





When four stars feel like five

Scott Armstrong foregoes his usual five-star standards for Benchmark and is pleasantly surprised

While the UAE marches ever closer to the world's first 100 star hotel, (come on, it will happen one day) a growing number of savvy consumers are compromising uber-luxury for value for money.

Once upon a time seeking a bargain meant a huge gulf in class, being charged through the nose for internet access, grumpy employees, rooms smelling of stale smoke, and breakfasts not fit for your pets.

Though these still exist (I could name some in Abu Dhabi and Dubai with pleasure) times are changing.

There is a quiet revolution happening in the UAE, not just only in budget hotels,

where service is getting better and rooms cleaner, but also in the four-star sector which is working to narrow the gap with the star above.

Nowhere is a better example of this than the new Marriott Courtyard World Trade Center, Abu Dhabi.

This is hotel that from the outset under-promises but over-delivers in almost every area.

Let's go through the checklist of things we expect from a five-star location.

- Prime location. Well the Marriott is directly connected to the new World Trade Center mall, packed with luxury shops, plus it is maybe a 10-minute walk, at most, to the seafront of Abu Dhabi's beautiful Corniche.

- Spacious, well designed room. Here the basic rooms started from around 32 sq m and do not feel cramped at all, however opt for the junior suite and you get a separate lounge and a total of 50 sq m.

- Spa-esque bathroom. Marble and monsoon showers are generally the order of the day at five-stars, the Courtyard delivers this too. In fact it probably features one of the best monsoon showers I've discovered in any hotel.

- Excellent restaurant, especially breakfast. Again here Courtyard over delivers, its restaurant is bright, featuring modern design and attentive staff, and the food on offer is good quality, fresh, with buffet and a la carte choices, plus a live cooking station.





To contact the hotel call +971-2-6982222. It is located at Hamdan Bin Mohammed Street (5th Street) Abu Dhabi. To visit the website scan the QR code attached.



● **Gadgets & tech.** An iPod docking station, flat screen television, free Wi-Fi all come as standard at the Courtyard.

● **Pool and pool bar.** Ok so you won't be training for any triathlons in Courtyard's cute rooftop pool, but as a place to soak up the sun and then cool off it works well as a sophisticated space. The happy hour besides the pool makes it a popular place to be too.

● **Great service.** We expect this at five-star hotels and too often they fail to deliver, with snooty staff looking down at the guests. Again here Courtyard goes a step beyond what one might expect from a four-star property. Smiling courteous staff who remember your name, and who are willing to help with all queries, rather than a default 'no' especially when querying a cost.

To linger on the rooms available it's worth saying that the king-size beds do exactly what they supposed to, deliver a good night's sleep.

The compromise might come if you demand the wood fittings in your room to be genuine deep walnut rather than veneer. However, the room designer has delivered a modern and clean look, nothing jars on the eye, the use of light and space helps to quell any claustrophobia.

Perhaps the main concession the guest at the Courtyard has to make is that of the

view, being on the outskirts of a busy commercial district in the capital don't expect breathtaking scenery out of the window.

But that is a small compromise when you consider a room at this hotel will set you back from Dh325 a night.

Other surprising treats at this property include the Fifth Street Café, through which you access the mall. Ideal for a coffee, this serves up lunchtime treats, and (surprisingly) is licensed too, making it ideal for the grumpy husband waiting for his wife to finish shopping (the mall has a multi-level House of Fraser so that could be a while).

Its rooftop pool lounge also offers great views across the city on nighttime, particularly in the winter months when the temperatures allow al fresco entertainment.

It is the ideal location for anyone looking for a spot of retail therapy. Firstly the World Trade Center mall, plus the Souq, is right on the doorstep, and it is also a short taxi ride to Marina Mall in one direction, or Abu Dhabi Mall, and Galleria on Al Maryah Island, in the other.

Spot on for a quick city break in Abu Dhabi, but big enough to allow for a longer stay, you even get fluffy dressing gowns and slippers.

So go on, why not treat yourself to a four-star hotel, you can spend the money you save in the mall. **15**

