



**Clockwise from left:** At the *Condé Nast Traveller Middle East Readers' Choice Awards*, in partnership with the Qatar Tourism authority, at Raffles The Palm; Park Hyatt Dubai, voted Favourite Hotel in the UAE; inside the hotly anticipated new SUSHISAMBA Dubai



PHOTOGRAPHS: EFRAIM EVIDOR (PARK HYATT DUBAI); INGRID RASMUSSEN (SUSHISAMBA DUBAI); EDITOR'S PHOTO: STYLED BY ENGE HASSAN (@ENGESTYLE)

None of us prepared me for events season in the Middle East – those sultry months from November through March when the heat abates, the world goes alfresco and Dubai dives into a dizzying gauntlet of galas and fetes. I touched down in the city at the end of October – after spending most of the pandemic in a locked-down New York that had only just begun to emerge from hibernation – so culture shock came with a bang when I went from loungewear to gowns at breakneck speed. Out came the long-neglected heels and dresses, and suddenly my calendar was packed with so many events that I immediately found myself double- and triple-booked and begging off plans. Not a bad start, considering I'm new around here!

This sudden flashback to 2019-era normalcy might have been pleasantly disorienting to a newcomer like me, but it is, of course, a testament to how effectively the region has approached these trying times we now live in. Others are taking note: across the Middle East, governments, travel industry leaders and citizens have rallied together to blaze a trail as a blueprint of responsible travel for the rest of the world to follow.

I may be biased, but the best event on this season's social calendar was, of course, our very own *Condé Nast Traveller Middle East Readers' Choice Awards*. The gala, in partnership with the Qatar Tourism Authority, returned after a two-year pandemic pause, and winners

were unveiled in the ethereal gardens of the new Raffles The Palm Dubai, resplendent with its illuminated

domes. This marks the eighth edition of the Readers' Choice Awards, honouring the finest hotels, destinations, airlines, cruises and more, from the Middle East and beyond, as chosen by the people who know them better than anyone else: the readers of *Condé Nast Traveller*. The record-breaking number of responses showed how eager you were to share with us your long-standing favourites as you venture back out into the world again. From a passion project in Beirut that's forged from the owner's breath-taking ancestral home to a stately chateau presiding over a romantic riverfront setting in Quebec City, flip ahead to see the places you've been longing to return to.

Elsewhere in the issue, we visit two exciting new openings in the Maldives, feast our way through Turkey, London and Singapore, and embark on a once-in-a-lifetime dream itinerary across Egypt. And in case your calendar isn't already overflowing with thrilling occasions, we've also recapped some of the banner events across the region this winter. Maybe I'll see you at one of them? If so, please do stop by to say ahlan!

**SARAH KHAN** Editor in Chief  
 @BySarahKhan

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