



An Abu Dhabi dream

ONE OF THE UAE'S LATEST HOTELS, THE ST REGIS ABU DHABI, IS PERCHED IN A PRIME POSITION ON THE CITY'S CORNICHE. WITH FINE FOOD, OPULENT DÉCOR, A SUMPTUOUS SPA AND FABULOUS CITY VIEWS, IT'S POISED TO BECOME A FIRM FAVOURITE

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The St Regis Abu Dhabi's lobby is a combination of Arabian flair and Art Deco detailing, magnificent crystal light fixtures dangling like precious jewels. "The idea was to bring an era to Abu Dhabi that the city didn't experience," says Laila Rihawi, public relations manager for the St Regis Abu Dhabi. We're gazing over the balcony on the mezzanine floor at the stylish welcome area below. "It's gorgeous," my mother whispers. I am treating her to a weekend in Abu Dhabi and we've chosen the St Regis as the epitome of elegance, a luxury-living hotel right in the city centre.

Wido, one of the hotel's butlers, whisks us to our room. We are in a corner suite which overlooks Al Maryah Island and Abu Dhabi city centre. The far-reaching views are simply breathtaking. "The skyline has really changed," my mother comments. We don't have time to dally now though – we're late for afternoon tea.

Ting-Ya Chuang greets us in the rather grand Drawing Room, a fitting scene to celebrate the time-honoured tradition of afternoon tea, reminiscent of Lady Astor's day. Ting-Ya has a Master's in tea and she blends our personalised concoctions expertly, carefully selecting complementary flavours to suit our tastes. The

result, an exquisite Mayan chocolate-enhanced Kenyan black tea, is surprisingly light, helping the tidbits of tantalisingly flavoured finger food and delicate crustless sandwiches dissolve. Delicious home-made scones and a selection of luscious pastries follow.

It's a balmy afternoon, the sunlight casting a golden glow, and Abu Dhabi's residents are making the most of it. We join them for a stroll along the Corniche, where families walk together, young children peddling along on bicycles or skipping beside their parents. It's a lovely way to relax before dinner at the hotel's signature restaurant, Rhodes 44.

The man himself, British chef Gary Rhodes, is rumoured to be in the kitchen tonight. From our al fresco table in the private garden, we try unsuccessfully to catch a glimpse of the restaurateur, famed for his enthusiastic promotion of British cuisine. This rich gastronomic heritage delivered with flair, translates into the menu, where British classics like fish and chips and steak and kidney dumpling appear alongside dishes with an Arabian twist, such as the almond, date and Arabic goat cheese salad.

We share a serving of chicken liver and foie gras parfait so light that it's like consuming

mouth-watering clouds. For mains, the seared sumac and pistachio King prawns are sheer perfection, light and tangy with just a faint nod towards the creamy tahini sauce.

Our impeccably turned-out waiter quietly places small servings of sticky toffee pudding on the table. "Compliments of the chef," he says with a smile. The beautifully-fluffy pudding with its luscious caramel sauce is the perfect finale for the meal, leaving a faint sweetness on our palates.

After an evening spent gazing at the lights of Abu Dhabi, and a deep dreamless sleep, we awake refreshed and rejuvenated. That doesn't stop us slipping into the Remede spa. No luxury weekend would be complete without an indulgent treatment or two. We're booked in for customised massages – the spa recognises each guest is unique and caters accordingly. My back and shoulders receive intensive muscular attention, while mum is softly soothed into a state of bliss.

Back in the suite, bags packed, we are reluctant to leave. I stand by the floor-to-ceiling window for one last lingering look at that magnificent view before we depart. "I won't wait so long to come back," my mother declares as we drive away. Neither will I. 🍷