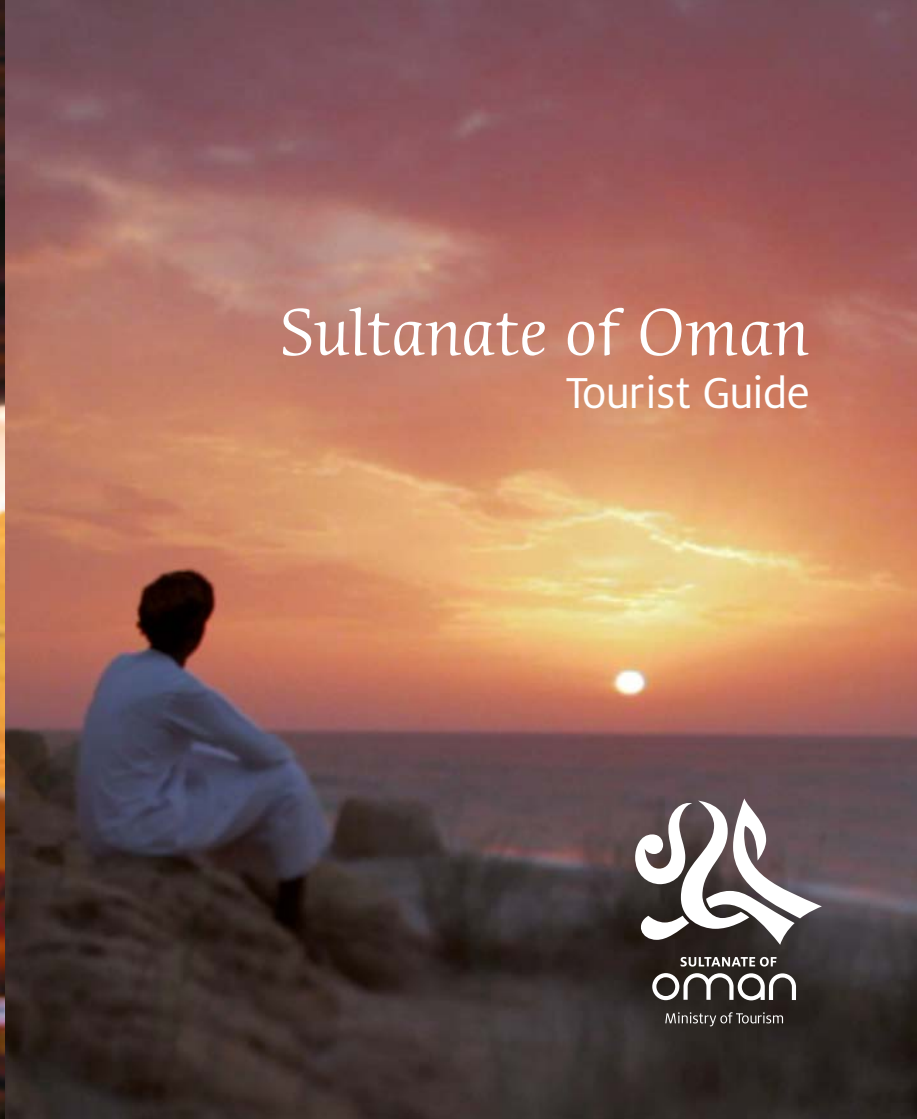




Sultanate of Oman

Tourist Guide





Sultanate
of Oman

*Discover the secret
of Arabia*



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AHLAN! Welcome to Oman!

As-salaamu alaykum, and welcome to the enchanting Sultanate of Oman. Safe and inviting, Oman will hypnotise you with its fragrant ancient *souks*, mesmerise with dramatic landscapes and leave you spellbound with its stories. Home to numerous UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Oman is steeped in history and has inspired some of literature’s most famous tales.

Muscat, the vibrant capital, is full of memorable sites and experiences. Visitors can take in extraordinary museum exhibits, visit ancient houses and wander the fishing port, home to traditional *dhow*s. Evenings offer the chance to eat at one of the city’s cafes and restaurants or even experience the first Opera House on the Arabian Peninsula – the Royal Opera House of Muscat.

Head out of the city, and Oman becomes even more captivating. Explore the small towns nestled between the mountains. Visit the Bedouin villages. Drive the incense route. You’ll do it all under the constant gaze of ancient forts dotted throughout the landscape like imposing sand castles.

Stop by the date farms and witness the harvesting of the roses, that cover the hills with delicate hues of pink and fill the air with an enchanting fragrance. Spend the night under the stars in a desert camp then swim in the *wadis*, stunning natural pools offering respite from the heat. Marvel at Oman’s magnificent beaches, pristine diving sites and nature reserves. There aren’t many places in the world where you can observe rare species of turtles up close and swim with dolphins in the wild, but you can here.

All of this, as well as a colourful annual events calendar and a wide range of international sports events, ensures a travel experience unlike any other.

A journey of discovery awaits you in this welcoming land at the crossroads between Asia, Africa and Western civilisation. Enjoy all of the marvels of this unique setting, the ideal gateway to Southern Arabia.



02 MUSCAT

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MUSCAT

The capital of the country – where traditional architecture sits beside stunning beaches and bustling *souks* – reflects Oman's past and its present. Set between the sea and rugged mountain ranges, Muscat, with its melting pot of cultures, is the perfect starting point for an Omani adventure.

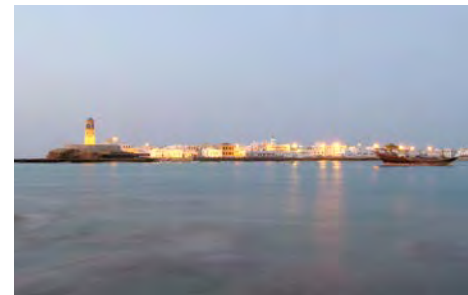
Located at the foot of the Hajar Mountains, Oman's major mountain range, Muscat faces the Arabian Sea. Architecturally, the city is characterised by a typical oriental Arabesque style with its low-standing white and sand-coloured houses. The skyline is dotted with the minarets and domes of the city's mosques.

Archaeological remains suggest this was the site of an early fishing settlement as far back as the fifth millennium BC, making Muscat one of the oldest cities in the Middle East. As a trading port, Muscat experienced continual growth and attracted sailors and merchants from all over the world. In 1507 it was conquered by the



Portuguese, who occupied the city until 1650 when it was freed by Sultan bin Saif, who founded an empire that stretched from Pakistan to Zanzibar. In 1832 a second capital city was settled on the African island of Zanzibar. This marked the beginning of a period of decline for Muscat, which only regained its former glory after the current sultan, His Majesty Qaboos bin Said, rose to power in the 1970s.

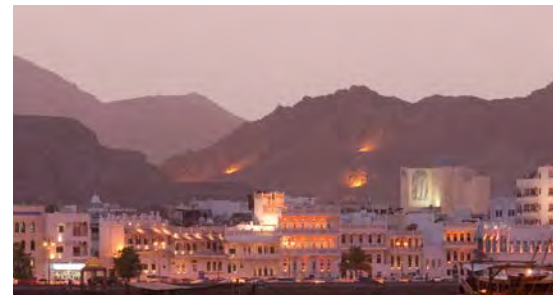
Today, there is plenty to captivate the visitor. Start with a stroll along the **Muttrah corniche** (seafront). First thing in the morning, this busy port is the site of a fish market, while in the early evening locals flock here to take in the sea air. Looking out over the seafront are some of the city's oldest and most beautiful houses, as well as the Lawati mosque, with its blue minaret and majestic dome decorated with mosaics. The same area is also home to the best-stocked *souk* in the Arabian Peninsula. Here, in its maze of alleyways, it is possible to find traditional clothes, jewellery, spices, antiques, hand-woven Bedouin carpets



and craft workshops. Look for the craftsmen making traditional sculpted silver and ivory daggers known as *khunjars*.

Within walking distance of Muttrah is a magnificent private home called **Bait al Baranda**, or "House of the Porch", now a museum dedicated to the history of Muscat from prehistory to the present day, with a section focusing on the current ruling dynasty. The museum is open from Saturday to Thursday, 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 6pm.

The breathtaking **Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque**, opened in 2001, is a must for anyone visiting the country. Its elegantly carved arches lead to the courtyard and



from there you can enter the huge main prayer hall, entirely decorated in white, blue and gold. An opulent Swarovski chandelier hangs from the dome and the floor is covered with a Persian carpet handcrafted by 600 weavers and spanning 4,263 square metres.

One of the first nations to embrace Islam in a peaceful manner, Oman converted to

Set between sea and mountains, the capital of the Sultanate seduces with its blend of ancient and modern charms.

Ibadi Islam in 700 AD. This denomination – also called Ibādiyya – is believed to be a division of the Khawaji school of Islam. Formed some 50 years after the death of Mohammed, Ibadi is the dominant form of Islam in Oman and Zanzibar, although there are also Ibadis in the Nafus mountains in Libya, the Mzad valley in Algeria, the island of Jerba in Tunisia and in East Africa. The Grand Mosque is open from Monday to Thursday, 9am to 11am.

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE

Opened in 2011, the Royal Opera House – the first of its kind in the Arabian Peninsula – is the Sultan's vision for the future of Oman's cultural heritage and legacy. It is in the heart of the city and its calendar features classical music, jazz, symphony and ballet, as well as international acts. To see the list of performances and to buy tickets, visit www.rohmuscat.org.om

You may not be able to venture inside the **Al Alam Royal Palace** in the Old Muscat area, but it is still worth a visit. Built by Sultan Qaboos in 1972, its elaborately decorated façades and the impressive courtyard give visitors a good idea of the opulence within the palace, which is used for high-profile public ceremonies and meetings.

