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Tour Notes

Oman Explorer – Self Drive Tailormade Tour

Tour Duration – 8 Days



Tour Rating

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

Tour Pace

Moderate/Busy

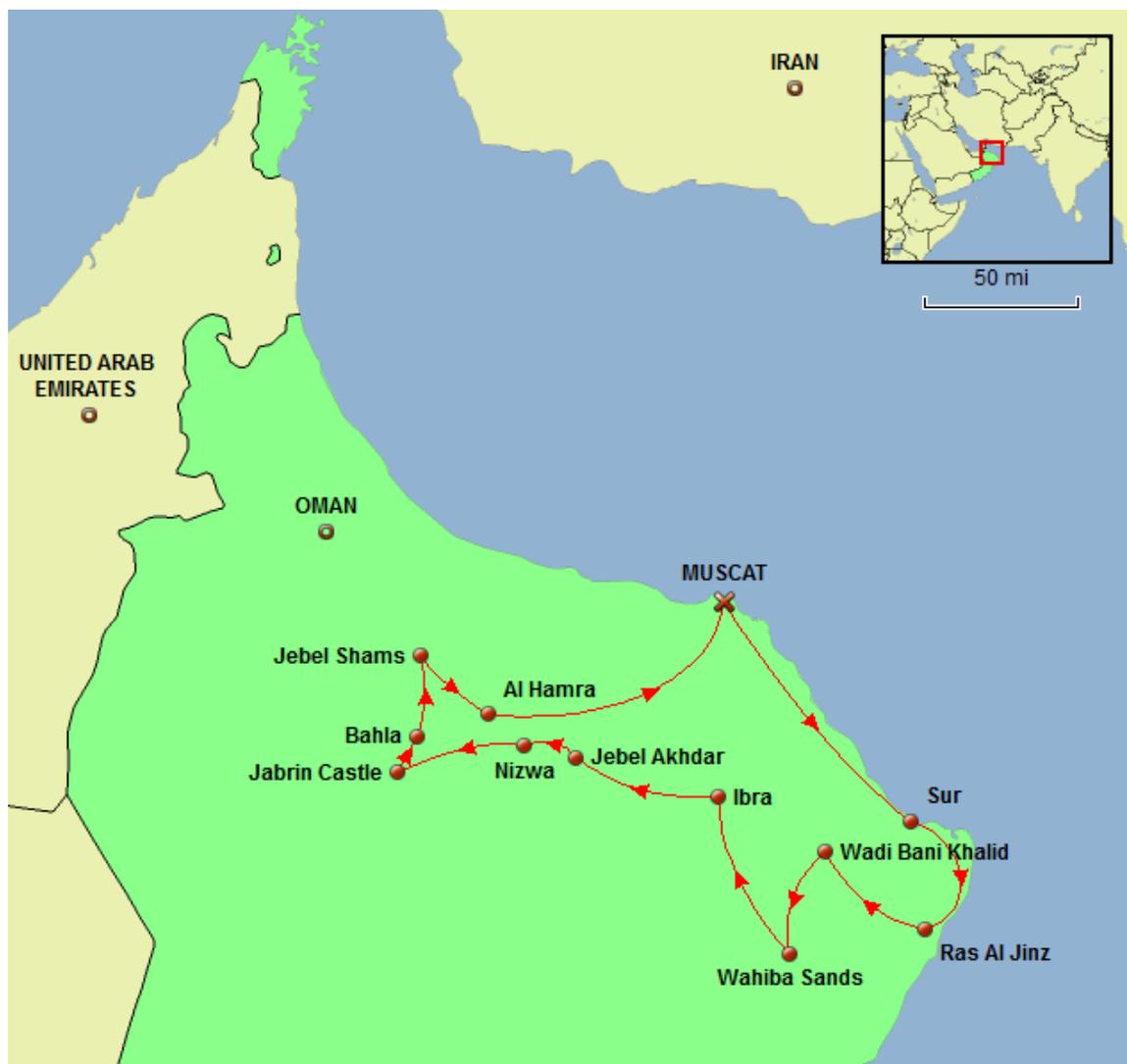
Tour Highlights

- ✓ 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
- ✓ Be able to travel at your own pace and stop when you want on this self-drive tour



