



Ministry of Tourism

# *Marhaba* *Oman*





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## Marhaba Oman

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# Welcome to Oman

*With pristine beaches, magnificent deserts, rugged mountains and a history that spans over 7,000 years, the Sultanate of Oman will refresh, engage and inspire you.*

Thirsty for adventure? You will love our searing sands and striking gorges. The Hajar and Dhofar ranges, the rolling dunes of Sharqiya, our lush wadis and the huge, open landscapes of the Empty Quarter are waiting to be explored.

Do you love luxury, elegance and style? Do you like to feel close to nature? Whatever your preference, our gorgeous boutique hotels, desert camps and eco-resorts will be your home from home.

But what really sets our nation apart is the beguiling blend of ancient and modern which pervades our heritage and culture.

You will discover it in our architectural treasures – from Bronze Age burial sites and historic forts to our glittering, contemporary Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque and Royal Opera House.

You will encounter it in our cities – where sellers of silver, frankincense and spices ply their trade in labyrinthine souqs, while young men in immaculate traditional dishdashas check the international news on their smartphones.

You will also find it in our warmth and kindness to visitors. Wherever you go, you will be greeted with the words, A'salaam alaykum. Reply with Wa alaykum a'salaam, and you will witness the widest smiles in the world.

The very best of  
*Oman*

*Each of Oman's geographical regions has something unique to offer. Not sure where to start? Here are some suggestions to help you plan the perfect itinerary.*

1 *Muscat*

**Muscat**

Our beautiful, progressive capital city is packed with interest. Do not miss the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Mutrah's colourful souq and the Royal Opera House.

2 *Musandam*

**Khasab**

From this lively town in the scenic north, you can take a dhow cruise through the turquoise waters of Khor ash Sham, Musandam's most spectacular fjord. You can also enjoy the picturesque Khasab Castle overlooking the harbour.

3 4 *Batinah (North & South)*

**Wadi Bani Awf**

Spectacular canyon with steep mountain tracks, streams, springs and pools. A prime target for off-road adventurers.

**Nakhla Fort**

This soaring 17th century castle has richly carpeted rooms and panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and date palm plantations.

**Damaniyat Islands**

With immaculate coral gardens patrolled by turtles, moray eels and iridescent reef fish, this is a gorgeous diving destination.

**Sohar Fort and Museum**

Built between the 13th and 14th century AD, the Sohar Fort is one of the most prominent features in the city of Sohar.

5 *Dhahira*

**Bat, Al Khutm and Al Ayn**

These remote World Heritage listed settlements and tombs are over 4,000 years old. Supremely remote, you may have them all to yourself.

6 *Dakhiliyah*

**Jebel Shams**

Oman's greatest peak is so high, snow sometimes dusts the ground in winter. It is in the central section of the Hajar Mountains, a fantastic region for camping and trekking.

**Al Hoota Cave**

Festooned with stalactites, this limestone cave offers a glimpse of Oman's subterranean landscape, much of which remains unexplored.

**Jabrin**

Picturesque region, famed for its rose gardens and one of the finest forts in Oman, with splendid traditional architecture and an ornate interior.

**Nizwa**

Oman's most characterful regional capital has a historic atmosphere, an impressive fort, a lively Friday morning livestock market and colourful souqs.

**Saiq Plateau**

Magical villages of traditional mudbrick houses and winding alleys cling to the slopes in this part of the western Hajar Mountains.

7 *Buraymi*

**Al Khandaq Fort**

Visit this traditional mud fort which has been restored to its former glory.

8 9 *Sharqiya (North & South)*

**Wadi Shab**

Stroll along this stunningly picturesque mountain gorge where you can swim in cool, emerald green pools beneath sheer sandstone cliffs.

**Ras al Jinz**

The protected beaches at Oman's easternmost tip are a must for wildlife-watchers. Every summer, green turtles return by night to lay their eggs.

**Sharqiya Sands**

The Wahiba Desert is a classic Omani landscape of rolling dunes, where you can learn about Bedouin culture and camp under a dome of stars.

**Wadi Bani Khalid**

The best known wadi of the region. Its stream maintains a constant flow of water throughout the year.

10 *Wusta*

**Duqm**

One to watch. Once a sleepy fishing village, Duqm is set to become a modern coastal hub. Hotels have opened and a brand new airport will follow in 2014.

**Rub al Khali**

For an unforgettable taste of the desert, venture into the vast Empty Quarter, where there are majestic, arid landscapes to explore.

**Ras Madrasah**

This coastal area is known for the cleanliness of its beaches and the purity of its waters. You are likely to see dolphins and turtles swimming close to shore.

**Pink Lagoons**

This beautiful lagoon is an amalgamation of salt water pools. Given the nature of the soil's pink colour, the ponds' water looks pink.

11 *Dhofar*

**Salalah**

Charming coastal city with mild temperatures, beaches, frankincense souqs and a trick up its sleeve – during the summer khareef from June to August (monsoon), its surroundings turn lush and green.



Europe

Marhaba Oman 3

Asia

Middle East

Pacific Ocean

Africa

Indian Ocean

Australia

Sultanate  
Of Oman



# Need to know

## Useful Arabic words and phrases

**Greetings (peace be upon you)**  
a'salaam alaykum

**Greetings (and upon you)**  
wa alaykum a'salaam

**Welcome**  
ahlan wa sahlan

**Hello**  
marhaba

**Hi!**  
hala!

**Goodbye**  
ila al'likaa'

**See you later!**  
ma'a ssalama!

**Please**  
min fadlak

**Thank you**  
shukran

**You are welcome**  
afwan

**Yes**  
na'am

**No**  
la

**How are you?**  
kaifa haluka?

**I'm fine, thank you**  
bikhair, shukran

**God willing**  
insh'allah

**Thanks be to God**  
al hamdu'lillah

**Pleased to meet you**  
souedtoo bi lika'ek

**My name is ...**  
ana ismee ...

**I'm sorry**  
ana asef

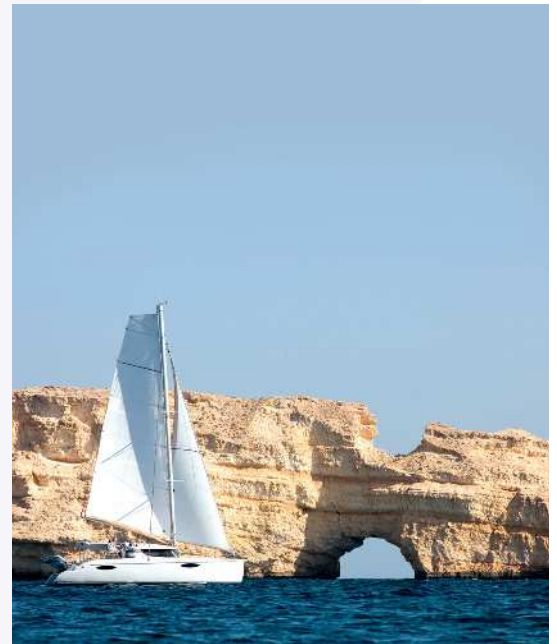
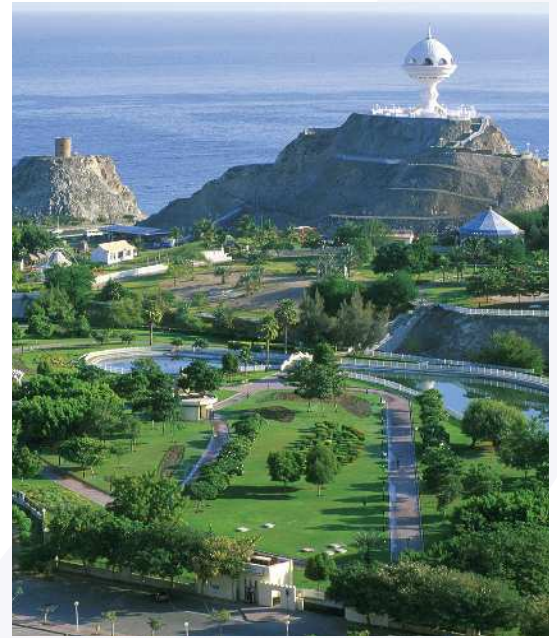
**I do not understand**  
lam af'ham

