

HIGH-TECH HOTELS



20

As technology enables a new standard in luxury, these hotels aren't just adapting to, but redefining the art of modern hospitality

WORDS YI-HWA HANNA

In recent decades, the Middle East's hospitality industry has become synonymous with bold architectural feats and luxury experiences. Now, as the region grows increasingly known for pushing the boundaries of innovation, it's also leading the charge in high-tech hospitality. From AI-powered concierges and immersive smart rooms that adapt to your preferences with just a touch, the next wave of top hotels in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and beyond are harnessing the power of technology to deliver seamless, hyper-personalised stays that can cater to the modern traveller's every whim. We take a look at some of the properties and developments that are pushing the envelope on everything from design to comfort and convenience, and transforming the way we think about travel, one smart innovation at a time.

ME DUBAI BY MELIÁ

This showstopping property designed by Zaha Hadid – the only building in Dubai that features interiors and exteriors personally designed by the late visionary architect herself – is enough to make anyone pause for another look. Called the Opus, the building was released as part of her posthumous work, but her sci-fi-worthy touch lives on not only through its geometrically-impressive design, but through its features, too. The ME brand is known for its stylish, urban appeal, and this hotel (*pictured above*) fuses art and technology for a truly unique experience. Inside, you'll find the VITA Tronic, a "space harmoniser that creates harmonious balance in the electro-technological environment, reducing the intensity of interference and creating a pleasant and harmonious living environment." The sound-based device is said to synchronise with the Earth's magnetic field through a 7.83-hertz frequency, commonly referred to as the Schumann

Resonance, while also improving air quality within the premises and reducing EMF pollution. They also offer the AQUA VITA Life – a "patented water vitaliser and chalk transformer that revitalises water from its natural source, achieving optimal energising to promote vitality", as well as an "Energy Card, with properties that amplify subtle energy fields and imitate positive frequencies," as well as FAZUP, described as an anti-radiation patch for mobile devices. The latter items are available through a well-being package offered in partnership with GreenTECH by AQUAcell, a homegrown brand focusing on a holistic and sustainable approach, that aims to promote long-term health while positively contributing to the development of our environment by reducing carbon footprints. The hotel also minimises paper waste by providing guests with digital media in lieu of printed magazines and newspapers, while the staff only uses digital rather than physical business cards.

SHEBARA

A cutting-edge island destination in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Shebara (*pictured right*) is the first resort brand to be owned and operated by Red Sea Global (RSG), the developer behind the area it's in – The Red Sea. Famous for its commitment to regenerative tourism and sustainability, RSG's debut hotel resort will be located on Sheybarah Island in the Al Wajh Lagoon, with an eye-popping design reminiscent of a series of UFOs. When viewed from the sky, the main hub in the centre of its line of overwater villas resembles an alien-like stingray – a fitting image for a futuristic retreat on an island that's working to redefine how technology can blend in with nature. Like the other properties in The Red Sea, the resort (and the entire island) will be supported by solar power – it even boasts its own solar farm with more than 11,000 PV panels. Designed by Killa Design – the company behind Dubai's iconic Museum of the Future – the silvery orb-like pods reflect and refract light from the sun, the sky, and the sea, allowing them to meld into the surrounding environment like a chameleon, while still standing out with their futuristic aesthetic. Their placement, too, has been crafted to align with lunar positioning. Deepening its commitment to sustainability, the pods were made with as many eco-materials as possible, while fresh water will be supplied by a solar-powered desalination plant, and waste material will be recycled on the island itself, reducing the need for expensive or environmentally damaging transport. With their conscience clear, guests



enjoying this hyper-responsible destination will be able to step out of their pods – which will stay cool with minimal energy losses, thanks to their unique design – to enjoy the island's 30- to 40-metre reef drop-off, exploring the unspoiled waters' stunning coral reefs and thriving ocean life. Behind the scenes, Shebara is the first hotel in KSA to use Opera Cloud Property Management System and the first Oracle Cloud Central Distribution System customer in the region.

