



The pool at Jumeirah Garden

Supplied photos

Phone at hand

## A CLASS APART

### From the celebrity chef to the furniture and knick-knacks, Jumeirah Garden stands out

By PAULINE M. FORTE  
Features Writer

Something unique to the Jumeirah Garden is that every room comes with a mobile phone credited with Dh20. Guests can use this phone during their stay and take it wherever they go.

In case of an emergency, they can call Ace, the hotel's concierge, or Gidley, the co-owner, anytime.



All the rooms in the hotel are designed by co-owner Paul Gidley

Calling the Jumeirah Garden a "guesthouse" really doesn't do it justice. Discreetly tucked away in a quiet corner of Jumeirah, this boutique hotel is housed in a pink villa with no front signage. Until now, people couldn't find

cushioned chairs with matching footrests, classic headboards and huge beds with comforters and plenty of pillows in all shapes.

The room rates are surprisingly affordable — Dh450 including breakfast (except for the Garden Majlis, which is Dh550). "If we can charge less and give people a little bit more to spend out there, we're happy," Gidley said.

The prices may reflect those of a cheap accommodation but the bedrooms and service are typical of luxurious hotels. More often than not, Gidley bonds with his customers and many become friends. And many of those who have tasted British celebrity chef Andy Campbell's food once, return for more of his cuisine.

#### A chosen few

Having cooked for stars such as Guy Ritchie, Michael Cain, Jude Law and Chris Evans, and appeared on TV-food programmes in England, Campbell is the only chef in Dubai to cook every night for a small set of diners. The best thing is that he comes out of the kitchen (where

only he cooks) and casually talks to his guests. He's a friendly, down-to-earth and talented man.

According to Gidley, diners at the Jumeirah Garden Restaurant are old-school expats, including bankers, those working in the media, and sons of entrepreneurs. "You want people in your restaurant who enjoy food," he said.

#### Fun for groups

The covered restaurant at the back of the villa can be reserved for wedding receptions, birthday parties, hen nights and other events. Guests staying at the hotel can have all three meals at the restaurant.

The garden is split into three areas: A peaceful croquet lawn in the front; the herb-and-vegetable garden to the side, where Campbell grows organic basil, garlic, aubergine and tomato; and the pool garden at the back, which has a nice swimming pool (with fountains), Jacuzzi and wooden loungers

covered with cushions and printed with British flags.

The only missing touches in the rooms (maybe because they were designed by a man?) are that there are no lamps on the bedside tables — which means guests have to get up to turn the main light off before going to sleep.

Although the bathrooms are spacious and clean, they don't have shelves or hangers. A bar of soap is provided but shampoo,

#### Chef's secret

Here's how to make chef Campbell's triple-cooked chips:  
Cut high-quality potatoes in thick, rectangular shapes. Rinse in cold water for at least 30 minutes to get rid of the starch and boil them. Freeze for at least 30-60 minutes. Cook the chips in low-temperature oil and freeze them again for at least 30 minutes. Fry until golden brown and crispy just before serving. With this technique, the centre is soft, like mashed potato and the outside is crispy like a chip.

#### Details

out about the hotel from travel guides or advertisements — only by word of mouth. Co-owner Paul Gidley would prefer if his hotel, open since December last year, remained one of Dubai's best-kept secrets.

Once in the reception area, one can sense a strong British influence in the interior design and decoration. A nice round table with magazines, a chest of drawers painted with the English flag, a bulldog statue and other funky Britannia fixtures and fittings adorn the space. "It's tongue-in-cheek British. We don't take it too seriously," Gidley said.

The ten bedrooms split across two levels are equally appointed and were all decorated by Gidley. Simple elegance is how I would describe them with French grey and British green walls, leather-

**Where:** Villa 76, 14a Street, Jumeirah (exit 41 — Al Thanya Street — on Shaikh Zayed Road)  
**Price:** Dh450 per night, including breakfast, Dh550 for the Majlis room  
**Visit:** www.thejumeirahgarden.com  
**E-mail:** bookings@thejumeirahgarden.com



The restaurant's elegant lamb dish

body cream and other toiletries are not.

Each room has internet access and a TV but no channels — a nice touch in my opinion. Because the guests were never watching TV, Gidley decided to buy 500 DVDs instead and placed them all over the house. And there's no fridge in the rooms because they're noisy and don't look nice, Gidley said. But a large fridge is available near the kitchen and guests are trusted to put Dh2 for water and soft beverages. There's a classy lounge on the second floor for guests.



Andy Campbell

Just opposite the villa is the Whitehouse, a small separate building with four bedrooms. Each room is temporarily designed in a "white on white" style. The Whitehouse is ideal for larger families or groups. It can be booked as a whole; individual rooms are also available.

