

“Umm Ali”

By Allan Fox – December 2008

‘Umm Ali’ is served, as we recline luxuriously on our cushions in the desert camp.

Had it only been 3 hours since we set out from Dubai to storm the dunes and to experience, if just for the briefest of time, what it was like to be alone in one of the most inhospitable places in the world ?

The heat ! the sand ! and the thirst !

BUT wait a minute, did I say inhospitable ?

As I look around our encampment, the flaming torches cast shadows across the Arabian mats laid out over the soft sands. The enormous pillows are scattered in groups as we wait in anticipation of the belly dancer and, to the side, in smaller groups around the ‘hubble-bubble’ pipes.

The camels are barking in the distance under a jet-black sky, pin pricked by the silver stars and the glow of distant jets.

Seated, or should that be reclining, at low tables, we have feasted on fresh olives, flat breads and creamy dips, exotically barbecued lamb, spiced beef and other meats that we failed to identify, and refer to simply as ‘local delicacy’, accompanied by sweet red wine.

The *‘Umm Ali’* is delicious, it is a pudding, similar to creamed baked custard or a rich bread and butter pudding, loaded with coconut, almonds, raisin and cream, and baked to perfection.

Gazing towards the sky, drinking thick black sweet coffee and eating dates, you have to wonder ‘Does it get any better than this ?’