Opposite the Palace, the imposing forms of the **Jalali** and **Mirani Forts** stand on the high ground around the city and are among its most distinguishing features. Built in about 1580 during the Portuguese occupation, their

exceptional structures make these two of the most beautiful forts in the country.

The fortress-style Old Town gates now house a magnificent museum that allows you to explore how the city appeared – from its ancient wells to sprawling *souks* – in days past. From its highest windows, there is also a panoramic view of the city and ocean.

The beautiful home of **Bait al Zubair** is a complex of private buildings transformed into an ethnographic museum. It has recently been extended, with the addition



of an Oman Renaissance building. Its broad collection of traditional clothes, objects and jewellery helps paint a picture of daily life in the Sultanate over the centuries. The museum also has a collection of local and contemporary art and organises temporary exhibitions, concerts and events to support young and up-and-coming artists. It is open from Saturday to Thursday, 9.30am to 6pm.

The old French consulate – **Bait Fransa** – has also been renovated and converted into a delightful museum. Focusing on the building of ties between Oman and France, it also has a cool, luxuriant inner garden. It is open from Sunday to Thursday, 9am to midday.

Nature lovers will take great pleasure in discovering the flora and fauna of the Sultanate – including some in fossilised form – at the fantastic Natural History Museum in the Ministry of Heritage and Culture Building in the Al Khuwair area. The star exhibit, dominating an entire room, is an enormous skeleton of a whale. The museum is open from Sunday to Thursday, 9am to midday.

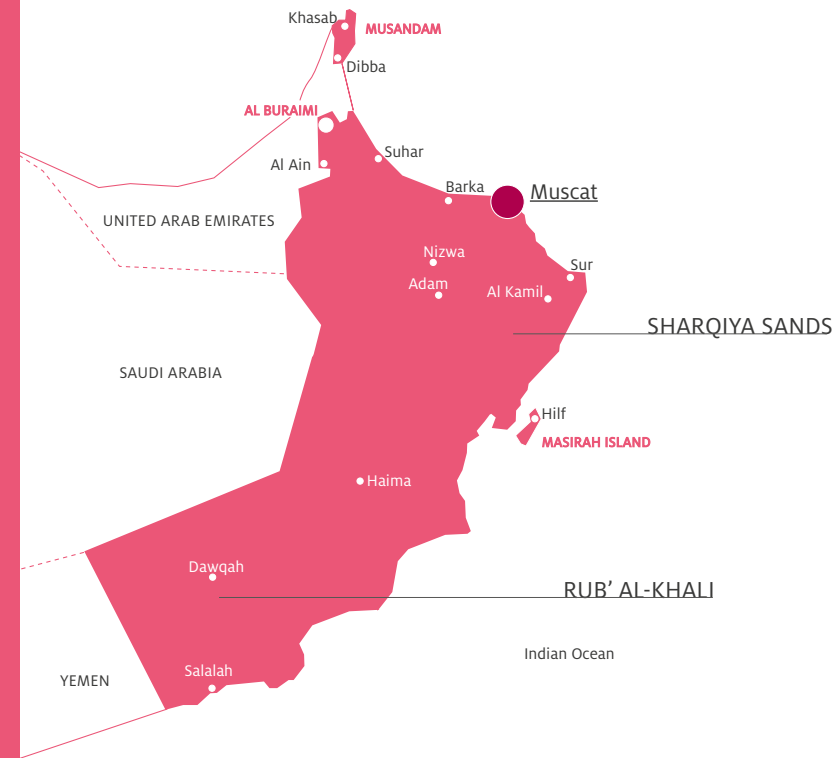


AN EVENING IN MUSCAT

Throughout the capital of the Sultanate, you'll find exceptional restaurants, both in four- and five-star hotels, as well as throughout the city.

If you're inclined to explore, there are restaurants serving local cuisine and international flavours. Enjoy generous portions of fish and Turkish dishes at reasonable prices at **Turkish House** (Al Khuwair district, +968 24 48 80 71). **Ubhar** is one of the few Omani restaurants in the capital (Bareeq Al Shatti, +968 24 69 98 26). Renowned Omani chef Issa recently opened **Al Mandoos** (Al Ghubra, +968 96 91 11 40). Take a seat either at an outside table or a Bedouin tent at **Kargeen**, which serves oriental, Yemeni and continental specialities (Madinat Qaboos, +968 24 69 22 69). **Mumtaz Mahal** is among the most popular Indian restaurants in the capital (Qurum, +968 24 60 59 07). On the floor below it, you can enjoy a drink and some tapas at **The Left Bank** (Qurum, +968 24 69 36 99). **Kurkum** offers simple and inspiring fusion meals blending Indian and Arabic flavours – don't miss the refreshing lassis (Muttrah, +968 24 71 41 14).

Before dinner, work up an appetite with a walk on the waterfront. Qurum public beach is very popular among Omani people at sunset, as is the Muttrah *corniche* alongside the harbour. Take in the stunning array of colours at sunset and inhale the delicious fragrances of saffron, mint and za'atar in the air.



03 THE DESERT AND NIZWA

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THE DESERT OF ONE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS

With its seemingly endless expanses steeped in silence, the desert has a unique appeal. The landscape is rich and varied, ranging from classic high sand dunes to rocky surfaces with stones in countless different shades. Whatever form it takes, it is always spellbinding and offers unparalleled experiences for anyone who loves adventure and getting back to nature.

Seventy per cent of Oman is desert and there are many ways to explore it. Accommodation options range from complete comfort and luxury to more low-key options for adventure lovers and the budget-conscious. It also offers a great experience for families: imagine camel riding during the day and camping under the stars at night.

A journey into the desert allows visitors to witness the daily lives of the exceptionally hospitable Bedouins who still live on its outskirts.



Sharqiya Sands

The vast Sharqiya desert – also known as the Wahiba Sands, since this is the name of the local tribe – lies at the heart of Oman. Throughout the day, its dunes change colour from white to yellow to red.

Just a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Muscat or Sur, it is the most easily accessible desert

area in the country. Using either of these two cities as a base means you can experience the desert in a day trip.

Although tours lasting just a few hours are available, it is worth remembering nothing compares to the magic of a night spent under star-studded skies in the bewitching silence of the desert. There are lots of opportunities for

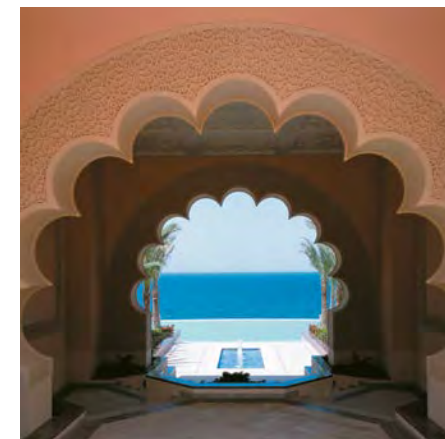
overnight camping and, with more days at your disposal, you'll be able to take longer trips to see truly remarkable views.

For an unforgettable experience, visitors can spend up to two days crossing the entire Sharqiya desert from north to south, ending the journey with the sight of golden dunes descending into the Arabian Sea. To extend the tour, continue along the coast once you reach the sea, following a well-maintained road through the wild, entrancing region that lies between the dunes of the Sharqiya Sands and the blue sea.

Any Omani desert experience should be led by a licensed tour guide as they have the best local knowledge on traversing the wide plains.

Rub' al-Khali

A vast area of Oman is covered by the Rub' al Khali, the largest expanse of sand in the world. This Arabic phrase means "the Empty Quarter", and this desert stretches over a quarter of the entire Arabian Peninsula. Its enormous surface area (twice the size of



Victoria) lies partly in the Sultanate and partly in neighbouring Saudi Arabia and Yemen. One of the few areas on Earth not to have been fully explored, it was nicknamed the Desert of the Deserts by the explorer Wilfred Thesiger.

As it covers the northern region of **Dhofar**, the southern part of the Sultanate, it is accessible from the city of Salalah. A number of tour operators organise trips lasting several days in the area.

Another way to explore the coastal plains is to drive from Muscat to Salalah, visiting Rub' al Khali on the way. The 12-hour journey along a route of approximately 1,000 kilometres provides a great opportunity to admire the vast desert plains known as *hamadas* in the heart of the country. It is also an excellent chance to see the elusive Arabian oryx and the giant volcanic rock formations called the Mushroom Rocks in the provinces of Dhofar and Al Wusta.

The desert is one of the key parts of a voyage to the Sultanate of Oman.

Nizwa: gateway to the desert

The enchanting city of Nizwa lies in the middle of a breathtaking mountainous region and is an excellent starting point for trips into Oman's deserts from the north of the country. During the 6th and 7th centuries, it was the capital and has managed to preserve the flavour and richness of its quintessential Omani-styled buildings.

The ancient city developed around a lush, green oasis where the caravan routes from the north met those from the south. Its importance as a trading site is still demonstrated today by its outstanding *souk*, one of the most beautiful and bountiful in the country, showcasing a selection of items made from wood, clay and precious metals, as well as meat, fish, fruit, vegetables and spices. It is the perfect place to buy beautiful, original souvenirs. From dawn until gam on Fridays, there is the unmissable sight of a large cattle market. Bedouins from a number of different tribes flock here to buy and sell camels and other animals. Viewing the Friday markets in Nizwa transports visitors back in time and is a great addition to an Oman experience.

OASIS AND AFLAJ

Arabian ingenuity has allowed even barren, arid land to become lush and fertile thanks to an intelligent network of canals known as *aflaj* (or *falaj* in the singular). First introduced in Oman by the Persians in 2500BC, the system of about 10,000 channels is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The *falaj* diverts water from its source through underground tunnels to open above-ground channels that supply water to many of the villages and towns dispersed throughout Oman.



