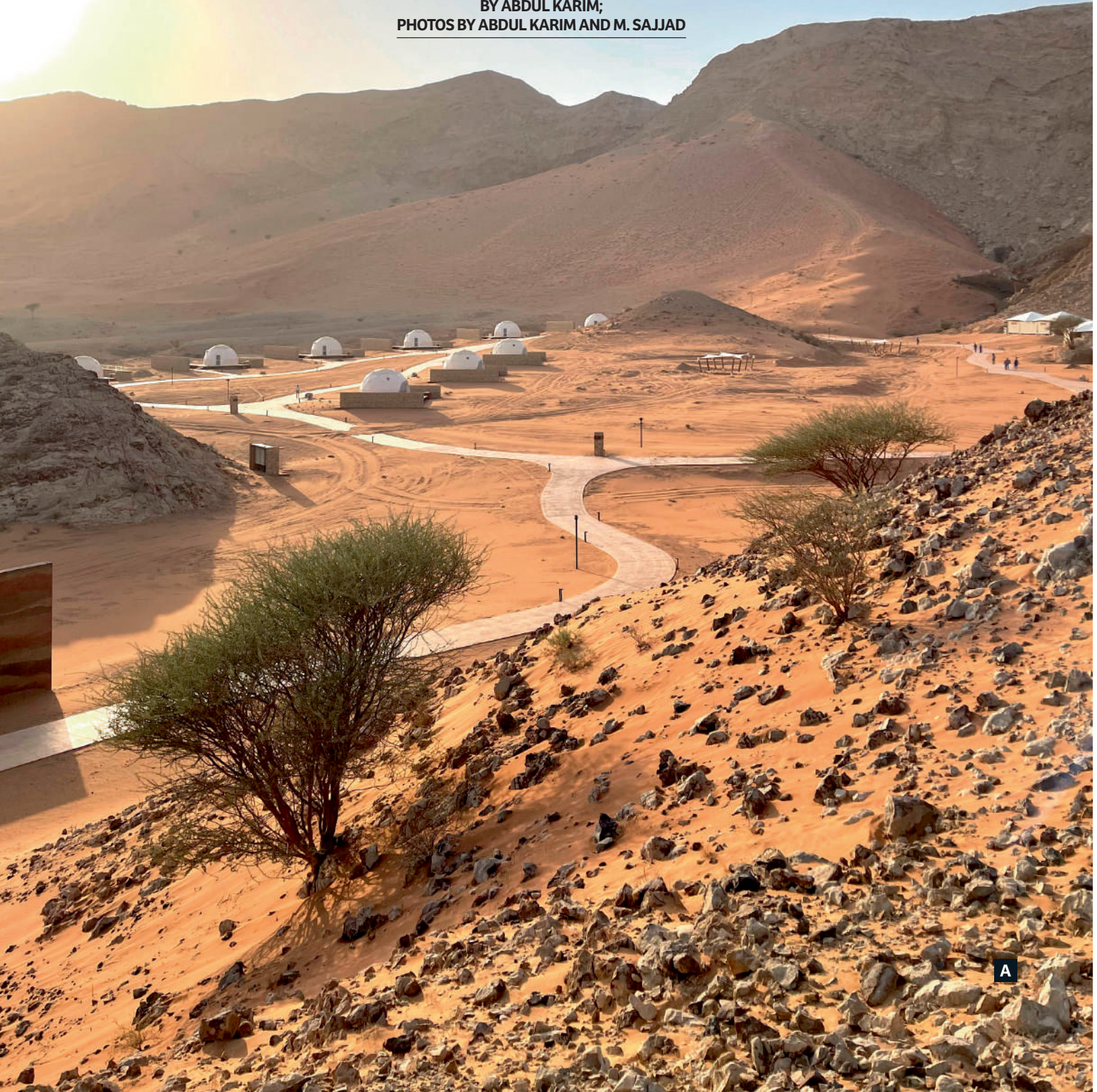


Being one with nature

MAKE THE MOST OF THE COOLER MONTHS BY
EXPLORING PICTURE-PERFECT CAMPING SPOTS IN
SHARJAH'S DESERTS

BY ABDUL KARIM;
PHOTOS BY ABDUL KARIM AND M. SAJJAD



With the mercury levels dropping down, to ring in the outdoor season in the UAE, many UAE residents will now be scrambling to get picture-perfect spots to set up camp. Sharjah's desert areas, stretching all the way from the emirate's hinterland Al Dhaid, through the archaeological sites of Mleiha desert and down to the red sand dunes of Al Madam, have long been a hot spot for adventure seekers and visitors who seek to trace the historical wonders the region holds.

Over the years, archaeologists have continued to unearth ancient remains of Mleiha's early inhabitants, some dating as far back as 130,000 years.

Located further down south in the Al Madam vicinity is Al Badayer, which is frequented by off-roaders who aim to conquer the dunes on-board their vehicles. During these cooler months, it often becomes a weekly ritual to go dune bashing or quad biking to explore the region, popular for the famous 'Big Red'.

