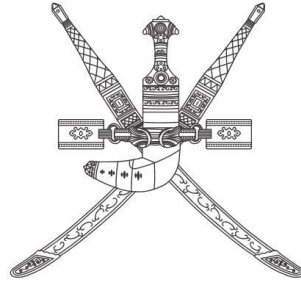




# OMAN MINISTRY OF HERITAGE & TOURISM PRESS KIT 2021



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**Note:** the Arabic toponyms in English correspond to the names displayed in the actual Omani road signs.



## OMAN FROM A TO Z

### A as in ATTITUDE

Hospitality is a main attitude in the Arabian Peninsula and Oman is no exception: the people of the Sultanate are welcoming and friendly. The country has opened to international tourism for almost thirty years now, although it has always been a place of trade and exchange with foreign nations.

### B as in BIVOUAC

Wadis, mountains, beaches, deserts ... Oman is a dream destination for camping in the great outdoors in absolutely exceptional sites. The country's legislation does not impose any restrictions on the matter, except in nature reserves, and you can put up your tent wherever you want, provided you respect the basic rules of decorum towards the population. Several camps have also been set up, notably in the desert dunes of A'Sharqiyah Sands, located about 3 hours away from Muscat, close to the mountains and not far from the town of Al Hamra. Temporary camps can also be pitched by local authorities upon request.

### C as in CARAVANSERAIL

The Sultanate has a long culture of commercial exchanges dating from the third century BC. Oman has always been at the crossroads of shipping routes between Asia, East Africa and Europe. In the desert, the Bedouins have perpetuated the great caravan tradition by transporting spices, dates and the fragrant frankincense.

### D as in DATES

This unmistakable supply for the desert nomads is also one of the main food productions of the Sultanate. The Bedouins, gathered in different nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, live from date palm cultivation's seasonal work. As a sign of welcoming the guests, you will be offered a small cup of coffee flavoured with rose water and cardamom. And some fresh dates, preferably in odd numbers, as it is believed to bring good luck.

### E as in ENVIRONEMENT

The Sultanate is famous for its 3165 km of coastline facing the Arabian Sea. Alternately bordered by immense beaches of caramel blond sand, high cliffs and rocky coasts, the Omani shores reveal beautiful landscapes in the Musandam peninsula, nicknamed "the Arabian fjords", as well as a hundred kilometres south of Ras Al Jinz, where the sand dunes of A'Sharqiyah caress the sea. Thanks to the extended maritime front, the Sultanate of Oman is the ideal destination for water sports: scuba diving and snorkelling, kitesurfing, sailing, sport fishing, not to mention sea trips, in traditional dhows or in a catamaran, for marine life observation.

Another peculiarity. Oman has a large number of caves, and among them the largest in the world: Majlis Al Jinn, which could contain up to eight planes. Another one, named Al Hoota, is 5 km long. It is located at the foot of Jabal Shams ("the mountain of the sun"), in the province of Al Hamra it looks like an underground gorge with two entrances, at 810 and 1040 m above sea level. Stalactites, stalagmites, limestone rocks and karst crystals cover the ceiling and the soil, while some rare species of insects and crustaceans live thanks to the water generated by the rain.



### **F as in FRANKINCENSE**

*Boswellia sacra* a shrub whose resin is known as frankincense, grows mainly in dry conditions in the wadis of Dhofar, in the southwest tip of the country. In Salalah, the capital of Dhofar, you should not miss a visit to the incense souk, famous for this coloured gum which can range from pale yellow to brown depending on its quality. Used since ancient times in religious ceremonies, this resin has invigorating and energizing properties. It is also credited with anti-inflammatory, pain-relieving, healing and soothing properties. Used as well in cosmetics and perfumery for its unique fragrance. The Salalah Frankincense Museum traces its entire history.

### **G as in GOLF**

Boasting a beautiful year-round weather, Oman has become the rising star for golf holidays in the Middle East with four exceptional championship 18-hole courses in Muscat Hills Golf & Country Club, Almouj Golf (designed by Greg Norman and settled along the coastline facing the Arabian Sea), Ghala Valley Golf Course and Ras Al Hamra Golf Club (oldest golf club), plus Jebel Sifah Golf, a 9-hole course.

### **H as in HAJAR**

This chain of mountains stretching over 600 km between the Musandam Peninsula and Sur is the backbone of the country. The chain is viewed all the way while going from Muscat to Nizwa or inland. The Hajar displays colourful mineral treasures: the purple of ophiolite, the grey-white of marble and gypsum, the green of copper and the red of iron.

### **I as in INDIAN INFLUENCES**

There is a long tradition of trade and cultural exchanges between the Indian subcontinent and the Sultanate that shows in clothing, architecture, but also in gastronomy.

### **J as in JABAL**

*Jabal* means mountain in Arabic. The best example of this typical Omani landscape is the Hajar massif itself, with peaks over 2000 m high. It displays rock colours changing from sepia to different shades of grey depending on the time of day and the nature of its mineral constituents. Jabal Shams, the Mountain of the Sun, is the highest point in the country reaching 3075 m. Jabal Akhdar, with its magnificent hanging terraced gardens, deserves the name of Green Mountain.

### **K as in KHANJAR**

This is the name of the dagger with a curved blade that Omani men tug into their belts. Today, it is mostly sported during special occasions and remains the symbol of masculine elegance that completes the full attire. Its price varies depending on the preciousness of the materials used for the handle (metal, wood, resin, animal horn ...) and the quality of its blade. You can find this precious souvenir in the Muttrah souk, in Muscat, and Nizwa souk.



### **L as in LOST CITY OF UBAR**

True story or legend? Ubar is a fictional name of a legendary lost city in the Dhofar region, precisely in the Rub-al-Khali desert, the southern Arabian sands, claimed to have been destroyed by a natural disaster or as God's punishment. It all started in 1992, with the book *Atlantis of the Sands. The Search for the Lost City of Ubar* wrote by Sir Ranulph Fiennes and has been the source of debate among historians, archaeologists, and explorers about its existence.

### **M as in MUSCAT**

Long circumscribed to the small historic core of Old Muscat city (3 km<sup>2</sup>), today Muscat stretches along the coastline for about 65 km, in an enchanting setting, between the sea and the mountains. The museums of Old Muscat, the animation of the Muttrah coastal road (souk, fish market), the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, and the Royal Opera House are the highlights of the capital, in addition to the walks along the beach and the sea tours.

### **N as in NIZWA**

Birthplace of Islam in Oman and the former capital of the country, Nizwa is today famous for its fort and its souk. Located in a vast oasis, Nizwa is at the crossroads of the caravan trails between north and south. Every Friday, Nizwa hosts a large cattle market. This is also the ideal starting point to explore the Hajar massif, its wadis and old villages with remarkable architecture.

### **O as in OFF-ROAD**

Off road means 4-wheel drive equipped vehicles, mainly white Toyota Land Cruisers, indispensable to get through wadis, mountain tracks, as well as desert dunes. You can indulge yourself in the fun of dune bashing but, before entering the sands, do not forget to deflate a bit of the tires for a better grip. Rally chills guaranteed!

### **P as in PETROLEUM**

Oman gained economic and strategic importance since the discovery of oil in the region in the 1940s and '50s. Successfully exploited since the late 1960s, oil and gas still make up the bulk of the country's revenues. Yet, the resources being somewhat limited, the State manages its production prudently and currently conducts an active economic diversification policy. Oil production revenues have helped create modern infrastructure (equipment, roads, schools, universities, free healthcare for all ...) and develop industries.

### **Q as in QALHAT**

The ancient city of Qalhat, listed as World Heritage by UNESCO in June 2018, is located on the east coast of the Sultanate, about 20 kilometres north of the city of Sur. Qalhat was an important port under the reign of the princes of Hormuz, between the 10th and the 15th centuries, circumscribed by internal and external ramparts, as well as areas outside the walls where once the necropolis were located. These ruins witness the trade that Oman had with Africa, India and China.



## R as in RUINS

The Omani archaeological heritage is still to be discovered. In addition to the sites already classified as UNESCO's World Heritage, there are many citadels, bastions and small palaces made of dried earth bricks, palm timber, limestone and other raw materials locals have always employed to protect themselves from the high temperatures of the desert.

## S as in SULTAN

The word Sultan designates the male sovereign of a state and gives the name to the territory he rules. Under the reign of Sultan Qaboos bin Said, who was on the throne from 1970 until his death in January 2020, Oman experienced a modern turn and a complete development in all economic sectors. A true reformer, who knew how to unite his people and lead them to prosperity, Sultan Qaboos modernized the country in depth. Among its major achievements (creation of schools, universities, hospitals, safe transport infrastructure throughout the country), the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat and its 40,000 m<sup>2</sup> cultural complex is undoubtedly the most impressive project. Sultanate of Oman combines a resolute modernity with secular traditions. On 10 January 2020, Haitham bin Tarik was named by the royal family and by Qaboos's will as Sultan of Oman the next day. In his first speech, the new sultan stressed his intention to follow the path of his predecessor and to preserve his achievements.

## T as in TRADITIONS

Traditions are alive in Oman and show in everyday life, as wearing the dishdasha (a kind of djellaba, or ankle-long tunic), the national men's attire completed with a turban (mussar) or an embroidered round hat (kumma), a headgear of Zanzibari origin. Women's clothing varies widely according to the region. In public places, Omani women wear an abaya over their clothes, a large black tunic or cape. But this apparent austerity gives way to shimmering outfits worn in private: luxurious silks, gold and silver brocades and cotton textiles patterned with cabalistic symbols. Another explosion of both tradition and exotic dressing is particularly visible in the markets frequented by the Bedouins, like those of Ibra and Sinaw. Indeed, markets and souks represent the country's tradition of trade, as seen in the main cities (Muscat, Nizwa, Salalah), in the colourful markets of Nizwa (not to be missed the one devoted to cattle) and in the Ibra Wednesday Ladies Souk, reserved for Bedouin women from the neighbouring A'Sharqiyah Sands. Souks are a must for any visitor. To name but a few: Muttrah in Muscat; the ones in the cities of Nizwa; Ibri souk in the A'Dhahirah governorate, where the Duru tribesmen come for supplies, and the Mundaybi souk in the governorate of A'Sharqiyah. Other interesting souks frequented by the Bedouins are: Al Wasil and Al Mintirib, at the entrance of the A'Sharqiyah Sands, and the Bahla souk near Nizwa, specialized in pottery.

## U as in UNESCO

Oman has five architectural sites and works classified as World Heritage by UNESCO: the Bahla Fort; the Bat archaeological complex Al-Khutm and Al-Ayn; the ancient city of Qalhat; the frankincense production and trade area in the Dhofar and the *aflaj* (plural of *falaj*) or smart canalization and irrigation systems which constitute a vital part of the Omani heritage with a network of almost 10 000 scattered throughout the territory. The *aflaj* of Jabal Akhdar, which allowed the rise of agriculture and now used in terraces, are undoubtedly the most interesting in the country. The water that circulates in these hillside canals comes either from the wadis (rain-filled riverbeds), or from springs or mountain wells.



### V as in VILLAGES

Tiny fishing towns nestled at the foot of the cliffs in Musandam, “camping villages” of desert Bedouins made up of low stone huts and thatched roofs, or even “oasis villages” buried in the mountains like fragments of the Garden of Eden, the traditional villages are fascinating theatres of everyday life.

### W as in WADI

Meaning both river and valley in Arabic, the wadis are a part of the Omani mountain system and a source of almost inexhaustible explorations as there are so many of them nationwide. Sometimes narrow, sometimes open-air amphitheatres where small villages pop one after another, the wadis can be found in the form of a canyon or as clear water tanks where you can swim surrounded by a palm grove. They are mainly concentrated at the foot of the Hajar mountains, sometimes by the sea, and often used for agricultural purposes, animal breeding and irrigation of date palms. To name just a couple of the most famous ones: in Wadi Bani Awf, you can do canyoning after the heavy seasonal rains (flash floods), whether in the Dhofar, the wadi is the natural ground to grow frankincense trees.

### X as in LUXURY

A refined X. Elegance and discretion are the hallmarks of luxury in Oman, which bets on high-quality tourism development, based on hospitality and high-end services.

### Y as in YALLA

Surely, you’ve heard before this Arabic word meaning "let's go", "hurry up" or “keep moving”. The colloquial expression, very frequently used in Oman, can even be pronounced two to three successive times to stress the eagerness of the matter. *Yalla* is one of the few words to learn during a trip to Oman, like *Salaam Aleykum* "Hello" or “Peace be unto you”, *Shokran* or *Shukran* "Thank you", *Inshallah* "God willing" or even *Khalas* "stop, enough".

### Z as in ZANZIBAR

From the mid-17th century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, spice counters ranging from Zanzibar to present-day Baluchistan made the fortune of the Omani sultans. From 1832 to 1861, the Omani Empire even named Zanzibar the second capital of the Sultanate. Since May 2011, Oman Air operates on nonstop flights between Muscat and the island of Zanzibar, these two mysterious and bewitching Indian Ocean destinations can now be combined.



## NOT LIKE ANYWHERE ELSE:

### THE OMANI EXCEPTION IN 10 KEY POINTS

#### 1

A cultural melting pot, unique among the Gulf countries and due to a long history of commercial exchange by land and sea with the rest of the world.

#### 2

The Sultanate is the third-largest country on the Arabian Peninsula – stands as a guardian of traditions. As an example, buildings over 9 floors high are forbidden in Muscat.

#### 3

Islam the national religion. Based on pacifism, tolerance towards other religions and indulgence, it takes into account the country's pre-Islamic past.

#### 4

Regular policy of reforms towards modernization carried out in the early 1970s by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, and pursued by Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the current sovereign.

#### 5

Dates' data: the country ranks among the top 10 date producers globally, with 8 million palm trees yielding more than 250 indigenous varieties. *Farth* (also called *fard*) is perhaps the most common, chocolate-coloured and tender. *Khalas* is the most valuable variety: It is yellow when fresh, caramel in both flavour and colour when dried, and has a melt-in-the-mouth texture. Local favourite *khunaizi* is large and red when fresh, and is renowned for its succulence.

#### 6

Once a British protectorate, nevertheless Oman is not part of the Commonwealth. The country's initial contacts with the British were part of a plan to undermine the Portuguese's commercial and political power and their highly profitable Indies spice trade established in 1507 in the area. In 1650, when the Portuguese were finally expelled, the British East India Company established favourable trading, legal and religious rights with the Omanis. Oman was primarily a commercial staging post between Europe and the Indian sub-continent. It was also at the centre of a dynamic regional trading hub that connected India, the Middle East and East Africa. The British were present in the Gulf until 1971, but perhaps more than with any other country in the region the British have maintained an uncommonly strong relationship with Oman.





## 7

The Sultanate's cultural heritage counts more than 5000 years of history. From the centuries-old trade with foreigners, the Omanis have developed a deep sense of warm welcome and hospitality. Also, fortresses and archaeological sites bear witness to this past everywhere.

## 8

Hunting is strictly forbidden in Oman. Just all year-round offshore fishing is allowed, with precious catches such as voluminous sailfish, yellowfin tuna, king mackerel and the giant trevally.

## 9

The southern quarter's weather is influenced by the monsoon regime. In summer, while the north of the country is subject to very hot weather from mid-May to mid-August, in the south, the Dhofar governorate receives the monsoon rains from India, bringing coolness and pleasant temperatures.

## 10

Frankincense: one of the best qualities in the world, produced from the resin of the Boswellia Sacra tree which grows in the Dhofar hills and wadis. It is employed in the making of perfumes and fragrances.