Nizwa is renowned for its beautiful architecture and the mighty fort that stands tall over the city. Built in the mid-1600s on top of the remains of a previous castle dating back to the 9th century, it is the biggest fort in the Arabian Peninsula. Famous for its round guard tower – it has a diameter of 45 metres and is 34 metres taller than any of the other fortifications – the fort is now home to an interesting museum that presents Omani history and traditions.

Imagine seeing lush orchards tucked into mountain terraces at heights of more than 1,000 metres. Nizwa is a great base for side trips, including to old villages like Tanuf and

Birkat Al Mawz. **Al Hamra** is considered the most authentic and unspoilt village in Oman, with picturesque buildings reminiscent of the beautiful ochre houses of bygone days. **Bahla** is a well-known ancient town famous for Bahla Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the exceptional craftsmanship of its potters. You can discover this longstanding tradition by visiting the workshops.

A short drive away is **Jabrin Castle**, built in 1670 as the summer palace of the ruling Imam. The castle has been fully restored and now houses a museum as well as a special Sun and Moon Chamber said to be blessed with magical powers.

DESERT CAMPS IN SHARQIYA SANDS

Spending a night in the desert is an unforgettable experience that you should enjoy at least once in your life. There are a number of opportunities for overnight stays in Oman's deserts, ranging from the bare essentials to the most sophisticated accommodation.

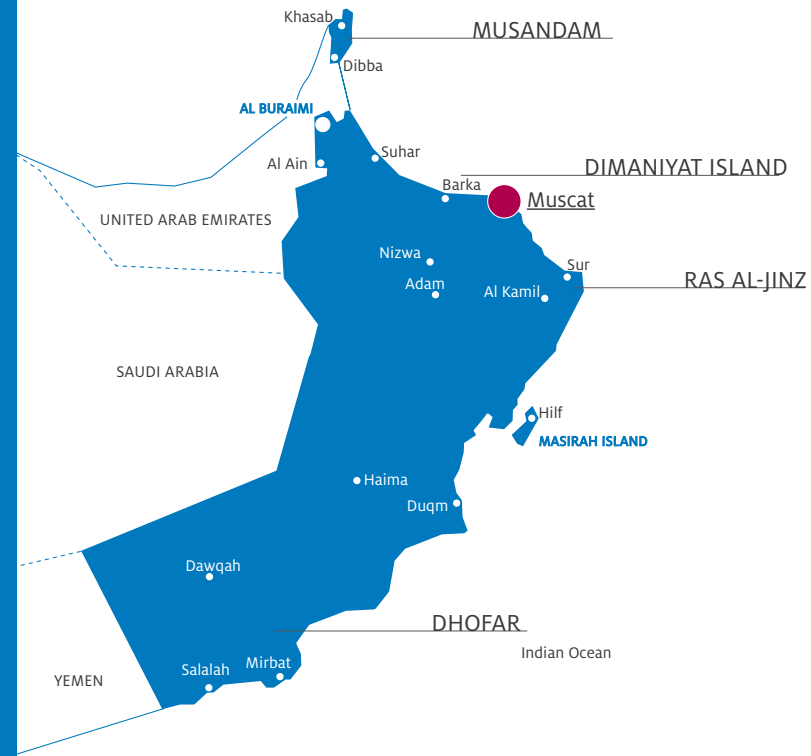
Desert Nights Camp This oasis in the desert will win the hearts of luxury lovers. Just two and a half hours from Muscat, it has 30 suites with king-sized canopied beds and panoramic views of the surrounding dunes. There's also a refined restaurant serving Omani cuisine and a full program of excursions. More information: www.omanhotels.com/desertnightscamp

Safari Desert Camp Traditional Omani style is the cornerstone of this site in Bidiyah, which has tents with typical Arabian decorations. It also offers its guests trips through the dunes by 4WD or camel. More information: www.safaridesert.com.

Arabian Oryx Camp This camp combines modern and traditional elements with 37 air-conditioned cabins surrounded by breathtaking sand dunes. More information: www.oryx-camp.com

1000 Nights Camp Thanks to its isolated location this site offers unparalleled delights. As night falls, hundreds of candles are lit to create a magical atmosphere. There are several Bedouin tents with carpets, candles, bathrooms and private showers. More information: www.1000nightscamp.com





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THE OMANI COAST

With its long, quiet beaches, tropical bays in the shade of palm trees, towering cliffs that drop into the ocean and 3,165 kilometres of coast, Oman is the ideal destination for anyone who loves to spend time by the shore.

From Muscat, the coast is sandy, with a calm sea and long stretches of beach boasting a wealth of facilities and water sports opportunities. To the north, the Musandam Peninsula is famous for its dramatic fjords plunging into the sea to create spectacular inlets and coves. To the south, the Salalah region is full of banana plantations and tropical beaches with turquoise water and palm trees bordering the golden sands.

The Oman Sea and Arabian Sea host a huge variety of animal species such as turtles, whales and dolphins, while their depths (Oman and Arabian seas) are home to coral reefs, long stretches of which are still intact.



Enjoying the coast in Muscat

The vibrant capital city of Muscat is blessed with many beaches and a calm sea suitable for year-round swimming. A large number of outstanding tourist facilities makes it an ideal base for visitors who want to combine relaxation by the sea with exploration of the country's inland regions.

The most popular public beach is **Qurum**, just a short distance from the city centre. It is the ideal place to relax after a day visiting the sights or to experience local life, admiring families strolling along and football matches on the beach. Anyone who is not staying in a hotel with a private beach can use the ones at the Capital Yacht Club and the Oman Dive Centre for a fee.

Muscat has a busy port that offers plenty of opportunities to explore the coastline from the sea. Visitors can hire a boat, or go snorkelling, diving, game fishing, kayaking, sailing or kitesurfing.

Youngsters will be excited to see large numbers of dolphins in the local area. Boat trips are organised every morning from Muscat marinas,



notably to **Bandar Khayran**, a bay that is a popular snorkelling spot.

A trip to the **Dimaniyat Islands** Nature Reserve is another must-do experience, particularly for diving enthusiasts. These nine uninhabited islets, an important breeding site for visiting marine life including turtles and whales, are a nature-lover's paradise. Due to weather conditions, the archipelago can only be visited

With 3,165 kilometres of coast, the Sultanate of Oman is an ode to the sea.

from November to April and a limited number of diving permits are issued. Trips to the reserve must be carried out by licensed operators.

Finally, south-east of Muscat is the beautiful **Fins Beach**, famous for its beckoning turquoise

waters that provide a refreshing stop for those exploring Wadi Shab and Wadi Tiwi along the coast of Sur while also enticing snorkellers and divers.

Sur and Ras Al Hadd

The picturesque seaside town of Sur, with its local fishing boats, *souks* and museums, is a great base for exploring Oman's rich maritime history. Even today it is one of the most important hubs for the construction and preservation of *dhow*s, the distinctive boats from the Sultanate. A unique museum tells the tale of the longstanding naval tradition in the local area and provides an excellent introduction to the history of the great Omani sailors, including Sinbad. Visit some of the *dhow* shipyards in Sur to marvel at the craftsmanship and reflect on modern innovation and development.

After a day enjoying the sea or exploring the exceptional local fish and produce markets, an excellent way to pass the time is to wait for night to fall by the shore and watch the *dhow*s serenely glide into the ocean. For a few rials, the fishermen of the village will take tourists on a trip

KITESURFING IN MASIRAH

The island of Masirah in the south-east of the country is a haven of calm with a gentle Indian Ocean sea breeze blowing through it, making it very popular with kitesurfing enthusiasts, especially between May and September due to the excellent winds at that time of the year. The natural environment is unspoilt, and it's not uncommon to see flamingos and loggerhead sea turtles side by side. Access to Masirah Island is by a short ferry trip from Shannah, a five-hour drive from Muscat. Kiteboarding Oman is the only registered facility at Masirah and operates a Bedouin camp and kite station directly on the beach. More information: www.kiteboarding-oman.com

around the bay and port before dropping them off in the **Al Ajjah** district, whose narrow streets are lined with white houses with magnificent wooden or wrought-iron doors, bearing witness to the ties between Oman and Zanzibar. At the end of the day, the *souk* district offers a range of restaurants specialising in seafood.



SAILING

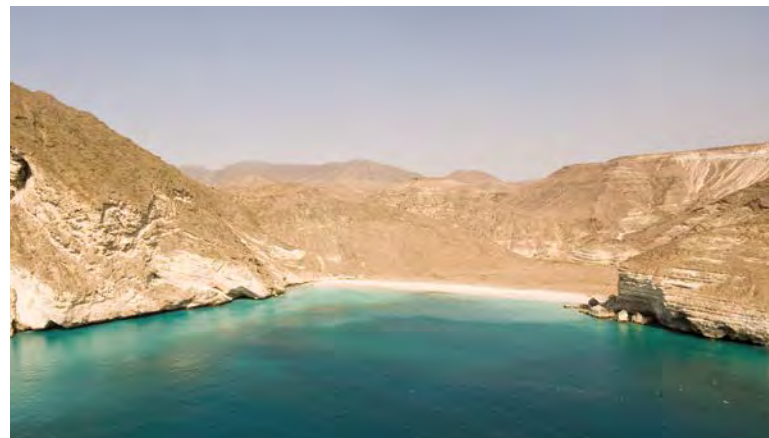
Oman is home of the legendary Sinbad the Sailor and has nautical traditions dating back 5,000 years, making it the perfect destination for sea lovers of all kinds. With its spectacular coastline, a sea dotted with islands and islets, bays that are perfect for mooring and 360 days of sunshine, there are many reasons to explore the Sultanate from the water. Even today, some villages, such as the picturesque village of Kumzar in the Musandam Peninsula, can only be reached by boat.

