

On the Road



JENNY WALKER *Coordinating Author*

It was on the fringe of the Sharqiya Sands (p216) in Oman when Abdullah al-Wahabi said 'Come! You, me, we go together with camel.' I looked across the desert and thought of Lady Montague plodding into the sunset on her mount. Then I noticed the Mitsubishi and realised that the modern equivalent of hitching a ride with the Bedu is distinctly less glamorous. I'm standing here sizing up my travel companions, wondering whether I might wait for the bus instead.



STUART BUTLER This photo was taken in the Tihama (p464) in Yemen. I saw a group of children selling two hawks on the roadside and so, being an animal caring type (and possibly a bit naive), I bought them both, went a little way out of the village and released them. Yes, I know the children probably went straight out and caught some more, but I can happily report that these two are busy massacring the local rodent population as we speak. Sorry Mr Mouse!



ANDREA SCHULTE-PEEVERS There's something intensely spiritual about the vast expanses of the southern United Arab Emirates. Silent desert where only the unseen wind moves. The haunting beauty of rippling dunes, sensual and majestic. Shifting hues and moods as the sun arcs across the sky in timeless, eternal fashion. This is a land of ancient murmurings and, if you sit very still, they will speak to you.

IAIN SHEARER Friends of friends had taken pity on a dusty traveller and generously invited me to lunch. This photo was taken at an expat compound in Riyadh (p306), Saudi Arabia, towards the end of an exciting time out on the road. I must have imbibed the spirit of Saudi a bit more than I realised because I felt like a Victorian great aunt sat by the pool – all that pink flesh on display. A bit of a culture shock, to be shocked by your own culture!



Destination Oman, UAE & Arabian Peninsula

For centuries Arabia has excited the interest and inspired the imagination of Western countries. As early as 1829, Victor Hugo, in the preface to *Les Orientales*, wrote that Europe was 'leaning towards the East'. Since that time, an astonishing 60,000 books have been written about Arabia in Britain alone.

Thanks to this literary relationship, say the word 'Arabia' (rather than 'Middle East') and a set of images is instantly conjured: Queen of Sheba holding court at Ma'rib in Yemen; camel caravans of frankincense from Dhofar in Oman; dhows laden with pearls from Dilmun; ruins of empire picked over by crows in Saudi Arabia's Madain Saleh. The caravans and the dhows may be plying different trades these days on more mechanised routes, but the colour of a modern camel market in Najran, and the click of amber prayer beads in Doha, belong to the lexicon of *The Thousand and One Nights* that brought Sheherazade's exotic and vulnerable world to English-speaking countries. This text continues to inform the way we relate to the modern countries of the Arabian Peninsula today.

What binds the seven countries of Arabia into a single entity for Western onlookers are the elements that are most 'other' (to borrow Edward Said's term) to Western concepts. There's the emphasis on race, grounded in Bedouin roots and expressed through tribal allegiance, family values and hospitality; Islam and the haunting call to prayer that rises above the daily grind; a shared language – not just any language, but God's own words, spoken through the Quran. And then there's the desert, a physical and metaphorical reduction of life to essential principles.

'No man,' wrote Wilfred Thesiger of his travels with the Bedu in *Across the Empty Quarter*, 'can live this life and emerge unchanged... He will carry, however faint, the imprint of the desert.' Above all, it is in the desert that the sense of 'otherness' is at its most powerful, and its austere allure has attracted Western travellers to Arabia for more than 400 years. Marco Polo, Jean Lewis Burckhardt, Charles Doughty, Wilfred Thesiger and Paul Theroux all reflect on their country of origin through their experiences of *Arabia Deserta* (Desert Arabia).

Standing on the utterly flat Jiddat al-Harrasis, with no tree, hill or boulder in sight, it is easy to share the exhilaration of the 19th-century writer, AW Kinglake, at being 'the very centre of a round horizon'. This egoism raises the great challenge of Arabia: it is hard not to go in search of self in the blank canvas of the Rub al-Khali (Empty Quarter); not to look for Aladdin's lamp in the souqs of San'a and Muscat; not to peer behind covered balconies in Jeddah; and not to search for Sinbads in Gulf fishing villages. It is hard not to go in search, in other words, of a Western construct. In so doing, however, one can easily miss the modern reality of Arabia.