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Oman Explorer Self Drive – Tour Map



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mixture of comfortable hotels and permanent tented camp accommodation (no air conditioning in Wahiba Sands). All properties have private bathrooms
- Included Meals:** Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary
- Group Size:** Private Tailormade tour – there is no minimum of maximum group size
- Start Point:** Muscat
- End Point:** Muscat
- Transport:** Self-drive in 4WD Air-Conditioned vehicle
- Country Visited:** Oman
- Options:** Beach extension or fly to the south of Oman to Salalah



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Oman Explorer – Self Drive Tailormade Tour

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 self-drive tour allows you to explore barren deserts and rugged coasts, as well as verdant oases and lush plantations all at your own pace. From remote mountain villages and vast spectacular canyons to desert forts, 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

This is a self-drive tour and therefore you will not be accompanied by a guide on your tour. Our local representative will brief you fully on arrival with regard to the self-drive procedures. On the tour where necessary the services of local guides may be used.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival Muscat (Approximate overall driving time today is 45 minutes)

Arrive in Muscat and meet with our local representative who will brief you on the tour and the procedures with regard to the 4WD self-drive transportation you will be using (please see the tour notes after the itinerary for further information). After the briefing, continue to your accommodation and the rest of the day will be at leisure. No meals nor guided excursions are included today. Overnight at Al Falaj Hotel.

Note – We can book a range of accommodation throughout Oman so please contact us if you are interested in staying in different properties.

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 overall driving time today is 3.5 hours)

Today you start your adventure and drive through spectacular rugged mountains towards the coastal town of Sur. En route, stop at Bimmah Sink Hole, a rather unusual water filled structural depression, and Wadi Shab, an oasis of inviting pools where it may be possible to take a dip.



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Continue to Sur, in the past renowned for its dhow shipyards, before continuing to Ras al Jinz. After an early dinner, you will 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. (BD)

Note – *The visiting of the turtle reserve is conducted in groups so this is not possible as a private excursion.*

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 overall driving time today is 3 hours)

This morning 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. Thereafter, head into the Wahiba Sands, an undulating red and white spectacular sea of dunes. You will meet an escort car at a designated point who will safely navigate you into the dunes. After some exciting dune driving, you will arrive at your desert camp. Overnight 1000 Nights Camp. (BD)

Note – *We recommend staying in the Sheikh tents for an atmospheric Arabian desert experience. These are comfortable and furnished with private bathrooms attached. They do not have air conditioning. If you prefer a room type in the desert with air conditioning please contact us to quote for an upgrade. Also note that alcohol is not served in the desert but you can take it with you.*

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 at leisure to relax. There are a number of optional activities that can be arranged from the camp such as lunch at a Bedouin house, camel trekking and hiking. The activities can either be arranged on the spot subject to availability or they can also be booked in advance so please advise us if you would like the full list), or just simply take in the views over the dunes and relax by the pool. Overnight 1000 Nights Camp. (BLD)



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Day 5: Wahiba Sands – Ibra – Jebel Akhdar – Nizwa (Approximate overall driving time today is 5.5 hours)

After breakfast depart the desert with your escort car and then continue unaccompanied to the historic town of Nizwa, Oman's cultural capital. En route make stops at 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. Also call in at Wadi Habib to see one of the more remote villages and its nearby fruit plantations, before continuing to Nizwa. Overnight Al Falaj Daris Hotel. (BD)

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.

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 overall driving time today is 2 hours)

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

Day 7: Jebel Shams – Al Hamra – Wadi Bani Awf – Muscat (Approximate overall driving time today is 5 hours)

This morning take in spectacular views of Jebel Shams, the 'Grand Canyon of Oman'. Afterwards 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. Then take an incredibly scenic mountain drive to Wadi Bani Awf, the end point of the canyon, to see the 'snake gorge' in the middle of steep mountain cliffs. Continue to Nakhl and visit its restored fort, perched on a rocky outcrop, before returning to Muscat. Overnight Al Falaj Hotel. (B)

Day 8: Departure from 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. Later this afternoon drive back to the airport where you will drop off your vehicle before checking in for your evening onward flight. (B)

Note – Contact is if you wish to extend your stay in Oman. Perhaps to fly north to the Musandam Peninsular for snorkelling or dolphin watching or south to the interesting region of Salalah. Alternatively, we can book one of the man beach hotels for you in Muscat for some relaxation.