From the Mussanah Marina in the north to the south of Jebel Sifah, the 130 kilometres of coastline around Muscat offers beautiful spaces to navigate. Discover the deserted beaches of the Sawadi Islands, the unspoilt Dimaniyat Islands Nature Reserve and the sheltered bays of Bandar Khayran.

Muscat's marinas are the main centres for sailing activities. Oman Sail runs three sailing schools: at Marina Bandar Al Rowdah, The Wave – Muscat Complex and Mussanah Marina. Through its charter subsidiary, the company also offers the chance to rent a sailboat or catamaran, with or without skipper, for a day to a week. More information: www.omansail.com

Ocean Blue Oman offers an unparalleled experience on a luxury 75-foot catamaran, the SY Azzura. It is available for private charter for small groups of up to 60 people. More information: www.ocenablueoman.com

The new marina complex The Almouj (The Wave) is another ideal spot for a stopover while in Muscat. More information: www.seaoman.com



Ras Al Hadd, east of Sur is the meeting point of the Oman Sea and Arabian Sea. Its beach and the nearby one at Ras Al Jinz are famous for the thousands of green turtles who lay their eggs here each year, with the nesting season stretching from June to September. After about two months, the hatchlings emerge from the sand and scramble down towards the sea. It is a breathtaking phenomenon that can be seen either early in the morning or very late at night, making an overnight experience essential. In nearby **Ras Al Jinz**, the Scientific Center, which studies and protects turtles, recently opened a Turtle Visitor Center that offers information about the life cycle of these fascinating creatures. The Scientific Center also organises guided turtle-watching sessions and has a restaurant and a few bedrooms available for visitors. The reserve is a popular destination, so it's advisable to book

well in advance if you want to stay in the vicinity overnight. Alternatively accommodation options are available at Ras Al Hadd or Sur.

Salalah and Dhofar

A completely different side to Oman can be found in the far south of the country. Looking out over the Arabian Sea is a real tropical haven, where gorgeous sandy bays lie between crystal-clear water and lush green palm groves. In the town of Salalah you can see tropical fruit plantations and stalls loaded with coconuts, bananas and mangos. It is the perfect place to sit back and relax.

Dhofar's coastal landscape also features a large number of freshwater springs and striking lagoons known as *khawrs*, home to a huge range of birds, including flamingos.

Take to the water on a boat trip – some combine dolphin watching, diving and fishing and stops for inland walks – and admire the coastal scenery from the sea. The rich, varied marine fauna in this region attracts game fisherman targeting fish like giant trevally and black marlin. Divers too will be impressed with the sea life in



this stretch of water. The depths remain largely unexplored and are ideal for expert scuba divers who want to discover an environment where humans have had very little impact.

Mirbat, which lies 70 kilometres to the east of Salalah, is also worth visiting to see its historical cultural sites, including the grand fort and tomb of Ali, not to mention the beautiful beach that runs alongside the entire town straight up to the picturesque port. Abalone fishing is a primary industry, as well as the production of incense burners.

The Musandam Peninsula

The best way to appreciate the rugged, fjord-like terrain of the Musandam Peninsula is to view it from the sea. In Khasab, half- or full-day trips that include dolphin watching, snorkelling and kayaking can be organised on a traditional Omani *dhow*. Visitors can journey through the fjords, sheltered bays and inlets to Khor Sham or Kumzar. Reef conservation work is carried out in the Musandam Peninsula every February by Biosphere Expeditions.

DIVING

The waters of Oman are home to countless species of fish and vast stretches of coral, many of which remain largely unexplored, allowing diving enthusiasts to engage in a continual discovery process. Although diving can be done year round, the best period is between April and July when visibility is good and the temperature of the water is pleasant. Diving in the southern region of Dhofar is not recommended during the *khareef* (monsoon season) – June to September – due to poor visibility.

The main dive spots are off the coast of Muscat at Bandar Khayran, including the Al Munassir wreck, the extraordinary marine reserve of the Dimaniyat Islands, in the Musandam Peninsula and in Salalah.

DIVE CENTRES IN AND AROUND MUSCAT

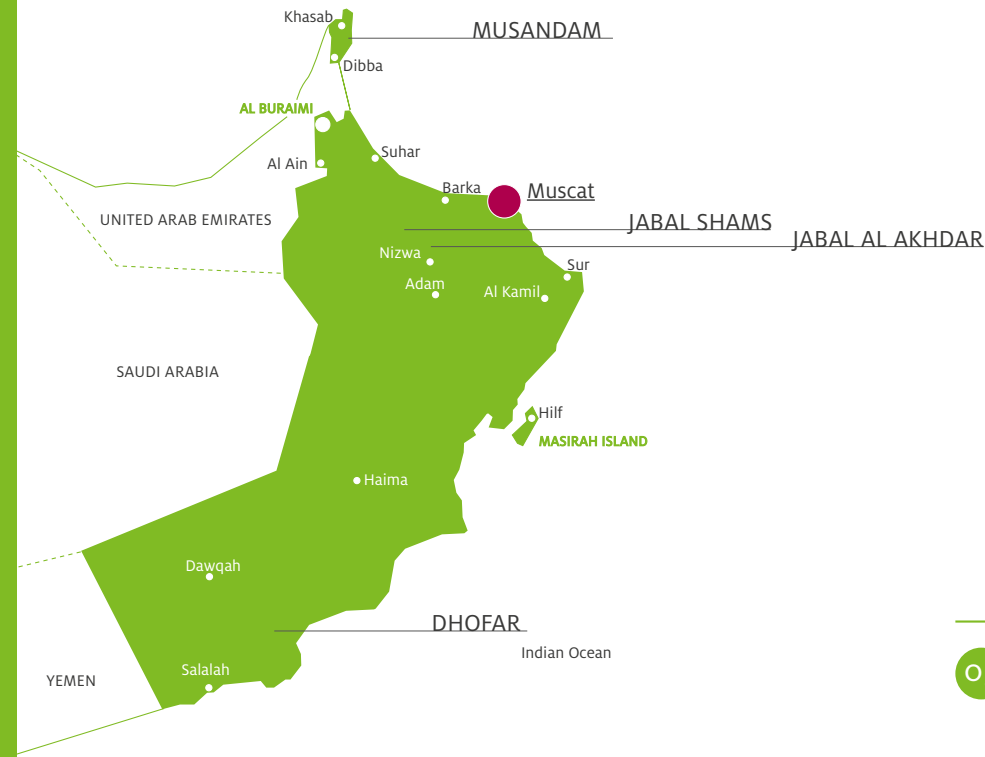
Dive Adventures Australia	www.diveadventures.com.au
Oman Dive Centre	www.omandivecentre.com
Euro Divers Oman	www.euro-divers.com
Blu Zone Diving	www.bluzonediving.com
Global Scuba	www.global-scuba.com
Moonlight Dive Centre	www.moonlightdive.com
Muscat Diving & Adventure Centre	www.holiday-in-oman.com
Arabian Sea Safaris	www.arabianseasafaris.com
Extra Divers Qantab	www.extradivers.info
Sun Diving Tourism	www.sundiving-tourism.com
Omanta Scuba Diving Academy	www.omantascuba.com
Extra Divers Al Sawadi	www.extradivers-worldwide.com
Allways Dive Expeditions	www.allwaysdive.com.au

DIVE CENTRES IN THE MUSANDAM AREA

Musandam Diving	www.musandamdiving.com
Extra Divers Musandam	www.extradivers.info
Extra Divers at Six Senses Zighy Bay	www.extradivers-worldwide.com
Nomad Ocean Adventures	www.discovernomad.com
Al Marsa Tours Travel & Tourism	www.almarsamusandam.com

DIVE CENTRES IN THE DHOFAR AREA

Extra Divers (Crown Plaza)	www.extradivers-worldwide.com
Sub Aqua Dive Centre (Hilton)	www.subaqua-divecenter.com
Extra Divers Mirbat (Hotel Marriott Beach Resort)	www.extradivers.info



05 THE *WADIS* AND THE MOUNTAIN OF SUN

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THE *WADIS* AND THE MOUNTAIN OF SUN

Postcard villages sitting between rock faces and breathtaking canyons with fertile, lush orchards bearing almonds, apricots and pomegranates can be found in Oman's mountain ranges, the largest in the Arabian Peninsula with peaks rising to more than 3,000 metres. They start at the well-known Arabian fjords in Musandam and stretch through to the Hajar Mountains and the peaks of Dhofar in the far south. Oman's mountains offer spectacular views, each with a unique landscape and a broad selection of outdoor activities.

The list of adventures on mountain trails and in the *wadis* is practically endless: you can go swimming in natural pools, canyoning, climbing, scaling via ferrata routes, mountain biking and caving. Hiking is another fun option with seven marked trails that can take a couple of hours up to a few days to traverse. An additional bonus is the opportunity to fully embrace nature by freely camping anywhere you like in complete safety.

The Hajar Mountains

The Hajar Mountains, Oman's major stretch of peaks, are 600 kilometres long from the far north in Musandam to the south of Sur. They are divided into two ranges: the lower **Jabal Akhdar** and the higher **Jabal Shams**. Outdoor activities for people of all ages and levels of fitness are available, all with a stunning backdrop.

Jabal Akhdar, with its terraced agricultural land on steep mountain slopes, is considered a regional highlight. Translated from the Arabic for "green mountains", it is an incredibly fertile area that is pleasantly cool with a large number of traditional villages. The ideal place to view Jabal Akhdar is from the **Saiq Plateau**, which lies at an altitude of 2,000 metres. Spend days exploring its countless walking paths (not all of which are signposted), discovering spellbinding spots and photographing the striking landscape. Access to the plateau is by 4WD only. From the plateau, another road leads to the peaks of Jabal Akhdar.