When asked what they most like about their land of sand dunes, the Bedu near Al-Hashman in Oman reply: 'Coming to town.' Town! This is the Arabia of the 21st century, built on oil and banking – sophisticated communities looking to the future with vision, and creating empires out of sand, or rather on land reclaimed from the sea.

As a traveller to Arabia, it's easy to become aware of the responsibility towards the fragile structures of the desert, but there is a greater

'it is in the desert that the sense of "otherness" is at its most powerful'

responsibility to see a region for what it is rather than how the media, literature or tradition portrays it. The Peninsula Arabs are proud of their heritage but they are not sentimental about infant mortality rates, lack of education and the desiccating summer months without air conditioning. If they are not sentimental about the passing of the past, then neither perhaps should we be.

Getting Started

Many people think of the Peninsula under the generic term ‘Middle East’ and immediately assume that it’s virtually a no-go area. For the most part, however, this is not the case. Yemen continues to give the visitor cause for concern and it’s imperative to check with your embassy before travelling. Elsewhere, though, there is an overwhelming determination to increase tourism and hand in hand with that is a greater commitment to the visitor’s safety (see p516).

Indeed, pockets of political troubles aside, the Arabian Peninsula is actually one of the *safest* places you’re likely to visit: crime rates are low, people run after you with shopping you’ve left on the counter, unlocked cars are still there when you get back, and people mostly want to give (a greeting, coffee, some dates) rather than take.

So how easy is it to visit? Most countries in the region now offer visas on arrival. Only entering Saudi Arabia remains challenging – particularly for single women (see p356). With some planning, however, it’s possible to obtain a Saudi transit visa, giving you the ability to travel overland between most Peninsula countries.

The world-class hotels and restaurants of the Gulf States are no secret, but it may come as some surprise that the Peninsula is criss-crossed with an excellent set of roads. With widespread electricity, clean-water provision and access to car hire, you can penetrate mountain villages and desert wilderness without missing your creature comforts.

The challenge the Peninsula presents for the visitor is more in terms of cost. To make the most of the region, you ideally want to be staying in four- or five-star hotels and hiring a 4WD. Facilities have been deliberately developed for the affluent tourist and there’s almost no tradition of back-packer travel. Public transport seldom leads to sites of interest, there are no

One night in the Panoramic Suite at the Burj al-Arab seven-star hotel in Dubai costs US\$2500.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT

- **Appropriate clothing** (p48) People of the Peninsula are usually impeccably dressed and you may feel embarrassed without something smart: long sleeves, trousers (not jeans) and a head scarf (for women) are useful for visiting mosques or family homes. Pack some warm attire too: this may seem odd in a region with some of the hottest temperatures on earth but many places of interest are above 2000m (including San’a, Abha and Jebel Akhdar) and at ground level the air conditioning can be ferocious.
- **International Driving Permit** (p536) Some regional car-hire companies won’t accept your home licence.
- **Mosquito net and repellent** Mosquitoes are an irritating problem in low-lying areas throughout the region.
- **Personal items** While condoms and tampons are available in the big cities, they are hard to find elsewhere.
- **Travel insurance** (p539) With a high regional incidence of road traffic accidents, health insurance is strongly advised.
- **Vaccinations** (p544) Thankfully few are essential for the region.
- **Visas** (p525) Note that anyone carrying an Israeli passport or an Israeli stamp in their passport may be denied entry.

'cheap-and-cheerful' hostelrys where budget travellers can meet each other, and *foul madamas* (bean dish with olive oil) is more likely for breakfast than banana pancakes.

Yemen is something of an exception: with a much less developed infrastructure, tourism (particularly of the outdoor-adventure kind) has for decades been targeted as a useful source of income. Even here, however, most tourists rely on hiring a vehicle or taking a tour, and this is particularly the case in the current turbulent climate.

So does this mean you shouldn't go if you can't afford Northern European prices? If you can muster a group of four to share the cost of car hire, pack camping equipment and eat locally (kebabs and salad), it's possible to target areas of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman for prices similar to a touring holiday in the USA. In addition, package tours from Europe are making destinations like Dubai and Salalah more affordable.

WHEN TO GO

The Peninsula is ideally visited between November and March. At this time, the temperature hovers between 25°C and 35°C, occasional rains bring a blush of flowers to the desert and the interior can be explored without the worry of heat stroke.

