

# A QUINTESSENTIALLY BRITISH WELCOME

As luxury resort Dukes Dubai opens its doors, operator Seven Tides' CEO Abdulla Bin Sulayem talks of further establishing the Dukes brand in a competitive Middle East market.

BY INGA STEVENS

**F**amed for its lavish Afternoon Tea and its strong Royal connection (it was a favorite of the late Queen Mother), the luxury Mayfair retreat Dukes London has expanded its presence to the Middle East with its very own sister hotel—Dukes Dubai. Touted as the quintessentially British hospitality experience (but without the dreary weather), the first international property for Dukes opened its doors within the Oceana complex on The Palm Jumeirah in Dubai on April 2017.

Made up of 279 elegantly appointed and spacious guestrooms including 64 suites, with a ladies-only Liberty Duchess floor featuring 20 rooms, as well as 227 fully furnished hotel apartments and six distinctive dining experiences, Dukes Dubai is a welcome addition to the hospitality scene in the emirate.

Owned and operated by Dubai-based Seven Tides International, Dukes Dubai certainly mirrors its sister hotel's reputation for understated luxury and discreet British charm. The elegant décor and refined furnishings throughout the 15-story property, perfectly complemented by the opulence of the chandelier in the hotel reception and the dramatic canopy over the main entrance, relays the traditional and friendly charisma of a far more established hotel.

Dukes Dubai is the fifth property in the Seven Tides portfolio of residential, commercial and hospitality projects in Dubai alongside the Anantara Residences, a luxurious residential property forming part of the Anantara The Palm Dubai Resort, Mövenpick Ibn Battuta Gate Hotel Dubai, Avani Deira Dubai Hotel, and Oceana Residences on The Palm Jumeirah.

The two-tower hotel, situated on a private beach with a view of the Dubai Marina skyline, is clearly a great source of pride for Seven Tides CEO Abdulla Bin Sulayem. Having acquired Dukes London in early 2007, the hotelier knew he had a fantastic opportunity to expand the renowned Dukes product to the Middle East.

"As one of the first cities to jump back into the hospitality game after the economic crisis, Dubai was always a preferred



Abdulla Bin Sulayem,  
CEO of Seven Tides

location for the expansion of the Dukes Collection brand," Bin Sulayem explains. "The government's drive to keep reinvesting in the city's tourism infrastructure, with landmark projects and infrastructure upgrades underway such as the expansion of the ports, the new airport, and entertainment complexes and theme parks, gives us great confidence in the future of Dubai as a global tourism hub."

This confidence is further boosted by the continued strength of the British tourism market in Dubai. As the number three tourism volume generator in 2016, with nearly 1.25 million visitors, the United Kingdom is also one of the most dominant markets for all of the Seven Tides properties in Dubai.

Guest demographics aside, maintaining strong customer relationships and cultivating existing brand loyalty are also

parts of the strategy for the developer and Sulayem believes that the centuries-old reputation of the London property will go a long way in attracting high numbers of both leisure and business guests to Dukes Dubai. “By meticulously replicating the high level of customer service in both Dukes properties, with the help of our Managing Director Debrah Dhugga who will split her time between the two, we expect that many of our guests from the London property will quickly become return customers at Dukes Dubai,” he adds.

Since the initial announcement of the Dukes Dubai project in April 2015, the Seven Tides team used the lead-time wisely to perfect the design, style and quality of the hotel features and the rooms, ensuring that the hotel stands out from the competition. As Bin Sulayem explains, simply being on The Palm Jumeirah alone does not guarantee success. “To be attractive to guests your hotel needs that special feature or unique quality,” he says. “Just as Anantara has direct room access to the lagoons, Dukes Dubai has a number of differentiating features such as beautiful, functional rooms, a stunning and spacious lobby, and a number of world-class dining options.”

The hotel’s signature dining outlet Great British Restaurant (GBR), headed up by Dukes Dubai’s Executive Chef, Martin Cahill, adds a glamorous twist to traditional British cuisine by infusing tastes from the U.K.’s rich culinary history with ingredients from heritage brands. The 390-capacity restaurant, with floor-to-ceiling windows and views of the surrounding Arabian Gulf, has a menu full of iconic British classics such as battered cod and chips while introducing a number of elegant menu items such as Colchester oysters, and hock and foie gras terrine served with Piccalilli.

“We wanted GBR to stand out in Dubai’s already crowded restaurant scene and the best way to do that was to focus on using top quality, seasonal produce, sourced from the U.K.,” says Cahill, who also oversees five further dining and lounge venues at the property including the multi-award winning Khyber Indian restaurant and the popular West 14th steakhouse. “The décor and design of the space were also crucial in creating a particular ambience that lends itself to a distinctly British buzz.”

Substantiating its great British offering, Dukes Dubai has also partnered up with a number of British brands including Royal Warrant holder Floris for in-room amenities, Liberty Fabrics for custom-made soft furnishings on the Liberty Duchess Floor, interior design by Andrew Martin Interiors, bespoke bone china from specialist William Edwards, hairdressing services from renowned British hair salon Toni&Guy, as well as sourcing its cheese from cheesemonger Paxton & Whitfield.

“Channeling the British spirit through our choice of



partners and brands reflects our need to authenticate the Dukes Dubai experience,” Cahill explains. “Guests will be immersed in British culture from the moment they arrive for their stay.”

With Dukes Dubai now open to the public, the focus for Seven Tides has turned towards an exciting new hospitality project in the emirate. In collaboration with Anantara, work is now underway to build the first five-star resort on The World Islands, a man-made archipelago about four kilometres off the coast of Dubai.

Employing a new, highly time and energy efficient method of construction, the resort, featuring 50 private villas with plunge pools, the main pool, a signature restaurant, all-day dining and a spa, is expected to open by the Q1 2018. It will operate as a luxury extension to the 300-room Anantara The Palm Dubai Resort, which will only be 15 minutes away by speedboat.

“We feel there is a lot of opportunity for high-end hospitality on The World Islands as no one has dared to venture there yet,” explains Bin Sulayem. “This property will rival the Maldives and Seychelles for island resorts as it will have immediate access to one of the region’s most vibrant cities and it will be protected by a man-made breakwater ensuring that the sea remains calm almost 365 days a year, no matter what the weather conditions.”

Clearly a man with his finger firmly on the pulse of the luxury hospitality industry, Bin Sulayem believes that there are only a handful of properties in Dubai that truly deserve a five-star rating, going beyond the standard requirements with the exceptional level of detail and service that they offer. “It is no longer enough to just tick the boxes of what meets the five-star criteria,” he notes. “The future of the hospitality industry lies in the idea that you need to have a resort with a purpose—either a beach resort or a golf resort, or it could be attached to a shopping mall—to capture the imagination and loyalty of the guests.” 