## FIGURES TALK

- **309,500** km<sup>2</sup>: **80%** of the territory is occupied by the desert and the rocky plateaus, **17%** by the mountains and **3%** by fertile plains.
- More than **3,000** km of coastline.
- The Jabal Shams, **3,075** m high, is the country's top peak.
- **5,000** years of history.
- Population: **4,650,000** (2020) (Omanis: 2 705 000 - expatriates: 1 945 000)
- **30%** of the population is under **15** years of age.  
Life expectancy: **75** years for men and **79** years for women.
- More than **1,000** forts, castles and watchtowers have been built during the history of the Sultanate of Oman; at least **500** are still visible or restored.
- There are approximately **60** wadis spread throughout the territory.
- There are approximately **10,000** irrigation canals named *aflaj* (plural of *falaj*). It is not uncommon to find fish swimming in their clear waters.
- **Over 35,000** km of paved roads.
- Due to its strategic position at the entrance to the Arabian Gulf, the Sultanate has control access to the richest oil region: **60%** of the world's crude production transits through the Strait of Hormuz.
- A bottle of mineral water costs about **200** *baisas* (0.45 €), just like a litre of gasoline.
- There are a hundred varieties of dates grown in Oman.
- Omani weekends are on Fridays and Saturdays.
- The second largest single-piece carpet in the world is inside the prayer hall of the monumental Grand Mosque of Muscat. It measures **60** x **70** meters, is made of 1,700,000,000 knots, weighs 21 tons and took four years to produce.
- Accommodation: **492** hotels and apartment hotels, which totals more than **25,408** rooms (2019).



## **COUNTRY ID**

### **CAPITAL:**

Muscat (population 1,475,000 inhabitants).

### **MAIN CITIES:**

Nizwa, Salalah, Sur, Sohar, Buraimi, Duqm.

### **HEAD OF STATE:**

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

### **REGIME:**

Parliamentary monarchy.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE BREAKDOWN:**

11 governorates (*mouhafaza*) and 60 provinces (*wilayat*).

### **TOTAL POPULATION:**

4,650,000 inhabitants. 58% Omanis, 42% foreigners, mostly from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. A large number of Oman born natives still live-in rural areas, although this fact is rapidly changing.

### **LANGUAGES:**

Arabic is the official language. English is widely spoken, especially in main cities.

### **MAIN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES:**

Oil and gas exports, minerals, maritime trade, fishing, agriculture and tourism.



## **GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE**

### **THE SULTANATE AND ITS REGIONS**

The Sultanate of Oman is located in the south-eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, a region that the Romans called Arabia Deserta as opposed to Arabia Felix, Dhofar governorate is located in the southern part of the country.

Oman is the third largest country in the peninsula after Saudi Arabia and Yemen, different from the Gulf emirates not only by its size, but also by its location facing the Indian Ocean. In addition, its deserts and mountains create a splendid natural barrier with a rugged topography of an incredible beauty. The huge sand belt that forms the Rub Al Khali desert - the "Empty Quarter" - cuts an imprecise but all-natural border with southern Saudi Arabia. Two mountain ranges bordered by two flat coastal strips separate Oman from its other two neighbours: the north one stretching from Muscat to the border with the United Arab Emirates, and the south one around the city of Salalah, near the Yemenite border.

From north to south, this 309,500 km<sup>2</sup> sultanate has a contrasting relief made up of jagged or sandy coasts, mountains, plains and dunes. The current demography of Oman shows a concentration of the population in two main regions: the north and the Dhofar ("the south" in Arabic). In between, a vast inhabited area long 800 km with the desert itself (Rub Al Khali), the *sebkha* (the saltwater lake of Oum Al-Samin), the *hamadas* (the rocky plateaus of Jiddat el-Harassis) and the dunes (A'Sharqiyah Sands).

The country is administratively divided into eleven governorates - Muscat, Dhofar, Musandam, Al Buraymi, A'Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Wusta, A'Sharqiyah North, A'Sharqiyah South and A'Dhahirah. Dhofar and Musandam have strong cultural and natural particularities: isolation and strategic positioning in the Musandam peninsula; monsoon, humid climate and Yemenite traditions in the Dhofar.

The variety of landscapes as well as the mines of copper, gypsum, marble and the even rarer green rock called ophiolite, draws the attention of geologists and nature lovers in search of a unique mineral environment.

### **CLIMATE**

Oman can be divided into two climatic zones: during winter, the north has a Mediterranean climate, while the south benefits from a tropical influence with the arrival of monsoon rains from June to September. In the centre of the country a desert climate prevails, it's hot all year round with a higher average monthly maximum of 25 ° C. The Sultanate has no intermediate seasons, it goes from an eight-month summer weather (March to October) to a four-month winter from November to February. Unlike other deserts, where the thermal range between day and night is considerable, here the night temperatures are mild, normally above 20 ° C. Humidity is quite high, while rainfall (100 mm on average per year) is low. In mountainous regions the average rainfall goes up to 300 mm annually and the temperatures also drop a few degrees. The rainiest months are November in Muscat and its region; August and September in Salalah and the southern Dhofar.



## **FLORA AND FAUNA**

DHOFAR FRANKINCENSE TREES, MANGROVE BIRDS, SEA TURTLES IN RAZ AL JINZ, SEA MAMMALS AROUND MASIRAH ISLAND, MOUFLONS (WILD SHEEP) IN THE JABAL AKHDAR MOUNTAINS, AN ORYX RESERVE IN THE DESERT: OMAN HAS A VARIETY OF ECOSYSTEMS, WITH MORE THAN 80 VARIETIES OF TYPICAL ENDEMIC PLANTS FROM THE DESERT AND NEARLY 400 SPECIES OF BIRDS.

### **LOCAL FLORA**

A large part of the species that live in the desert come from other neighbouring areas, mainly the Mediterranean, Iran and Africa. Given the extreme conditions of drought and radiation, all plant species are very resistant. They are classified into two main categories: the ones that require water to sprout and grow, and the ones that don't. The first ones, buried in the rocks or in the sandy soils, can wait for long periods of drought until the rain finally arrives. Suddenly, the desert becomes green. The second type of species, mostly the native flora of succulents and thorny cactus, resist on the ground all year round. The Oman Botanic Garden near Muscat, currently under development, will showcase the main plant species from the whole Arabian Peninsula. [www.omanbotanicgarden.om](http://www.omanbotanicgarden.om)

### **BOSWELLIA SACRA, THE FRANKINCENSE TREE**

Traditionally, incense was derived from plant resins, commonly from frankincense and myrrh trees. Resin is tapped from the tree and allowed to harden. When burned, the hardened resin releases aromatic smoke. Also called Olibanum, it is a whitish coloured gum (actually, a resin which comes out from the bark after cutting or removing it) that must be dissolved and distilled in order to produce the essential oil. These trees of the Burseraceae family grow only in the Dhofar region. Frankincense essential oil is invigorating and energizing, prevents infections of the respiratory tract, and has an anti-inflammatory, pain-relieving, healing and soothing effect. Its smell is balsamic-spicy, sweet and warm.

### **NATURE RESERVES AND ANIMAL SANCTUARIES**

Protected species include the houbara bustard, the monitor lizard, the *dharb* (large thorny lizard) and the thar (wild goat). Various kinds of antelope (especially small gazelles) gather near oases and irrigated crop areas. Each year, nearly 400 species of birds migrate from Asia, Africa and Europe and stop by the Omani coast. The best season for birdwatching runs from November to September, but it is also possible to observe flamingos all year round on the island of Masirah, on the wild beaches of the seafront facing the Arabian Sea, and sometimes even in Muscat. From May to October, they nest at the Daymaniyat Islands nature reserve.

### **THE DROMEDARY**

This iconic animal of the A'Sharqiyah Sands desert and the Dhofar governorate is perfectly adapted to the desert environment, as it can stroll on sandy surfaces without sinking. The Arabian tribes have intensely used this type of camel for riding and as a beast of burden. In an expedition, a dromedary can travel nearly 1,000 km a month carrying weight up to 250 kilos. It feeds on foliage and desert vegetation. Several adaptations, such as the ability to tolerate losing more than 30% of its total water content, allow it to thrive in its desert habitat. The reserves stored in the single hump provide energy in the form of fat and fibrous tissues. The hump can weight 15 kilos at the beginning of the trip but will slowly melt under the combined effect of the heat and the fatigue causing the regular loss of its total weight. Thick eyelids and long eyelashes protect the animal's eyes from wind and sand.



## ARABIAN LEOPARDS, SEA TURTLES AND ARAB HORSES

These three animals are part of the native fauna of southern Arabia. The Arabian leopard is a night hunter whose habitat is situated mainly in Musandam and in the tiny arc of green land in the mountains of Dhofar. It's a little smaller compared to similar species found in the African wild. Researchers from Oman and the UAE have launched a captive breeding program as it is categorized as an endangered species with as few as a hundred individuals remaining.

Omani waters are home to five of the seven sea turtle species listed worldwide: the Green Turtle, the Loggerhead Turtle, the Hawksbill Turtle, the Olive Ridley Turtle, and the Leatherback Turtle. Annually, lots of turtles migrate to the beaches of the Sultanate to lay their eggs. The peak time for the turtles' migration is between April and August. Some of the beaches in which turtles lay eggs are Ras Al Hadd and Ras Al Jinz in the governorate of A'Sharqiyah, Masirah Island, the Daymaniyat Islands, the shores of the Dhofar governorate, and some of the beaches in the north-eastern area of the country. Ras Al Jinz is a nature reserve for turtles and considered one of the largest nesting sites near the Indian Ocean.

With a solid reputation, the Arabian horse is one of the top ten breeds in the world: good-natured, quick to learn and a unique ability to bond with their owners. For thousands of years, Arabians lived among the desert tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, bred by the Bedouins as war mounts for long treks and quick forays into enemy camps. In these harsh desert conditions evolved this horse of unparalleled beauty and incredible endurance. The Bedouin tribes began selectively breeding horses in arid, dusty desert conditions around 5,000 years ago, and most modern horses alive today have an Arabian ancestor somewhere in their DNA.

## OCEAN LIFE

Oman is fast becoming a sought-after diving destination in the Middle East. Washed by the waters of the Indian Ocean, more precisely by the Arabian Sea, its 3165 km long coastline is home to many unspoiled reefs. The seabed of the Arabian Sea close to the shores shelters a variety of fish living around the corals. Oman proudly displays the title of geological gem, and its underwater natural environment is also part of the heritage with sumptuous landscapes made of very colourful soft corals. Muscat is the ideal starting point for a diving safari. To the north, Daymaniyat is a tiny archipelago of rocky islands and the first marine reserve created in Oman. Coral reefs surround the islands, which are an important area for nesting sea turtles. Deep-ocean upwellings attract large schools of barracudas, plus zebra sharks, whale sharks and reef sharks. To the south, the barren Hallaniyat Islands are home to small fishing communities and great dive sites, only accessible by liveaboard. There are several wreck dives in the area. Additionally, marine life highlights include manta rays, pods of dolphins, humpback whales and even sperm whales.

Musandam is another must do. This peninsula in the northernmost region of Oman is known for fantastic scuba diving thanks to nutrient-rich waters and diverse marine life. Musandam is famous for whale sharks, which swim in the shallow waters here, plus colourful coral reefs, sea turtles, rays, mola molas and numerous critters. Two of the most popular dive sites, The Caves and Lima Rock, offer the chance to explore tunnels and underwater chambers, plus coral-encrusted walls. The Caves is a great place to search for resting sharks, while Lima Rock has large schools of tuna and jacks. Two more tips: whale watching is best in February and September, as they come close to the shores. While dolphins can be seen all year round.



## **HISTORY, CIVILIZATION AND TRADITIONS**

THE HISTORY OF OMAN TAKES ROOT IN THE III MILLENNIUM BC, WHEN THE NATIVE INHABITANTS SEDENTARIZED AND ESTABLISHED THEMSELVES IN SMALL VILLAGES ALONG THE COASTLINE. FROM THEN, AND UNTIL THE MID 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY, THE SULTANATE OF OMAN HAS LED A KEY ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARITIME ROUTES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE TRADE BETWEEN ASIA, EASTERN AFRICA AND EUROPE.

### **A POINT IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA**

Oman is a horn-shaped country stretching towards Iran into a constellation of islands. The first settlements in Oman were people who came from Mesopotamia through the Strait of Hormuz and established in the coastline. Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenid Persian dynasty, conquered the land in 536 BC; a domination which remained until 640 AD under the control of the Sassanid rulers. The Persians stayed in Oman until the advent of Islam and brought their expertise in irrigation. They are at the origin of a clever irrigation device called *falaj* that is still used today to make the cultivation of arid lands.

### **THE OCCUPATIONS**

The second great Arab migration to Oman took place around 751, under the control of Julanda-Bin-Massud, the first imam of the country. The economy then experienced an unprecedented boom: frankincense, copper, horses, dates and spices circulated through the ports of the regions of Al Batinah and Dhofar. Between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Arab sailors established a chain of trading posts stretching from present-day South Africa to Eritrea.

### **THE PORTUGUESE PERIOD**

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to approach the Omani coasts, occupying the ports and the strategic points of the country. In 1514, Alfonso de Albuquerque invaded the Strait of Hormuz and made it a Portuguese base on the Indian trade route. Muscat was a harder fortress to take due to fierce competition between Turks, Persians and other Europeans who coveted the location of the future capital. The Portuguese remained until 1650 when a member of the Yarubid dynasty recaptured Muscat and the coasts. The capture of Mombasa in 1665 signs the final departure of the Portuguese. The Omanis attacked the Portuguese possessions in Africa and changed the rules, becoming the colonizers. The establishment of spice and slave counters, from Zanzibar to Mogadishu and Bahrain to the actual Pakistan, made the fortune of the Sultans of Oman. Towards the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a sovereign state is finally established, making the Sultanate of Oman one of the oldest independent countries in the Middle East.



## THE ENGLISH PROTECTORATE

For London, the Gulf countries meant a highly sought-after communication route to the eastern possessions ruled by the English East India Company. The company quickly installed an agent in Muscat in order to counter the Persians' offensive who were trying to recover the Omani capital. They then launched campaigns against the pirates of the coasts and also offered discreet support to the Sultan in order to withstand the attacks of the neighbouring Saudi Arabia. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Great Britain concluded treaties with Sultan Said that made Oman a de facto protectorate. By 1830, Muscat was the largest trading point in the Gulf and the main port of the Indian Ocean.

## THE MARITIME ROUTES

A true crossroad between three continents, Oman has a colonial past rich with trade. Silk and Silk Road goods are believed to have reached the West via sea routes than by overland routes. The main Silk Road sea routes were between Indian ports like Barbaricon, Barygaza and Muziris and Middle Eastern ports such as Muscat, Sur, Kane and Aden on the Arabian Sea and Muza and Berenike on the Red Sea. From the Middle East goods were transported overland to the Mediterranean Sea and then Europe. In Oman, there is still a strong African atmosphere in Sur and Mirbat, the oldest fishing ports. Silk and crockery from China, fabrics and Indian spices are regular finds in the souks, showing the country's attachment to the subcontinent and the Far East.

## THE FRANKINCENSE ROUTES

According to the literary tale, Sindbad was a sailor who lived around the 10<sup>th</sup> century in Sohar, a port in the north of Muscat. For centuries, the *dhow*, a rot-proof teak ship that crisscrossed the oceans ensured the transportation of spices and frankincense between east and west, Asia and Africa. The *dhow* had an ancestor, the *mhele*, a type of vessel whose bow was carved in the shape of a camel head. A lesser-known fact in the country's history is to have been the only colonial empire in the Middle East, with trading posts along the East African coast, more precisely in Zanzibar and Mombasa. Between 1510 and 1650, Oman endured Portuguese invasion which left traces in the forts and fortresses that can be seen still today. The invaders were later expelled from the territory and their African possessions were taken over by the Omanis. There starts a period of prosperity for Muscat with a broad commercial empire covering central Asia to southern Africa. Gwadar, the last Omani overseas counter, was sold to Pakistan in 1958. Even if the Silk Road remained the most popular route to reach the East, from the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards Arab navigators reached China by sea. The first colonies of Arab merchants in Canton were established in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The European courts were fond of luxury items: precious stones and spices from India, silks, porcelain and lacquerware from China, gold and ivory from southern Africa; not to mention the slave trade. Arabian merchants in the Gulf commercialized glassware, armour, fabrics and perfumes, and frankincense, Arabian horses and pearls from the Persian Gulf.





