

Oman Obsession

Explore the land of frankincense and rosewater

Writer Judy Chapman



PREVIOUS PAGE: The Chedi Muscat has an Arabian vibe with its romantic archways.
OPPOSITE PAGE: Getting pampered on the beach at Shangri-La Hush Resort & Spa.
THIS PAGE: Chi, The Spa features regional experiences and ingredients



With endless coastlines, rugged mountains and epic deserts, sacred mosques and souks, Oman offers the most diverse landscape in the Middle East. It is also the region's fastest growing country in terms of tourism, and ranked as one of the safest countries in the world. But it's their rich spa culture that makes Oman a pamper-seekers dream destination.

Omani culture is well known for indigenous scent rituals that have captivated the hearts of many. Take *bakhoor*, Arabic for 'vapour', for example. Believed to originate from nomadic tribes who burnt agarwood with grounded resins, powdered flowers and herbs to mask the scent of cooking, today the aroma of *bakhoor* can be found everywhere.

When entering a home, spa or even a shopping mall, the exotic scent of rose, sandalwood and juniper is usually in the air. As you pass doorways of the souk, you

may witness the burning of frankincense for purification. Inside homes, Omanis smoke *bakhoor* to fragrance their clothes and hair. Outside, the men layer their dishdashas in scents of oud (or agarwood) and frankincense while the women adorn their elegant abayas with jewels and perfume oils. Secret *bakhoor* recipes are passed down through the generations, and no two recipes are ever the same.

Little wonder the treatments on the menu at Oman's finest spas feature these exotic fragrances.

CHI, THE SPA AT SHANGRI-LA AL HUSH RESORT & SPA

As Oman produces the highest quality frankincense in the world, it makes sense that spa offerings incorporate the wild ingredient once worth more than gold. This luxury seaside spa in the capital city of Muscat offers a Sense of Place menu with divine Frankincense and Rose Wraps. The

menu also features regional experiences such as Journey of Arabia ritual that includes sacred time in the hammam.

The resort with its incredible clifftop location overlooking the Gulf of Oman is the largest in Muscat with more than 640 hotel rooms designed to reflect the nation's rich cultural heritage. There are stunning beaches and pools to cool off in during the summer, and endless eateries to dine in. Their upgraded spa and wellness facilities launched this October.

www.shangri-la.com

AYANA SPA

Middle Eastern women visit this popular spa for their beauty services. Founded by an esthetician, it offers world-class beauty facials including LED Light Therapy and Microdermabrasion. However, the menu of local experiences such as Moroccan cleansing and hammam rituals are favoured among locals and expats.



Journey through a menu of Omani Purify Ritual, The Frankincense Polish and The Ayana Olive Oil Ritual – all comprising frankincense, myrrh, rose and other heavenly local ingredients. Most popular is The Amber Ritual that consists of scrubs, oils and massage balms scented with amber resin and concludes with an offering of amber tonic water. This is Muscat's only upmarket independent spa and is a favourite for bridal and birthday groups. www.ayanaspa.com

THE SPA AT THE CHEDI MUSCAT

Omanis take a great deal of care with their appearance, and the well-heeled head to this expansive 800sqm spa for weekly manicures and facials. Many have a preference for organic offerings and this spa caters to this with its sublime Ila spa treatments, as well as massages using pure frankincense oil. This city's largest and most upscale spa situated in the sea-facing Chedi Muscat's 21 acres boasts 13 dimly lit teak wood treatment rooms.

Downstairs, the gym is designed with private workout spaces for men and women and holds daily yoga and Pilates classes. Design-wise, the hotel feels Arabian with



romantic archways and tranquil pools, a stunning homage to contemporary Omani architecture. The resort is known for The Restaurant, undoubtedly Muscat's finest destination dining experience. www.ghmhotels.com

SIX SENSES SPA AT AL BUSTAN PALACE

Get a sense of traditional Omani life as you weave through endless arched walkways, domed ceilings and spouting *falaj* (water channels) at this incredible spa. Housed over three levels, the spa is designed like an ancient Omani fort and features several

hammams, some private and others for groups. As is the tradition in the Middle East, spas usually offer separate men and women areas but this luxury seaside spa goes a step further by offering Muscat's only private ladies beach.

