

Secret islands, amazing architecture, natural wonders and more all await, and some of them are still relatively undiscovered. Check out these six amazing off the beaten track spots in Abu Dhabi

1

BANI HASHIM MOSQUE

Of course, the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque is breathtakingly beautiful, but for an alternative culture fix that you haven't visited every single time your family or friends are in town, we recommend hopping across the Grand Canal to the more understated, but equally gorgeous, Bani Hashim Mosque. Adorned with a sparkling gold dome and gorgeous blue and turquoise engravings, it's a super impressive and intricate example of Islamic architecture. Built as a direct replica of the Dome of the Rock shrine in Jerusalem, spending a few moments admiring the stunning facade of this special place is a humbling experience.
 📍 Near Souk Qaryat Al Beri, Rabdan, Al Maqtaa, Abu Dhabi.



Photo credit: Mohammed Sahil

2

AL WATHBA LONG SALT LAKE

Admittedly, more and more people have started to flock here over the last few months. But still, only the truly dedicated Abu Dhabi explorers have seen this utterly sensational, Insta-worthy attraction in person. Boasting crystal clear, azure waters dotted with ethereal, mushroom-shaped salt formations, it almost looks like it was purposefully made for a photo shoot. But no, whilst the channel that holds Al Wathba Long Salt Lake might be manmade, the striking floating islands of sodium chloride are totally natural. Hopping from one to the other is a thrill like you've never known, but please tread carefully and take care not to damage them. This mesmerising lagoon is only about an hour's drive from downtown Abu Dhabi, and while you're there you may as well check out the slightly more famous, and just as other-worldly, Fossil Dunes formations. You only live once after all...
 📍 Al Wathba Desert, Abu Dhabi.



Photo credit: @halakrunz

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

Feel like you've seen all that the capital has to offer? Think again...

Words: Harriet Shephard

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KASHTA RENTAL BOATS

Calm, bright blue and green waters, untouched white sands and not another soul to be seen for miles around; no, this isn't the Maldives we're describing, it's actually the mystical, and exceptionally gorgeous, sand bank islands of Saadiyat Island. Never heard of them? Well, that's not too surprising considering that these idyllic, top-secret floating mounds of sand only appear at certain times of day when the tide is low. But don't worry, you don't have to become an expert on the patterns and movements of the Arabian Gulf to find them. Instead, you can enlist the help of the brilliant seafarers at Kasha boat rental service, who know the waters surrounding Saadiyat Island like the back of their hands. They'll take you and four pals out to the islands at precisely the right time (normally early morning during the summer), and provide chairs, an umbrella, water and a kayak. Then, once you've taken as many photos as your phone can handle, they'll pick you up and take you back. Dolphins can be spotted out here throughout the year, and it's guaranteed to be the dreamiest, most relaxing few hours you'll ever have.

🏠 *Kashta Rental Boats, Saadiyat Island, daily 7am to 2pm and 4pm to 6pm, Dhs500 (five people for three hours), Dhs600 (five people for five hours). Tel: (0)56 366 5335. @kkashtaa.*



Photo credit: @up6

5

MOON ISLAND RESORT

Formerly called Happiness Island, we first went to Moon when it was a somewhat rough-and-ready party spot. But now, the crescent-shaped resort has rebranded as a family-friendly, classy hideaway that comes complete with an infinity pool, swim-up bar and private beach. Still excellent value for money (day passes are AED 150, fully redeemable on food and beverage), and capable of throwing big parties when the occasion calls for it, the island now boasts an extensive bar-bite menu, kids' play area, inflatable waterpark and two adorable, friendly lamas (we mean, why wouldn't there be?). The private villas are currently closed for renovation, but in a few months' time you'll also be able to spend a full night here, too. Just a ten-minute boat ride from downtown but offering a totally different vibe to the hustle and bustle of the city, Moon lets you experience total escapism with minimal hassle and for a reasonable price. Oh, and make sure you get a photo in front of the pool and its city-skyline backdrop, just in case your friends back home need reminding that you still live in the best city in the world.

🏠 *Boats depart from The British Club, Mina Saadiyat, weekdays, 11am to 9pm, weekends 11am to 10pm, Dhs150 (redeemable). Tel: (0)50 954 3636. @moon_island_ad.*



4

MAKERSPACE

It may not be a cultural landmark or have panoramic vistas, but we've never been anywhere quite like Makerspace. If you want to put this summer to good use and come away with something to show for it, then this might just become your new favourite hangout. An arty hub for creative minds, members of Makerspace get access to state-of-the-art equipment suitable for a wide range of disciplines such as woodworking, textiles, metalwork, electronics, ceramics, and more. But as well as empowering and inspiring SMEs and freelancers, the Al Zeina establishment offers over 70 different classes a month, including starter sessions in skills like wood and metal work. BRDG café has also just opened up in the same building, so there's even somewhere cool to go for lunch break. Plus, you never know what fresh connections or new friends you'll make whilst nursing a cappuccino and pondering your next ceramic pot design.

🏠 *Block C1, Al Zeina, Al Raha Beach, Saturday to Thursday, 9am to 9pm, day passes start from Dhs95, classes start from Dhs220. Tel: (0)2 558 8624. @makerspacead.*



Photo credit: Mohammed Al Fairan

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PURA ECO RETREAT

Gone are the days when we had to road trip it up to Fujairah or Ras Al Khaimah to go back to nature and do some fancy glamping. PURA Eco Retreat, the capital's first environmentally friendly resort, is a refreshing contrast to the flashy, glamorous, marble-floored hotels that we've become so accustomed to. This tranquil, peaceful oasis of natural beauty is nestled on the edge of Jubail Mangrove Park, and it's been purposefully designed to have minimal impact on the surrounding protected area. A wilderness escape infused with a subtly luxurious touch, each state-of-the-art dome tent comes with an ensuite bathroom, king-sized bed, private firepit and stunning views out over the surrounding landscape. Adults-only and totally car-free for extra relaxation, there's also loads of cool activities to do such as kayaking, biking and beach yoga, plus a healthy, eco-friendly restaurant and super-cool beach bar complete with upcycled tables and chairs.

🏠 *Jubail island. Tel: (0)50 383 7878, stayapura.com. @stayapura.*



Photo credit: PURA Eco Retreat