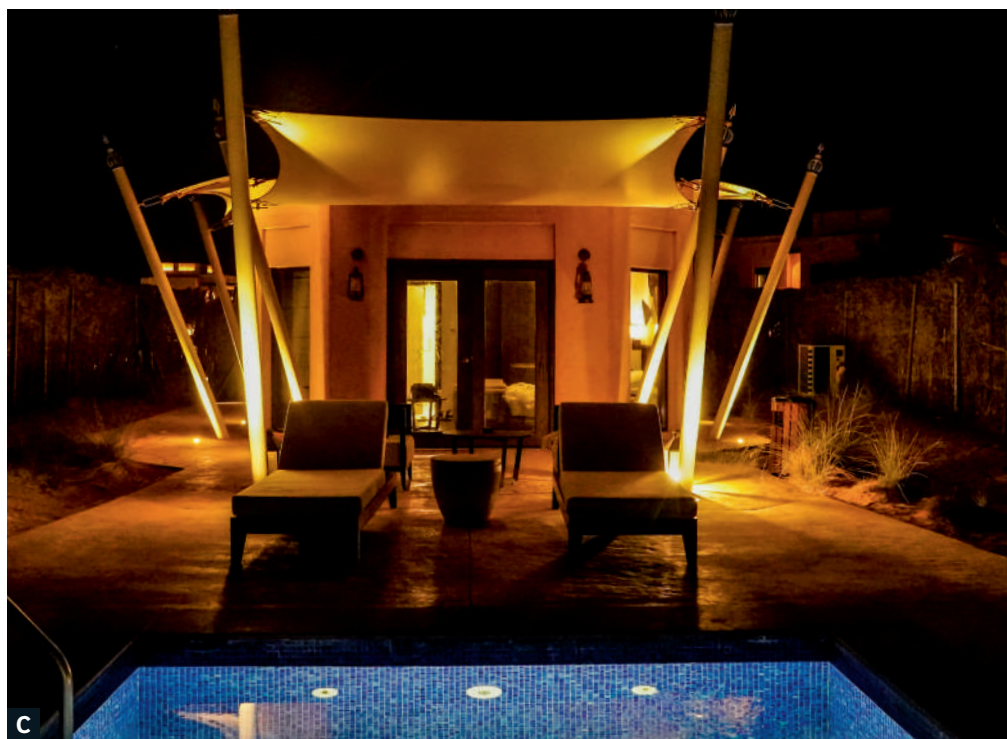
For the many off-road driving groups and even frequent visitors to the UAE's east coast, Al Badayer and the UAE's central region has usually been a quick transit hub for refuelling and gathering supplies. Just a stopover or a day trip for an adrenaline rush does not do justice to the beauty of Al Badayer, home to the most impressive sand dunes of the UAE desert.

Aside from being home to the abandoned village of Al Madam, Sharjah's Mleiha and Al Badayer are important destinations for the emirate's eco-tourism strategy to attract local and international visitors.

Those looking for weekend get-aways from the hustle and bustle of the cities should consider camping in this desert where the sand meets the rocks. Courtesy of the new retreats, there is now a variety of options to stay overnight with a glamorous touch, including private swimming pools for a refreshing experience.



B



C

A) Entrance of Akagera National Park; B) Great Cormorants retiring for the night; C) Great Cormorants retiring for the night

Where to stay

Choosing a hotel for a staycation can sometimes be a challenge given the huge variety in the UAE. Luckily, Sharjah has the eco-retreats tactically placed at its distinct historical and natural sites that form part of 'Mysk Sharjah Collection'.

Go glamping

For a magical experience of stargazing, grilling up a barbecue and a comfortable camping experience, the Mysk Moon Retreat has it all covered. It opened its doors for the public in October 2021 and was reportedly fully booked during the first week of its operations.

Located around 60 kilometres away from Sharjah City, in the rocky plains of Mleiha and surrounded by the Al Faya mountains, this new retreat is a place where one can be adventurous by the day and spend a reclusive time at night.



C

It offers a blend of simplicity, discovery and privacy as the resort only offers the residential units.

The Mysk Moon Retreat houses 10 single-bed domes with private pools, four family tents with private pools, and two single-bed tents. Each unit is fitted with essential amenities and also includes a private barbeque area.

There are no recreational facilities such as a swimming pool or a dining outlet at the moment. Though it has larger tents for the families, its iconic dome-shaped tents will certainly be popular amongst young couples who want their own space. Inclusive of the hotel price is a BBQ basket, which includes marinated items for the guests to grill up in the dedicated space whilst soaking in the natural surroundings.

Cost: Half board rates for a Dome with king-sized bed and a private pool starting from Dh2,195 per night.

Al Badayer Retreat

Adorned with Arabian ornaments, this hotel first opened its doors in 2019. If you're seeking a glimpse into the Emirati life, well before the mass urban development the country has witnessed, then add a visit to this retreat to your list. Located over 60 kilometers away from Sharjah, it is a dreamy oasis that amplifies the tranquillity of the desert. Covering an area of 230,000 square me-



C) Entrance of Akagera National Park; D) Great Cormorants retiring for the night

ters, this resort is nestled amongst the sand dunes, showcasing what life was like a few hundred years ago.

It has been designed to reflect the essence of Emirati lifestyle inside an Arabian castle, where one can marvel the beauty of its aesthetics for several hours. A spacious amphitheatre along with the recreational facilities as well as a dining outlet form the nucleus of this resort surrounded by the hotel rooms and private tents.

It has 10 private tents, seven one-bedroom tents and three two-bedroom

tents, all with a private pool. They are concrete-built individual units with a spacious patio for stargazing and a quick dip in the private pool. Overlooking a large sand dune, these are fully covered on either side to ensure seclusion.

This can be a comfortable option for a couple or a small family who seek privacy yet want to be able to interact with others and have an option of activities at their disposal.

Mysk Al Badayer Retreat will soon house 15 new tents as part of its expansion plans, which will also include three-bedroom tents.

Cost: During the winter season, prices for the 'one-bedroom tent' start from Dh1,950 a night **W**

abdulkarim@khaleejtimes.com