

EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES



Arabian Sands (OM 2017)



TRIPDURATION
8
DAYS



Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Moderate

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation
Grade: Standard

Trip Code: OM

Trip Highlights - Arabian Sands

- ✓ Muscat - See the impressive Forts, Royal Palace and Corniche of the capital
- ✓ Finns Beach - Take a walk from Wadi Shab and relax on the sandy beach
- ✓ Sur - Learn about Dhow building at the Ayega village and boat yard
- ✓ Wahiba Sands - 4WD exploration and camp among spectacular sand dunes
- ✓ Nizwa - Visit the impressive Jebel Shams 'Grand Canyon'
- ✓ Dhow- Take an optional trip on a traditional wooden boat, enjoy great snorkelling opportunities

Trip Essentials

Accommodation: 4 nights Standard Hotel
3 nights Simple
Camping

Included Meals: 7 breakfasts, 3
lunches, 3 dinners

Start Point: Join trip: Muscat

End Point: Trip ends: Muscat

Transport: 4WD, Bus, Boat

Countries: Oman

Arabian Sands

On this exciting journey in Oman, we discover diverse landscapes; from the majestic Green Mountains of Jebel Akhdar to the soaring dunes of the Wahiba Sands. We experience the wilderness of the desert, visit spectacular beaches and swim in the turquoise waters of the Gulf of Oman. We camp under the stars, have a chance to sail on a traditional dhow and experience Oman's rich culture with visits to Muscat and Nizwa.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Accommodation Grade: Standard

Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Tour Pace: Moderate

These moderately paced tours provide some busy days with plenty of experiences to enjoy, as well as time to relax along the way.

Your trip itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

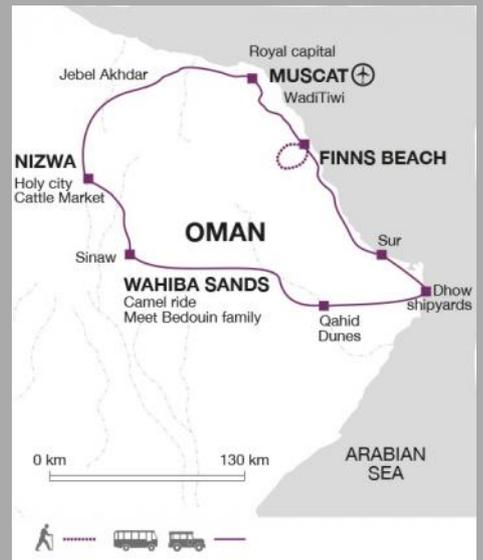
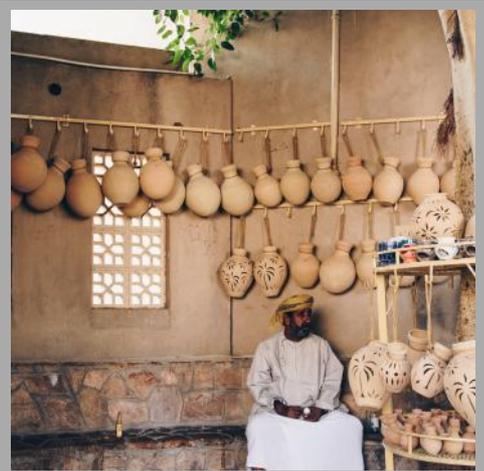
While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

Your Tour Leader

A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced Tour Leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your Tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and organisation throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

DAY 1 Join tour in Muscat; afternoon sightseeing tour

Arrive in Muscat and join the tour at the hotel. Muscat is an old walled town, arguably the Gulf's most attractive city, surrounded by a horseshoe ring of mountains that naturally restricts its growth. The seaward face of Muscat is dominated by the Portuguese fortresses of Merani and Jalali (built in 1587) with their crenelated parapets. The city displays intermingling ancient cultural heritage and modern style; you will see houses, gates, old markets, small shops and winding roads redolent of authentic history, side by side with modern markets, shops, buildings and streets stamped with modern architecture. This allows Oman to preserve its historic character and at the same time enjoy its contemporary spirit. In the afternoon we will take a guided tour of the city including visiting the Bait Baranda Museum. We will also have the chance to take a stroll along the waterfront of Mutrah, Muscat's oldest quarter and onto the bustling souk.



Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 2 Drive to Finns Beach via Wadi Tiwi

Before leaving Muscat we will visit the Grand Mosque. We then follow the coast down to Wadi Shab and Wadi Tiwi, stopping along the way to view the natural beauty of the Bimah Sinkhole. A beautiful oasis of freshwater pools, Wadi Shab is an ideal place for a photo opportunity. We will then visit Wadi Tiwi where there is the option to walk in the wadi, following the pools up through a haven of lush vegetation and palms, before heading to our camp at Finns Beach. Upon arrival there should be time for a swim before spending a memorable night under the clear Arabian sky.

Overnight: **Simple Camping**
Your own tent available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 3 Drive to Qahid via Sur

Continuing along the rugged coastline we head for Qahid, pausing en-route to visit the Port of Sur. Once a major trading port with East Africa, Sur represents the seafaring origins of Oman. We will visit the dhow shipbuilding yard where traditional dhow boats, used throughout the 19th century, are still built today. We also visit the nearby small fishing village at Ayega, now a quiet community of old merchant houses, but once a stronghold of rebellious sheikhs. The desert coast of Oman is wild, rugged and beautiful; a place where deserted white beaches are interspersed with small, traditional villages. As we journey along here, the Wahiba Sands begin to rise before us, a vast sea of sand covering about 15,000 square kilometres.

Overnight: **Simple Camping**
Your own tent available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4 Drive into Wahiba Sands

Breaking camp this morning we leave the coast behind and drive deep into the heart of the shifting sands of Wahiba. Laid out like a great ocean of sand the endless dunes are generally rusty red at the base and honey coloured on the top - an alluring landscape of changing contours and colours. The sands are home to the Bedu, nomadic tribesmen who roam the land with goats and camels, or live in small fishing villages. An exhilarating drive across the dunes brings us to our nightstop in the Wahiba Sands. Sunset promises stunning photo opportunities amidst the spectacular dunes, before we settle down for another night under the desert sky.

Overnight: **Simple Camping**
Your own tent available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5 Drive across Wahiba Sands and onto Nizwa

Early mornings in the desert are a time of activity. Mists are a curious phenomena of the sands, spreading across the dunes and wadis at night, to disappear in the early mornings. The remarkable dew drinking beetle, living just below the surface of the normally scorching sands, utilizes this time to gain valuable sustenance. We continue through the desert this morning. In spite of its barren feel the sands contain a phenomenal amount of life. As well as the Bedu they are home to an exotic diversity of fauna including dragonflies, wolf, two species of Ruppell's fox, wild cats and white-tailed mongooses. Some 115 species of birds have also been recorded here and it is one of the few remaining refuges for the elusive Arabian and Sand Gazelles. Once out of the sands we continue through a market town that is a meeting point for Bedouin for miles around. From here it is a fairly easy drive along tarmac roads to Nizwa, the capital of Oman from 751 to 1154 AD and still regarded as the cultural capital.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 6 In Nizwa; visit Nizwa Fort and Jebel Shams viewpoint

We spend a full day exploring some of the many highlights of the surrounding area. We begin in Nizwa itself, visiting the traditional and modern souk. We continue onto the 17th century fort, built to guard the Sumail Gap during the struggle between the Sultan and the radical Imams. Nizwa was the centre of Imam resistance right up until the 1950s when the Sultan had to call upon the help of the British to quell the rebels. Heading north we travel through the mountains, passing the dramatic craggy peaks of the Jebel Akhdar ('Green Mountain') range, the highest mountain range in Oman. Despite its desolate and barren nature, small settlements cling to the plateau areas, nestling in the lunar like landscape. For thousands of years self-sufficient oases have flourished in the folds of

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rocks, using an ancient irrigation system known as falaj. These are water channels that never dry up, often contoured round wadis or tunneled through the cliffs in order to tap the water table. Upkeep of the life-giving falaj is a community responsibility and contributes to maintaining harmony within a village. We stop en route to view the Al Hamra mountain range; at 3,000m, Jebel Shams (Mountain of the Sun) is the highest peak in Oman. Along the track to the summit of Jebel Shams, we encounter an astonishing view down a sheer drop of 1000m to the bottom of the 'Grand Canyon', Oman's very own (and equally spectacular) version of its American counterpart. At the bottom of this vast void, a wadi winds peacefully through the landscape. According to one theory, the canyon was once a huge cave and evidence of fossils and shells suggests that the canyon base was at one time covered by a shallow sea. Finally we call in for a photo stop at the eerie ruined village of Tanuf, destroyed during the Jabal war and where a famous brand of mineral water is now drawn and bottled. We return to Nizwa late in the afternoon.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 7 Drive via Wadi Bani Awf to Muscat; optional Dhow trip