**Do you speak English?**  
hal tatakallam al ingliziya?

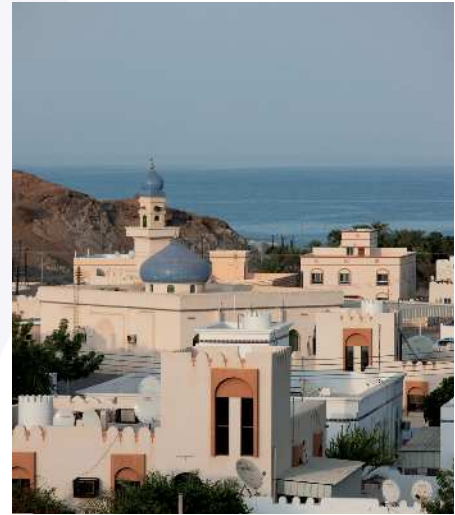
**I need help, please**  
ahtajoo ilal musa'ada raja'an

**Congratulations!**  
mabrouk!

**Great!**  
adheem!







**Head of State**  
His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said

**Government**  
Sultanate of Oman (monarchy)

**Languages**  
Arabic (official), English (commonly used)

**Religion**  
Islam

**Time zone**  
GMT+4

**Country code**  
+968

**National currency**  
Large: Rial, Small: Baisas

**National day**  
18 November



### Did you know?



The Sultanate of Oman is located at the eastern point of the Arabian Peninsula and has an area of 309,500km<sup>2</sup>

Travelling to

# Oman

&

# getting around



### By Air

Oman is easier to get to than you might think. Over 20 international airlines fly direct to Muscat International Airport (MCT), 32km west of the city centre. Take off from London Heathrow with Oman Air, our national carrier, and you will be in Muscat 7.5 hours later. Flying to Oman from Dubai takes barely an hour.

Oman Air offers direct flights from an extensive network of cities in the Middle East, Europe, Asia and Africa, including Abu Dhabi, Doha, Riyadh, Frankfurt, Milan, Paris, Bangkok, Mumbai and Cairo.

You can fly to our southern gateway, Salalah Airport (SLL) in Dhofar, from Jeddah, Dubai, Doha and several Indian cities with Oman Air and other airlines.

Domestic flights connect Muscat with Salalah and Khasab Airport (KHS) in Musandam. New regional airports are being built at Sohar (Batinah), Ras al Hadd (Sharqiya) and Duqm (Wusta).

#### Oman Air

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

#### Oman Airports Management Company

[www.omanairports.co.om](http://www.omanairports.co.om)



### By Land

You can drive into northern Oman from the United Arab Emirates. The journey from Dubai to Muscat takes approximately four hours. Visas are available at the border for eligible passengers (see Visas).

Oman's white-and-orange city taxis are handy for short hops. For longer journeys by road, we recommend you join an organised tour or rent a vehicle, with or without a driver. Petrol is cheap by European standards.

Do not miss the chance to go off-roading in our mountains and dunes. It is one of Oman's essential adventure experiences.



### By Sea

Port Sultan Qaboos in Mutrah (Muscat) is our main port for cruise liners, inter-city ferries and local boat trips. Ships also dock at Khasab and Salalah (Dhofar) in the south.

Oman's National Ferries Company runs a high-speed catamaran ferry service from Muscat to Khasab, which takes just five hours. NFC also connects Khasab with Lima and Shinas (Batinah). Future plans include a water taxi service for Muscat.

#### National Ferries Company

[www.nfc.om](http://www.nfc.om)

## Did you know?



*Over 20 airlines fly direct to Oman. Our national carrier, Oman Air, offers direct flights from over 40 cities around the globe*





Muscat



### Other practicalities

**Visas.** Citizens of most countries require a visa to enter Oman. Single-entry visas, valid for tourism or business, can be obtained on arrival for eligible passengers. For further details, visit [www.rop.gov.om](http://www.rop.gov.om)

**Visa exemptions.** Visitors arriving by air from Dubai or Doha with a valid Dubai or Qatar entry visa do not need an additional visa to enter Oman. Some residents of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE do not need a visa if flying direct from their home country; for further details, visit [www.rop.gov.om](http://www.rop.gov.om)

**Money matters.** The Omani Rial (OMR) is pegged to the US dollar at RO1 = US\$2.6. There are 1,000 Baisas in an Omani Rial. ATMs are widely available and major credit cards are accepted in larger hotels, restaurants and shops. In markets and small businesses, cash is preferred.

**Keeping in touch.** Oman has a good mobile network. Visitors can avoid roaming charges by buying a local SIM from outlets at the airports or shops. Free Wi-Fi is available at Omani airports and a growing number of hotels, banks and urban cafés.

**Dress code.** Oman is a Muslim country and respect for local customs is recommended. Omanis are

not obliged to cover up fully in public, but most wear long, loose, modest clothing and visitors are advised to do the same. Women should cover their head with a light shawl when visiting the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque or traditional rural communities. Things are generally more relaxed in tourist resorts and at sea, but you should change out of your beachwear when leaving the boat, beach or pool.

**Climate.** Oman is pleasantly warm for eight months of the year. From October to April, temperatures rarely dip below 20°C or exceed 30°C. The hottest months are from May to September. In June and July, the temperature often soars to 40°C. The coast can be humid, but most of the country remains arid all year. The exception is Salalah in the south, where the khareef, a monsoon, brings cooling rain between June and August. Some areas in the Wusta and Sharqiya region also remain cool in the summer months.

**When to travel.** The most popular months to visit Oman are November to March. There are good reasons to visit in summer, too. The turtle-watching season in Sharqiya lasts from June to August. From late June, locals converge on southern Dhofar to enjoy its temperate climate and lush scenery. Jebel Shams, Al Ashkhara and Al Wusta coastline are amongst the cooler places to visit in the summer.



Steeped in

# heritage & culture

*Oman is a thoroughly forward-looking nation, but we are proud of our distinctive architecture, customs and traditions crafted over the centuries. Our culture is both ancient and modern, with new ideas to complement the old.*

Oman, the oldest independent state in the Arab world, is peppered with traces of the past. The remains of protohistoric settlements pinpoint our earliest trading places. Striking fortresses recall a time when rivals tussled for territory. Our ancient irrigation channels reveal the ingenuity of our ancestors.

Visit our souqs and museums for a sense of our skills as traders and craftsmen. We are makers of pottery, textiles and silverware and are also camel-rearers, horse-breeders and boat-builders.

We blend exquisite traditional fragrances, many of them based on that quintessential Omani ingredient, frankincense, and are firm believers in old-fashioned hospitality.

