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Tour Notes

Oman – From the Desert to the Coast

Main Tour Duration – 8 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●●● | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●● | Culture ●●●●● | History ●●●●● | Wildlife ●●●●●

Tour Pace

Moderate

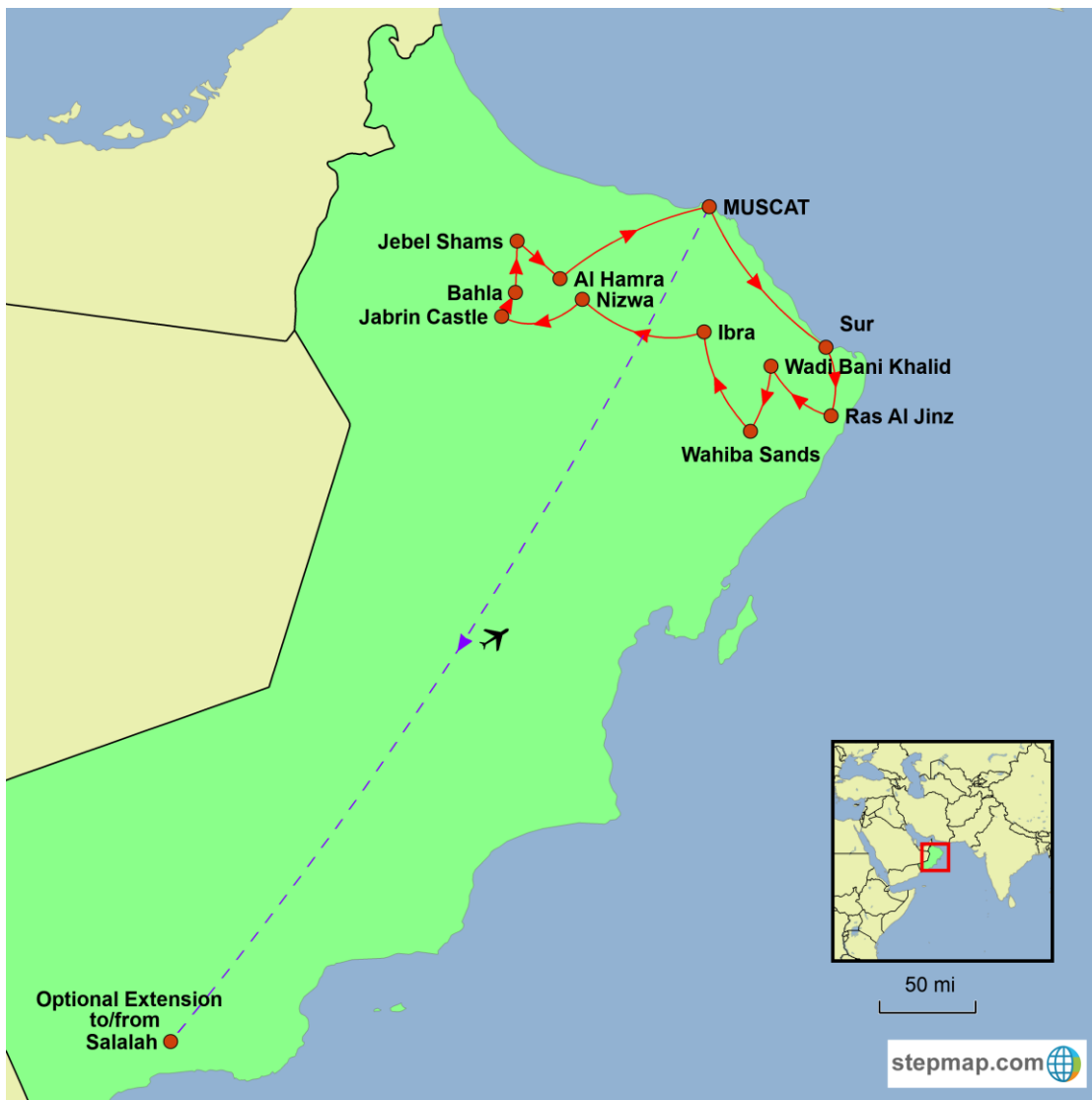
Tour Highlights

- ✓ See and scale the incredible vast dunes of the Wahiba Sands and spend 2 nights in the desert
- ✓ Explore mystical desert forts and castles
- ✓ Beautiful coastal scenery and the opportunity to spot rare turtles nesting on the beach
- ✓ Superb scenery of Jebel Akhdar and ancient mountain villages
- ✓ Wander in the atmospheric souqs of Muscat and Nizwa
- ✓ Enjoy the view at the huge expanse of Jebel Shams Grand Canyon
- ✓ Optional extension to the southern Oman region of Salalah or to the Musandam Peninsular