RADISSON RED DUBAI SILICON OASIS

Radisson has made great strides in digital



innovation in recent years, making this a key part of their ambitious five-year plan to become a leading pioneer in digital innovation. Among the many ways they're leading the charge are with a Radisson Operations App that streamlines digital collaboration and workflow between team members; smart hotel operations that use groundbreaking AI technology to perform repetitive tasks that would normally be done by humans and thereby freeing up employees' time for other tasks; and Radisson Assistance, a digital tool created using myMeta and Quantum Metric to improve hotel opps efficiency. In terms of customer-facing benefits, anyone hoping to sneak a peek at a Radisson room – from guest rooms to meeting spaces – can now virtually enter them through a laptop, mobile, or VR headset through the immersive experiences available at more than 185 of their hotels. Many of the brand's contemporary properties boast unique tech-forward appeal, too: the Radisson RED at Dubai's Silicon Oasis (*pictured left*), for instance, is located at Dubai Digital Park, which was the emirate's first-ever smart city project built with the latest AI and IOT technologies. The property itself has numerous i-work stations, interactive digi-walls (that can stream content to social media), and 10 ultra high-tech meeting venues. Bonus: It's also pet-friendly. →

21

IMAGES: SUPPLIED

JUMEIRAH EMIRATES TOWERS

Having all of the great devices in the world would be useless without ways to charge them. That's not a problem at this iconic business hotel (*pictured right*), where in all executive rooms and all of their suites, you'll find more plugs as well as USB ports than you could ever hope for on and around the desks, as well as next to the beds. Much like the quiet luxury it exudes in everything from its bedding to its service, this property's approach to technology is to integrate it in ways that will enhance the quality of your offline life. To save time at reception, guests can check-in digitally with the app before arrival so they can get straight to their rooms, and with a private dining e-menu allowing guests to order (and customise) meals through the dedicated app – that can be accessed through a simple QR code scan – spending more time relaxing in your suite is instantly easier. The hotel also offers an E-Butler service, wherein you can request literally anything you want – from a bucket of ice to a dinner reservation or spa treatment – through WhatsApp messages that are responded to within 30 seconds at most. Their dedicated fleet of hybrid cars are also fully wifi equipped, making it easier to work on the go, then enjoy downtime with less stress.

SINDALAH, NEOM

A quick look at pretty much any of the upcoming destinations being developed by NEOM, an urban area in Saudi Arabia's Tabuk province, is enough to make anyone's jaw drop. One of the company's missions is to revolutionise the concept of livability,

and boy does it take this calling seriously: its very name was chosen to reflect its reputation as an agent of progress and change. After intense consideration and deliberation with members of the project's founding board, plus a series of experts and specialists in the field – led by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Chairman of the NEOM Board of Directors, His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman – the name "NEO MSTACBEL" was chosen. "Neo" means "New" in Ancient Greek, and "MSTACBEL" is an acronym for the main sectors that the project represents, including Media, Sports, Technology, and Energy. The latter was then abbreviated to the letter M – which is also the first letter of the Arabic word for "future" – and the name "NEOM"

was set, to constitute "the beacon of change in the world", as per the official website. There are a number of different regions within NEOM, including Magna, Oxagon, Sindalah (*pictured bottom left*), The Line, and Trojena, and although none are open just yet, these will be opening in stages over the next 15 years, with all of them currently slated for completion by 2039. Sindalah, a luxury beachside island resort in The Red Sea project, is expected to be the first to open later this year, followed by Oxagon by 2025, and Trojena by 2026. Spread over 840,000 sqm, Sindalah is hoped to become a global yachting hub thanks to its state-of-the-art marina, and its future-forward, sustainability-friendly architecture – designed by Luca Dini Design and Architecture – incorporates as many locally-sourced, natural handmade materials as possible, to blend seamlessly into the landscape. It won't just look good, either: among the advanced technology integrated into its functions are 3D cast crystal glass, solar-responsive kinetic roofing, and rock pillars that will respond to human touch. A smart city, the island will also feature automated climate control, energy-efficient lighting, and advanced security systems designed to minimise the ecological footprint while simultaneously improving residents' and visitors' quality of life. Guest interactions will also be enhanced through virtually-supported services such as digital concierges, biometrics, and immersive technologies such as AR and VR.