## Cultural highlights

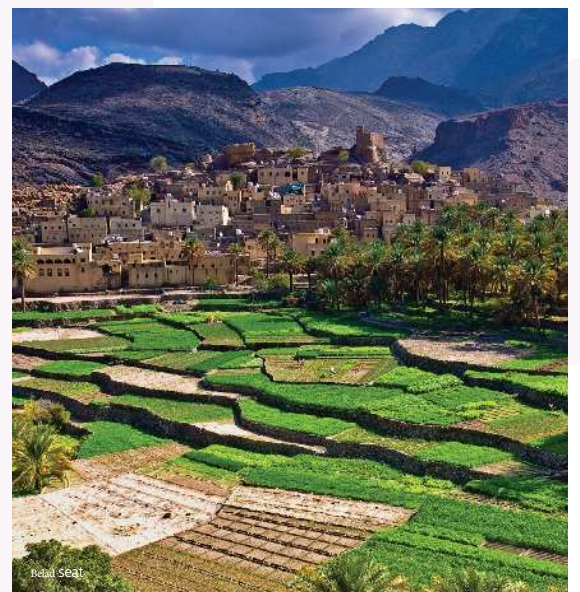
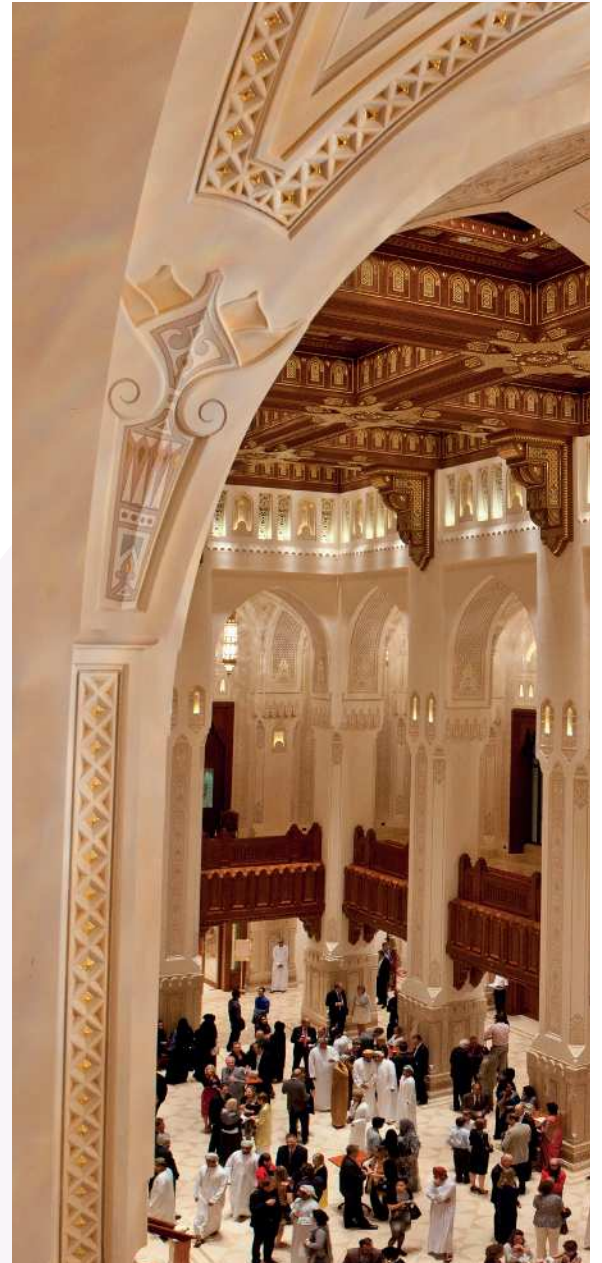
**Royal Opera House.** Muscat's glittering new performing arts centre features exquisite decorative features inspired by Middle Eastern tradition. Enjoy rich and diverse artistic creations from Oman, the region and the world. It hosts opera, music, dance and family events.

[www.rohmuscat.org.om](http://www.rohmuscat.org.om), Jan-Dec

**Muscat Festival.** Fabulously colourful month-long celebration featuring parades, performances, fireworks and lively demonstrations of traditional crafts and skills. [www.muscat-festival.com](http://www.muscat-festival.com), Feb

**Salalah Tourism Festival.** Timed to coincide with Salalah's verdant khareef, this four-week festival offers dances, concerts and plenty of shopping opportunities.

[www.salalah-tourismfestival.com](http://www.salalah-tourismfestival.com), Jun-Jul







Interior - Royal Opera House

## Did you know?

?

Oman's UNESCO World Heritage Sites include:

- Bahla fort (1987)
- Bat, Al-Khutm and Al-Ayn (1988)
- The Land of Frankincense (2000)
- Al Aflaj irrigation system (2006)



Nakhal Fort



Royal Opera House

Six of the best

## heritage sites

1

### Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque

Opulent, spacious and serene, Muscat's magnificent centrepiece is the only Omani mosque that is routinely open to both Muslim and non-Muslim visitors.

2

### Mutrah Souq

Haggle your heart out at Oman's most famous souq, near Port Sultan Qaboos. This maze of indoor stalls offers silverware, antiques, frankincense, garments and spices galore.

3

### Al Aflaj Irrigation Systems

Dating back to AD 500, this spectacular system uses gravity to channel water from underground sources or springs to support agriculture and domestic use.

4

### Forts

Oman's forts offer a powerful culture with stunning views of historic towns. Built in the third millennium BC, Bahla fort is a must-see. Experience its old alleys, its 13km extended wall and its picturesque terraces.

5

### Frankincense Trail

Get an overview of local history at Salalah's Museum of the Frankincense Land, then head out to explore the surrounding Boswellia groves and archaeological sites.

6

### Al Ayn Beehive Tombs

These fascinating Bronze Age burial chambers date back to a time when local communities were becoming sophisticated and hierarchical through trade.





## Did you know?



At over 30m high and 110m in circumference, Nizwa's brooding tower is the largest in the Arabian Peninsula

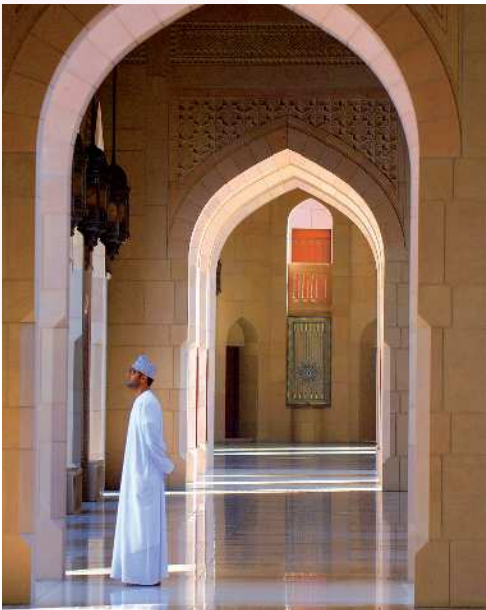






# Wander through time in our *SOUQS* & *forts*

*While other capitals bristle with steel and glass, Muscat remains refreshingly low-rise, its whitewashed buildings watched over by 16th century forts. Our archaeological sites hint at a dynamic past, and our souqs hum with an energy that has been handed down the centuries.*



**Omani architecture.** To admire Omani buildings at their grandest, spend time in Muscat or Salalah, then head inland to the rural oases to explore traditional mudbrick villages. Their gardens of roses, apricots and pomegranates are watered by the centuries-old falaj irrigation system of communal underground channels (afaj), designed to minimise evaporation.