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Tour Map



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mixture of comfortable hotels and permanent tented camp accommodation (no air conditioning in Wahiba Sands)
- Included Meals:** Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary
- Group Size:** Maximum of 12
- Start Point:** Muscat – you can arrive any time on day 1 (main tour)
- End Point:** Muscat – evening departure on day 8 (main tour)
- Transport:** 4WD vehicles in convoy with the local guide driving the lead vehicle
- Countries:** Oman
- Optional Extensions:** Extensions to Salah or Musandam



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Oman - From the Desert to the Coast

When referring to the Arab world, there's a differentiation between the Middle East and North Africa, and the Gulf. The latter's oil-rich states are often characterised by glittering high-rise developments, shopping malls, five-star hotels and industrial quantities of air-conditioning. Indigenous populations are often outnumbered by poorly paid guest workers, and little remains of traditional culture. Oman is an exception. The mostly benign absolute monarchy of the late Sultan Qaboos saw an insular conservative kingdom evolve to adopt a more modern outlook. However, as much as Oman has used its oil revenues for infrastructure development, it has retained its traditional culture and identity. This tour explores barren deserts and rugged coasts, as well as verdant oases and lush plantations. From remote mountain villages and simple farms to ornate tribal palaces, impressive mosques and modern cities, Oman displays its many faces. If you think you know the Gulf prepare to think again.

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

Please note for our small group tour in Oman we recommend clients regularly swap vehicles in order to communicate with the guide who drives the lead vehicle in the convoy. The drivers of the other vehicles are not English-speaking.

Itinerary

Optional Salalah (South Oman) Pre-Tour Extension

[Pre-Tour] Day 1: Arrival in Salalah

Arrive in Salalah and transfer to the hotel. No meals or guided arrangements are included today. Overnight at Salalah Garden Residences or similar.

[Pre-Tour] Day 2: Exploring Salalah and Surrounds

This morning we head east to the Dhofar region. Our first destination is Taqa where we visit the fort and the impressive ruins at Sumhuram which give an insight on life 2000-years-ago. The adjoining port of Khor Rori was once an important trade centre and the main conduit for the export of frankincense. Just before Mirbat we reach Bin Ali's Tomb, marked by a twin-domed mosque and adjoining cemetery. In Mirbat, the former capital of Dhofar, we visit the old merchant houses, built in traditional Omani-style. Returning to Salalah we call in at Ayn Razat Gardens, a quiet place at the foot of the lush Qara Mountains. In the afternoon we drive west towards Al-Mughsail Beach passing scattered stands of frankincense trees. At the beach we witness the surprisingly spectacular blow holes before visiting the Tomb of Prophet Ayub (Job), located in the mountains north of Salalah. Overnight Salalah Garden Residences or similar. (BL)



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[Pre-Tour] Day 3: 4WD to the Empty Quarter (Rub Al Khali)

Today we take 4WD vehicles and drive into the Qara mountain range from where there are spectacular views of the Salalah plains, dotted with thick shrubs and woodland. We continue west on a graded road, crossing the huge gravel desert of Al Nejd. After almost 175km we reach the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the 'Lost City of Ubar'. The legendary ancient kingdom of Ubar was said to have existed in one of the most inhospitable places on earth - the vast and forbidding Rub' Al Khali desert, or Empty Quarter. According to myth the desert swallowed Ubar. Quite literally, it sank without a trace, becoming the fabled 'Atlantis of the Sands'. The buried city was spotted by satellite and in 1992 benefited from work carried out by a team of explorers led by Sir Ranulph Fiennes. Afterwards we drive into the Empty Quarter to experience the 'world's largest sand desert'. From the top of the dunes breathtaking views over the vast sea of sand await. Later we head back to Salalah, stopping at the Bedouin settlement of Thumrait for lunch at a local restaurant. Overnight Salalah Garden Residences or similar. (BL)

Please note: *Lunch will be around 1400hrs on this day.*

[Pre-Tour] Day 4: City tour - Depart Salalah – Fly to Muscat (day 1 of the main group tour)

This morning we visit Al Balid Archaeological Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, home to 'The Museum of the Frankincense Land'. The museum's displays focus on the geography and history of the Frankincense trail, and Oman's rich marine heritage. Afterwards we drive through lush green plantations of vegetables and fruits, stopping to taste a fresh coconut water at a street stall. We also stop briefly at the impressive Sultan Qaboos Mosque and Al Husn Palace. At Al Hafa souk, famous for the sale of high-quality Frankincense, we follow fragrant, winding alleys populated by stalls offering incense boxes, decorated clay incense burners, and bags of incense. There's plenty of time to explore before we return to the hotel. Later we drive to Salalah Airport to catch an afternoon flight to Muscat. On arrival transfer to the hotel. Overnight Al Falaj Hotel or similar. (B)

Main Tour

Day 1: Arrival Muscat (*Approximate driving time: forty-five minutes*)

Arrive in Muscat and transfer to hotel accommodation. Depending upon flight schedules there may be time to explore the city independently. No meals or guided arrangements are included today. Overnight at Al Falaj Hotel or similar.