Jabal Shams – Arabic for "Mountain of Sun" – are the first peaks to feel the rays of



sunshine each day. At 3,075 metres they are the highest points in the Sultanate and some of the most beautiful locations in the country. Another natural wonder not to be missed in the area is Wadi Nakhar, better known as the Grand Canyon of Oman due to its majestic, breathtaking views. It can be admired from an altitude of 1,950 metres at the site known simply as the "plateau" by the locals.

A visit to the area also provides a chance to head underground at the Al Hoota Cave. Thought to be more than two million years old, Al Hoota is 4.5 kilometres long and home to a rich ecosystem including two lakes and more than a hundred animal species. However, it's the spectacular array of stalagmites and stalactites that is the real drawcard.

The western Hajar area has an equally impressive array of *wadis* and villages surrounded by attractive palm groves. The most beautiful valleys include the spectacular Wadi Bani Awf and Wadi al Sahtan, which has many riverbeds leading to nearby picturesque villages.

Musandam

The Musandam Peninsula is an enclave of Oman separated from the rest of the country by the United Arab Emirates. The northernmost part of the country, it is known for its Arabian fjords – tall cliffs plunging into the sea and creating marvellous views. A short scenic mountain road that can be travelled along by vehicle or on foot winds its way from its capital, Khasab, to the heart of the peninsula. Wadi Bih also offers good hiking opportunities. Hikes through the mountainous areas of the peninsula can be combined with trips through the fjords in kayaks or traditional *dhow*s.

Dhofar

At approximately 800 metres above sea level, the southern area of the Sultanate is particularly deserving of a visit right after the monsoon rains. In the summer months, from July to September, the peaks are covered in a carpet of lush, emerald-green vegetation and shrouded in a pearly grey mist. The summer monsoon, known as the *khareef*, means there is an amazing contrast between this region and the rest of the country – as well as neighbouring



countries – when temperatures often top 40°C. The landscape is unique and stunning, with cows and camels intermingling in the fields along the valleys.

The city of **Salalah** is a great starting point for people travelling around the region. To the east is **Wadi Darnat**, one of the most beautiful *wadis* in the area with ample opportunities for hiking. See the sparkling waterfalls of Jabal Samhan and stop at little stalls selling barbecued camel meat and goat shish kebabs. Bedouins in the area

JABAL AKHDAR ROCK ROSE HARVEST

From March to May, the slopes of Jabal Akhdar are covered with vast patches of pink and the air is filled with a delicate fragrance as the roses bloom. The indigenous Jabal Akhdar Rock Rose has been cultivated by the inhabitants of the mountain villages for generations and their flowers are gathered to produce one of the Sultanate's most quintessential products: *attar* (rose oil). It is a multi-purpose ingredient included in fragrances and flavourings for local confectionery and coffee. The long, fascinating distillation process is still carried out in the traditional manner in many areas, with the petals being heated over a fire in large containers called *bormas*. A visit during this time of the year really is breathtaking.

often serve these delicacies to visitors curious to discover traditional life in the mountains.

On the western side, the mountain range slopes down to the sea, creating a series of beaches, inlets and rocky stretches of jagged coastline with great visual appeal. It is also home to one of the

most beautiful and popular natural sites in the area, the blowholes of **Al Mughsayl**, where the sea rises through natural cavities and sprays up high in the air like a geyser. Even further to the west, at Dalkut, is a scenic road that zigzags up through one of the most stunning landscapes in the country.

Wadis

With spectacular oases and natural jade-green pools scattered along their lengths, the *wadis* are valleys formed by flowing streams. These watercourses are also used in the *aflaj* that forms the traditional irrigation system throughout the Sultanate. They create extremely striking landscapes and are among the main attractions in the Sultanate. There are especially large numbers of them in the Hajar Mountains and at Nizwa.

It takes just a few hours to drive from Muscat to the interconnected Wadi Dayqah and Wadi As Suwayh. Explore more than 60 kilometres of tracks here in an off-road vehicle, stopping occasionally for a break to plunge into crystal-clear freshwater pools.



WHERE TO STAY

In addition to camping, which is highly enjoyable, safe and possible anywhere you like in Oman, there are plenty of other accommodation options in the mountains. It is always best to book in advance.

Recently opened near the sea, **Wadi Shab Resort** offers an authentic experience close to nature. More information: www.wadishabresort.com

Approximately 15 kilometres from the centre of Nizwa is the four-star **Golden Tulip Nizwa** with 102 bedrooms, three suites, a garden, pool and gym. More information: www.goldentulipnizwa.com

In the centre of Nizwa, **Falaj Daris** is a classic, practical three-star hotel with 55 spacious rooms, two pools and a fitness club. More information: www.falajdarishotel.com

In the mountains, the Saiq Plateau offers three accommodation options. **Jabal al Akhdar Hotel** is a traditional chalet with 24 rooms and excursions and hiking trips in the surrounding area. More information: +968 25 42 90 09. With incredible views, the **Sahab Hotel** offers a variety of activities, such as caving, hiking and archaeology excursions, as well as visits to local farms to milk goats or harvest rose petals. More information: www.sahab-hotel.com. The luxurious **Alila Jabal Akhdar** resort consists of 86 villas, a spa and swimming pool. The resort has been built to blend with the natural environment and has breathtaking vistas of Green Mountain and the ranges. More information: www.alilahotels.com

For those looking for a deep connection with nature, tented **The View** (Al Hamra) epitomises the idea of eco-luxury, combining environmental friendliness with deluxe facilities. Its respect for the ecosystem, magnificent views of the valley below and attention to detail make this a truly special, welcoming place. More information: www.theviewoman.com



Wadi Bani Khalid lies in the Sharqiya region, approximately 200 kilometres from the capital. Its pools are always full of water and are very busy at the weekend when the local Omani people come for a swim and to picnic with their families and friends.

Adventure lovers can follow the riverbed on a journey lasting three days and two nights all the way to Wadi Tiwi, which opens up among lush palm groves. Another less commonly followed route passes gigantic rocks to the villages of Bidah and Saiq. The *wadis* that weave their way through the western part of the Hajar Mountains – Wadi Shab and Wadi Tiwi – stretch down to the sea, so are perfect for combining an excursion in the mountains with a camping holiday on the beach.



06 NATURE, HIKING AND ADVENTURE

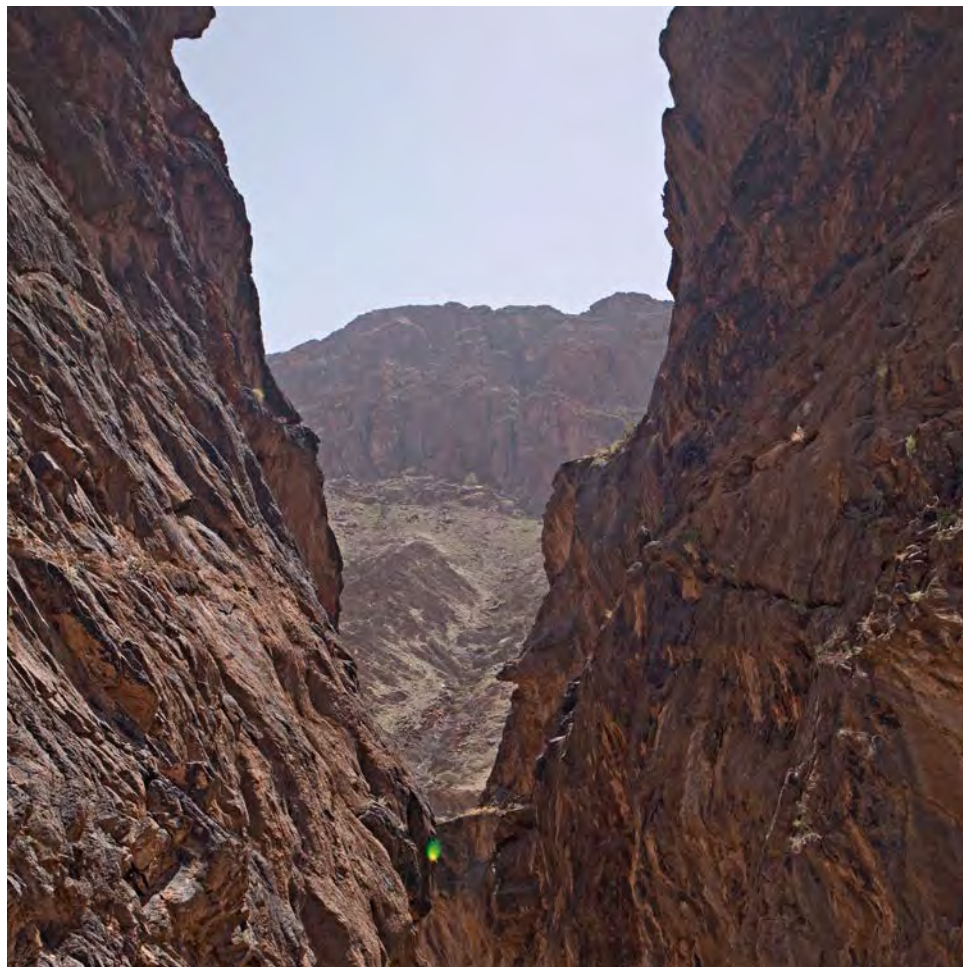
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NATURE, HIKING AND ADVENTURE

With its 3,165 kilometres of coast, two great deserts, mountain chains and rich natural environment, the Sultanate of Oman is perfect for people who love the great outdoors.