Winter may be optimum but it's not the only time to go. If you want to know the real meaning of desert, then the summer, (June to August, which regularly reaches 50°C), is certainly an experience: this is when you can spot mirages, visible heat waves and melting roads; when you appreciate the importance of the afternoon siesta; and when you finally understand why water, not oil, is the lifeblood of the region. Without water (and without a hat) heat exhaustion is an everyday hazard.

There are two other advantages to travelling in summer: firstly, this is considered off-season in most parts of the Peninsula (except for Salalah in Oman) and hotel prices are considerably lower. Secondly, in Salalah and parts of Yemen, the summer brings light drizzle, cooler temperatures than the rest of the Peninsula, and a magnificent green landscape. For more information on weather, see the Climate sections in individual country chapters.

Travelling during the region's religious festivals can be an interesting experience depending on which part of the Peninsula you are visiting. During Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, visitors are more restricted (eating or drinking during the day must be kept hidden, and restaurants are often closed for the month). There's the chance, however, to try night-time culinary treats in the Ramadan tents attached to hotels. Public transport can be erratic, driving habits deteriorate and business hours are reduced but, as if to compensate, the nights involve great socialising and public congregation. The two *eids* (Islamic feasts) tend to be family occasions but there's usually an opportunity to catch local dancing, singing and poetry recitals. See p519 for the dates of religious holidays. It's also worth checking the When to Go sections in individual country chapters as the experience of Ramadan is quite different from one country to another.

COSTS & MONEY

It's hard to generalise about costs across the entire Arabian Peninsula as different countries are good value for different things. In Saudi, for example, domestic airfares are reasonably priced; in Oman, street food and quick eats haven't increased in price for 10 years; in Yemen, accommodation is cheap; in the Gulf countries, electrical goods are markedly lower than in Western countries. The table on p22 gives an idea of some typical prices in each of the region's countries. Minimum daily expenses are based on a cheap eat,

When the temperature reaches 50°C, employers in the Peninsula are meant to send workers home. National weather centres, however, seem to be stuck on 49.9°C.

See Climate Charts (p514) for more information.

HOW MUCH?

Kebab snack	US\$1
Local newspaper	US\$0.80
1L bottle of water	US\$0.30
1L of petrol	US\$0.65
Packet of <i>khobz</i> (Middle Eastern bread)	US\$0.30

DAILY EXPENSES (US DOLLARS)

Country	Cheap Eats	Dinner	Budget Hotel	Midrange Hotel	Top-end Hotel	Car Hire	Min. Expenses	Max. Expenses
Bahrain	\$4	\$30	\$80	\$130	\$200	\$40	\$125	\$300
Kuwait	\$5	\$50	\$70	\$180	\$350	\$40	\$130	\$450
Oman	\$4	\$40	\$90	\$150	\$300	\$40	\$100	\$400
Qatar	\$5	\$30	\$110	\$200	\$350	\$45	\$150	\$450
Saudi Arabia	\$15	\$30	\$40	\$100	\$150	\$50	\$85	\$400
UAE	\$4	\$20	\$70	\$130	\$230	\$50	\$100	\$500
Yemen	\$2	\$5	\$10	\$20	\$60	\$90	\$18	\$100

budget hotel and public transport; maximum daily expenses reflect dinner, top-end accommodation and car hire.

ATMs are found in most major cities and even in many rural towns. Except in Yemen, credit cards are widely accepted. A combination of cash and credit cards is the best bet with a few travellers cheques tucked in the sock for an emergency! For more details, see p520.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Travelling sensitively often means following local custom, especially in choosing what to wear or how to interact socially. There are times, however, when following local custom is not such a good idea. Saving water, turning the air conditioning off when leaving a room, avoiding buying items such as turtle shell and coral, and disposing of litter appropriately are not always a priority of locals, but they are commonsense measures that can help protect the environment.

We've all heard the saying 'take only pictures; leave only footprints', but it's not always that simple. In the Arabian Peninsula, people (women in particular) are very sensitive about being photographed and it's worth asking before clicking. Military sites are another touchy subject; quite what the visitor can reveal from a photo that Google Earth cannot is not a conversation you want to have with a policeman.