**Archaeological sites.** Our oldest known structures date back to the third millennium BC. The remote drystone tombs and settlements of Bat, Al Khutm and Al Ayn, a World Heritage Site, are the most complete collection of their type in the world. Khor Rori, near Salalah, was a first century fortified town, built to defend the priceless frankincense trees in the region.

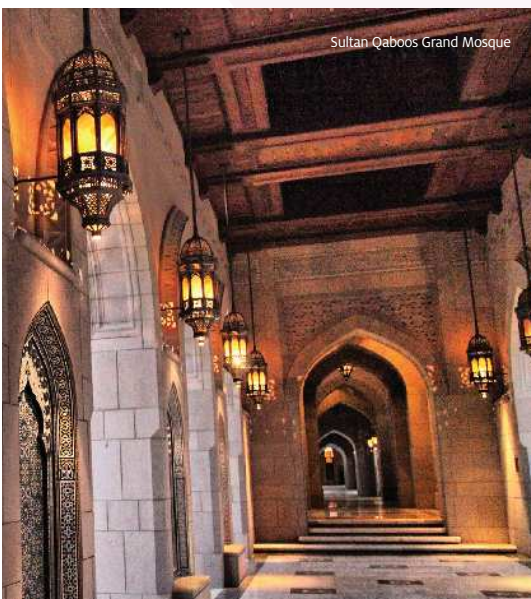
**Forts, castles and towers.** We have hundreds of fortresses – but if you only have time to visit one, make it Jabrin. Built in 1670, it is a jewel box of a castle. Every ceiling is a work of art. If you would like to visit a few more fortresses, try Nizwa, Bahla and the Rustaq Loop (Nakhal, Rustaq and Al Hazm), then move on to Sohar, Mirbat or Khasab. Some, like Rustaq, are massive, turreted structures with endless staircases and secret passages; others, like Nakhal, are almost homely. The oldest were built in the 13th century, a time of fierce invasions and tribal rivalries. Over time, they have housed sultans, acted as lookouts and withstood devastating sieges.

**Souqs.** In towns like Mutrah, Nizwa, Rustaq and Salalah, trading is a way of life. The aim is not just to buy and sell, but also to pour coffee, share it with friends and catch up on the news. Visitors, too, can take the pulse of an Omani town by exploring its souqs or covered markets, their stalls stacked with incense, produce, spices and antiques.

At Nizwa's famous Friday souq, cows, sheep and goats are paraded before an attentive crowd of potential bidders. Trading kicks off in the early morning and finishes before midday prayers. In general, Omanis like to shop in the cool of the evening. To enjoy the souqs at their most lively and atmospheric, visit after sunset.

**Mosques.** The soulful call to prayer is an essential part of the Omani soundscape and the minarets and domes of our mosques add grace to our skylines. Non-Muslims should not enter an Omani mosque without special permission. The exception is Muscat's breathtaking Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, which is open to all, except during Friday prayers.

Completed in 2001, this is considered one of the most impressive and beautiful places of worship in the Gulf. Once inside, respectful dress and behaviour are expected.



Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque



Immerse yourself in our

# customs & traditions

*A strong sense of belonging - to nation, tribe and family - is something that Omanis prize very highly. It is reflected in the way we dress and honour traditional customs. It is also expressed through the respect and hospitality we extend to those around us.*

**Customs.** Under the influence of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, Oman has become a modern, peaceful Sultanate which fosters open-minded attitudes while preserving its cultural integrity. Our culture is built around Islam and our profound respect for human relationships.

Generosity is extremely important to us: it is common for Omanis to welcome strangers into their homes for coffee or a cool drink and some dates, and it is always polite to accept.

For Omanis, national dress is the norm and appropriate greetings are essential. However, our friendships with outsiders are more relaxed.

Islamic tradition requires Omanis to pray five times every day. For one month per year, the holy fast of Ramadan is observed from dawn to dusk.

**Frankincense.** Fragrant and therapeutic, frankincense is the perfume of kings. We have used it for centuries to scent our rooms, furnishings and clothing. You will catch wafts of it wherever you go.

In its raw state, it looks crystalline. In fact, it is the resin of a tree, the *Boswellia sacra*, found in many Middle Eastern and African countries.

Experts agree that the trees which grow wild near Salalah in southern Dhofar produce the best frankincense in the world. To find out exactly how it is harvested, just hire a local guide.

Omani frankincense makes a delightful souvenir. If you would like to buy the best, look for *hojari* or *fusoos*, exquisite varieties with an intense, citrus note. The paler and larger the chunks, the better the quality.

**Rosewater.** The Jebel Akhdar highlands, northeast of Nizwa, have a Mediterranean-style climate that is perfect for growing sweet-scented roses. First introduced by Persian settlers, they are now widely cultivated, filling the air with fragrance when they burst into bloom in April and May. The petals are plucked by hand in the cool of the morning, then boiled to produce a vapour which condenses into the finest rosewater – an essential ingredient for traditional Omani halwa.



Burning Frankincense



Omani Henna







## Did you know?

?

*The prayer carpet in our Grand Mosque is the largest of its type ever handmade. It contains 1,700,000,000 knots, covers 4,343m<sup>2</sup>, weighs 21 tonnes and took four years to weave*

**Bakhoor.** Frankincense and rosewater are not the only aromatic substances we produce. Bakhoor is almost as ubiquitous. It is a blend of oil-soaked woodchips and natural ingredients such as sandalwood, attar and myrrh. Each specialist has their own secret recipe. Like frankincense, we gently burn it over charcoal. If you like the sound of that, you will love Muscat's Bait al Zubair Museum, which has a perfume section, and the souqs in Salalah which sell nothing but traditional fragrances.

**Craftsmanship.** Omani craftsmen work with silver, copper, wood, textiles, leather and clay. Our khanjars, the curved daggers which are a national symbol, have intricate silver scabbards and deer-horn hilts. You will see beautiful examples in the Mutrah and Nizwa souqs, along with plenty of silver jewellery.

Look out for traditional mabkharas, incense burners, handmade from silver, porcelain or pottery. And if you would like to see dhow-builders at work, visit Sur, the cradle of our maritime traditions, with sweeping beaches and an attractive corniche.

**Fishing.** At Mutrah's stunning new fish market, you will see shining hauls of tuna, snappers and sardines, fresh from the ocean. Omani fishermen are outgoing adventurers who, over six millennia, have forged trading relationships as far afield as Mesopotamia, India, East Africa and China.





Rich in

# wildlife & nature

*As part of our commitment to responsible, sustainable tourism, Oman takes great care to conserve the superb habitats and geological features which make our landscapes unique. Pack your swimwear, boots and binoculars, and prepare to be amazed.*

*The arid region of Wusta is home to the endangered Arabian Oryx.*







You have heard of our cities, mosques and souqs, but have you discovered our secret beaches and islands, explored our luxuriant oases or climbed our jagged mountains? Have you hiked along a shady wadi or camped out among our dunes?

Oman's nature reserves and wildlife sanctuaries protect important coastal and desert habitats totalling almost 30,000km<sup>2</sup>. The sheer diversity of our landscapes will astonish and inspire you.

