

Kempinski's two new seaside hotels bring new comforts and amenities to Jordan's resorts



Kempinski Hotel Aqaba

KEMPINSKI HOTEL AQABA

WITH ITS ARTFUL crescent-shaped slate infinity pool shaded by bamboo trees and hi-tech rooms, the new Kempinski Hotel Aqaba (it opened in 2009) has raised the bar on where to stay in Aqaba, a small developing resort in Jordan. Yes, there's still an empty plot beside it and you can't help but notice the freighters in the port. But the Kempinski's Royal Suite was still good enough for Nicole Kidman who also bedded here during our stay.

All 201 rooms and suites have dramatic views of the Red Sea. Huge balconies with marble floors have slatted wooden screens you can slide, depending on the position of the sun. Inside, the ultra-modern room décor is all white walls, blonde wood floors and chrome lamps, and white leather headboards highlight comfy beds with plush linens. The glass-walled bathrooms aren't for the modest, however – your room-mate can still see you through the pull-down translucent shade. But with free in-room Internet, a mini-bar stocked with complimentary Amstel beer and soft drinks, and convenient North American electricity plugs, we couldn't complain too much.

The hotel also features a delightful fish restaurant (the menu comes rolled up in a glass bottle). And it's only an



Kempinski Hotel Ishtar Dead Sea

hour away from the red desert of Wadi Rum, where you can tap into your inner Lawrence of Arabia on a jeep tour guided by a local Bedouin.

KEMPINSKI HOTEL ISHTAR DEAD SEA

OVER ON THE DEAD SEA—actually an inland salty lake—the Kempinski Hotel Ishtar Dead Sea has been designed to resemble the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. With nine pools and gardens dotted with lagoons and waterfalls, it's a beautiful and visually stunning resort.

But perhaps because of its sprawling size (over 300 rooms and suites), service isn't as spiffy as at the Aqaba property. And the main neon-lit buffet restaurant (where many half-board guests eat) doesn't do the hotel justice. Still, its à la carte Italian grill restaurant is excellent and more than compensates.

For a unique experience, don't miss slathering your body with black Dead Sea mud at the resort's beach and floating in the super buoyant water. Also treat yourself at the spa, the largest in the Middle East. — JANICE MUCALOV