Footprints may seem harmless enough but if you can see them, chances are you've just cut a new trail across the desert – in all probability over seeds that were lying dormant, ready to germinate at the first hint of rain.

In addition to pictures and footprints, one could add 'bag it and bin it'. But bear in mind that bagging live shells is banned across the Peninsula and avoid binning your rubbish in receptacles that are never emptied.

In summary, perhaps the best advice is 'take it or leave it as found'!

TRAVEL LITERATURE

There are some wonderful publications about the Peninsula, covering every kind of subject including history, the Bedu and wildlife. Included here are some highlights. See also Books in the Directory of each country chapter.

- *Arabia Through the Looking Glass*, by Jonathan Raban. Raban's observations on expatriate life in the region are as valid today as they were when he visited during the oil boom of the 1970s.
- *Arabian Sands*, by Wilfred Thesiger. As much an anthropologist and ethnographer as traveller, Thesiger, in this classic book, records the nomadic life of the Bedu before the discovery of oil changed the region forever.
- *A History of the Arab Peoples*, by Albert Hourani. This comprehensive and insightful history, written with the author's characteristic

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sensitivity, is a must for anyone keen to understand the peoples of the Peninsula.

- *The Merchants*, by Michael Field. Possibly the best single overview of life, business and culture in the Gulf.
- *Orientalism*, by Edward Said. This seminal discourse on the nature of the relationship between Arab lands and the West examines the stereotypes behind the mythologised view of the region in Western literature and media.
- *The Prize*, by Daniel Yergin. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, this book is an epic history of oil.
- *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, by TE Lawrence. This account of the Arab campaign of 1915–18 is widely regarded as the most evocative description written about Arabia and the foundation of the modern Peninsula states.
- *Travels With a Tangerine*, by Tim Mackintosh-Smith. This readable set of extracts from the journals of Ibn Battuta, a 14th-century Arab Marco Polo, traces his journeys across the Arab world.

FAVOURITE FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Mention the word 'holiday' while at work in the Arabian Peninsula and your colleague will have left the building before you've got past the letter 'h'. The people of the Peninsula love their holidays and make the most of them, usually with some kind of traditional celebration such as camel racing, dancing or poetry recital. Most of these occasions are small, ad hoc affairs: a spontaneous gathering of *sheiba* (old men) in a fishing village, singing the ancestral songs of toil and harvest; or the convergence of young cousins on a mountainside to drum up good omens for a wedding. If you chance upon one of these events in your travels, it is sure to be a highlight, as no one will let you stand on the sidelines. They provide a particularly exciting opportunity for women travellers to gain a window onto a world of henna-painted hands and feet, intimate discussions about married life and the jubilant wearing of magnificent gold.

For a more formal version of these kinds of local festivals, it's worth timing your visit around **Muscat Festival** (p196), held annually in January/February in Oman. The festival is a pageant of traditional craft making, moneymaking and merrymaking, with dancers from Sur (Oman), Egyptian kaftan-sellers and clowns from Eastern Europe all sharing in a cultural exchange that has typified the region for centuries.

Jenadriyah National Festival (p310), held outside Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in late February and early March, is where the King's Cup (an epic camel race) takes place, with all the fluffing-up of plumage and smoothing of coats that one would expect of the accompanying falconry displays and horse-racing events.

In August, Emiratis, Bahrainis, Kuwaitis and Qataris migrate south to Oman's Dhofar region to chew on camel kebabs under the rain in the **Salalah Tourism Festival** (p250), held annually in Salalah.

In December each year, the **Dubai International Film Festival** (www.dubaifilmfest.com) takes place under the auspices of Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed al-Maktoum. Inaugurated in 2004, this not-for-profit event attracts prominent figures from the film industry from over 45 countries. Dubai is even being slated for use as a location in one or two high-flying future film projects.

For festivals of a more high-octane kind, there's the **Grand Prix** (www.yasmarina.circuit.ae) in Abu Dhabi and a rival event in Bahrain (www.bahraingp.com).

And let's not forget the region's two great annual shopping festivals: the **Hala Shopping Festival** (p157) held in Kuwait City during the third week of February and the **Dubai Shopping Festival** (p432), usually held between December and February. While the bargains attract people from around the world, there is no greater gathering of regional people (other than during hajj, of course) on the Peninsula. Like the bazaars of ancient times, it matters little what is on sale or under what kind of roof: people come instead to ask '*Shay akhbar?*' (What's the news?), and, on hearing there's no news, settle down for a week's tea and talk.