Nature lovers

Starting from Muscat, head out on a two-week journey of discovery. There are numerous amazing beaches, such as Bandar Al Jissah, Qantab, Yiti and As Sifah, spread along the coastal road to the east of the capital. They're perfect for a relaxed day at the seaside, but you can also camp on them at night and look directly up at the stars before falling asleep. The same applies to Fins Beach, an ideal starting point for exploration of Wadi Shab and Wadi Tiwi. It's a two-hour drive from Fins to Ras Al Jinz turtle reserve (another hour in the car will deliver you to the town of Sur). Day four can be spent exploring Wadi Bani Khalid, with its natural pools – great for a cooling swim – and perfect picnic spots in the shade of palm trees. You can make it to



HIKING OR BIKING IN THE HAJAR MOUNTAINS

There are at least 30 trails covering several hundred kilometres in total in the Hajar Mountains. Serious trekkers can take the 12-day tour from Jabal Shams and Jabal Akhdar, covering the western part of the Hajar massif. The Al Hamra area offers the opportunity for mountain biking led by a guide. Many professional tour operators are on hand to offer you the best experience.

the dunes of Sharqiya Sands by sunset and spend the night in one of the campsites. The next few days can be devoted to the Hajar Mountains. Three days should be enough to see the main wonders of the region: Jabal Shams, Jabal Akhdar, the Saiq Plateau, the huge Al Hoota Cave and Wadi Nakhar, also known as the Grand Canyon of Oman. It is a very good idea to travel around this area with a guide who has expert knowledge of the region. The ninth day can be used to return to Muscat, before spending the final few days in the Musandam Peninsula, a one-hour

flight from the capital. At least three days are needed to take in the beauty of the fjords that drop sharply into the crystal-clear waters of the gulf.

A little more action

If you like active holidays and adrenaline rushes, spend two weeks trying out everything the Sultanate has to offer. As soon as you arrive in Muscat, book a diving trip for the next

CAMPING

There are no official campsites in the Sultanate, but lovers of the natural environment and outdoor life can choose to camp in some truly remarkable locations. The laws of the country impose no restrictions in this respect, so you can camp wherever you like: near *wadis*, in the mountains, on the beach or in the desert. The only requirement is to show respect for the environment and local people. The ideal period for camping is between October and April, but even in the summer pleasant temperatures and astounding views can be found on high ground, such as the Saiq Plateau and the peaks of Jabal Shams.



With its wide open spaces, the Sultanate of Oman is a paradise for outdoor sports and activities.

CANYONING AND KAYAKING

Some of Oman's canyoning sites – Wadi Dayqah and Wadi Bani Khalid – include stretches where it's necessary to travel through water. In Wadi Bani Awf, there is an adrenaline-inducing canyoning route through the narrow Snake Canyon (Wadi Bimmah) that involves scaling aerial runways and leaping into natural pools. It's not for the faint hearted. Trips of this kind should be organised with the help of expert guides. The Musandam fjords have peaks and beaches that are only accessible from the sea, so are perfect for scenic kayaking among the waves.



©Dieter Wetz

day, or consider the option of a night dive. You can spend the third day game fishing, before heading off to Barka and Rustaq by car. From there, venture into Wadi Bani Awf and sleep overnight under shelter. The following morning, go to Little Snake Canyon and enjoy its marvellous views. Those with sufficient expertise might like to put themselves to the test in Big Snake Canyon, where you can go

hiking, climbing and swimming across natural pools. The following two days should be devoted to Jabal Shams, with the Al Hoota Cave and hiking excursions along Wadi Nakhar, the stunning Grand Canyon of Oman. The Al Hamra region offers guided mountain bike excursions. On the seventh day, recover from the exertion by experiencing the charms of the old capital, Nizwa. It is the gateway to Sharqiya Sands, where you can go dune bashing before seeing the full moon or the sun rise during a ride on a camel. If you are adventurous, you might decide to go on a three-day hike between Wadi Bani Khalid and Wadi Tiwi on the eastern slopes of the Hajar Mountains. As you head back to Muscat stop off for a swim at somewhere like Fins Beach. From there, in the direction of Suhar, the road leads to the Musandam Peninsula. Try to spend three days

CLIMBING

With more than 160 registered sites, Oman is a very popular destination for rock climbers. The most famous is Jabal Misht, in the western Hajar Mountains, although its 1,000-metre cliffs are for experts only. The two protected climbing routes in Snake Canyon (Wadi Bani Awf) and the Bandar Al Khayran cliffs, overlooking the sea, are more suitable for amateurs following a guide.

here enjoying all of the natural wonders and opportunities for camping in the wild, as well as hiking, climbing, kayaking and sailing in *dhow*s.

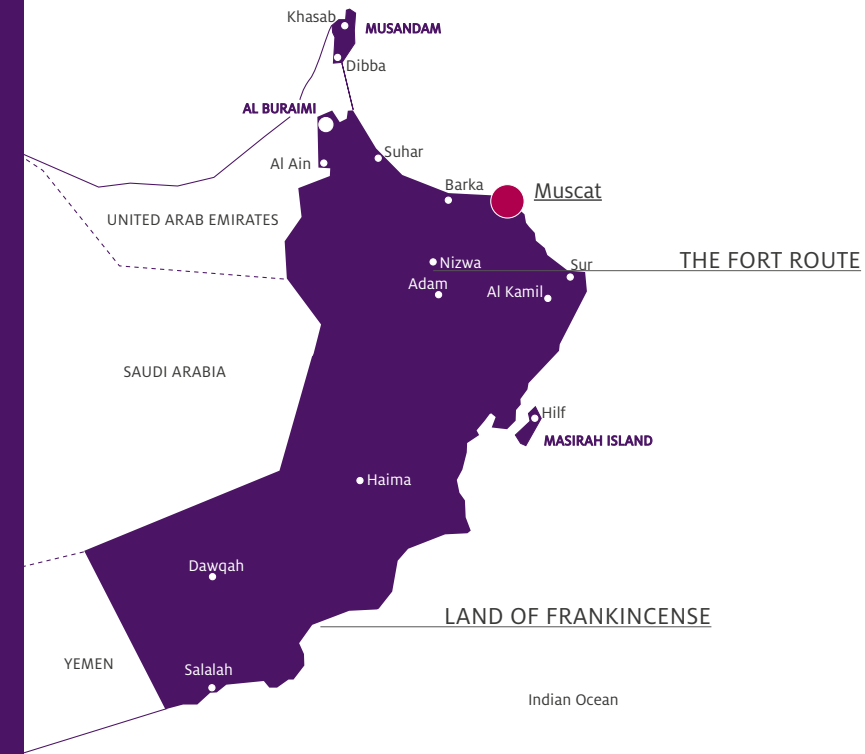
A family affair

Even with kids, Oman is the perfect destination for an adventure itinerary. Nights in the desert, camel rides, the discovery of Ras Al Jinz turtles and dolphin-watching trips amaze travellers of all ages.

TRIPS OUT TO SEA

Whether you are away for just a few hours or spend the night at anchor in a bay, a trip out to sea from Muscat is a must. All kinds of unique excursions are on offer in the capital city: dolphin watching, tours of Muscat from the sea (along the maritime perimeter of the city, with views of Muttrah, the old town, the Sultan's palace and the small fishing villages in the surrounding area), snorkelling in Bandar Khayran and dinner cruises. A number of trips to the Arabian fjords are offered in the ports of Khasab and Dibba in Musandam. They normally involve a tour of the islands, coasting by the cliffs, dolphin watching, swimming and snorkelling. From October to May, a number of trips to sea with dolphin-watching experiences also set out from Salalah, the capital of Dhofar.





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CULTURE OF OMAN

For thousands of years Oman has been a place of trading and encounters between the East and West, ensuring a country with a rich and fascinating culture. Since ancient times it has absorbed and given its own twist to traits and influences from India, Persia, Zanzibar, Portugal and the UK. Its conversion to Islam in the 7th century – in the moderate, tolerant form of Ibadism – was a strong unifying factor and has helped to hold together a blend of traditions and an acceptance of modernity.

Traces of the country's extraordinary heritage can be found in its archaeological sites, historical buildings, craftsmanship, clothing and cuisine. Visitors will find countless pleasant surprises – big and small – making a holiday in the Sultanate incredibly special.

The Land of Frankincense

From ancient times, the cultivation and export of incense helped to establish Oman on the major trading routes that were capable of making cities and places of commerce both



RAMADAN AND THE FEAST OF EID AL-FITR

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and a time when Muslims do not eat between sunrise and sunset. Many businesses are closed during Ramadan and, out of respect for the local customs, it is best to avoid eating, drinking and smoking in public during the day. The month ends with Eid al-Fitr, a week of festivities during which the community comes together to eat traditional food and celebrate with folk dances and songs. Omanis across the country serve an array of dishes. In Dhofar and Wusta, the festivities start with *ruz al mudhroub*, a dish made of cooked rice and served with fried fish, and *maqdeed*, special dried meat. In the Muscat, Al Batinah, Dhahirah and Sharqiya regions, *muqalab*, a tripe dish cooked with ground spices (cinnamon, cardamom, clove, black pepper, ginger, garlic and nutmeg), dominates the menu. Other dishes served during Eid festivities include *arsia*, a dish of lamb cooked with rice, and *mishkak*, skewered meat grilled on charcoal. Eid is a particularly great time to visit the country and embrace its rich cultural traditions in a joyful atmosphere. Ramadan's timing is based on the lunar calendar, so its date in the Western calendar is variable each year.

flourish and decline. Oman has always been one of the largest exporters of the resin that comes from the local *Boswellia sacra* tree.

