

# Eastern Mangroves Hotel & Spa by Anantara

Abu Dhabi

✿ The journey to Abu Dhabi must begin, naturally, with a flight from Australia on Etihad, national carrier of the United Arab Emirates. No doubt you will have sampled dates on board and perhaps considered their importance in desert cultures, which means the centrepiece decoration in the lobby of Eastern Mangroves Hotel & Spa by Anantara won't be quite so hard to fathom. From a distance, I wonder if the five merry mounds are composed of chocolates. But no, here we have pyramids of waxy dates the colour of treacle, of myriad sizes and types, of seemingly infinite degrees of plumpness, all lined up as a sort of edible installation. Surely all hotel lobbies should look like this — celebrating the bounty of a place, extending the notion of hospitality and sustenance from the minute you arrive.

As I check in, a tray is presented of welcome drinks served in little patterned glasses — my choice of saffron or date juice or perhaps, the waiter urges, I should try both.

Opened in June last year, and the third Anantara property in go-ahead Abu Dhabi, the 222-room Eastern Mangroves has the decided feel of an urban resort, with parades of date palms and a lagoon-like pool, set beside meandering creeks within a 1.2km stretch of nature reserve. There are wading birds in the flourishing mangroves, the spiky skyline of the city can be glimpsed beyond, and the property is a 20-minute highway zoom from Abu Dhabi international airport.

It's a shiny five-storey hotel with an Asia-meets-Arabia design aesthetic. There are glittering mosaics, timber trellises, concealing balconies, 18-carat gold leaf wall and domed ceiling insets and arched windows. Silken soft furnishings in bronzes and golds and exotic Thai details (gorgeous ginger, vetiver and lemongrass soaps) reference the Anantara corporation's homeland roots. Tall ceilings, latticed screens and recurring archways allow the circulation of air and filtration of sunshine that typify Arabic architecture, creating shadows and plays of light that soothe against the punishing heat. It is all serene and lovely and not too showy.

The spacious guestrooms are thoughtfully proportioned and furnished with dark timbers, carpets with swirled patterns that echo the waterways beyond, and thick, voluptuously pooling curtains. While anyone would be pretty happy in the lowest-tariff Deluxe Balcony (albeit with highway noise if you opt to use the small outdoor area) or Deluxe Mangroves (with water views) rooms, it's a treat to upgrade to one of the five 180sqm oasis-like Kasara Mangroves Suites on the ground floor with a terrace, small blue-tiled plunge pool, outdoor furniture and market umbrellas. All Kasara category rooms include access to the Kasara Club Lounge for breakfast, all-day refreshments, evening



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canapes and personal concierge services plus late check-out and other extras. The Royal Mangroves Residence is touted as the largest suite in the UAE, can be configured as three, seven or 10 bedrooms, and its budget-busting amenities include separate elevator access, a rooftop garden, infinity-edge pool complete with a swim-up bar, butlering around the clock, private chef and spa therapist, and chauffeured limousine on call.

**Dining:** The hotel is the destination, with no restaurants on its doorstep, although an Eastern Mangroves Promenade is under construction, which will feature dining and shopping alongside a 30-berth marina and a residential development. Meantime, there's breakfast and all-day dining at Ingredients with its open kitchens, five specialised cooking stations, health bar with gluten-free and non-sugar options, and themed displays of international dishes. Start the global village day with, say, French yoghurt, pomegranate juice, Chinese dumplings, continental charcuterie, warm flat bread and hummus spread and cardamom-flavoured coffee. Marvellous Thai

food is served at the — in chic surrounds screens, and with its or who matches slightly. The meal starts with street snack) box of b shallots, chopped pe dried shrimp, shreds and ground spices. C curry (cooked for at le with cashews and s afters, the delicious st Moroccan-born exact master Alain Ducasse get a poor meal here. **Everyone's talking** a 5km drive from the Centre and the hotel i for conference delegat includes a mix of expat





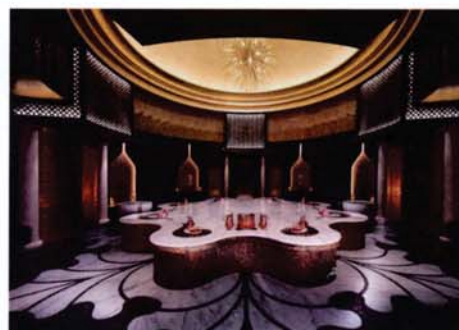
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... it's a chic, cushy space with mangroves views and, in the distance, the city's Corniche and Saadiyat Island.

Consider a package that blends your stay with sister properties Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort (*WISH*, June 2012), which stands like a fairytale fortress amid the dunes of the Liwa Desert, and the Desert Islands Resort & Spa and its two exclusive lodges on Sir Bani Yas Island, where excursions cover lagoon snorkelling, horse riding, nature walks and wildlife safaris to view oryxes, gazelles and cheetahs.

**Stepping out:** It's about a 10-minute drive to Abu Dhabi city centre or walk or cycle along the promenade to the Corniche. The concierge desk can organise kayak tours of the channel in front of the hotel, which contains the densest concentration of saline-resistant grey mangroves in the UAE. You might spot flamingos, and there are said to be more than 200 species of fish in the greenish water.

Also consider visits to Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, classic souks and Saadiyat Island. If cars are your thing, I recommend the tremendously big and

red Ferrari World (the world's largest indoor theme park) and the Yas Circuit for Formula One driving and drag racing experiences. Best resort-style outing is to the groovy Monte Carlo Beach Club on Saadiyat for lunch, dinner or see-and-be-seen beachside cocktails.

**Essentials:** Eastern Mangroves Hotel & Spa by Anantara, Eastern Ring Road, Salam Street, Abu Dhabi, UAE. Phone + 971 2 656 1000. Check the hotel website for a range of packages valid to December and including weekend specials and a Spa Essence deal of 15 per cent discount on accommodation in a Deluxe Balcony or Mangrove room or Kasara Club rooms or suites, daily buffet breakfast for two and a choice of Anantara Spa hammam experience or massages for two; from AED1870 (about \$485). Add 10 per cent service charge and 6 per cent tax. A 30-minute Turkish foam massage in Abu Dhabi's largest hammam costs AED350 (well worth considering even if you are not staying at the hotel).

More: [anantara.com](http://anantara.com); [etihadairways.com](http://etihadairways.com).



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