TOP 10


 SAUDI ARABIA

UAE

OMAN

LANDSCAPES

Thought the desert was much the same? The following list of spectacular Peninsula landscapes shows just how diverse the desert can be and is guaranteed to make you fall in love with it.

- 1 Mutla Ridge, Kuwait (p163) – A light fleece of grass and flowers across the coastal plain in springtime.
- 2 Khor al-Adaid, Qatar (p279) – Sun sparkling off the inland sea, netted by dunes.
- 3 Wadi Dharbat, Oman (p246) – Camels and cows sharing abundant herbage in seasonal mists.
- 4 Wadi Ghul, Oman (p226) – A vertiginous look into the Grand Canyon of Arabia.
- 5 Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia (p326) – Copper-coloured sandstone at sunset.
- 6 Al-Soudah, Saudi Arabia (p336) – Peregrine-eye views of the coastal plain from soaring escarpment summit.
- 7 Liwa Oasis, UAE (p417) – Sand dunes and date plantations: the quintessential Arabia.
- 8 Shaharah, Yemen (p464) – Switchback glimpses of livid green, terraced fields.
- 9 Suqutra, Yemen (p486) – Floating islands of cormorants off pristine coastline.
- 10 Mughlsail, Oman (p247) – Blowholes piping sardines beneath the dramatic undercliff.

ARCHITECTURAL HIGHLIGHTS

The architecture of the Arabian Peninsula may not be as well known as that of neighbouring countries, but it does have some gems. The following is a highly subjective Top 10 of architectural wonders, ancient and modern, that adorn the region:

- 1 Bahrain International Circuit, Bahrain (p123) – This Formula One racetrack is a good illustration of the way modern building design incorporates traditional design.
- 2 Beit Sheikh Isa bin Ali, Bahrain (p125) – This house has the best example of the air-conditioning wizardry of 18th- and 19th-century wind-tower architecture.
- 3 Arab Fund Building, Kuwait (p152) – For a demonstration of the unity of Islamic art, there's no finer modern example than the interior of this 20th-century building.
- 4 Al-Corniche, Qatar (p269) – A monument to 21st-century modern architecture, the buildings that grace Doha's corniche set the benchmark for daring design.
- 5 Muscat's Grand Mosque, Oman (p193) – This elegant, understated masterpiece in Muscat has the largest hand-loomed carpet in the world.
- 6 Nakhal Fort, Oman (p230) – It is difficult to choose just one of Oman's 1000 forts, but the setting of Nakhal Fort is hard to beat.
- 7 Madain Saleh, Saudi Arabia (p328) – The Nabataean monuments of this 'petite Petra' lie in a wind-sculpted desert of sandstone.
- 8 Burj al-Arab, UAE (p380) – For the ultimate postmodern experience, a tour of this iconic tower is a must.
- 9 Ma'rib Dam, Yemen (p483) – Though there's not much to see, the sense of one of the largest building projects of the ancient world lingers around the standing stones.
- 10 Houses of Shibam, Yemen (p489) – Called 'Manhattan of the Desert' by Freya Stark, this medieval town is where the art of high-rise began.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of good websites connected with the region.

Al-Bab (www.al-bab.com) Meaning 'The Gate', this is indeed a gateway to the Arab world with links to dozens of news services, country profiles, travel sites and maps.

Al-Jazeera (www.aljazeera.com) The controversial satellite service runs this very popular news-and-views-oriented website (see p287).

Arabnet (www.arabnet.me) Useful Saudi-run online encyclopaedia of the Arab world. It collects news and articles, and links to further resources, organised by country.

