



# Oman

عمان

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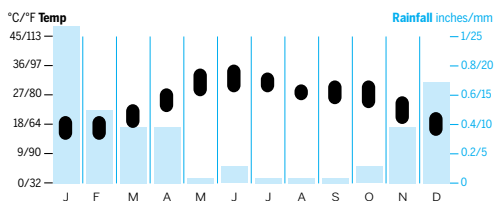
## Why Go?

In Muscat's Grand Mosque, there is a beautiful hand-loomed carpet; it was once the world's largest rug until Abu Dhabi's Grand Mosque, in the United Arab Emirates, pinched the record. This is poignant because Oman doesn't boast many 'firsts' or 'biggests' in a region obsessed by vanity. What it does boast, with its rich heritage and embracing society, is a strong sense of identity, a pride in an ancient, frankincense-trading past and confidence in a highly educated future.

For visitors, this offers a rare chance to engage with the Arab world without the distorting lens of excessive wealth. Oman's low-rise towns retain their traditional charms and Bedouin values remain at the heart of an Omani welcome. With an abundance of natural beauty, from spectacular mountains, wind-blown deserts and a pristine coastline, Oman is the obvious choice for those seeking out the modern face of Arabia while wanting still to sense its ancient soul.

## When to Go

### Oman



**Jan–Feb** Muscat Festival brings cultural shows and shopping to the capital.

**Jul–Aug** Salalah Tourism Festival celebrates the rainy season in southern Oman with shows and shopping.

**Nov–Mar** Cooler air and fresh winds herald the high season for tourism.

## Daily Costs

Oman is an expensive country to visit with limited accommodation and transport options outside the capital. Budget accommodation, where it is available, averages US\$50 for single occupancy but there are cheap options for eating (around US\$5) and minimal entry fees to many of the main sites of interest; with a combination of public transport and taxi, a minimum daily cost comes to around US\$100. This rises to US\$230 if staying in midrange hotels with car hire and US\$450 for a top-end hotel with 4WD hire.

### ITINERARIES

#### Muscat Stopover

Rise with the dawn to see the weird and wonderful at Mutrah's **fish market**. Join the ebb and flow of the city's residents by strolling the **corniche** and ducking into **Mutrah Souq**. Spare an hour for the sights of **Muscat** proper, the walled heart of the capital, before an extravagant dinner at **Al-Bustan Palace Hotel**.

#### Two weeks

Begin a mountain tour in the old city of **Nizwa**. Climb to **Jebel Akhdar**, famed for giant pomegranates. Hike the rim of Oman's Grand Canyon for some carpet-buying on **Jebel Shams**. Engage with *jinn* (genies) at the tombs and forts of **Bat**, **Bahla** and **Jabrin**. Take the long way home to Muscat via a dizzying mountain drive to Rustaq, and dive in a sparkling sea at **Sawadi**.

#### Three weeks

Go in search of wild places from Muscat to Salalah. Follow the coast road to **Sur**, home of the dhow (Arab boat), pausing to explore the celebrated wadis (desert valleys) of **Shab** and **Tiwi**. Learn about turtles at **Ras al-Jinz** before cutting inland to the **Sharqiya Sands**. Acclimatise to nights under the stars before the camping journey to beautiful **Salalah** via **Duqm**.

## Essential Food & Drink

- ➔ **'Lobster'** Local, clawless crayfish.
- ➔ **Harees** Steamed wheat and boiled meat.
- ➔ **Shuwa** Marinated lamb cooked in an underground oven.
- ➔ **Halwa** Gelatinous sugar or date-syrup confection.
- ➔ **Tap water** Safe to drink but most folk drink bottled water.
- ➔ **Alcohol** Available at hotels and tourist-oriented restaurants.
- ➔ **Coffee** Laced with cardamon and served with dates, it's an essential part of Omani hospitality.

### AT A GLANCE

- ➔ **Currency** Omani rial (OR)
- ➔ **Mobile phones** SIM cards widely available
- ➔ **Money** ATMs widespread; credit cards widely accepted
- ➔ **Visas** Available on arrival for many nationalities

## Fast Facts

- ➔ **Capital** Muscat
- ➔ **Country code** ☎968
- ➔ **Language** Arabic; English widely spoken
- ➔ **Official name** Sultanate of Oman
- ➔ **Population** 3.1 million

## Exchange Rates

The rial is pegged to the US dollar and rarely fluctuates. For current exchange rates see [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

Australia	A\$10	OR4
Bahrain	BD1	OR1.02
Euro zone	€10	OR4.93
Kuwait	KD1	OR1.35
Qatar	QR10	OR1.05
Saudi Arabia	SR10	OR1.02
UAE	Dh1	OR1.04
UK	UK£10	OR5.84
USA	US\$10	OR3.85
Yemen	YR100	OR1.79

## Resources

- ➔ **Destination Oman** ([www.destinationoman.com](http://www.destinationoman.com))  
Practical information
- ➔ **Oman Tourism** ([www.omantourism.gov.om](http://www.omantourism.gov.om))  
Official tourist website