

Muscat

Muscat lies sparkling white, topped with golden minarets in the middle of a maze of brown pleated mountains reaching down to the Arabian Sea. Described as "Arabia's jewel", this city is a blend of the old and the new. Muscat is a very green city and its roads are lined with well-manicured green lawns and trees. During winter this is interspersed with a profusion of multicoloured flowers. The city has steadfastly retained its old-world character. Years ago, Muscat was walled in. However, the wall is now replaced by a stone moat, which the Omanis call Al-Hosn or the fortification. Parts of the original wall still remain in which are located the three main access gates to the city: Bab al Matha'eeb, the Greater Gate and the Lesser Gate.



Muscat has a number of beautiful beaches such as Qurum Beach, Bandar Al-Jissah and Yeti. Public gardens and parks are everywhere with Qurum Natural Park, Riam and Kalboub being the most popular.

Famous landmarks include Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Muttrah Souq, the forts of Al-Jalali and Al-Mirani which flank his Majesty's colourful and elegant Al-Alam Palace, Burj As-Sahwa, Clock Tower Square, and Al-Bustan Palace Hotel; a building of great eminence throughout the Arabian Peninsula.

Sur

Sur is an ancient port and seafaring town that lies on the east coast 310 Km from Muscat. The Portuguese, who ruled the Gulf in the 16th century, occupied Sur until it was recaptured by Nasser ibn Murshid, first Imam of Al-Ya'aribah dynasty, in the 17th century.

The name of Sur is thought to be derived from the city of Sur in south Lebanon (Tyre). Sur played a major part in the trade between Oman, East Africa, and India. It was one of the renowned centres for shipbuilding in the country. Today, 7 boatyards are operated by the private sector, and craftsmen still use the traditional methods of shipbuilding to create ocean-going vessels. However, the tall ships are no longer made.



R'as Al Hadd and R'as Al Junayz

Situated at the extreme east of the Arabian Peninsula, this zone was transformed in Nature Reserve by the government. The area is home to one of the biggest green turtles concentration in the world. 13000 turtles come lay their eggs on the coast of 40km length. They come on land at night, dig large « nests » in which they drop up 100 eggs at a time. 60 days later, the little turtles break out and start their race for the sea. Only 1 out of a 1000 survives.



Nizwa

Nizwa, the verdant oasis city was the capital of Oman during the 6th and 7th century. Nizwa has been an important crossroads at the base of the Western Hajar Mountains connecting Muscat, Buraimi, and the lower reaches of Dhofar. The Falaj Daris of Nizwa is the largest single falaj in Oman and provides the surrounding country side with water.

The city, famous for its historical monuments, handicrafts and agricultural products, has an expansive Souq showcasing a wonderful array of handicrafts. Nizwa fort is Oman's most visited National monument. The most striking feature of the fort is the central tower; a colossal 150-foot-diameter circular tower soaring 115 feet above the rest of fortification, complete with battlements, turrets, secret shafts, false doors and wells. 4 cannons now remain on the tower's summit, down from a total of 24, which once served as the castle's main firepower provided complete 360-degree coverage of the countryside around.



Wahiba Sands

The great Wahiba sands are longitudinal dunes 200 km long and 100 km wide running south from the Eastern Hajars to the Arabian Sea. The dunes are 100-150 metres high in shades of colour from orange to hues of amber. Bedouin camps can be found along the tracks and trails in this isolated desert. In sporadic areas can be found stands of single-species woodlands. Where the sands meet the ocean, outcrops of aolianite (sand compressed into rock) can be found displaying unusual and attractive abstract shapes. Here the beaches mellow into soft shades of yellows and whites.



Wadis

A wadi is a dried up riverbed found in the mountain valleys. Wadis come into their own after heavy rains, when the rivers start running again and the vegetation is restored. However, some wadis have year-round running water, with deep, cool pools in which it is quite safe to swim if the currents are slow as in Wadi Bani Khalid. Wadis are green, lush oases of palm trees, grasses, and flowering shrubs. The villagers often take their cars down for washing and groups of people have great fun splashing around in the clean water.



Wadi Dayqah

Known as the Devil's Gap, Wadi Dayqah was described by explorer S. B. Miles in 1896 as "the most singular piece of earth sculpture in Arabia". The wadi runs through a narrow winding vertical-sided canyon that looks as though the mountain has been split in two. The walls soar to 1,700 meters and close in to 12 meters in some places.

Wadi Shab

The Wadi is 76 Km from Qurayyat–Muscat. The road to the wadi dips as it crosses the bed of the ravine and rises steeply on the other side where the houses of Tiwi cling to the cliffs. At the mouth of the wadi is a single beach dotted with fishing boats. Water flows all year round. The

wadi runs through a narrow gorge with date plantations, restful pools and lush vegetation. Oleander bushes attract butterflies and the singing of the birds is delightful.