Muscat

Strategically situated at the entrance to the Persian Gulf, Muscat has been an important trading town on the crossroads between east and west for at least two millennia. During the 16th and 17th centuries it changed hands between Portuguese and Turkish invaders several times before returning to local control. The discovery of oil in the 1960s saw Muscat grow from a small harbour town into a large and modern city, fuelling a vibrant economy and a multi-ethnic society as workers from countries such as India arrive in search of work. Muscat originally consisted only of the area known as Old Muscat, a walled town on a natural harbour which houses excellent examples of traditional Omani architecture and a couple of Portuguese built forts dating back to the 16th century.

Day 2: Muscat – Sur – Ras Al Jinz (*Approximate driving time: three-and-a-half-hours*)

Today we drive through spectacular rugged mountains towards Sur. En route we stop at Bimmah Sink Hole and Wadi Shab, an oasis of inviting pools where it may be possible to take a dip. After lunch we explore Sur, in the past renowned for its dhow shipyards, before continuing to Ras al Jinz. After an early dinner we visit the green turtle sanctuary where, after a journey of thousands of kilometres, mature females come ashore to lay their eggs. Overnight Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve or similar. (BLD)



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Sur

The attractive coastal town of Sur has long been known for its tradition of dhow building, its shipyard continuing to produce these mighty vessels which have formed such an important part of Omani culture and trade over the years, although these days there is less demand. Today it's a relatively quiet town where one can walk through traditional markets surrounded by Omanis in their typical national dress, and it's a good place to get a feel for local culture. Sur played a role in the slave trade for many years, being a conduit for slaves brought from East Africa on their way to the markets of Arabia, and it took many years for this practice to be eradicated in Sur after it was officially outlawed.

Day 3: Ras Al Jinz – Wadi Bani Khalid – Wahiba Sands (*Approximate driving time: three-hours*)

This morning we drive to Wadi Bani Khalid, an oasis in the middle of barren and dry mountain landscapes. It's one of the most beautiful wadis in Oman, and its pools of clear deep blue water are a welcome opportunity for a swim. After lunch we head into the Wahiba Sands, an undulating red and white sea of dunes. After some exciting dune driving, we arrive at our desert camp. Overnight 1000 Nights Camp or similar. (BLD)

Wahiba Sands

The Wahiba Sands are characterised by enormous rolling dunes, some as high as 150 metres, stretching as far as the eye can see – a quintessential desert landscape that is as beautiful as it is austere. Named after the Wahiba tribe, the region is home to Bedouin who manage to eke out an existence around the few oases, and is also home to a surprising amount of wildlife. Immortalised by the travels of Wilfred Thesiger, a journey into the sands offers a superb opportunity to experience desert wilderness.

The Bedouin

Bedouin is a collective name given to a variety of desert dwelling tribes, spread out from the Arabian Peninsula to North Africa. Traditionally the Bedouin were largely nomadic, taking their large goat hair tents and moving to find pasture for their flocks throughout the arid desert wastes. Although different tribes were united, typically the Bedu would live separately in their family groups – a necessity so as not to put excess pressure on the meagre resources of the landscape. Nowadays modernity has taken its toll on traditional Bedouin life, as many have settled in towns and cities in search of a more secure existence, but many nomadic families still exist. The recent imposition of national borders on the homelands of the Bedouin has also acted to circumscribe traditional patterns of migration. The Bedouin are famed for their culture of hospitality which dictates that they treat visitors as honoured guests.

