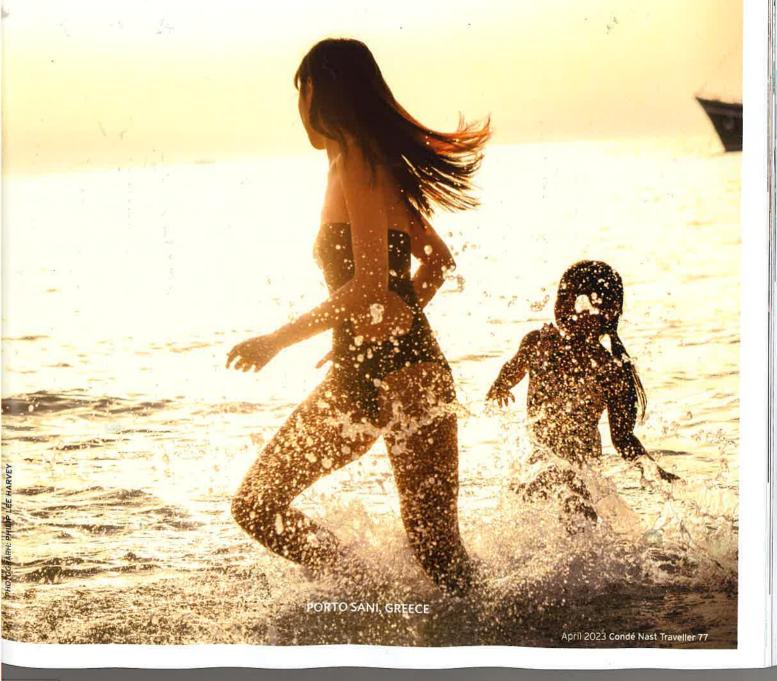


FAMILY HOLIDAYS 2023

BRILLIANT BREAKS TO CONNECT THE GENERATIONS

EDITED BY LYDIA BELL







ROYAL RETREAT

EMIRATES PALACE, ABU DHABI, UAE

My teenage son Alfie and I are a little late to the game of padel, the tennis-meets-squash hybrid popping up in resorts around the world, but we're doing our best to catch up on a beach court on the Persian Gulf. Trying to volley the ball as it bounces off the glass walls, we're distracted by the white-marble domes of Qasr Al Watan palace in one direction and a month-old camel skittering around the sand in the other. It's the sort of surreal composition that's easy to get used to here. Coaxing my son around an Impressionism exhibition at Louvre Abu

Impressionism exhibition at Louvre Abu Dhabi later that day, we're struck by 19th-century paintings of the fledgling French seaside. What, I wondered, would Seurat have made of this Arabian riviera?

The Emirates Palace can be a place of supersized spectacle – a desert Versailles of gold leaf and triumphal arches – but it's also surprisingly intimate. Newly adopted by Mandarin Oriental, it runs at least three kids' camps a year, promising am-dram, painting, water balloons, a lazy river and glamping. Not everything is structured, though: one afternoon chef Luigi Stinga shoos my son and another teen into the kitchen for an impromptu pizza masterclass; the next morning Alex the falconer puts his gauntlet on Alfie's hand and films his hawk in slo-mo as it takes off, a majestic brown spectre of talons and beak.

A breakfast trip one day takes us out by speedboat to sit munching croissants on a sandbar, keeping watch for dolphins.

A beach holiday with very few rainy days. RJ Doubles from £600; mandarinoriental.com