Oman's location in the northern reaches of the Indian Ocean makes our coastal waters a haven for dolphins, whales and birds. Close to the coast, our coral gardens teem with colourful fish. Our protected coves are crucial breeding grounds for endangered marine turtles. And our mountains and deserts are home to rare land



Damaniyat Islands

mammals including wild goats, sand cats, Nubian ibex and Arabian oryx, an icon of the Gulf. Our natural heritage is extraordinarily precious. It is a privilege to share it.

**Nature reserves.** Time your visit carefully, and you can witness an enchanting sight: from June to August, the Ras al Jinz Turtle Reserve is one of the best places in the world to see green turtles nesting, hatching and escaping to the sea.

For divers, snorkellers and birdwatchers, the Damaniyat Islands Nature Reserve is a must. It is a chain of islands stretching 20km from east to west, with fabulous coral formations. This is a breeding ground for gulls, terns, ospreys and sooty falcons. Rare hawksbill turtles also nest in unusually large numbers on the quiet beaches.



Our other significant reserves include the Dhofar Lagoons, superb for birds, and the Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve in the Dhofar highlands, one of the last remaining habitats for Arabian leopards.

**Birds.** Oman's cool uplands are rich in birdlife, particularly vultures and eagles. For the best birdwatching, you will need to return to the coast. Of Oman's 400 or so species, three quarters have been seen on or around Masirah Island, which lies on several important migration routes. The best time to visit is autumn and winter, when huge numbers are present.

Six of the best

## wildlife-watching hotspots

1

### Best for dolphins

*Khasab.* Take a dhow cruise through the ruggedly scenic, fjord-like khors of northern Musandam, where humpback dolphins are commonly seen at play.

2

### Best for turtles

*Ras al Jinz.* Visit Sharqiya's turtle reserve on a summer's night, and watch in amazement as female turtles haul themselves up the sands to dig their nests.

3

### Best for whales

*Mirbat.* This picturesque southern town has a small fort looking out to sea. If you are on a sailing trip, you may see humpback whales in the waters nearby.

4

### Best for tropical fish

*Damaniyat Islands.* Dive The Aquarium, as the islands' best scuba site is known, to see flitting fish, dazzling nudibranchs and delicate seahorses.

5

### Best for birds

*Masirah Island.* Well over 300 species including kingfishers, plovers, terns and flamingos have been counted on Masirah's wetlands and mudflats.

6

### Best for desert mammals

*Wusta.* This arid region is home to endangered Arabian oryx, a striking-looking gazelle, plus Nubian ibex, desert foxes, sand cats and caracals.





Bandar Khayran

## Did you know?



The Ras al Jinz Turtle Reserve protects 120km<sup>2</sup> of pristine coastal habitat including 45km of beaches and headlands. The green turtles which nest here lay their eggs in clutches of over 100



Marine Life





Encounter the wonders of our

# SEAS & LAGOONS

*If you count every beach, cove, island and inlet, our coastline measures 3,165km. This amazing marine environment harbours an abundance of wildlife, including whales, dolphins, turtles, seahorses, flamingos and wonderfully colourful fish. Jump on a boat, and take a look.*

**Beaches, islands and coral reefs.** Our beaches are wonderful places to picnic, swim or soak up the winter sun. They are also fascinating natural habitats that are sometimes so secluded, you will feel you have made a new discovery.

Thanks to Salalah's delightful microclimate, its palm-fringed beaches are among our best. There are many more gems along our unspoilt coastline.

Island-hoppers and divers will love the scenery at Musandam's northern tip and the uninhabited Sawadi and Damaniyat Islands, northwest of Muscat. Masirah Island is a mighty desert in miniature where, for now, you may see more turtles than tourists.

**Khors, creeks and lagoons.** Musandam's fjord-like khors are possibly the Gulf coast's most dramatic natural feature. Their idyllic, dolphin-dotted waters are hemmed in by sheer cliffs, which rise hundreds of metres into the sky.

Just a few miles from the Muscat is Bandar Khayran, a magical series of calm, rocky inlets and mangrove-fringed tidal creeks, ideal for swimming, snorkelling and birdwatching.

In the south, around Salalah in the south, you will find calm lagoons where flamingos, herons and egrets are often seen.

**Turtles.** Every year, thousands of endangered turtles make their way from the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to lay their eggs on the Omani beaches where they were born. This annual migration is one of the Middle East's most remarkable wildlife events.

Five turtle species are found in our waters – hawksbill, green, leatherback, loggerhead and olive ridley – and all but the leatherback nest on our shores.

The most important sites are Masirah Island and Ras al Jinz. Masirah is visited by all four nesting species, particularly loggerheads, while Ras al Jinz is one of the world's most significant green turtle colonies. Visit during the egg-laying season and wildlife guides will show you the

nesting sites by night so you can watch the action in close up. If you are lucky, you may also see hatchlings make a dash for the sea.

**Dolphins.** Take a short boat trip from Muscat and you may see a pod or two of spinner dolphins, named for their acrobatic leaps, in the waters near the capital. In northern Musandam, the wildlife-watching boats and eco-friendly wooden dhows which cruise along Khor ash Sham from Khasab often pass humpback dolphins, jumping or socialising with their young.

**Whales.** Oman's waters are patrolled by blue, humpback and Bryde's whales. The deep, nutrient-rich waters of southern Oman sometimes tempt them close to shore. They are rarely seen from the land, but with luck, you might spot one when you are out at sea.

Explore our wildest

# mountains & dunes

*If you love nature, our landscapes will beckon you on at every turn. Scored with dramatic canyons and gullies, the Hajar and Jebel Akhdar mountains are utterly unmissable. Dhofar's lush uplands and the drifting, burnished dunelands of Sharqiya and Rub al Khali are sure to impress you too.*

## Did you know?



*Dhofar's Furious Road climbs 400m in 5km via eight thrilling hairpin bends*

**Mountains and canyons.** The crumpled Hajar Mountains provide a commanding backdrop to Muscat and northeast Oman and an exciting target for adventurers. Daubed in shades of russet and mauve, they may look barren from a distance, but waterfalls and springs keep their cooler slopes and valleys fertile. The highest range is called Jebel Akhdar, Green Mountains, after its juniper woodlands. Jebel Shams, Sun Mountain, the loftiest peak, offers spectacular views of the Wadi Nakr and Wadi Ghul canyons.

In the hinterland of southern Oman, the Dhofar highlands are home to pastoral Jebali tribesmen and the last-known wild Arabian leopards. During the khareef or monsoon, the region becomes a misty, verdant garden, watered by tumbling rivers.

**Wadis.** Our deep, rocky gullies, carved out by seasonal floodwaters over millennia, beg to be explored on foot or by 4WD, stopping to picnic or camp on the way. Even in the height of

summer, wadis offer shade and a cool breeze. Some, such as Wadi Shab near Sur, are lush with palms and dotted with enticing freshwater pools, perfect for a dip. The rugged and highly scenic Wadi Bani Awf in the Western Hajar has exhilarating trails. Just make sure you check the local weather forecast, as seasonal storms can cause dangerous flash floods.

**Deserts.** Sharqiya Sands, also known as Wahiba Sands, is without a doubt one of the most beautiful deserts in the Arabian Peninsula. Its towering dunes, ranging in hue from deep red to rich honey, tumble down from the Eastern Hajar before crashing into the Arabian Sea. In southwest Oman, Rub al Khali, the Empty Quarter, is a vast sea of shifting dunes, stretching right to the horizon. Our deserts support a wide variety of highly adapted insects, reptiles, birds and mammals including sand cats, oryx and spiny-tailed lizards.





