Oman, UAE & Arabian Peninsula

Jenny Walker, Jessica Lee, Jade Bremner, Tharik Hussain, Josephine Quintero
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Arabian Peninsula Highlights in a Hurry

Weaving between the sites of modern and ancient Arabia, this itinerary highlights the best Peninsula experiences feasible in the least amount of time. If focuses on three Gulf cities, then offers a relaxing contrast to the urban pace in the wilds of Oman.

Begin with two days in friendly Manama, with its pearl-trading souq and interesting museums. Visit Bahrain Fort to better understand how the whole Gulf region was intent on repelling attack from the sea.

Fly to Dubai, a city obsessed with the newest, biggest and best, for a two-day stop, including that totem of superlatives, Burj Khalifa. Spend a day in Abu Dhabi, the UAE’s cultured capital, visiting Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque – proof there’s more to the Emirates than shopping.

For a complete contrast, fly from Abu Dhabi to Muscat. See how 40 years of ‘renaissance’ has created a modern nation underpinned by respect for heritage – evident during a four-day tour of Nizwa and Bahla. Allow three further days to forget history by hiking at Jebel Shams, camel riding across Sharqiya Sands and watching turtles return to the beach of their birth at Ras Al Jinz before returning to Muscat.
Many people visit one of the Gulf capitals as a stopover en route to somewhere else. There are more than enough diversions and experiences on offer, however, to make it worthwhile to combine these city-states as destinations in their own right.

Spend four days in each of four main Gulf cities, flying between each. Begin in dry, traditional Kuwait City. Learn here the sensory vocabulary of Arabia – the haggling in Souq Marbarakia, wafts of shisha from outdoor coffeehouses and strolls along the Corniche. Add to the Arabian lexicon by tracing similarities between Peninsula cultures at Tareq Rajab Museum and leave time to explore the urban landscape of high-rise towers – the quintessential symbols of Gulf modernity.

Oil is responsible for Arabia’s rapid propulsion into the 21st century: see how in nearby Bahrain, home to the Oil Museum. Enjoy the glamour associated with black gold at the Formula One racing circuit. Pearls gave the Gulf its former livelihood: dive for a pearl off the Hawar Islands or buy a string at Gold City in Manama and see how the sea has retreated as land has been reclaimed.

Abu Dhabi, the cultural and political capital of United Arab Emirates, is another city reliant on reclaimed land – as becomes obvious on a walk along the beautiful Corniche. Punctuate your high-voltage city tour with an escape to Liwa Oasis, where life moves at the pace of a camel’s stride.

If you miss the dynamism of the urban experience, then the best has been kept until last. Spend four days in and around Dubai, discovering what makes it the region’s most internationally famous city. Cook with chefs, shop with sharks, view the city from the world’s tallest tower and dine underwater in the Gulf’s most can-do city.
They may share the same Peninsula (and a similar name), but arid urban Doha in the north and subtropical, rural Dhofar in the south are so different in character that they may as well belong to different continents.

In week one, fly into Doha, renowned for its commitment to hosting international sports, for a three-day visit to this energetic city with its spectacular modern skyline. Visit Souq Waqif and the magnificent Museum of Islamic Art for full cultural immersion and then leave human civilisation behind in a camping trip to timeless Khor Al Adaid in southern Qatar. Camp along the edge of the country’s famous inland sea before returning to the city for a very different type of sundowner at a luxurious city bar.

Since a blockade was imposed on Qatar by some other Gulf states, a new route has opened up between Doha and Sohar in Oman. In week two, be one of the first to try the route out and begin a tour of the land of 1000 towers and fortifications at newly renovated Sohar Fort. Continue the fort theme by travelling to Muscat via Rustaq and Nakhal, boasting their own enormous forts, and end week two by spending a few days in Oman’s hospitable capital.

Begin week three travelling to Dhofar, crossing the edge of the Empty Quarter on the flat and utterly featureless highway to Thumrait. The descent into Oman’s southern capital Salalah, after 10 hours of stony-plain monotony, is sublime, especially during the rainy season when the desert turns green. End week four among frankincense trees near Mughsail and see where the precious resin was traded at Al Baleed and the ancient harbour of Khor Rori.