Forts

Nakhl Fort

Located in Al-Batina region, the fort sets on top of a 200-metre rocky prominence in the foothills of the Western Hajar Mountains, overlooking the extended verdant palm farms of Nakhl countryside which gave the fort its name. The fort is believed to be dated to pre Islamic period and was restored in the 3rd & 10th century A.H. during the reign of Bani Kharous and Ya'aribah Imams, respectively. The gate, fence and towers were built during the reign of Imam Said bin Sultan in 1834. In 1990, restoration work began, using traditional building materials and period furnishings.

Rustaq Fort

The fort nestles at the foot of Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar. It was first built upon Persian ruins circa in 13th century (around 1250 AD) but the current structure was re-established by the first Imam of Al-Ya'aribah dynasty between 1624-1649. The fort has 4 towers and contains several structures, which were used for housing, storage and defence. The Fort was restored in 1986.

Jibrin Fort

Jibrin Fort resembles a remarkable blend of defensive architecture and sophisticated artistry. It consists of three floors and 55 rooms, and is penetrated by Falaj Jibrin. The Fort is one of the most impressive forts in the Sultanate and the details and carvings in the rooms and balconies are most elaborate. Finely painted flowers and symbols are found on the ceilings in the 'living' rooms. Was restored and furnished in 1982.



Jabal Akhdar

Jebel Akhdar in Arabic means "Green Mountain" and this region of the most verdant outside of Salalah and the Batinah Coast. It is one of the most scenic areas in Oman, coupled with the friendly local inhabitants, this region is a natural spot for tourism. Points of interest include the towns of Wadi Bani Habib, Saiq and Al Ayn, where local farmers raise grapes, pomegranates, apricots and walnuts. The climate is moderate year round as the main altitude is about 1800 metres. Also of interest is the lookout over the canyon recently named Diana's Point, for the late Princess of Wales who spent time here in the late 80s.



Salalah and the South

Nestled in the southern region of Oman at more than 1.000 km from the capital Muscat, Salalah has the benefit of the annual Indian monsoon: locally known as the Khareef. This monsoon, which extends from early June to mid September, transforms the countryside into a veritable garden with tumbling waterfalls and meandering streams.

Salalah is steeped in myths and legends that date back to biblical times. In the Jebel Qara can be found the tomb of the Prophet Ayoub, better known as Job of the Old Testament. In Khawr Rhori lie the ruins of the palace reputed to be that of the Queen of Sheba. In the surrounding

countryside on the flanks of the jebels grows the Boswellia sacra better known for the sap it produces: Frankincense. In all probability the Frankincense that was a gift to the baby Jesus came from Oman as the Boswellia sacra tree grows no where else.

70 km **east** of Salalah lies Mirbat, famous for Bin Ali's tomb (Bin Ali was revered in the early days of Islam as a sage and holy man.). Taqah, 36kms from Salalah is a picturesque, quaint village. The fort at Taqah goes back several hundred years and is well stocked with authentic decorations and appointments.

Rising high above the coast is the Jebel Samhan plateau, the highest point in Dhofar at 1800 meters. Here you can find the hanging valley of Wadi Dirbat which is impressive in full flood. Further into the jebels is Tawi Attir (the hole of the birds), a natural sink hole over 100 metres wide and 250 metres deep. Nestled in a hidden valley is the Baobab Forest with huge bulbous trees, one tree over 2000 years old and 30 feet in diameter at its base.



To the **west** of Salalah are many stretches of beautiful beaches. One of the most popular of these is Mughsayl where you can find unusual blow holes in the rocky shelf close to the shore. To the **north** of Salalah is the region known as the Nejd. This is a barren desolate area that is actually the southern fringe of the R'ub Al Khali. Here you find sweeping sand dunes and parched wadis. Lying 175 km north of Salalah is the remote village of Shisr. Here in the early nineties, with the help of satellite imagery from the space shuttle, explorers found what they believe to be the lost city of Ubar. Called by T. E. Lawrance (of Arabia) as the "Atlantis of the sands", Ubar was once considered to be the trading centre for frankincense before it was buried in the rising dunes.

Musandam Peninsula

From November to March is particularly an ideal time to visit the Musandam.

In Khawr Ash Shamm, which you reach by dhow, you will find placid waters, marine life, secluded beaches and isolated outposts. A stop over at Telegraph Island is a highlight of this trip. Dhow trips can also be arranged to visit the cliff side village of Kumzar. By land you can rent a 4 wheel drive to see Khawr Najd, Jebel Harim (the highest point in Musandam) and the Acacia forest near Sal Al Ala.



Khasab Fort

A picturesque stronghold situated on the inner cove of Khasab Bay in Wilayat Khasab–Musandam. The fort was built in the 17th century by Portuguese seeking dominion over regional maritime trade. Within its low crenellated walls, the fort contains a large central tower which is anticipated to pre-date the fort itself. Was restored in 1989.