*Did you know?*

?

*The highest point in Oman, Jebel Shams, is 3,009m above sea level. From here, you can enjoy spectacular views of Wadi Nakhr, our 'Grand Canyon'*



A taste for

# *sport* — & — *adventure*

*Oman is a superb destination for an outdoor holiday. Our open waters and vast, untamed wilderness will have you itching to explore – on foot, by boat, on two wheels or four. Of our many exciting activities, which will you choose? When it comes to adventure, the sky is the limit.*

Omanis are passionate about racing. For centuries, this was all about camels – a tradition that His Majesty Sultan Qaboos is keen to support and sustain. These days, it is yachting, cycling and motor racing that really get us on our feet.

To create your own adventure, have a go at hiking, climbing, abseiling, caving or off-roading. If you love getting your feet wet, you will be in your element – our beach resorts and marinas offer watersports galore.

Our world class golf courses are bound to bring out the best in your game. With championship-standard courses surrounded by impressive scenery, a relaxing round of golf can feel like an adventure in Oman. Muscat's best clubs have fantastic mountain and ocean views.







Six of the best  
*sporting events*

1

**Tour of Oman**

Launched in 2010, this long-distance cycle race has quickly become one of the highlights of our sporting calendar. It lasts six days and attracts athletes from all over the world. **Feb**

2

**Mussanah Race Week**

Over two hundred top sailors from 30 countries battle it out in the Gulf of Oman, near Muscat, at this high-octane international dinghy regatta, hosted by Oman Sail. **Mar**

3

**Rally Oman**

This five-stage motor event kicks off in Muscat then proceeds to Sohar, Nizwa and Sur before returning to Muscat. The routes are rugged and the pace fast and furious. **Mar-Dec**

4

**Royal Camel Races**

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has done much to preserve Oman's traditional sporting culture. At tracks in every region, professional camel jockeys battle it out on his pedigree steeds. **Sep-Mar**

5

**Horse Races**

Horse races such as The Royal Horse Racing organised by the Royal Stables are held annually and is a favourite pastime for Omanis. **Dec-Apr**

6

**National Bank of Oman Golf Classic**

The championship course at Almourj Golf, The Wave, Muscat is the perfect setting for this promising new European Challenge tournament. **Oct**





Feel the energy of our

# wind — & — waves

*With sparkling seas and state-of-the-art marinas,  
Oman is a fine place to catch the breeze.  
Our calm coastal inlets are perfect for kayaking,  
while beneath the surface, a whole new world of  
coral reefs and marine creatures awaits.*







**Sailing.** To make the most of the fine sailing conditions near Muscat, start from Mussanah Marina, Oman Sail's marina at the Millennium Resort Mussanah, where dinghy, yacht and powerboat instruction, skippered charters and bareboat rental are all available. You may also opt for the new Almouj Marina, Oman's largest private yachting hub and home to Oman Sail's sailing school, at The Wave, Muscat.

There is another superb sailing school at Marina Bandar al Rowhda, south of the city. Sail to the fabulous Damaniyat Islands off the Batinah coast. With a week to spare, you could go island-hopping, discovering hidden beaches and anchoring in sheltered, secluded bays.

**Cruising.** For a taste of sailing at its most leisurely, book a short, skippered cruise from Muscat, Sur, Khasab or elsewhere, enjoying drinks and lunch or canapés onboard while the crew take care of everything. Day trips and overnight cruises from Khasab will show you Khor ash Sham, Telegraph Island and the remote village of Kumzar, with dolphins dancing past your boat along the way.

**Kayaking.** If you would prefer more of a workout, you could rent a kayak for an hour or two, or join a long-distance kayaking tour to explore Oman's lovely inlets, fjords and fishing villages by paddle power, camping on pale, sandy beaches.

**Windsurfing and kiteboarding.** Windsurfing is a fantastic, eco-friendly way to enjoy our open waters, with massive health benefits. Oman's modern marinas offer instruction and most beach hotels have equipment for hire. Kiteboarding is still relatively new to Oman, but it is taking off in a big way at Al Sawadi, Duqm and Masirah Island. From May to September, strong winds guarantee a high-octane experience.

**Surfing.** Year-round breakers and manageable summer temperatures make Oman one of the best surfing destinations in the Middle East. Head for the southeast coast to Salalah, where quality surf breaks onto the sandy beaches of the Arabian Sea. June to September brings the best swells.

**Diving and snorkelling.** Whether you are a snorkeller, a seasoned scuba diver or a novice diver who's keen to learn, you will be dazzled by our underwater world. Hidden just beneath the waves are reefs, drop-offs and coral-lined fjords. Try the Damaniyat Islands, whose waters are

home to hawksbill turtles, leopard sharks, moray eels and an amazing array of tropical fish. Gentle whale sharks are regular visitors too.

Other rewarding sites within easy reach of Muscat include Bandar Jissah's wonderful coral formations, Bandar Khayran's protected coves and creeks and the shark breeding grounds around Fahal Island.

In Musandam, northern Oman, Lima Rock hosts barracuda, nurse sharks, rays and sunfish. Visibility is best from October to May, particularly in April, when the seas are calm.



Discover landscapes of

# majesty & mystery

*It is time to rev things up a bit. Join us on an action-packed adventure in which we scale cliffs, abseil into caves, clamber through canyons and roar across the desert in a top-of-the-range 4x4. It will be the ride of your life, with scenery to take your breath away.*

**Off-road driving.** Gaze up at the Hajar Mountains from Muscat, and you might wonder what is up there. You can find out. To experience the highlands at their best, leave the tarmac behind and tackle steep, challenging tracks through charming mountain villages planted with pomegranates and roses. Your adventure will not be complete without a dose of wadi-bashing, switching into 4WD to drive along scenic river beds.

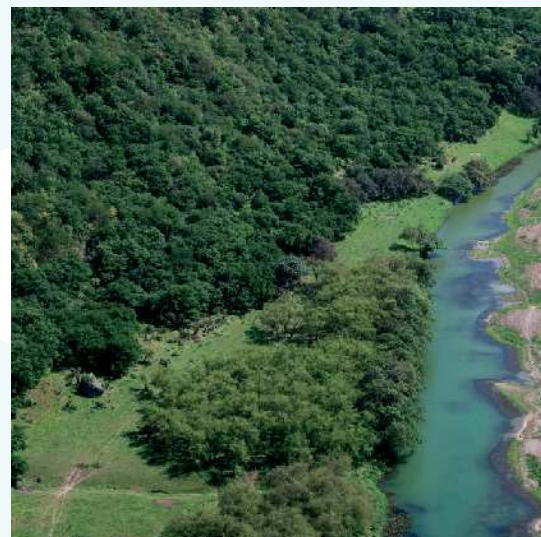
On a 4WD journey into the Wahiba desert, you can learn how the Bedouins steer across the sand, then dash down the dunes on a board or on foot – it is fantastic fun. Have lunch with a Bedouin family for further insights into their lifestyle and soak up the atmosphere under an apricot sky at sunset before camping beneath the stars.

**Hiking and canyoning.** Marked hiking trails lead deep into Oman's enigmatic hinterland. Exciting spots to start include Jebel Shams for mountain scenery, or Sharqiya's duneland camps for a taste of the desert. The going can be tough, but the scenery is worth every step.

