



# Oman

عمان

## Includes ➔

Muscat .....	123
Sur .....	150
Ras al Jinz .....	156
Sharqiya (Wahiba) Sands .....	165
Nizwa .....	169
Jebel Shams .....	177
Bahla & Jabrin .....	179
Sohar .....	182
Nakhal .....	183
Khasab .....	188
The Musandam Khors .....	192
Salalah .....	194

## 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 bent on grand-standing. 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.

## Best for Culture

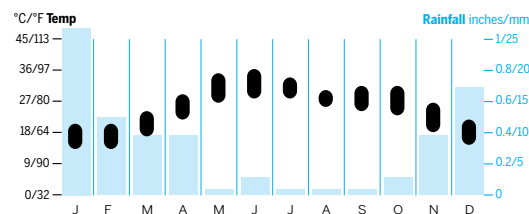
- ➔ Bahla Fort (p179)
- ➔ National Museum (p131)
- ➔ Mutrah Souq (p127)
- ➔ Rustaq Fort (p185)
- ➔ Bayt al Zubair (p131)

## Best for Nature

- ➔ Jebel Shams (p177)
- ➔ Sharqiya Sands (p165)
- ➔ Wadi Dharbat (p202)
- ➔ Ras al Jinz (p156)
- ➔ Wadi Shab (p154)

## 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 with entertainment and shopping.

**Nov–Mar** Balmy temperatures herald the high season for tourism.

## 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
- ➔ **Population** 4.2 million

## Exchange Rates

For current exchange rates see [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

Australia	A\$10	OR2.7
Bahrain	BD1	OR1
Euro zone	€10	OR4.2
Kuwait	KD1	OR1.3
Qatar	QR10	OR1
Saudi Arabia	SR10	OR1
UAE	Dh10	OR1
UK	UK£10	OR6
USA	US\$10	OR3.8

## Resources

- ➔ **Destination Oman** ([www.destinationoman.com](http://www.destinationoman.com)) Practical information.
- ➔ **Ministry of Information** ([www.omanet.om](http://www.omanet.om)) Official handbook of facts and figures.
- ➔ **Oman Tourism** ([www.oman tourism.gov.om](http://www.oman tourism.gov.om)) Official tourist website.

## Daily Costs

Oman is an expensive country to visit with limited accommodation and transport options outside the capital. Budget accommodation averages US\$70 for single rates but there are cheap options for eating (around US\$7) 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\$130. This rises to US\$250 staying in midrange hotels with car hire and US\$500 for top-end with 4WD hire.

## ITINERARIES

### Muscat Stopover

Rise with the dawn to see fishermen bring in the weird and wonderful at Mutrah's **fish market**. Stroll the **corniche** and then duck into **Mutrah Souq** to lose your way among the pink, plastic and implausible. Spare an hour for the sights of **Muscat** proper, the walled heart of the capital, before a spot of respite at the **Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa**.

### Two Weeks

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

### Three Weeks

Travel an adventurous route from Muscat to Oman's second city, Salalah, 1000km to the south. Follow the coast road to **Sur**, exploring the wadis (dry river beds) of **Shab** and **Tiwi**. Learn about turtles at **Ras al Jinz** before cutting inland to the **Sharqiya Sands** near Al Mintirib. Acclimatise to nights under the stars before the camping journey to Salalah via **Duqm**. Leave time to explore **Salalah** with its beautiful beaches, blowholes and frankincense.

## Essential Food & Drink

- ➔ **Harees** Steamed wheat and boiled meat.
- ➔ **Shuwa** Marinated lamb traditionally cooked in an underground oven.
- ➔ **Halwa** Gelatinous sugar or date-syrup confection served at all official functions.
- ➔ **Tap water** Safe to drink although most people stick to bottled water.
- ➔ **Alcohol** Available at hotels and tourist-oriented restaurants.
- ➔ **Coffee** Laced with cardamom and served with dates, it's an essential part of Omani hospitality.