**SIRO ONE ZA'ABEEL**

At this central Dubai-based hotel (*pictured above*), the tech is focused on supporting a different kind of sustainability: the longevity of the human body, through health and well-being. The property's Fitness Lab is to-die-for, but if you'd rather not leave your room, you'll also be able to access virtual classes from TechnoGym through in-quarters projectors.

At the hotel's unique and extensive Recovery Lab, you'll find cryogenic chambers, infrared and high-frequency therapy, electrical muscle stimulation, and vibroacoustic therapy beds that will immerse you in binaural acoustics while you relax on a specially-designed bed. Once you're back in your room, people with back pain will find relief in anti-gravity chairs designed to improve spinal decompression, along with thermoregulated mattresses for your best night's sleep. Your nutrition, too, can be customised through video consultations with the brand's in-house expert – and whether you'll notice it or not, every facet of your room will have been tailored to improve your quality of rest and recovery from the demands of a fast-paced life, from app-controlled blackout blinds (coordinated with one's circadian rhythm) to smart lighting, natural cooling (for the moments where you'd like a break from an A/C), and more. Essentially, if you've ever dreamed that technology could transform your personal trainer or health coach into a physical space that acts as the ultimate biohacking support system, this is it.

25HOURS HOTEL DUBAI ONE CENTRAL

The buzzy 25hours brand (*pictured below*) is on a mission to redefine urban living, and the Dubai location – the hotel's first outside of Europe – celebrates the same ethos. Here, you don't have to choose between futuristic tech or old-school media – it encourages you to live in a world where you can enjoy both. Guests entering the lobby are welcomed by an "analogue circus" that "celebrates the pleasures of VHS, vinyl, polaroids, and typewriters", as well as a "Fountain of Tales" featuring bookshelves with cozy seating nooks that encourage you to curl up with a book – the ultimate offline entertainment. For more futuristic vibes, the hotel also overlooks the Museum of the Future, and we wouldn't be surprised if Robi – an AI-equipped hotel robot that has been trained at the 25hours Hotel The Circle in Cologne, Germany, to welcome and entertain guests – made an appearance here soon enough too.

**FAIRMONT DOHA**

The unique architecture of the building this hotel is set in – the landmark Katara Towers (*pictured above*), designed to resemble traditional scimitar swords – wouldn't feel out of place in an Isaac Asimov novel. The hotel, which shares the building with the Raffles Doha, is committed to honouring Qatari and Islamic heritage with a contemporary flair, welcoming guests with the world's biggest chandelier as they walk in. There's a nautical theme to the place, and through its Pillar Wellbeing offering at the Fairmont Spa, guests can enjoy a truly immersive wellness experience that "[harnesses] the power of technology and touch." Cutting-edge tech is used to provide avant-garde treatments for skincare, relaxation, fitness, and more. In the rooms, a customised tablet device allows guests to control everything from the curtains to the TV, order room service, access concierge services, browse digital media, and more. The Fairmont Doha uses technology to enhance its commitment to sustainability, regularly measuring and monitoring its energy consumption and carbon footprint, and using initiatives like smart lighting control systems, energy-efficient HVAC, and more. The Katara Towers was also the first hospitality project in Qatar to be certified with a GSAS Design & Build 5 Stars rating – which assesses and simulates energy and water systems, before giving certified properties to sophisticated software that enhances environmental performance – from its design stage. **BT**