The Dhofar region is the starting point for the famous incense route that first connected the Arabian Peninsula with the Mediterranean in Roman times. The great historical and cultural value of the area has been acknowledged by UNESCO, which added four sites that make up the Land of Frankincense to its World Heritage List in 2000. They include the frankincense trees

of Wadi Dawkah, the remains of the caravan oasis of Shisr, the port of Khor Rori, and the archaeological site of Al Balid, dating back to the 4th century BC (although it was rebuilt during the Middle Islamic period). In Salalah, the Al Balid Maritime Museum displays 5,000 years of the Sultanate of Oman's history, from naval construction to navigation and maritime routes over the Indian Ocean.

Incense is still produced in the region today and it can be bought all over Oman and at



the Al Husn *souk* in Salalah. Once a year, in September, a big market trading solely in resin and its essential oil is held in Salalah.

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

A number of sites and cultural features in Oman have been added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. As well as the Land of Frankincense sites, they include the ingenious, multi-branched canals of the traditional irrigation systems known as *affaj*. Then there are the historic sites of Bat, Al-Khutm and Al Ain,

which form the largest and best preserved collection of settlements and necropolises from the 3rd millennium BC in the world. Finally, there is the immense fort in Bahla, capital of the Banu Nebhan tribe from the 12th to the end of the 15th century, which has been fully restored. More information:

whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/om

The fort route

Looking like enormous sandcastles, magnificent, immense forts can be found on high ground and rocky outcrops throughout the Sultanate. More than 500 forts, castles and watchtowers – each with its own special charms or distinctive features – have been built over the course of Oman's long history. Muscat, the capital city, is dominated by the awe-inspiring Mirani and Jalali Forts. Standing on top of a rocky plateau that juts out of an endless green plain of date palms, the Nakhal Fort is truly majestic. The Bait Naman and Al Hobe forts are two more unmissable sights.

Jabrin Castle is also spellbinding, with its secret passages, painted ceilings and courtyards

THE BEDOUIN

The term Bedouin comes from the Arabic *badawi* meaning “desert dweller”. There are many nomadic tribes in Oman who live not only in the deserts but also in the mountainous areas and along the coast. They make a living by fishing, raising livestock and taking part in seasonal work such as growing date palms and harvesting crops. Bedouins are very hospitable people who are faithful to their traditions but also show a cautious openness to the modern world. The men from the different tribes can be distinguished by the colours of their turbans and the ways in which they wear them. Similarly, it is possible to identify the tribe of a woman by looking at her extremely colourful clothes, such as her embroidered trousers and shawls, as they reflect the tribe or ethnicity of the person.

enclosed by delicately carved wooden panels. From the highest point of the building, the views of the Hajar Mountains are breathtaking. Dhofar's Taqah Castle, the birthplace of Oman's current ruler, Sultan Qaboos, has been fully restored.



EVENTS

Oman's citizens have a very healthy appetite for culture and the arts, and there are numerous events, from fashion festivals to sporting contests, held throughout the year.

From September until May, the **Royal Opera House** in Muscat, the first classical music structure of its kind in the Arabian Peninsula, offers a prestigious program featuring the biggest names – both local and international – in classical music, jazz, opera and ballet. More information: www.rohmuscat.org

From the end of January to the end of February the **Muscat Festival** takes place, enlivening the already magical city as it presents the best of Omani culture. There are craft displays, light shows, concerts, sporting events and the city's celebrity chefs cooking top traditional dishes for everyone to sample. More information: www.muscat-festival.com

In February, the **Tour of Oman** attracts the top cyclists from all over the world, including Australia's Cadel Evans. More information: www.tourofoman.om

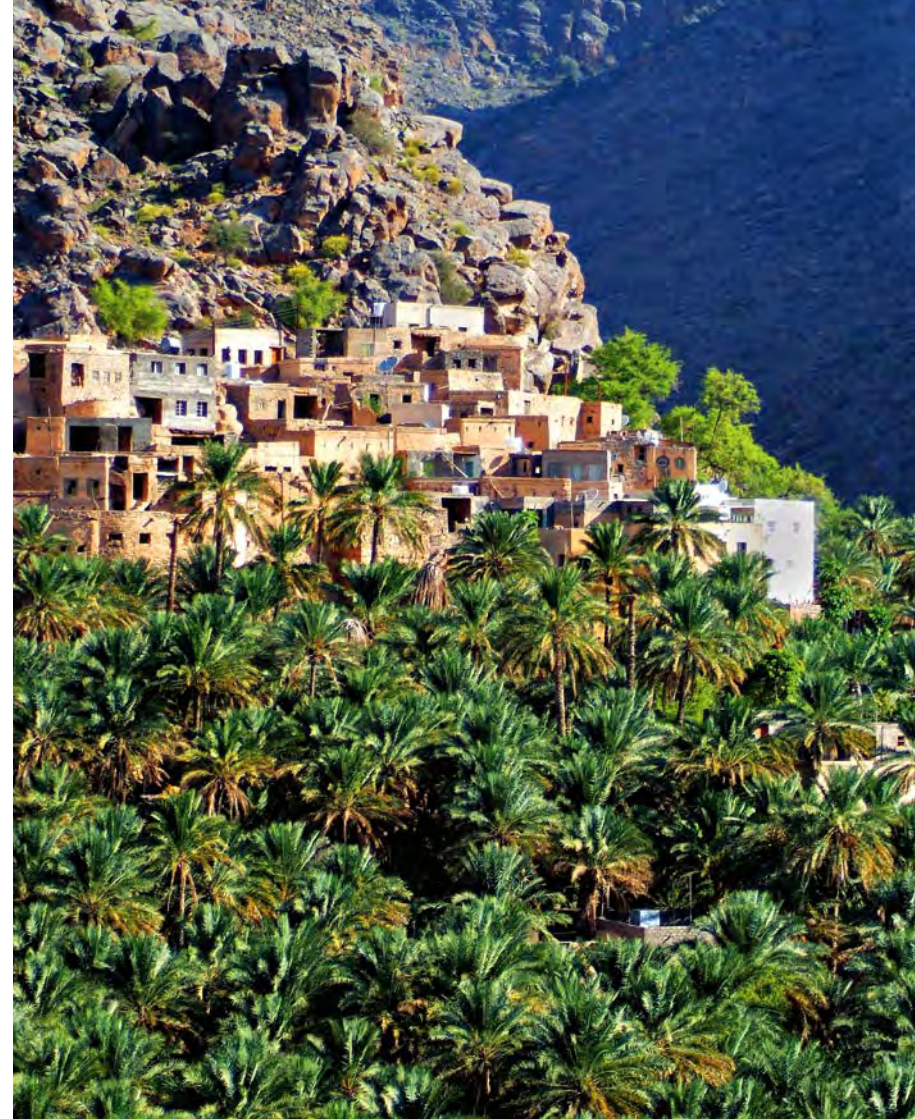
For fashionistas, **Muscat Fashion Week** is a must-see, as designers from Oman, Asia, Africa and the Middle East showcase their latest creations. More information: www.muscatfashionweek.com

From October until March, **camel races** are organised almost every week, mainly in Al Batinah and Sharqiya regions. Wintertime is also the season of **bullfights** in Seeb and Barka.

The **Salalah Festival**, held during July and August, celebrates the *khareef* (monsoon season), which brings cool temperatures and sees vegetation burst into life. There is a full schedule of concerts, traditional cultural shows and activities for families with children, including the fantastic kite festival. More information: www.salalahtourismfestival.com

The Sultanate's ancient sailing tradition continues thanks to a number of high-profile international competitions. **Sailing Arabia: The Tour**, held in February, has legs throughout the north of the Arabian Peninsula (www.sailingarabiathetour.com). High-speed catamarans are the drawcard during March's **Extreme Sailing Series** (www.extremesailingseries.com). In March, **Mussanah Race Week**, an international dinghy regatta, is held (www.mussanahraceweek.com/en/).





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A PROFILE OF THE SULTANATE

The Sultanate of Oman is at the south-eastern end of the Arabian Peninsula. It is the third-biggest country in the region after the neighbouring nations of Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The Tropic of Cancer runs across Oman, passing just below Muscat, its capital city.

It has a population of 2,773,479 and a land area of 309,500 square kilometres, making it double the size of the state of Victoria in Australia. The population is concentrated in the north and in the Dhofar area in the south. Widely open to the sea (3,165 kilometres of coastline), Oman is partly occupied by two major mountain ranges rising to 3,075 metres. The country also has two sandy deserts including the famous Rub’ al-Khali.

Economy Oman’s economy is largely based on exports of oil and natural gas. More than 60 per cent of the oil consumed worldwide passes through the Strait of Hormuz, where

the Sultanate and Iran both have strategically positioned territory. Other significant contributions to trade are made by maritime commerce, fishing, agriculture and tourism, which is developing and expanding rapidly to cater to the growing numbers of international visitors to the country. The Sultanate of Oman’s sustainable and responsible growth and development of its local tourism has attracted a wide audience in Australia and New Zealand.

Political system Oman is a constitutional monarchy and the head of state is His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The capital city is Muscat.

Religion The state religion is the less widespread form of Islam known as Ibadism. The doctrine places great importance on pacifism, tolerance and leniency. Ibadism is only found in Oman, Zanzibar and some smaller enclaves in Tunisia and Algeria.



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Time zone UTC +4

Currency The Omani rial (OMR), which is divided into 1,000 baisa. One rial is worth around AU\$2.75, but the exchange rate varies.

Banks The banking system operates to Australian standards. It is possible to pay with major credit cards in the main towns and cities, but it is better to have cash at your disposal for use in small shops and villages, especially away from Muscat and Salalah.