Lonely Planet (lonelyplanet.com) For succinct summaries on travelling to the Peninsula, combined with travel news and 'postcards' from other travellers. The Thorn Tree forum allows you to ask questions before you go or dispense advice when you get back.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

PAN-PENINSULA: SIX COUNTRIES IN SIX WEEKS

Six Weeks / San'a to Kuwait City

In week one, learn the sensory vocab of Arabia: haggling in souqs, the haunting call to prayer and wafts of *sheesha* in **San'a** (p447, political situation allowing). Add to the Arabian lexicon at Queen of Sheba's **Ma'rib** (p480). In week two, continue the Queen's legendary journey across the **Sarfait border** (p247) into Oman and visit **Khor Rouri** (p245): it was from here that frankincense was exchanged for spices from India. Cross the desert to **Muscat** (p183), where modern exchange involves expatriate workers. In week three, cross via the **Wajaja border** (p234) into the UAE, where overseas trading continues to power the cities of the Gulf. Walk on water in **Dubai** (p371) – or rather, on reclaimed land – then fly to **Doha** (p266) to repeat the trick. Pearls gave the Gulf its former livelihood: fly into **Manama** (p109) in week five and buy a string. Oil is responsible for Arabia's modern wealth: see how in **Bahrain's Oil Museum** (p124). In week six count the cost of black gold in **Kuwait City** (p146) and trace similarities between Peninsula countries at **Tareq Rajab Museum** (p154).

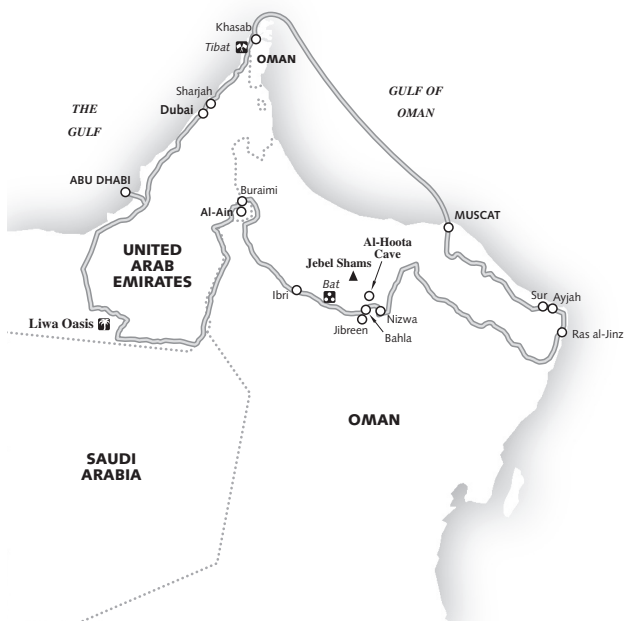
Trace the social history of the Peninsula from Yemen to Kuwait on an epic 5000km, six-week journey, focusing on the region's highlights. If you're lucky enough to get a Saudi visa, continue overland from Kuwait to Riyadh for a 'seven countries in seven weeks' experience.



THE TOWER TOUR: OMAN & UAE

Three Weeks / Dubai to Sharjah

Begin with your head in the clouds at the top of the world's tallest tower, the **Burj Khalifa** (p379), or admire this Dubai icon from another symbol of the vertical, **Burj al-Arab** (p380). Cruise the **Dubai Creek** (p375) to see how height dominates the city. On day three, transfer to the UAE's sophisticated capital **Abu Dhabi** (p406), capital of UAE: what the turrets of the **Emirates Palace** (p410) lack in height, they make up for in light bulbs. On day five, escape the city to enjoy lights of a different kind under the starry skies of **Liwa Oasis** (p417), and let your shadow tower over the apricot-coloured dunes at sunset. Wander through souqs of grumbling camels in **Al-Ain** (p420) on day seven and the next day, travel via **Buraimi** (p229) to **Ibri** (p228) in Oman, land of a thousand aged towers and fortifications, gracing mountain top and wadi's edge. On day nine, feel the spirit of the ancients in their burial towers at **Bat** (p228). Continue through the castle towns of **Jibreen** (p227) and **Bahla** (p227) and visit the interior towers, formed drip by drip, of **Al-Hoota Cave** (p225). Stay in **Nizwa** (p223) where the mighty **Jebel Shams** (p226) towers over this heritage city. On day 12, travel to the turtle sanctuary in **Ras al-Jinz** (p211), and watch turret crabs making towers in the sand. Complete week two in **Sur** (p208) and see how the lighthouses of **Ayjah** (p210) guide dhows to safe haven. Travel the coast road back to **Muscat** (p183), home of the watchtowers. After three days, take the ferry to **Khasab** (p234) and get a feel for nature's perpendicular at **Jebel Harim** (p237). End your tower tour, via **Tibat** (p234), under the wind-tower constructions of **Sharjah's Heritage Area** (p396).



