

A Waldorf Weekend

Discovering a magnificent palatial retreat just 50 minutes from bustling Dubai, behind the wheel of the new Porsche Macan Turbo



Ras Al Khaimah has been enticing UAE golfers up north for over 10 years with its pair of very enjoyable and largely underrated courses, Al Hamra and Tower Links. With the addition of the spectacular Waldorf Astoria a little under 12 months ago, the emirate has accelerated from hidden gem to resort heavyweight as impressively as the latest addition to the Porsche stable moves through the gears on the open road.

Later this year, the Waldorf and Ras Al Khaimah's golf courses will play host to the first ever 'destination' grand final in the Xerox Corporate Golf Challenge and having experienced the wonders of this hotel first hand, we can attest that the successful qualifying pairs are in for a treat.

From the moment we were handed the keys to the new Porsche Macan Turbo, this trip ticked every conceivable box for the high-end luxury golf retreat. Porsche have developed a sports car for the compact SUV market, and the result is a versatile beast with looks to kill and enough room in the trunk for a couple of sets of clubs. Straining at the leash through the customary Sharjah traffic, the Macan Turbo's 3.6 litre V6 biturbo engine packs frightening power. We escaped the sluggish urban crawl and the car leapt into its element, making short work of the old Emirates Road as the towering red dunes of Ras Al Khaimah rushed by on either side.



Above: The Waldorf Astoria towers over Al Hamra's par 5 third hole. **Below:** Peacock Alley, Camelia and Marjan bring a distinctive elegance to the hotel

Porsche actually chose the Waldorf and the sweeping roads of Ras Al Khaimah as the location for the Macan's Middle East launch a few months back, and it's easy to see why they were drawn to a property that has brought a little Great Gatsby to the embodiment of a sheikh's palace. Looming over the golf course and flanked by three helicopter landing bays, it is unmistakably Arabic in both style and stature. But it's only





THE COURSE

Like Saadiyat Beach in Abu Dhabi, Al Hamra Golf Club has benefited hugely from the completion of the five star resorts that flank the course. Now receiving a steady flow of golfers from these properties, the club has enjoyed its busiest year to date. Another enjoyable **Peter Harradine** design, there are no hidden surprises on the 18-hole layout, but no shortage of hazards.



THE CAR

The Porsche Macan Turbo belies its Sport SUV class with frightening performance, reaching 100 km/h in just 4.8 seconds and topping out at 266. It boasts the sleek lines of a sports car without the cramped interior, the practicality of an SUV without the clunky handling. This excellent addition to the Porsche stable is the full package



THE RESORT

Legendary hospitality meets Arabian opulence at Ras Al Khaimah's Waldorf Astoria, which celebrates its one-year anniversary over the summer. Panoramic views of the golf course, the Arabian Gulf and the Al Hajar mountains greet guests from each one of the 346 deluxe rooms and suites, while a stunning selection of bar and dining options include the famed Peacock Alley, Lexington Grill, Marjan and L7

Above: The Porsche Macan Turbo has the look of a sports car and the practicality of a compact SUV.

UAE, it is only in Abu Dhabi, on Saadiyat and Yas Island, and here in Ras Al Khaimah, where you can find five star resorts of this quality and scale that service a championship course to match on site. As a result, you get that seamless transition from hotel lounging to golf mode, where a shuttle waits to whisk you to Al Hamra's clubhouse just a few hundred yards away. The club has just enjoyed the busiest 12 months of operation since it opened way back in 2006, and the Waldorf, together with other surrounding properties that are contributing to a tourism boom in Ras Al Khaimah, have played a significant part in this recent success.

Like other **Peter Harradine** layouts in the Middle East, it's a course that is easy to score, but difficult to score well on, thanks to several watery holes that will test your shot-making to the full. The par 5 18th is a beauty, running adjacent to the lagoon and requiring two long hits to get home in two – which is more than we managed during an error-strewn round. When the rest of the weekend is this perfect, playing good golf on top of that was clearly too much to ask.

—ROBBIE GREENFIELD



when you step into the lobby that you gain a full appreciation of the Waldorf's extraordinary opulence. This is a place where the decorations - whether that be a towering Arabic clock or a diamond and sapphire encrusted peacock - run into the millions of dirhams apiece. For the cost of the entire enterprise, you can add three more zeros onto those figures. And it shows.

In Peacock Alley, which reimagines the glitz and finery of the original Waldorf Astoria in 'roaring twenties' New York, two sweeping staircases converge on a private after-dinner cigar lounge, while afternoon tea (not to mention the famous Waldorf Salad) can be enjoyed in any one of the cozy enclaves set back

from the main atrium.

The only drawback of a weekend break here is that it will be difficult to squeeze in a table at all of the hotel's award-winning restaurants in a single visit. Perhaps the most intriguing of these is Marjan, which serves Middle East cuisine with a twist courtesy of resident celebrity chef, Joe Barza, and UMI, a Japanese dining experience that offers some of the best sushi and tepanyaki dishes in the country. Steak lovers will gravitate to Lexington Grill, while Azure is the aptly named eatery that serves poolside Mediterranean dishes and aperitifs.

While the emirate of Dubai is certainly the most established golf destination within the