



Oman, UAE & Arabian Peninsula



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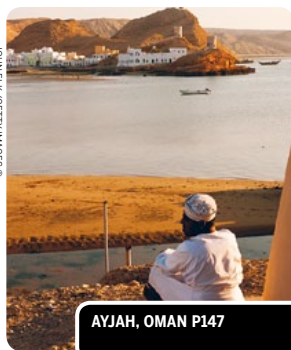
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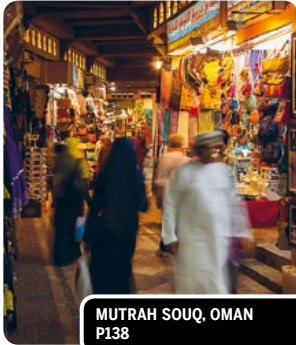
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Oman, UAE & Arabian Peninsula



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One of Arabia's thousand forts (p62)

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ELEVATION



Itineraries



2 WEEKS Best of Oman, UAE & Arabian Peninsula

For an introduction to the Peninsula that weaves between modern and ancient, begin your visit with two days in **Doha**, with its skyline of 21st-century architectural gems. Loiter with falcons in Souq Waqif and visit the exceptional Museum of Islamic Art to understand that the modern Gulf is built on inherited Arab values.

Fly to **Dubai** for three days to see a city obsessed with the newest, the biggest and the best, and visit that totem of superlatives, Burj Khalifa. Resurrect the past in a dhow trip along the Dubai Creek and visit Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood.

Fly on to **Muscat** for two days for a low-rise, understated experience of modern Arabia, catching a show in the city's magnificent Royal Opera House. See how 40 years of 'renaissance' has created a modern nation strongly underpinned by a respect for the past in a four-day tour of the heritage sites of **Nizwa** and **Bahla**. Forget history and think timelessness by hiking on top of lofty **Jebel Shams**, camel riding with the Bedu across **Sharqiya Sands** and watching turtles return to the beach of their birth at **Ras al-Jinz** en route back to Muscat.



The Gulf Experience

Spend the first four days in dry and traditional **Kuwait City**, learning the sensory vocab of Arabia – the haggling in Souq Marbarakia, the haunting call to prayer, the wafts of *sheesha* (waterpipes used to smoke tobacco) from outdoor coffeeshops. Add to the Arabian lexicon by tracing similarities between Peninsula cultures at Tareq Rajab Museum with its priceless collection of regional jewellery, costumes and manuscripts. Old Arabia is only half the equation: leave time to explore the urban landscape of high-rise towers – the quintessential icons of modernity in the Gulf – before flying to **Bahrain** for four days (political situation allowing).

Oil is responsible for Arabia's rapid propulsion into the 21st century: see how in Bahrain's Oil Museum and enjoy some of the glamour of wealth at the Formula One racing circuit. Pearls gave the Gulf its former livelihood: buy a string at Gold City in **Manama** or dive for your own off the **Hawar Islands** before flying on to **Doha** for four days.

Both pearls and black gold have helped Qatar, with its commitment to hosting international sports, compete with the best. And what a venue Doha makes, with one of the most spectacular modern skylines in the world built on land reclaimed from the sea. Visit **Khor al-Adaid** in southern Qatar and watch the inland sea get its own back as it encroaches ever deeper into the interior sand dunes.

You can continue to walk on water – or rather, on reclaimed land – in **Abu Dhabi** where you will spend the next three days discovering how and why it has become the cultural as well as the political capital of United Arab Emirates. For contrast with the high-voltage Gulf city, escape to **Liwa Oasis** for two days. Here life moves at the pace of a camel's stride or a trade wind shunting sand across the tops of the dunes.

Unless you're a modern-day Thesiger, you'll soon be missing the dynamism of the urban experience, and in this respect the best has been kept until last. Spend your final four days in and around **Dubai**, discovering what makes it the most internationally famous city of the region. Swim with dolphins, shop with sharks, view the city from the world's tallest tower and dine underwater in the Gulf's most 'Yes we can' city.