Day 4: Wahiba Sands

Today is free to relax. There's lunch at a Bedouin house, and a range of activities are available from the desert camp (which may be booked in advance – please advise if you would like the full list), or just take in the views over the dunes. Overnight 1000 Nights Camp or similar. (BLD)

Day 5: Wahiba Sands – Ibra – Jebel Akhdar – Nizwa (*Approximate driving time: five-and-a-half-hours*)

After breakfast we drive to the historic town of Nizwa, Oman's cultural capital. En route we visit Ibra Old Houses and explore Jebel Akhdar. In Arabic Jebel Akhdar means Green Mountains, and the area is justifiably famous for its gardens, farms and terraced plantations. We call in at Wadi Habib to see one of the more remote villages and its nearby fruit plantations, before continuing to Nizwa. Overnight Intercity Hotel or similar. (BLD)

Jebel Akhdar

Jebel Akhdar is part of the Hajar Mountains, which stretch for about 300km from North West to South East. The higher parts of the region receive enough rainfall to allow agriculture and many traditional fruits and vegetables are grown on the slopes. This is one of the most scenic areas in Oman, and is mostly inhabited by members of the Bani Riyam tribe. Jebel Akhdar was the scene of some fierce fighting between rebels and Omani and British forces in the late 1950s.



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Nizwa

The town of Nizwa has historically been a very important oasis offering respite from the often harsh landscape surrounding it, and is a key centre for growing dates. However it is far better known for its splendid fort built in the 17th century and painstakingly restored in 1990. The fort is vast and contains many different sections, including a Koranic school, a mosque, a prison and living quarters. Once the capital of Oman, Nizwa became an important centre for trade and education, profiting from its strategic position between Muscat and Dhofar. The town has been extensively modernised under Sultan Qaboos bin Said, but retains its flavour, especially in the back streets of the old souq.

Day 6: Nizwa – Jabrin Castle – Bahla - Jebel Shams (Approximate driving time: two-hours)

This morning we visit Nizwa's souk, its busy livestock market and its fort. Afterwards we drive to the 17th century Yaruba dynasty castle of Jabrin, where magnificent plasterwork, painted wooden beams, and carved doors make it unique in Oman. Afterwards we drive to Bahla, one of the oldest towns in Oman and a 12th century tribal capital. We admire views of the town and its magnificent fort before continuing to Jebel Shams. Overnight Jebel Shams Resort or similar. (BLD)

Day 7: Jebel Shams – Al Hamra – Wadi Bani Awf – Muscat (Approximate driving time: five-hours)

Today we take in spectacular views of Jebel Shams, the 'Grand Canyon of Oman'. Afterwards we drive to Al Hamra and Misfah, to see one of the region's oldest villages. Here traditional mud houses over 400-years-old are still occupied. After an early lunch we head to Wadi Bani Awf, the end point of the canyon, to see the 'snake gorge' in the middle of steep mountain cliffs. Later we drive to Nakhl and visit its restored fort, perched on a rocky outcrop, before arriving in Muscat. Overnight Al Falaj Hotel or similar. (BLD)

Day 8: Muscat

This morning we visit the magnificent Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, one of the largest in the Middle East. Afterwards we drive through Muscat's old, walled district and visit Bait Al Zubai Museum for its Omani cultural displays. Later we head to Muttrah Souk where it's possible to bargain for handicrafts and silverware. In the late afternoon we take a sunset cruise, before transferring to Muscat airport to meet onward flights. (BL)

Optional Musandam Peninsular Extension

[Post tour] Day 8: Muscat Airport - Overnight Stay

After the sunset cruise transfer to the airport and stay overnight at a hotel next to the airport. Overnight Hotel Sundus Rotana (Novotel) or similar. (B)

Note: Due to timings of domestic flights it is not possible to fly same day up to Musandam Peninsular.

[Post tour] Day 9: Muscat – Musandam Peninsular

Today we board a flight to Khasab and on arrival transfer to hotel accommodation. In the afternoon we take a 4WD safari to Jebel Harim, the highest point of the Musandam Peninsula, where we are rewarded by impressive views of the wadis. Afterwards we visit the lagoon of Khor Al Najd before returning to the hotel via Al Khalidiya park, an acacia woodland home to a variety of butterflies and birds. Overnight Atana Khasab Hotel or similar. (BD)

[Post tour] Day 10: Full day dhow cruise

This morning we board a traditional Arab dhow to enjoy a full-day's cruise to Khor Sham. We sail through the majestic fjord, surrounded by spectacular mountains and white sand beaches, passing the occasional tiny fishing villages. Scanning the water's surface, we look out for dolphins riding the dhow's bow wave and wake. We anchor at Telegraph and Seebi Island, excellent places for swimming and snorkelling where pristine waters teem with colourful marine life. After a relaxed lunch aboard, we sail back to the harbour of Khasab and return to the hotel. Overnight Atana Khasab Hotel or similar. (BLD)



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[Post tour] Day 11: Return to Muscat and depart

Transfer to the airport for our flight back to Muscat. If you have an evening flight out of Muscat then the tour ends here or alternatively you can book extra accommodation in Muscat (please contact us for prices). (B)

Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions

Arrival and departure transfers
All accommodation
Services of an English-speaking guide/tour leader
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Transport in 4WD convoy
Entrance fees for sites as listed as part of the itinerary

Excluded

International flights
Travel Insurance
Items of a personal nature
Visa
Drinks
Tips (discretionary)

Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At the time of writing there are no travel warnings in place for Oman.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.