## OMAN AND ZANZIBAR

The *dhow*s in the port of Sur dealt with the transportation of goods towards East Africa: first to Mozambique for spices, gold and ivory, then in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, towards Mombasa, Pemba and Zanzibar for cloves. The prosperity of these trading posts was such that the Sultan moved the capital and the court to Zanzibar in 1831 and remained there until 1856. When the Sultan died, the Germans, English and French tried to impose their own protectorates.

The Omanis have always had their eyes turned to the sea to trade with the neighbouring territories, which led them to also play the part of explorers of new lands. Shipyards in Sur still perpetuate the tradition of the great navigators and build *dhow*s for fishing according to ancestral methods, without nails, and employing Indian teak for the keel, and Malabar teak for the mast. Imported at great cost from Oman to Zanzibar, the heavy carved doors are witnesses of this common past. For the ancient Arabs the door was a key element of the house: it was both the first object manufactured and the last to be installed. A typical entrance consisted of a double-leaf door made of imported teak wood from India. Closed with a lock from the inside and with a large chain from the outside, doors are always decorated with extreme care. Each motif has its own symbolism: fish is to assure fecundity, lotus flowers represent reproduction and wisdom; palms represent health; the chains mean security and the date palm, abundance. On the lintel, the name of the owner appears engraved next to a verse from the Quran.

## OMAN TODAY

The interior of the country around Nizwa was the administrative seat of an independent imamate between 1913 and 1955 when Sultan Said bin Taimour (father of the late Sultan Qaboos) took advantage of inheritance struggles to assert control and obtain the abdication of the imam. In 1957, the Sultan, assisted by British forces, put an end to a new attempt to restore the Imamate and the Nizwa revolt died out in 1959. However, in 1961, a new revolt broke out in the country, led by the National Liberation Front and supported by Yemen, this time in Dhofar. The guerrillas were reduced with the help of the English military. Since then, the policy of amnesty applied by the late Sultan Qaboos has contributed to the unification of the country and local development. In 1970, the accession to the throne of Sultan Qaboos started a period of prosperity and the emergence of the Omani Renaissance's national identity. Sultan Qaboos was able to strengthen state power and its institutions, pacify and modernize his country, and exploit oil. One of his first steps was to change the country's name, now known as the Sultanate of Oman, the creation of a national flag, and the progressive opening of the country to the modern world. Its reforms paid particular attention to health and education (creation of hospitals and public schools in rural areas), the environment, the restoration of the rich architectural heritage, and in the "Omanization" of society, which results in regular educational training for young people (about 30% of the population is under 15) in order to take over the functions previously held by expatriates. As the head of state, the current Sultan, His Majesty Haitham bin Tarik, follows the precepts of true belief by advocating tolerance towards other religions (Christians and Hindus are present in the country), the kind treatment to animals (hunting is prohibited in Oman) and also strives to reconnect with the past (reevaluation of historical and artistic heritage). The late Sultan Qaboos made his people rediscover history and the extent of its heritage and renovated forts, castles, and citadels using traditional materials. Omani military architecture, simple but powerful, followed the Portuguese and the Persians; however, its Arab character is undeniable. The late Sultan Qaboos also revived the national identity by valuing seamen and nomadic Bedouins' ancestral trades and bringing up to date the traditional national attires.



## NOMADIC TRIBES

THE FRIENDLY OMANI TRIBES PARTAKE WITH PRIDE IN A LIFESTYLE MADE OF TRADITIONAL VALUES AND CRAFTS.

### THE BEDOUIN TRIBES

The word Bedouin comes from the Arabic *badw* which means "desert dweller", traditionally divided into tribes or clans, and sharing a common culture of herding camels and goats. Nowadays, the lifestyle of these nomadic tribes depends largely on seasonal employment like date palm cultivation, grain harvesting, fishing and farming. There are several nomadic tribes in Oman, including the desert Bedouins, the mountain people and the fishermen Bedouins settled along the coasts. To give just a few examples of their activities, the Bidar are dedicated to pruning and pollinating palm trees and harvesting dates, while the Awamir are specialists in irrigation specialists, well drillers and know how to repair the falaj. Although the wearing, the traditional Omani men (*dishhdasha*), is now a regular habit, the members of the different tribes can be recognized by the colours of their turbans (*mussar*) and by the way they knot them (the embroidered headgear or *kumma* is reserved to city dwellers), as well as the shimmering colours of women's clothing, made of embroidered trousers.

### THE DESERT BEDOUINS

Two-thirds of Omani territory is made of deserts and dunes, where water sources are scarce and vegetation almost non-existent. Traditionally, irrigation by the *afraj* system favours permanent settlements in small towns with their own oasis. Apart from that, food is scarce in the desert, even for dromedaries, camels and goats. *Arfaj* and *rimth*, two common herbs that grow in the rocky and sandy areas, are used as fodder. The dromedary remains the most popular and reliable means of transportation in this environment. Nomadic tribes from southern Oman, such as the Wahiba, build huts called *barasti* made of branches and palm leaves while those in the north, like the Rawashid, choose to live in more comfortable tents made of black wool called *beit es-shaa*, using the hair of dromedaries and goats to build them. These tents have a reserved section for women, separated from the men's one; the latter being the only place in the house allowed to strangers. Hospitality under the tent is one of the first duties of the nomad and relies on the concept of collective responsibility. During the periods when they stay in the oasis, where mud and water are available, the Bedouins make various pieces of pottery to be used later during their journeys and future relocations.

### THE MOUNTAIN BEDOUINS

Mountains in Oman are remote and difficult-to-access areas home to semi-nomadic populations. Existence in mountainous areas is hard and the conditions of comfort are often rudimentary. Deep and narrow canyons lead to springs and rivers that are the only life in this environment. The view of a green ribbon announcing a wadi is always a surprise for the visitor who has travelled along with dry and desolated areas. The mountain Bedouins' economy is based on breeding semi-sedentary sheep and goats that provide milk, meat and leather. Women are often in charge of the herd and have the animals graze in the rare shrubs they find. Date palms are the first resource of mountain oasis. The most important date fair occurs place in Nizwa, perpetuating one of the oldest agrarian rites in this part of the world. Mountain people remain very respectful to the courteous traditions of Arab chivalry, particularly by the prestige attached to weapons, rifles, daggers and revolvers. In the Dhofar, it is also the Jaballi Bedouins (literally "the mountain people") who harvest the resin from the boswellia to make frankincense.



## THE FISHERMEN BEDOUINS

Even if the tasks associated with the sea hardly match the imagery of the Bedouins, both fishing and the collection of pearl oysters keep the tribes busy for several months. The Arabian Sea coast was known in ancient texts as the coast of the ichthyophages, or fish eaters. All along with East Arabia, the deep sea-trench close to the shoreline is a seasonal migration point where schools of sardines gather aplenty every year. In early spring, from Ras Al Jinz, known as the turtle beach, year after year the fishermen Bedouins are ready for the catch. From the fishing village of Quriyat to the one of Sur, along the narrow coastal corridor between the mountains and the sea, sardines dry on the beach under the shade of palm trees. Daily catches of fresh fish, mainly tuna, king mackerel or giant mackerel are sold on local markets or exported, while the dried fish will be used to feed both humans and animals during the rest of the year. The precious resources of the Indian Ocean have also delivered their last secret: the abalone, a fleshy gastropod mollusc much prized on the Japanese market where the entire Omani production is sold. The Omani government encourages the settlement of the fishermen Bedouins along the coastline with financial help when deciding to establish and build a permanent home for residence. But the fishermen of the region cannot settle definitely as they follow the rhythm of fish migrations. Plus, during the monsoon season, the winds are too strong to venture out to sea. That's why Bedouins migrate, from June to October, to a large oasis in inland Oman called Bilad Bani Bu Hassan, to harvest dates.

## EID AL FITR

Eid Al Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, where we break the fasting month. It is a week of colourful festivals and the best time to discover traditional Oman.

Equivalent to the holiday season in the West, the Eid gathers the population around typical meals, celebrations in all the villages, folk songs and dances.



## **ECONOMY AND SOCIETY**

PETROLEUM HYDROCARBONS ARE STILL THE FIRST RESOURCE OF THE SULTANATE, BUT THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY HAS BEEN CONSTANTLY DIVERSIFYING IN THE PAST DECADES.

THE POPULATION, IN MAJORITY OMANI BUT OF VARIOUS ORIGINS, IS CHANGING THEIR RURAL HABITATS FOR URBAN AREAS.

### **THE OIL WINDFALL**

The Omani economy is based mainly on the production and export of oil and gas. After discovering of oil and especially the accession to the throne of Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1970, Oman has embarked on an accelerated process of modernization. Formerly based on regional internal trade and international maritime trade, in particular the export of dates, citrus and fish, Oman's resources today rely primarily on hydrocarbons.

Located near the capital Muscat, three industrial zones including Rusail. Mina al-Fahal serves as the refinery and oil port of Oman, the terminal of the Fahud pipeline, about 280 km long.

### **DIVERSIFICATION OF THE ECONOMY**

The Sultanate earns most of its income from the windfall of oil and gas (almost 35.5% its GDP). With oil reserves being limited, Oman prudently manages its production and leads an active prospecting policy. Since 1996, Muscat started an ambitious program of development intended to restructure the economy, the objective of which involves reducing the contribution from hydrocarbons to GDP (50% of GDP in 2008). Investments are directed towards light industries, but also into fishing, agriculture, farming and tourism. Other resources come from important minerals such as copper, marble, lime, chromium, gypsum and in particular natural gas. The country's main food products are dates, limes, bananas, wheat and sorghum that come from sedentary agriculture in the plains near the coastline (using well irrigation) in the plateaus (*falaj* irrigation) and the terraced cultivation of Hajar. Fisheries are present in the Gulf of Oman and in the Arabian Sea, manufacturing mainly sardines and tuna. Lobster fishing in Masirah Island and the Dhofar coast brings an extra export resource. The Quriyat salt refinery annually produces 3,000 tons of table salt and 5,000 tons of industrial salt. The tourism industry benefits from an excellent road network, modern airports, and high-end hotel infrastructure; the Omani government has the goal to make tourism one of the main economic sectors.

### **DEMOGRAPHY AND SOCIETY**

The Sultanate of Oman has a population of almost 5 million inhabitants. The urbanization rate increased from 15% in 1970 to 85% in 2018, thanks to the influx of foreign workers, which represent one fifth of the population. The main cities are Muscat, the capital (1,5 million inhabitants), and Salalah, the primary urban centre of Dhofar (about half a million inhabitants). Oman's population consists of Arab, Baluchi, South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi), and African ethnic groups. Because of a relatively small Omani population and a fast-growing oil-driven economy, the country has attracted many migrants. Since 1970, the Sultan has given high priority to education to develop a domestic workforce in a process called "Omanization", which the government considers a vital factor in the country's economic and social progress.



## **OMAN ITINERARIES**

**A LONG COASTLINE, VAST DESERTS AND RUGGED MOUNTAIN RANGES: THE SULTANATE OF OMAN OFFERS A VARIETY OF LANDSCAPES, COLOURS AND ATMOSPHERES TO EXPLORE ON A 4-WHEEL DRIVE, A TRADITIONAL DHOW OR EVEN IN A HELICOPTER.**

### **MUSCAT AND THE AL BATINAH GOVERNORATE**

Reflection of past and present, Muscat, the Omani capital, catches the eye with its traditional architecture, its beaches and its enchanting setting, between the sea and the mountains. It is divided into two historic districts: Old Muscat, surrounded by thick walls and once forbidden to foreigners, is home to museums and two forts, Mirani and Jalani, and the Sultan's Al Alam Palace. In the neighbouring bay, the port of Muttrah and its 3 km-coastal road is the perfect scenery for the beautiful 18<sup>th</sup> century mansions. Modern Muscat city plan is made of low-rise white buildings and divided into districts, each one devoted to a different activity: the business district of Ruwi, shopping centres, etc. Muscat is also the starting point for excursions to the valleys and forts (towards Nizwa), along the northern coast up to Sohar or, in the southern coast, to Sur and the A'Sharqiyah Sands.

### **THE SULTAN QABOOS GRAND MOSQUE**

Inaugurated in 2001 to celebrate thirty years of his reign and entirely financed by the late Sultan's personal funds, Oman's main mosque is located in Bawshar. Open to both Muslim and non-Muslims, its proportions and interior decoration are impressive. The exterior consists of three main aisles, five minarets, several ablution courts and three vaulted passageways. Headed by a central dome, the men's prayer room is monumental with walls and pillars in Carrara marble, stained glass and Persian style tiles. Suspended 50 meters above the ground, a 14-meter, 8-ton Swarovski crystal chandelier illuminates the room with a thousand lights, while on the floor, the 21-ton, single-piece, hand-sewn Persian carpet is the second largest in the world.

### **THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE MUSCAT**

The late Sultan Qaboos was a fan of classical music and arts and ordered the construction of this premier venue in 2001. Located in the heart of the capital, the Qurm district, this monumental opera house was finally inaugurated in October 2011. Apart from its architectural success, a style between modernity and tradition, it offers each season a selection of the most beautiful works from the classical international and oriental repertoire. For information on the latest shows: [www.rohmuscat.org.om](http://www.rohmuscat.org.om)

### **THE BAIT AL ZUBAIR MUSEUM**

Located in a beautiful traditional house of Old Muscat, this small ethnographic museum devoted to everyday life and clothing is one of the most interesting in the capital. Weapons, jewellery, costumes and decorative items are on display inside, while the back garden recreates a typical village. [www.baitalzubair.com](http://www.baitalzubair.com)



### THE BAIT AL BARANDA MUSEUM

This recent museum dedicated to the history of Muscat is located near the old citadel, not far from the Muttrah Corniche. It occupies a century-old house and offers an interactive route retracing the events of the city since prehistoric times. Few objects, especially models and screens. The liveliest part traces the history of the Al Busaid dynasty that reigns today. <http://baitalbaranda.mm.gov.om>

### THE OMANI FRENCH MUSEUM BAIT FARANSA

Residence of the French consuls until 1920, this beautiful Omani residence now houses a heritage museum which traces the history of diplomatic, commercial and cultural relations between the two countries which date back to the reign of Louis XIV. The former consul's office has been kept as it was, and documents, photos, model ships, navigation instruments and maps dating from the 17th to the 19th centuries are on display.

### THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

A large display of fossils, the oldest of which dates from the Precambrian. It is also an interesting place to understand in depth the geological wealth of the country through minerals.

[www.experienceoman.om/places\\_to\\_see/oman-natural-history-museum](http://www.experienceoman.om/places_to_see/oman-natural-history-museum)

### THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

Located in Old Muscat, it retraces all the history and traditions of the country with more than 7000 objects exposed. In total, it consists of 12 galleries, such as the maritime gallery, the splendours of Islam, Oman and the world, etc., another gallery for temporary exhibitions, a warehouse and a workshop area for children. [www.nm.gov.om/en/home](http://www.nm.gov.om/en/home)

### THE OLD PORT OF MUTTRAH

If Muscat prides itself on its role as political capital, the real economic heart of the city is Muttrah. Worth a visit is the seafront with its old mansions dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the small fishing port and the most complete souk in the Arabian Peninsula. There are traditional clothes, handcrafts and antique jewellery, Bedouin rugs, as well as live workshops to learn how to manufacture the khanjar, a traditional dagger carved in horn.