Opening times Friday and Saturday make up the weekend in Oman. The banks are open from 8am to noon or 2pm from Sunday to Thursday. Shops and *souks* are open from Sunday to Thursday, from 8am to 1pm and from 4pm to 9pm.

Health No vaccines are required.

Language The official language is Arabic.

English is widely spoken in the main cities and in all tourist establishments.

Clothing Summer clothes can be worn throughout the year, even if evenings in December and January are a bit chilly. It is advisable to take warm clothing to wear at night in the desert or the mountains, in premises with air conditioning and in Dhofar if you plan to visit during the monsoon season. Avoid wearing short pairs of shorts and skirts, sleeveless tops, and clothes that are very tight or low-cut.

Climate Oman can be visited all year round. There are two seasons: summer lasts from May until September, and winter lasts from October until April. During winter, daytime temperatures range between 25°C and 30°C on the coast and on the plains, but they drop to between 15°C and 25°C above 1,800 metres. In December and January, they even fall below 0°C at night in the mountains. In summer, the southern region of Dhofar benefits from the *khareef* (monsoon

season), which brings very humid weather but keeps the temperatures at about the average winter levels (23-25°C). In the north it gets very hot at this time of year, with temperatures often hotter than 40°C. The best period for trips into the desert and outdoor activities is between October and late April.

MONTH	TEMPERATURES IN MUSCAT	HUMIDITY
January	14-26°C	61%-81%
February	15-27°C	63%-81%
March	18-30°C	61%-74%
April	22-34°C	63%-66%
May	27-38°C	61%-63%
June	29-39°C	64%-65%
July	29-39°C	64%
August	27-41°C	64%-66%
September	24-38°C	64%-73%
October	22-36°C	62%-77%
November	17-30°C	59%-78%
December	15-27°C	62%-82%

GETTING TO OMAN

AIRLINES

Currently there are no direct flights from Australia and New Zealand. However, Emirates, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways offer regular air services with daily connecting flights from Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha. Oman Air does not fly into Australia but visitors can connect with Malaysian Airways at Kuala Lumpur and Thai Airways at Bangkok into Muscat International Airport.

GETTING AROUND OMAN

Oman Air operates a number of domestic flights that connect Muscat to Salalah (five to seven flights a day) and Khasab (one flight a day).

It takes five hours to travel from Muscat to Khasab by high-speed catamaran (on a weekly basis). The service is provided by the National Ferry Company, which also connects Khasab to Shinas (four-hour trip, on a weekly basis). More information: www.nfc.om

Visitors can travel by car on Oman's main long-distance roads and in off-road vehicles on smaller roads and tracks. Driving takes place on the right-hand side of the road. Visitors can drive by themselves on the main road links, but for more demanding trips in the desert or the mountains, it is much better to have a local guide and driver. Taxis are available in Muscat.

The Oman National Transport Company operates a line of comfortable, efficient coaches that provide links between the main cities in the



country (Muscat, Salalah, Sohar, Sur, Al Buraimi). More information: www.ontcoman.com

DOCUMENTS

To enter the country, you need a passport valid for at least six months. New Zealand passport holders do not require a visa, while Australian travellers can apply for a visa upon arrival at Muscat International Airport at the cost of either five Rials (for stays of up to 10 days) or 20 Rials (for stays from 11 to 30 days). If you plan to travel by land to the Musandam Peninsula from Muscat, you will need to pay for a second visa when going through the United Arab Emirates border. If you fly to Musandam, the visa from your arrival in Muscat will be sufficient.

CONDUCT

It is always best to ask for permission before taking photographs of people, especially of women and children.

WHERE TO STAY

The Sultanate of Oman offers a wide range

of hotels – from three-star to luxury five-star – to suit all budgets and tastes, and visitors can expect exceptional service. The recent development of tourism in the country has encouraged expansion into natural areas with fewer visitors, such as the regions around the mountains of Nizwa and the coast along Sur where striking, unique desert and mountain camps are available. Even today it is possible to camp freely anywhere in Oman, including in the mountains and on the beaches under a canopy of stars.

VOCABULARY

Omanis are always very happy to come across a visitor to their country who speaks a little Arabic. It is a good idea to learn a few simple greetings and introductory words.

Unlike certain other languages, there are no distinct formal and informal versions of the word “you” in Arabic.

The most formal greeting is *as-salaamu alaykum* (peace be with you), to which the response is

wa alaykum assalaam (and with you).

A more informal greeting is *sabah al khayr* (good day), to which the response is *sabah annur* (which literally means “day of light”).

In the evening: *masà al khayr* (good evening), to which the response is *masà annur*.

Welcome: *ahlan wa sahlan*.

Goodbye: *maasalama*.

How are you?: *kef halak?*

(if you are asking a man) or

Kef halik? (if you are asking a woman).

Well: *ana mabsout* (man),

ani mabsouta (woman).

Thank you: *shukran*.

You're welcome: *afuan*.

Yes, please: *naam, shukran*.

No, thank you: *laa, shukran*.

What's your name?: *Aysh ismak?*

(if you are asking a man) or

aysh ismik? (if you are asking a woman).

My name is...: *ismi...*

USEFUL CONTACTS

IN NEW ZEALAND

Sultanate of Oman Tourism

PO Box 279, Auckland 1140

Tel. +64 (0)9 977 2222

Contact World Journeys:

Tel. 09 360 7311 or 0800 11 73 11

info@worldjourneys.co.nz

www.worldjourneys.co.nz

world.
JOURNEYS

IN OMAN

Ministry of Tourism

PO Box 200 PC 115

Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos, Muscat

Tel. +968 24 58 87 00

Fax +968 24 58 88 80

info@omantourism.gov.om

www.omantourism.gov.om

Australian Embassy and Consular Section

Abdullah bin Hozafa Al-Sahmi Avenue

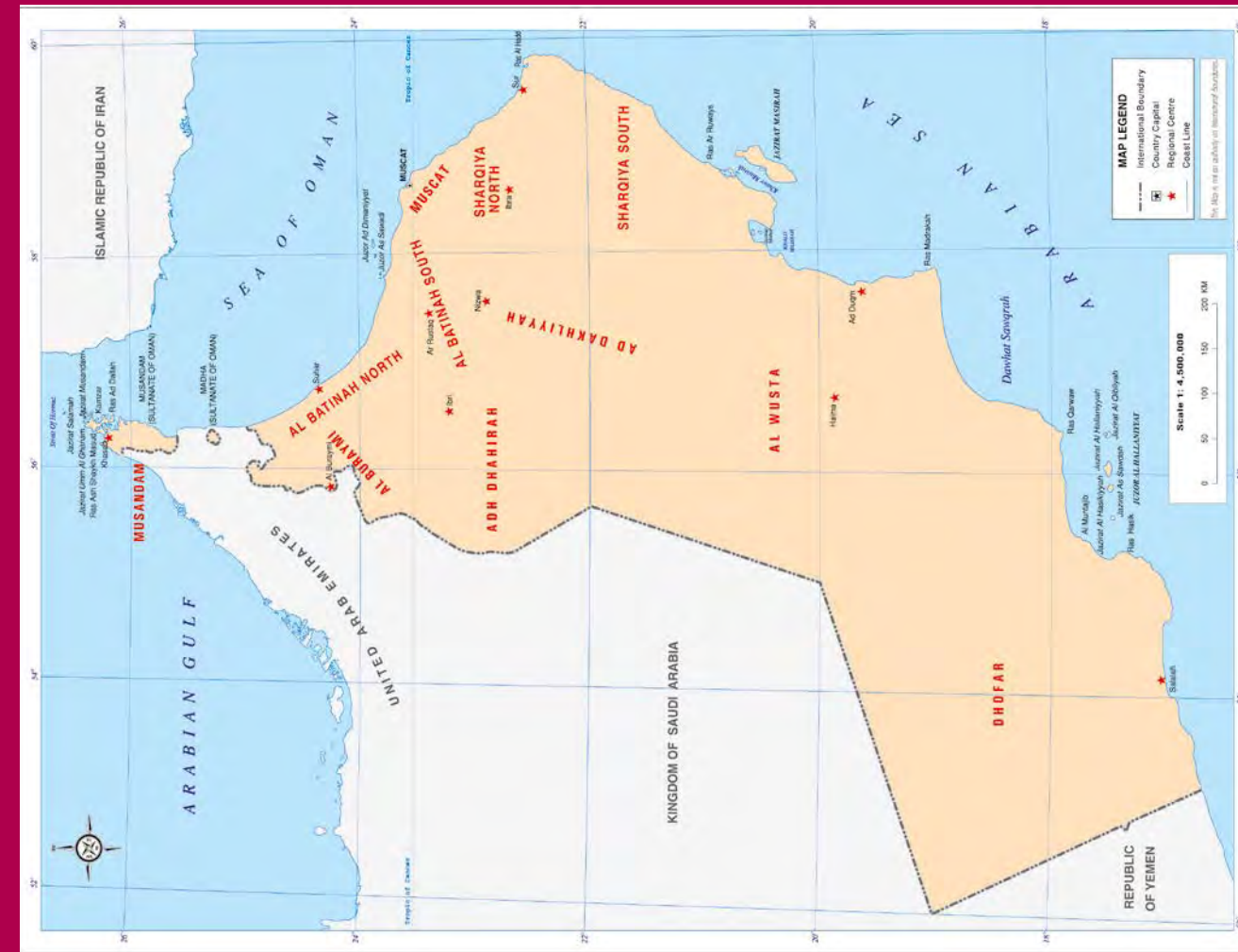
Diplomatic Quarter, Riyadh

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Tel. +966 11 250 0900

Sunday to Thursday, 7.45am to 3.45pm

www.saudiarabia.embassy.gov.au



SOURCE: TOURISM OFFICE OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN