle, those waves are never far, setting a hypnotising soundtrack for meals at the Greek-inspired Helios, the Argentinean Luna Lounge and the

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monumental manmade isle to the next, all manner of quotidian concerns dissipated into the briny breeze. When the first cluster of thatched villas came into view, I briefly wondered if I'd traded Dubai for a tropical isle – until I set foot on the beach and turned around to behold the shimmering spire of the Burj Khalifa.

This sensory dissonance is something Anantara capitalises on throughout the resort. Even as the rest of the World Islands develop further in the coming years, none can lay claim to a vantage point like the one Anantara has, which promises a sweeping, unobstructed view from Jumeirah to the Palm. The atmosphere is more rustic and intimate than in other Anantara properties I've visited around the world; while resorts in Tunisia, Sri Lanka and Oman lean heavily into their surroundings for dramatic aesthetic inspiration, this resort channels not so much a sense of place as a state of mind. Strolling the sandy trails lined by blossoming bougainvillea in riotous shades of fuchsia and

Indian-Arabic restaurant Qamar, as well as the alfresco sandbar cinema, outdoor spa pavilions and the beachside bubble dining experience. The eclectic interiors and cuisines are a microcosm of the world, a global ethos befitting the resort's location.

Tracking that glinting skyline as it evolves throughout the day becomes a habit in my meanderings and meals around the island. I squint at it through a thick haze during a beach yoga class in the morning; when the sky clears a bit later, it sparkles brightly in the sun as I have lunch. I gaze at the sprawling cityscape through half-open eyes while enjoying a massage on the deck of my suite one afternoon, and floating in my plunge pool the next. The Burj Khalifa glows a fiery orange from the balcony of the Luna lounge at sunset; later, from the terrace at Qamar, the entire city unfurls before me beneath a canopy of twinkling lights. From my perch at the edge of the World, Dubai always managed to feel close enough to touch. *Doubles from AED 1,890; anantara.com* 

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Lunch at Helios; signs lead the way across the island; the Indian-Arabic Qamar restaurant; inside a garden pool villa; the waves are never far; peacocks roam the island; the Grand House; a row of thatched-roof suites; the pool has a sweeping view of Dubai's skyline. **Previous page:** The main swimming pool

