03/11/2010

Wed, 03/11/2010 - 12:00

View PDF

After much trepidation I boarded the flight to Abu Dhabi to attend the art fair, there. I was invited by the extremely glamorous female Lebanese Minister of Culture I had the luck to be introduced to by a friend in London. Perhaps because of the recent bombs the plane was only a quarter full, and I was upgraded to business class. But the bed and slippers, amuse-bouches and glasses of champage, paled into comparison with what greeted me once I arrived in the desert kingdom. Things looked promising as soon as stepped off the plane and was greeted by the driver of a black leather-upholstered Mercedes who told me he was my personal chauffeur all week. But it was at the end of the twenty minute journey from the airport when I realised I was finally living in the manner to which I would like to become accustomed. "Would you like me to drop you at the royal entrance to the hotel? " asked the driver, in apparent seriousness. The Emirates Palace Hotel is the most expensive in the world (£1,000 a night) and cost £1.5 billion to build. It certainly seems the largest; the walk from reception to my room is one kilometre. "before I had time to take in the rose petals on the floor and the pearl-encrusted soap"
I was visited by the chambermaid, a butler and some flunky asking me to stump up a £700 deposit. I lay down on the embroidered sheets to recover from the shock and started stuffing some chocolate covered dates while staring out beyond my private balcony to the white sands of the Arabian sea. Cucklington feels very far away, yet the people there are dearer than ever.