Top: Mutrah Souq (p138),
Muscat, Oman
Bottom: Royal Opera
House Muscat (p127),
Oman



FRANZ ABERHAM / GETTY IMAGES ©



Pan-Peninsula: Five Countries in Five Weeks

Spend the first two weeks of the journey enjoying the Gulf experience with four days in each of the virtual city states of **Kuwait City**, **Manama** and **Doha**. Fly to **Dubai** and begin week three with your head in the clouds on top of the world's tallest tower, the Burj Khalifa, or admire this Dubai icon from another symbol of the vertical, Burj al-Arab. Cruise the Dubai Creek to see how height dominates the city. Transfer to the UAE's sophisticated capital **Abu Dhabi**: what the turrets of the Emirates Palace lack in height, they make up for in light bulbs.

With the city-centric part of the journey over, escape to the starry skies and apricot-coloured dunes of **Al Ain**. Allow time to wander through souqs of grumbling camels and listen for the ghost of intrepid desert explorer Thesiger, commemorated in the fort museum.

Begin week four by crossing the border via **Buraimi** to **Ibri** in Oman. This is the land of a thousand aged towers and fortifications, gracing mountain top and wadi's edge, and it's easy to feel the spirit of the ancients in their burial towers at **Bat**. Continue through the castle towns of **Jabrin** and **Bahla** to **Nizwa** where the mighty Jebel Shams towers over this heritage city.

Take a complete break from the vertical by journeying across the edge of the Empty Quarter on the flat and utterly featureless highway to **Thumrait**. The descent into **Salalah**, Oman's southern capital, after 10 hours of stony-plain monotony is sublime, especially during the rainy season when the desert turns green. End week four among the frankincense trees near **Mughsail** and see where the precious resin was traded at Al-Baleed and the ancient harbour of **Khor Rouri**.

With a car, begin week five by skirting the Arabian Sea from Salalah (via Hasik when the coast road is completed) to **Duqm**, pausing for a night on floating hotel Veronica. Complete a lap of **Masirah** to understand the true meaning of the term 'desert island' before continuing along the auburn edge of the Sharqiya sands to **Ras al-Hadd**. Spend a day in **Sur**, where the lighthouses of Ayjah guide dhows to safe haven, before heading to journey's end in the hospitable city of **Muscat**.

5
DAYS

Easy Escape from Dubai

Leave the city for a gentler pace by heading north to **Sharjah** with its historic wind towers of the Heritage Area and the cultural riches of the nearby Arts Area. Arrive for lunch at **Sharjah Desert Park** overlooking ostrich, oryx and gazelle. On day two, wind through the northern Emirates to the **Shams/Tibat border** and enter Oman's fabled Musandam Peninsula. Enjoy the spectacular drive along the cliff-hugging road to **Khasab** and time your arrival for a snorkel and sunset cruise on a dhow in Musandam's celebrated deep-water *khors* (creeks). Spend day three ascending by 4WD to **Jebel Harim** and descend to Rawdah Bowl for a picnic beside a 'House of Locks'. Retrace your steps to Khasab ready to board the evening fast ferry to **Muscat**: entering Mutrah harbour lit up with night lights is a magical experience. Visit Mutrah Souq and the old quarter of Muscat on day four. On day five, head west to the old capital cities of **Nakhal** and **Rustaq** with their magnificent forts. Break your journey back to Dubai at the beautiful beach resort at **Sawadi** or stretch into an extra day by staying overnight at the growing town of **Sohar**.

1
WEEK

Easy Escape from Kuwait

For the complete antithesis of life in Kuwait City, take a three-centre trip to Oman and the UAE. Fly on day one to **Muscat** and be immediately struck by the more tolerant attitudes towards dress and entertainment. Spend day two at a beachside hotel and enjoy a swim in a sea with waves, followed by sundowners and dancing in a local nightclub. On day three, be reminded of what mountains and orchards look like in a day trip to **Jebel Akhdar** and hike in that rare medium of pure, dry, fresh air. On day four, fly down to **Salalah** where the subtropical climate, rich greenery (especially in summer), cooler climate and more casual atmosphere will feel like another continent. On day five, relax with a spa and fresh papaya at your seaside resort, go snorkelling or visit the spectacular blowholes at **Mughsail**, located in a landscape untrammelled by oil pipelines and nodding donkeys. On day six, swap the rural idyll for the urban wild side by flying into **Dubai** for some extreme shopping, dining and partying. On day seven, button up the collar for the return to a very different Gulf experience in Kuwait.

On the Road