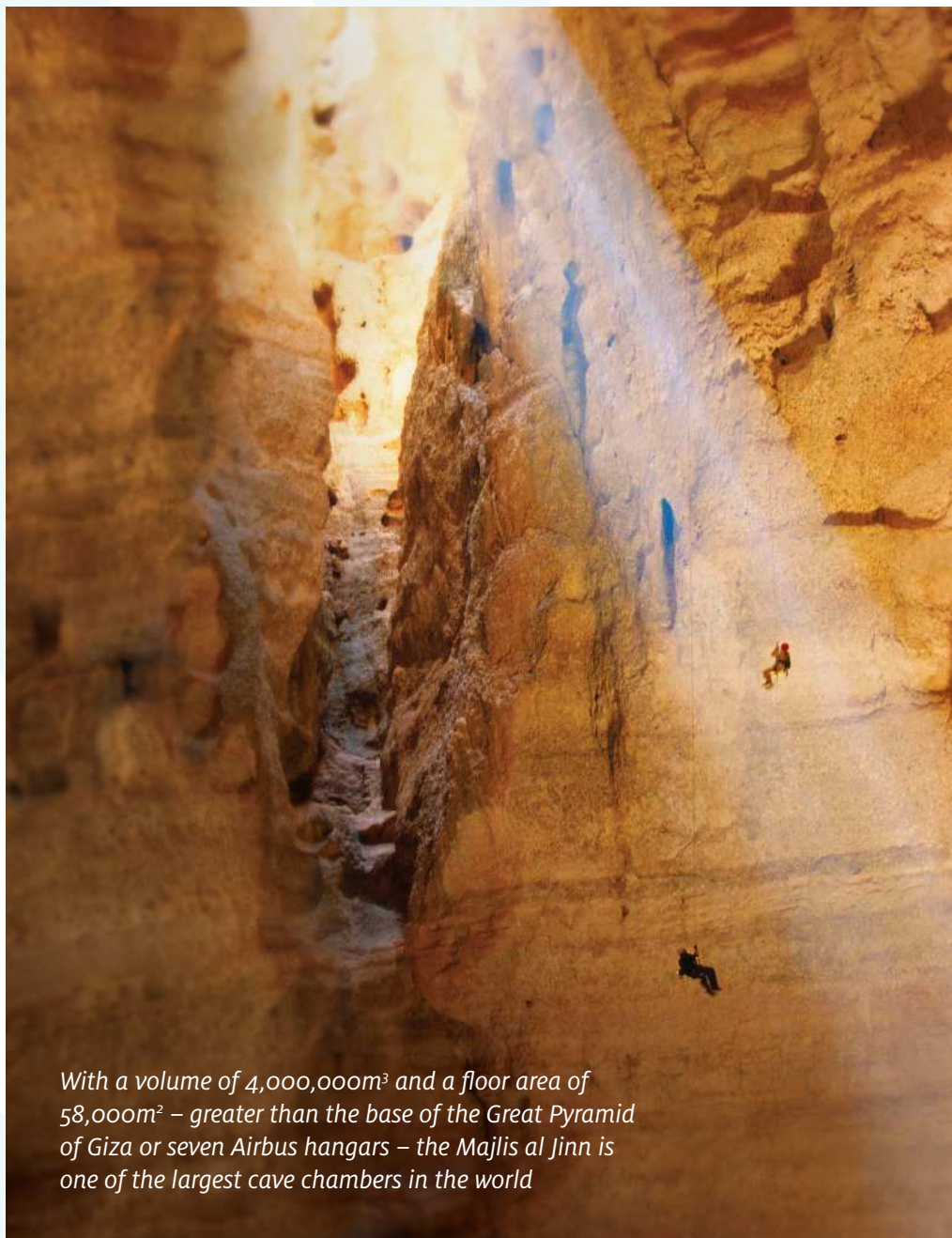
**Climbing, abseiling and caving.** Oman is a sublime destination for climbers, with over 160 graded ascents. If you are a serious scrambler, you will have heard of Jebel Misht (2,090m) in the Akhdar range. It has the most challenging rock face on the Arabian Peninsula – a thrill for those in top physical condition. Oman's highest mountain, Jebel Shams (3,009m), has cliffs which are superb for abseiling.

For something completely different, try abseiling into the Majlis al Jinn (Genie's Meeting Place), Sharqiya. On the surface, the only clues to its presence are three inconspicuous holes. Beneath, it is a vast cavern.

Al Hoota, at the foot of Jebel Shams, provides an easier introduction to caving. It is an eco-friendly tourist attraction with illuminated pathways which pass crystal-garnished walls, stalactites and an underground lake.







*With a volume of 4,000,000m<sup>3</sup> and a floor area of 58,000m<sup>2</sup> – greater than the base of the Great Pyramid of Giza or seven Airbus hangars – the Majlis al Jinn is one of the largest cave chambers in the world*

## Did you know?

?

*For the ultimate adventure within easy reach of Muscat, head for Sharqiya's Wahiba Sands, where the desert stretches for 12,500km<sup>2</sup> and the dunes can reach 200m in height*

**Canyoning is even more energetic.** Fans converge on Wadi Bimma (Snake Gorge) in Wadi Bani Awf to bound over boulders, leap into pools and wade through streams.

**Horse riding and camel trekking.** Oman has a long history of equestrianism and breeds some of the most beautiful horses in the world. Hire an expert guide, and you can explore the Wahiba Sands on horseback – a fascinating, eco-friendly way to immerse yourself in this intriguing region. Or ride a camel, in traditional Bedouin style. It is a pleasingly rhythmic experience.

**Wild camping.** Oman has gorgeous luxury camps. If you prefer your camping to feel more raw and spontaneous, pitch a tent on a little-known beach or deep in the dunes. Experienced guides can show you the best spots.





# Food & drink

*Omani cuisine reflects our rich ethnic and tribal mix. Our chefs blend flavours from the Arabian and Indian subcontinents in dishes such as grilled mishkak kebabs, shuwwa and harees.*

Traditionally, Omani families entertain at home rather than in restaurants, but our hotel scene is expanding, and with it, our restaurant culture.

Many hotels serve international cuisine, but if you would like to try something more authentically Omani, look out for qabooli (a hearty dish of rice, nuts, raisins and mutton or beef), harees (meat stew, thickened with wheat) and shuwa (tender, lightly spiced, slow-roasted meat).

Our classic sweet delicacies are dates and halwa, a soft blend of sugar, semolina, ghee, saffron, almonds and fragrant rosewater. Both go perfectly with khawa. This is an aromatic black coffee, flavoured with cardamom and poured from a metal coffeepot into beakers (finjan), as a sign of hospitality. It is always polite to accept. When you have finished, just shake our cup gently, saying Bas, shukran (Enough, thank you).

## Places to eat

**Al Bustan Palace.** One of the finest places in Oman for fresh, locally-caught fish and seafood – and you can enjoy it right beside the sea, under the stars. Muscat.

Call +968 2479 9666 [www.ritzcarlton.com](http://www.ritzcarlton.com)

**Bin Ateeq.** Reassuringly authentic, with majlis cushions on the floor, khanjar daggers on the walls and harees on the menu. Branches in Muscat, Salalah and Nizwa.