### RED BUS TOURS OF MUSCAT

The Big Bus Tours company proposes a tourist circuit through Muscat on panoramic buses. The 2-hour guided tours in English are available every day of the week, starting at Muttrah souk. With the purchase of the 24-hour ticket, you can hop-on and hop-off at any of the 12 stops along the route.

[www.bigbustours.com/en/muscat/muscat-bus-tours](http://www.bigbustours.com/en/muscat/muscat-bus-tours)

### HELICOPTER TOURS OF MUSCAT

In 2020, Al Sharqiya Aviation initiated the first flights in helicopter over Muscat. From Quantab to the charming ledge of Muttrah, through Bandar Al Khayran, this is a unique service to discover the capital from the air. Individual or shared 15-minute flights available. [www.asa.om](http://www.asa.om)



## OMAN CONVENTION & EXHIBITION CENTER MUSCAT

Opened in 2016, Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre in Muscat is just 4 km away from the international airport. It has 2 auditoriums with 3200 and 450 seats, 20 meeting rooms (capacity for 25 to 360 people), 2 theatres with a capacity for 2,360 people, a 22,396 m<sup>2</sup> hall (without columns) divisible into 5 spaces, Hall 1 & 2 (10,000 people concerts, large meetings), 1 large ballroom (1,200 people), 1 junior ballroom (540 people for banquets), 10 reception suites, 1 VIP pavilion and 4,000 parking places. In total, the OCEC offers more than 55 meeting spaces. When completed, the OCEC will be integrated into the new Madinat Al-Irfan district, which includes 4 hotels, shops and residences, surrounded by a natural sanctuary for the exotic birdlife in Oman. The Crowne Plaza hotel, already opened in December 2017, has a capacity of 296 rooms. The JW Marriott, opened in early 2020, and has 304 rooms and suites. [www.omanconvention.com](http://www.omanconvention.com)

## THE AL BATINAH COASTLINE

Al Batinah is the most populated and fertile coastal region in the country. It stretches for 300 km at the foot of the Western Hajar massif. There are small villages scattered along the coast and the main activities here are agriculture and fishing. The landscape in the interior is characterized by palm groves nestled at the foot of the mountains and by small breeding farms. There are plenty of wadis who supply villages with water almost all year round.

## WADI BANI AWF

This fantastic excursion can be done during the day from Muscat on a 4-wheel drive vehicle. The road, or rather the track that runs at the bottom of this 30 km long wadi, requires experience in driving and an excellent off-road map. An eroded mineral landscape and a series of interconnected gorges make the experience unforgettable. At the end of the wadi, the village of Bilad Sayt is one of the most scenic ones in Oman. From the southern slope, a winding road climbs till the top of the mountain up to the village of Misfat Al Abryeen. Archaeological evidence in this oasis records human presence from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, probably related to an important agricultural activity still present today in the almond, hazel, apricot, fig and pomegranate plantations along the road.

## SAWADI

Located 25 km west of Muscat, this village's main draw are its mangroves and ponds, pristine beaches and translucent waters perfect for snorkelling.



## THE ROUTE OF THE FORTS FROM MUSCAT

Among the most impressive forts in Oman are those of Jalali and Mirani in Old Muscat; the forts of Nizwa and the castle of Jabrin with a sumptuous palace inside; Bait Ar Rudaydah Castle which used to house the Imam and his administration; the fort of Nakhal, majestically nested on a rocky outcrop overlooking a huge plain of date palms; the forts of Bait Naman and Al-Hobe which are used as holiday resorts by the sovereigns. Other constructions worth seeing are the Bahla fort, classified in the UNESCO World Heritage (about 20 km from Nizwa), the Ar Rustaq and Al Hazm forts (near Al Batinah coast), as well as the watchtowers that can be seen in many mountain passes.

## THE HINTERLAND OF MUSCAT, TOWARDS NIZWA, THE A'DAKHILIYAH AND A'DHAHIRAH REGIONS

### NIZWA

The ancient capital of Oman is located in a large oasis, at the crossroads of the caravan tracks from north to the south. Nizwa is the main city in this mountain region and has typical Omani buildings. The great fortress transformed into a museum is one of the highlights of the visit. The souk is just as fascinating as the one in Muttrah, near Muscat; not to be missed is the cattle market held every Friday morning.

### THE PROVINCE OF AL HAMRA

Certainly, the Omani city that has remained the most authentic one across the country. Its two-story high, ochre-coloured houses are similar to the ones found in Yemen. The Eco museum of Bait Al Safah tells all about the traditions of Omani life.

### AL HOOTA CAVE

This cave, 5 km long and crossed by an underground river, is located at the foot of Jabal Shams, in the province of Al Hamra. It looks like an underground gorge and has two entrances located at an altitude of 1040 m and 810 m. Stalactites, stalagmites, limestone rocks and karst crystals line the ceiling and the soil, while some rare species of insects and crustaceans live on water generated by the rains.  
[www.alhootacave.com](http://www.alhootacave.com)

### BAHLA

The town is famous for its pottery production and has also a huge fortress that can be visited. In the surrounding area, the Jabrin Castle is worth a visit. Built in 1670, during the most prosperous period of the Yarubid dynasty, it has a sumptuous palace inside.





## JABAL AKHDAR

The Green Mountain which rises to an altitude of 3,020 m is located in the highest central part of the Hajar Mountains, the backbone of the country. It separates the governorate of Al Batinah (literally the "belly"), the coastal plain which borders the mountains, from the governorate of A'Dhahirah ("the back") and its interior plateaus. Several villages are scattered in the mountains, including Seiq Al-Sherija, Wadi Beni Habib, Al Ain, Al Saqer, Al Manakher, Hil Al Yaman, Al Qasha. One of the main attractions is the rose and fruit tree plantations (pomegranate, peach, apricot, almond ...) on the Saiq plateau. April is the season for rose picking and their petals are fixed in domestic ovens to extract essences used for perfumes, confectionery, etc.

## JABAL SHAMS

At the other end of the western Hajar range, "the mountain of the sun" is the highest point in the country with its peak at 3,075 m. Covered by several hiking trails, the Jabal Shams is one of the most breathtaking natural sites of Oman: the "Grand Canyon" of Wadi an Nakhar. A good road, first paved, then which turns into a track, leads to the crest of the canyon at a place called "Plateau" that reaches 1,950 meters above sea level. There, the splendid view embraces the canyon, the Jabal Shams peak just opposite, and the bottom of Wadi an Nakhar below. Accessible by 4x4 from the village of Wadi Ghul, the winding road that runs at the bottom of the wadi through the middle of the massive boulders is also exceptional.

## OMAN ACROSS AGES MUSEUM IN MANAH (OPENING SCHEDULED IN 2021).

Located in the A'Dakhiliyah governorate, more precisely in Manah, one of the oldest and most important archaeological sites of the Sultanate with 376 houses and no less than 250 wells, this museum, ordered by the late Sultan Qaboos, aims to celebrate Oman's economic, cultural and social renaissance since the 1970s. A link between the past and the future, this show casting place is aimed to inform the visitors of the country's achievements in an innovative, interactive way.

### THE ROUTE OF THE PAST

This itinerary is located between the towns of Izki and Bahla and has several stops with a rich historical heritage: Birkat Al Mawz and Tawf are two villages worth a visit, both with 17<sup>th</sup> century forts. Also, in the surroundings, the falaj of Tanuf, with healing properties, and the castle of Jabrin.

### THE ROUTE OF THE MOUNTAIN OASIS

In the A'Dhahirah governorate, starting from the province of Ibri, you can reach the valley of Wadi Hawasina and visit the small hill towns like Dariz, Fidah, Dhahir and Yanqul. North of Bahla (the town known for its fort), you can reach the province of Al Hamra, famous for its traditional architecture, the village of Misfat Al Abryeen, Wadi Al-Ain, Jabal Misht (the "Comb Mountain") and Wadi Ghul.



## TOWARDS SUR AND THE A'SHARQIYAH GOVERNORATE

### SUR

Sur is the main coastal city located southeast of Muscat. Historic centre of commerce and shipbuilding, Sur has kept the appearance of the old Omani cities. Shipyards and ancestral techniques for dhow's construction remain here, the wood-made large traditional ships used for fishing and trade. Very lively in the morning and at the end of the day, Sur is home to a fort and a maritime museum. Not to be missed either, its fish and vegetable market (in the morning) and the souk in the town centre. For a few rials, the fishermen will take you on a boat around the port to witness the activity, before dropping you off in the Al Ayjah district with alleys lined with white houses. At noon, at the time of the call to prayer, the watchtower is also an excellent observation post to listen to the muezzins of the surrounding mosques. The visit to the town of Sur can be combined with the discovery of Wadi Tiwi and Wadi Shab, as well as a swimming stop at the beach of Fins.

### RAS AL JINZ TURTLE RESERVE

Evenings and nights are the best times to go to the Green Turtle Reserve in Ras Al Hadd or Ras al-Jinz whose beaches are home to almost 30,000 turtle eggs each year. Sea turtle laying season spans from June to September, but the activity is guaranteed almost all year round. Guided tours and observations are available every day (early in the morning and late in the evening) by the eco-tourist info point (accommodation provided on site). Since 2012, the Turtle Visitors Centre shows the cycle of reproduction and exhibits the archaeological excavations carried out on the site of Ras Al Jinz. [www.rasaljinz-turtlereserve.com](http://www.rasaljinz-turtlereserve.com)

### THE MARKETS

Every Wednesday morning in Ibra there is a unique market held by Bedouin women and strictly forbidden to men. The one of Sinaw takes place on Thursday. These two very colourful markets sell kitchen utensils, fabrics, perfumes, make-up, henna, jewellery, and old silver coins for ornaments. At the edge of the A'Sharqiyah Sands there are also a couple of Bedouin markets, such as those in Al Wasil and Al Mintirib.

### THE DESERT OF A'SHARQIYAH SANDS

As you move away from the coast of Sur to the inland, the desert changes colour, from white to red-ochre, and the tall dunes of A'Sharqiyah Sands finally reveal all their splendour. A three-hour drive from Muscat, the A'Sharqiyah desert welcomes travellers for a day or more, in comfortable tents organized in twenty camps or in a simple bivouac under the stars. On a 4-wheel drive, you can travel the 180 kilometres of sandy tracks crossing from the desert to the Arabian Sea. On site, visitors will find activities such as camel riding, climbing the dunes on foot and by quad, or even skiing on sand and "dune bashing", an activity which consists of climbing the dunes at full speed in an adapted 4x4 vehicle.

### THE WADIS

The eastern Hajar massif is plenty of beautiful wadis. Between Muscat and Sur, Wadi Tiwi reveals the luxuriance of its palm groves and its many villages. It is also the starting point of a 3-day hiking trail which joins Wadi Bani Khalid and its natural pools, a popular weekend escape for the inhabitants of Muscat. Accessible on foot, Wadi Shab has also some natural pools suitable for swimming.



## THE DHOFAR (SOUTHERN REGION)

No other region shows more contrast with the clichés of the Arabian Peninsula than the coastal plain of Dhofar during the three summer months. Due to the monsoon rainfall from June to September, the southernmost region of Oman sees its temperatures drop to a cool 20°Celsius, reveals its barren slopes suddenly covered with a cloud forest vegetation and a tropical atmosphere invades the city of Salalah, the capital. The remarkable transformation is known as the "Khareef Salalah" affecting the south east of a country better known for its sandy deserts than rolling green hills. Inside this narrow strip of land, which stretches approximately 250 kilometres from east to west, there is a jungle feeling in the beaches fringed by coconut palms and enclosed by the plantations of exotic fruits. At its deepest, the monsoon only extends about 30 kilometres inland from the shore, creating a dramatic disparity between this green oasis and the surrounding Arabian "Empty Quarter". Whether you stay at any of the resorts fronting the Indian Ocean, a relaxing holiday can also be challenged by a mountain excursion (the Dhofar Mountains culminate at 1,463 m in Jabal Samhan), the exploration of natural sites (Mirbat and Wadi Darbat, geyser of Al Mughsayl) and, why not, a road trip to the virtually impassable Rub al-Khali desert itself, which occupies the entire northern part. The region is famous for the frankincense caravan trails since ancient times, but also witness of the most remarkable maritime history of the Sultanate in its four archaeological sites classified as World Heritage by UNESCO plus the Frankincense Museum in Salalah.

### SALALAH

Luscious tropical plantations and long sandy beaches give Salalah a desert mirage ambiance right at the borders of the sandy dunes of Rub-al Khali. An impression enhanced by the multitude of small stalls selling fresh fruit juice and coconut water and the dromedaries enjoying the fresh ocean mist right by the seashore or in the natural pools.

Salalah reached the peak of prosperity in the 13<sup>th</sup> century thanks to incense trade. Between 1932 and 1970, it was the capital of the Sultanate of Oman under Said bin Taimur. After the latter's overthrow, his son Qaboos, born in Salalah himself, decided to move the country's capital to Muscat. The port of Salalah, one of the largest on the Peninsula, is an important transshipment hub for container shipping connecting Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The new international airport, opened in 2015, connects Salalah to Muscat, but also the region, especially Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., Qatar, Dubai and even India. During the monsoon season, lots of tourists visit mainly from the Middle East countries. The consolidation of air routes supports the recent important hotel development of Salalah and Dhofar. The Salalah Rotana Resort (400 rooms) is the first major hotel to have opened in the Hawana Salalah tourist complex which also includes, the Juweira Boutique hotel (64 rooms) and the Fanar Hotel & Residences (400 rooms). The Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara (40 rooms and 96 villas), located near the archaeological site of Al Balid is another example.

Apart from beach activities, one of the main attractions is the mountains' waterfalls, mainly in Wadi Darbat, Ain Athum, Ain Tubrook, and Ain Khor. Wadi Darbat is made of six side-by-side waterfalls falling over 20 metres into a wide grotto of aquamarine water and white sands. In the shopping district, you just have to push the door of the confectioners' shops to taste the halwa and take the time to stroll through its souks, especially the frankincense one, where women explain the art of burning incense in a terracotta pot to scent clothes. If market shopping is your thing, you should not miss the goat's trade. The Salalah Festival (the monsoon fair) is an exhibition show and a cultural event which attracts about 700,000 tourists from Oman and the Arabian Peninsula every year.



## THE AL BALID MARITIME MUSEUM IN SALALAH

In 2007, the Sultanate revived its maritime tradition with the opening of this museum at the archaeological site of Al Balid. In ancient times, this port was the starting point for incense caravan trails, by land and sea, as well as the transport of minerals to Mesopotamia. If the legend relates the mythical explorer Sindbad the Sailor as an ancestor of the present Omanis, this museum bets on history through real facts. It reviews of shipbuilding since the third millennium BC, navigation, life on board and the major shipping routes. Tribute to the first Omani navigators who, from nomads and caravan chiefs, gradually turned into experienced seafarers. In the History Museum, you can learn more about the upheavals in the local society through economic and social changes.

## DHOFAR LAND OF FRANKINCENSE: THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE

Produced by a tree native to Dhofar, the *Boswellia sacra*, the incense resin was at the origin of one of the most important commercial activities in the ancient and medieval world. In 2000, four sites of this region were classified with the UNESCO World heritage label: the frankincense trees from Wadi Dawkah, the remains of the caravan oasis of Shisr (lost city of Ubar) and those of the ports of Khor Rori (ancient Samhuran) and Al-Balid which count today among the most interesting archaeological remains of the sultanate. Occupying a substantial seaside site in Salalah, Al Balid was probably built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC but rebuilt during the medieval Islamic period (13<sup>th</sup> century). About 40 km east of Salalah, the ancient port of Khor Rori has preserved the foundations of places of worship and dwellings on a rocky promontory overlooking the sea in a beautiful setting.