#### Breakfast blues

One common complaint among guests staying at the hotel for four days or more, was that breakfast was the same

every day, consisting of tea and coffee, juice, cereals, toast, preserves, and a choice of two eggs (poached, fried, scrambled, boiled) served with button mushrooms and grilled tomatoes. Although it was tasty, it was repetitive (and heavy). As a resident of Dubai, this truly tranquil stay (you can sleep with the windows open) turned out to be a welcome escape from city life. And if you want genuine friendliness and one-to-one service, you can't do better.

Campbell grows seasonal herbs and vegetables in a small garden on one side of the villa. He used top-quality produce, sourced either from the British Isles or the same suppliers as some of the most luxurious hotels in Dubai.

For dessert, Campbell prepared an amazing flourless chocolate cake served with a spoonful of crème fraiche. The sugar syrup used in preparing the cake stabilises it all and keeps it from crystallising, Campbell explained, as we were all raving about the rich and dense dessert.

I forgot to mention the freshly baked bread that was placed on the table at the beginning of the meal — still warm. It was a focaccia with rosemary and semi-dried cherry tomatoes.

The second time I dined at the Jumeirah Garden, the main course was fine-dine steak and chips, or more precisely, black Angus beef from Margaret in Perth, Australia, and triple-cooked chips — thick fries tasting like mash on the inside and crisp on the outside (see box for recipe).

But I can't omit the entrée. The seared tuna with a side of white radish and cucumber in a sesame and soy dressing with slices of ginger was exquisite, melting on the tongue.

The relaxed atmosphere paired with unpredictability highlights the quality of the food served at the Jumeirah Garden — simple and sophisticated.

## Picnic in the sands with exotic friends

The Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve offers an insight into how much life the seemingly barren desert actually supports

By MANJARI SAXENA  
Features Writer

Having been in the UAE for the past 30 years now, I've learnt I share a love-hate relationship with the desert. I love to watch the dunes pass by through the window of a car, especially on a full-moon night. I love dune bashing and standing atop one to watch the sunset. But I hate feeling like a tonne of bricks each time I step on the sand. I hate

the sand flying into my face and hair, creeping into my clothes.

Yet, there's something endearing about it that keeps pulling me back. So, last weekend saw me and two colleagues at the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve in Margham area for a nature trail organised by Arabian Adventures.

As I leafed through a brochure about wildlife at the reserve that our safari guide, Vinod Kumar, handed me, I found that except for

maybe the Arabian oryx, the Arabian and sand gazelles, and desert fox, the majority belonged to the reptile species. I've never really been a fan of anybody with their belly too close to the ground. One consolation was that most of these species are nocturnal and it was mid-morning when we arrived. The heat would keep them away, I thought.

#### Bustling haven

My first encounter that day was with colonies of spider-like flying insects in the camp toilet. We had seen different tracks in the sand made by lizards, dung beetles, agamas, gerbils and desert hare on our way in. Kumar informed us there were over 40 wildlife species, 120 bird species and 55 identified plant species in the reserve. As he pointed out the foliage, the only ones I could identify were the ubiquitous acacia and ghaf trees, and Sodom's apples.

Most animals were shy away from the heat. One flighty gazelle had teased us as we began our journey into the reserve but it was only after driving a good way in that we saw it again with a compan-

#### Inside story



Oryx rest under ghaf trees

Photos by KAREN DIAS/Gulf News

The Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve (DDCR) covers 225 square km, 4.75 per cent of the land area of Dubai, making it the largest area dedicated to one project of the emirate. DDCR is a joint effort of Dubai government, Emirates airline and the Al Maha Desert Resort and Spa. It is divided into four zones, of which two are for research and conservation. The resort forms the third and the last is the tourist trail.

Conservation efforts began in the 1960s but it was only after 35 years that, under

the sponsorship of His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, that 90 Arabian oryx were brought from their American sanctuary. Today there are 300.

Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa opened in 1999 and was an instant success. Finally, based on research and conservation proposals by the resort, the DDCR was created in 2004. It is also a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the world's largest environmental organisation.

ion — gracefully at play. The oryx came in much later — first a loner, then, a little ahead, a small herd. In the meantime, the gazelles kept us amused, jumping into view often. It was almost noon before we came

upon a large herd of oryx. Close to them, Kumar set out a little picnic breakfast under a ghaf tree.

All this time in the car, Kumar told us to keep our eyes to the ground. At one point he braked

hard pointing to the right. We only caught the sand shifting like molten lava as a sandfish raced across. Just as we pulled away I spotted an Arabian toad-headed agama on my side of the path. But before Kumar could stop the car, it disappeared, leaving the tell-tale parallel lines in the sand.

It wasn't long before our trail ended. We saw a few other herds of oryx on our way out. Kumar informed us that the reserve is spreading them out.

— For information visit [www.arabian-adventures.com](http://www.arabian-adventures.com)

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