The spa retail space showcases some of the world's best brands including Subtle Energies and Margy's Monte Carlo. Guests seeking deeper relaxation can book a signature Yogic-Sleep programme and measure their body's stress parameters, hydration, oxygen uptake, metabolism and inflammation with a Wellness Screening. www.sixsenses.com



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Ayana Spa is known for its world-class beauty services; Six Senses Spa at Al Bustan Palace offers a range of wellness experiences; enjoy daily yoga at The Chedi Muscat's spa; The Chedi Muscat pays homage to contemporary Omani architecture



SPA ALILA AT ALILA JABAL AKHDAR

Weather-wise, Oman has one of the hottest climates in the world, and come summer many escape to the Al Akhdar, or Green Mountain region for respite. This Alila property is probably Oman's most upscale boutique resort, its luxurious rooms and suites all with views of the mystical desert. Spa Alila is a sanctuary of seven treatment rooms and offers a menu of Asian therapies such as the Balinese Massage and Herbal Compress. But their treatments and rituals created from locally grown juniper berry, frankincense and rosewater sound most appealing.

Yoga can be enjoyed overlooking the canyon, and another highlight is their frankincense and juniper-infused steam room. In the evenings, enjoy refreshing tonics at their Rose Lounge followed by

Arabian cuisine at the Juniper Restaurant. Outside the resort, soak in local life as you explore nearby villages, sunrise treks and hikes and visit rose terraces and rosewater distillers – divine!

www.alilahotels.com

ANANTARA AL JABAL AL AKHDAR

Also situated in the cool mountain region, this resort offers one-, two- and three-bedroom pool villas that work well for friends and families travelling together. Designed by a French-Moroccan architect, the dreamy resort features 82 guest rooms and 33 villas with signature Omani touches throughout including intricate tiles, decorative lighting and *falaj* water features. At the heart of the spa is the majestic hammam, a building within a building. Inside this incredible space you receive cleansing scrubs made

from locally grown rose and pomegranate, some of which are performed on a heated white marble table.

Explore Rose Rescue Ritual, Green Mountain Escape and Arabian rituals or be cleansed in Oman's first Himalayan Salt steam room. Wellness-seekers can book three-day retreats enhanced with their signature Balance Wellness Menu featuring unlimited juices. Nearby are wadis, waterfalls and villages, and come March, the beautifully scented Damask rose is in full bloom.

www.jabal-akhdar.anantara.com



SIX SENSES SPA ZIGHY BAY AT SIX SENSES ZIGHY BAY RESORT

There are several ways to reach Oman's most prestigious wellness resort, including paragliding in from the rugged cliffs above. Set on a secluded bay surrounded by magical desert mountains, there's no place like it in the world. Pool villas are fitted with rustic materials and textures, designed to resemble native Omani life. In usual Six Senses fashion, your villa comes with your own bikes. Feast on local dishes made from fresh produce handpicked from organic gardens.



OPPOSITE PAGE: Spa Alila at Alila Jabal Akhdar overlooks breathtaking canyon views; Damask rose at Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar is in full bloom in March; Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar's spa features a modern design with Omani touches. THIS PAGE: Six Senses Zighy Bay Resort is set on a secluded bay, and its hammam rituals are must-tries; stunning pool at Anantara Al Baleed Resort Salalah

The hideaway offers all the elements of a wellness stay including nutritious food, daily yoga, meditation, adventure and fitness. Spa-wise, local rituals are infused with Omani aromatherapy. Try hammam rituals and The Wonders of Oman performed with locally grown dates, honey and crushed almonds. For guests seeking a longer healthy holiday, book in for Six Senses signature Yogic Detox and Yogic Sleep retreats.

www.sixsenses.com

ANANTARA SPA AT ANANTARA AL BALEED RESORT SALALAH

Located in the Dhofar region, this popular summer destination is famous for producing the highest quality Frankincense oil in the world. Anantara spa is an oasis situated between a beach and freshwater lagoon. Enjoy spa experiences using locally grown

coconut and frankincense such as The Frankincense Ritual, Coconut Indulgence or the regionally inspired Arabian Massage. In terms of wellness, retreat programmes are enhanced with yoga, meditation and healthy cuisine.

www.salalah.anantara.com

What else? Visit the Amouge Perfumery in Muscat to learn more about Oman's indigenous apothecary and see luxury fragrances being bottled. Other memorable Omani rituals include the offerings of fresh dates and date coffee in the afternoon. There's the call of prayer resonating five times a day, and if you are fortunate to visit during Ramadan, the holy month of fasting, cleansing and self-reflection, you will experience first-hand the beauty and colour of this important festival. 🌿