Still cultivated and produced in the region, frankincense resin is collected every year in May and June. The Wadi Dawkah reserve shelters 1,200 adult incense trees in their natural production area plus 5,000 new plants added recently and is especially interesting during the harvesting season. The largest incense market is held in Salalah every year in September.

## MUSANDAM PENINSULA (NORTHERN REGION)

This mountainous peninsula, where the cliffs drop steeply into the Strait of Hormuz's turquoise waters, is separated from the rest of the country by a territorial advance from the United Arab Emirates (Emirate of Sharjah). Wild and beautiful, Musandam is undoubtedly Oman's best kept secret. A jagged shore was made of deep bays enclosed by the cliffs' vertical walls that earned the nickname of "Arabian fjords". From Khasab and Dibba, the two main cities, Musandam is a region that is easily reached by sea rather than by road, on a traditional dhow for instance, or by sea kayak, to get to the isolated villages and coves. One of the most beautiful fjords is Khor al Sham, reachable from Khasab, where you can swim, snorkel, dive, sea kayak and visit tiny fishing villages. Other activities not to be missed in the region are swimming in the cove of Khawr Nadj, also accessible by road from Khasab, bivouac in sheltered coves along the coast, big-game fishing, 4-wheel drive trips in the mountains, oasis and wadis. With its sheltered bays and coves, Musandam is also a renowned spot for scuba diving. Khasab, Musandam main city, is a small but lively fishing port. The city has a fort built by the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century who then managed the strait trade. The restored fort now houses a small museum. Nearby, you can visit the picturesque village of Kumzar at the tip of the peninsula, by dhow or by water taxi. From Muscat, you can reach Khasab by road, by plane, or by ferry (6 hours crossing). The Musandam region is also easily accessible by road from Dubai in about 2.5 hours.



## ANNUAL EVENTS: CULTURE & SPORTS

In Oman, particularly in Muscat, the winter months are plenty of festivities and sports events with a well-established annual calendar.

### CULTURE AND MUSIC

**The Royal Opera House Muscat (from September to May)**

The first Opera House to open in the Arabian Peninsula, with a large selection of performances from the classical and oriental repertoire: ballets, recitals, jazz concerts, operas, family shows ...

Reservations: [www.rohmuscat.org.om](http://www.rohmuscat.org.om)

### FESTIVALS

**Muscat Festival (late January - late February)**

This annual festival highlights the country's heritage and culture: crafts, gastronomy, children's activities, concerts and theatre venues. [www.muscat-festival.com](http://www.muscat-festival.com)

**Salalah Festival (July - August)**

Both a cultural event and an exhibition of Omani and regional products, the Salalah Festival is held every summer during the monsoon season and attracts many tourists from the Arabian Peninsula. Events are related to the traditions of the region (dance, crafts, gastronomy).

### SAILING RACES AND REGATTAS

The Sultanate of Oman has an undeniable bond with the sea. Five thousand years of maritime history that continue today with major sailing gatherings.

**Mussanah Race Week (Mid-January)**

This international dinghy regatta is held on the waters of Mussanah, north of Muscat, where the Asian Beach Games took place in 2010. [www.mussanahraceweek.com](http://www.mussanahraceweek.com) and [www.omansail.com](http://www.omansail.com)

**Sailing Arabia-The Tour (January-February)**

Since its first edition in 2011, EFG Sailing Arabia – The Tour has grown in stature to become the region's annual premier offshore race and a favourite winter destination for sailors around the globe. A journey along the Omani coast, from Salalah to Muscat, highlighting the beauty of the Sultanate. [www.sailingarabiathetour.com](http://www.sailingarabiathetour.com)

**GC 32 Raising Tour - Oman Cup (March or November)**

This category of large "flying" catamarans started their competitions in 2012, after the San Francisco edition of the America's Cup. The GC32 catamaran allows regular sailors, both pros and keen amateurs, to get a taste of flying in foil-born sailboats racing at 30+ knot speeds. The GC32 Racing Tour is aimed at both pro and owner-driver teams who compete on a five event circuit, sailing their catamarans for the maximum amount of time. [www.gc32raisingtour.com](http://www.gc32raisingtour.com)



## CYCLING

### Tour of Oman (mid-February)

The worlds' most experienced cyclists speed along the coast and struggle up the mountains. Oman's varied and rich landscape offers glimmering opportunities for all-rounders, climbers and even sprinters to mount the podium. The cyclists reach up to 100 km/per hour downhill, an average 40-50 km/per hour on the flat and an average 28-30 km/per hour uphill. [www.en.tourofoman.om](http://www.en.tourofoman.om)

### BikingMan Oman (end of February)

This exploration race gathers cyclists from all over the world, in a maximum of 5 days, for more than 1000 km through the most spectacular Omani landscapes. <https://bikingman.com/en/>

### Haute Route (early March)

The aim of this races is to allow amateur cyclists to face similar challenges than the professional riders. Three-day Haute Route events feature two classic stages and end with a Stage 3-time trial in the heart of the Hajar mountains. [www.hauteroute.org](http://www.hauteroute.org)

## RUNNING

### Muscat Marathon (January)

A footrace which includes three tests to choose from: a marathon, a half-marathon or a 10 km race through the most beautiful streets of the capital. [www.muscatmarathon.om](http://www.muscatmarathon.om)

### Oman By UTMB (November / December)

Three different distances to choose from in this extraordinary footrace, 50 km, 100 km or 150 km, all on a very steep terrain in the heart of the Hajar mountains. A trail along the mountain ridges, through villages, palm groves, wadi and narrow gorges, featuring breath-taking landscapes. [www.omanbyutmb.com](http://www.omanbyutmb.com)

### Oman Desert Marathon (February)

A self-sufficient stage race in the Sharqiyah Sands desert where participants carry their belongings (sleeping bag and food) throughout the competition.

Four stages of 42 km, 35 km, 60 km, 28 km to discover the most remote and untouched sands and the highest dunes of the Oman Desert on the tracks of the ancient caravans. From the Oasis of Bidiyah to the Arabian Sea. Six stages and six different perspectives of one of the most beautiful deserts of the world: red, golden and white sands will give make this journey unique and always different, in a scenario that doesn't know the monotony. [www.marathonoman.com](http://www.marathonoman.com)

## THRIATLON

### Ironman 70.3 (February in Muscat, September in Salalah)

70.3 is the figure (in miles) of the total distance to be covered: actually, the 113 km in this triathlon include three events: a 1.9 km swim in the clear waters of Muscat, followed by a 90.1 km bike race going through the main Muscat points (Royal Opera House, Al Bustan Palace, Muttrah Gate...). The last stage is a 21.1 km footrace in the Omani capital. There is also a Salalah edition in Dhofar, the southern tip of the country. [www.ironman.com](http://www.ironman.com)



## OUTDOOR & SPORTING ACTIVITIES

A 3165 KM COASTLINE, TWO VAST SAND DESERTS, TWO HIGH MOUNTAIN MASSIFS AND MORE THAN 60 WADIS: THE SULTANATE OF OMAN IS A DREAM DESTINATION FOR THE ACTIVE OUTDOOR'S LOVERS.

### ABSEILING

Several mountain sites are equipped for abseiling, especially in Jabal Shams (a 180 m descent), or combined with other activities (canyoning, speleology). This activity must be supervised by instructors. [www.holiday-in-oman.com](http://www.holiday-in-oman.com)

### CANYONING

To name just one of the many spots, Wadi Bani Awf, the Snake Canyon's narrow gorge (Wadi Bimmah) reserves a very sporty canyoning route of 3 to 4 hours for the initiated. In some easy-to-access gorges, canyoning is similar to water-hiking (in Wadi Dayqah and Wadi Bani Khalid).

### CLIMBING AND VIA FERRATA

With over 160 sites listed, Oman is a renowned destination for climbing enthusiasts. The most requested site is the Jabal Misht (Western Hajar), its 1,000 metre cliffs are aimed only for the very experienced. Other sites are more accessible and equipped with a via ferrata or climbing wall: the Grand Canyon (Jabal Shams), in Jabal Akhdar and the Snake Canyon (Wadi Bani Awf), the latter being currently closed for renovation.

### DIVING

The abundance of fish and a preserved seabed make Oman a very popular destination for divers. During winter, the concentration of phytoplankton limits visibility, which becomes optimal between April and December, between 10 and 30 meters. The water temperature varies between 30 ° C in summer and 20 ° - 25 ° C during the winter months, which may require a 5 mm wet suit.

### IN MUSCAT AND THE DAYMANIYAT ISLANDS

Muscat has a dozen diving clubs that offer day trips. About twenty dive sites are easily accessible by boat (5 to 90 minutes) from Muscat: Fahal Island Cave, Bandar Al Khayran Bay and the Al-Munassir shipwreck sunk 30 meters deep (many seahorses) are among the favourites. Practicable all year round, its waters host 85 varieties of coral, beautiful coral tables, and 900 species of fish, from the smallest to the majestic whale shark. Visibility is between 10 and 15 meters and, due to the lack of current, the dives are perfect for beginners.

A little further north, the uninhabited islets of the Daymaniyat Nature Reserve are home to some of the most beautiful diving sites in the country. With a maximum depth of 25 to 30 meters, the area offers a unique diversity of hard corals (deer coral, lettuce coral and many acropora coral tables) and promises unexpected encounters: eagle rays, manta rays (in summer), dolphins, lemon sharks, black tip sharks, whales (February-September).



### IN THE MUSANDAM PENINSULA

With its drop offs and sheltered bays, Musandam is a renowned spot, especially for itinerant diving cruises. Sites in the region are intact and numerous, with ocean currents activity and massive rock formations, carpeted with soft corals and superb tables of acropora, the reef stony corals. Very varied, the sea fauna is notably made up of dolphins, whales (February), seahorses, nudibranchs, black tip sharks, parrotfish, angel fish and clownfish. Diving clubs are installed in Khasab and Dibba.

### IN THE DHOFAR

Still little explored, the Dhofar dive sites are accessible by 4-wheel drive or speed boat. Due to the summer monsoon, scuba diving is only practiced from October to April. There are different species of rays, parrotfish, angel fish, batfish, turtles, sepia, octopuses, moray eels, as well as a wide variety of nudibranchs and soft and hard corals. From October to December, the monsoon leaves an astonishing ephemeral underwater forest of giant algae. Several diving centres are installed in Mirbat and Salalah. From November to April, diving cruises are also organized in the Hallaniyat Islands to discover pelagic fish.

Full details of diving clubs and cruises at: [www.experienceoman.om](http://www.experienceoman.om)

## GOLF

Since October 2012, Muscat boasts four 18-hole courses offering breath-taking panoramas, beautiful routes and optimal practice conditions from October to April. Also, several hotels offer "Stay & Golf" packages or just weekly golf packages.

Opened in 1969, the **Ras Al Hamra Golf Club** is the oldest golf course in Muscat on a course of Sand. Recently, it has been redesigned by Graham Marsh Golf Design teams to become an 18-hole course on grass. It is also the first fully lit golf course in the country. [www.rasalhamragolfclub.com](http://www.rasalhamragolfclub.com)

A former golf course on sand, the **Ghala Valley Golf Course** is now an 18-hole green. Players enjoy the unique setting of the wadi whose course follows the natural contours. [www.ghalagolf.com](http://www.ghalagolf.com)

**Muscat Hills Golf & Country Club** (2009) has equipped its Golf Academy with the most advanced technologies in learning and analysis of his software-assisted game technique. [www.muscathillsgolf.com](http://www.muscathillsgolf.com)

Designed by Greg Norman by the ocean, **Almouj Golf** keeps its promises high standards and fun. It also has an illuminated 9-hole Par 3 course that allows you to play in the evening. [www.almoujgolf.com](http://www.almoujgolf.com)

In April 2017, a 9-hole golf course opened in **Jebel Sifah**. Designed by Peter Harradine, this course between natural wadis and strategic bunkers, challenges the most experienced golfers while remaining accessible for beginners. [www.jebelsifah.com/golf](http://www.jebelsifah.com/golf)





## HIKING

In the mountains, in the desert or along the coastline, hiking is a regular, popular activity in the Sultanate and global tour operators specialized in hiking and trekking propose their tours from October to April. True backbone of the country, the imposing chain of the Hajar mountains offers a majestic setting of high mountains and over a hundred kilometres of marked trails. Between Jabal Akhdar (green mountain) and Jabal Shams, the highest point in the country (3075 m), terraced crops and palm groves green areas show great contrast with the mineral universe of the massif. And everywhere, the emerald green water of the wadis invites the visitors to a refreshing stop. Get to know the Bedouin traditions by crossing villages, palm groves, canyons, wadis or even on camel rides in the ochre dunes. Most itineraries can be done during the day (they are not looped) but it is technically possible to do a grand foot tour of the Western Hajar in about ten days, between the Jabal Shams and the Jabal Akhdar. Hiking trails are also present in the Dhofar and the Musandam Peninsula. Full contact details of specialized tour operators at: [www.experienceoman.om](http://www.experienceoman.om)

## HORSEBACK RIDING

Oman is famous for the Arabian Thoroughbreds and renowned for its royal cavalry. Galloping on the Omani beaches, trotting in the sand dunes, walking in the wadis ... the Sultanate is one of the world's largest riding arena. Tour operators, agencies and equestrian centres organize horse treks with an instructor.

## KITESURF

Oman has become an institution for board water sports, as it offers exceptional wind conditions from May to September. There are two kitesurf centres affiliated with the VDWS Water Sport Association: in Mussanah (Millennium Resort) 70 km north of Muscat, suitable for beginners from October to April, and on Masirah Island (5 hours' drive from Muscat) from May to September. One-off trips can also be organized from Sur as well as in the Dhofar. [www.kiteboarding-oman.com](http://www.kiteboarding-oman.com)

## MOUNTAIN BIKE

With its large unspoiled spaces, its high mountains suitable for mountain biking and its ideal climate in winter, the Sultanate of Oman is a fantastic destination for cycle tourism and mountain bike activities. From The View hotel near the Jabal Shams, there are 8 mountain bike trails supervised by professional monitors, to discover the Hajar massif and its traditional villages. These programs are available in three different levels of practice: from the 21 km uneven route in the middle of palm groves, to a sporty mountain-bike at an altitude of 2000 meters around the Jabal Shams. [www.bikeandhikeoman.com](http://www.bikeandhikeoman.com)

## SAILING

Oman Sail, the official sailing structure of the Sultanate of Oman, manages four sailing schools in Muscat (Marina Bandar Rowdha and The Wave-Muscat complex) and in its region (in Mussanah) as well as in Sur, where visitors can follow training or hire equipment for the day. Through its charter company, Oman Sail also offers sailboat and catamaran cruises with skipper to discover the uninhabited islets of the Daymaniyat and the splendid bay of Bandar Al Khayran. A la carte itineraries are proposed from one to seven nights.

[www.omansail.com](http://www.omansail.com) - [www.seaoman.com](http://www.seaoman.com)



## SEA KAYAK

The Musandam fjords are a dream setting for sea kayaking tours in coves and beaches accessible only by sea. Each winter, several tour operators offer itineraries combining sea kayaking and hiking. In the program: bivouacs on wild beaches, plus swimming with green turtles and dolphins. Natural bays located south of Muscat are also ideal for kayaking, often directly from the beach resorts.

## SEA TOURS

Sea tours departing from Muscat are not to be missed, just for a few hours or on an overnight excursion including camping on a deserted beach. Various operators and offers: dolphin watching, Muscat discovery from the sea (Muttrah, Old Muscat and the Sultan's palace, the surrounding fishing villages), combined with snorkelling in Bandar Al Khayran bay and even a dinner cruise. The choice of boats is varied: traditional wooden boat (dhow), catamaran, a more luxurious yacht with cabins or a speed boat. In the Musandam governorate where mountains meet the sea, a boat trip from the ports of Khasab and Dibba is the best way to discover the breath-taking panorama of the Arabian Fjords. In the programs: drop-off on the islands, coasting along the cliffs, dolphin watching, swimming and snorkelling. From October to May, when the sea is calm, the city of Salalah (the Dhofar region) is also a starting point for dolphin watching tours.