Our route back to Muscat is through the stunning Wadi Bani Awf. We once again leave the smooth roads behind, and head into a narrow canyon with steep sided cliffs. The palm trees, scattered dwellings and interrupted streams create a peaceful atmosphere. In the afternoon we have the opportunity to take an optional trip on a timeless Dhow vessel, before returning to Muscat, where we overnight.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 8 Tour ends Muscat

The trip ends today in Muscat.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Accommodation Notes

The campsites on this trip are wild camps in the desert. There are no showers or toilet blocks. These basic facilities ensures a true wilderness experience in the desert. Camping equipment is provided locally including a mattress, bed sheet, sleeping bag and pillow. Your tents will be erected by our camp crew on arrival to camp.

Food & Drink

Included meals: 7 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 3 dinners included in the price of this trip. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Trip

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the trip price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Oman

Lunch £: 4.50

Dinner £: 10.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Oman

Bottle of Beer £: 3.50

Water £: 1.00

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Dhow trip - 70USD

Tipping - Tour Leader

Tour Leader: At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

You should allow approximately £25 for gratuities for local staff.

Foreign Exchange

Oman

ATM Availability: ATMs are widely available in major towns/cities.

Credit Card Acceptance: In hotels and some larger shops/restaurants.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers Cheques can be cashed in Oman, but banks and exchange offices do tend to charge a high exchange rate.

Local Currency: Omani Riyal.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Sterling and US\$ are widely accepted. It is worth taking some money in cash. You can get local currency from exchange offices at home.

Where to Exchange: Banks or 'Forex' offices in main towns/cities

Joining your Trip

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

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DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE



Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

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Travel Aware

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety

We strongly advise that you register with the FCO to receive updates to the travel advice for your chosen destination. A hard copy of the current FCO Travel Advice for your chosen destination is available by contacting cr@explore.co.uk or 01252 379438.

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Visa Information

Oman: Citizens from the UK, New Zealand, Australia, US and Canada require a visa, this can be arranged on arrival for the current cost of 20 Omani Rials per person, approximately 43GBP, 55USD for a 1 month visa. This can be paid in British Sterling or US Dollars. Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate.

You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on **0208 5431846**.

Vaccinations & Protection

Oman

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against Malaria, Tetanus, Infectious Hepatitis, Typhoid and Polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against Malaria. Please note that all travellers aged over 9 months old will be required to supply a yellow fever certificate if you have travelled from or have transited via a country with a risk of yellow fever transmission. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Trip

Climate

Oman

The annual rainfall in most parts of Oman does not usually exceed 125mm, although in the north (the Jebel Akhdar mountain area), it can exceed 20-25mm per month in the December to February period. The coastal areas have a hot and humid season from May to September (up to 38 degrees C), although temperatures remain high throughout the year. Inland the humidity is lower, and nights are cooler in winter when there can be frost in the desert. There is perpetual sunshine throughout the year.

Clothing

You will need lightweight clothing for sunny days, with a sunhat and neck protection. You will also need some warmer clothing for the evenings. Nights camping in the desert and along the Arabian coast can be cold in winter, so please bring a warm jacket or fleece. Bare shoulders and legs cause offence outside main cities and hotels. Therefore women should cover up when visiting villages. At our wild camping spots shorts are fine. Women are advised not to wear shorts or dresses that are too revealing as this can attract unwelcome attention in the streets of towns - loose fitting trousers are ideal. Women should also cover their head and shoulders when entering a mosque and men should wear long trousers.

Equipment

A personal water bottle is useful and a small torch essential. A sleeping bag is provided, but if you would like to bring your own then we recommend a 2/3 season.

Footwear

Comfortable walking shoes or boots, trainers (that you don't mind getting wet) and sandals.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of luggage and a daypack. Dust-proof bags will be needed for luggage whilst travelling through the desert.

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Oman

Population: 2,800,000

Size of Country: 212,500

Major Language: Arabic, English, Farsi, Baluchi, Urdu.

Religion: Badi Islam, Sunni Islam, Shiite Islam, Hindu.

Time Difference to GMT: +4

Electric Supply & Plugs

Oman

3 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailor-made holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one of the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, or any number of unusual forms of transport. Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to - and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people) and have recently supported women's cooperatives in Borneo and Morocco. We are a member of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operator Group (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) and support their campaign for fair and ethical tourism. We also care passionately about the world's wildlife and actively support and promote the Born Free Organisation and Mahouts Elephant Foundation.

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017.

Trip Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2017 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2017. 2018/19 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2018.

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