



A real village home

An authentic Omani dinner experience in an Omani home



Our Correspondent
theweek@apexstuff.com

An oft used and sometimes abused phrase, 'Omani hospitality' is bandied about by just about anyone with any interest in the hospitality industry, but seldom does it come as close to the real thing as it does at Bait al Bilad. Conceived by Clara Zawawi, chairperson of Ocean Blue International, Bait al Bilad is an unassuming house nestled in the little fishing village of Qantab. There is no pomp and splendour about it if you are expecting a five-star experience, but then that's the beauty of it.

As Clara said, "We want to give our guests an authentic Omani experience. This is an old house some parts of which are said to be

about 70 years old. And what we offer is a simple Omani meal in a real Omani ambience."

The approach to the house is simple and as it was after dark, the pathway had been lit up with little candles and we were greeted by Anna Palaszynska, the general manager and led up to the terrace, above the Ocean Blue offices. Electricity has not been fed to the roof. Instead it is nicely lit up with gas lanterns and open-flame torches.

On the sea-facing side there is a *majlis* style setting with cushions scattered about for a very informal seating arrangement, while on the other side there are low tables with

plenty of cushions. This is the dining area. Sales and marketing executive, Chidi al Rawaby said, "It is most beautiful at *maghrib*. In the background you can hear the *azzan* going out from the local mosque while the setting sun's rays are glimmering on the sea. It really is special then."

While drinks are served two Omani musicians softly serenade us with Arabic songs accompanied by oudh and tabla. In the moonlight you can make out the mountains around the village and the calm sea.

Service is buffet style and while the choice is not extensive, the dishes are delicious. All traditional Omani food. Clara said that the recipes have come down through generations. There is *Mutton Kabull*, a lightly spiced rice dish with tender

mutton pieces, *Manak Samak* (fish curry), *Okra Marak* and *Mashuai Dijaj* (grilled chicken). Breads, salad, pickles and a sauce, that is very much like a salsa, are accompaniment. Conversation drops to a low



murmur as everyone tucks in. Kahwa and shishas follow.

The service is exceptional as the girls station themselves at either corner and the minute you set your napkin down they are there to whisk the plates away.



You wish that this was a regular restaurant but Bait al Bilad is only available by booking.

Available to groups of ten to 40 people (they can accommodate up to a 100 but that would take away from the experience)," Clara Zawawi

is an ideal venue for corporates or for small parties.

Clara says they once had a visiting couple book the terrace for a dinner, but that is more the exception than the norm.