Travel through time on this 3000km, three-week route around the eastern rim of the Arabian Peninsula. Towers are the theme, from UAE's glass-and-steel tower blocks, to Oman's crenulated watchtowers. If time and security allows, add in a trip to Shibam, Yemen's 'Manhattan of the Desert' (p490).

TAILORED TRIPS

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FAMOUS 1: IBN BATTUTA

Follow me – though in imagination only! I'm the legendary ghost of the Arab world's most famous traveller. I was born in Morocco in 1304 and at the age of 20, set out for Mecca. What started as a pilgrimage grew into a journey that lasted three decades and covered 120,000km, and took me

from North Africa to China. But it was Arabia, and the land of the holy cities, that drew me back. To this day, my shadow keeps crossing the flame of desert campfires and, in the true oral tradition of my fellow Arabs, my travels lengthen the more each generation embellishes them for me.

I began my Arabian adventures in **Al-Ula** (p326), where Syrian Christians must end their journey and only Muslims may continue on the path of Abraham to Medina. From here I travelled on in pilgrim clothes to **Mecca** (p67). It was a pious journey filled with prayer in which I was conscious that the 'burdens of sin are effaced' by the merit of pilgrimage.

It was some years before I returned to Arabia – I arrived in **Jeddah** (p316) in a year of little rain. I took a *jalbah* (boat) from here. It was my first time at sea and I was fearful of the troublesome camels and of the high waves that threw us off course. We landed on the **Tihama** (p465) and drank water from ostrich shells. The merchants of Al-Yemen were open-handed and generous, and assisting of pilgrims. We rode to the great city of **Zabid** (p469) amid luxuriant gardens and where the women were of exceeding beauty. They travelled in camel litters and had a great 'predilection for strangers' whom they agreed readily to marry. I left, without a wife, for **Ta'izz** (p474) and **San'a** (p447), a 'large and well-constructed city of bricks and plaster'. Then I set sail for East Africa from the port of **Aden** (p477), returning many moons later to **Al-Baleed** (p241) where people ate bananas and coconuts and fattened their livestock on plentiful sardines. In **Hasik** (p247) Arabs gathered gum from incense trees and lived in houses built with fish bones and roofed with camel hides.

From here I sailed in violent winds past **Masirah** (p219) – where people ate nothing but fish and cormorants, killed in an improper way – and landed at **Sur** (p208). I hired an Indian guide to take me to the great city of **Qalhat** (p208), which we reached in a state of great exhaustion – partly from trying to hinder the guide from making off with my garments, and partly through thirst, 'this being the season of heat'. I visited the **Tomb of Bibi Miryam** (p208) and then, after six days of traversing the desert, reached **Nizwa** (p223). At the foot of the mountain 'with fine bazaars', it had 'corrupt women' for whom the men showed no jealousy nor disapproval. I travelled next to Hormuz in Persia but stepped once again into Arabia, landing in **Bahrain** (p100) to watch **pearl divers** (p128) and shelter from the ravages of the sun in orchards of pomegranates and citrons. From Al-Bahrain I returned to Mecca and was honoured by God to perform the pilgrimage again.



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FAMOUS 2: WILLIAM GIFFORD PALGRAVE

I am no ghost – as an Englishman and Arabic scholar of the mid-19th century, I don't believe in them. I'm no scientist either: unlike many of my topographically minded contemporaries, I prefer to study 'the men of the land, rather than the land of the men'. I don't have the colourful genius of my compatriot, Richard Burton, under whose popular shadow my own figure has faded, but I am sincere in my desire to reveal the Arab temperament. Follow me through my *Personal Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia*, if you care – and if you dare. I had the courage to pass through Wahhabi territory in disguise and stay in Riyadh for six weeks where Burton, eight years earlier, was too scared to enter. I'm not scared of anything, not even criticism – minor exaggerations improved the story of my travels – as they might improve yours.

I trained as a Jesuit priest and when Napoleon III sponsored my mission to Arabia, Pope Pius IX summoned me to Rome to test my missionary zeal. Dressed as a middle-class merchant from Syria, with my assistant (a Greek I asked to be ordained for the purpose of accompanying me) and speaking Arabic passably well, I arrived in the heart of Arabia. My first great test was crossing the Nafud, 'an immense ocean of loose reddish sand'. In the midsummer heat, it was not unlike a scene from Dante's *Inferno*. We reached **Jubba** (p315) thirsty and exhausted, our leather bottles empty on the camel's flanks. In **Hail** (p314), enclosed by high mud walls, the people showed us Bedouin courtesy – and so we stayed. I ministered to the sick and watched the market erupt into life like the dawn chorus, and noted the humanity of Islamic daily life. When we came to leave, 'we carried with us the goodwill of all the court'.

It took us time to find guides willing to escort us to **Riyadh** (p306). The Najd is genuine Wahhabi country and 'to the rest of Arabia a sort of lion's den, on which few venture and fewer return'. Faisal's great city was surrounded by a sea of palm trees and echoed with the 'singing droning sound of waterwheels'. Fearful of spies and infidels, the old king fled on news of our arrival. After a month, Faisal's son Abdullah discovered we were Christian and threatened to have us killed. We negotiated a safe departure and left for the prosperous city of Al-Hofuf, in the heart of a great oasis.

We took a ship to **Bahrain** (p100) and, in January 1863, I bid farewell to my companion and sailed again for **Qatar** (p258). From here I tried several times to make the voyage to Oman and succeeded at length in reaching **Sohar** (p232). I was shipwrecked soon after and in **Muscat** (p183) suffered great weariness and depression, which I blamed on my year and 10-month journey. I was in fact suffering from typhoid. In March 1864 I returned to Europe and retreated to a monastery in Germany; a year later I renounced my Roman Catholic faith but remained an Englishman, spending my remaining days as a diplomat.



The Authors

**JENNY WALKER** **Coordinating Author, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar**

Jenny Walker's first involvement with Arabia was as a student, collecting butterflies for her father's book on entomology in Saudi Arabia. Convinced her mother and she were the first Western women to brew tea in the desolate interior, she returned to university to see if that were true. Her studies resulted in a dissertation on Doughty and Lawrence (BA, University of Stirling) and a thesis entitled Perception of the Arabic Orient (MPhil, University of Oxford). She has written extensively on the Middle East for Lonely Planet and other publishers and coauthored *Off-Road in the Sultanate of Oman*. Although deeply attached to Arabia, Jenny has travelled to 98 countries, from Panama to Mongolia, on diverse assignments. Jenny is Associate Dean for Professional Development at the Caledonian University College of Engineering in Muscat. Jenny also wrote the Destination, Getting Started, Itineraries, History, The Culture, Islam, Food & Drink, Expats, Environment, Arabian Peninsula Directory and Transport in the Arabian Peninsula chapters.

**STUART BUTLER****Yemen**

English-born Stuart Butler first visited Yemen almost 15 years ago. Since that first captivating trip he has returned many times, becoming a little more addicted with each visit. He has contributed many Yemeni-based articles and photographs to magazines, and has led tours to Yemen. In 2004 he became one of the first people to surf the wild southern coast of Yemen. He now calls the south of France home and, in addition to Yemen, his travels have taken him across the Middle East and beyond, from the desert beaches of Pakistan to the coastal jungles of Colombia. During his last trip to Yemen he finally gained an appreciation for qat.

**ANDREA SCHULTE-PEEVERS****United Arab Emirates**

Andrea has travelled the distance to the moon and back in her visits to over 60 countries and carries her dog-eared passport like a badge of honour. Born and raised in Germany and with a degree from UCLA, she's authored or contributed to more than 40 Lonely Planet titles. Andrea traces her passion for Arab countries back to the three months she spent in Tunisia in the 1980s. Being tapped to update this book's United Arab Emirates chapter, though, was a special thrill as it allowed her to immerse herself in this complex country tiptoeing so deftly between deep tradition and turbo-modernity. It turned out to be an experience that opened her mind and heart.



IAIN SHEARER

Hajj, Saudi Arabia

Iain is an archaeologist who has been fortunate enough to work in the field for the last 16 years in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Central Asia, Israel & the Palestinian Territories, Iran and the Arab Middle East. He has contributed to Lonely Planet guides to Afghanistan, Central Asia and Iran, and getting to write the Saudi Arabia chapter has been a bit of a dream job. He is based at the Institute of Archaeology, University College, London, and was recently appointed a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland.

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