## SPELEOLOGY

The Hajar massif is home to huge networks of underground cavities, including Majlis Al Jinn, the second largest cave in the world. Some easier-to-access caves (Muqal Cave) can be explored as part of a canyoning route. However, most of the caves in the Selma Plateau require solid training and professional supervision.

## SPORTS FISHING

Fish is a main resource in the Omani waters of the Arabian Sea. Along the shoreline, medium to large game fish is aplenty, while the big game and pelagic fauna (tunas, swordfish, groupers and snappers) can be found offshore. Although practicable all year round in Musandam and around Muscat, for the recreational angler the best of the fishing season goes from October to May. In the Dhofar, the Hallaniyat islands host an impressive population of ignobilis jacks (30 to 40 kg), but also of king mackerels, beaks, black tip jacks, yellowfin tuna, dolphin fish, amberjacks, among others.

## WILD CAMPING

Except for the desert camps, the Sultanate has very few equipped structures, which makes it a dream destination for wild camping enthusiasts in exceptional landscapes. The country's legislation does not impose any restriction in the matter and you can pitch your tent wherever you want (wadi, mountain, beach, desert, etc.) provided the basic rules of decency towards the population are respected. The ideal season goes from October to April, but even in summer, in the Omani peaks such as the Saiq Plateau, the Salma Plateau and Jabal Shams temperatures remain pleasant. Those visitors considering this option should get the Oman Off-Road guide which indicates safe and comfortable camping sites (watch out for flash floods in the wadis). In Muscat, some incoming agencies rent camping equipment (tent, sleeping bag, table, stove).



## ACCOMMODATION. EATING OUT. NIGHTLIFE

Find the complete hotel listings at [www.experienceoman.om](http://www.experienceoman.om)

### HOTELS IN MUSCAT AND AROUND

#### Accommodation in or around Muscat: 5-star hotels \*\*\*\*\*

• **Al Bustan Palace - A Ritz Carlton Hotel.** This mythical palace with its typical Arab decoration stands in a dream-like bay, between sea and mountain, on the edge of a huge private beach. Its bathing facilities (lagoon pool, sports activities), its gardens and its choice of gourmet restaurants make it an exceptional address for a stay. Reopened in early 2019 after major renovations, it has 250 luxurious rooms and a monumental atrium lined with carved wood and precious materials. Also equipped with a magnificent Six Senses Spa in traditional Omani decoration, a 3000 m<sup>2</sup> space dedicated to well-being.

Reservations +968 24 79 96 66 and [www.albustanpalace.com](http://www.albustanpalace.com)

• **Grand Millennium Muscat.** 18 minutes away from the international airport and only 5 minutes from the beach, in the heart of the business district and near the Muscat Grand Mall. It has 296 rooms and 40 luxury apartments in contemporary decor, 5 restaurants including one specialized in seafood, swimming pools, spa and tennis court on the roof.

Reservations +968 22 34 22 22 and [www.millenniumhotels.com/en/muscat/grand-millennium-muscat](http://www.millenniumhotels.com/en/muscat/grand-millennium-muscat)

• **Hormuz Grand Hotel.** Opened in September 2014, Hormuz Grand Hotel combines elegance, comfort and an ideal location, close to Muscat Airport. Modern and warm design, this 230-room hotel suits both leisure and business customers.

Reservations +968 24 35 05 00 and [www.quorvuscollection.com/hormuz-grand-hotel](http://www.quorvuscollection.com/hormuz-grand-hotel)

• **JW Marriott Muscat.** Opened in February 2020, has 304 rooms. It's the first JW Marriott hotel in the Sultanate and the second hotel in the district of the Oman Convention & Exhibition Center (OCEC) in Madinat Al Irfan. JW Marriott Muscat is the latest acquisition of the OMRAN group which aims to boost the MICE offer in the Sultanate with 5 \* installations and plays a vital role in attracting business and leisure travellers to Oman.

Reservations +968 24 92 00 00 and [www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/mctmj-jw-marriott-muscat](http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/mctmj-jw-marriott-muscat)

• **Kempinski Hotel Muscat.** Located 10 minutes from Muscat International Airport and a stone's throw away from the Al Mouj marina offering a wide range of leisure activities, the Kempinski Hotel, opened in April 2018, extends over 2 km of beach, it has 310 rooms, 3 swimming pools, one for children, 10 restaurants to suit everyone's taste, a kids club and 12 meeting rooms. Golf lovers can indulge in the adjoining world-famous course, the Al Mouj Golf Club, designed by Greg Norman.

Reservations +968 24 98 50 00 and [www.kempinski.com](http://www.kempinski.com)



• **Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa & Shangri-La Al Husn Resort & Spa.** Facing the crystal-clear waters of the Gulf of Oman, the **Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa** is a true Resort composed of two hotels, **Al Waha and Al Bandar**. The 460 rooms and suites face the Arabian Sea, with 500 meters of virgin coast. The coast and temperate waters are ideal for practicing all types of water sports: diving, deep sea fishing, excursions to see dolphins and whales. Activities can be booked at the hotel's diving centre and marina. Perched on the top of the cliff overlooking the Gulf of Oman, the 180 luxury rooms at **Shangri-La Al Husn Resort & Spa** has established high luxury standards in Muscat. It has welcomed the most demanding travellers for more than a decade, inspired by the historic architecture of the Omani forts. Reservations +968 24 77 66 66 and [www.shangri-la.com/shangrila/city/muscat](http://www.shangri-la.com/shangrila/city/muscat)

• **The Chedi.** In this chic designer luxury hotel, everything is thought for the rest of body and mind: the minimalist Zen decor of the rooms - some of which are in villas scattered around the luscious garden- and its Spa, among the most famous ones in Muscat. Completely redone, the space dedicated to well-being has eight treatment suites. Voluntarily discreet, the leisure facilities include three swimming pools - one of which is 103 meters long, the longest in the Middle East -, two tennis courts, a fitness room and a library. The Chedi has its own private beach. Reservations +968 24 52 44 00 and [www.ghmhotels.com](http://www.ghmhotels.com)

#### **Along the public beach of Al Qurum, other luxury hotels compete for the favours of visitors:**

• **Crowne Plaza Muscat.** Overlooking Al Qurum Beach from a rocky promontory, this 4-star hotel offers unrivalled view of the city from its sea view rooms and the terrace of its restaurants. A beautiful swimming pool and a small private beach at the foot of the cliff also make it a very pleasant address for a stay in Muscat. Reservations +968 24 66 06 60 and [www.crowneplaza.com](http://www.crowneplaza.com)

• **Grand Hyatt Muscat.** Right on the seafront (undeveloped public beach), this 5-star is ideally located to enjoy the family animation on the beach of Al Qurum and to walk to the coffee shops. The quality of the equipment, its beautiful swimming pool and its solarium area make it an address of choice for a seaside break or an exploratory stay combining relax and excursions. Reservations +968 24 64 12 34 and <https://muscat.grand.hyatt.com>

• **InterContinental Muscat.** Located in front of Qurum public beach, in the district of the Embassies, this 5-star hotel has 258 rooms and suites, of which 180 with sea views. Large garden with 2 swimming pools, 6 tennis courts, fitness room. Six restaurants with different sorts of international cuisine. Reservations +968 24 68 00 00 and [www.intercontinental.com](http://www.intercontinental.com)

• **W Muscat.** Located on the seafront of Shatti Al Qurum, 20 minutes from Muscat Airport and 15 minutes from the old town, this 5-star hotel opened in August 2019, is connected to the Royal Opera House by a footbridge. 279 luxurious rooms and suites where the Omani heritage blends with contemporary design. 7 bars and restaurants, 2 outdoor swimming pools, one on the roof, an AWAY® spa, a gym and tennis courts. Reservations +968 22 12 00 00 and [www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/mctwh-w-muscat](http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/mctwh-w-muscat)



## Accommodation in Muscat and around: 4 \* hotels and camps

- **Best Western Premier Hotel Muscat.** In the heart of the Al Khuwair shopping district, not far from the embassies and ministries, this hotel is ideally located just 15 minutes from the international airport and 5 minutes away from the Royal Opera House and the Great Mosque. Reservations +968 22 03 33 33 and [www.bwpmuscat.com](http://www.bwpmuscat.com)
- **Centara Muscat.** Located in Al Ghala, one of the capital's business centres, this hotel is only a 15-minute drive from the airport and provides easy access to must-see Muscat sites including the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, the Royal Opera House Muscat, and the Oman Convention & Exhibition Center, as well as Muscat Hills Golf & Country Club and Almouj Golf. The hotel has 152 rooms and offers a spa, a fitness centre, a swimming pool and a pool for children both located on a panoramic terrace as well as event spaces. Reservations +968 24 23 66 00 and [www.centarahotelsresorts.com/fr/centara/cmo](http://www.centarahotelsresorts.com/fr/centara/cmo)
- **Crowne Plaza Muscat Oman Convention & Exhibition center.** Located 5 km from Seeb International Airport, the hotel has 296 rooms and suites, restaurants and a sublime outdoor swimming pool, various activities such as golf and scuba diving from the hotel are offered there. A car-rental service has a booth in the hotel. Reservations +968 2425 20 00 and [www.crowneplaza.com](http://www.crowneplaza.com)
- **Dunes by Al Nahda.** Located inland, about 1h15 from downtown Muscat. It has 30 luxury rooms and tents; many traditional and original activities are offered to guests, from camel rides to slides on the dunes, golf, sand surfing or stargazing with a guide. A small spa offers, among other things, sand therapy treatments, for a relaxing experience. Reservations +968 97 23 57 00 and [www.dunesbyalnahda.com](http://www.dunesbyalnahda.com)
- **Millennium Resort Mussanah.** By the sea, opposite a marina, a 45-minute drive from Muscat Airport, this hotel offers spacious rooms and fully furnished apartments. Also 4 restaurants, bars, 4 swimming pools, tennis courts, Spa, meeting rooms and beach nearby. Guests can also use the facilities of the sailing school and Oman Sail dive center located in the marina. Reservations +968 26 87 15 55 and [www.millenniumhotels.com/fr/mussanah/millennium-resort-mussanah](http://www.millenniumhotels.com/fr/mussanah/millennium-resort-mussanah)
- **Mysk Al Mouj by Shaza Hotel.** Located in the Al Mouj district and close to the airport, it has 195 rooms, a marina, an Italian restaurant, a rooftop swimming pool and a fitness room plus several meeting rooms. Reservations +968 24 27 44 00 and [www.myskhotels.com/en/hotels/almoujmuscat/](http://www.myskhotels.com/en/hotels/almoujmuscat/)
- **Muscat Hills Resort.** On the beach in a private bay east of Muscat, the Muscat Hills Resort is an original accommodation of 35 bungalows in local barasti style and has a PADI diving centre. The restaurant "Le Club" offers international and ethnic cuisine, barbecues and the beach bar serves delicious cocktails. Reservations +968 24 85 30 00 and [www.muscathillsresort.com](http://www.muscathillsresort.com)
- **Park Inn by Radisson Muscat.** This hotel offers spacious and comfortable rooms, a 24-hour restaurant, and a grill. The swimming pool is located on a roof terrace of a swimming pool and a bar, where local DJs perform during the weekend. On site: fitness centre, sauna and hammam, conference room, parking and 24-hour room service. Reservations +968 24 50 78 88 and [www.parkinn.com/hotel-muscat](http://www.parkinn.com/hotel-muscat)



• **Sifawy Boutique Hotel.** In the new Jebel Sifah marina, this hotel located 40 km south of Muscat stands in the proximity of a very beautiful beach easily accessible on foot (beach restaurant). Its 55 rooms, including 26 suites, are elegantly decorated and have private balconies.

Reservations +968 9400 40 69 and [www.sifawyhotel.com](http://www.sifawyhotel.com)

• **Swiss BellInn Muscat.** This hotel enjoys an exceptional location just 10 minutes from the airport, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque and the Convention and Exhibition Center of Oman (OCEC) Azaiba Beach is just 4 minutes from the hotel while the golf course Al Mouj is only 5 minutes away. The Swiss-BellInn Muscat is a contemporary 3-star hotel with 128 well-appointed rooms. Its trendy and comfortable interiors as well as cutting-edge technology (4K TV, free Wi-Fi, etc.) provide all the essentials for a new generation of travellers. It has a 32m<sup>2</sup> conference room and on-site catering providing everything necessary for efficient and successful meetings.

Reservations +968 24 90 88 00 and [www.swiss-belhotel.com/en-gb/swiss-belinn-muscat](http://www.swiss-belhotel.com/en-gb/swiss-belinn-muscat)

## EATING OUT

### GASTRONOMY

*Shuwa* means grilled meat in Arabic. It's a favourite dish often cooked on special occasions like Eid as the preparation takes a long time. In fact, the meat is prepared on the first day of Eid, and eaten on the second or the third day. The *Shuwa* is marinated in Omani spices, then wrapped in banana leaves or palm leaves and put in an underground sand oven, where it gets cooked for one to two days. Another traditional option is *Kabsa* or *Makboos*, a dish that consists of basmati rice, vegetables, meat or chicken and a mix of spices. It is served with either yoghurt or a green salad, traditional Omani bread and tomato sauce. Also known as kebab, *Meshkak* is marinated beef, mutton or chicken that is grilled on sticks. It is usually marinated with different spices, especially curry, and served with Omani bread. *Mashuai* is a tasty Omani fish dish. It consists of grilled kingfish with a special savoury lemon sauce.

Although a foreign import, *biryani* (spicy rice with chicken, lamb or fish) is very popular in Oman where meals are largely influenced by Indian cuisine. Restaurant's menus often include meats and fish prepared in tandoori, masala or tikka versions. There is also a strong influence of dishes from the Middle East: several Lebanese cuisine restaurants serve shawarma, meat kebabs, mezze and falafel. As a southern alternative, you can taste the few Swahili or Dhofar dishes with African influences, like the use of coconut milk. Asian and Italian restaurants complete the offer in the largest cities.

Traditional desserts are *halwa* and *luqaimat* (sweet dumplings), a Middle Eastern dessert that is an absolute must serve during Ramadan. Coated in cardamom infused sugar syrup, they are satisfyingly crunchy but fluffy in the inside. Also do not miss the Lemon Mint, a non-alcoholic juicy drink made of lemon and crushed mint, ideal for a refreshing break.



## RESTAURANT IN MUSCAT

Here is a short selection to enjoy the best dining experience. International hotels are also excellent choices.