In week four, take another little-known air route between Salalah and Dubai to re-emphasise the contrast between top and toe of the Peninsula. A visit to the historic neighbourhood of Al Fahidi and the souqs of Deira will demonstrate that the connections between Arabian countries are greater than the elements that distinguish them.
Kuwait is a fascinating country to explore, but as a conservative, flat, dry state, hemmed in by travel-restricted neighbours, it doesn’t offer many opportunities to let your hair down. For the complete antithesis of life in Kuwait City, take the following trip to Oman, UAE and Bahrain.

Fly to Muscat and enjoy the tolerant, cosmopolitan nature of the city. Spend a day at a beachside hotel and enjoy the novelty of a sea with waves, followed by sundowners and dancing in a nightclub. On day three be reminded of what mountains and orchards look like by hiking in clear fresh air, blissfully devoid of humidity, on Jebel Akhdar.

On day four, swap the desert wilderness for the urban wild side by flying to Dubai for extreme shopping, dining and partying. On day five, bring the temperature down a notch by flying to Manama for a fun but slightly less high-octane experience (unless of course the Grand Prix is in town), before buttoning up the collar for the journey back to Kuwait City.

Easy Escape from Dubai

If the intensity of Dubai begins to take its toll, a trip into the neighbouring emirates and Oman provides an enjoyable antidote. Oman’s Musandam Peninsula makes a good weekend break, but with an extra day or two, a mini-tour of northern Oman is possible.

From Dubai, head north to Sharjah, a hub of heritage and Islamic arts. 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 dhow cruise in Musandam’s celebrated khors (creeks).

Spend day three in a 4WD, exploring Jebel Harim and Rawdah Bowl with its ‘House of Locks’. Return to Khasab and on day four take the ferry and bus to Muscat. Visit Mutrah Souq and Muscat’s old quarter and on day five meander west to historic Nizwa and ascend Jebel Shams, the Peninsula’s highest mountain. Return to UAE via the typical towns of Ibrī and Buraimi on the UAE border.

Easy Escape from Kuwait

Kuwait is a fascinating country to explore, but as a conservative, flat, dry state, hemmed in by travel-restricted neighbours, it doesn’t offer many opportunities to let your hair down. For the complete antithesis of life in Kuwait City, take the following trip to Oman, UAE and Bahrain.

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Jenny Walker
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UAE  United Arab Emirates

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Sights
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- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours
- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping
- Sleeping
- Camping
- Hut/Shelter

Eating
- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife
- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment
- Entertainment

Shopping
- Shopping

Information
- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic
- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population
- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport
- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro/MTR/MRT station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Skytrain/Subway station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

Routes
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries
- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography
- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas
- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book
A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, Across Asia on the Cheap. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

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In 2011 Jessica swapped a career as an adventure-tour leader for travel writing, and since then her travels for Lonely Planet have taken her across Africa, the Middle East and Asia. She has lived in the Middle East since 2007 and tweets @jessofarabia. Jess has contributed to Lonely Planet’s Egypt, Turkey, Cyprus, Morocco, Marrakesh, Middle East, Europe, Africa, Cambodia and Vietnam guidebooks and her travel writing has appeared in Wanderlust magazine, the Daily Telegraph, the Independent, BBC Travel and lonelyplanet.com.

**Jade Bremner**  
Kuwait, Qatar  
Jade has been a journalist for more than a decade. She has lived in and reported on four different regions. Wherever she goes she finds action sports to try, the weirder the better, and it’s no coincidence many of her favourite places have some of the best waves in the world. Jade has edited travel magazines and sections for Time Out and Radio Times and has contributed to the Times, CNN and the Independent.

**Tharik Hussain**  
Bahrain, Saudi Arabia  
Born in Sylhet, Bangladesh and raised in London, Tharik is a freelance travel writer and occasional broadcaster/journalist who specialises in Islamic culture. He loves writing about forgotten Muslim heritage on his travels across the globe, often accompanied by his family. Tharik’s work has been published by the BBC, Lonely Planet, Aljazeera and Arab News amongst others. He has a Masters in Islamic Studies and has previously lived in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

**Josephine Quintero**  
Dubai  
Josephine launched her journalism degree at a wine and lifestyle magazine followed, ironically, with a move to ‘dry’ Kuwait where she worked as the Editor of the Kuwaiti Digest until the day Iraq invaded. After six weeks as a hostage, Josephine moved to the relaxed shores of Andalucía in southern Spain. She has worked as a ghostwriter for crooks and minor celebrities, while also writing for in-flight magazines and Lonely Planet. She primarily covers Spain and Italy; other titles include Mexico City, Australia, Portugal and Mediterranean Europe.
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