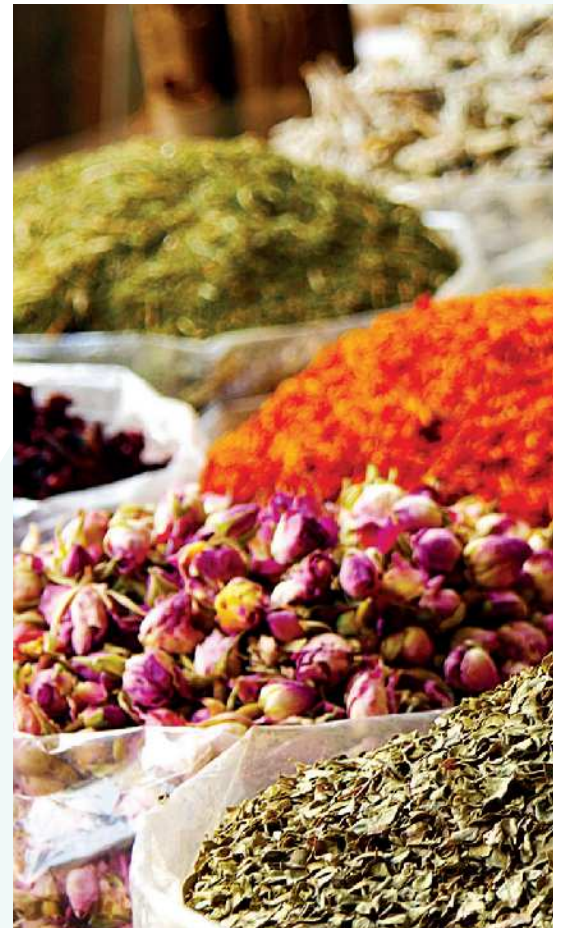
[www.binateeqoman.com](http://www.binateeqoman.com)

**The Chedi.** This stylish hotel's award-winning restaurant offers Omani, Asian and international cuisine in serene surroundings which ooze modern-Arabian chic. Al-Ghobra.

Call +968 2452 4400 [www.ghmhotels.com](http://www.ghmhotels.com)

**Kargeen Caffé.** Popular with expats and locals, this laid-back Muscat restaurant serves Omani grills and Italian dishes in a lantern-lit garden and shisha lounge. Madinat al Sultan Qaboos Plaza.

Call +968 2469 2269 [www.kargeencaffe.com](http://www.kargeencaffe.com)







**Mumtaz Mahal.** One of Muscat's best Indian restaurants, with excellent cooking and sweeping views. For a theatrical finish, order a Snake Coffee, flavoured with flambéed orange peel. Qurum.

Call +968 2460 4907 [www.mumtazmahal.net](http://www.mumtazmahal.net)

**Opera Galleria.** The complex adjoining Muscat's beautifully designed Royal Opera House houses cafés and fine dining restaurants with an international flavour. Muscat.

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

#### Slider Station

This industrial chic restaurant specializes in gourmet and classic sliders and burgers as well as a wide range of American grills, tapas and salads. Call +968 2469 8990

[www.sliderstation.com/oman](http://www.sliderstation.com/oman)

#### Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort and Spa.

This impressive resort has several restaurants – choose between Arabian, Moroccan, Italian, Lebanese, Asian or traditional Omani seafood. Barr al Jissah.

Call +968 2477 6666 [www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com)

#### Tokyo Taro Restaurant

Enjoy authentic Japanese food with a 'Tepanyaki' counter and a variety of sushi, sashimi and tempura.

Call +968 2470 2311 [www.omanhotels.com/alfalaj](http://www.omanhotels.com/alfalaj)





# Places *-to-* stay

*Whether you want to chill out on the coast, camp under the stars, unwind in supreme luxury or simply enjoy the winter sun, our hotels, resorts, camps and retreats will suit you perfectly.*







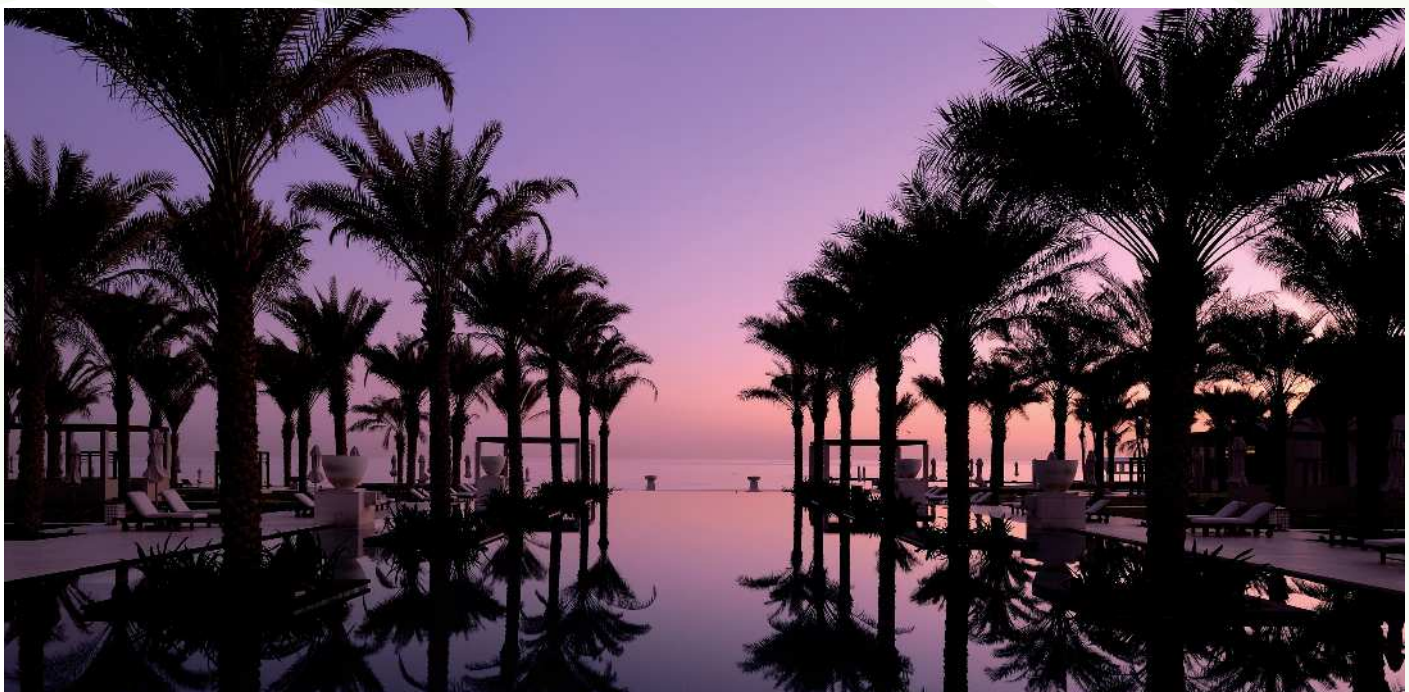
Recognising the Sultanate's vast tourism potential, many international hotel chains have opened properties in Oman.

These luxurious hotels cater to the premium traveler and embody the ultimate spirit of Arabian hospitality.

We also have a growing range of domestic hotel chains, privately owned boutique establishments and quality three and four star hotels.

Oman's diverse environment also allows many options for camping. Take a break from the city life and discover the outdoors!

For further details on accommodation options, visit: [www.omantourism.gov.om](http://www.omantourism.gov.om)







[omantourism.gov.om](http://omantourism.gov.om)

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Ministry of Tourism