- **Turkish House Restaurant**, in the Al Khuwair district. Excellent restaurant at low prices, where you can taste fish prepared in various ways, mezze, Turkish dishes and homemade bread. Very generous portions. Reservations + 968 24 48 80 71
- Within the Opera Galleria, **Al Angham** is an excellent restaurant specialized in Omani cuisine, which also impresses with its magnificent oriental decor. Reservations + 968 22 07 77 77
- On the Muttrah corniche, opposite the fish market, on the top floor of the Marina hotel, the **Al-Boom Restaurant** offers fresh fish specialties and other classic dishes. Breath-taking view of the bay (the few tables on the terrace are on high demand!). Moderate prices. Reservations + 968 24 71 31 00
- **Al Mandoos** offers local Omani cuisine at good value for money, this is where you can try camel meat. Reservations + 968 97 42 99 72
- **Bait Al Luban** is an Omani restaurant to give a try; located in Muttrah, it offers delicious cuisine with exotic flavours, from East Africa to India. Reservations + 968 24 71 18 42
- **Bin Ateeq**, in the Ruwi district, is a typical Omani restaurant. Small private rooms with panelled walls and *majlis* (cushions). Rice dishes with fish and grilled meats. Two other branches in Nizwa and Salalah. Reservations + 968 24 47 82 25
- **Kalabash Lounge** located in the district of Qurum, its terrace offers a beautiful view of the Qurum Natural Park. A pleasant place to have a meal or taste a shisha. Reservations + 968 95 98 53 33
- **The Huqqa Market** restaurant overlooks the Al Mouj marina and specializes in matured beef or lamb dishes. Reservations +968 24 54 88 11
- **The Cave**, in the Darsait district, is a series of 7 restaurants with atmospheres and colours from around the world: Omani, seafood, Asian, Lebanese, Mediterranean, Brazilian and Italian. Something to delight everyone's palate. Reservations +968 24 65 14 65
- **Marlins Restaurant** in Bandar Al Rowdha marina specializes in seafood and fish. Reservations +968 24 74 00 38
- **Ubhar**, in Boulevard Boutique mall. Among the best restaurants in Muscat, this restaurant serves mainly Omani specialties: lamb fatta or shuwa, qabuli chicken, Omani harees, homemade soups made with local products, etc. Reservations + 968 24 69 98 26
- Indian restaurants abound in Muscat: the **Mumtaz Mahal** located in the lively Qurum district is one of the most prestigious (the prices are therefore accordingly) Reservations +968 24 60 59 79 as well as **Passage to India** in Wattayah (+ 968 95 12 41 65) which serves specialties from northern India.
- Among the Lebanese restaurants at fair prices and of good quality, a special mention for **Beirut Express** in Qurum (Reservations + 968 24 56 84 11) with a quaint room upstairs and the **Automatic**, a chain present in several districts including Qurum (Reservations + 968 24 48 72 00).



## MUSCAT NIGHTLIFE

In the capital, Omanis do not usually have dinner before 9:00 or 9:30 p.m. At nightfall, one of the most popular bars for expatriates is the **Liquid Sky** (+ 968 95 29 91 36), located above the Qurum district. Families generally go for a walk on the Muttrah corniche to get some fresh air, followed by a visit to the souk open late at night and, finally, have a drink (sale of alcohol authorized) at the **Al-Boom restaurant** on the terrace of the Marina hotel (see above). The illuminated bay and the dhow anchored in the bay undoubtedly contribute to the magic of the place.

To overlook the city, the **rooftop bar** at the Park Inn Muscat hotel is perfect (+968 24 50 78 88), or a late cocktail at the **Beach Bar** at Muscat Hills Resort (+ 968 91 21 66 45) or even the **B.A.B Lounge** of the Shangri La Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa (+968 24 77 65 65).

The other trendy district to enjoy evening life is along Shatti Al Qurum beach where a Californian-style complex hosts some international cafés (Starbucks, Costa Coffee, Second Cup), as well as the Italian restaurant **O sole Mio**. (Reservations + 968 24 47 98 69) or even **Route 66**, a bar-restaurant offering live music (+968 24 69 99 46).

## HOTELS IN SOHAR, THE NORTHERN COAST

### Accommodation in Sohar: 5 \* Hotels

- **Crowne Plaza Sohar**. Located 20 km from the city centre of Sohar, the birthplace of the legendary Sindbad the sailor, this hotel offers 126 modern rooms with a flat-screen TV and balcony. Featuring a large outdoor pool, it has two floodlit tennis courts, four bowling alleys, a gym, a spa with hammam and sauna as well as two restaurants and two bars. Fort and museum tours of the city can be arranged by the hotel.

Reservations +968 26 85 08 50 and [www.ihg.com](http://www.ihg.com)

- **Radisson Blu Hotel Sohar**. Located on the seafront, 15 km from Sohar Airport, this hotel has breath-taking views on the Gulf of Oman and adjoins the Silver Jubilee Park. It has 179 rooms, two restaurants, three bars, one of which is on the rooftop, as well as an outdoor pool, a spa, a free gym and a access to the sauna.

Reservations +968 26 64 00 00 and [www.radissonhotels.com/en-us/hotels/radisson-blu-sohar](http://www.radissonhotels.com/en-us/hotels/radisson-blu-sohar)

### Accommodation in Sohar: 3 \* Hotels

- **Al Wadi Hotel**. Halfway between Muscat and Dubai, on Al Batinah coast, this hotel has 78 standard rooms as well an outdoor swimming pool, a gym, a restaurant and 2 bars.

Reservations +968 26 84 00 58 and [www.omanhotels.com/alwadi](http://www.omanhotels.com/alwadi)





## HOTELS IN NIZWA AND IN THE HAJAR MOUNTAINS

### Accommodation in or near Nizwa: 5 \* Hotels

• **Alila Jabal Akhdar.** Design and eco-friendly, this hotel in the mountains has been designed with respect for local culture. Infinity pool, spa and breath-taking view of the majestic canyons and mountains. Reservations +968 25 34 42 00 and [www.alilahotels.com/jabalakhdar](http://www.alilahotels.com/jabalakhdar)

• **Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort.** Perched over 2000 meters above sea level on the Saiq plateau and overlooking a canyon in the heart of the Green Mountain, the 5-star hotel has rooms and villas and offers its guests unique luxury experiences and services. The establishment is located just 2 hours' drive from Muscat and 30 minutes from the ancient city of Nizwa, also nicknamed the Pearl of Islam and recently recognized as a Capital of Islamic Culture. Reservations +968 25 21 80 00 and [www.jabal-akhdar.anantara.com](http://www.jabal-akhdar.anantara.com)

### Accommodation in or near Nizwa: 4 \* Hotels

• **Golden Tulip.** Almost essential step to explore the Hajar massif, this hotel located 15 km from the Nizwa centre has 120 rooms upstairs or on the ground floor (around the pool). During the high season, the barbecue dinners served outside are very appreciated after a long day tour. Reservations +968 25 43 16 16 and [www.goldentulipnizwa.com](http://www.goldentulipnizwa.com)

• **Sahab Resort & Spa.** Located 2000 m high on the Saiq plateau (2 hours' drive from Muscat), this charming hotel has 27 rooms with a terrace. From its swimming pool and its solarium, you can enjoy breath-taking views of the Jabal Akhdar Mountains and the plain below. It is the starting point for many hikes in the neighbouring villages. Reservations +968 25 42 93 88 and [www.sahabresort.com](http://www.sahabresort.com)

### Accommodation in or near Nizwa: 3 \* Hotels

• **Falaj Daris Hotel.** In the city of Nizwa, this functional and comfortable hotel (55 spacious rooms, swimming pool) is very appreciated. Reservations +968 25 41 05 00 and [www.falajdarishotel.com](http://www.falajdarishotel.com)

• **Sama Hotel Jabal Al Akhdar.** Located on the Saiq plateau, this hotel offers 60 spacious rooms with every comfort. It has a restaurant with panoramic terrace, a fitness centre as well as a heated swimming pool with breath-taking views of the mountains. Ideally located for exploring or hiking in the surrounding villages. Reservations +968 72 14 88 85 and [www.samaresorts.com/wakan-heritage](http://www.samaresorts.com/wakan-heritage)

### Accommodation near Nizwa. Mountain and desert camps

• **The View.** Located on a hillside on the heights of Al Hamra, The View is an eco-style camp resort with 30 charming and comfortable bungalows, a swimming pool and a quality restaurant. Its location to the west of the Hajar massif makes it an ideal stopover for those who want to explore the Jabal Shams and the surrounding wadi. Reservations + 968 24 400 873 and [www.theviewoman.com](http://www.theviewoman.com)



- **Sama Heights Resort & Spa.** Located at 2100 m above sea level, at the foot of Jabal Shams (the highest point of the country) and its hiking trails, it overlooks the Jabal Misht, the Wadi Ghul and the famous Wadi Nakhr known as the Grand Canyon of Arabia. You can choose from chalets and bungalows, built from local stones and recycled materials with private bathroom, Bedouin-style tents and a restaurant.

Reservations +968 92 72 19 99 and [www.samaresorts.com/sama-heights-resort-jabal-shams/](http://www.samaresorts.com/sama-heights-resort-jabal-shams/)

### Accommodation in or near Nizwa. Guest Houses

- **Al Misfah Hospitality Inn.** Located in the village of Misfah Al-Abryeen, about 200 km from Muscat, the Misfah Hospitality Inn is housed in an old restored house overlooking the green palm grove. Guests can admire the view of Fort Rogan, built over 1,500 years ago. Accommodation offers family, traditional and comfortable rooms. Some rooms have mountain or garden views, and a shared bathroom.

- **Durrat Al-Misfah Guest House.** Located 50km away from Nizwa, in Misfah, the Durrat Al-Misfah Guest House offers air-conditioned rooms, a restaurant, a buffet breakfast, a 24-hour reception, and can also book excursions. The region is popular among bike lovers and the establishment offers bicycle and car rental.

- **Misfah Old Houses.** Located in the heart of the old village of Misfah Al Abryeen, 40km south-west of Nizwa, Misfah Old House offers traditional accommodation and typical food specialties prepared by local families. Omani guides organize guided tours of the village and the surrounding area. Hiking and horse riding are among the activities available on site. Public parking with free access nearby.

Reservations [www.misfaholdhouse.com](http://www.misfaholdhouse.com)

- **Nizwa Heritage Inn.** Located in Nizwa, near the souk and the fort, the Nizwa Heritage Inn offers rooms with Wi-Fi connection and free private parking. A buffet or à la carte breakfast is available in this guest house. In addition, to discover the region, the Nizwa Heritage Inn offers a rental service bikes.

- **Nizwa Antique Inn.** Located in Nizwa, less than 200 meters away from the fort and 400 meters from the souk, the Antique Inn offers rooms all overlooking a garden. This property also has family rooms and a beautiful terrace, a 24-hour reception and a help desk to book excursions. This guesthouse serves a buffet breakfast.

- **Sama Wakan Heritage Home.** Perched in the heart of wadi Mistal, in the village of Wakan, the Sama group has renovated a bunch of traditional houses and turned them into 12 guest rooms to experience a stay in a preserved local environment. A beautiful hiking trail is nearby.

Reservations +968 72 14 88 85 and [www.samaresorts.com/wakan-heritage](http://www.samaresorts.com/wakan-heritage)



## ACCOMODATION TOWARDS SUR, THE GREEN TURTLES' RESERVE AND A'SHARQIYAH SANDS DESERT

### 3-star hotels \*\*\* (local standards)

- **Sama Wadi Shab Resort.** Ideally located between Muscat (1h15 drive) and the port of Sur (40 minutes) renowned for the ancestral manufacture of dhows, this 37 room and spacious suites hotel, all facing the Arabian Sea, is a good choice to explore the wadis of the region, Wadi Shab and Wadi Tiwi in particular. Dinner is a real experience here; you can choose either the sea view restaurant or a dinner under the stars in a dhow setting. Reservations + 968 92 72 19 99 and [www.samaresorts.com/wadi-shab](http://www.samaresorts.com/wadi-shab)
- **Sur Beach Holiday.** Located along the Sur seaside, 180 km from Muscat, this beach hotel has 84 rooms, an outdoor swimming pool and a restaurant. Sur city centre is 9 km away. Reservations +968 25 54 20 31 and [www.surhotelsoman.com](http://www.surhotelsoman.com)
- **Sur Grand Hotel.** This beachfront hotel offers 55 rooms (sea view and mountain view) and an outdoor rooftop swimming pool. It is around 2 hours' drive from Muscat Airport, 55 km from Turtle Beach, 70 km from Wadi Shab and 7 km from the centre of Sur. 1 restaurant. Free private parking. Reservations +968 25 24 00 00 and [www.surgrandhotel.com](http://www.surgrandhotel.com)
- **Sur Plaza Hotel.** At the entrance to Sur, this stopover hotel is well located to enjoy the excitement of the city. Functional and modern, it has 92 rooms and an outdoor swimming pool. Reservations +968 25 54 37 77 and [www.omanhotels.com/surplaza](http://www.omanhotels.com/surplaza)

### Accommodation in or around Sur: 2 \* hotels, guest houses and camps

- **Al Ajjah Plaza Hotel.** This 41-room hotel offers a beautiful setting facing the sea and is located about a 15-minute walk from the fort and Al Ajjah lighthouse. The Sur Maritime Museum and the Sunaysilah Fort are also less than 5km away. Wi-Fi and room service. Restaurant. Reservations + 968 25 54 44 33 and [www.alajjahplazahotels.com](http://www.alajjahplazahotels.com)
- **Sama Ras Al Jinz.** Located south of Sur in the A'Sharqiyah region, at the easternmost point of the Arabian Peninsula. Ras Al Jinz is known for its green turtle nesting site and a paradise for star gazing. 10 standard rooms and 10 deluxe rooms, restaurant. Meals are served in a buffet style. All bedrooms have outdoor private seating areas. Reservations +968 9749 4004 and [www.samaresorts.com/sama-ras-al-jinz](http://www.samaresorts.com/sama-ras-al-jinz)
- **Ras Al Jinz Scientific & Visitor Centre.** The beaches of Ras al-Jinz are one of the most important nesting sites for green turtle populations (more than 30,000 come here year). The research centre provides 13 well-equipped rooms and 12 AC "eco-luxury" tents located on a hill overlooking the sea. Restaurant open all day, souvenir shop, and bookshop. You can book all turtle watching activities accompanied by professional guides here. Night observations start at 9:00 p.m. and 4:00 a.m. Reservations + 968 96 550 606 or + 968 96 550 707 and [www.rasaljinz-turtlereserve.com](http://www.rasaljinz-turtlereserve.com)



• **Turtle Beach Resort.** This simple Omani style camp is located at the tip of a small beach about 40 km away from Sur, in the Ras Al Hadd region. It offers barasti (huts) and comfortable bungalows. On site: a beachfront restaurant, a swimming pool, a bar and beach facilities. Reservations +968 25 54 49 00 and [www.tbroman.com](http://www.tbroman.com)

• **Zaki Hotel Apartment.** A 10-minute ride from Sur Maritime Museum and a 45 min drive from Raz Al Jinz reserve, this hotel offers 30 well-furnished apartments, a 24-hour café and a restaurant. 24-hour room service, free Wi-Fi in all rooms. Reservations +968 79 01 11 84

### Accommodation in A'Sharqiyah Sands Desert Camps

For those travellers wishing to experience one or more nights in the desert, desert camps are the best choice at just a 3-hour drive from Muscat in the dunes of A'Sharqiyah Sands.

Among them: The **1000 Nights Camp** ([www.thousandnightsoman.com](http://www.thousandnightsoman.com)) is a traditional and comfortable choice with sixty Bedouin tents (sleeping 2) equipped with a bed, carpet, chairs, small table and candle, toilet and private shower. Small pool on site. The **Al Sarmadi Desert Night Camp** has 14 tents with shared bathrooms and toiletries available for guests. The **Arabian Oryx Camp** ([www.oryx-camp.com](http://www.oryx-camp.com)) is inspired in the barasti, the Bedouin huts made of branches and palm leaves. It combines authenticity and modern comfort. The **Desert Nights Camp** ([www.desertnightscamp.com](http://www.desertnightscamp.com)) is one of the most upscale ones with 32 air-conditioned units in concrete with a canvas roof. The **Desert Retreat Camp**, located near Al Wasil, has 10 tents, but can host more guests during high season and offers transfer service to the dunes. **Wahiba Sands Magic Camp** ([www.magic-camps.com](http://www.magic-camps.com)) is an eco-chic all year-round camp with 10 rooms inside two tents, one reserved for the sleeping area and the other with private bathrooms, local gastronomy, solar electricity, reduced use of water and plastic, everything here is inspired by the Bedouin lifestyle to minimize the camp's carbon footprint as much as possible. **Nomadic Desert Camp** ([www.nomadicdesertcamp.com](http://www.nomadicdesertcamp.com)) consists of 20 typical barasti huts with comfortable beds and a hot water shower. The **Sama Al Areesh** ([www.samaresorts.com/sama-al-areesh](http://www.samaresorts.com/sama-al-areesh)) offers simple accommodation, but full amenities, comfortable rooms with private bathroom, air conditioning and a beautiful common outdoor terrace. The **Sama Al Wasil Camp** ([www.desertpalmoman.com](http://www.desertpalmoman.com)) is a half concrete, half tent camp made of 20 units and rooms and a large Bedouin tent for the restaurant. All these camps offer transfer services for guests, at the pick-up points known by locals as the main access to the desert.