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Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions

Meet and greet with briefing of the tour and the self-drive protocols
All accommodation as per the itinerary (many other properties can be booked)
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Transport in private air conditioned 4WD vehicle excluding fuel
Escort vehicle into and back from the Wahiba Sands
Entrance fees for sites as listed as part of the itinerary
Insurance for your self-drive vehicle (see tour notes)

Excluded

International flights
Travel Insurance
Items of a personal nature
Visa if applicable
Drinks
Entrance fees (allow approx GBP £25 per person)
Fuel
Tips (discretionary)

Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). 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.

Accommodation Rating

The tour is based on comfortable mid-range accommodation with private bathroom facilities. Air conditioning is not provided in the Wahiba Sands although you can upgrade to a room type with air conditioning. All properties have a restaurant on site.



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Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). 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 (Note alcohol is not served everywhere in Oman)

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is common practise in the Middle East. If you have been happy with the services of staff assisting you on your adventure then please consider providing a tip.

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: GBP or US Dollars

Where to Exchange: The airport on arrival

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

You will be met on arrival but our local representative who will brief you on the tour ahead and the self-drive procedures and protocols.



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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 being 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

British nationals require a visa to enter Oman. You can apply for this prior to travel. Applications can be made through the [Royal Oman Police portal](#). If you're travelling as a tourist, you can apply for an unsponsored visa. The visa is only valid to enter Oman within 30 days of the date of issue. We advise to apply within 30 days of your arrival date. The visa is then valid for the duration (10 or 30 days) from your arrival date. If travelling on our 8-day Oman tour, you can get a short stay tourist visa, valid for 10 days for OMR 5.00. If you are staying longer, a 30-day visa is required. At present the cost is OMR 20.00. For all other visas, please follow the guidance on the portal.

Most European nationals, together with US, Canadian, and Australian citizens are also eligible for an e-visa. For a complete list visit: <http://www.rop.gov.om/old/english/countrylist1.asp>

U.S. citizens should apply for tourist visas in advance via the [Royal Oman Police E-Visa website](#). However, tourist visas are also available upon arrival at airports and land crossings. The current list of visa types and a schedule of fees are available at the [Royal Oman Police website](#). You must have proof of adequate funds and an onward/return ticket.

It should be noted that most 'G1 Nationals' which includes UK, EU, US and Australian citizens do not require a hotel voucher or letter of invitation to support their unsponsored e-visa tourist application. At the time of writing the only required documents are a passport copy and a copy of a passport sized photo which will need to be uploaded to the e-visa website as jpeg (not PDF) file.

*Regulations do frequently change though, so we advise that you check the current requirements with your nearest Embassy and Foreign Office.

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



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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.

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) for any dimly lit areas.

Footwear

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





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Luggage on tour

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

Access to the Internet

Kindly note that access to the Internet in Oman is widespread and Wi-Fi is available in every location on the main tour, with the exception of the Wahiba Sands. We cannot be responsible for local connection issues or connection speed.

Electric Supply & Plugs

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

Self-drive information

Type of vehicle: 4X4 Car (Toyota Land Cruiser or similar).

Rental Agreement Requirements: Passport, Valid driving license with an IDP (International Driving Permit) and a valid Credit Card.

Insurance: All vehicles will be covered with full comprehensive insurance. Only applicable expense from the clients in the event of an accident would be insurance service charges which is approximately US\$ 150.00. A police report is mandatory after an accident for necessary paper work.

Support: You will be provided with a Rent-A-Car support call centre number as the emergency 24-hour contact details of our local management team.

Daily navigation: Google Maps works very well in Oman so if you have international data plan that is ideal. Alternatively, you can purchase a local sim card from the airport with enough data. Our local representative would be happy to assist where required.

Driving times

The driving times stated in the itinerary are given in the best of faith. Driving times may on occasion be longer due to unforeseen circumstances such as poor weather, road construction activity, mechanical problems etc. Most of the roads in Oman are in good condition and well maintained although on you will be driving in off road conditions into and out of the Wahiba Sands (with an escort car) and also on Day 7 through the mountains to Wadi Bani Awf.

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 07th July 2020.