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Accommodation Rating

On this tour you can expect to stay in simple but clean and comfortable accommodation. With a few exceptions you can expect rooms to be en-suite, with private bathroom and when necessary air-conditioning will be provided. In general you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch £5

Dinner £10

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Water £1

Beer £3

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is common practise in the Middle East. If you have been happy with the services of your guide and driver, then a reasonable amount to tip would be \$5-10 per day for the driver and \$3-5 for the driver, if you are travelling on a group tour. If you are travelling privately then around double this amount would be reasonable.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: ATMs found in the main cities only

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are widely accepted at hotels throughout Oman

Local Currency: Omani Rial (OMR)

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US Dollars

Where to Exchange: Your guide will advise you



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Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive an airport transfer, both on arrival and departure include in the tour price. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Travel Insurance and Altitude

Please note that your tour involves some walking/trekking at altitude – Jebel Akhdar and Jebel Shams are located approximately 2800-3000m above sea level. Some travel insurance policies may exclude walking and trekking above a certain altitude. Please ensure that your travel insurance is valid for walking at altitude and if you have any doubts please contact your insurance provider.

Visa Information

At the time of writing British nationals do not require a visa for a tourist visit to Oman for less than 14 days

At the time of writing of US and Australian nationals require a visa for Oman.

For further details please visit the applicable website shown below

British Nationals - www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

US Nationals - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

Australian Nationals - www.smartraveller.gov.au/

Other nationals should check the latest requirements with the authorities in their home country, or with the destination's nearest embassy or consulate.

Should you require any documentation to support a visa application, such as a letter of invitation, upon request this will be provided by Undiscovered Destinations after receipt of your balance payment.

As it is the travellers' responsibility to ensure that they meet all entry requirements it is essential that you check the rules and any other conditions at the time of booking and again when making your balance payment. In addition, we would strongly advise that you make a final check around two weeks before your arrival. This is important as requirements can change at short notice. Undiscovered Destinations, when possible, will provide guidance about entry rules, but in the first instance please contact the relevant authorities, including the applicable embassy or consulate for assistance.



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Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to your country.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

For the visitor, Oman is one of the cleanest countries in the region: even small restaurants are inspected regularly. There are no compulsory vaccinations and malaria has almost been eradicated. However, we strongly recommend that you contact your Doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the recommended vaccinations.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

The hottest months are June to September. The summer monsoon just touches the southern coast of Dhofar during these months bringing regular light rain to Salalah and reducing the average daytime highs to 30°C. The most pleasant months to visit Oman are from November through March when daytime temperatures fall into the lower 30s and below. October is still a hot month where temperatures can still reach the high 30's or more. On our group tour you will be visiting the mountainous areas of Jebel Akhdar and Jebel Shams at a higher altitude and so particularly from November – February it can get quite cool at night in these areas with temperatures dropping well into single digits in celsius and also to a lesser extent in the Wahiba Sands. Some showers can occur in the winter months but they are not predictable.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet or windy which in Oman is quite rare but cannot be ruled out. For the mountainous areas particularly from November – February it is advisable to bring some warmer clothes especially for night time and early morning. For the visit to the Sultan Qaboos mosque it is necessary for women to cover knees and arms (full sleeve shirt), and to wear a head scarf and men should wear trousers and no singlets. On the beach it is acceptable to wear swimwear but Oman is still quite a conservative country and you should dress accordingly when travelling around the country. Please do not wear sleeveless shirts. T Shirts are fine.





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Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared and to be adequately immunized. A good insect repellent and bite cream is advisable. Suncream/sunblock is a must – please ensure you bring enough as it may not be available locally. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. It is recommended to also bring a torch (flashlight).

Footwear

Comfortable walking shoes are recommended when visiting the various sights. Sandals are fine when travelling.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Guiding and Transport on tour

The English-speaking guide/tour leader drives the lead vehicle in the convoy and other vehicles are driven by non-English speaking drivers and thus we encourage clients to switch places in the vehicles after stops so that everyone has the opportunity to chat with the guide during journeys.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 230V/50 Hz and British three pin plugs are widely used.

Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated 5 July 2023.