**Hud Hud Travels** ([www.hudhudtravels.com](http://www.hudhudtravels.com)) and **Magic Private Camp** ([www.magic-camps.com](http://www.magic-camps.com)) are two companies specialized in luxurious temporary settlements such as tents or camps.



## HOTELS IN AD DUQM, ALONG THE COASTLINE BETWEEN MUSCAT AND SALALAH

Located halfway between Ras Al Hadd and Salalah, the Ad Duqm region reveals a wild coastline, home to many species of migratory birds. The ongoing development of the industrial port of Ad Duqm saw the recent opening of quality accommodations along this unspoiled coastal strip.

• **Crowne Plaza Ad Duqm.** This 4-star beach hotel has 213 rooms (including 21 suites), all with sea views. In addition to an outdoor swimming pool and 5 restaurants, it also has meeting rooms, and a meetings and events area for business. Located near the port and the town.

Reservations +968 25 21 44 44 and [www.ihg.com](http://www.ihg.com)

• **Park Inn by Radisson Hotel & Residence Duqm.** This 4-star hotel offers direct access to the beach and houses, 73 chalets and apartments equipped with a kitchenette and wi-fi. It also has two restaurants and bar, a fitness centre, a swimming pool, a tennis court, a beauty salon and a spa. Reservations +968 2208 5700 and [www.parkinn.com/hotel-duqm](http://www.parkinn.com/hotel-duqm)

• **Atana Stay Al Ashkara.** Located in Al Ashkharah, 120 km south of Sur, this 3-star hotel has 52 rooms and suites, a restaurant, an outdoor swimming pool, a shared lounge, a garden and a children's playground. It offers room service and free Wi-Fi. The air-conditioned rooms include a sitting area, flat-screen TV, kitchenette, dining area and bathroom. A buffet breakfast is served every morning.

Reservations + 968 25 56 65 55 and [www.atanastay.com/stays/al-ashkara](http://www.atanastay.com/stays/al-ashkara)

## HOTELS IN THE DHOFAR

Chain-branded hotels are gradually taking over the beautiful seafront of Salalah, the capital of Dhofar.

### Accommodation in or around Salalah: 5 \* Hotels

• **Al Baleed Resort - Salalah by Anantara.** This hotel is just 15 minutes away from the international airport and close to many local attractions. Perfectly located between the sea and the lagoon, this Anantara group establishment is composed of 88 villas and private swimming pools.

Reservations +968 23 22 82 22 and [www.anantara.com/en/al-baleed-salalah](http://www.anantara.com/en/al-baleed-salalah)

• **Crowne Plaza Resort Salalah.** On the tip of Salalah beach and close to the city centre, to the plantation district (coconut, mango, sugar cane, etc.) and the Al Balid archaeological site. Its 153 rooms open onto the garden or the swimming pool. On site: a diving centre, swimming pools and water games for children, 3 restaurants (including one on the beach), 2 tennis and squash courts, a 9-hole golf course, a gym...

Reservations +968 23 23 80 00 and [www.ihg.com](http://www.ihg.com)



• **Fanar Hôtel & Residences.** Ideally located in the tourist complex of Hawana Salalah, this hotel in Arab architecture has open views of the Indian Ocean. 400 rooms and suites as well as two restaurants, Al Souk and Aubergine. The hotel has a private beach, a kids club and two swimming pools, plus activities such as tennis and beach volleyball. Outside the hotel, you can book dolphin watching tours and several water sports. Reservations +968 23 27 68 00 and [www.fanarhotel.com](http://www.fanarhotel.com)

• **Hilton Salalah.** This high-end hotel is located right on the beach, 15 km away from the city centre and about 10 km from the airport and has 147 spacious rooms (including 63 sea view, 42 sea view with balcony and 13 mountain views) all equipped with broadband Internet access. Three restaurants, including one on the beach, 1 swimming pool, 1 fitness centre, 1 diving centre, windsurfing and tennis. Reservations +968 23 13 33 33 and [www.salalah.hilton.com](http://www.salalah.hilton.com)

• **Millennium Resort Salalah.** Modern and unique hotel complex located north of Salalah, in the Al Saada region, just a few kilometres away from the beach and just a 15 minutes' drive from Salalah Airport. It has 285 elegantly furnished rooms, apartments, chalets and villas furnished and accommodates business and leisure travellers in search of refinement.

Reservations +968 23 22 21 11 and [www.millenniumhotels.com/en/salalah/millennium-resort-salalah](http://www.millenniumhotels.com/en/salalah/millennium-resort-salalah)

• **Salalah Rotana Resort.** Located in the heart of the new Salalah Beach complex, on a private beach, this superb resort includes not only 399 rooms and suites, but also a wide choice of restaurants and bars, a fitness centre and a spa. Reservations +968 23 27 57 00 and

[www.rotana.com/rotanahotelandresorts/oman/salalah/salahrotanaresort](http://www.rotana.com/rotanahotelandresorts/oman/salalah/salahrotanaresort)

• **Kairaba Mirbat Resort.** Beachfront hotel located in Mirbat, in a very beautiful setting, with views of the sea and the mountains. 80 km from Salalah international airport, its equipment activities (permanent diving centre, majestic swimming pool, fitness centre & spa, etc.) make it a suitable address for all types of tourists.

Reservations +968 23 27 55 00 and [www.kairaba-hotels.com/en/hotels/SLL527/kairaba-mirbat-resort](http://www.kairaba-hotels.com/en/hotels/SLL527/kairaba-mirbat-resort)

#### Accommodation in or around Salalah: 4 \* hotels

• **Juweira Boutique Hotel.** Located 18 km away from Salalah and 20 km from the airport, it has 82 rooms, 2 swimming pools, a children's pool, a gym and games room, and offers direct access to the beach. Scuba diving services, snorkelling, as well as nautical activities.

Reservations +968 23 23 96 00 and [www.juweirahotel.com](http://www.juweirahotel.com)

#### Accommodation in or around Salalah: 3 \* hotels and camps

• **Atana Stay Salalah.** Located just 19 km from the airport, this hotel offers a restaurant, free private parking, an outdoor pool and a gym. Each of the 52 rooms has a desk, a seating area with a flat-screen TV and a private bathroom. Buffet or continental breakfast.

Reservations +968 26 73 08 88 and [www.atanastay.com/stays/salalah](http://www.atanastay.com/stays/salalah)

• **Souly Ecolodge Salalah.** Located about 30 km from Salalah airport, between Salalah and Taqah, this accommodation offers 15 elegantly decorated beachfront bungalows, each with a living room and a private terrace. Its Bedouin-style restaurant welcomes guests under three traditional tents, around a campfire, comfortably furnished with rugs. Several activities: scuba diving, horse riding, cycling.

Reservations +968 9497 2220 and [www.souly-ecolodge.com](http://www.souly-ecolodge.com)



## HOTELS IN THE MUSANDAM PENINSULA

Separated from the rest of Oman by an advance land from the United Arab Emirates, the Musandam Peninsula is the perfect place for an off-the-beaten-track holiday.

### 5 \* Luxury Hotels

- **Six Senses Zighy Bay.** Isolated in a splendid beach south of the peninsula and 120 km from Dubai airport this exclusive beach hotel has 79 villas, some of them with a private pool. Built in local stone in the most elegant style, the interiors are luxurious and tastefully decorated. Some have their own spa. On site: private beach, seawater swimming pool - the largest in the region -, diving centre, spa, restaurants, excursions. Ideal for an exclusive stay of a few days or more.

Reservations +968 26 735 555 - [www.sixsenses.com](http://www.sixsenses.com)

### 4 \* hotels

- **Atana Khasab.** Located near Khasab on a rocky promontory, this hotel has 102 comfortable rooms with balcony or terrace overlooking the ocean, plus restaurant, outdoor swimming pool with solarium, gym. Besides the presence from a permanent dive centre, guests can benefit from an on-site excursion service (dhow cruise, 4-wheel driving in the mountains, etc.).

Reservations +968 26 730 777 and [www.atanahotels.com](http://www.atanahotels.com)

- **Atana Musandam.** Located very close to Khasab airport at the northern tip of the peninsula. The hotel offers 105 rooms and modern suites overlooking the small port of Khasab and the majestic mountains. Like the Atana Khasab, there is an outdoor swimming pool, a fitness centre and also a diving centre and a desk to book excursions. Reservations +968 26 73 08 88 and [www.atanahotels.com](http://www.atanahotels.com)

- **Dibba Beach Resort.** Located on Dibba Beach, in the south of the peninsula, this new hotel has 54 luxury rooms and a private beach. On site, a swimming pool, water sports (diving, kayaking) and a choice of excursions in the Musandam mountains. A 2 hours' drive from Dubai, this hotel is a great stopover for those traveling to Oman from the Emirates.

Reservations +968 26 83 66 54 and [www.dibbabeachresort.com](http://www.dibbabeachresort.com)



## **PRACTICAL INFORMATION**

### **ENTRY REQUIREMENTS**

Passport should have at least 6 months' validity remaining on your date of entry to Oman. For visa information, check the Royal Oman Police website: <https://evisa.rop.gov.om>

### **HEALTH**

Given the current health circumstances, it is advisable to check before departure the sanitary conditions for travel.

Check whether you need a yellow fever certificate by visiting the National Travel Health Network and Centre's <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/>

### **CURRENCY**

The Oman Rial (OMR) divided into 1000 baizas.

Exchange rate: 1 Omani rial = around 2.06 GBP or 2.60 US\$.

### **BANKS / EXCHANGE**

Very good banking network, many ATMs accept most international bankcards. Credit card payments accepted in shops, in shopping centres and by most vendors in the souks. Exchange offices in the city centre, in international hotels and inside the souks.

### **TIME ZONE**

UTC +4. Oman observes Gulf Standard time all year.

### **COUNTRY PHONE CODE**

00 968 + area code (24 for Muscat).

### **BEST TIME TO VISIT**

September to early May, with temperatures between 25 ° C and 30 ° C. Divers will find better visibility in April and October, the months before and after summer. The northern region has almost permanent sunshine all year round while the monsoon affects the southern tip of Dhofar from June to September.

### **DRESS**

Light clothes in all seasons, but dressing appropriately is the most important thing to remember. Women should wear loose clothing, with arms and shoulders covered. Skirts, if worn, should reach at least beneath the knee, although wearing trousers is probably a better option. It is also useful to carry a shawl to cover your hair in more conservative areas. Dress codes are less crucial for men.





## GETTING AROUND

Driving is on the right and the condition of the road network is very satisfactory. The distances between the main cities (Muscat, Nizwa, Sur, Sohar) are relatively short (except for Salalah and Khasab) and the most popular tourist spots are 3 hours away from Muscat. There is a good bus network for long distances ([www.mwasalat.om](http://www.mwasalat.om)) but car rental is the easiest way to get around the country. The main international car rental companies are present at Seeb International Airport. Four-wheel drive vehicles are essential if you are travelling to the wadis, to mountain tracks and the dunes in the desert. The best way to reach Salalah from Muscat is by plane (flights operated by Oman Air and Salam Air). Within the major cities, using a vehicle is indispensable to reach hotels, markets or restaurants. Individual (painted white and orange) or collective taxis are available in major cities.

To reach the Musandam peninsula by land from Muscat, you have to cross the United Arab Emirates. Oman Air also provides a domestic flight service connecting Muscat to Khasab (one flight per day). Khasab is also accessible by ferry from the port of Shinas (4 hours, two weekly connections) located on the coast from Al Batinah, about 2h30 drive from Muscat. Connections are provided by the National Ferry Company ([www.nfc.om](http://www.nfc.om)).

## TRAVEL INFORMATION

Since June 2018, the official website of the Omani Ministry of Tourism [www.experienceoman.om](http://www.experienceoman.om), is available in English and in 5 other languages (Arabic, French, German, Italian and Russian).

## SOUVENIRS

What should you bring back from Oman? A handmade, colourful incense burner in painted terracotta and frankincense. Nothing more typical. On the other hand, a khanjar, the dagger with a curved tip that the Omani men wear tugged in their belts. Women travellers can pick a piece of gold jewellery in the Muttrah souk of Muscat. Always in the souk, but the Nizwa one, rose water from handpicked petals and locally distilled is on sale. The famous brand of Omani perfumes, Amouage, manufactures precious and expensive essences that will appeal to the wealthiest travellers. In matter of traditional Omani men's clothes, the embroidered hat (kumma) is a must, while women can choose some beautiful fabrics, such as the fine and colourful kangas to use as shawls. More design gifts can be found in hotels. Omani artists and stylists are quite frequent and are mainly based in Muscat.

## AIRLINES

**Oman Air**, the national carrier based in Muscat, operates non-stop international and domestic flights. Major airports in Oman are Muscat, Salalah, Duqm & Khasab.

[www.omanair.com](http://www.omanair.com)

Other flights with stopovers:

- **Emirates** - [www.emirates.com](http://www.emirates.com)
- **Etihad Airways** - [www.etihad.com](http://www.etihad.com)
- **Gulf Air** - [www.gulfair.com](http://www.gulfair.com)
- **Lufthansa** - [www.lufthansa.com](http://www.lufthansa.com)
- **Qatar Airways** [www.qatarairways.com](http://www.qatarairways.com)
- **Swiss International Air Lines** - [www.swiss.com](http://www.swiss.com)
- **Turkish Airlines** - [www.turkishairlines.com](http://www.turkishairlines.com)

**Salam Air**, the new low-cost airline of the Sultanate, operates flights from Muscat to Salalah (3 to 4 flights per day) and Dubai (2 to 3 flights per day). [www.salamair.com](http://www.salamair.com)



## BOOKS AND GUIDES

### *Oman, UAE & Arabian Peninsula*

Collective. Lonely Planet.

Lonely Planet editions, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, September 2019.

### *The Rough Guide to Oman*

Collective, Rough Guide editions, December 2018.

### *Oman Guide and Oman Visitors' Guide.*

Collective. Explorer, 2019.

This Dubai-based publishing company covers all the aspects of the Sultanate, including the exceptional off-road itineraries.

### *Oman Off-road*

Collective. Explorer, 2016.

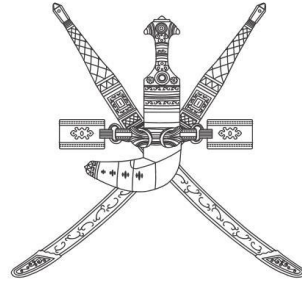
With satellite maps detailing the routes, this guide offers 38 tourist off-road routes in Musandam, the Hajar Mountains, the East Coast (between Muscat and Sur) and the Dhofar. Classified by type of roads (mountain, wadi, beach, desert), each route details the main highlights of the trip, provides suggestions for hikes and visits, as well as wild camping spots.

### *Off-road in the Sultanate of Oman*

Jenny Walker and Sam Owen. Motivate Publishing Ltd., July 2007.

This road-book details 15 thematic routes for 4-wheel driving, from north to south. Fortresses, rose water distilleries in Jabal Akhdar, bird migration, Dhofar incense, geology ... each theme provides a comprehensive panorama of the Sultanate's natural and cultural attractions.

The national daily is the **Times of Oman** as well as two others papers: the **Oman Observer** and **Muscat Daily**. There are also free newspapers like **Y Magazine**.



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